

Bardic Memories

Laura Berlage

~Lyrics~

The Minstrel and the Gypsy

Lyrics, melody, and arrangement by Laura Berlage ©2011

The minstrel and the gypsy met upon the road
Each one a-traveling to destinations yet unknown,
Neither one the other knew nor name they could have told
Both were weary for the walking and both were far from home.

He with lute and starry eyes and a pocket full of dreams
Thoughts of forest, falcons, fox, and castles painted white that teem,
With maidens fair and shining knights and golden goblet's gleam
A tune for each of these had he with words like a woodland stream.

She with incense, colors rich, and flash of firelight
Longed for the sea and the whisp'ring waves and the gulls that wheel to great heights,
Never long upon one shore did she care to alight
With movements quick as the raven black and mystical as the night.

Fate must have there been written in the stars so fair to see
For in each they found a light worth a lifetime's journey,
And though they now are parted by miles and society
They've kept the promise that they shared, the minstrel and the gypsy.

Not all who wander are lost, says the poet wizened well
And if the two shall meet again, only time will tell,
But if you hear this gypsy rose by wind or sea swell
Know that this I sing for you and that I am safe and well.

Trees They Grow High

Traditional, inspired by the John Renbourn and Jacqui McShee version.

Trees they grow high and the leaves they do grow green
Many is the time my true love I've seen
Many's the hour I've watched him all alone

His young body's daily growing.

“Father, dear Father you've done me great wrong
You've married me to a boy who is too young
I am twice twelve and he is but fourteen
His young body's daily growing.”

“Daughter, dear daughter I've done you no wrong
I've married you to a brave lord's son
He'll be a man to you when I am dead and gone
His young body's daily growing.”

“Father, dear Father if you see fit
We'll send my love to college for one year yet
Tie blue ribbons all around his head
To let the ladies know that he's married.”

One day as I was looking o'er my father's castle wall
Saw all the boys a-playin' at the ball
My own true love was the flower of them all
His young body's daily growing.

At the age of fourteen he was a married man
Age of fifteen the father of a son
Age of sixteen on his grave the grass was green
Cruel death had put an end to his growing.

I'll make my love a shroud of the Holland so fine
Every stitch I put in it the tears come a-tricklin' down
Once I had a true love but now I ne'er a one
But I'll watch o'er his son while he's growing.

The Tinkerman's Daughter

By Michael McConnel

The wee birds were lining the bleak autumn branches
Preparing to fly to a far sunny shore,
When the tinkers made camp at a bend in the river
Coming back from the horse fair at Ballinsloe.
Now the harvest bein' over the farmer came walking
All along the Faele River that borders his land,
And 'twas there he first saw her twixt firelight and water
The tinkerman's daughter, the red-headed Ann.

Well next mornin' he rose from a night without resting
He went straight tae her father and he made his case known,
And in a pub in Listowell they worked out a bargain
For the tinker a pony, for the daughter a home.
Where the trees make their shadows along the Faele River
The tinker and the farmer inspected the land,
And the white gelding pony was the prize they agreed on
For the tinkerman's daughter, the red-headed Ann.

With their wedding soon over the tinkers departed
They were eager to travel-on south down the road,
But the crunch of the iron-shod wheels on the gravel
Was as bitter to her as the way she'd been sold.
But she tried hard to please him, she did all his bidding
She slept in his bed and she worked on his land,
But the walls of that cabin pressed tighter and tighter
'Round the tinkerman's daughter, the red-headed Ann.

Now as white as the hands of the priest or the hangman
The snow spread its blanket the next Christmas round,
And the tinkerman's daughter slipped out from his bedside
Turned her back on the land and her face to the town.
Yet it's said someone saw her at dusk the same evening
She was makin' her way out o'er Lyeacrompane,
Aye and that was the last time the settled folks saw her
The tinkerman's daughter, the red-headed Ann.

Where the north Kerry hills cuts the Faele near Listowell
At a farm on its banks lives a bitter old man,
And he swears by the shotgun he keeps at his bedside
That he'll kill any tinker that camps on his land.
Yet whenever he hears iron-shod wheels crunch on gravel
Or a horse in the shafts of a bright caravan,
Then his day's work's tormented and his night's sleep's demented
By the tinkerman's daughter, the red-headed Ann.

