

Goblin Market

By Christina Rossetti

*Transcription, correction, editorial commentary, and
markup by Students and Staff at the University of Virginia*

- [frontispiece] -

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GOBLIN MARKET
and Other Poems
by Christina Rossetti
"Golden head by golden head"

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- [TP2] -

GOBLIN MARKET.

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 unpecked cherries,
8 Melons and raspberries,
9 Bloom-down-cheeked 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 bowed her head to hear,

35 Lizzie veiled 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 covered up her eyes,
51 Covered close lest they should look;
52 Laura reared her glossy head,
53 And whispered like the restless brook:
54 "Look, Lizzie, look, Lizzie,

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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 whisked a tail,
73 One tramped at a rat's pace,
74 One crawled like a snail,

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75 One like a wombat prowled 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 stretched 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 Turned and trooped the goblin men,
89 With their shrill repeated cry,
90 "Come buy, come buy."
91 When they reached where Laura was
92 They stood stock still upon the moss,

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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 reared 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 heaved 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 Longed but had no money.
107 The whisk-tailed 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

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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 answered all together:
125 "Buy from us with a golden curl."
126 She clipped a precious golden lock,
127 She dropped a tear more rare than pearl,
128 Then sucked their fruit globes fair or red:
129 Sweeter than honey from the rock,
130 Stronger than man-rejoicing wine,
131 Clearer than water flowed that juice;

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132 She never tasted such before,
133 How should it cloy with length of use?
134 She sucked and sucked and sucked the more
135 Fruits which that unknown orchard bore;
136 She sucked until her lips were sore;
137 Then flung the emptied rinds away,
138 But gathered up one kernel stone,
139 And knew not was it night or day
140 As she turned 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

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151 Plucked from bowers
152 Where summer ripens at all hours?
153 But ever in the moonlight
154 She pined and pined away;
155 Sought them by night and day,
156 Found them no more, but dwindled and grew gray;
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 Tomorrow night I will
168 Buy more;" and kissed her:
169 "Have done with sorrow;
170 I'll bring you plums tomorrow

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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,

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190 Like two wands of ivory
191 Tipped with gold for awful kings.
192 Moon and stars gazed in at them,
193 Wind sang to them lullaby,
194 Lumbering owls forbore to fly,
195 Not a bat flapped to and fro
196 Round their rest:
197 Cheek to cheek and breast to breast

198 Locked together in one nest.
199 Early in the morning
200 When the first cock crowed his warning,
201 Neat like bees, as sweet and busy,
202 Laura rose with Lizzie:
203 Fetched in honey, milked the cows,
204 Aired and set to rights the house,
205 Kneaded cakes of whitest wheat,
206 Cakes for dainty mouths to eat,
207 Next churned butter, whipped up cream,
208 Fed their poultry, sat and sewed;

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209 Talked 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 plucked 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 loitered still among the rushes
227 And said the bank was steep.

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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,

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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 turned 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 drooped from the root:
261 She said not one word in her heart's sore ache;
262 But peering thro' the dimness, nought discerning,
263 Trudged home, her pitcher dripping all the way;
264 So crept to bed, and lay
265 Silent till Lizzie slept;

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266 Then sat up in a passionate yearning,
267 And gnashed her teeth for baulked 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 waxed 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 Dewed it with tears, hoped for a root,

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284 Watched 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 dreamed of melons, as a traveller sees
290 False waves in desert drouth
291 With shade of leaf-crowned trees,
292 And burns the thirstier in the sandful breeze.

293 She no more swept the house,
294 Tended the fowls or cows,
295 Fetched 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.

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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 voice and stir
309 Poor Laura could not hear;
310 Longed to buy fruit to comfort her,
311 But feared 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

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321 Seemed knocking at Death's door:
322 Then Lizzie weighed no more
323 Better and worse;
324 But put a silver penny in her purse,
325 Kissed Laura, crossed 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 Then Lizzie weighed no more
330 Better and worse;
331 But put a silver penny in her purse,
332 Kissed Laura, crossed the heath with clumps of furze
333 At twilight, halted by the brook:
334 And for the first time in her life
335 Began to listen and look.

336 Laughed every goblin
337 When they spied her peeping:
338 Came towards her hobbling,
339 Flying, running, leaping,
340 Puffing and blowing,
341 Chuckling, clapping, crowing,
342 Clucking and gobbling,
343 Mopping and mowing,
344 Full of airs and graces,
345 Pulling wry faces,
346 Demure grimaces,

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347 Cat-like and rat-like,
348 Ratel — and wombat-like,
349 Snail-paced in a hurry,
350 Parrot-voiced and whistler,
351 Helter skelter, hurry skurry,
352 Chattering like magpies,
353 Fluttering like pigeons,
354 Gliding like fishes, —

355 Hugged her and kissed her:
356 Squeezed and caressed her:
357 Stretched up their dishes,
358 Panniers, and plates:
359 "Look at our apples
360 Russet and dun,

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361 Bob at our cherries,
362 Bite at our peaches,
363 Citrons and dates,
364 Grapes for the asking,
365 Pears red with basking
366 Out in the sun,
367 Plums on their twigs;
368 Pluck them and suck them,
369 Pomegranates, figs." —

370 "Good folk," said Lizzie,
371 Mindful of Jeanie:
372 "Give me much and many:" —
373 Held out her apron,
374 Tossed them her penny.
375 "Nay, take a seat with us,
376 Honour and eat with us,"
377 They answered grinning:
378 "Our feast is but beginning.
379 Night yet is early,
380 Warm and dew-pearly,
381 Wakeful and starry:
382 Such fruits as these
383 No man can carry;
384 Half their bloom would fly,
385 Half their dew would dry,

