

Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832)

8 *The Erl-King*

From the German of Goethe.

(The Erl-King is a goblin that haunts the Black Forest in Thuringia. — To be read by a candle particularly long in the snuff.)

O, who rides by night thro' the woodland so wild?
It is the fond father embracing his child;
And close the boy nestles within his loved arm,
To hold himself fast, and to keep himself warm.

“O father, see yonder! see yonder!” he says; 5
“My boy, upon what doest thou fearfully gaze?” —
“O, 'tis the Erl-King with his crown and his shroud.”
“No, my son, it is but a dark wreath of the cloud.”

(The Erl-King speaks.)

“O come and go with me, thou loveliest child;
By many a gay sport shall thy time be beguiled; 10
My mother keeps for thee full many a fair toy,
And many a fine flower shall she pluck for my boy.”

“O, father, my father, and did you not hear
The Erl-King whisper so low in my ear?” —
“Be still, my heart's darling — my child, be at ease; 15
It was but the wild blast as it sung thro' the trees.”

Erl-King.

“O wilt thou go with me, thou loveliest boy?
My daughter shall tend thee with care and with joy;
She shall bear thee so lightly thro' wet and thro' wild,
And press thee, and kiss thee, and sing to my child.” 20

“O father, my father, and saw you not plain,
The Erl-King’s pale daughter glide past thro’ the rain?” —
“O yes, my loved treasure, I knew it full soon;
It was the grey willow that danced to the moon.”

Erl-King.

“O come and go with me, no longer delay, 25
Or else, silly child, I will drag thee away.” —
“O father! O father! now, now keep your hold,
The Erl-King has seized me — his grasp is so cold!”

Sore trembled the father; he spurr’d thro’ the wild,
Clasping close to his bosom his shuddering child; 30
He reaches his dwelling in doubt and in dread,
But, clasp’d to his bosom, the infant was *dead!*

Trans, 1797

(From *The Poetical Works of Sir Walter Scott*. Ed. J. G.
Lockhart. Edinburgh: Robert Cadell, 1841)