

CHRISTINA ROSSETTI (1830-1894)

GOBLIN MARKET *Original Text: Christina Rossetti, Goblin Market and other Poems* (Cambridge: Macmillan, 1862).

1 Morning and evening  
2 Maids heard the goblins cry:  
3 "Come buy our orchard fruits,  
4 Come buy, come buy:  
5 Apples and quinces,  
6 Lemons and oranges,  
7 Plump unpeck'd cherries,  
8 Melons and raspberries,  
9 Bloom-down-cheek'd peaches,  
10 Swart-headed mulberries,  
11 Wild free-born cranberries,  
12 Crab-apples, dewberries,  
13 Pine-apples, blackberries,  
14 Apricots, strawberries;--  
15 All ripe together  
16 In summer weather,--  
17 Morns that pass by,  
18 Fair eves that fly;  
19 Come buy, come buy:  
20 Our grapes fresh from the vine,  
21 Pomegranates full and fine,  
22 Dates and sharp bullaces,  
23 Rare pears and greengages,  
24 Damsons and bilberries,  
25 Taste them and try:  
26 Currants and gooseberries,  
27 Bright-fire-like barberries,  
28 Figs to fill your mouth,  
29 Citrons from the South,  
30 Sweet to tongue and sound to eye;  
31 Come buy, come buy."  
  
32 Evening by evening  
33 Among the brookside rushes,  
34 Laura bow'd her head to hear,  
35 Lizzie veil'd her blushes:  
36 Crouching close together  
37 In the cooling weather,  
38 With clasping arms and cautioning lips,  
39 With tingling cheeks and finger tips.  
40 "Lie close," Laura said,  
41 Pricking up her golden head:  
42 "We must not look at goblin men,

43 We must not buy their fruits:  
44 Who knows upon what soil they fed  
45 Their hungry thirsty roots?"  
46 "Come buy," call the goblins  
47 Hobbling down the glen.

48 "Oh," cried Lizzie, "Laura, Laura,  
49 You should not peep at goblin men."  
50 Lizzie cover'd up her eyes,  
51 Cover'd close lest they should look;  
52 Laura rear'd her glossy head,  
53 And whisper'd like the restless brook:  
54 "Look, Lizzie, look, Lizzie,  
55 Down the glen tramp little men.  
56 One hauls a basket,  
57 One bears a plate,  
58 One lugs a golden dish  
59 Of many pounds weight.  
60 How fair the vine must grow  
61 Whose grapes are so luscious;  
62 How warm the wind must blow  
63 Through those fruit bushes."  
64 "No," said Lizzie, "No, no, no;  
65 Their offers should not charm us,  
66 Their evil gifts would harm us."  
67 She thrust a dimpled finger  
68 In each ear, shut eyes and ran:  
69 Curious Laura chose to linger  
70 Wondering at each merchant man.  
71 One had a cat's face,  
72 One whisk'd a tail,  
73 One tramp'd at a rat's pace,  
74 One crawl'd like a snail,  
75 One like a wombat prowl'd obtuse and furry,  
76 One like a ratel tumbled hurry skurry.  
77 She heard a voice like voice of doves  
78 Cooing all together:  
79 They sounded kind and full of loves  
80 In the pleasant weather.

81 Laura stretch'd her gleaming neck  
82 Like a rush-imbedded swan,  
83 Like a lily from the beck,  
84 Like a moonlit poplar branch,  
85 Like a vessel at the launch  
86 When its last restraint is gone.

87 Backwards up the mossy glen  
88 Turn'd and troop'd the goblin men,  
89 With their shrill repeated cry,  
90 "Come buy, come buy."  
91 When they reach'd where Laura was  
92 They stood stock still upon the moss,  
93 Leering at each other,  
94 Brother with queer brother;  
95 Signalling each other,  
96 Brother with sly brother.  
97 One set his basket down,  
98 One rear'd his plate;  
99 One began to weave a crown  
100 Of tendrils, leaves, and rough nuts brown  
101 (Men sell not such in any town);  
102 One heav'd the golden weight  
103 Of dish and fruit to offer her:  
104 "Come buy, come buy," was still their cry.  
105 Laura stared but did not stir,  
106 Long'd but had no money:  
107 The whisk-tail'd merchant bade her taste  
108 In tones as smooth as honey,  
109 The cat-faced purr'd,  
110 The rat-faced spoke a word  
111 Of welcome, and the snail-paced even was heard;  
112 One parrot-voiced and jolly  
113 Cried "Pretty Goblin" still for "Pretty Polly;"--  
114 One whistled like a bird.

