

John Sterling (1806-44)

2 *The Rose and the Gauntlet*

Low spake the knight to the peasant girl:
"I tell thee sooth, I am belted earl;
Fly with me from this garden small,
And thou shalt sit in my castle's hall.

"Thou shalt have pomp, and wealth, and pleasure, 5
Joys beyond thy fancy's measure;
Here with my sword and horse I stand,
To bear thee away to my distant land.

"Take, thou fairest! this full-blown rose —
A token of love that as ripely blows." 10
With his glove of steel he plucked the token,
But it fell from his gauntlet crushed and broken.

The maiden exclaimed, "Thou seest, sir knight[,]
Thy fingers of iron can only smite;
And, like the rose thou hast torn and scattered, 15
I in thy grasp should be wrecked and shattered."

She trembled and blush'd, and her glances fell,
But she turned from the knight, and said, "Farewell!"
"Not so," he cried, "will I lose my prize:
I heed not thy words, but I read thine eyes." 20

He lifted her up in his grasp of steel,
And he mounted and spurred with furious heel;
But her cry drew forth her hoary sire,
Who snatched his bow from above the fire.

Swift from the valley the warrior fled, 25
Swifter the bolt of the cross-bow sped;
And the weight that pressed on the fleet-foot horse
Was the living man and the woman's corse.

That morning the rose was bright of hue;
That morning the maiden was fair to view; 30
But the evening sun its beauty shed
On the wither'd leaves and the maiden dead.

(From George Barnett Smith, ed. *Illustrated British Ballads, Old and New*. Vol. 2. London, 1881)