

Tam o' Shanter by Robert Burns

Tam o' Shanter (Original)

When chapmen billies leave the street,
And drouthy neibors, neibors meet,
As market days are wearing late,
An' folk begin to tak the gate;
While we sit bousing at the nappy,
And getting fou and unco happy,
We think na on the lang Scots miles,
The mosses, waters, slaps, and styles,
That lie between us and our hame,
Where sits our sulky sullen dame.
Gathering her brows like gathering storm,
Nursing her wrath to keep it warm.

This truth fand honest Tam o' Shanter,
As he frae Ayr ae night did canter,
(Auld Ayr, wham ne'er a town surpasses
For honest men and bonie lasses.)

O Tam! had'st thou but been sae wise,
As ta'en thy ain wife Kate's advice!
She tauld thee weel thou was a skellum,
A blethering, blustering, drunken blellum;
That frae November till October,
Ae market-day thou was nae sober;

Tam o' Shanter (Translation)

When the peddler people leave the streets,
And thirsty neighbours, neighbours meet;
As market days are wearing late,
And people begin to take the road home,
While we sit boozing strong beer,
And getting drunk and very happy,
We don't think of the long Scots miles,
The marshes, waters, steps and stiles,
That lie between us and our home,
Where sits our sulky, sullen wife,
Gathering her brows (*frowning*) like a gathering storm,
Nursing her wrath (*anger*), to keep it warm.

This truth found honest Tam o' Shanter,
As he from Ayr one night did canter;
Old Ayr, which never a town surpasses,
For honest men and bonnie lasses (*girls/women*).

Oh Tam, had you but been so wise,
As to have taken your own wife Kate's advice!
She told you well you were a waster,
A rambling, blustering, drunken boaster,
That from November until October,
Each market day you were not sober;



That ilka melder, wi' the miller,
Thou sat as lang as thou had siller;
That every naig was ca'd a shoe on,
The smith and thee gat roaring fou on;
That at the Lord's house, even on Sunday,
Thou drank wi' Kirkton Jean till Monday.
She prophesied that late or soon,
Thou would be found deep drown'd in Doon;
Or catch'd wi' warlocks in the mirk,
By Alloway's auld haunted kirk.

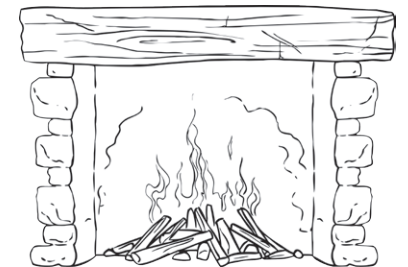
Ah, gentle dames! it gars me greet,
To think how mony counsels sweet,
How mony lengthen'd, sage advices,
The husband frae the wife despises!

But to our tale:-- Ae market-night,
Tam had got planted unco right;
Fast by an ingle, bleezing finely,
Wi' reaming swats, that drank divinely
And at his elbow, Souter Johnny,
His ancient, trusty, drouthy crony;
Tam lo'ed him like a vera brither--
They had been fou for weeks thegither!
The night drave on wi' sangs and clatter
And ay the ale was growing better:

During each milling time, with the miller,
You sat as long as you had money,
For every horse he put a shoe on,
The blacksmith and you got roaring drunk on;
That at the Lord's House (*church*), even on Sunday,
You drank with Kirkton Jean till Monday.
She prophesied that late or soon,
You would be found deep drowned in Doon,
Or caught by warlocks in the murk,
By Alloway's old haunted church.

Ah, gentle ladies, it makes me cry,
To think how many counsels (*warnings*) sweet,
How much long and wise advice,
The husband from the wife despises!