115 But sweet-tooth Laura spoke in haste:  
116 "Good folk, I have no coin;  
117 To take were to purloin:  
118 I have no copper in my purse,  
119 I have no silver either,  
120 And all my gold is on the furze  
121 That shakes in windy weather  
122 Above the rusty heather."  
123 "You have much gold upon your head,"  
124 They answer'd all together:  
125 "Buy from us with a golden curl."  
126 She clipp'd a precious golden lock,  
127 She dropp'd a tear more rare than pearl,  
128 Then suck'd their fruit globes fair or red:  
129 Sweeter than honey from the rock,  
130 Stronger than man-rejoicing wine,

131 Clearer than water flow'd that juice;  
132 She never tasted such before,  
133 How should it cloy with length of use?  
134 She suck'd and suck'd and suck'd the more  
135 Fruits which that unknown orchard bore;  
136 She suck'd until her lips were sore;  
137 Then flung the emptied rinds away  
138 But gather'd up one kernel stone,  
139 And knew not was it night or day  
140 As she turn'd home alone.

141 Lizzie met her at the gate  
142 Full of wise upbraidings:  
143 "Dear, you should not stay so late,  
144 Twilight is not good for maidens;  
145 Should not loiter in the glen  
146 In the haunts of goblin men.  
147 Do you not remember Jeanie,  
148 How she met them in the moonlight,  
149 Took their gifts both choice and many,  
150 Ate their fruits and wore their flowers  
151 Pluck'd from bowers  
152 Where summer ripens at all hours?  
153 But ever in the noonlight  
154 She pined and pined away;  
155 Sought them by night and day,  
156 Found them no more, but dwindled and grew grey;  
157 Then fell with the first snow,  
158 While to this day no grass will grow  
159 Where she lies low:  
160 I planted daisies there a year ago  
161 That never blow.  
162 You should not loiter so."  
163 "Nay, hush," said Laura:  
164 "Nay, hush, my sister:  
165 I ate and ate my fill,  
166 Yet my mouth waters still;  
167 To-morrow night I will  
168 Buy more;" and kiss'd her:  
169 "Have done with sorrow;  
170 I'll bring you plums to-morrow  
171 Fresh on their mother twigs,  
172 Cherries worth getting;  
173 You cannot think what figs  
174 My teeth have met in,  
175 What melons icy-cold

176 Piled on a dish of gold  
177 Too huge for me to hold,  
178 What peaches with a velvet nap,  
179 Pellucid grapes without one seed:  
180 Odorous indeed must be the mead  
181 Whereon they grow, and pure the wave they drink  
182 With lilies at the brink,  
183 And sugar-sweet their sap."

184 Golden head by golden head,  
185 Like two pigeons in one nest  
186 Folded in each other's wings,  
187 They lay down in their curtain'd bed:  
188 Like two blossoms on one stem,  
189 Like two flakes of new-fall'n snow,  
190 Like two wands of ivory  
191 Tipp'd with gold for awful kings.  
192 Moon and stars gaz'd in at them,  
193 Wind sang to them lullaby,  
194 Lumbering owls forbore to fly,  
195 Not a bat flapp'd to and fro  
196 Round their rest:  
197 Cheek to cheek and breast to breast  
198 Lock'd together in one nest.

199 Early in the morning  
200 When the first cock crow'd his warning,  
201 Neat like bees, as sweet and busy,  
202 Laura rose with Lizzie:  
203 Fetch'd in honey, milk'd the cows,  
204 Air'd and set to rights the house,  
205 Kneaded cakes of whitest wheat,  
206 Cakes for dainty mouths to eat,  
207 Next churn'd butter, whipp'd up cream,  
208 Fed their poultry, sat and sew'd;  
209 Talk'd as modest maidens should:  
210 Lizzie with an open heart,  
211 Laura in an absent dream,  
212 One content, one sick in part;  
213 One warbling for the mere bright day's delight,  
214 One longing for the night.

215 At length slow evening came:  
216 They went with pitchers to the reedy brook;  
217 Lizzie most placid in her look,  
218 Laura most like a leaping flame.

219 They drew the gurgling water from its deep;  
220 Lizzie pluck'd purple and rich golden flags,  
221 Then turning homeward said: "The sunset flushes  
222 Those furthest loftiest crags;  
223 Come, Laura, not another maiden lags.  
224 No wilful squirrel wags,  
225 The beasts and birds are fast asleep."  
226 But Laura loiter'd still among the rushes  
227 And said the bank was steep.

