**Goblin Market**

BY [CHRISTINA ROSSETTI](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/christina-rossetti)

Study Material by

Imrul Kayes Alam Sarkar

Asst. Professor & HOD

Dept. of English, S.F.S Mahavidyalaya

# Christina Rossetti: Poems Summary and Analysis of "Goblin Market" (1862)

### Summary:

Every evening, when sisters Lizzie and Laura go to fetch water from a nearby stream, they must listen to the tempting calls of goblin men selling delicious fruit. Lizzie fears the goblins and admonishes her sister to do the same. When they catch sight of the goblins displaying their wares on golden platters, Lizzie runs home, but Laura is entranced. Despite the goblins' demonic appearance, resembling cats, rats, snails and covered in whiskers, Laura hears only the coo of doves. The goblins see her and repeat their cry. Although Laura has no money, the goblins accept a lock of her hair as payment for the fruit. Laura drinks her fill of fruit juice and returns home, intoxicated by the sweet nectars. She brings one fruit stone (pit) home with her.

Lizzie meets Laura at the gateway to their home and scolds her sister for returning late. She recounts the tale of their friend Jeanie, who ate a piece of the goblin fruit and then pined away to her death because she could not get any more. Laura assures her sister that all is well and that she plans to buy enough fruit for both of them the next day. The sisters proceed with their housework. The next day, Laura discovers that she cannot see the goblins anymore nor hear their calls, although Lizzie still can. Laura pines for the fruit, losing her health and youthful vigor. After some futile attempts to plant the fruit pit, Laura despairs. She stops eating and working.

Lizzie fears that Laura will die soon, so she places a silver penny in her purse and goes to the goblin men. She asks for fruit for her sister, but the goblins instead invite Lizzie to join their feast. When she refuses, the goblins beat her and try to force the fruit into her mouth, smearing her face with juice. She does not succumb, and the goblins soon tire of torturing her.

Lizzie returns home and tells Laura to kiss the juice on her face, and Laura does so. The juice acts like a poison and Laura collapses into a deathlike state. Lizzie remains by her sister's side through the night and in the morning, Laura awakens, her health and beauty restored. Years later, when they are both married, the two sisters tell their children the tale of the goblin men. Laura ends the story with the moral, “there is no friend like a sister.”

### Analysis:

This narrative poem has an irregular rhyme scheme and loose iambic tetrameters, which quickens the pace. The loose meter allows for the narrators' spontaneity, and the rapid pace lends a tone of urgency. Lizzie and Laura, the narrators, deliver the poem as a lesson to their children.

There are two popular interpretations of “Goblin Market”: one reading is religious, and the other focuses on gender and sexuality. Because it is difficult to prove Rossetti's original intent, scholars have invented a useful dichotomy. If the reader is more familiar with the religion, the reader will see the Christian allegory. However, if the reader is well versed in the study of gender and sexuality, then the symbolism will more readily relate to that topic. These interpretations are not mutually exclusive; rather, they should be viewed in tandem to extract the maximum meaning from this poem.

In the Christian interpretation, Laura represents Eve, the goblin men are the equivalent of Satan, their fruit is the temptation to sin, and Lizzie is the Christ figure. Laura sins by going against the interdiction that she must not eat the goblins’ fruit, which is an homage to Adam and Eve eating the forbidden fruit in the Book of Genesis. The long list of the goblins' fruit represents the wide variety of temptations that humans face during their lifetimes. Like Adam and Eve, Laura discovers that the fruit does not bring fulfillment, but rather, death and destruction.

Meanwhile, Lizzie suffers the consequences of Laura’s sin in order to rescue her sister from the punishment of death, just like Christ. The red fruit juice that Lizzie tries to get Laura to drink is like the blood of Christ in the Eucharist. Rossetti describes Lizzie as a pure “lily in a flood," and that is why she is the only person who is able to save Laura’s life. The sacrifice Lizzie makes for her sister comes out of pure love and true friendship.