But to our tale :- One market night,
Tam was seated just right,
Next to a fireplace, blazing finely,
With creamy ales, that drank divinely;
And at his elbow, Cobbler Johnny,
His ancient, trusted, thirsty crony;
Tom loved him like a very brother,
They had been drunk for weeks together!
The night drove on with songs and clatter,
And all the ale was tasting better:



Tam o' Shanter by Robert Burns

The landlady and Tam grew gracious,
wi' favours secret, sweet and precious
The Souter tauld his queerest stories;
The landlord's laugh was ready chorus:
The storm without might rair and rustle,
Tam did na mind the storm a whistle.

Care, mad to see a man sae happy,
E'en drown'd himsel' amang the nappy!
As bees flee hame wi' lades o' treasure,
The minutes wing'd their way wi' pleasure:
Kings may be blest, but Tam was glorious.
O'er a' the ills o' life victorious!

But pleasures are like poppies spread,
You seize the flower, its bloom is shed;
Or like the snow falls in the river,
A moment white--then melts for ever;
Or like the borealis race,
That flit ere you can point their place;
Or like the rainbow's lovely form
Evanishing amid the storm.--
Nae man can tether time or tide;
The hour approaches Tam maun ride;
That hour, o' night's black arch the key-stane,

The landlady and Tam grew gracious,
With secret favours, sweet and precious
The cobbler told his queerest stories;
The landlord's laugh was ready chorus:
Outside, the storm might roar and rustle,
Tam did not mind the storm a whistle.

Care, mad to see a man so happy,
Even drowned himself among the ale!
As bees fly home with loads of treasure,
The minutes winged their way with pleasure:
Kings may be blessed, but Tam was glorious,
Over all the ills of life victorious!

But pleasures are like poppies spread,
You seize the flower, its bloom is shed;
Or like the snow fall on the river,
A moment white - then melts for ever;
Or like the Aurora Borealis rays,
That move before you can point to their place;
Or like the rainbow's lovely form
Vanishing amid the storm.
No man can tether (*stop/hold*) time or tide;
The hour approaches when Tom must ride:
That hour, of night's black arch - the key-stone,



Tam o' Shanter by Robert Burns

That dreary hour he mounts his beast in;
And sic a night he takes the road in
As ne'er poor sinner was abroad in.

The wind blew as 'twad blawn its last;
The rattling showers rose on the blast;
The speedy gleams the darkness swallow'd
Loud, deep, and lang, the thunder bellow'd:
That night, a child might understand,
The Deil had business on his hand.

Weel mounted on his gray mare, Meg--
A better never lifted leg--
Tam skelpit on thro' dub and mire;
Despisin' wind and rain and fire.
Whiles holding fast his gude blue bonnet;
Whiles crooning o'er some auld Scots sonnet;
Whiles glowering round wi' prudent cares,
Lest bogles catch him unawares:
Kirk-Alloway was drawing nigh,
Whare ghaists and houlets nightly cry.

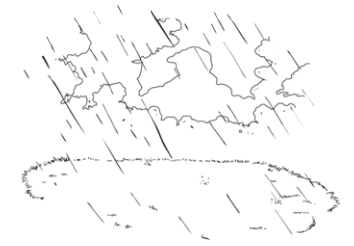
By this time he was cross the ford,
Whare, in the snaw, the chapman smoor'd;
And past the birks and meikle stane,
Whare drunken Chairlie brak 's neck-bane;

That dreary hour he mounts his beast in;
And such a night he takes to the road in
As never a poor sinner had been out in.

The wind blew as if it had blown its last;
The rattling showers rose on the blast;
The speedy gleams the darkness swallowed,
Loud, deep and long the thunder bellowed:
That night, a child might understand,
The Devil had business on his hand.

Well mounted on his grey mare (*female horse*), Meg -
A better never lifted leg -
Tam, raced on through mud and mire,
Despising wind and rain and fire;
Whilst holding fast (*tight*) his good blue bonnet (*hat*),
While crooning over some old Scots sonnet (*poem*),
Whilst glowering round with prudent care,
Lest ghosts catch him unaware:
Alloway's Church was drawing near,
Where ghosts and owls nightly cry.

