



THE LASS OF LOCHROYAN

A traditional Scots ballad



A Scottish Studies Chapbook

The story centres on “The Lass” who, along with her infant child, has been separated from Lord Gregory, her lover and father of her child; and her quest to reunite with him. Why they are being kept apart is not clear, although it has been assumed that he may either have been unwell or is being kept against his will -- confined by fairy charms in an enchanted tower situated in the sea.

No doubt the tale became more and more embellished with the telling over the years, such as in this mature version in which the boat in the story, made especially for her by her father, has been given a golden mast, a sail of crimson silk (cramoisie) and a crew of “four-and-twenty mariners.”

She then sets out to find the island and the tower where Gregory is being held. Once there, she makes her way to the tower but despite constant pleading to have the door opened, she is instead subjected to relentless interrogation by one she assumes to be Gregory and who ultimately tells her to leave. Instead, readers are left in no doubt that the voice she hears is that of Gregory’s mother. The story ends with Gregory awaking to the realization of what his mother has done.

Lochroyan (Loch Ryan) is located in Galloway in South-West Scotland. The enchanted tower of the ballad, situated on the sea, is probably based on one of the ancient structures whose ruins may yet be seen on the rocky coasts of Ayrshire and Galloway.

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'O wha will shoe my bonny foot?
And wha will glove my hand?
And wha will bind my middle jimp
Wi' a lang, lang linen band?

'O wha will kame my yellow hair,
With a new-made silver kame?
And wha will be my babe's father
Till Gregory come hame?'

'Thy father, he will shoe thy foot,
Thy brother will glove thy hand,
Thy mither will bind thy middle jimp
Wi' a lang, lang linen band.

'Thy sister will kame thy yellow hair,
Wi' a new-made silver kame;
The Almighty will be thy babe's father
Till Gregory come hame.'

'And wha will build a bonny ship,
And set it on the sea?
For I will go to seek my love,
My ain love Gregory.'

Up then spak her father dear,
A wafu' man was he;
'And I will build a bonny ship,
And set her on the sea.

'And I will build a bonny ship,
And set her on the sea,

And ye sal gae and seek your love,
Your ain love Gregory.'

Then he's gart build a bonny ship,
And set it on the sea,
Wi' four-and-twenty mariners,
To bear her company.

O he's gart build a bonny ship,
To sail on the salt sea;
The mast was o' the beaten gold,
The sails o' cramoisie.

The sides were o' the gude stout aik,
The deck o' mountain pine,
The anchor o' the silver shene,
The ropes o' silken twine.

She hadna sail'd but twenty leagues,
But twenty leagues and three,
When she met wi' a rank reiver,
And a' his companie.

'Now are ye Queen of Heaven hie,
Come to pardon a' our sin?
Or are ye Mary Magdalane,
Was born at Bethlehem?'

'I'm no the Queen of Heaven hie,
Come to pardon ye your sin,
Nor am I Mary Magdalane,
Was born in Bethlehem.

gart: made them
cremosie: crimson

aik: oak
rank: evil

reiver: robber
hie: here

'But I'm the lass of Lochroyan,
That's sailing on the sea
To see if I can find my love,
My ain love Gregory.'

'O see na ye yon bonny bower?
It's a' covered owre wi' tin;
When thou hast sail'd it round about,
Lord Gregory is within.'

And when she saw the stately tower,
Shining both clear and bright,
Whilk stood aboon the jawing wave,
Built on a rock of height,

Says, 'Row the boat, my mariners,
And bring me to the land,
For yonder I see my love's castle,
Close by the salt sea strand.'

She sail'd it round, and sail'd it round,
And loud and loud cried she,
'Now break, now break your fairy charms,
And set my true-love free.'

She's ta'en her young son in her arms,
And to the door she's gane,
And long she knock'd, and sair she ca'd,
But answer got she nane.

'O open, open, Gregory!

O open! if ye be within;
For here's the lass of Lochroyan,
Come far fra kith and kin.

'O open the door, Lord Gregory!
O open and let me in!
The wind blows loud and cauld, Gregory,
The rain drops fra my chin.