The second interpretation of "Goblin Market" is based on symbols of repressed sexual desire and sexual violence. Lizzie and Laura are both innocent and virginal at the beginning of the poem, but Laura’s curiosity proves to be stronger than her sister’s warning. Rossetti creates an uncomfortable struggle between the consequences of pursuing lust and the need to explore natural human desires. Amidst charged language like “sucked” and “heaved,” Laura loses her youth and bloom (her virginity, essentially) as a result of taking the goblin men's tempting fruit. In Victorian society, a woman’s deflowering marks her transition into adulthood as a wife and mother. However, because Laura is not married, the encounter strips her of her "maiden" status prematurely. Laura did not heed her sister's warning, and now, just like Jeanie, she will suffer.

Lizzie's trajectory in this interpretation, however, is not quite as straightforward. Rossetti uses the language of sexual violence when the goblin men attack her with fruit, but Lizzie refuses to drink the juice. Meanwhile, she manages to hold onto her virtue in the form of the silver penny, which has a double meaning - "silver penny" was an Elizabethan term for the female genitalia. Lizzie makes a sacrifice so that Laura can heal and recover. However, the difficulty of this interpretation is that lost maidenhood cannot be recovered. Instead, Laura’s redemption could be refer to her reintroduction into normal social relationships, because at the end of the poem, she is married with children.

The motto, “there is no friend like a sister,” coincides with the feminist theme. Sisterhood and female community were important to Rossetti, who worked with prostitutes at the St. Mary Magdalene Home for Fallen Women. Perhaps she hoped that through this poem, even fallen women could seek a path to redemption, leaving their past indiscretions behind. However, there is a darker side to the feminist interpretation. Much of the language in “Goblin Market” refers to buying and selling. In Victorian England, women were expected to follow a certain standard of conduct. Failure to meet these standards led to the depreciation of a woman’s worth when she came to the marriage "market." Unlike Laura, Lizzie heeds the warning and safeguards her money in her purse, thereby protecting her maidenly virtue.

***INTRODUCTION***

***PRE RAPHAELITE BROTHERHOOD***

***LIFE OF C. ROSSETTI***

***PLOT***

***THEMES***

***Goblin Market*** (composed in April 1859 and published in 1862)

is a narrative poem by [Christina Rossetti](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christina_Rossetti). The poem tells the story of Laura and Lizzie who are tempted with fruit by goblin merchants.[[1]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Goblin_Market#cite_note-1)  . When the poem appeared in her first volume of poetry, [*Goblin Market and Other Poems*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Goblin_Market_and_Other_Poems), it was illustrated by her brother, the [Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood artist](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pre-Raphaelite_Brotherhood) [Dante Gabriel Rossetti](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dante_Gabriel_Rossetti).



The **Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood**(later known as the **Pre-Raphaelites**) was a group of [English](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/England) [painters](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Painting), [poets](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poets), and [art critics](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Art_critic), founded in 1848 by [William Holman Hunt](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Holman_Hunt), [John Everett Millais](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Everett_Millais), [Dante Gabriel Rossetti](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dante_Gabriel_Rossetti), [William Michael Rossetti](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Michael_Rossetti), [James Collinson](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_Collinson), [Frederic George Stephens](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frederic_George_Stephens) and [Thomas Woolner](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Woolner) who formed a seven-member "Brotherhood" modelled in part on the [Nazarene movemen](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nazarene_movement)

The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood was founded in John Millais's parents' house on [Gower Street](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gower_Street_(London)), London in 1848. At the first meeting, the painters [John Everett Millais](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Everett_Millais), [Dante Gabriel Rossetti](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dante_Gabriel_Rossetti), and [William Holman Hunt](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Holman_Hunt) were present

1. to have genuine ideas to express;
2. to study Nature attentively, so as to know how to express them;
3. direct and serious and heartfelt thing should be described …in previous art, to the exclusion of what is conventional and self-parading and learned by rote; and
4. most indispensable of all, to produce thoroughly good pictures and statues.

