

The story of Thomas the Rhymer is very different than that of Tam Lin, as Thomas was taken into Faeryland to be the lover of the Faery Queen. This tale is much more uplifting and positive all the way through than that of Tam Lin. While Thomas may not have chosen to enter Faeryland of his own accord, he is granted much more agency when he is there. He also seems very willing to serve out his time at the Faery Court, without the desire to escape which Tam Lin has. While Thomas eventually gets blessed by the Queen of Elphame, Tam Lin only gets freed by the love of a mortal woman because the Queen is a fearsome figure.

Tam Lin (also called Tame, Tamlane, Tambling, Tomlin, Tam Lien, Tam-a-Line, Tam Lyn, or Tam Lane) is a character in a legendary ballad originating from the Scottish Borders. It is also associated with a reel of the same name, also known as the Glasgow Reel. The story has many variants and revolves around the rescue of Tam Lin by his true love, Janet, from the Queen of the Fairies. (The motif of winning a person by holding him through all forms of transformation is found throughout Europe in folktales.) The story has been adapted into numerous stories, songs, and films.

The story of Tam Lin is one of a Faery Knight in duty to the Faery Queen of Elphame. (Elphame is a concept from Scottish and English folklore. The term literally translates to Elf-home. It is a chthonic place, the underworld, so to speak. Fairies are frequently associated with the underground and ancestors, burial mounds, as well as the landscape as land wights.) It comes to be revealed that he was not always a denizen of Elphame. Tam Lin had been captured from the human world and was forced to be in service to the Faery Queen. However, Tam Lin feels

trapped as an unhappy lover and consort of the Queen of Elphame. The Faery Queen here is seen as a malevolent force because she is keeping Tam Lin captive.

Most variants of the famed ballad begin with the warning that Tam Lin takes either a possession or the virginity of any maiden who passes through the forest of Carterhaugh. When a young woman, usually called Janet or Margaret, goes to Carterhaugh and plucks a double rose, Tam Lin appears and asks her why she has come without his leave and taken what is his. She states that she owns Carterhaugh because her father has given it to her. Eventually, they fall in love and consummate it in the forest. They carry on a secret affair, with Janet often stealing away into the forest to spend time in the arms of her Faery Knight lover. (This relationship is an instance of a widespread leitmotif in European romance literature, generally a love affair with a non-human or supernatural man or woman who is known as the "Demon Lover.")

In most variants, Janet then goes home and discovers that she is pregnant; some variants pick up the story at this point. It is when Janet finds out that she is pregnant that the stakes of the story are raised. It is at that point that Tam Lin tells her that if she comes to see the Faery Rade (procession) on Samhain, she can get him back from the Queen of Elphame and they can be together, marry, and raise their child. When her father presses her about her condition, she declares that her baby's father is an elf whom she will not forsake. In some versions, she is informed of a herb that will induce abortion. In all the variants, when she returns to Carterhaugh and picks a plant, either the same

roses as on her earlier visit or an herb, Tam Lin reappears and challenges her action.

Janet asks him whether he was ever human, either after that reappearance or, in some versions, immediately after their first meeting resulted in her pregnancy. Tam Lin reveals that, though he was once a mortal man, he was imprisoned in Carterhaugh by the Queen of Faeries after she kidnapped him by catching him when he fell from his horse. He goes on to tell Janet that the Faery Horde give one of their people as a teind (tithe) to Hell at midnight on every seventh Samhain night. The compact of the Queen of Elphame with Hell shows her to be a very dangerous force indeed, showing why many people in Celtic countries so feared the Fae.

He asks Janet for her help in freeing him, and receives her agreement. He then instructs her to come to the forest at the time of the tithe, during which he'll be in the company of numerous faerie knights, and he tells her that she'll recognize him by his white horse. Janet must pull him down from his horse, thus making her the one to "catch" him this time and hold him tightly. He warns her that the fairies will attempt to make her drop him by turning him into all manner of beasts, but tells her not to fear for none of these forms will actually cause her harm. Tam Lin tells her that he will eventually take the shape of burning coal, and when this occurs, he instructs her to throw him into a well, whereupon he will reappear as a naked mortal man whom

Janet must hide. It turns out that Janet does as she is asked and wins her knight, although her success angers the Queen of Faeries and she curses Tam Lin, she accepts her defeat. The bravery of Janet, and her willingness to rescue the man she loves, is what gives this dark story a happy ending.

The story of Tam Lin is steeped in the Celtic night of Samhain (or our adopted Halloween or All Saints Day (Day of the Dead)).

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The ancient lyric of this ballad was adapted by Robert Burns in the 18th century, but conveys a morality tale concerning the consequences of maidens cavorting with rakish men.

The ballad dates to at least as early as 1549 as “The Tale of the Young Tamelene,” which is among a long list of medieval romances. Francis James Child collected fourteen traditional variants in his *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads* published in the nineteenth century.