

Christina Georgina Rossetti (1830-94)

4 *Maude Clare*

Out of the church she followed them
With a lofty step and mien:
His bride was like a village maid,
Maude Clare was like a queen.

“Son Thomas,” his lady mother said, 5
With smiles, almost with tears:
“May Nell and you but live as true
As we have done for years;

“Your father thirty years ago
Had just your tale to tell; 10
But he was not so pale as you,
Nor I so pale as Nell.”

My lord was pale with inward strife,
And Nell was pale with pride;
My lord gazed long on pale Maude Clare 15
Or ever he kissed the bride.

“Lo, I have brought my gift, my lord,
Have brought my gift,” she said:
“To bless the hearth, to bless the board,
To bless the marriage-bed. 20

“Here’s my half of the golden chain
You wore about your neck,
That day we waded ankle-deep
For lilies in the beck:

“Here’s my half of the faded leaves 25
We plucked from budding bough,
With feet amongst the lily leaves, —
The lilies are budding now.”

He strove to match her scorn with scorn,
He faltered in his place: 30
“Lady,” he said, — “Maude Clare,” he said, —
“Maude Clare:” — and hid his face.

She turn’d to Nell: “My Lady Nell,
I have a gift for you;
Though, were it fruit, the bloom were gone 35
Or, were it flowers, the dew.

“Take my share of a fickle heart,
Mine of a paltry love:
Take it or leave it as you will,
I wash my hands thereof.” 40

“And what you leave,” said Nell, “I’ll take,
And what you spurn, I’ll wear;
For he’s my lord for better and worse,
And him I love, Maude Clare.

“Yea, though you’re taller by the head, 45
More wise, and much more fair;
I’ll love him till he loves me best,
Me best of all, Maude Clare.”

1858

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