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386 Half their flavour would pass by.
387 Sit down and feast with us,
388 Be welcome guest with us,
389 Cheer you and rest with us." —
390 "Thank you," said Lizzie: "But one waits
391 At home alone for me:
392 So without further parleying,
393 If you will not sell me any
394 Of your fruits though much and many,
395 Give me back my silver penny

396 I tossed you for a fee." —
397 They began to scratch their pates,
398 No longer wagging, purring,
399 But visibly demurring,
400 Grunting and snarling.
401 One called her proud,
402 Cross-grained, uncivil;
403 Their tones waxed loud,
404 Their looks were evil.
405 Lashing their tails

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406 They trod and hustled her,
407 Elbowed and jostled her,
408 Clawed with their nails,

409 White and golden Lizzie stood,
410 Like a lily in a flood, —
411 Like a rock of blue-veined stone
412 Lashed by tides obstreperously, —
413 Like a beacon left alone
414 In a hoary roaring sea,
415 Sending up a golden fire, —
416 Like a fruit-crowned orange-tree
417 White with blossoms honey-sweet
418 Sore beset by wasp and bee, —

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419 Like a royal virgin town
420 Topped with gilded dome and spire
421 Close beleaguered by a fleet
422 Mad to tug her standard down.

423 One may lead a horse to water,
424 Twenty cannot make him drink.
425 Though the goblins cuffed and caught her,
426 Coaxed and fought her,
427 Bullied and besought her,
428 Scratched her, pinched her black as ink,
429 Kicked and knocked her,
430 Mauled and mocked her,
431 Lizzie uttered not a word;
432 Would not open lip from lip
433 Lest they should cram a mouthful in:
434 But laughed in heart to feel the drip
435 Of juice that syruped all her face,

436 And lodged in dimples of her chin,
437 And streaked her neck which quaked like curd.

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

448 In a smart, ache, tingle,
449 Lizzie went her way;
450 Knew not was it night or day;
451 Sprang up the bank, tore thro" the furze,
452 Threaded copse and dingle,
453 And heard her penny jingle
454 Bouncing in her purse, —
455 Its bounce was music to her ear.
456 She ran and ran

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457 As if she feared some goblin man
458 Dogged her with gibe or curse
459 Or something worse:
460 But not one goblin skurried after,
461 Nor was she pricked by fear;
462 The kind heart made her windy-paced
463 That urged her home quite out of breath with haste
464 And inward laughter.

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

476 Laura started from her chair,
477 Flung her arms up in the air,
478 Clutched her hair:
479 "Lizzie, Lizzie, have you tasted
480 For my sake the fruit forbidden?
481 Must your light like mine be hidden,
482 Your young life like mine be wasted,
483 Undone in mine undoing,
484 And ruined in my ruin,
485 Thirsty, cankered, goblin-ridden?" —
486 She clung about her sister,
487 Kissed and kissed and kissed her:
488 Tears once again
489 Refreshed her shrunken eyes,
490 Dropping like rain
491 After long sultry drouth;
492 Shaking with aguish fear, and pain,
493 She kissed and kissed her with a hungry mouth.

494 Her lips began to scorch,

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

508 Swift fire spread through her veins, knocked at her heart,
509 Met the fire smouldering there
510 And overbore its lesser flame;
511 She gorged on bitterness without a name:
512 Ah! fool, to choose such part

513 Of soul-consuming care!

514 Sense failed in the mortal strife:
515 Like the watch-tower of a town
516 Which an earthquake shatters down,
517 Like a lightning-stricken mast,
518 Like a wind-uprooted tree
519 Spun about,
520 Like a foam-topped waterspout
521 Cast down headlong in the sea,
522 She fell at last;
523 Pleasure past and anguish past,
524 Is it death or is it life?

525 Life out of death.
526 That night long Lizzie watched by her,
527 Counted her pulse"s flagging stir,
528 Felt for her breath,
529 Held water to her lips, and cooled her face
530 With tears and fanning leaves:
531 But when the first birds chirped about their eaves,

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532 And early reapers plodded to the place
533 Of golden sheaves,
534 And dew-wet grass
535 Bowed in the morning winds so brisk to pass,
536 And new buds with new day
537 Opened of cup-like lilies on the stream,
538 Laura awoke as from a dream,
539 Laughed in the innocent old way,
540 Hugged Lizzie but not twice or thrice;
541 Her gleaming locks showed not one thread of grey,
542 Her breath was sweet as May
543 And light danced in her eyes.

544 Days, weeks, months, years
546 Afterwards, when both were wives
547 With children of their own;
548 Their mother-hearts beset with fears,
549 Their lives bound up in tender lives;
550 Laura would call the little ones
551 And tell them of her early prime,

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552 Those pleasant days long gone
553 Of not-returning time:
554 Would talk about the haunted glen,

555 The wicked, quaint fruit-merchant men,
556 Their fruits like honey to the throat
557 But poison in the blood;
558 (Men sell not such in any town:)
559 Would tell them how her sister stood
560 In deadly peril to do her good,
561 And win the fiery antidote:
562 Then joining hands to little hands
563 Would bid them cling together,
564 "For there is no friend like a sister
565 In calm or stormy weather;
566 To cheer one on the tedious way,
567 To fetch one if one goes astray,
568 To lift one if one totters down,
569 To strengthen whilst one stands."