

Anonymous

The Lady Odivere

I

In Norowa a lady bade,
A bonny lass in muckle gear,
And it was soothly sung and said,
She was a lady sweet and fair.

Them cam' fae east and west i' pride 5
An' some cam sailan owre the sea,
An' a' tae win her for a bride;
But never a bride wad the lady be.

She bade them gang heem an' mend their claes 10
That they had worn in comin' sae far,
She ca'd them fules, she ca'd them flaes,
Set stooks on them and gae them a skar.

There was a man baith stoor and strang
An' he wis neeméd Odivere;
He lo'ed the sword, he lo'ed the sang, 15
But aye he lo'ed the lasses mair.

This Odivere fell on his knee
An' vooed a voo upo' his life,
And swore b' him that hang on tree
To mak' this lady fair his wife. 20

He's coorted her, he's wedded her,
An' they were blithe and blissfu' baith;
An' aye he bragged near and far
He won his wife b' Odin's oath.

He's left her in his boorly ha', 25
A-greetan sair that dolefu' day;
Tae Guthaland he's gaen awa'
The muckle pagan loons to slay.

As he cam' back fae Guthaland
I' Muckle Gerth be bade awhile, 30
An' foy's and fiechtins had tae hand
For ladies fair did him beguile.

At Muckle Gerth he tarried lang —
Black sight on him for bidan there!
While sat i' dule her maids amang 35
Wi' tearful e'e his lady fair.

An' aft she boonied hersel sae braw,
An' aft her gowden hair wad keem,
An' then look owre the castle wa
To see her ain good-man come heem. 40

An' aye she looked an' lipped lang
For many a dowie day an' year;
But Odivere, he didna come,
Nor word o' Oddie could she hear.

II

At e'enin i' the mirkin o't 45

A stately knight cam' tae her ha'.
 Fu lood he chappéd on the yett
 And loodly at the yett did ca'.

'A boon, a boon! ye porter loon,
 Bed me this nicht within your ha'. 50
 Me vista's lang, the nicht is mirk,
 An' home and haudin far awa'.'

'Begone, begone, awa, awa!
 To bed you here that may not be.
 Nae stranger sleeps within this ha' 55
 While my good lord's ayont the sea.'

'Gin you wad no' find the weight o' me hand,
 Gae tell your lady mistress fair
 That I hae come fae Guthaland
 An' bear her word o' Odivere.' 60

The yett was opened at his word,
 An' boldly strode he in the ha'.
 And a' the women roond him said
 A stoorer knight they never saw.

An' he's taen off his silken cap 65
 An' he's gaen doon apo his knee
 And he's laid a gowd ring on the lady's lap
 That she was unco fain to see.

'A token fae thee husband dear
 I bring tae thee, my lady fair, 70
 I left him weel, i' jolly cheer.
 They ca' him noo, Sir Odivere.

'An' weel he's won his knight's degree.
 B' slaying many a soldier stoor,
 An' makan hosts o' pagans flee, 75
 Afore his sword sae sharp an' door.'

When she the gowden ring had seen
 She took nae tent o' what he said
 But drew her kerchief ower he een,
 An' colour fae her fair face fled. 80

But syne her bonny face grew bright
 An' blithely blinked her bonny e'e.
 'Rise up, rise up, ye valiant knight
 For oncons guid ye bring to me.

'A stately bulie i' the ha', 85
 Pour oot the best o' blude-red wine,
 Wi' futh o' a' that's guid and braw
 That this brave knight fu' weel may dine.'

An' many a tale he told that nicht
 O' tulyies focht for ladies fair 90
 An' a' about that worthy knight
 I' Guthaland, Sir Odivere.

He minted aye, tho, he never said,
 An' skeeted aye i' ilka tale,
 That Odivere was a rovin' blade 95
 An' liked the lasses ower weel.

An' when the bulie was fairly done
 An' a' the servants gaen tae bed
 An' the twa themsels were left alane
 The lady to the stranger said: 100

'Why bring ye back that gowden ring
 That brings to me sair dule and pain,
 That minds me o' the blithesome days
 When I o' thee was ower fain?'

'Ye ken, fair dame, to me aye dear, 105
 Lang syne ye gae that ring to me,
 An' on this ring i' the moon-licht clear
 Ye swore for ever mine to be.

'An' I i' dule hae gaen sin' syne,
 A lanely man on land an' sea, 110
 An' never a face hae seen but thine
 That I could spier me wife to be'.

'Noo wheesht, noo wheest, ye fause-tongued knight,
 Your words will work me muckle skaith.
 Full weel ken ye what sundered us 115
 — It was the dowie Odin's aith.'

He's taen her white hand i' his stately nave,
 An' fain was she, an' fain was he.
 What happened next, ye need no' speer;
 In sooth I wisna dare to see. 120

The knight's awa' i' morning grey,
 He bade no' for a farewell foy.
 What naebody kens naebody can say;
 But the lady's left i' peerie joy.

