

Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936)

19 *The Last Rhyme of True Thomas*

The King has called for priest and cup,
The King has taken spur and blade
To dub True Thomas a belted knight,
And all for the sake of the songs he made.

They have sought him high, they have sought him low, 5
They have sought him over down and lea.
They have found him by the milk-white thorn
That guards the Gates of Faerie.

'Twas bent beneath and blue above:
Their eyes were held that they might not see 10
The kine that grazed beneath the knowes,
Oh, they were the Queens of Faerie!

“Now cease your song,” the King he said,
“Oh, cease your song and get you dight
“To vow your vow and watch your arms, 15
“For I will dub you a belted knight.

“For I will give you a horse o’ pride,
“Wi’ blazon and spur and page and squire;
“Wi’ keep and tail and seizin and law,
“And land to hold at your desire.” 20

True Thomas smiled above his harp,
And turned his face to the naked sky,
Where, blown before the wastrel wind,
The thistle-down she floated by.

“I ha’ vowed my vow in another place, 25
“And bitter oath it was on me.
“I ha’ watched my arms the lee-long night,
“Where five-score fighting men would flee.

“My lance is tipped o’ the hammered flame,
“My shield is beat o’ the moonlight cold; 30
“And I won my spurs in the Middle World,
“A thousand fathom beneath the mould.

“And what should I make wi’ a horse o’ pride,
“And what should I make wi’ a sword so brown,
“But spill the rings of the Gentle Folk 35
“And flyte my kin in the Fairy Town?

“And what should I make wi’ blazon and belt,
“Wi’ keep and tail and seizin and fee,
“And what should I do wi’ page and squire
“That am a king in my own countrie? 40

“For I send east and I send west,
“And I send far as my will may flee,
“By dawn and dusk and the drinking rain,
“And syne my Sendings return to me.

“They come wi’ news of the groanin’ earth, 45
“They come wi’ news of the roarin’ sea.
“Wi’ word of Spirit and Ghost and Flesh,
“And man, that’s mazed among the three.”

The King he bit his nether lip,
And smote his hand upon his knee: 50
“By the faith of my soul, True Thomas,” he said,
“Ye waste no wit in courtesie!

“As I desire, unto my pride,
“Can I make Earls by three and three,
“To run before and ride behind 55
“And serve the sons o’ my body.”

“And what care I for your row-foot earls,
“Or all the sons o’ your body?
“Before they win to the Pride o’ Name,

“I trow they all ask leave o’ me. 60

“For I make Honour wi’ muckle mouth,
“As I make Shame wi’ mincing feet,
“To sing wi’ the priests at the market-cross,
“Or run wi’ the dogs in the naked street.

“And some they give me the good red gold, 65
“And some they give me the white money,
“And some they give me a clout o’ meal,
“For they be people of low degree.

“And the song I sing for the counted gold
“The same I sing for the white money, 70
“But best I sing for the clout o’ meal
“That simple people given me.”

The King cast down a silver groat,
A silver groat o’ Scots money,
“If I come wi’ a poor man’s dole,” he said, 75
“True Thomas, will ye harp to me?”

“Whenas I harp to the children small,
“They press me close on either hand.
“And who are you,” True Thomas said,
“That you should ride while they must stand? 80

“Light down, light down from your horse o’ pride,
“I trow ye talk too loud and hie,
“And I will make you a triple word,
“And syne, if ye dare, ye shall ’noble me.”

He has lighted down from his horse o’ pride, 85
And set his back against a stone.
“Now guard you well,” True Thomas said,
“Ere I rax your heart from your breast-bone!”

True Thomas played upon his harp,
The fairy harp that couldna lee, 90

And the first least word the proud King heard,
It harpit the salt tear out o' his e'e.

"Oh, I see the love that I lost long syne,
"I touch the hope that I may not see,
"And all that I did of hidden shame, 95
"Like little snakes they hiss at me.

"The sun is lost at noon — at noon!
"The dread of doom has grippit me.
"True Thomas, hide me under your cloak,
"God wot, I'm little fit to dee!" 100

*'Twas bent beneath and blue above —
'Twas open field and running flood —
Where, hot on heath and dyke and wall,
The high sun warmed the adder's brood.*

"Lie down, lie down," True Thomas said, 105
"The God shall judge when all is done,
"But I will bring you a better word
"And lift the cloud that I laid on."

True Thomas played upon his harp,
That birled and brattled to his hand, 110
And the next least word True Thomas made,
It garred the King take horse and brand.

"Oh, I hear the tread o' the fighting-men,
"I see the sun on splent and spear.
"I mark the arrow outen the fern 115
"That flies so low and sings so clear!

"Advance my standards to that war,
"And bid my good knights prick and ride;
"The gled shall watch as fierce a fight
"As e'er was fought on the Border-side!" 120

'Twas bent beneath and blue above,

*'Twas nodding grass and naked sky,
Where, ringing up the wastrel wind,
The eyass stooped upon the pye.*

True Thomas sighed above his harp, 125
And turned the song on the midmost string;
And the last least word True Thomas made,
He harp it his dead youth back to the King.

“Now I am prince, and I do well
“To love my love withouten fear; 130
“To walk with man in fellowship,
“And breathe my horse behind the deer.

“My hounds they bay unto the death,
“The buck has couched beyond the burn,
“My love she waits at her window 135
“To wash my hands when I return.

“For that I live am I content
“(Oh! I have seen my true love’s eyes)
“To stand with Adam in Eden-glade,
“And run in the woods o’ Paradise!” 140

*'Twas naked sky and nodding grass,
'Twas running flood and wastrel wind,
Where, checked against the open pass,
The red deer turned to wait the hind.*

True Thomas laid his harp away, 145
And louted low at the saddle-side;
He has taken stirrup and hauden rein,
And set the King on his horse o’ pride.

“Sleep ye or wake,” True Thomas said,
“That sit so still, that muse so long? 150
“Sleep ye or wake? — till the Latter Sleep
“I trow ye’ll not forget my song.

