



Ririro

READ ANYWHERE, ANYTIME

The Elfin Knight

Unknown writer

The autumn wind blew sharp and shrill around the turrets of a grey stone castle. But indoors, the fire crackled merrily in the lady's bower, where an old nurse was telling a tale of Elfland to Janet, the fairest maiden in all Scotland.

When the story was finished, Janet laughed, and the sound rang through the halls. The old nurse nodded gravely. "It's well known, my lassie, that the people of Elfland dance in the hills and hollows of Scotland. Come close, and I'll tell you a secret."

Janet leaned in, and the old woman whispered, "An Elfin Knight named Tam Lin haunts the moorland at the edge of your father's land. No maiden dares go near that enchanted place. If she fell under his spell, she would have to give him a precious jewel as ransom."

"One glimpse of the Elfin Knight would be worth the rarest gem I own," laughed Janet. "How I wish I could see him!"

"Hush!" said the nurse, trembling. "No, no, my lady! Mortals should have nothing to do with the people of Elfland. Stay away from that moor at this time of year, for tomorrow is Hallowe'en, the night when the fairies ride abroad."

But the next morning, Janet bound her golden braids about her head, hitched up her green gown, and tripped lightly off to the enchanted moor. As she drew near, she saw flowers blooming as brightly as if it were midsummer. She stooped to pick some roses, and just then she heard the faintest silvery music. She looked up, and there, riding toward her, was the handsomest knight she had ever seen. His milk-white horse sped along lighter than the wind. It was shod in silver shoes, and tiny silver bells hung from its bridle.

The knight sprang lightly down. "Fair Janet," he said, "why do you pick roses in Elfland?"

Her heart beat very fast, and the flowers fell from her hands. But she answered proudly, "I came to see Tam Lin, the Elfin Knight."

"He stands before you," said the knight. "Have you come to free him from Elfland?"

At these words, Janet's courage wavered, for she feared he might cast a spell on

her. But when the knight saw her tremble, he said gently, "Have no fear, Lady Janet, and I will tell you my story. I am the son of noble parents. When I was nine years old, I went hunting with my father. We became separated, and my good horse stumbled and threw me to the ground, where I lay stunned. The Fairy Queen found me there and carried me off to that green hill yonder. Fairyland is pleasant enough, but I long to live among mortals again."

"Then why don't you ride home?" asked Janet.

"Ah, that I cannot do unless a brave maiden helps me. She must prove her courage in three ways. First, she must choose to meet me here on the enchanted moor. That you have done."

He paused and looked at her pleadingly. All Janet's fear melted away. "What are the other two ways?" she asked.

"She must put away all fear of me. That, too, you have done."

"Tell me the third, Tam Lin, for I believe I am the maid to free you."

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

"Then I am your true love, Tam Lin," she answered.

"Then listen well, brave lady. Tonight is Hallowe'en. At midnight the Fairy Queen and all her knights will ride abroad. If you dare to win your true love, wait at Milescross until they pass. I will be in her train."

"But how will I know you among so many knights?" asked Janet.

"Let the first and second companies pass, and look for me in the third. There will be only three knights in that last company. One rides a black horse, one a brown, and one a milk-white steed like this one," said the knight, pointing to his horse. "My right hand will be gloved, but my left will hang bare at my side. By these signs you will know me."

"I will know you without fail," said Janet.

"Wait calmly until I come close, then spring forward and seize me. When the fairies see you holding me, they will change me into many shapes. Do not be afraid. Hold me fast. At last I will take my human form again. If you have courage enough, you will free your true love from the power of the fairies."

"I have courage enough for all of it," said Janet. They sealed the promise with a kiss and parted.



The night was gloomy, and the way to Miles-cross was eerie. But Janet threw her green mantle about her shoulders and hurried to the moor, whispering to herself the whole way, "Tonight at midnight, I will free my true love from Elf-land."

At Miles-cross she hid and waited. The wind moaned in from the sea across the moor. At last she heard a merry tinkling of far-off music, and in the distance a twinkling light came dancing toward her. Her heart pounded, but she stood firm. The Fairy Queen and her train were riding out. The beautiful queen led the first company of knights and ladies, her jeweled girdle and crown flashing in the dark. The second company passed quickly. Then came three knights in a third group. One rode a black horse, one a brown, and last of all came the milk-white steed. Janet saw that one of the rider's hands was gloved, and the other hung bare at his side.

Up she leaped! She seized the milk-white steed's bridle, pulled the rider from his saddle, and wrapped her green mantle around him. A clamour rose among the Elfin Knights, and the Fairy Queen cried out, "Tam Lin! Tam Lin! A mortal has hold of Tam Lin, the bonniest knight in my company!"

Then the strangest things happened. Instead of Tam Lin, Janet held a bearded lion, struggling mightily to get away. But she remembered his warning: *Hold me fast, and fear me not.*

The next moment she held a fire-breathing dragon that nearly slipped from her arms. She tightened her grasp and thought of Tam Lin's words. The dragon became a burning bush, and the flames leaped up on every side, but Janet stood still and felt no harm. Then she held a branching tree, covered in blossoms. And at last Tam Lin himself, her own true love, stood before her.

The Fairy Queen saw that none of her enchantments could frighten Janet, and she cried out angrily, "The maiden has won a stately bridegroom, and he was my bonniest knight! Alas, Tam Lin is lost to Elf-land."

On into the darkness rode the fairy train. Tam Lin and Lady Janet hurried home to the grey stone castle. Soon a wedding feast was prepared, and Tam Lin, who was really a Scottish Earl, married Lady Janet, the bravest maid in Scotland.

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