

JOHNIE OF BREADISLEE

AN ANCIENT NITHISDALE BALLAD

1. Johnie rose up in a May morning,
 Called for water to wash his hands—
 “Gar loose to me the gude graie dogs,
 That are bound wi’ iron bands.”
2. When Johnie’s mother gat word o’ that,
 Her hands for dule she wrang—
 “O Johnie! for my bennison,
 To the grenewood dinna gang!
3. “Eneugh ye hae o’ the gude wheat bread,
 And eneugh o’ the blude-red wine,
 And therefore for nae vennison, Johnie,
 I pray ye, stir frae hame.”
4. But Johnie’s buskt up his gude bend bow,
 His arrows, ane by ane,
 And he has gane to Durrisdeer,
 To hunt the dun deer down.
5. As he came down by Merriemass,
 And in by the benty line,
 There has he espied a deer lying,
 Aneath a bush of ling.
6. Johnie he shot, and the dun deer lap,
 And he wounded her on the side;
 But, atween the water and the brae,
 His hounds they laid her pride.
7. And Johnie has bryttled the deer sae weel,
 That he’s had out her liver and lungs,
 And wi’ these he has feasted his bludey hounds,
 As if they had been Erl’s sons.
8. They eat sae much o’ the vennison,
 And drank sae much o’ the blude,
 That Johnie and a’ his bludey hounds
 Fell asleep as they had been dead.

9. And by there cam a silly auld carle,
An ill death mote he die!
For he's awa to Hislinton,
Where the Seven Foresters did lie.
10. "What news, what news, ye gray headed carle?
What news bring ye to me?"—
—"I bring nae news," said the gray headed carle,
"Save what these eyes did see.
11. "As I came down by Merriemass,
And down amang the scroggs,
The bonniest Childe that ever I saw,
Lay sleeping amang his dogs.
12. "The shirt that was upon his back,
Was o' the holland fine;
The doublet which was over that,
Was o' the lincome twine.
13. "The buttons that were on his sleeve,
Were o' the gowd sae gude;
The gude graie hounds he lay amang,
Their mouths were dyed wi' blude."
14. Then out and spak the first forester,
The heid man ower them a'—
"If this be Johnie o' Breadislee,
Nae nearer will we draw."
15. But up and spak the sixth forester,
His sister's son was he;
"If this be Johnie o' Breadislee,
We soon shall gar him die!"
16. The first flight of arrows the foresters shot,
They wounded him on the knee;
And out and spak the seventh forester,
"The next will gar him die."
17. Johnie's set his back against an aik,
His fute against a stane;
And he has slain the seven foresters,
He has slain them a' but ane.

18. He has broke three ribs in that ane's side,
But and his collar bane;
He's laid him twa fald ower his steed,
Bade him carry the tidings hame.
19. "O is there na a bonnie bird,
Can sing as I can say?
Could flee away to my mother's bower,
And tell to fetch Johnie away."
20. The starling flew to his mother's window stane,
It whistled and it sang;
And aye the ower word o' the tune
Was—"Johnie tarries lang!"
21. They made a rod o' the hazel bush,
Another o' the slae thorn tree,
And mony mony were the men
At fetching our Johnie.
22. Then out and spak his auld mother,
And fast her teirs did fa'—
"Ye wad nae be warn'd, my son Johnie,
Frae the hunting to bide awa.
23. "Aft hae I brought to Breadislee,
The less gear and the mair,
But I ne'er brought to Breadislee,
What grieved my heart sae sair!
24. "But wae betide that silly auld Carle,
An ill death shall he die!
For the highest tree on Merriemass,
Shall be his morning's fee."
25. Now Johnie's gude bend bow is broke,
And his gude graie dogs are slain;
And his body lies dead in Durrisdeer,
And his hunting it is done.