The Birth of Taliesin

Traditional Welsh story re-imagined by Laura Berlage. Accompanying tunes
"Troubadour's Lament," "Running Music," and "Hills of Wales" by Laura Berlage
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The goddess Ceridwen had two sons. One of them was quite handsome, and the other was ugly...very ugly. Ceridwen feared that there would be no future for her repulsive son, so she decided to make him a magical potion so he would know everything

there was to know. With this power, people would come to him for council and revere him as a wise man. It would take a whole year to make this potion because each herb and flower had to be collected in precisely the right place at the right time of year in the correct phase of the moon. To help her in its preparation, Ceridwen contracted a blind man to continually stoke the fire beneath the cauldron and a young boy, Gwion Back, to stir the mixture. With stern hand and fierce eyes, the goddess warned little Gwion to never, NEVER touch or taste the potion—EVER! Or he would die. Little Gwion's eyes grew round and he nodded, promising never to taste any of it.

Bending over the enormous cauldron, he stirred and stirred through many moon phases, stirring harder as each new herb and flower was added to the boiling concoction. But then, on the last day of the year, Ceridwen was out in the fields picking the very last plant to add to the magical drink that would give her son complete knowledge. Gwion was at the cauldron, stirring, stirring...when all of a sudden three drops of the boiling concoction flew out onto his thumb, and it burned his thumb, and he stuck it in his mouth... And in an instant he realized that he had broken his promise because in those three drops was contained the precious knowledge meant for the goddess' son. Suddenly Gwion Back knew everything there was to know, and the thing he knew most certain of all was that Ceridwen was going to be fiercely angry.

The potion, its magic spent, burst the cauldron into pieces, extinguishing the fire and spilling out onto the floor. But Gwion did not care, he had started running. When Ceridwen returned home, she discovered the disaster all over the floor and the old man cowering in the corner, and knew at once what had happened. And she began running too...after the little stirring boy. And little Gwion, he sees the goddess coming, and terrified, he turned himself into a fox, but Ceridwen turned into a greyhound to chase after him. Then the boy turned into a sparrow to fly through the air, and Ceridwen turned herself into a falcon to swoop and try to catch him. Then Gwion turned into a salmon in the river, and Ceridwen turned into an otter with sharp claws. Finally, little Gwion ran into a barn and turned into a grain of wheat to hide. And Ceridwen turned into a big, black hen, strutted in, and ate him. And that was that...or so she thought.

Nine months later, Ceridwen gave birth to a baby boy. And she knew exactly who it was. But she had not the heart to kill the product of her own womb, so the goddess tied the child into a leather sack and threw him into the sea for the fates to do what they will.

There was in the village, a little ways off, a young man called Elffin, and he was a very luckless man. He had tried his hand at every craft, but his work was always a failure. On this day, he had begged his uncle for the use of a fishing boat and some nets to try his luck at fishing. At first the uncle had declined, but with persistence, Elffin was allowed to take the boat out to sea. He cast the nets to the left, and caught nothing. He tried again to the right...still nothing. Not even a lonely piece of driftwood. So he cast his nets out one last time, and they were heavier. Elffin leaned over the rail to see a lumpy, leather sack caught up in the nets. "Aha!" he cried, "This is my lucky day, for surely I have caught some lost treasure of gold and jewels from some sunken ship!" Elated, he hauled up the net and clutched the sack. Opening it, he saw to his amazement that it contained no golden coins, but the golden locks on a small child's head. And, as soon as the bag was opened, the child began to speak in beautiful words of poetry.

Elffin decided that this miraculous child was more precious than gold or jewels and brought him home and raised him as his own. And they named him Taliesin, which means “shining brow,” after his golden hair and the light of his wisdom. And this boy, Gwion Back reborn through the womb of the goddess Ceridwen, would grow to become the greatest bard in all of Wales and would later save Elffin from imprisonment and certain death at the hands of an evil king.

Willie O' Winsbury

Traditional.

The King has been a prisoner
And a pris'ner long in Spain,
And Willie of the Winsbury
Has lain long with his daughter at home.

“What ails you, what ails you my daughter Janet,
Why you look so pale and wan,
Oh have you had any sore sickness
Or yet been a-sleepin' with a man.”

“Oh I have not had any sore sickness
Nor yet been a-sleepin' with a man,
But it was for you my father dear
For biding so long in Spain.”

“Cast off, cast off your berry-brown gown
You stand naked upon the stone,
That I may know you by your shape
Whether you be a maiden or no.”

And she's cast off her berry-brown gown
She stood naked upon the stone,
Her apron was low and her haunches were round
Her face was pale and wan.

“Oh was it with a lord or a duke or a knight
Or a man of birth and fame,
Or was it with one of my serving men
That's lately come out of Spain?”

