

The dreadful end of Marianna for sorcery

Words and music: Karine Polwart (from Malinky's 2000 album Last Leaves)

Inspired by George Mackay Brown's short story 'Witch', set on Hoy

Marianna o' the Howe was a young lassie wi' gowden hair
Sweet and honest, true and bonnie, and lover of one John Sinclair
Marianna met the factor at the dawning, at the fold
And he said, "Lie with me now, Marianna, and you will not want for gold"

"Well, I thank you for your offer, but I fear it canna be.
I maun lie with John Sinclair, for he's the only one for me"
So the factor, sore affronted, whispered evil of her name
Every sorrow and misfortune 'twas Marianna was to blame

Soon there came a deputation Marianna for to see
For to slight her reputation, "The de'il has laid his hands on ye
Ye've soured the cream and blighted the corn and danced wi' fairies on the hill
Ye who are of devil born and ye who bow to no man's will"

Seven evenings, seven mornings they spoke of Marianna ill
There they shamed her, stripped her and maimed her, but they never tamed her will
"Let her sweetness not deceive you, evil hides itself right well
Once within, it will never leave you, Marianna, you'll burn in hell"

"Who are these who stand against me? Who are these who slight my name?
Let them tell their lies before God and let them hang their heads in shame"
Then she saw a sight that grieved her, all the hope inside her died
John Sinclair all clad in satin standing at the factor's side

"I was child and now a woman, but I shall be no man's wife
For my love has me forsaken, and I want no more of this life"
They've shorn the hair from Marianna, the witch's snare o' gowden thread
Marched her tae the Gallowsha' and whipped her sair until she bled

In the crowd she spied her lover, and he had his new coat on
Soon the flames danced all above her, and the people danced 'til the dawn
Marianna o' the Howe, was a young lassie wi' gowden hair
Sweet and honest, true and bonnie, betrayed by the factor and John Sinclair