

A. C. Swinburne (1837-1909)

16 *The King's Daughter*

We were ten maidens in the green corn,
Small red leaves in the mill-water;
Fairer maidens never were born,
Apples of gold for the king's daughter.

We were ten maidens by a well-head, 5
Small white birds in the mill-water:
Sweeter maidens never were wed,
Rings of red for the king's daughter.

The first to spin, the second to sing, 10
Seeds of wheat in the mill-water:
The third may was a goodly thing,
White bread and brown for the king's daughter.

The fourth to sew and the fifth to play, 15
Fair green weed in the mill-water;
The sixth may was a goodly may,
White wine and red for the king's daughter.

The seventh to woo, the eighth to wed, 20
Fair thin reeds in the mill-water;
The ninth had gold work on her head,
Honey in the comb for the king's daughter.

The ninth had gold work round her hair,
Fallen flowers in the mill-water;
The tenth may was goodly and fair,
Golden gloves for the king's daughter.

We were ten maidens in a field green, 25
Fallen fruit in the mill-water;
Fairer maidens never have been,
Golden sleeves for the king's daughter.

By there comes the king's young son,
 A little wind in the mill-water; 30
 "Out of ten maidens ye'll grant me one,"
 A crown of red for the king's daughter.

"Out of ten mays ye'll give me the best,"
 A little rain in the mill-water;
 A bed of yellow straw for all the rest, 35
 A bed of gold for the king's daughter.

He's ta'en out the goodliest,
 Rain that rains in the mill-water;
 A comb of yellow shell for all the rest,
 A comb of gold for the king's daughter. 40

He's made her bed to the goodliest,
 Wind and hail in the mill-water;
 A grass girdle for all the rest,
 A girdle of arms for the king's daughter.

He's set his heart to the goodliest, 45
 Snow that snows in the mill-water;
 Nine little kisses for all the rest,
 An hundred fold for the king's daughter.

He's ta'en his leave at the goodliest,
 Broken boats in the Mill-water, 50
 Golden gifts for all the rest,
 Sorrow of heart for the king's daughter.

"Ye'll make a grave for my fair body,"
 Running rain in the mill-water;
 "And ye'll streek my brother at the side of me," 55
 The pains of hell for the king's daughter.

1866

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