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Susan Cooper , Warwick Hutton (Illustrator)

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Margaret, daughter of the king of Scotland, longs for adventure. Tired of setting a good example for all the other young girls -- and of waiting to be married -- Margaret flings down her embroidery one day and runs out of the castle, over the fields to Carterhays, a wood that is supposedly haunted by Tam Lin, an Elfin knight. There, indeed, she meets Tam Lin, who is remarkably handsome. When she learns his story -- that he is human, not Elfin at all, and was stolen as a baby by the Elfin Queen -- she determines to help break the enchantment that holds him. Courageous and steadfast throughout one fearful night, Margaret defeats each dangerous and dramatic attempt by the Elfin Queen to keep Tam Lin. And when the morning sun rises, Margaret and Tam Lin ride together across the green fields of Scotland, back to the castle.

Tam Lin Details

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From Reader Review Tam Lin for online ebook

Fantasy Literature says

Anyone who is familiar with the ballad Tam Lin knows it's a story that is very much for grown-ups, or at least teenagers. Susan Cooper does a very good job here of adapting the old story so that it's suitable for any age. It requires changing a few plot elements, but the essential spirit of the story remains the same.

Margaret is tired of sewing and acting polite and talking about future husbands with the other girls at her father's castle, so she runs away to the woods of Carterhays to pick flowers. She has been expressly forbidden to go there, of course. There, she meets the handsome Tam Lin, and after arguing for a minute over who really owns the forest, they spend a pleasant afternoon talking and becoming friends in the woods. When Margaret gets back home, she's in big trouble — she has actually been gone a week! Her unlikely friendship with Tam Lin leads her to sneak out once again, to rescue him from... Read More:
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Heather says

I was most excited to read this when I requested Christmas books from the library.
I love Scotland and love the idea of a Scottish Christmas book. However this didn't look Scottish at all. It looks more Chinese, as well as the name.

I immediately liked Margaret, who was the princess and didn't like sewing, and longed for adventure. That's my kind of princess.
I liked the line "the right man will come for you at the right time."
The word 'reprovingly' is too big for a kids book.

I love that there's the forest that's said to be haunted by the Elfin knight.
This also seemed to elude to adult material. Her nurse says "if once you saw him it would be the end of you. No man would marry you then." It implies he would compromise them.
I did think Margaret was rude to her nurse, the way she said can you talk about anything besides marriage, and then storms off. I like strong, but likable characters, and this was a bratty moment.

I like the life of a princess, how the men at arms sprang to attention as she ran past.
I didn't like that it didn't show a close-up of Tam Lin. It just shows him at a distance.

Tam Lin says he's a knight. His dad is the Earl of Roxburgh, on the other side of Scotland. But he's human. When he was 3, he fell asleep in his dad's garden and the Elfin Queen stole him. I was instantly disappointed that he wasn't an elf, and was a human.
It's pretty serious that the Elfin people have a pact with the devil, that every seven years they send a soul to hell. That might scare kids.

He said a maid who loved him could save him, as is always the case in fairy tales. On Midsummer's Eve, the Elfin folk ride abroad at night, through England, Scotland, and all over the world. She should go to the holy well at Miles Cross, where two roads meet, with her cloak wrapped around her and her horse blindfolded while the Elfin folk ride by.

He said a group of squires will ride by, then a group of ladies, and last will be the highest group, of the King and Queen and their knights. He said let the black and grey horse pass, and to put out her hand to the white horse that breathes fire. He will be on that horse, wearing one gloves hand and one bare, with a gold star in his coroner because he's an earthly knight.

She should take his horse by the bridle and must not look at the Queen, only at him,& take his bare hand. He will change shapes, but she must hold on and not let go,& remember he will never hurt her, whatever he is. Then she must drop what's in her hand in the well.

Everything is seen at a distance. She mentions the gleaming squires with their banners riding by, and the ladies, beautiful as a dream, and the glittering coach of the King and Queen, with their knights trotting on tall ghostly horses. That would be nice to see up close.

