

Charles MacKay (1814-89)

1 *The Kelpie of Corryevreckan*

I.

He mounted his steed of the water clear,
And sat on his saddle of sea-weed sere;
He held his bridal of strings of pearl,
Dug out of the depths where the sea-snakes curl.

II.

He put on his vest of the whirlpool froth, 5
Soft and dainty as velvet cloth,
And donn'd his mantle of sand so white,
And grasp'd his sword of the coral bright.

III.

And away he gallop'd, a horseman free,
Spurring his steed through the stormy sea, 10
Clearing the billows with bound and leap —
Away, away, o'er the foaming deep.

IV.

By Scarba's rock, by Lunga's shore,
By Garveloch isles where breakers roar,
With his horse's hoofs he dash'd the spray, 15
And on to Loch Buy, away, away!

V.

On to Loch Buy all day he rode,
And reach'd the shore as sunset glow'd,
And stopp'd to hear the sounds of joy,
That rose from the hills and glens of Moy. 20

VI.

The morrow was May, and on the green
They'd lit the fire of Beltan E'en,
And danced around, and piled it high
With peat and heather, and pine logs dry.

VII.

A piper play'd a lightsome reel, 25
 And timed the dance with toe and heel;
 While wives look'd on, as lad and lass
 Trod it merrily o'er the grass.

VIII.

And Jessie (fickle and fair was she)
 Sat with Evan beneath a tree, 30
 And smiled with mingled love and pride,
 And half agreed to be his bride.

IX.

The Kelpie gallop'd o'er the green —
 He seem'd a knight of noble mien;
 And old and young stood up to see, 35
 And wonder'd who the knight could be.

X.

His flowing locks were auburn bright,
 His cheeks were ruddy, his eyes flash'd light;
 And as he sprang from his good gray steed,
 He look'd a gallant youth indeed. 40

XI.

And Jessie's fickle heart beat high,
 As she caught the stranger's glancing eye;
 And when he smiled, "Ah well," thought she,
 "I wish this knight came courting me!"

XII.

He took two steps towards her seat — 45
 "Wilt thou be mine, O maiden sweet?"
 He took her lily-white hand, and sigh'd,
 "Maiden, maiden, be my bride!"

XIII.

And Jessie blush'd, and whisper'd soft —
 "Meet me to-night when the moon's aloft. 50
 I've dream'd, fair knight, long time of thee —

I thought thou camest courting me.”

XIV.

When the moon her yellow horn display'd,
Alone to the trysting went the maid;
When all the stars were shining bright, 55
Alone to the trysting went the knight.

XV.

“I have loved thee long, I have loved thee well,
Maiden, oh more than words can tell!
Maiden, thine eyes like diamonds shine;
Maiden, maiden, be thou mine!” 60

XVI.

“Fair sir, thy suit I'll ne'er deny —
Though poor my lot, my hopes are high;
I scorn a lover of low degree —
None but a knight shall marry me.”

XVII.

He took her by the hand so white, 65
And gave her a ring of gold so bright;
“Maiden, whose eyes like diamonds shine,
Maiden, maiden, now thou'rt mine!”

XVIII.

He lifted her up on his steed of gray,
And they rode till morning away, away — 70
Over the mountain and over the moor,
And over the rocks to the dark sea-shore.

XIX.

“We have ridden east, we have ridden west —
I'm weary, fair knight, and I fain would rest.
Say, is thy dwelling beyond the sea? 75
Hast thou a good ship waiting for me?”

XX.

“I have no dwelling beyond the sea,
I have no good ship waiting for thee:

Thou shalt sleep with me on a couch of foam,
And the depths of the ocean shall be thy home.” 80

XXI.

The gray steed plunged in the billows clear,
And the maiden’s shrieks were sad to hear; —
“Maiden, whose eyes like diamonds shine —
Maiden, maiden, now thou’rt mine!”

XXII.

Loud the cold sea-blast did blow 85
As they sank ’mid the angry waves below —
Down to the rocks where the serpents creep,
Twice five hundred fathoms deep.

XXIII.

At morn a fisherman sailing by
Saw her pale corse floating high. 90
He knew the maid by her yellow hair
And her lily skin so soft and fair.

XXIV.

Under a rock on Scarba’s shore,
Where the wild winds sigh and the breakers roar,
They dug her a grave by the water clear, 95
Among the sea-weeds salt and sere.

XXV.

And every year at Beltan E’en,
The Kelpie gallops across the green,
On a steed as fleet as the wintry wind,
With Jessie’s mournful ghost behind. 100

XXVI.

I warn you, maids, whoever you be,
Beware of pride and vanity;
And ere on change of love you reckon,
Beware the Kelpie of Corryvreckan.

(From Charles Mackay, *Legends of the Isles and Other Poems*. London, 1851)