228 And said the hour was early still  
229 The dew not fall'n, the wind not chill;  
230 Listening ever, but not catching  
231 The customary cry,  
232 "Come buy, come buy,"  
233 With its iterated jingle  
234 Of sugar-baited words:  
235 Not for all her watching  
236 Once discerning even one goblin  
237 Racing, whisking, tumbling, hobbling;  
238 Let alone the herds  
239 That used to tramp along the glen,  
240 In groups or single,  
241 Of brisk fruit-merchant men.

242 Till Lizzie urged, "O Laura, come;  
243 I hear the fruit-call but I dare not look:  
244 You should not loiter longer at this brook:  
245 Come with me home.  
246 The stars rise, the moon bends her arc,  
247 Each glowworm winks her spark,  
248 Let us get home before the night grows dark:  
249 For clouds may gather  
250 Though this is summer weather,  
251 Put out the lights and drench us through;  
252 Then if we lost our way what should we do?"

253 Laura turn'd cold as stone  
254 To find her sister heard that cry alone,  
255 That goblin cry,  
256 "Come buy our fruits, come buy."  
257 Must she then buy no more such dainty fruit?  
[258](#) Must she no more such succous pasture find,  
259 Gone deaf and blind?  
260 Her tree of life droop'd from the root:  
261 She said not one word in her heart's sore ache;

262 But peering thro' the dimness, nought discerning,  
263 Trudg'd home, her pitcher dripping all the way;  
264 So crept to bed, and lay  
265 Silent till Lizzie slept;  
266 Then sat up in a passionate yearning,  
267 And gnash'd her teeth for baulk'd desire, and wept  
268 As if her heart would break.

269 Day after day, night after night,  
270 Laura kept watch in vain  
271 In sullen silence of exceeding pain.  
272 She never caught again the goblin cry:  
273 "Come buy, come buy;"--  
274 She never spied the goblin men  
275 Hawking their fruits along the glen:  
276 But when the noon wax'd bright  
277 Her hair grew thin and grey;  
278 She dwindled, as the fair full moon doth turn  
279 To swift decay and burn  
280 Her fire away.

281 One day remembering her kernel-stone  
282 She set it by a wall that faced the south;  
283 Dew'd it with tears, hoped for a root,  
284 Watch'd for a waxing shoot,  
285 But there came none;  
286 It never saw the sun,  
287 It never felt the trickling moisture run:  
288 While with sunk eyes and faded mouth  
289 She dream'd of melons, as a traveller sees  
290 False waves in desert drouth  
291 With shade of leaf-crown'd trees,  
292 And burns the thirstier in the sandful breeze.

293 She no more swept the house,  
294 Tended the fowls or cows,  
295 Fetch'd honey, kneaded cakes of wheat,  
296 Brought water from the brook:  
297 But sat down listless in the chimney-nook  
298 And would not eat.

299 Tender Lizzie could not bear  
300 To watch her sister's cankerous care  
301 Yet not to share.  
302 She night and morning  
303 Caught the goblins' cry:

304 "Come buy our orchard fruits,  
305 Come buy, come buy;"--  
306 Beside the brook, along the glen,  
307 She heard the tramp of goblin men,  
308 The yoke and stir  
309 Poor Laura could not hear;  
310 Long'd to buy fruit to comfort her,  
311 But fear'd to pay too dear.  
312 She thought of Jeanie in her grave,  
313 Who should have been a bride;  
314 But who for joys brides hope to have  
315 Fell sick and died  
316 In her gay prime,  
317 In earliest winter time  
318 With the first glazing rime,  
319 With the first snow-fall of crisp winter time.

320 Till Laura dwindling  
321 Seem'd knocking at Death's door:  
322 Then Lizzie weigh'd no more  
323 Better and worse;  
324 But put a silver penny in her purse,  
325 Kiss'd Laura, cross'd the heath with clumps of furze  
326 At twilight, halted by the brook:  
327 And for the first time in her life  
328 Began to listen and look.

