

Lucy Gray

William Wordsworth

"Lucy Gray" is a poem written by William Wordsworth in 1799 and published in 1800 in his Lyrical Ballads. It describes the death of a young girl named Lucy Gray, who went out one evening into a storm to bring her mother back home.

Stanza: 1

Oft I had heard of Lucy Gray:

And, when I crossed the wild,

I chanced to see at break of day

The solitary child.

This stanza provides the setting and the foreshadowing for the rest of the poem. I had often heard of Lucy Gray. When I crossed the wide open valley. I happened to see the solitary child at the time of break of day. The first stanza simply strikes up curiosity about Lucy and sets her up as an important figure.

Stanza : 2

No mate, no comrade Lucy knew;

She dwelt on a wide moor,

—The sweetest thing that ever grew

Beside a human door!

This stanza continues to create curiosity about Lucy. She had never enjoyed the company of any playmate or companion. She lived in an open wide valley. The last lines say that she grew "beside a human door". It seems strange that she did not grow inside that door, since she is a human child.

Stanza: 3

You yet may spy the fawn at play,

The hare upon the green;

But the sweet face of Lucy Gray

Will never more be seen.

Here, the speaker talks directly to the readers and says that you may still see the young deer at play or the hare running about over the green valleys but you can never see anymore the sweetest face of Lucy Gray. With this stanza, the speaker reveals that something has happened to Lucy.

Stanza: 4

To-night will be a stormy night—

You to the town must go;

And take a lantern, Child, to light

Your mother through the snow

He begins to talk from another's point of view. Lucy's father told her that it was expected to be a stormy night. She must go to the town with a lantern and bring her mother back home.

Stanza : 5

That, Father! Will I gladly do:

'Tis scarcely afternoon—

The minster-clock has just struck two,

And yonder is the moon!

This also reveals that the speaker within the quotes is Lucy's father. Lucy told her father that she would gladly do so. It was hardly afternoon at that time. The church clock had struck two. The moon was still hanging low in the horizon.

Stanza : 6

At this the Father raised his hook,

And snapped a faggot-band;

He plied his work;—and Lucy took

The lantern in her hand.

This stanza continues the story from the original speaker's point of view. When her father heard this, he was satisfied. He took his sharp hook and got busy with his work of cutting the bundle of woods. He went on doing his work and Lucy took the lantern in her hand and went on.

Stanza: 7

Not blither is the mountain roe:

With many a wanton stroke

Her feet disperse the powdery snow,

That rises up like smoke.

Even the deer of the mountain is not so active and smart as Lucy was. This stanza describes Lucy as walking along slowly and carelessly, kicking up the “powdery snow” as she walks, and watching it rise “like smoke”. These descriptions of Lucy help to continue to paint a picture of a sweet and innocent child.

Stanza : 8

The storm came on before its time:

She wandered up and down;

And many a hill did Lucy climb:

But never reached the town.

With the first line of this stanza, the speaker reveals what will happen to Lucy. The storm burst before its time. She wandered up and down. Although she climbed many hills yet she never reached the town.

Stanza :9

The wretched parents all that night

Went shouting far and wide;

But there was neither sound nor sight

To serve them for a guide.

This stanza reveals that at some point during the night, Lucy’s mother returned home and her miserable parents came out to search for her. They shouted for her through the night far and wide. But they neither heard any sound nor saw any sight to guide them in the darkness and silence of the night.

Stanza :10

At day-break on a hill they stood

That overlooked the moor;

And thence they saw the bridge of wood,

A furlong from their door.

Again, the speaker mentions day-break. They stood over a hill. From there, they could see all over the wild valley. They saw a wooden bridge at a distance of about one furlong from there door.

Stanza : 11

They wept—and, turning homeward, cried,

“In heaven we all shall meet;”

—When in the snow the mother spied

The print of Lucy’s feet.

At this point, the parents weep and give up their search for Lucy. As they came towards their home, they said that they would meet the poor girl in heaven. The mother saw the foot-prints of Lucy Gray in the snow. However, the sight of her footprint gives hope.

Stanza : 12

Then downwards from the steep hill’s edge

They tracked the footmarks small;

And through the broken hawthorn hedge,

And by the long stone-wall;

With this, the parents begin to follow her footprints. They traced the small footprints downwards from the side of the steep hill. Those footprints passed through the broken hawthorn hedge and went along the stone wall.

Stanza : 13

And then an open field they crossed:

The marks were still the same;

They tracked them on, nor ever lost;

And to the bridge they came.

Then parents passed over an open field. There were the same marks. They went on tracing them. They did not lose them until they came to the bridge.

Stanza : 14

They followed from the snowy bank

Those footmarks, one by one,

Into the middle of the plank;

And further there were none!

This stanza invokes the feeling of intense loss. While the parents follow in the footsteps of the child, there is hope that she might be found alive at the end of those footprints. Instead, the prints led the parents to the “middle of the plank” on the bridge, and suddenly the footprints stop. The only conclusion is that Lucy fell off the bridge.

Stanza : 15

Yet some maintain that to this day

She is a living child;

That you may see sweet Lucy Gray

Upon the lonesome wild.

Yet some people believe up to this day that she is a living child. They think they can see sweet Lucy Gray wandering over the lonely wild valley.

Stanza : 16

O'er rough and smooth she trips along,

And never looks behind;

And sings a solitary song

That whistles in the wind.

She walks slightly over rough as well as smooth places, but she never looks behind. She sings a lovely song that whistles in the wind.