

The Erl King

--Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

Who's riding so late where winds blow wild
It is the father grasping his child;
He holds the boy embraced in his arm,
He clasps him snugly, he keeps him warm.

"My son, why cover your face in such fear?"
"You see the elf-king, father?
He's near! The king of the elves with crown and train!"
"My son, the mist is on the plain."

'Sweet lad, o come and join me, do!
Such pretty games I will play with you;
On the shore gay flowers their color unfold,
My mother has many garments of gold.'

"My father, my father, and can you not hear
The promise the elf-king breathes in my ear?"
"Be calm, stay calm, my child, lie low:
In withered leaves the night-winds blow."

'Will you, sweet lad, come along with me?
My daughters shall care for you tenderly;
In the night my daughters their revelry keep,
They'll rock you and dance you and sing you to sleep.'

"My father, my father, o can you not trace
The elf-king's daughters in that gloomy place?"
"My son, my son, I see it clear
How grey the ancient willows appear."

'I love you, your comeliness charms me, my boy!
And if you're not willing, my force I'll employ.'
"Now father, now father, he's seizing my arm.
Elf-king has done me a cruel harm."

The father shudders, his ride is wild,
In his arms he's holding the groaning child,
Reaches the court with toil and dread. -
The child he held in his arms was dead.