329 Laugh'd every goblin  
330 When they spied her peeping:  
331 Came towards her hobbling,  
332 Flying, running, leaping,  
333 Puffing and blowing,  
334 Chuckling, clapping, crowing,  
335 Clucking and gobbling,  
336 Mopping and mowing,  
337 Full of airs and graces,  
338 Pulling wry faces,  
339 Demure grimaces,  
340 Cat-like and rat-like,  
341 Ratel- and wombat-like,  
342 Snail-paced in a hurry,  
343 Parrot-voiced and whistler,  
344 Helter skelter, hurry skurry,  
345 Chattering like magpies,  
346 Fluttering like pigeons,  
347 Gliding like fishes,--

348 Hugg'd her and kiss'd her:  
349 Squeez'd and caress'd her:  
350 Stretch'd up their dishes,  
351 Panniers, and plates:  
352 "Look at our apples  
353 Russet and dun,  
354 Bob at our cherries,  
355 Bite at our peaches,  
356 Citrons and dates,  
357 Grapes for the asking,  
358 Pears red with basking  
359 Out in the sun,  
360 Plums on their twigs;  
361 Pluck them and suck them,  
362 Pomegranates, figs."--

363 "Good folk," said Lizzie,  
364 Mindful of Jeanie:  
365 "Give me much and many: --  
366 Held out her apron,  
367 Toss'd them her penny.  
368 "Nay, take a seat with us,  
369 Honour and eat with us,"  
370 They answer'd grinning:  
371 "Our feast is but beginning.  
372 Night yet is early,  
373 Warm and dew-pearly,  
374 Wakeful and starry:  
375 Such fruits as these  
376 No man can carry:  
377 Half their bloom would fly,  
378 Half their dew would dry,  
379 Half their flavour would pass by.  
380 Sit down and feast with us,  
381 Be welcome guest with us,  
382 Cheer you and rest with us."--  
383 "Thank you," said Lizzie: "But one waits  
384 At home alone for me:  
385 So without further parleying,  
386 If you will not sell me any  
387 Of your fruits though much and many,  
388 Give me back my silver penny  
389 I toss'd you for a fee."--  
390 They began to scratch their pates,  
391 No longer wagging, purring,  
392 But visibly demurring,

393 Grunting and snarling.  
394 One call'd her proud,  
395 Cross-grain'd, uncivil;  
396 Their tones wax'd loud,  
397 Their look were evil.  
398 Lashing their tails  
399 They trod and hustled her,  
400 Elbow'd and jostled her,  
401 Claw'd with their nails,  
402 Barking, mewling, hissing, mocking,  
403 Tore her gown and soil'd her stocking,  
404 Twitch'd her hair out by the roots,  
405 Stamp'd upon her tender feet,  
406 Held her hands and squeez'd their fruits  
407 Against her mouth to make her eat.

408 White and golden Lizzie stood,  
409 Like a lily in a flood,--  
410 Like a rock of blue-vein'd stone  
411 Lash'd by tides obstreperously,--  
412 Like a beacon left alone  
413 In a hoary roaring sea,  
414 Sending up a golden fire,--  
415 Like a fruit-crown'd orange-tree  
416 White with blossoms honey-sweet  
417 Sore beset by wasp and bee,--  
418 Like a royal virgin town  
419 Topp'd with gilded dome and spire  
420 Close beleaguer'd by a fleet  
421 Mad to tug her standard down.

422 One may lead a horse to water,  
423 Twenty cannot make him drink.  
424 Though the goblins cuff'd and caught her,  
425 Coax'd and fought her,  
426 Bullied and besought her,  
427 Scratch'd her, pinch'd her black as ink,  
428 Kick'd and knock'd her,  
429 Maul'd and mock'd her,  
430 Lizzie utter'd not a word;  
431 Would not open lip from lip  
432 Lest they should cram a mouthful in:  
433 But laugh'd in heart to feel the drip  
434 Of juice that syrapp'd all her face,  
435 And lodg'd in dimples of her chin,  
436 And streak'd her neck which quaked like curd.

437 At last the evil people,  
438 Worn out by her resistance,  
439 Flung back her penny, kick'd their fruit  
440 Along whichever road they took,  
441 Not leaving root or stone or shoot;  
442 Some writh'd into the ground,  
443 Some div'd into the brook  
444 With ring and ripple,  
445 Some scudded on the gale without a sound,  
446 Some vanish'd in the distance.

447 In a smart, ache, tingle,  
448 Lizzie went her way;  
449 Knew not was it night or day;  
450 Sprang up the bank, tore thro' the furze,  
451 Threaded copse and dingle,  
452 And heard her penny jingle  
453 Bouncing in her purse,--  
454 Its bounce was music to her ear.  
455 She ran and ran  
456 As if she fear'd some goblin man  
457 Dogg'd her with gibe or curse  
458 Or something worse:  
459 But not one goblin scurried after,  
460 Nor was she prick'd by fear;  
461 The kind heart made her windy-paced  
462 That urged her home quite out of breath with haste  
463 And inward laughter.