The drawings aren't my style, but I liked the moonlight edged around the tree. It actually looked like it had light in it. However it was so light out anyone could have seen Margaret and her horse under the tree. I liked the sound of the elfin folk standing shadowy in the trees, watching. And how when they sighed it sounded like leaves in the wind.

He only changed to a few animals, wolf, snake, deer, and then a hot coal.

The elves vanish into the air, and the high lament of the Queen says "Tam Lin leaves me" which is odd because she chose his soul to go to hell, so why is she mournful that he's leaving her?

I was absolutely shocked to see a naked butt on the page. Knowing she's seeing his front side straight on! haha That's a lot for a kids book!

This was sudden: "one day we shall have a child, you and I, as naked and glad as the knight born today out of this well." Obviously the baby would be born naked. And she says we'll teach her to pick roses. He didn't say it'd be a girl. And it was a random thing to say.

The scene of them walking back to the castle was funny because you could see him sort of hunched over, with his hands covering his front. While she walked behind him holding the cloak up.

This was misleading. I'm disappointed he wasn't really an elf.

And kids books are never conclusive enough at the end.

The illustrations were probably the most disappointing. Sketchy looking, far away. Not much detail. With the right illustrations this could have been so much better.

I'd love to read a YA version of this.& have more romance, dialogue and connection.

It's like the old Disney movies where they fall immediately in love, and get married when they barely know each other.

I wish there had been a wedding, with them going back to the castle and seeing her parents& getting married. I realized we never saw the queens face. Or any of them. It didn't say their ages.

Or how people thought he was an elf. He did come off as evil in the beginning. He seemed mad that she picked the fruit, and how was it possible that she only spent one afternoon with him, but it turned out to be a week when she went home? This should have been explained. And how long has he been there, if rumor says he steals girls. He's young himself, so he could have only been 'stealing girls' for the past few years or so. I was so surprised she held on the whole time to Tam Lin because characters never do. When they're told not to look, they do. It was refreshing, because I expected her to let go, and the whole thing ruined, and for her to have to find another way to save him (like in East of the Sun, West of the Moon). It was nice to have the MC follow orders, and not mess up in the end.

I realized after finishing this that this was not a Christmas book in any way, and wondered how in the world I thought it was. I had been looking at Christmas books in the library's catalog, and this showed up, and I guess I assumed it was Christmas, and didn't look closely at it. I read this Christmas day, and didn't up finishing A Christmas Carol that night because I had read this!!

Bruce says

Using the text of the old Scottish ballad Tam Lin (Child 39 version G) Cooper tells of the bold Princess Margaret who ventures into a haunted wood to meet Tam Lin, an earthly Knight under the spell of the Elfin Queen. Then by a trial of courage bravely steals him away for her husband and thereby rescues him from hell.

Amanda says

Let me preface this review by saying that, yes, this is a picture book. But it's written by the incomparable Susan Cooper! I thought that reading two "Tam Lin" picture books would help to provide an interesting point of comparison to the more mature retellings I've been reading. As I discovered while writing my thesis on "Beauty and the Beast" retellings, picture books are much more complex than we traditionally give them credit for. In the case of *Tam Lin*, I read the story to see how Cooper remained faithful and deviated from a tale that's not much shorter than her retelling itself. I also wanted to look at what scenes and images were selected to be portrayed through the illustrations. I swear, it's really interesting stuff!

The story itself does not deviate much from the original ballad. In fact, it remains a pretty faithful rendition of the core story of the many variants that I read. Nevertheless, it is safe to assume that Cooper's audience with a picture book is going to be slightly younger than those who either heard or sang the ballad back in Scotland, so there are some slight modifications.