**OFTEN DEAL WITH MEDIEVAL THEMES**

**Christina Georgina Rossetti** (5 December 1830 – 29 December 1894) was an English poet who wrote various [romantic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Romanticism), [devotional](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pietism), and [children's poems](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Children%27s_literature). "[Goblin Market](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Goblin_Market)" and "Remember" remain famous. She wrote the words of two Christmas carols well known in the UK: "[In the Bleak Midwinter](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/In_the_Bleak_Midwinter)", later set by [Gustav Holst](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gustav_Holst) and by [Harold Darke](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harold_Darke), and "[Love Came Down at Christmas](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Love_Came_Down_at_Christmas)", set by Harold Darke and by other composers.

Christina Rossetti was born in [Charlotte Street](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charlotte_Street) (now 110 [Hallam Street](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hallam_Street" \o "Hallam Street)), London, to [Gabriele Rossetti](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gabriele_Rossetti), a poet and a political exile from [Vasto](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vasto" \o "Vasto), Abruzzo, since 1824 and [Frances Polidori](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frances_Polidori), the sister of [Lord Byron](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lord_Byron)'s friend and physician, [John William Polidori](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_William_Polidori).[[1]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christina_Rossetti#cite_note-Poets.org-1) She had two brothers and a sister: [Dante Gabriel](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dante_Gabriel_Rossetti) became an influential artist and poet, and [William Michael](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Michael_Rossetti) and [Maria](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maria_Francesca_Rossetti) both became writers.[[1]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christina_Rossetti#cite_note-Poets.org-1) Christina, the youngest, was a lively child. She dictated her first story to her mother before she had learned to write.[[2]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christina_Rossetti#cite_note-2)[[3]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christina_Rossetti#cite_note-ODNB-3)

SETTING - UNIDENTIFIED RURAL AREA

POINT OF VIEW -THIRD PERSON

VICTORIAN AGE

A **goblin** is a [monstrous](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monster) creature from [European folklore](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European_folklore), first attested in stories from the [Middle Ages](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Middle_Ages). They are ascribed various and conflicting abilities, temperaments and appearances depending on the story and country of origin. They are almost always small and [grotesque](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grotesque), [mischievous](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trickster) or outright malicious, and greedy, especially for gold and jewelry. They often have magical abilities similar to a [fairy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fairy) or [demon](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demon). Similar creatures include [brownies](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brownie_(folklore)), [dwarfs](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dwarf_(mythology)), [duendes](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Duende" \o "Duende), [gnomes](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gnome), [imps](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Imp), and [kobolds](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kobold).



**PLOT**

*Goblin Market* tells the adventures of two close sisters, Laura and Lizzie, with the river [goblins](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Goblin).

Although the sisters seem to be quite young, they live by themselves in a house, and draw water every evening from a stream. As the poem begins, the sisters hear the calls of the goblin merchants selling their fantastic fruits in the twilight. On this evening, Laura, intrigued by their strangeness, lingers(delay or stay for long time) at the stream after her sister goes home. (Rossetti hints that the "goblin men" resemble animals with faces like wombats or cats, and with tails.) Longing for the goblin fruits but having no money, the impulsive Laura offers to pay a lock of her hair and "a tear more rare than pearl."

Laura takes the delicious fruit in a sort of [bacchic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bacchanalia" \o "Bacchanalia) frenzy or madness. Once finished, she returns home in an ecstatic trance /sleepy, carrying one of the seeds. At home, Lizzie warns her " reminding Laura of Jeanie, another girl who partook of the goblin fruits, and then died at the beginning of winter after a long and pathetic decline. Strangely, no grass grows over Jeanie's grave. Laura dismisses her sister's worries, and plans to return the next night to get more fruits for herself and Lizzie. The sisters go to sleep in their shared bed.

