

Robert Louis Stevenson (1850-94)

5 *Ticonderoga*

A Legend of the West Highlands

This is the tale of the man  
    Who heard a word in the night  
In the land of the heathery hills,  
    In the days of the feud and the fight.  
By the sides of the rainy sea, 5  
    Where never a stranger came,  
On the awful lips of the dead,  
    He heard the outlandish name.  
It sang in his sleeping ears,  
    It hummed in his waking head: 10  
The name — Ticonderoga,  
    The utterance of the dead.

I. The Saying of the Name

On the loch-sides of Appin,  
    When the mist blew from the sea,  
A Stewart stood with a Cameron: 15  
    An angry man was he.  
The blood beat in his ears,  
    The blood ran hot to his head,  
The mist blew from the sea,  
    And there was the Cameron dead. 20  
“O, what have I done to my friend,  
    O, what have I done to mysel’,  
That he should be cold and dead,  
    And I in the danger of all?  
Nothing but danger about me, 25  
    Danger behind and before,  
Death at wait in the heather  
    In Appin and Mamore,  
Hate at all of the ferries  
    And death at each of the fords, 30  
Camerons priming gunlocks

And Camerons sharpening swords.”

But this was a man of counsel,  
This was a man of a score,  
There dwelt no pawkier Stewart 35  
In Appin or Mamore.  
He looked on the blowing mist,  
He looked on the awful dead,  
And there came a smile on his face  
And there slipped a thought in his head. 40

Out over cairn and moss,  
Out over scrog and scaur,  
He ran as runs the clansman  
That bears the cross of war.  
His heart beat in his body, 45  
His hair clove to his face,  
When he came at last in the gloaming  
To the dead man’s brother’s place.  
The east was white with the moon,  
The west with the sun was red, 50  
And there, in the house-doorway,  
Stood the brother of the dead.

“I have slain a man to my danger,  
I have slain a man to my death.  
I put my soul in your hands,” 55  
The panting Stewart saith.  
“I lay it bare in your hands,  
For I know your hands are leal;  
And be you my targe and bulwark  
From the bullet and the steel.” 60

Then up and spoke the Cameron,  
And gave him his hand again:  
“There shall never a man in Scotland  
Set faith in me in vain;  
And whatever man you have slaughtered, 65  
Of whatever name or line,  
By my sword and yonder mountain,  
I make your quarrel mine.

I bid you in to my fireside,  
I share with you house and hall; 70  
It stands upon my honour  
To see you safe from all.”

It fell in the time of midnight,  
When the fox barked in the den  
And the plaids were over the faces 75  
In all the houses of men,  
That as the living Cameron  
Lay sleepless on his bed,  
Out of the night and the other world,  
Came in to him the dead. 80

“My blood is on the heather,  
My bones are on the hill;  
There is joy in the home of ravens  
That the young shall eat their fill.  
My blood is poured in the dust, 85  
My soul is spilled in the air;  
And the man that has undone me  
Sleeps in my brother’s care.”

“I’m wae for your death, my brother,  
But if all of my house were dead, 90  
I couldnae withdraw the plighted hand,  
Nor break the word once said.”

“O, what shall I say to our father,  
In the place to which I fare?  
O, what shall I say to our mother, 95  
Who greets to see me there?  
And to all the kindly Camerons  
That have lived and died long-syne —  
Is this the word you send them,  
Fause-hearted brother mine?” 100

“It’s neither fear nor duty,  
It’s neither quick nor dead  
Shall gar me withdraw the plighted hand,  
Or break the word once said.”

Thrice in the time of midnight, 105  
    When the fox barked in the den,  
And the plaids were over the faces  
    In all the houses of men,  
Thrice as the living Cameron  
    Lay sleepless on his bed, 110  
Out of the night and the other world  
    Came in to him the dead,  
And cried to him for vengeance  
    On the man that laid him low;  
And thrice the living Cameron 115  
    Told the dead Cameron, no.

“Thrice have you seen me, brother,  
    But now shall see me no more,  
Till you meet your angry fathers  
    Upon the farther shore. 120  
Thrice have I spoken, and now,  
    Before the cock be heard,  
I take my leave for ever  
    With the naming of a word.  
It shall sing in your sleeping ears, 125  
    It shall hum in your waking head,  
The name — Ticonderoga,  
    And the warning of the dead.”

Now when the night was over  
    And the time of people’s fears, 130  
The Cameron walked abroad,  
    And the word was in his ears.  
“Many a name I know,  
    But never a name like this;  
O, where shall I find a skilful man 135  
    Shall tell me what it is?”  
With many a man he counselled  
    Of high and low degree,  
With the herdsmen on the mountains  
    And the fishers of the sea. 140  
And he came and went unwearied,  
    And read the books of yore,

And the runes that were written of old  
     On stones upon the moor.  
 And many a name he was told, 145  
     But never the name of his fears —  
 Never, in east or west,  
     The name that rang in his ears:  
 Names of men and of clans;  
     Names for the grass and the tree, 150  
 For the smallest tarn in the mountains,  
     The smallest reef in the sea:  
 Names for the high and low,  
     The names of the craig and the flat;  
 But in all the land of Scotland, 155  
     Never a name like that.