Cooper blends together a number of different "Tam Lin" tales (some I apparently haven't even read) and adds her own interpretation to make this story more child-friendly. In her version, Margaret becomes more fleshed out, as do the motivations for her actions. In a way, Margaret can be viewed as an empowering role model for young girls. She is a princess, but feels confined sewing each day and is tired of her nurses speaking constantly of marriage and how ladies must prepare to be wives. Headstrong Margaret is defiant and stubborn, and in this case she travels to Carterhays to prove a point: she doesn't want to be married off like a piece of property. It is this frustration with the way her life is being planned out that causes Margaret to rebel and seek out Tam Lin's wood. Of course Cooper must take some liberties with Margaret and Tam Lin's relationship. There is no hint of anything remotely sexual between them, nor is there much in the way of romance, although Tam Lin does mention at the end that he and Margaret will have a child together some day.

Illustrations frequently accompany the text, and the images seem to mirror Margaret's desire for the freedom to see more of the world. For the most part, the illustrations show humans as tiny against sweeping scenery and landscapes. Nature and the natural world plays a large role in the story. Take, for example, the image to the right, as Margaret covers the saved Tam Lin.

It is interesting that Susan Cooper chose to have her byline read "retold by" instead of the traditional "by."

None of the authors of the other "Tam Lin" versions I read chose to do that. In a way, what Cooper manages to do with this book is create a version that is more accessible to a younger audience, and perhaps takes fewer authorial liberties than most authors do who choose to retell classic tales.

With that in mind, how do I think *Tam Lin* fared? The illustrations were not my favorite, but I'm picky with those. I did enjoy how Cooper has made the story more accessible to a younger audience, although some of her modifications (such as making the tithe occur during Midsummer's Eve rather than Halloween) left me a little confused. Nonetheless, this is definitely a story that I would share with children, especially young girls.

Karyn Huenemann says

Retold by Susan Cooper; illustrated by Warwick Hutton. While I love Susan Cooper's writing, for the most part, this retelling of the Tam Lin story is inferior to Jane Yolen's 1990 retelling. Rather than creating a tale steeped in the magic of faërie and moonlight, as Yolen has done, Cooper has written a story for younger children, with Margaret as a headstrong, disobedient girl, rather than the proud, willful but capable Jennet of Yolen's tale. The requisite plot elements are both retained and removed from the original to recast it for younger readers (no mention of sex, although Tam Lin promises Margaret a baby at the end), but the narrative style is that of a modern picture book, rather than a simplified oral narrative. Read Yolen's!

Jeremy says

Also read the 9781782501343 edition. I'm still not attracted to sassy characters (Margaret). See an introduction [here](#).

Justyn Rampa says

Read this fairytale recommendation since I couldn't find it in a proper anthology. I had never heard of this tale though it is a great example of a strong female protagonist. This does not vary too much from the original tale except for Margaret's pregnancy and the rumors around Tam Lin, a mysterious man from the forest. To be honest, it still works without those. The illustrations seem to be a bit of an afterthought, but the writing was good.

Anna Smithberger says

2.5 stars rounded up to 3 for goodreads.

There isn't anything wrong with this version of Tam Lin, there just isn't anything spectacular about it either. The illustrations don't offer much and the prose is sorta awkward. All of the sexual overtones have been removed and it's very clearly a woo! girl power telling for children.

And just me being me, I don't like that the heroine's name was changed to Margaret for seemingly no reason. Name changes in adaptations are fine and totally make sense, but this is supposed to be a picture book

version of Tam Lin and I want my sassy, strong Janet.

Miriam says

This prose retelling of the Tam Lin story focuses on Janet's rebellion against social strictures. The sexual aspect is elided, making Janet's decision to save her ~~lover~~ recent acquaintance less emotional and more kindly. Likewise removed is the suggestion that Tam Lin engineered their relationship in a self-interested attempt to find a savior. Here he is merely a nice, handsome, ill-fated dude who hangs around a spot that Janet visits strictly because she has been told not to. If this book introduces more young readers to the story, I'm glad it exists, but it is definitely not a better retelling. I thought the illustrations were pretty weak, as well.

Diana Ferguson says

I love the story of Tam Lin and thought that Susan Cooper's retelling was very well done. I was not especially keen on Warwick Hutton's illustrations, but that is more likely an issue of personal taste and not of quality.