Her bony e'en blinked no sae bright, 125
 Her red and white grew white an' grey,
 An' ilka day she wished for nicht
 An' ilka nicht she wished for day.

III

I heard a lady ba'an her bairn,
 An' aye she rockit, an' aye she sang, 130
 An' took sae hard apo the verse
 Till the he'rt within her body rang.

'Ba loo, ba, loo, me bonny bairn,
 Ba loo lillie, ba loo lay,
 Sleep thu, me peerie bonie budo! 135
 Thu little kens thee mither's wae.

'Aloor! I dinna ken thee faither.
 Aloor, aloor! me waeful sin!
 I dinna ken me bairn's faither
 Nor yet the land that he lives in. 140

'Aloor, aloor! ca'd sall I be
 A wicked woman b' a' men,
 That I, a married wife, soud hae
 A bairn tae him I dunno ken.'

Then up an' spak a grimly gest 145

That stood sae lech at her bed feet,
'O here I am, thee bairn's faither,
Although I'm no' thee husband sweet.'

'Me bairn's faither I ken thu are,
Nae luve sae sweet I'll ever hae, 150
An' yet I hae a guid, guid man
That's far awa' fae me this day.'

'I care no' for thee wedded carl,
I wish his face I'll never see,
But when six months is come an' gane 155
I'll come an' play the noris fee.

'It's no be said thu tint b' me
A bodle worth o' worldly gare,
So when I come, thu'll get thee fee 160
An' I me bairn to be me heir.'

'Noo, for the love I bore tae thee,
A love that's brought me muckle shame,
O tell me where thee home may be,
An' tell me true thee vera name?'

'San Imravoe it is me name, 165
I gang on land and swim on sea,
Among the ranks o' selkie folk
I am a yarl o' high degree.

'I am a man apo the land,
I am a selkie i' the sea, 170
My home it is the Soola-Skerry
An' a' that's there is under me.

'Mair or a thoosand selkie folk
Tae me a willing service gae,
An' I am king o' a' the folk 175
An' law to them is what I say.'

'O hoo can thu thee bairn tak',
An' hoo can thu thee bairn save?
I' thee caald home thu'll only mak 180
The grimly sea me bairn's grave.'

'Me peerie bairn I'll safely ferry,
Tho' I hae neither ship nor skift,
Wi' muckle care tae Soolis-Skerry
Afore the sun's hich i' the lift.'

'But hoo sall I me young son ken, 185
An' hoo sall I me bairn know?'
'O' a' the selkies i' Soolis-Skerry
He'll be the middlemaist o' them a'.

'His megs sall a' be black as soot,
His croopan white as driven snaw, 190
An' I beside him, like the sam'
I was tae thee i' times awa'.'

'Me ain guidman's a warrior prood
An' aye a stival nave has he,
An' he may prick or club me bairn 195
When he's a selkie i' the sea.'

'I fear no that, I fear but this
That cockcraa comes an' finds me here,
But come what may, I come again
An' fetch me bairn in ae half-year. 200

'For then will be a seventh stream,
An' then again a man I'll be,
An' tak' me bonny peerie bairn
A' tae the boons o' Soolis-Skerry.'

When the six months were come and gane 205
He cam' to pay the noris fee.
The tane o' his hands was fu' o' gowd,
The tither fu' o' white monie.

The lady's taen a gowden chain,
Her waddin' boon fae Odivere, 210
She tied it roond her bairn's haas,
It for her sake she bade him wear.

'I'm come to fetch me bairn awa'.
Farewell, for thu're anither's wife.'
'I'll wad thee wi' a gowden ring 215
An' bide beside thee a' me life.'

'Thu wadna when I wad, goodwife,
I winno when thu're willan noo.
That day thu tint thu'll never find.
It's late, it's ower late tae rue'. 220

The lady lives a lanely life,
An' aften looks apo the sea,
Still lipenan her first luve ta fin',
But jubish that can never be.

IV

So Odivere's come home again 225
Wi' muckle store o' wardly gear,
An' he, his lady, an' his men
Mak' holidays wi' bulies rare.

They danced and sang, they told their tales,
An' syne sat down tae drink and dine 230
Wi' joles of flesh and fuman cogs
An' wallie horns o bluid-red wine.

Ae day says Oddie tae his men
'I doot gin here we langer link
We'll a' grow fat as butterba's 235
An' dee wi' futh of meat an' drink.

'It's weel enough a peerie while,
I canna thole it lang ava.
Let's hunt the otters on the shore
An' start the morn at blink o' da'. 240

They hunted otters on the shore,
A selkie ran oot o' a geo,
An' Odivere he took no lang
To fell him wi' a mester blow.

Then oot and spak een o' his men 245

'Far hae I sailed and muckle seen,
 But never gowd on selkie's haas,
 Till noo I see 't wi' baith me e'en.'

They bore the selkie tae the ha'
 An' never a word said Odivere. 250
 His face was black an' lowed his e'en
 Though he did neither ban nor swear.