By this time he was across the ford (*stream*),
Where in the snow the pedlar got smothered;
And past the birch trees and the huge stone,
Where drunken Charlie broke his neck bone;



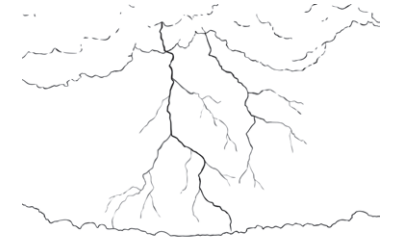
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And thro' the whins, and by the cairn,
Whare hunters fand the murder'd bairn;
And near the thorn, aboon the well,
Whare Mungo's mither hang'd hersel'.--
Before him Doon pours all his floods;
The doubling storm roars thro' the woods;
The lightnings flash from pole to pole;
Near and more near the thunders roll:
When, glimmering thro' the groaning trees,
Kirk-Alloway seem'd in a bleeze;
Thro' ilka bore the beams were glancing;
And loud resounded mirth and dancing.

Inspiring bold John Barleycorn!
What dangers thou canst make us scorn!
Wi' tippeny, we fear nae evil;
Wi' usquabae, we'll face the devil!--
The swats sae ream'd in Tammie's noddle,
Fair play, he car'd na deils a boddle.
But Maggie stood, right sair astonish'd,
Till, by the heel and hand admonish'd,
She ventured forward on the light;
And, vow! Tam saw an unco sight

And through the thorns, and past the cairn (*pile of stones or large single stone*),
Where hunters found the murdered child;
And near the thorn, above the well,
Where Mungo's mother hanged herself.
Before him the River Doon pours all his floods;
The doubling storm roars through the woods;
The lightning flashes from pole to pole;
Near and more near the thunder rolls:
When, glimmering through the groaning trees,
Alloway's Church seemed in a blaze,
Through every gap, light beams were glancing,
And loud resounded mirth (*happiness*) and dancing.

Inspiring bold John Barleycorn! (*whisky*)
What dangers you can make us scorn!
With ale, we fear no evil;
With whisky, we'll face the Devil!
The ales so swam in Tam's head,
Fair play, he didn't care a bit for devils.
But Maggie stood, right sore astonished,
Till, by the heel and hand admonished,
She ventured forward on the light;
And, vow! Tom saw an incredible sight!



Tam o' Shanter by Robert Burns

Warlocks and witches in a dance;
Nae cotillion brent-new frae France,
But hornpipes, jigs strathspeys, and reels,
Put life and mettle in their heels.
A winnock-bunker in the east,
There sat auld Nick, in shape o' beast;
A towzie tyke, black, grim, and large,
To gie them music was his charge:
He scre'd the pipes and gart them skirl,
Till roof and rafters a' did dirl.--
Coffins stood round, like open presses,
That shaw'd the dead in their last dresses;
And by some develish cantraip slight,
Each in its cauld hand held a light.--
By which heroic Tam was able
To note upon the haly table,
A murders's banes in gibbet-airns;
Twa span-lang, wee, unchristen'd bairns;
A thief, new-cutted frae a rape,
Wi' his last gasp his gab did gape;
Five tomahawks, wi blude red-rusted;
Five scymitars, wi' murder crusted;
A garter, which a babe had strangled;
A knife, a father's throat had mangled,
Whom his ain son o' life bereft,

Warlocks and witches in a dance:
No cotillion (*an old French dance*), brand new from France,
But hornpipes, jigs, strathspeys, and reels (*types of Scottish music*),
Put life and mettle (*life/spirit*) in their heels.
In a window alcove in the east,
There sat Old Nick (*the Devil*), in shape of beast;
A shaggy dog, black, grim, and large,
To give them music was his charge (*role/job*):
He screwed the pipes and made them squeal,
Till roof and rafters all did ring.
Coffins stood around, like open presses (*cupboards*),
That showed the dead in their last dresses;
And, by some devilish magic sleight (*trick*),
Each in its cold hand held a light:
By which heroic Tom was able
To note (*notice/see*) upon the holy table,
A murderer's bones, in gibbet-irons (*things to keep them held steady*);
Two span-long, small, unchristened babies;
A thief just cut from his hanging rope ,
With his last gasp his mouth did gape;
Five tomahawks with blood red-rusted;
Five scimitars (*swords*) with murder crusted;
A garter with which a baby had strangled;
A knife a father's throat had mangled (*ruined/messed up*),
Whom his own son of life bereft -