'The shoe is frozen to my foot,
The glove unto my hand,
The wet drops fra my yellow hair,
Na langer dow I stand.'

O up then spak his ill mither,
An ill death may she die!
'Ye're no the lass of Lochroyan,
She's far out-owre the sea.

'Awa', awa', ye ill woman,
Ye're no come here for gude;
Ye're but some witch or wil' warlock,
Or mermaid o' the flood.'

'I am neither witch nor wil' warlock,
Nor mermaid o' the sea,
But I am Annie of Lochroyan,
O open the door to me!'

'Gin ye be Annie of Lochroyan,
As I trow thou binna she,
Now tell me of some love-tokens

gin: if
langer dow: longer do

trow: think
binna: be not

'That pass'd 'tween thee and me.'

'O dinna ye mind, love Gregory,
As we sat at the wine,
We changed the rings frae our fingers?
And I can shew thee thine.

'O yours was gude, and gude enough,
But ay the best was mine,
For yours was o' the gude red gowd,
But mine o' the diamond fine.

'Yours was o' the gude red gowd,
Mine o' the diamond fine;
Mine was o' the purest troth,
But thine was false within.'

'If ye be the lass of Lochroyan,
As I kenna thou be,
Tell me some mair o' the love-tokens
Pass'd between thee and me.'

'And dinna ye mind, love Gregory!
As we sat on the hill,
Thou twin'd me o' my maidenheid,
Right sair against my will?

'Now open the door, love Gregory!
Open the door! I pray;
For thy young son is in my arms,
And will be dead ere day.'

'Ye lie, ye lie, ye ill woman,

So loud I hear ye lie;
For Annie of the Lochroyan
Is far out-owre the sea.'

Fair Annie turn'd her round about:
'Well, sine that it be sae,
May ne'er woman that has borne a son
Hae a heart sae fu' o' wae!

'Tak down, tak down that mast o' gowd,
Set up a mast of tree;
It disna become a forsaken lady
To sail sae royallie.'

When the cock had crawn, and the day did dawn,
And the sun began to peep,
Up then raise Lord Gregory,
And sair, sair did he weep.

'O I hae dream'd a dream, mither,
I wish it may bring good!
That the bonny lass of Lochroyan
At my bower window stood.

'O I hae dream'd a dream, mither,
The thought o't gars me greet!
That fair Annie of Lochroyan
Lay dead at my bed-feet.'

'Gin it be for Annie of Lochroyan
That ye mak a' this mane,
She stood last night at your bower-door,
But I hae sent her hame.'

'O wae betide ye, ill woman,
An ill death may ye die!
That wadna open the door yoursell
Nor yet wad waken me.'

O he's gane down to yon shore-side,
As fast as he could dree,
And there he saw fair Annie's bark
A rowing owre the sea.

'O Annie, Annie,' loud he cried,
'O Annie, O Annie, bide!
But ay the mair he cried 'Annie,'
The braider grew the tide.

'O Annie, Annie, dear Annie,
Dear Annie, speak to me!
But ay the louder he gan call,
The louder roar'd the sea.

The wind blew loud, the waves rose high
And dash'd the boat on shore;
Fair Annie's corpse was in the faem,
The babe rose never more.

Lord Gregory tore his gowden locks
And made a wafu' moan;
Fair Annie's corpse lay at his feet,
His bonny son was gone.

'O cherry, cherry was her cheek,

And gowden was her hair,
And coral, coral was her lips,
Nane might with her compare.'

Then first he kiss'd her pale, pale cheek,
And syne he kiss'd her chin,
And syne he kiss'd her wane, wane lips,
There was na breath within.

'O wae betide my ill mither,
An ill death may she die!
She turn'd my true-love frae my door,
Who cam so far to me.

'O wae betide my ill mither,
An ill death may she die!
She has no been the deid o' ane,
But she's been the deid of three.'

Then he's ta'en out a little dart,
Hung low down by his gore,
He thrust it through and through his heart,
And words spak never more.



syne: then



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