The next day, as Laura and Lizzie go about their housework, Laura dreamily longs for the coming meeting with the goblins. That evening, Laura discovers to her horror that, although her sister still hears the goblins' chants and cries, she cannot.

Unable to buy more of the forbidden fruit, Laura sickens and pines for it. As winter approaches, she withers and ages unnaturally, too weak to do her chores. One day she remembers the saved seed and plants it, but nothing grows.

Months pass, and Lizzie realizes that Laura is wasting to death. Lizzie resolves to buy some of the goblin fruit for Laura. Carrying a silver penny, Lizzie goes down to the brook and is greeted warmly by the goblins, who invite her dine. But when they realize that she means to pay with mere silver, and to give the fruits to her sister, they turn upon the girl and beat her, trying to feed her their fruits by force. Lizzie is drenched with the juice and pulp, but consumes none of it.

Lizzie escapes and runs home, but when the dying Laura eats the pulp and juice from her body, the taste **repulses /protihoto korche** rather than satisfies her, and she undergoes a terrifying **paroxysm. extreme form suffering**

By morning, however, Laura is fully restored to health. The last stanza attests that both Laura and Lizzie live to tell their children of the evils of the goblins' fruits, and of the power of sisterly love.

1. Describe the influences of Pre Raphalite movement in C. Rossetti’s poem Goblin Market ?

2. How does c. Rossetti implement the theme of temptation, sacrifices and salvation in Goblin market?

Morning and evening

Maids heard the goblins cry:

“Come buy our orchard fruits,

Come buy, come buy:

Apples and quinces,

Lemons and oranges,

Plump unpeck’d cherries,

Melons and raspberries,

Bloom-down-cheek’d peaches,

Swart-headed mulberries,

Wild free-born cranberries,

Crab-apples, dewberries,

Pine-apples, blackberries,

Apricots, strawberries;—

All ripe together

In summer weather,—

Morns that pass by,

Fair eves that fly;

Come buy, come buy:

Our grapes fresh from the vine,

Pomegranates full and fine,

Dates and sharp bullaces,

Rare pears and greengages,

Damsons and bilberries,

Taste them and try:

Currants and gooseberries,

Bright-fire-like barberries,

Figs to fill your mouth,

Citrons from the South,

Sweet to tongue and sound to eye;

Come buy, come buy.”

Evening by evening

Among the brookside rushes,

Laura bow’d her head to hear,

Lizzie veil’d her blushes:

Crouching close together

In the cooling weather,

With clasping arms and cautioning lips,

With tingling cheeks and finger tips.

“Lie close,” Laura said,

Pricking up her golden head:

“We must not look at goblin men,

We must not buy their fruits:

Who knows upon what soil they fed

Their hungry thirsty roots?”

“Come buy,” call the goblins

Hobbling down the glen.

“Oh,” cried Lizzie, “Laura, Laura,

You should not peep at goblin men.”

Lizzie cover’d up her eyes,

Cover’d close lest they should look;

Laura rear’d her glossy head,

And whisper’d like the restless brook:

“Look, Lizzie, look, Lizzie,

Down the glen tramp little men.

One hauls a basket,

One bears a plate,

One lugs a golden dish

Of many pounds weight.

How fair the vine must grow

Whose grapes are so luscious;

How warm the wind must blow

Through those fruit bushes.”

“No,” said Lizzie, “No, no, no;

Their offers should not charm us,

Their evil gifts would harm us.”

She thrust a dimpled finger

In each ear, shut eyes and ran:

Curious Laura chose to linger

Wondering at each merchant man.

One had a cat’s face,

One whisk’d a tail,

One tramp’d at a rat’s pace,

One crawl’d like a snail,

One like a wombat prowl’d obtuse and furry,

One like a ratel tumbled hurry skurry.

She heard a voice like voice of doves

Cooing all together:

They sounded kind and full of loves

In the pleasant weather.

