

Quoth the King: "Thou speak'st but for one Estate,  
Nor doth it avow thy gage.

Let my liege lords hale this traitor hence!"

The Graeme fired dark with rage:

"Who works for lesser men than himself,  
He earns but a witless wage!"

But soon from the dungeon where he lay

He won by privy plots,

And forth he fled with a price on his head

To the country of the Wild Scots.

And word there came from Sir Robert Graeme

To the King at Edinbro':

"No Liege of mine thou art; but I see

From this day forth alone in thee

God's creature, my mortal foe.

"Through thee are my wife and children lost,

My heritage and lands;

And when my God shall show me a way,

Thyself my mortal foe will I slay

With these my proper hands."

Against the coming of Christmastide

That year the King bade call

I' the Black Friars' Charterhouse of Perth

A solemn festival.

And we of his household rode with him

In a close-ranked company;

But not till the sun had sunk from his throne

Did we reach the Scottish Sea.

That eve was clenched for a boding storm,  
    'Neath a toilsome moon, half seen;  
The cloud stooped low and the surf rose high;  
And where there was a line of the sky,  
    Wild wings loomed dark between.

And on a rock of the black beach-side  
    By the veiled moon dimly lit,  
There was something seemed to heave **with life**  
    As the King drew nigh to it.

And was it only the tossing furze  
    Or brake of the waste sea-wold?  
Or was it an eagle bent to the blast?  
When near we came, we knew it at last  
    For a woman tattered and old.

But it seemed as though by a fire within  
    Her writhen limbs were wrung;  
And as soon as the King was close to her,  
    She stood up gaunt and strong.

'T was then the moon sailed clear of the rack  
    On high in her hollow dome;  
And still as aloft with hoary crest  
    Each clamorous wave rang home,  
Like fire in snow the moonlight blazed  
    Amid the champing foam.

And the woman held his eyes with her eyes:  
    "O King, thou art come at last;  
But thy wraith has haunted the Scottish Sea  
    To my sight for four years past.

"Four years it is since first I met,  
 'Twixt the Duchray and the Dhu,  
 A shape whose feet clung close in a shroud,  
 And that shape for thine I knew.

"A year again, and on Inchkeith Isle  
 I saw thee pass in the breeze,  
 With the cerecloth risen above thy feet  
 And wound about thy knees.

"And yet a year, in the Links of Forth,  
 As a wanderer without rest,  
 Thou cam'st with both thine arms i' the shroud  
 That clung high up thy breast.

"And in this hour I find thee here,  
 And well mine eyes may note  
 That the winding-sheet hath passed thy **breast**  
 And risen around thy throat.

"And when I meet thee again, O King,  
 That of death hast such sore drouth,  
 Except thou turn again on this shore,  
 The winding-sheet shall have moved once **more**  
 And covered thine eyes and mouth.

"O King, whom poor men bless for their **King**,  
 Of thy fate be not so fain;  
**But** these my words for God's message take,  
**And** turn thy steed, O King, for her sake  
 Who rides beside thy rein!"

While the woman spoke, the King's horse reared  
As if it would breast the sea,  
And the Queen turned pale as she heard on the **gale**  
The voice die dolorously.

When the woman ceased, the steed was still,  
But the King gazed on her yet,  
And in silence save for the wail of the sea  
His eyes and her eyes met.

At last he said: "God's ways are His own;  
Man is but shadow and dust.  
Last night I prayed by His altar-stone;  
To-night I wend to the Feast of His Son  
And in Him I set my trust.

"I have held my people in sacred charge  
And have not feared the sting  
Of proud men's hate, to His will resign'd  
Who has but one same death for a hind  
And one same death for a King.

"And if God in His wisdom have brought close  
The day when I must die,  
That day by water or fire or air  
My feet shall fall in the destined snare  
Wherever my road may lie.

"What man can say but the Fiend hath **set**  
Thy sorcery on my path,  
My heart with the fear of death to fill,  
And turn me against God's very will  
To sink in His burning wrath?"

The woman stood as the train rode past,  
And moved nor limb nor eye;  
And when we were shipped, we saw her there  
Still standing against the sky.

As the ship made way, the moon once more  
Sank slow in her rising pall;  
And I thought of the shrouded wraith of the King,  
And I said, "The Heavens know all."

And now, ye lasses, must ye hear  
How my name is Kate Barlass:  
But a little thing, when all the tale  
Is told of the weary mass  
Of crime and woe which in Scotland's realm  
God's will let come to pass.

'T was in the Charterhouse of Perth  
That the King and all his Court  
Were met, the Christmas Feast being done,  
For solace and disport.

'T was a wind-wild eve in February,  
And against the casement-pane  
The branches smote like summoning hands  
And muttered the driving rain.

And when the wind swooped over the lift  
And made the whole heaven frown,  
It seemed a grip was laid on the walls  
To tug the housetop down.

