



Ririro

READ ANYWHERE, ANYTIME

The Ballad of the Fairy Thorn-Tree

Dora Sigerson Shorter

This is an evil night to go, my sister,
To the fairy-tree across the fairy rath,
Will you not wait till Hallow Eve is over?
For many are the dangers in your path!

I may not wait till Hallow Eve is over,
I shall be there before the night is fled,
For, brother, I am weary for my lover,
And I must see him once, alive or dead.

I've prayed to heaven, but it would not listen,
I'll call thrice in the devil's name to-night,
Be it a live man that shall come to hear me,
Or but a corpse, all clad in snowy white.

She had drawn on her silken hose and garter,
Her crimson petticoat was kilted high,
She trod her way amid the bog and brambles,
Until the fairy-tree she stood near-by.

When first she cried the devil's name so loudly
She listened, but she heard no sound at all;
When twice she cried, she thought from out the darkness
She heard the echo of a light footfall.

When last she cried her voice came in a whisper,
She trembled in her loneliness and fright;
Before her stood a shrouded, mighty figure,
In sombre garments blacker than the night.

"And if you be my own true love," she questioned,
"I fear you! Speak you quickly unto me."
"O, I am not your own true love," it answered,
"He drifts without a grave upon the sea."

"If he be dead, then gladly will I follow
Down the black stairs of death into the grave."
"Your lover calls you for a place to rest him

From the eternal tossing of the wave."

"I'll make my love a bed both wide and hollow,
A grave wherein we both may ever sleep."

"What give you for his body fair and slender,
To draw it from the dangers of the deep?"

"I'll give you both my silver comb and earrings,
I'll give you all my little treasure store."

"I will but take what living thing comes forward,
The first to meet you, passing to your door."

"O may my little dog be first to meet me,
So loose my lover from your dreaded hold."

"What will you give me for the heart that loved you,
The heart that I hold chained and frozen cold?"

"My own betrothed ring I give you gladly,
My ring of pearls—and every one a tear!"

"I will but have what other living creature
That second in your pathway shall appear."

"To buy this heart, to warm my love to living,
I pray my pony meet me on return."

"And now, for his young soul what will you give me,
His soul that night and day doth fret and burn?"

"You will not have my silver comb and earrings,
You will not have my ring of precious stone;
O, nothing have I left to promise to you,
But give my soul to buy him back his own."

All woefully she wept, and stepping homeward,
Bemoaned aloud her dark and cruel fate;
"O, come," she cried, "my little dog to meet me,
And you, my horse, be browsing at the gate."

Right hastily she pushed by bush and bramble,
Chased by a fear that made her footsteps fleet,
And as she ran she met her little brother,
Then her old father coming her to meet.

"O brother, little brother," cried she weeping,
"Well you said of fairy-tree beware,
For precious things are bought and sold ere mid-night,
On Hallow-eve, by those who barter there."

She went alone into the little chapel,
And knelt before the holy virgin's shrine,
Saying, "Mother Mary, pray you for me,
To save those two most gentle souls of thine."

And as she prayed, behold the holy statue
Spoke to her, saying, "Little can I aid,
God's ways are just, and you have dared to question
His judgment on this soul you bought—and paid."

"For that one soul, your father and your brother,
Your own immortal life you bartered; then,
Yet one chance is allowed—your sure repentance,
Give back his heart you made to live again."

"For these two souls—my father and my brother—
I give his heart back into death's cold land,
Never again to warm his dead, sweet body,
Or beat to madness underneath my hand."

"And for your soul—to save it from its sorrow,
You must drive back his soul into the night,
Back into righteous punishment and justice,
Or lose your chance of everlasting light."

"O, never shall I drive him back to anguish,
My soul shall suffer, letting his go free."
She rose, and weeping, left the little chapel,
Went forward blindly till she reached the sea.

She dug a grave within the surf and shingle,
A dark, cold bed, made very deep and wide,
She laid her down all stiff and stretched for burial,
Right in the pathway of the rising tide.



First tossed into her waiting arms the restless
Loud waves, a woman very grey and cold,
Within her bed she stood upright so quickly,
And loosed her fingers from the dead hands' hold.

The second who upon her heart had rested
From out the storm, a baby chill and stark,
With one long sob she drew it on her bosom,
Then thrust it out again into the dark.

The last who came so slow was her own lover,
She kissed his icy face on cheek and chin,
"O cold shall be your house to-night, beloved,
O cold the bed that we must sleep within.

"And heavy, heavy, on our lips so faithful
And on our hearts, shall lie our own roof-tree."
And as she spoke the bitter tears were falling
On his still face, all salter than the sea.

"And oh," she said, "if for a little moment
You knew, my cold, dead love, that I was by,
That my soul goes into the utter darkness
When yours comes forth—and mine goes in to die."

And as she wept she kissed his frozen forehead,
Laid her warm lips upon his mouth so chill,
With no response—and then the waters flowing
Into their grave, grew heavy, deep and still.

And so, 'tis said, if to that fairy thorn-tree
You dare to go, you see her ghost so lone,

She prays for love of her that you will aid her,
And give your soul to buy her back her own.

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