## II. The Seeking of the Name

And now there was speech in the south,  
     And a man of the south that was wise,  
 A periwig'd lord of London,  
     Called on the clans to rise. 160  
 And the riders rode, and the summons  
     Came to the western shore,  
 To the land of the sea and the heather,  
     To Appin and Mamore.  
 It called on all to gather 165  
     From every scrog and scaur,  
 That loved their fathers' tartan  
     And the ancient game of war.  
 And down the watery valley  
     And up the windy hill, 170  
 Once more, as in the olden,  
     The pipes were sounding shrill;  
 Again in highland sunshine  
     The naked steel was bright;  
 And the lads, once more in tartan, 175  
     Went forth again to fight.

"O, why should I dwell here  
     With a weird upon my life,  
 When the clansmen shout for battle

And the war-swords clash in strife? 180  
 I cannae joy at feast,  
 I cannae sleep in bed,  
 For the wonder of the word  
 And the warning of the dead.  
 It sings in my sleeping ears 185  
 It hums in my waking head,  
 The name — Ticonderoga,  
 The utterance of the dead.  
 Then up, and with the fighting men  
 To march away from here, 190  
 Till the cry of the great war-pipe  
 Shall drown it in my ear!"

Where flew King George's ensign  
 The plaided soldiers went:  
 They drew the sword in Germany, 195  
 In Flanders pitched the tent.  
 The bells of foreign cities  
 Rang far across the plain:  
 They passed the happy Rhine,  
 They drank the rapid Main. 200  
 Through Asiatic jungles  
 The Tartans filed their way,  
 And the neighing of the warpipes  
 Struck terror in Cathay.

"Many a name have I heard," he thought, 205  
 "In all the tongues of men,  
 Full many a name both here and there,  
 Full many both now and then.  
 When I was at home in my father's house  
 In the land of the naked knee, 210  
 Between the eagles that fly in the lift  
 And the herrings that swim in the sea,  
 And now that I am a captain-man  
 With a braw cockade in my hat —  
 Many a name have I heard," he thought, 215  
 "But never a name like that."

### III. The Place of the Name

There fell a war in a woody place,  
Lay far across the sea,  
A war of the march in the mirk midnight  
And the shot from behind the tree, 220  
The shaven head and the painted face,  
The silent foot in the wood,  
In a land of a strange, outlandish tongue  
That was hard to be understood.

It fell about the gloaming 225  
The general stood with his staff,  
He stood and he looked east and west  
With little mind to laugh.  
“Far have I been and much have I seen,  
And kent both gain and loss, 230  
But here we have woods on every hand  
And a kittle water to cross.  
Far have I been and much have I seen,  
But never the beat of this;  
And there’s one must go down to that waterside 235  
To see how deep it is.”

It fell in the dusk of the night  
When unco things betide,  
The skilly captain, the Cameron,  
Went down to that waterside. 240  
Canny and soft the captain went;  
And a man of the woody land,  
With the shaven head and the painted face,  
Went down at his right hand.

It fell in the quiet night, 245  
There was never a sound to ken;  
But all of the woods to the right and the left  
Lay filled with the painted men.

“Far have I been and much have I seen,  
Both as a man and boy, 250  
But never have I set forth a foot  
On so perilous an employ.”  
It fell in the dusk of the night

When unco things betide,  
 That he was aware of a captain-man 255  
 Drew near to the waterside.  
 He was aware of his coming  
 Down in the gloaming alone;  
 And he looked in the face of the man  
 And lo! the face was his own. 260  
 "This is my weird," he said,  
 "And now I ken the worst;  
 For many shall fall the morn,  
 But I shall fall with the first.  
 O, you of the outland tongue, 265  
 You of the painted face,  
 This is the place of my death;  
 Can you tell me the name of the place?"  
 "Since the Frenchmen have been here  
 They have called it Sault-Marie; 270  
 But that is a name for priests,  
 And not for you and me.  
 It went by another word,"  
 Quoth he of the shaven head:  
 "It was called Ticonderoga 275  
 In the days of the great dead."

And it fell on the morrow's morning,  
 In the fiercest of the fight,  
 That the Cameron bit the dust  
 As he foretold at night; 280  
 And far from the hills of heather,  
 Far from the isles of the sea,  
 He sleeps in the place of the name  
 As it was doomed to be.

1887

(From *Ballads*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1890)