

3 Jovial Poems of Christina Rossetti

The Queen of Hearts

How comes it, Flora, that, whenever we
Play cards together, you invariably,
However the pack parts,
Still hold the Queen of Hearts?

I've scanned you with a scrutinizing gaze,
Resolved to fathom these your secret ways:
But, sift them as I will,
Your ways are secret still.

I cut and shuffle; shuffle, cut, again;
But all my cutting, shuffling, proves in vain:
Vain hope, vain forethought, too;
That Queen still falls to you.

I dropped her once, prepense; but, ere the deal
Was dealt, your instinct seemed her loss to feel:
"There should be one card more,"
You said, and searched the floor.

I cheated once: I made a private notch
In Heart-Queen's back, and kept a lynx-eyed watch;
Yet such another back
Deceived me in the pack:

The Queen of Clubs assumed by arts unknown
An imitative dint that seemed my own;
This notch, not of my doing,
Misled me to my ruin.

It baffles me to puzzle out the clew,
Which must be skill, or craft, or luck in you:
Unless, indeed, it be
Natural affinity.

Farm Walk

The year stood at its equinox
And bluff the North was blowing,
A bleat of lambs came from the flocks,
Green hardy things were growing;
I met a maid with shining locks
Where milky kine were lowing.

She wore a kerchief on her neck,
Her bare arm showed its dimple,
Her apron spread without a speck,
Her air was frank and simple.

She milked into a wooden pail
And sang a country ditty,
An innocent fond lovers' tale,
That was not wise nor witty,
Pathetically rustical,
Too pointless for the city.

She kept in time without a beat
As true as church-bell ringers,
Unless she tapped time with her feet,
Or squeezed it with her fingers;
Her clear unstudied notes were sweet
As many a practised singer's.

I stood a minute out of sight,
Stood silent for a minute
To eye the pail, and creamy white
The frothing milk within it;

To eye the comely milking maid
Herself so fresh and creamy:

"Good day to you," at last I said;
She turned her head to see me:
"Good day," she said, with lifted head;
Her eyes looked soft and dreamy,

And all the while she milked and milked
The grave cow heavy-laden:
I've seen grand ladies plumed and silked,
But not a sweeter maiden;

But not a sweeter, fresher maid
Than this in homely cotton,
Whose pleasant face and silky braid
I have not yet forgotten.

Seven springs have passed since then, as I
Count with a sober sorrow;
Seven springs have come and passed me by,
And spring sets in to-morrow.

I've half a mind to shake myself
Free just for once from London,
To set my work upon the shelf
And leave it done or undone;

To run down by the early train,
Whirl down with shriek and whistle,
And feel the bluff North blow again,
And mark the sprouting thistle
Set up on waste patch of the lane
Its green and tender bristle,

And spy the scarce-blown violet banks,
Crisp primrose leaves and others,
And watch the lambs leap at their pranks
And butt their patient mothers.

Alas, one point in all my plan
My serious thoughts demur to:
Seven years have passed for maid and man,
Seven years have passed for her too;

Perhaps my rose is overblown,
Not rosy or too rosy;
Perhaps in farm-house of her own
Some husband keeps her cosey,
Where I should show a face unknown.
Good by, my wayside posy.

A Birthday

My heart is like a singing bird
Whose nest is in a watered shoot;
My heart is like an apple-tree
Whose boughs are bent with thick-set fruit;
My heart is like a rainbow shell
That paddles in a halcyon sea;
My heart is gladder than all these
Because my love is come to me.

Raise me a dais of silk and down;
Hang it with vair and purple dyes;
Carve it in doves and pomegranates,
And peacocks with a hundred eyes;
Work it in gold and silver grapes,
In leaves and silver fleurs-de-lys;
Because the birthday of my life
Is come, my love is come to me.