Cynthia Egbert says

Last night, when sleep eluded me, I was reading fairy tales to bring my brain down from thinking. This is one of my favorites and I love the way that Susan Cooper retells it. I was really thinking that this is the story that they were going to adapt for Disney's "Brave", and I still wish that somebody would do a nice movie version of this Scottish fairy tale.

Mary says

In this version of *Tam Lin*, Margaret is a princess frustrated by her role in life, "sewing, listening to the stories told by [her] old nurse and waiting to be married." The nurse tells her never to go to Carterhays because it is haunted by an Elfin knight, but Margaret disobeys her and goes anyway. She meets Tam Lin, who tells her that the Elfin Queen has chosen him as their sacrifice, and tomorrow who will go to Hell. He says he can escape "only with the help of a maid who loves me."

This is another child-friendly version of *Tam Lin*, but I prefer Jane Yolen's retelling of Tam Lin, which features a more admirable heroine and better illustrations.

Mikaela Renz-Whitmore says

This is one of the most compelling myths of my life, and Susan Cooper is author of one of my favorite kids series (*Dark Is Rising*).

Despite the auspicious synchronicity here, this book fell flat for me.

So sad! Such high hopes.

Andrea says

I liked Margaret as a character: she likes adventure, is against convention. I especially liked her when she said "I am not a flower waiting to be picked. I would rather do my own picking" about a husband. I didn't agree with the term "fat Jana" and was shocked that a children's author would refer to a character as fat. Would you like children to go around and start identifying people as fat? Calling her just her name would have sufficed.

I liked learning about the rules back then. Maids were supposed to sit quietly, sew, rub cucumbers on their skin to be soft, be modest around men, and never travel the road alone. It got so interesting when her nurse said never to travel near Carterhays and Jana said it was haunted. I was so interested in Tam Lin because she said he was an Elfin knight who waits to trap girls.

I couldn't wait to see where the story went. I liked that his identity wasn't immediately obvious. She expected a knight from the stories and since he was dressed like a country guy, barefoot with a shirt and tunic, she didn't think he was the guy from the legend. I wondered how he knew her by name though. He used her name the first second he saw her and that stood out to me as odd.

What a line, that she ate the apple, forgetting that apples aren't ripe in June!

It was such a surprise that the one day spent with him was actually a week to everyone else. It was cool that anyone that was with Tam Lin was ruined for marriage and considered a disgrace.

I thought it was a dumb question that she asked if the Elfin Queen was very beautiful after he said he's been a captive of her kingdom ever since he was 3. That should be the least of her concerns.

It was a bit of a jolt to read about the Devil and Hell. In a little kid's book that seems way too dark and mature. They made a pact with the Devil that every 7 years they have to send someone to Hell, and he thought the Queen chose him. I wondered why now she chose him. And why she took him in the first place. And what she's done with him his entire life. There needed to be a reason.

The instructions were a bit much, that she was supposed to wait for 3 different parties to go by, and then take his horse's reins. It was cool that she was supposed to take his bare hand and hang onto it no matter what. The queen was going to change his shape over and over again and she wasn't supposed to let go. And then when that was over she was supposed to throw what she had down the well.

I was so glad that she didn't let go of him because I was expecting her to fail as happens in most stories. Even though he turned into a wolf, and then a snake, and then a wild deer, she didn't let go of him. Then the Queen made him turn into a burning hot iron bar and then she was supposed to drop him in the well. I turned the page and was shocked to see his bare butt as he was coming out of the well. That's a sight I've never seen in a book before, especially as a kid. I would have been scandalized as a kid!

The image of him standing with his hands down in front of his crotch was so funny. I would have never

expected that in here.

It was so weird when he said they'll have a child one day as naked and glad as the knight born today. Do kids come out fully dressed?? Of course the baby would be naked, and that's just a really weird thing to say.

Lisa says

I really didn't like the art and Cooper didn't seem to be trying to make an original interpretation of the tale. I was rather bored.
