

# How Tamson got the Third Degree

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First published 1919

Whan Tammass Tamson joined the Craft,  
Wise freends declared that he was daft.  
To tak a hand in sic a ploy,  
An' swore 'twad bring mair grief than joy.  
But Tam, ne'er mindin' what they said  
Held on the road quite undismayed;  
He took his First, an' proud was he  
To learn it was but ae degree,  
An' that the Second telled him mair  
About the Compasses an' Square.  
He took that stap yae winter nicht,  
Syne, gropin' still for further licht,  
Begoud to think about his Third,  
An' that in spite of a' he heard!  
And oh! that Third! Ae niclit whan Tam,  
Was crouse wi cronies owre a dram,  
The cronies thocht he'd draw a wee,  
An' plied him weel. wi' barley bree;  
But Tam was deaf as adamant  
Till a' had gane save Snecky Grant,  
Syne, whan the coast was sae far clear  
He made that billie cock his ear:

“By faith!” he cried, “yon was a splore!  
The like o’t I’d ne’er seen before!  
Beats onything you ever saw.  
Guid guide us! I was near in twa’  
Ere a’ was dune! I reeked, an’ swat,  
An’ focht until my sark was wat;  
‘As lang as life is left to me,  
I’ll ne’er forget the Third Degree!”  
Twas clear that Tam was, fidgin’ fain  
To live the haill thing owre again.  
“Just tell’s the tale,” quo Snecky Grant,  
“To hear what’s dune is a’ I want,  
An’ if you tell’s I’ll save my siller,  
Yet be as wise as Brother Miller.”  
Now, for a skinflint, Sneck was kenned,  
Twa broun bawbees he wadna spend,  
‘Twixt Handsel-Monday and Yules-een  
Though he at every ploy was seen  
A measly miser, kirk-gaun. Saunt  
You fand at aince in Snecky Grant.  
A’ Snecky’s fauts were plain to Tammass –  
As plain as floods that come at Lamrnas  
Sweep a’ before them. “By my aith,”  
Thocht Tam, “I’ll gie him haud his breath.”  
“Weel, Snecky, since you seem sae keen’,  
An’ since you’re sic a trusted freen’

I'll tell you, but you first maun swear  
You'll never drap a word you hear,  
For, if you did, then, by my whittle!  
My life wad no', be worth a spittle!  
Haud up your hand, an' promise true,  
You'll no' turn owre what's tauld to you."  
At that, Grant held up baith his hands;  
"By freendship's name, at your commands  
I wad my word nae mortal ear  
Shall ever hark what I may hear."  
They sattled doun, an' owre the tale  
Sneck grued at times, and whiles turned pale;  
Its fearsomeness now made him glower,  
And then, in terror, keek atower  
The room to" whaur the aumrie stude,  
Hauf-thinkin' that some empty shroud.  
Wad flaff its faulds, or gie a squeal!  
I fair believe he thocht the Deil  
Was at his elbow a' the time  
As Tammas tauld how the sublime  
Degree was wrocht that winter nicht  
Whan he perceived the Master's Licht.  
"Jock Anderson and Jamie Cherry"  
Grant kent them baith for masons merry  
"Cam' out to me an' said," quo Tam,  
"You'd be, the better o' a' dram

To gie you strength. Tak' this the noo;  
Ay, drink it up. You'll no' be fou.'  
Syne. Grant, as sure s you're sittin' there,  
Tey baith begond to say a prayer!  
They prayed that God might guide me richt,  
In a' I had to dae that nicht,  
How, if I chanced to meet wi' Death,  
I'd sneck tae loon below the breath,  
An' triximp as the rest had dune  
Wha houped to reach the Lodge abune.  
To tell the truth, that scared me some.  
I thocht o' dreidfu' things to come  
An' saw mysel' in mony a plicht  
Ere I achieved Masonic Licht.  
Whan they had prayed, Jock took a kilt,  
Try't on,' quo' he; 'I houp you fill't.'  
I held it up. 'A kilt?' quo' I,  
He leuch his fill, an' wi' a sly  
Wink exclaimed wi' puffed-out cheeks,  
'Wha heard o' Solomon wi' breeks!'  
Syne; whisperin' cannily, he said,  
'Auld Hiram wore a kilt and plaid;  
We only don the kilt thae days;  
Sae now, mak' haste! Tak aff your claes!'  
They cled me in the kilt an' sark  
An' said, 'You're ready for the wark.'

