

Excerpts from The Ballad of Lorianna, Ever Brush Away The Sleep, To Winter
and other poems, by Christopher Laverty

APPLE BLOSSOM GIRL

She's in the field, not in the valley,
and weaves a braid with fresh-blown flowers;
she's in the woods - not forests shady -
with nature's music passing hours.
She's by the lake, not by the ocean,
whose waters seldom know commotion;
she's in the garden, not the moors,
nor near the fall's majestic roars.

She has not passed from storm to peace -
no thunder ever shook her summer;
when passing I will never cease
to pause and hear this artless hummer.
Serene her temples as a sage,
though she's a dew-clad May in age;
she's dutiful as honey bee,
and labours lost in reverie.

Around her mouth a laughter dances -
I know not why – nor hunger to;
my soul's transparent in her glances -
she's ageless as these rocks in view.
She's fragile-strong as swooning swan,
as secret as the dappled dawn -
when in her cottage she has gone
her fountain ever trickles on.

A BUTTERFLY I THOUGHT I SAW

A butterfly I thought I saw -
with snow-like wings the field explore;
the smiling grass you flitted on -
your fragile beauty caught my eye -

I then gave chase – with longing sigh -
but blinked then looked – and you were gone.

A spider in its place I found -
poised motionless; beneath – around -
was spread your soft, alluring web,
which with a thousand charms was wrought,
where helpless like a fly I'm caught -
snared in the lair of passion's ebb.

The spider fled – around my head
a boisterous bee I heard instead;
with clumsy curiosity
you caused commotion then me teased -
threatened to sting me if you pleased -
with piercing kisses shower me.

The bee vanished - last on my hand
I felt a beetle soundless land;
in nature's duties deep absorbed -
so delicate I feared to crush
your tiny dome of colours lush -
of quaintest red with speckles daubed.

All these things – Emelie – are you
and more - a puzzle with no clue,
a horde of creatures in a box;
yet each is neither right nor wrong,
just notes that form your varied song,
song rich with human paradox.

ON SEEING MANCHESTER AT DAWN

The sky's as charmless as a filthy rag -
as daylight breaks, the traffic shuffles filed;
pavements are tired and littered, bins are piled,
the clay-like Sun's first smiles with sadness sag.
The city's ragged as a vagrant hag,
and seems a lightless land for souls exiled -

yet somehow by this sight I am beguiled,
my spirits roused that in dejection drag.
I did not see - so hushful in the stone -
this loveliness I unexpected meet -
see these subtle charms all of their own,
that play around each weather-beaten street -
see in these buildings - that like flesh and bone
stir and wake - the city's hidden beat.

COULD I CAST SPELLS

Could I cast spells – antique and gilded cup -
clay guardian - whose tableaux chronicle
these fishermen their sea-nets lifting up,
these foxes eyeing gleans in baskets full -
clay man-at-arms - that battles time's keen edge,
that shields from its advance this pastoral scene
of two pale youths in rivalry to pledge
their hearts to her that tends the orchard green -
could I cast spells – in tableaux I would freeze
those moments spent with you that time lays waste -
those eyes that danced like light on summer seas -
where refuge from mortality they'd taste;
eyes that only memories have kept,
until towards oblivion they're swept.

ON SEEING THE AOSTA VALLEY

To add more notes to birdsongs would – I know -
only mar the passing hearer's bliss,
more hues just cloy the glory of the rainbow;
monarchs crowned would little gain or miss
if crowned once more for show – while here below
this scene is such that art I can dismiss.
Tranquil it sits in winter's parting chill:
the shops and cafes of the village seem
drowsy with sleep; surrounding mountains gleam
with fading snow; only the churchbells fill
the alleys hushed and calm; all life is still,
ruled by the rhythm of the gentle stream -
low clouds enfold the valley in a dream,
as we stand and watch it from the hill.