Laura stretch’d her gleaming neck

Like a rush-imbedded swan,

Like a lily from the beck,

Like a moonlit poplar branch,

Like a vessel at the launch

When its last restraint is gone.

Backwards up the mossy glen

Turn’d and troop’d the goblin men,

With their shrill repeated cry,

“Come buy, come buy.”

When they reach’d where Laura was

They stood stock still upon the moss,

Leering at each other,

Brother with queer brother;

Signalling each other,

Brother with sly brother.

One set his basket down,

One rear’d his plate;

One began to weave a crown

Of tendrils, leaves, and rough nuts brown

(Men sell not such in any town);

One heav’d the golden weight

Of dish and fruit to offer her:

“Come buy, come buy,” was still their cry.

Laura stared but did not stir,

Long’d but had no money:

The whisk-tail’d merchant bade her taste

In tones as smooth as honey,

The cat-faced purr’d,

The rat-faced spoke a word

Of welcome, and the snail-paced even was heard;

One parrot-voiced and jolly

Cried “Pretty Goblin” still for “Pretty Polly;”—

One whistled like a bird.

But sweet-tooth Laura spoke in haste:

“Good folk, I have no coin;

To take were to purloin:

I have no copper in my purse,

I have no silver either,

And all my gold is on the furze

That shakes in windy weather

Above the rusty heather.”

“You have much gold upon your head,”

They answer’d all together:

“Buy from us with a golden curl.”

She clipp’d a precious golden lock,

She dropp’d a tear more rare than pearl,

Then suck’d their fruit globes fair or red:

Sweeter than honey from the rock,

Stronger than man-rejoicing wine,

Clearer than water flow’d that juice;

She never tasted such before,

How should it cloy with length of use?

She suck’d and suck’d and suck’d the more

Fruits which that unknown orchard bore;

She suck’d until her lips were sore;

Then flung the emptied rinds away

But gather’d up one kernel stone,

And knew not was it night or day

As she turn’d home alone.

Lizzie met her at the gate

Full of wise upbraidings:

“Dear, you should not stay so late,

Twilight is not good for maidens;

Should not loiter in the glen

In the haunts of goblin men.

Do you not remember Jeanie,

How she met them in the moonlight,

Took their gifts both choice and many,

Ate their fruits and wore their flowers

Pluck’d from bowers

Where summer ripens at all hours?

But ever in the noonlight

She pined and pined away;

Sought them by night and day,

Found them no more, but dwindled and grew grey;

Then fell with the first snow,

While to this day no grass will grow

Where she lies low:

I planted daisies there a year ago

That never blow.

You should not loiter so.”

“Nay, hush,” said Laura:

“Nay, hush, my sister:

I ate and ate my fill,

Yet my mouth waters still;

To-morrow night I will

Buy more;” and kiss’d her:

“Have done with sorrow;

I’ll bring you plums to-morrow

Fresh on their mother twigs,

Cherries worth getting;

You cannot think what figs

My teeth have met in,

What melons icy-cold

Piled on a dish of gold

Too huge for me to hold,

What peaches with a velvet nap,

Pellucid grapes without one seed:

Odorous indeed must be the mead

Whereon they grow, and pure the wave they drink

With lilies at the brink,

And sugar-sweet their sap.”

Golden head by golden head,

Like two pigeons in one nest

Folded in each other’s wings,

They lay down in their curtain’d bed:

Like two blossoms on one stem,

Like two flakes of new-fall’n snow,

Like two wands of ivory

Tipp’d with gold for awful kings.

Moon and stars gaz’d in at them,

Wind sang to them lullaby,

Lumbering owls forbore to fly,

Not a bat flapp’d to and fro

Round their rest:

Cheek to cheek and breast to breast

Lock’d together in one nest.