Then, blinders owre my een they clapped  
An' at the inner door they chapped.  
'He comes!' I heard a voice declare,  
'Auld Hiram comes to offer prayer!'  
Wi' that a bell begoud to toll,  
I thocht on my immortal soul.  
I couldna see a stime, an' stude  
My veins a' fou o' frozen blude.  
Then, a' at aince, I fand my strength,  
Thinks I, wha comes goes down at length.  
I set my teeth, and clenched my neives,  
Though, Grant, you'll maybe no believe's,  
An' said into mysel', said I,  
'Come on! Somebody's got to die.',  
The tollin' stopped. A moment's silence,  
An,' syne some chield begoud wi' violence;  
I made a lunge just richt fornenst  
Whaur a' the stushic had commenced.  
I felt my fist, strike some ane's heid,  
Says I, 'By God! that's ane that's deid.'  
'Come on!' I cried; 'come ony seven;  
You'll a' be deid as sure's I'm livin'!  
'I heard some slippin' round about;  
Thinks I, 'That's some that's wantin'out.'  
Wi' that, I heard an eerie laugh  
As some. ane tore my blinders aff.

'God keep us, Grant! The awfu' scene  
That met my mair than startled een,  
I'll no', in fifty years, forget;  
It mak's me grue to think, o't yet.  
Crossbanes an! skulls were all around,  
Alang the wa's, and on the ground;  
Coffins I saw on baith my hands,  
An' corpses stood in little bands,  
An' girmed at me, as though to say,  
'Tammy, my man, you've had your day,  
An' now are here among the deid,,'.  
Frae earth an' Mistress Tamson freed'.  
I looked bambazed. I couldna speak.  
Then lo! The place a' filled wi reek,,  
An' through, the reek the corpses crawled  
The while some brethren sat and drawled  
A sang or hymn - I kentna which -  
About the puir and eke the rich,  
How, though they lived as saunt or devil,  
Cam' a' at last to ae same level  
Whan they were deid. I clutched at Jock.  
Says I, 'What's this? Wha's a' th. folk?'  
Says he, 'If I the truth may tell,  
My guid freend, Tam, you're now in hell.  
But hark! His Nab's 'll tell in Laitin,  
What you mann dae to conquer Satan.'

An' just at that the master said:  
Send Tamson forrit here!' I gaed  
Quo he, 'Now, Tamson, ere this nicht,  
You see the Master Mason's Licht,  
You've got to fecht three heidstrong deils  
That want to lay you, by the heels;  
Three, wily blades that lie in wait  
To catch a' mortals sune or late.  
Now if you're staunch you'll sune owrecome  
Baith Jubelo an' Jubelum,  
But watch the third he's Jubela;  
An' dour as balth the ither twa.'  
'Fecht three at aince?" quo I. He leuch.  
'Fegs, no,' quo' he; 'you may be teuch  
Yet, still, I doubt if you could gie  
The knock out blow to a' the three;  
But if you manage them in turn  
Your Mason's Licht will brightly burn.  
The first is Greed, an ugly chield  
He guards the entrance to the field.,  
The second, Avarice, midway  
You'll. likely meet. Tak' tent, an' pray;  
The third'll try to sneck your breath,  
An ugsome earl - we ca' him Death.'  
'Lord help me, Grant! I fairly shook  
As, thick and thicker, grew the smook,