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The gray hairs yet stack to the heft;
Wi' mair o' horrible and awfu',
Which even to name was be unlawfu'.
Three lawyers' tongues, turn'd inside out,
Wi' lies seam'd like a beggar's clout;
Three priests' hearts, rotten, black as muck,
Lay stinking, vile in every neuk.

As Tammie glowr'd, amaz'd, and curious,
The mirth and fun grew fast and furious;
The piper loud and louder blew;
The dancers quick and quicker flew;
They reel'd, they set, they cross'd, they cleekit,
Till ilka carlin swat and reekit,
And coost her duddies to the wark,
And linket at it in her sark!

Now Tam, O Tam! had thae been queans,
A' plump and strapping in their teens,
Their sarks, instead o' creeshie flannen,
Been snaw-white seventeen hunder linnen!
Thir breeks o' mine, my only pair,
That ance were plush, o' gude blue hair,
I wad hae gi'en them off my hurdies,
For ae blink o' the bonie burdies!

The grey-hairs yet stack to the shaft;
With more of the horrible and awful,
Which even to name would be unlawful.
Three Lawyers' tongues, turned inside out,
Sown with lies like a beggar's cloth;
Three Priests' hearts, rotten, black as muck
Lay stinking, vile, in every nook.

As Tam glowered, amazed, and curious,
The mirth and fun grew fast and furious;
The piper loud and louder blew,
The dancers quick and quicker flew,
They reeled, they set, they crossed, they linked,
Till every witch sweated and smelled,
And cast her ragged clothes to the floor,
And danced deftly at it in her undershirts!

Now Tam, O Tam! had these been young girls,
All plump and strapping in their teens!
Their undershirts, instead of greasy flannel,
Been snow-white seventeen hundred linen! -
The trousers of mine, my only pair,
That once were plush, of good blue hair,
I would have given them off my buttocks
For one blink of those pretty girls!



But wither'd beldams, auld and droll,
Rigwoodie hags wad spean a foal,
Louping and flinging on a crummock,
I wonder did na turn thy stomach!

But Tam kend what was what fu' brawlie:
There was ae winsome wench and waulie,
That night enlisted in the core,
Lang after ken'd on Carrick shore;
(For mony a beast to dead she shot,
And perish'd mony a bonie boat,
And shook baith meikle corn and bear,
And kept the country-side in fear.)
Her cutty-sark, o' Paisley harn
That while a lassie she had worn,
In longitude tho' sorely scanty,
It was her best, and she was vauntie,-
Ah! little ken'd thy reverend grannie,
That sark she coft for he wee Nannie,
Wi' twa pund Scots, ('twas a' her riches),
Wad ever grac'd a dance of witches!

But here my Muse her wing maun cour;
Sic flights are far beyond her pow'r;
To sing how Nannie lap and flang,
(A souple jade she was, and strang),

But withered hags, old and droll,
Ugly enough to suckle a foal,
Leaping and flinging on a stick,
It's a wonder it didn't turn your stomach!

But Tam knew what was what well enough:
There was one winsome (*good looking*), jolly wench,
That night enlisted in the core,
Long after being known on Carrick shore;
(For many a beast to death she shot,
And perished (*destroyed*) many a bonnie boat,
And shook both much corn and barley,
And kept the country-side in fear.)
Her short underskirt, o' Paisley cloth,
That while a young girl she had worn,
In longitude (*length*) though very limited,
It was her best, and she was proud -
Ah! little knew your reverend grandmother,
That underskirt she bought for her little granddaughter,
With two Scots pounds (*it was all her riches*),
Would ever grace a dance of witches!