'Co' doon, co' doon! Lady Odivere,
 Co' doon and see me ferly fang. 255
 Ye's read tae me this riddle-rae
 B' a' the saints that ever sang!'

The lady she cam' doon tae see,
 They made sae muckle steer.
 'Here's the gowd chain ye got fae me.
 Tell me, goodwife, hoo cam it here?' 260

'Aloor, aloor! me bonny bairn.
 Me bairn! What am I born tae see?
 Me malison lie on the hand
 That's wrought this deed o' blude on thee!'

The lady wi' her torn hair 265
 She was a doleful sicht tae see,
 Her greetan lood and sabban sair,
 Her arms around the dead selkie.

'Yer bairn, guidwife! no bairn o' mine,
 An' yet ye were me wedded wife. 270
 I doot, when I've been far fae home,
 Ye've led a wicked woman's life.'

'An' gin I be thee wedded wife,
 A wedded man wur thu tae me?
 Ye left me tae a lanely life 275
 An' bade lang years ayont the sea.'

'I left thee wi' baith lands and gare,
 An' made thee mistress o' them a',
 An' thocht thu wad be true to me
 As I to thee when far awa'.' 280

'Black sight apo thee lands and gare!
 Thu little kens a woman's he'rt,
 To think thee gift o' worldly gare
 Is a' the lovin' husband's pert.'

'When doughty deeds were to be done 285
 It wad hae been a bonny pass
 Had I ly'n hame tae culye thee
 An' bore me finger i' the asse.

'I couldna thole a sluggard life,
 An', lady, I wad hae thee ken 290
 When I took thee to be me wife
 I did no' want a cluckan hen.'

'Gin I can cluck, saul thu can crawl
 Owre a' thee deeds wi' women done,
 Hoo ilka bonny wench thu saw 295
 Thu courted her and ca'd it fun.

- 'But ae deid bairn, aloor, hae I!
 An' if this deed was wrang i' me,
 Hoo many bairns hes thu tae shaw
 Hoo true a man thu's been tae me? 300
- 'Could I no' tak what cam tae me
 Tae tempt me i' me langsome life
 While thu were skalan frank and free
 Thee dearest tocher o' a wife?'
- 'Ye lee, ye lee, lee leean limmer!
 Whare'er we drank, abune them a'
 Thee weel-faur'd face I toasted aye,
 An' focht wi' him what said me na. 305
- 'An' when i' battle's saviest pall,
 Me he'rt grew strang when maist ootmoucht
 B' thinkan on me lovan wife —
 That she was faus I little toucht. 310
- 'Wi' selkie folk thu's led a life!
 Awa, ye limmer slut, fae me!
 I wadna hae thee for a wife
 For a' the gowd i' Christindee!' 315
- She's whipped the chain fae the selkie's haas
 An wapéd it on Oddie's croon.
 'Gae, tak ye that, ye ill-tongued tyke.
 An' keep it for a parting boon!' 320
- The lady they put i' a hich hich toor
 Wi' nae sweet light t'row hole or bore.
 They hae gaen her meat and water there,
 An' steeked fast the iron door.
- V
- The Ting has passed her awfu' doom,
 That for her fauts an' sinfu' deed,
 She 'sud be taen an' brunt tae asse
 Withoot or mercy, or remeed. 325
- 'Aloor, aloor, the dolefu' day!
 Aloor! what am I born tae see?
 I' the red-hot fire I man be burnt!
 O waes me he'rt an' waes me. 330
- 'O gin me faither been i' life
 He wad hae doorly focht for me.
 Deid mither's gest will thu no come
 An' set thy dolefu' dochter free? 335
- 'When I lay on thee cother breest
 An' thu thee peerie bairn did rus,
 Thu little thocht thy bonny bairn
 Wad be a cinder i' the asse!' 340
- Then up and spak San Imravoe
 An' a lood and wallie cry gaed he;
 'Ye selkie folk, tae Norowa
 Ca' a' the whal's i' the Nort Sea!' 345
- The day before that lady fair 345

Was tae be brunt wi' muckle woe
A cry was raised around the ha,
'Whal's, whal's, i' ilka bay and voe!'

That Odivere an' a' his men
Ran tae the ca' wi' muckle speed, 350
An' there was rowin', rootin', yowlin'.
An' noise that nicht hae raised the deid.

They rowed an' rooted a' the day
But never a whal' got for their pains
An' i' the mirkin home they gaed 355
Wi' sweean laevis an' tiftan banes.

An' when that they cam tae the ha'
They got a gluf, ye may be sure,
For ilka door stood open wide,
An' the door o' the toor lay on the floor. 360

An' they ran up, and they ran doon,
An' glower'd about wi' a' their e'en.
The lady fair was clean awa
An' never mair b' mortal seen.

An' Odivere's a lanely man 365
An' weary o' his sicker skathe.
An' aye an' sair he rues the day
He ever took the Odin aith.

Tae menye-singers t'anks we gae,
Tae menye-singers drink we a'. 370
Wur foy's they wur no worth a strae
Without their songs an' ballans bra'.

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