Early in the morning

When the first cock crow’d his warning,

Neat like bees, as sweet and busy,

Laura rose with Lizzie:

Fetch’d in honey, milk’d the cows,

Air’d and set to rights the house,

Kneaded cakes of whitest wheat,

Cakes for dainty mouths to eat,

Next churn’d butter, whipp’d up cream,

Fed their poultry, sat and sew’d;

Talk’d as modest maidens should:

Lizzie with an open heart,

Laura in an absent dream,

One content, one sick in part;

One warbling for the mere bright day’s delight,

One longing for the night.

At length slow evening came:

They went with pitchers to the reedy brook;

Lizzie most placid in her look,

Laura most like a leaping flame.

They drew the gurgling water from its deep;

Lizzie pluck’d purple and rich golden flags,

Then turning homeward said: “The sunset flushes

Those furthest loftiest crags;

Come, Laura, not another maiden lags.

No wilful squirrel wags,

The beasts and birds are fast asleep.”

But Laura loiter’d still among the rushes

And said the bank was steep.

And said the hour was early still

The dew not fall’n, the wind not chill;

Listening ever, but not catching

The customary cry,

“Come buy, come buy,”

With its iterated jingle

Of sugar-baited words:

Not for all her watching

Once discerning even one goblin

Racing, whisking, tumbling, hobbling;

Let alone the herds

That used to tramp along the glen,

In groups or single,

Of brisk fruit-merchant men.

Till Lizzie urged, “O Laura, come;

I hear the fruit-call but I dare not look:

You should not loiter longer at this brook:

Come with me home.

The stars rise, the moon bends her arc,

Each glowworm winks her spark,

Let us get home before the night grows dark:

For clouds may gather

Though this is summer weather,

Put out the lights and drench us through;

Then if we lost our way what should we do?”

Laura turn’d cold as stone

To find her sister heard that cry alone,

That goblin cry,

“Come buy our fruits, come buy.”

Must she then buy no more such dainty fruit?

Must she no more such succous pasture find,

Gone deaf and blind?

Her tree of life droop’d from the root:

She said not one word in her heart’s sore ache;

But peering thro’ the dimness, nought discerning,

Trudg’d home, her pitcher dripping all the way;

So crept to bed, and lay

Silent till Lizzie slept;

Then sat up in a passionate yearning,

And gnash’d her teeth for baulk’d desire, and wept

As if her heart would break.

Day after day, night after night,

Laura kept watch in vain

In sullen silence of exceeding pain.

She never caught again the goblin cry:

“Come buy, come buy;”—

She never spied the goblin men

Hawking their fruits along the glen:

But when the noon wax’d bright

Her hair grew thin and grey;

She dwindled, as the fair full moon doth turn

To swift decay and burn

Her fire away.

One day remembering her kernel-stone

She set it by a wall that faced the south;

Dew’d it with tears, hoped for a root,

Watch’d for a waxing shoot,

But there came none;

It never saw the sun,

It never felt the trickling moisture run:

While with sunk eyes and faded mouth

She dream’d of melons, as a traveller sees

False waves in desert drouth

With shade of leaf-crown’d trees,

And burns the thirstier in the sandful breeze.

She no more swept the house,

Tended the fowls or cows,

Fetch’d honey, kneaded cakes of wheat,

Brought water from the brook:

But sat down listless in the chimney-nook

And would not eat.

Tender Lizzie could not bear

To watch her sister’s cankerous care

Yet not to share.

She night and morning

Caught the goblins’ cry:

“Come buy our orchard fruits,

Come buy, come buy;”—

Beside the brook, along the glen,

She heard the tramp of goblin men,

The yoke and stir

Poor Laura could not hear;

Long’d to buy fruit to comfort her,

But fear’d to pay too dear.

She thought of Jeanie in her grave,

Who should have been a bride;

But who for joys brides hope to have

Fell sick and died

In her gay prime,

In earliest winter time

With the first glazing rime,

With the first snow-fall of crisp winter time.

