

Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-82)

1 *The Blessed Damozel*

The blessed damozel leaned out
From the gold bar of Heaven;
Her eyes were deeper than the depth
Of waters stilled at even;
She had three lilies in her hand, 5
And the stars in her hair were seven.

Her robe, ungirt from clasp to hem,
No wrought flowers did adorn,
But a white rose of Mary's gift,
For service meetly worn; 10
Her hair that lay along her back
Was yellow like ripe corn.

Herseemed she scarce had been a day
One of God's choristers;
The wonder was not yet quite gone 15
From that still look of hers;
Albeit, to them she left, her day
Had counted as ten years.

(To one, it is ten years of years.
. . . Yet now, and in this place, 20
Surely she leaned o'er me—her hair
Fell all about my face. . . .
Nothing: the autumn-fall of leaves.
The whole year sets apace.)

It was the rampart of God's house 25
That she was standing on;
By God built over the sheer depth

The which is Space begun;
So high, that looking downward thence
She scarce could see the sun. 30

It lies in Heaven, across the flood
Of ether, as a bridge.
Beneath, the tides of day and night
With flame and darkness ridge
The void, as low as where this earth 35
Spins like a fretful midge.

Around her, lovers, newly met
'Mid deathless love's acclaims,
Spoke evermore among themselves
Their heart-remembered names; 40
And the souls mounting up to God
Went by her like thin flames.

And still she bowed herself and stooped
Out of the circling charm;
Until her bosom must have made 45
The bar she leaned on warm,
And the lilies lay as if asleep
Along her bended arm.

From the fixed place of Heaven she saw
Time like a pulse shake fierce 50
Through all the worlds. Her gaze still strove
Within the gulf to pierce
Its path; and now she spoke as when
The stars sang in their spheres.

The sun was gone now; the curled moon 55
Was like a little feather
Fluttering far down the gulf; and now
She spoke through the still weather.
Her voice was like the voice the stars

Had when they sang together. 60

(Ah sweet! Even now, in that bird's song,
Strove not her accents there,
Fain to be hearkened? When those bells
Possessed the mid-day air,
Strove not her steps to reach my side 65
Down all the echoing stair?)

"I wish that he were come to me,
For he will come," she said.
"Have I not prayed in Heaven?—on earth,
Lord, Lord, has he not pray'd? 70
Are not two prayers a perfect strength?
And shall I feel afraid?"

"When round his head the aureole clings,
And he is clothed in white,
I'll take his hand and go with him 75
To the deep wells of light;
As unto a stream we will step down,
And bathe there in God's sight.

"We two will stand beside that shrine,
Occult, withheld, untrod, 80
Whose lamps are stirred continually
With prayer sent up to God;
And see our old prayers, granted, melt
Each like a little cloud.

"We two will lie i' the shadow of 85
That living mystic tree
Within whose secret growth the Dove
Is sometimes felt to be,
While every leaf that His plumes touch
Saith His Name audibly. 90

“And I myself will teach to him,
I myself, lying so,
The songs I sing here; which his voice
Shall pause in, hushed and slow,
And find some knowledge at each pause, 95
Or some new thing to know.”

(Alas! we two, we two, thou say'st!
Yea, one wast thou with me
That once of old. But shall God lift
To endless unity 100
The soul whose likeness with thy soul
Was but its love for thee?)

“We two,” she said, “will seek the groves
Where the lady Mary is,
With her five handmaidens, whose names 105
Are five sweet symphonies,
Cecily, Gertrude, Magdalen,
Margaret and Rosalys.

“Circlewise sit they, with bound locks
And foreheads garlanded; 110
Into the fine cloth white like flame
Weaving the golden thread,
To fashion the birth-ropes for them
Who are just born, being dead.

“He shall fear, haply, and be dumb 115
Then will I lay my cheek
To his, and tell about our love,
Not once abashed or weak:
And the dear Mother will approve
My pride, and let me speak. 120

“Herself shall bring us, hand in hand,
To Him round whom all souls

Kneel, the clear-ranged unnumbered heads
 Bowed with their aureoles:
And angels meeting us shall sing 125
 To their citherns and citoles.

“There will I ask of Christ the Lord
 Thus much for him and me:—
Only to live as once on earth
 With Love,—only to be, 130
As then awhile, for ever now
 Together, I and he.”

She gazed and listened and then said,
 Less sad of speech than mild,—
“All this is when he comes.” She ceased. 135
 The light thrilled towards her, fill’d
With angels in strong level flight.
 Her eyes prayed, and she smil’d.

(I saw her smile.) But soon their path
 Was vague in distant spheres: 140
And then she cast her arms along
 The golden barriers,
And laid her face between her hands,
 And wept. (I heard her tears.)

1847-69

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