Tam Lin

The beautiful Janet lived in her father’s castle, the castle of the glorious count March. Together with other girls she used to spend her days in a high tower – where they sewed and embroided silk attires. But Janet didn’t care about making her seams straight and flat. She liked to look out of the windows much more.

And in the window you could see the trees of the Kartehog forest, where the girls were strictly forbidden to go. The knights of the elfs’ Queen were said to hunt there and woe is the girl who would dare to go there and meet one of them.

But Janet wouldn’t listen to it. And one day her sewing was thrown away. The needle appeared to be on the floor and the young lady – in the green forest.

Walking in the forest she suddenly saw a white horse tied to a tree. The horse was whiter than milk and its harness shone like pure gold. Janet went on and came to a glade, smothered in roses. She had just picked one flower, when a beautiful youth appears in front of her from nowhere.

“Why did you pick the white rose, beautiful Janet?” he asked. “Who allowed you? And how did you dare to come to the Kartehog forest without my permission?”

“I pick flowers wherever I want!” Janet answered. “And I’m not going to ask you for permission.”

Having heard such a cheek answer the youth laughed and all the seven handbells on his belt began to tinkle merrily. Then he picked up a red rose and handing it to Janet said

“Don’t be angry, it was a joke. I would spare even all the roses of the Kartehog forest for such a beautiful girl.”

For the whole day Janet and Tam Lin (that was the boy’s name) walked through the forest, danced on the glades to magic music and tender singing.

But at some moment Janet noticed the sun setting. And she understood it was time to go home if she wanted to get to the castle before her father had noticed her absence.

Poor Janet was in such a hurry that she ran almost all the way back and was exhausted. When she, pale and weary went through the large gates of the castle, the court ladies who were playing with a ball in the yard in front of the castle asked her:

“What have you seen in the forest, beautiful Janet that made you look so tired and pale?”

But Janet answered nothing.

Next day the court ladies played chess in the big hall and girls were sitting and sewing again in the tower. Janet was left alone. She looked out of the window and thought: “I wish I were there, walking in the forest with the young Knight, dancing to magic music and listened to tender singing.”

Lost in thought she didn’t see the old lord, her father’s, the glorious count March, friend come in.

“Why are you grieving, beautiful Janet?” He asked. “It seems to me you visited the green elfs’ country yesterday. If only our count find it out, we all will be in trouble.”

“Oh! Leave me alone!” Janet said angrily.

Her answer sounded cheek but she felt that the old count was right. Tam Lin wasn’t an ordinary mortal, but a knight of the elfs’ Queen. And woe is the girl who will fall in love with a knight from the magic elfs’ country. Everybody said so. But Janet wouldn’t listen to it. And one fine day she ran to the forest again. But she hadn’t met either the white horse or its young master. She already wanted to go home and picked a green twig to take with her as keepsake – when suddenly Tam Lin rose in view.

“Tell me quickly, Tam Lin, what are you?” Janet asked.

“I am the guard of the Kartehog forest”, the youth said.

“So, it is true, you are really the knight of the elfs’ Queen” Janet asked sadly

“They named me so, Tam Lin answered. But I was born and grew among people. I was brought up by my grandfather, the count of Rocksembourg, because my parents died when I was a child. Since that time I lived in his castle. Once upon a time when we were hunting in this very forest an awful gust of wind came from the North. The count of Rocksembourg with his suite galloped home and I was overtaken by some kind of strange sleep and fell down from my horse. I woke up in the elfs’ country – it was their Queen who had sent on me an angry northern wind on purpose, to take me away, to the green hills of the country of endless Youth.”

Having remembers the green hills Tam Lin ceased speaking, hung his head. Then he said again sadly:

“Since that time I has been under an incantation: at the day-time I must guard the Kartehog forest, at night I get back to the elfs’ country, where it is always merry and warm. I am a greatly honor person there. If you only know Janet how much I want to destroy the wicked oaths and go back to people!”

“I’ll help you!” Janet exclaimed and added softly at once. “if you want of course.”

Tam Lin took her hands in his and said:

“There is only one night in the year, when it is possible to destroy the incantation of the elfs’ Queen, the eve of All Saints’ Day. That night all the elves leave their green hills. I go with them. Today is such night. But it is not easy to release me. Would you dare to do it, dear Janet?”

In reply Janet only asked what she had to do.

And Tam Lin said:

When the clock strikes midnight wait for me on the on the crossroads of four roads. At first you will see the knights of the Elfs’ Queen on black horses, let them go, but don’t move from your place. Then knights on dun horses will pass by. Let them gallop by too. And finally the knights on white horses will appear. I’ll be among them. I’ll take off one glove to let you know, that it is me. You should come up to my horse, take it by the golden bridle and snatch from my hands. As soon as you take away the reins, I’ll fall down from the horse, and the Elfs’ Queen will exclaim:

“The faithful tam Lin is kidnapped!” Then the most difficult part is beginning. You should hug me firmly no hold me no matter what will happen to me, whatever I will be turned into. That is the only way to break the spell and defeat the Elfs’ Queen.

It was frightening for poor Janet to stay alone in the night forest. But she remembered what Tam Lin had told her and she full felled everything as he had said. She caught the white horse by the golden bridle and snatched the rein from Tam Lin’s hands, and when he fell down on the ground she hugged him as firmly as she could.

“The faithful Tam Lin has been kidnapped” exclaimed the Elfs’ Queen.

But Janet didn’t get scared and just hugged him more firmly. Then the Elfs’ Queen whispered an incantation and turned Tam Lin into a small green lizard. Janet held the lizard close to her heart, but the lizard turned into a cold snake, which wound itself around her neck. Janet bravely grasped the snake, but it turned into a bar of burning iron. Tears poured form Janet’s eyes, it was so painful but anyway she didn’t let Tam Lin go all the same.

And the Elfs’ Queen understood that Tam Lin was lost for her forever. She returned him his former looks and said:

“Farewell Tam Lin! Farewell! The country of elfs’ lost its best knight. If I had known yesterday, what I know now, I would have turned your tender heart into a stone.”

With those words the Elfs’ Queen disappeared in the green forest.

And the beautiful Janet hold of Tam Lin’s hand and took him to the castle of her father, the glorious count March.