464 She cried, "Laura," up the garden,  
465 "Did you miss me?  
466 Come and kiss me.  
467 Never mind my bruises,  
468 Hug me, kiss me, suck my juices  
469 Squeez'd from goblin fruits for you,  
470 Goblin pulp and goblin dew.  
471 Eat me, drink me, love me;  
472 Laura, make much of me;  
473 For your sake I have braved the glen  
474 And had to do with goblin merchant men."

475 Laura started from her chair,  
476 Flung her arms up in the air,  
477 Clutch'd her hair:  
478 "Lizzie, Lizzie, have you tasted  
479 For my sake the fruit forbidden?"

480 Must your light like mine be hidden,  
481 Your young life like mine be wasted,  
482 Undone in mine undoing,  
483 And ruin'd in my ruin,  
484 Thirsty, canker'd, goblin-ridden?"--  
485 She clung about her sister,  
486 Kiss'd and kiss'd and kiss'd her:  
487 Tears once again  
488 Refresh'd her shrunken eyes,  
489 Dropping like rain  
490 After long sultry drouth;  
491 Shaking with aguish fear, and pain,  
492 She kiss'd and kiss'd her with a hungry mouth.

493 Her lips began to scorch,  
494 That juice was wormwood to her tongue,  
495 She loath'd the feast:  
496 Writhing as one possess'd she leap'd and sung,  
497 Rent all her robe, and wrung  
498 Her hands in lamentable haste,  
499 And beat her breast.  
500 Her locks stream'd like the torch  
501 Borne by a racer at full speed,  
502 Or like the mane of horses in their flight,  
503 Or like an eagle when she stems the light  
504 Straight toward the sun,  
505 Or like a caged thing freed,  
506 Or like a flying flag when armies run.

507 Swift fire spread through her veins, knock'd at her heart,  
508 Met the fire smouldering there  
509 And overbore its lesser flame;  
510 She gorged on bitterness without a name:  
511 Ah! fool, to choose such part  
512 Of soul-consuming care!  
513 Sense fail'd in the mortal strife:  
514 Like the watch-tower of a town  
515 Which an earthquake shatters down,  
516 Like a lightning-stricken mast,  
517 Like a wind-uprooted tree  
518 Spun about,  
519 Like a foam-topp'd waterspout  
520 Cast down headlong in the sea,  
521 She fell at last;  
522 Pleasure past and anguish past,  
523 Is it death or is it life?

524 Life out of death.  
525 That night long Lizzie watch'd by her,  
526 Counted her pulse's flagging stir,  
527 Felt for her breath,  
528 Held water to her lips, and cool'd her face  
529 With tears and fanning leaves:  
530 But when the first birds chirp'd about their eaves,  
531 And early reapers plodded to the place  
532 Of golden sheaves,  
533 And dew-wet grass  
534 Bow'd in the morning winds so brisk to pass,  
535 And new buds with new day  
536 Open'd of cup-like lilies on the stream,  
537 Laura awoke as from a dream,  
538 Laugh'd in the innocent old way,  
539 Hugg'd Lizzie but not twice or thrice;  
540 Her gleaming locks show'd not one thread of grey,  
541 Her breath was sweet as May  
542 And light danced in her eyes.

543 Days, weeks, months, years  
544 Afterwards, when both were wives  
545 With children of their own;  
546 Their mother-hearts beset with fears,  
547 Their lives bound up in tender lives;  
548 Laura would call the little ones  
549 And tell them of her early prime,  
550 Those pleasant days long gone  
551 Of not-returning time:  
552 Would talk about the haunted glen,  
553 The wicked, quaint fruit-merchant men,  
554 Their fruits like honey to the throat  
555 But poison in the blood;  
556 (Men sell not such in any town):  
557 Would tell them how her sister stood  
558 In deadly peril to do her good,  
559 And win the fiery antidote:  
560 Then joining hands to little hands  
561 Would bid them cling together,  
562 "For there is no friend like a sister  
563 In calm or stormy weather;  
564 To cheer one on the tedious way,  
565 To fetch one if one goes astray,  
566 To lift one if one totters down,  
567 To strengthen whilst one stands."