Till Laura dwindling

Seem’d knocking at Death’s door:

Then Lizzie weigh’d no more

Better and worse;

But put a silver penny in her purse,

Kiss’d Laura, cross’d the heath with clumps of furze

At twilight, halted by the brook:

And for the first time in her life

Began to listen and look.

Laugh’d every goblin

When they spied her peeping:

Came towards her hobbling,

Flying, running, leaping,

Puffing and blowing,

Chuckling, clapping, crowing,

Clucking and gobbling,

Mopping and mowing,

Full of airs and graces,

Pulling wry faces,

Demure grimaces,

Cat-like and rat-like,

Ratel- and wombat-like,

Snail-paced in a hurry,

Parrot-voiced and whistler,

Helter skelter, hurry skurry,

Chattering like magpies,

Fluttering like pigeons,

Gliding like fishes,—

Hugg’d her and kiss’d her:

Squeez’d and caress’d her:

Stretch’d up their dishes,

Panniers, and plates:

“Look at our apples

Russet and dun,

Bob at our cherries,

Bite at our peaches,

Citrons and dates,

Grapes for the asking,

Pears red with basking

Out in the sun,

Plums on their twigs;

Pluck them and suck them,

Pomegranates, figs.”—

“Good folk,” said Lizzie,

Mindful of Jeanie:

“Give me much and many: —

Held out her apron,

Toss’d them her penny.

“Nay, take a seat with us,

Honour and eat with us,”

They answer’d grinning:

“Our feast is but beginning.

Night yet is early,

Warm and dew-pearly,

Wakeful and starry:

Such fruits as these

No man can carry:

Half their bloom would fly,

Half their dew would dry,

Half their flavour would pass by.

Sit down and feast with us,

Be welcome guest with us,

Cheer you and rest with us.”—

“Thank you,” said Lizzie: “But one waits

At home alone for me:

So without further parleying,

If you will not sell me any

Of your fruits though much and many,

Give me back my silver penny

I toss’d you for a fee.”—

They began to scratch their pates,

No longer wagging, purring,

But visibly demurring,

Grunting and snarling.

One call’d her proud,

Cross-grain’d, uncivil;

Their tones wax’d loud,

Their looks were evil.

Lashing their tails

They trod and hustled her,

Elbow’d and jostled her,

Claw’d with their nails,

Barking, mewing, hissing, mocking,

Tore her gown and soil’d her stocking,

Twitch’d her hair out by the roots,

Stamp’d upon her tender feet,

Held her hands and squeez’d their fruits

Against her mouth to make her eat.

White and golden Lizzie stood,

Like a lily in a flood,—

Like a rock of blue-vein’d stone

Lash’d by tides obstreperously,—

Like a beacon left alone

In a hoary roaring sea,

Sending up a golden fire,—

Like a fruit-crown’d orange-tree

White with blossoms honey-sweet

Sore beset by wasp and bee,—

Like a royal virgin town

Topp’d with gilded dome and spire

Close beleaguer’d by a fleet

Mad to tug her standard down.

One may lead a horse to water,

Twenty cannot make him drink.

Though the goblins cuff’d and caught her,

Coax’d and fought her,

Bullied and besought her,

Scratch’d her, pinch’d her black as ink,

Kick’d and knock’d her,

Maul’d and mock’d her,

Lizzie utter’d not a word;

Would not open lip from lip

Lest they should cram a mouthful in:

But laugh’d in heart to feel the drip

Of juice that syrupp’d all her face,

And lodg’d in dimples of her chin,

And streak’d her neck which quaked like curd.

At last the evil people,

Worn out by her resistance,

Flung back her penny, kick’d their fruit

Along whichever road they took,

Not leaving root or stone or shoot;

Some writh’d into the ground,

Some div’d into the brook

With ring and ripple,

Some scudded on the gale without a sound,

Some vanish’d in the distance.