And the Queen was there, more stately fair  
Than a lily in garden set;  
And the King was loth to stir from her side;  
For as on the day when she was his bride,  
Even so he loved her yet.

And the Earl of Athole, the King's false friend,  
Sat with him at the board;  
And Robert Stuart the chamberlain  
Who had sold his sovereign Lord.

Yet the traitor Christopher Chaumber there  
Would fain have told him all,  
And vainly four times that night he strove  
To reach the King through the hall.

But the wine is bright at the goblet's brim  
Though the poison lurk beneath;  
And the apples still are red on the tree  
Within whose shade may the adder be  
That shall turn thy life to death.

There was a knight of the King's fast friends  
Whom he called the King of Love;  
And to such bright cheer and courtesy  
That name might best behave.

And the King and Queen both loved him well  
For his gentle knightliness;  
And with him the King, as that eve wore on,  
Was playing at the chess.

And the King said (for he thought to jest  
 And soothe the Queen thereby),  
 "In a book 't is writ that this same year  
 A King shall in Scotland die.

"And I have pondered the matter o'er,  
 And this have I found, Sir Hugh,  
 There are but two Kings on Scottish ground,  
 And those Kings are I and you.

"And I have a wife and a newborn heir,  
 And you are yourself alone;  
 So stand you stark at my side with me  
 To guard our double throne."

"For here sit I and my wife and child,  
 As well your heart shall approve,  
 In full surrender and soothfastness,  
 Beneath your Kingdom of Love."

And the Knight laughed, and the Queen, too, smiled,  
 But I knew her heavy thought,  
 And I strove to find in the good King's jest  
 What cheer might thence be wrought.

And I said, "My Liege, for the Queen's dear love  
 Now sing the song that of old  
 You made, when a captive Prince you lay,  
 And the nightingale sang sweet on the spray,  
 In Windsor's castle-hold."

Then he smiled the smile I knew so well  
 When he thought to please the Queen:

The smile which under all bitter frowns  
Of hate that rose between,  
For ever dwelt at the poet's heart  
Like the bird of love unseen.

And he kissed her hand and took his harp,  
And the music sweetly rang;  
And when the song burst forth, it seemed  
'T was the nightingale that sang.

*"Worship, ye lovers, on this May:  
Of bliss your kalends are begun:  
Sing with us, Away, Winter, away!  
Come, Summer, the sweet season and sun!  
Awake for shame, your heaven is won,  
And amorously your heads lift all:  
Thank Love, that you to his grace doth call!"*

But when he bent to the Queen, and sang  
The speech whose praise was hers,  
It seemed his voice was the voice of the Spring  
And the voice of the bygone years.

*"The fairest and the freshest flower  
That ever I saw before that hour,  
The which o' the sudden made to start  
The blood of my body to my heart.*

.....

*Ah sweet, are ye a worldly creature  
Or heavenly thing in form of nature?"*



And the song was long, and richly stored  
 With wonder and beauteous things;  
 And the harp was tuned to every change  
 Of minstrel ministerings;  
 But when he spoke of the Queen at the last,  
 Its strings were his own heart-strings.

*"Unworthy but only of her grace,  
 Upon Love's rock that's easy and sure,  
 In guerdon of all my love's space  
 She took me her humble creature.  
 Thus fell my blissful aventure  
 In youth of love that from day to day  
 Flowereth aye new, and further, I say,*

*" To reck all the circumstance  
 As it happed when lessen gan my sore,  
 Of my rancor and woeful chance,  
 It were too long— I have done therefor.  
 And of this flower I say no more  
 But unto my help her heart hath tended  
 And even from death her man defended."*

"Ay, even from death," to myself I said;  
 For I thought of the day when she  
 Had borne him the news, at Roxbro' **siege**,  
 Of the **fell** confederacy.

But death even then took aim as he sang  
 With an arrow deadly bright;  
 And the grinning skull lurked grimly **aloof**,  
 And the wings were spread far over the **roof**  
 More dark than the winter night.

Catherine Douglas

Yet truly along the amorous song  
Of Love's high pomp and state,  
There were words of Fortune's trackless doom  
And the dreadful face of Fate.

And oft have I heard again in dreams  
The voice of dire appeal  
In which the King sang of the pit  
That is under Fortune's wheel.

*"And under the wheel beheld I there  
An ugly Pit as deep as hell,  
That to behold I quaked for fear;  
And this I heard, that who therein fell  
Came no more up, tidings to tell;  
Whereat, astound of the fearful sight,  
I wist not what to do for fright."*

And oft has my thought called up again  
These words of the changeful song:  
*"Wist thou thy pain and thy travail  
To come, well might'st thou weep and wail"*  
And our wail, O God! is long.

But the song's end was all of his love;  
And well his heart was grac'd  
With her smiling lips and her tear-bright **eyes**  
As his arm went round her waist.

And on the swell of her long fair throat  
Close clung the necklet-chain  
As he bent her pearl-tir'd head aside,  
And in the warmth of his love and pride  
He kissed her lips full fain.