An' in a. silence almost seen,  
They drew the blinders owre my een.  
Then in, a crack a waesome voice  
Sent up a maist unchancy noise,  
An' some ane gied my airm a grup  
Says I, ' Now, Greed, your number; s up!  
He held me hard, syne strak me sair,  
But, fegs, I stretched him on the fluir,  
Deid as a mawk! 'Good lad!' they cried,  
It's lang since Greed so quickly died.'  
I thocht I'd get a breath or twa,  
But that appeared against the law.  
The next cam' on; his name I kent.  
Says I, ' My man, your days. are spent,  
For Avarice maun gang wi' Greed,  
In less than naetime you'll be deid, ,  
If my name's Tamson.' 'Haud a wee,'  
Says he, 'If Snecky Grant you see  
Whan you go out, just tell him this,  
Since I am deid, he's Avarice!'  
Grant girmed at Tamson's weel-aimed. shaft.  
Quo he, "I think your auncient Craft  
Micht leave a lad like me alone."  
But Tamson leuch, an' thus gaed on:  
"I've telled you, Grant, just what he said –  
An' in an instant he was dead!



But mind his words his dyin' breath  
Was meant for you, I'll tak' my aith.  
Think less o' siller, mair o' men,  
Or you may come to sic' an' en',  
An' whan this coil You shuffle aff,  
Get 'Avarice' for epitaph?"

"Go on," says Grant, no owre weel pleased,  
"Just tell us how the neist you seized.  
Ise warrant you he wasna deid  
As quick as Avarice an' Greed."

"Heth no!" said Tamson, wi' a smile,  
"I wrasded wi' the loon a while,  
But ne'er could get a richt stroke in,  
He feinted aye, an' I grew dune,  
Until at last he cloured my heid,  
An' I gaed doun. Says I, 'I'm deid.'  
I fand mysel.' grow stiff an' cauld,  
My teeth fa' out, my heid grow bald.  
Thinks I, 'I doubt it's death for me,'  
Whan some ane whispered, 'Let, him. see.'  
They taen the blinders, frae my een.  
Lord, Grant, I saw a fearsome scene!  
There Death, himsel', wi' ugly grin,  
Stude blinkin' at the settin' mune,  
His scythe a' reid wi' human gore  
O' them he'd snecked in days before.

He took ae step. I cried, 'Get out!'  
At that there rase a hellish shout;  
I clutched him by the beard, an' sair  
I shook him as' he chittered there;  
His banes, a' dirlin' in their places,  
Made a' the corpses twist their faces!  
Wi' abject fear I staggered back  
Whan coffin lids began to crack!  
'For God Almighty's sake,' says I,  
'Gie me some licht, or else I'll. die.'  
An' whan the licht gaed up I saw  
'That Death had vanished clean awa'!"  
So'Perish all our foes!' I heard,  
An' syne I got the master's Word.  
"And afterthat? Weel a' I'll say,  
I'll never see anither day  
Like yon though I should live to see  
A thousand nichts o' harmony.  
Lord! ilka man was three times fou,  
Lang ere the festival was through!  
How I got hame I canna tell,  
But weel I wat, I aften fell  
Across the road, an' fine I ken,  
Had Death but tackled me again,  
It's no' wi' you I'd be this nicht,  
But far beyond Masonic Licht.

“Now, mind your promise! No a word  
How Tammas Tamson got his Third?  
They pairted; and as Tam. gaed hame,  
He felt he wasna much to blame  
If Grant believed the idle tale,  
An’ dreamt a’ nicht o’ Deathan’ ale  
Puir Grant! believin’ a’ he heard  
Was keen to ken the Mason’s Word;  
He even thocht he micht gang through  
The thing himsel’. That three times fou  
Appealed to Snecky’s commonsense,  
As mair than ample recompense.  
An’ as for Tam, weel, Tam’ll see  
The beauties o’ the High Degree,  
An’ learn its secrets, signs, an’ words,  
An’ a’ the blessin’s it affords  
Whan, aided by Masonic Licht,  
He gets his Third on Friday nicht!