In a smart, ache, tingle,

Lizzie went her way;

Knew not was it night or day;

Sprang up the bank, tore thro’ the furze,

Threaded copse and dingle,

And heard her penny jingle

Bouncing in her purse,—

Its bounce was music to her ear.

She ran and ran

As if she fear’d some goblin man

Dogg’d her with gibe or curse

Or something worse:

But not one goblin scurried after,

Nor was she prick’d by fear;

The kind heart made her windy-paced

That urged her home quite out of breath with haste

And inward laughter.

She cried, “Laura,” up the garden,

“Did you miss me?

Come and kiss me.

Never mind my bruises,

Hug me, kiss me, suck my juices

Squeez’d from goblin fruits for you,

Goblin pulp and goblin dew.

Eat me, drink me, love me;

Laura, make much of me;

For your sake I have braved the glen

And had to do with goblin merchant men.”

Laura started from her chair,

Flung her arms up in the air,

Clutch’d her hair:

“Lizzie, Lizzie, have you tasted

For my sake the fruit forbidden?

Must your light like mine be hidden,

Your young life like mine be wasted,

Undone in mine undoing,

And ruin’d in my ruin,

Thirsty, canker’d, goblin-ridden?”—

She clung about her sister,

Kiss’d and kiss’d and kiss’d her:

Tears once again

Refresh’d her shrunken eyes,

Dropping like rain

After long sultry drouth;

Shaking with aguish fear, and pain,

She kiss’d and kiss’d her with a hungry mouth.

Her lips began to scorch,

That juice was wormwood to her tongue,

She loath’d the feast:

Writhing as one possess’d she leap’d and sung,

Rent all her robe, and wrung

Her hands in lamentable haste,

And beat her breast.

Her locks stream’d like the torch

Borne by a racer at full speed,

Or like the mane of horses in their flight,

Or like an eagle when she stems the light

Straight toward the sun,

Or like a caged thing freed,

Or like a flying flag when armies run.

Swift fire spread through her veins, knock’d at her heart,

Met the fire smouldering there

And overbore its lesser flame;

She gorged on bitterness without a name:

Ah! fool, to choose such part

Of soul-consuming care!

Sense fail’d in the mortal strife:

Like the watch-tower of a town

Which an earthquake shatters down,

Like a lightning-stricken mast,

Like a wind-uprooted tree

Spun about,

Like a foam-topp’d waterspout

Cast down headlong in the sea,

She fell at last;

Pleasure past and anguish past,

Is it death or is it life?

Life out of death.

That night long Lizzie watch’d by her,

Counted her pulse’s flagging stir,

Felt for her breath,

Held water to her lips, and cool’d her face

With tears and fanning leaves:

But when the first birds chirp’d about their eaves,

And early reapers plodded to the place

Of golden sheaves,

And dew-wet grass

Bow’d in the morning winds so brisk to pass,

And new buds with new day

Open’d of cup-like lilies on the stream,

Laura awoke as from a dream,

Laugh’d in the innocent old way,

Hugg’d Lizzie but not twice or thrice;

Her gleaming locks show’d not one thread of grey,

Her breath was sweet as May

And light danced in her eyes.

Days, weeks, months, years

Afterwards, when both were wives

With children of their own;

Their mother-hearts beset with fears,

Their lives bound up in tender lives;

Laura would call the little ones

And tell them of her early prime,

Those pleasant days long gone

Of not-returning time:

Would talk about the haunted glen,

The wicked, quaint fruit-merchant men,

Their fruits like honey to the throat

But poison in the blood;

(Men sell not such in any town):

Would tell them how her sister stood

In deadly peril to do her good,

And win the fiery antidote:

Then joining hands to little hands

Would bid them cling together,

“For there is no friend like a sister

In calm or stormy weather;

To cheer one on the tedious way,

To fetch one if one goes astray,

To lift one if one totters down,

To strengthen whilst one stands.”