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IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

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## The Elf Knight

The autumn wind blew hard around the towers of a gray stone castle. But inside, the fire crackled cheerfully. By the fireplace, an old nursemaid told Janet, a beautiful maid, a special story about Elf Land. When the story was over, Janet's joyful laughter echoed through the halls. The old nursemaid nodded seriously and said, "It is well known, my girl, that the people of Elf Land roam the hills of Scotland. Come closer, and I will tell you a secret."

Janet leaned forward, and the old woman whispered, "An Elf Knight named Tam Lin haunts the moorland at the edge of your father's estate. No girl dares to venture near the enchanted place, for if she were to fall under the spell of this Elf Knight, she would be obliged to give him a precious jewel as ransom."

"Even a glimpse of the Elf Knight would be worth the rarest gem I have," Janet laughed. "How I would love to see him!"

"Quiet!" said the old nursemaid trembling. "No mortals should have anything to do with the people of Elf Land. Avoid the moorland at least during this time of year, for tomorrow is Halloween, the night when the Fairies ride abroad."

But the next morning, Janet tied her golden braids around her head, lifted up her green skirt, and skipped over the enchanted heath. As she approached, she saw

beautiful flowers blooming as if it were midsummer. She stooped to gather some roses when she suddenly heard tinkling bells in the distance. She looked around and saw the handsomest knight she had ever seen riding towards her. He was on a milk-white horse that ran faster than the wind. The horse had silver hooves, and small silver bells hung from the bridle.

As the knight approached, he dismounted lightly and said, "Lovely honest Janet, tell me why you are picking roses in Elf Land?"



The girl's heart beat very fast, and the flowers fell from her hands, but she answered proudly, "I have come to see Tam Lin, the Elf Knight."

"He stands before you," said the knight. "Have you come to rescue him from Elf Land?"

At these words, Janet lost her courage, for she was afraid he would enchant her. When the knight saw her trembling, he said, "Do not be afraid, Janet. I will tell you my story. I am the son of noble parents. One day, when I was nine years old, I went hunting with my father. We were accidentally separated, and I had no luck. My horse stumbled and threw me to the ground where I lay unconscious from the fall. That's where the Fairy Queen found me and carried me to that green hill over there. Although it is very pleasant in Elf Land, I still long to live among people."

"Why don't you go home then?" asked Janet.

"Ah, I can only do that if a fair maid is brave enough to help me. She must prove her courage in three ways. First, she must meet me on the enchanted heath. That has already happened," explained the Elf Knight. Then he stopped talking and looked imploringly at Janet. All her fear disappeared, and she asked, "In what other ways must the maiden prove her courage?"

"She must no longer be afraid of him. That you have done," said the knight.

"Tell me the third way, Tam Lin, for I believe I am the maiden who must rescue you."

"Only my true love can prove her courage in the third way, lovely honest Janet."

And the girl replied, "I am your true love, Tam Lin."

"Listen then to what I say, brave girl. Tonight is Halloween. At midnight, the Fairy Queen and all her knights will ride to the countryside. If you dare to show your true love, you must wait at Milescross until the Fairy Queen and her knights have passed. I will be among them."

"But how will I recognize you among so many knights, Tam Lin?" asked Janet.

"I will ride in the third group of followers. Let the first two groups pass and look for me in the third group. There will be only three knights riding there. One on a black horse, one on a brown horse, and one on a milk-white horse," said the knight pointing to his own horse.

"My right hand will be gloved, but my left hand will hang bare at my side. You can recognize me by these signs."

"I will certainly recognize you," nodded Janet.

"Wait quietly until I reach you. Then jump forward and hold on to me. If the Fairies see that you are holding me, they will transform me into many forms. But do not be afraid and hold me in your arms. Eventually, I will take my human form again. If you have the courage to do this, you will free your true love from the power of the Fairies."

"I have enough courage to do everything you say," declared Janet. They sealed this promise with a kiss and parted.

The night was gloomy, and the road to Miles-cross was eerie. But Janet wrapped her green cloak around her shoulders and hurried to the enchanted heath. The whole way, she repeated to herself: "On this Halloween at midnight, I will free my true love, Tam Lin, from Elfland."

At Miles-cross, she hid and waited. She heard the wind moaning above the heath, but soon she heard a cheerful jingling sound and saw a sparkling light in the distance. Janet could hear her own heart beating, but she remained undaunted. The Fairy Queen and her entourage rode past. At the head of the first group rode the beautiful queen with her decorated crown and



belt, which shone in the night. The second group quickly passed. Now the three knights in the third group were coming.

One rode a black horse, one a brown horse, and last came a knight on a milk-white horse. Janet saw the gloved hand and the other bare hand of the knight. Then the girl jumped out. She quickly grabbed the reins of the milk-white horse, pulled the rider off his horse, and threw her green cloak around him. Immediately there was a commotion among the Elven knights, and the Fairy Queen shouted, "Tam Lin, Tam Lin. Some mortal is holding Tam Lin, the bravest knight in my entourage."

Then strange things happened. Instead of Tam Lin, Janet held a large lion in her arms, which struggled greatly to get away. But she remembered the knight's warning: "Hold me and fear me not."

The next moment, she held a fire-breathing dragon in her arms, which almost slipped away, but she tightened her grip and thought of Tam Lin's words. The dragon turned into a burning bush, and flames shot up on all sides, but Janet stood still and felt no pain. Then she held a branching tree full of blossoms in her arms. And finally, Tam Lin, her true love, was there.

When the Fairy Queen saw that none of her enchantments could scare Janet, she exclaimed angrily, "The girl has won a stately bridegroom who was my bravest knight. Alas! Tam Lin is lost to Elfland."

The Fairy Queen rode on with her retinue into the darkness. Tam Lin and Janet hurried back to the gray stone castle, and there Tam Lin, a noble Scottish earl, and Janet, the bravest girl in Scotland, were married. And they lived happily ever after.