But here my tale must stoop and bow,
Such flights are far beyond her power;
To sing how Nannie leaped and kicked
(A supple youth she was, and strong);



And how Tam stood, like ane bewitch'd,
And thought his very een enrich'd;
Even Satan glowr'd, and fidg'd fu' fain,
And hotch'd and blew wi' might and main;
Till first ae caper, syne anither,
Tam tint his reason ' thegither,
And roars out, "Weel done, Cutty-sark!"
And in an instant all was dark:
And scarcely had he Maggie rallied,
When out the hellish legion sallied.

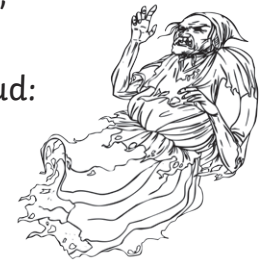
As bees bizz out wi' angry fyke,
When plundering herds assail their byke;
As open pussie's mortal foes,
When, pop! she starts before their nose;
As eager runs the market-crowd,
When "Catch the thief!" resounds aloud;
So Maggie runs, the witches follow,
Wi' mony an eldritch skriech and hollo.

Ah, Tam! ah, Tam! thou'll get thy fairin'!
In hell they'll roast thee like a herrin'!
In vain thy Kate awaits thy commin'!
Kate soon will be a woefu' woman!
Now, do thy speedy utmost, Meg,
And win the key-stane o' the brig;

And how Tom stood like one bewitched,
And thought his very eyes enriched;
Even Satan glowered, and fidgeted full of lust,
And jerked and blew with might and main;
Till first one caper, then another,
Tom lost his reason (*senses*) all together,
And roars out: 'Well done, short skirt! '
And in an instant all was dark;
And scarcely had he Maggie rallied,
When out the hellish legion sallied (*came out/appeared*).

As bees buzz out with angry wrath,
When plundering herds assail (*attack*) their hive;
As a wild hare's mortal foes (*enemies*),
When, pop! she starts running before their nose;
As eager runs the market-crowd,
When 'Catch the thief!' resounds (*is shouted*) aloud:
So Maggie runs, the witches follow,
With many an unearthly scream and holler.

Ah, Tom! Ah, Tom! You will get what's coming!
In hell they will roast you like a herring!
In vain your Kate awaits your coming !
Kate soon will be a woeful (*sad*) woman!
Now, do your speedy utmost, Meg,
And beat them to the key-stone of the bridge;



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There at them thou thy tail may toss,
A running stream they dare na cross.
But ere the key-stane she could make,
The fient a tail she had to shake!
For Nannie, far before the rest,
Hard upon noble Maggie prest,
And flew at Tam wi' furious ettle;
But little wist she Maggie's mettle -
Ae spring brought off her master hale,
But left behind her ain gray tail;
The carlin claught her by the rump,
And left poor Maggie scarce a stump.

No, wha this tale o' truth shall read,
Ilk man and mother's son take heed;
Whene'er to drink you are inclin'd,
Or cutty-sarks run in your mind,
Think! ye may buy joys o'er dear -
Remember Tam o' Shanter's mare.

There, you may toss your tail at them,
A running stream they dare not cross.
But before the key-stone she could make,
She had to shake her tail at the fiend (*enemy*);
For Nannie, far before the rest,
Hard upon noble Maggie pressed,
And flew at Tam with furious aim;
But little knew she Maggie's mettle (*strength*)!
One spring brought off her master whole,
But left behind her own grey tail:
The witch caught her by the rump,
And left poor Maggie scarce a stump.

Now, who this tale of truth shall read,
Each man, and mother's son, take heed;
Whenever to drink you are inclined,
Or short skirts run in your mind,
Think! you may buy joys over dear (*expensive*):
Remember Tam o' Shanter's mare.

