

A. C. Swinburne (1837-1909)

19 *Lord Scales*

Lord Randal lay in low prison,
He looked against the wa';
Gin the big wa' stanes were linen bands,
I'd win weel through them a'.

Lord Randal sat by a low lattice, 5
He looked against the sea;
Gin the foul bed straws were bonny ships,
I wot weel wad I be.

Lord Randal stood by a strang window
He looked against his hand; 10
Gin my twa wrist chains were hempen threads,
I'd win weel to the sand.

Ye'll take the rings frae my fingers,
The silk knot frae my hair;
Ye'll gie them to the bonny knight 15
That cries on me sae sair.

Ye'll take the gowd bands frae my back,
The covers frae my bed;
Ye'll gie them to the Lord Randal
To put beneath his head. 20

Hae silk into your hands, Randal,
And gowd twine to your feet:
And braw pillows about your head
To keep your lang hair sweet.

For the rain rins through the rank bedstraw, 25
And the wet drips in the wa';

And the wee red worms in this prison
Wad gar your gowd hair fa'.

I had liefer hae my ain twa hands,
And keep my body cold; 30
I had liefer hae my own twa feet
Than two sic shoon of gold.

But I had liefer hae my lady's mouth
Than the silk and the siller bands;
But I had liefer hae her sweet body 35
Than a' the gowd in land.

I had liefer kiss my lady dead
Than a live woman should kiss me:
I had liefer hae my lady dead
Than a fair woman's live body. 40

O ye'se hae twine o' gowd for hemp,
And twine o' silk for thread;
And ye shall hae her fair body,
But no' her body dead.

She's loosed the knot upon his back, 45
The knot upon his throat:
She's clad him with a suit of samite.
And red silk to his coat.

She's washed him well wi' sweet waters,
Put spice into his hair; 50
She's set his feet in a narrow side chamber,
Upon a sideway stair.

He's ta'en him to her, Lady Helen,
Where she sat by a bed,
The least cloth upon her body, 55
It was of the noble red.

The insides of her bed curtains,
The gold was gone them through;
The outsides of her bed curtains,
They were full merry and blue. 60

The silk side of her bed pillows,
It was of summer green;
The gold was bound in her gold hair,
That now should tell them twa between.

O came ye for my lord's land, 65
Or for my lord's fee;
Or came ye for my lord's hate,
Or yet for love of me?

O gin ye come like a land robber,
For soon shall ye hang; 70
But gin ye come like a woman's lover,
Full sweetly ye shall gang.

O it was never for no hate,
For lord's love nor for fee:
But a' the weird that is me on 75
It was a' for your body.

Gin ye set nae scorn by me, Randal,
To dree a weird and a pain,
It's no Lord Scales my auld husband
That shall depart us twain. 80

Gin this be sooth of you, Randal,
That ye have good will to play;
It's no Lord Scales my auld husband
Shall be better of us twey.

For I hae reapers to the land, 85

And sailors to the sea;
And I hae maidens to my bower
That wait by three and three;
And it's no Lord Scales my auld husband
Shall part my will and me. 90

The first draw rapes upon the ship
Between the sea and the sea sand;
The neist they lie in the lang corn,
Wi' the reaphooks to their hand;
And between the lang beds and the wa', 95
It's there the maidens stand.

She's had him to her bonnie bed,
She's laid it warm and wide;
He's clipped that lady by the middle waist,
And by the middle side. 100

There was neither light nor fire them by,
And they twain were set to sleep,
When she's turned her chin to the pillow side
Made her a space to weep.

He kissed her on her fair twa breasts, 105
And hard upon her chin;
He's kissed her by her white halse-bane
The little salt tears fell in.

The small tears fell about her face
Between her lips and his; 110
From side to side of her gold hair
Her face was full sad to kiss.

Lie down, lie down now, Lady Helen,
Lie still into my hand;
I wadna gie ane o' the pillow-beres 115
For ten measures of land.

Lie still into my arms, Helen,
Betwixen sheet and sheet:
I wadna gie ane o' the cods of silk
For ten measures of wheat. 120

Lie back into mine arms, Helen,
The gold side of the bed;
I wadna gie ane o' thy kaims o' lammer
For the gold on the queen's head.

It's I lie saft the night, Randal, 125
With my head against your face;
But gin ye had slept in my stables,
It had been the sweeter place.

It's I lie saft the night, Randal,
But ye'll lie hard the morn; 130
For I hear a mouse rin by the straw,
And a bird rin by the corn.

O whatten a bird is that, Helen,
I wad fain ken what it ails?
It's an auld bird and an ill, Randal, 135
Gin it be no Lord Scales. □

Then in and came her auld husband,
I wot a fu' lean bird was he;
It's wake ye or sleep ye now, madame,
Ye'se gar mak room for me. 140

O are ye sick the night, Lord Scales,
In the head or else the side?
Or are ye fain to sleep, Lord Scales,
For the fear ye have to ride?

Randal's taen out her girdle knife, 145

He's stricken him amang his e'en;
It was mair for the lady's love
Than it was for his proper teen.

Out came a' her bower maidens,
In their night smocks and night vails; 150
It was a' for sorrow of their lady,
It was naething for Lord Scales.

Out came a' her bower maidens,
In their sma' coats green and white;
With a red rose wrought for the left breast, 155
And a rose wrought for the right.

Lord Scales had on a goodly coat,
It was a' bound wi' steel thickly;
Lord Randal had but a little shirt
Between the wind and his body. 160

The first good straik Lord Randal strak,
The red blood sprang upon his face;
It was mair for his lady's love
Than it was for her lord's grace.

The neist good straik Lord Randal strak, 165
The bright blood sprang upon his nails;
It was mair for love of Lady Helen
Than pity of Lord Scales.

Lord Scales he strak a fu' straight straik,
But Randal strak a sair; 170
Lord Scales had a little joy of it,
But Lady Helen had mair.

Gar set my ships into the sea
And my hooks into the corn;
For gin I have lost a man the night, 175

I'll get a man the morn.

1909

(From *Ballads of the English Border*. Ed. with Introduction, Glossary and Notes by William A. MacInnes. London: William Heinemann, 1925)