

The Kelpie

Chorus:

The rushes swaying by the river,
The water rippling in the breeze,
Scattering the wan reflections
Of the gaunt and budless trees.
“Take me, mother, to the river,
Where it runs cold, dark and deep,
To seek the soul of my dear brother
Where his body lies in sleep.”

1. Autumn pale was ending, a chill was
in the air,
His mother sternly told him, “My little
boy beware!
Never wander by the river, my dear
darling child!”
Yet he wandered ever onward, deep into
the wild.

2. Turgid was the water, dim and dark
with peat,
Black was the mud that clung to his wee
feet.
Dismal was the day, the rushes dripped
with dew,
And dire were the auguries, if only
mother knew.

Chorus

3. A horse stood in the river, silent as the
night,
And up tripped the little lad, joyful at
the sight.
Darksome, motionless the mare, hair
soaked by the rain,
And like the feathers of a raven hung the
dripping mane.

4. He touched it on the muzzle, the
eyelids open wide;

He reached to put his little hand upon its
clammy side.

He grasped it by the fetlock, he tugged it
by the tail,
Yet still the horse unblinking stood amid
the evening pale.

Chorus

5. The boy stood up to his knees amid the
stagnant mud;
The horse turned round to look at him
with eyes as red as blood.
“Mummy warned me not to do it.
Mummy said beware!”
Yet still he climbed upon its back and
grasped its lanky hair.

6. He cried and trembled as the horse let
out a lowly groan
And where the eyebrows should have
been he saw a ridge of bone.
The boy let out a sharp shrill scream that
echoed in the gloom;
The Kelpie sunk into the depths and
dragged him to his doom.

Chorus

Autumn pale was ending, a chill was in
the air,
“Don’t go where your poor brother
went, I tell you girl, beware!
Never wander by the river, my dear
darling child!”
Yet she wandered ever onward, deep
into the wild.

Lyrics by Giles Watson. Source material:
Scottish folk tale, as recalled by Judith
Reid.