“No it wasn't with a lord nor a duke nor a knight
Nor a man of birth and fame,
But it was with Willie of Winsbury
I could bide no longer alone.”

And the King he has called on his merry men all
By thirty and by three,
Saying, "Fetch me this Willie of Winsbury
For hanged he shall be."

But when he was brought the King before
He was clad all in the red silk,
His hair was like the strands of gold
His skin was as white as the milk.

"And it is no wonder," said the King
"That my daughter's love you did win,
For if I was a woman as I am a man
My bedfellow ye would ha' been.

"And will ye marry my daughter Janet
By the truth of your right hand,
And will ye marry my daughter Janet
I'll make you the lord of my land."

"Oh yes I will marry your daughter Janet
By the truth of my right hand,
Oh yes I will marry your daughter Janet
But I'll not be the lord of your land."

And he's mounted her on a milk-white steed
And himself on a dapple gray,
And he's made her the lady of as much land
As she could ride o'er a long summer's day.

Through Bushes and Through Briars

Traditional

Through bushes and through briars, I lately made my way
All for to hear the small birds sing and the lambs to skip and to play
All for to hear the small birds sing and the lambs to skip and to play.

I overheard a female, her voice it rang so clear
Sayin' "Long time have I been waiting for the coming of my dear
Long time have I been waiting for the coming of my dear.

"Sometimes I am uneasy, and restless in my mind
Sometimes I think I'll go to my love and tell to him my mind

Sometimes I think I'll go to my love and tell to him my mind.

“But if I should go to my love, my love he would say nay
If I showed to him my boldness he'd never love me again
If I showed to him my boldness he'd never love me again.”

Through bushes and through briars, I lately made my way
All for to hear the small birds sing and the lambs to skip and to play
All for to hear the small birds sing and the lambs to skip and to play.

Lament of the Roast Goose

Medieval Goliard lyrics, translated from Latin. Melody and arrangement by Laura Berlage ©2011.

Time was my wings were my delight
Time was I made a lovely sight
'Twas when I was a goose snow-white.

(Chorus)

Woe's me, I vow, black am I now
Burned up back, beak, and brow.

The baster he turns me on the spit
The fire I've felt the force of it
The carver he carves me bit-by-bit!

(Chorus)

I'd rather in the water float
Under the bare heavens like a boat
Than have this pepper down my throat!

(Chorus)

Whiter I was than wool or snow
Fairer than any bird I know
Now I am blacker than a crow.

(Chorus)

Now in the gravy dish I lie
I cannot swim, I cannot fly
Nothing by gnashing teeth I spy!

(Chorus twice)

My Lady Greensleaves

Traditional. Musical arrangement by Laura Berlage and Tom Draughon.

Alas my love you do me wrong
To cast me off discourteously,
And I have love you oh so long
Delighting in your company.
 Greensleaves was all my joy
 Greensleaves was my delight
 Greensleaves was my heart of gold
 And who but my lady Greensleaves.

Lady Isabel and the False Knight

Traditional Child Ballad, with lyrics recomposed by Laura Berlage. Musical arrangement by Laura Berlage and Tom Draughon.

He's followed her up and he's followed her down
And into the room where she lay,
She hadn't the strength for to flee from his arms
The tongue for to answer him nay.

“Rise up, rise up my pretty fair maid
Rise up and go with me,
And I will take you to north Scotland
And there you'll marry me.

“Go fetch ye a bag of your father's gold
And some of your mother's fee,
And two fine horses out of the stable
Where they stand thirty and three.”

And she's lit upon the nimble-going brown
He's mounted the dapple gray,
And when they came to north Scotland
It was just three hours 'til day.

“Light you down, light you down my pretty fair maid
Light you down I say to thee,
For six king's daughters have I drowned here
The seventh will surely be thee.

“Pull off, pull off your rich silk gown
Deliver it unto me,

For it is too fine and it cost too much
To rot in the salty sea.

“And pull off, pull off your silken stays
Deliver them unto me,
For they are too fine and they cost too much
To rot in the salty sea.

“And pull off, pull off your Holland smock
Deliver it unto me,
For it is too fine and it costs too much
To rot in the salty sea.”

“If I must pull off my Holland smock
Pray turn thy back to me,
For it is unfitting for such a cruel rogue
A naked lady to see.”

He’s turned his back unto her then
And turned his face to a tree,
And she’s picked him up by the waist so small
And thrown him into the sea.

“Lie there, lie there you false young knight
Lie there in place of me,
For six king’s daughters have you drowned here
The seventh hath drowned thee.”

And she’s lit upon the nimble-going brown
And she’s led the dapple gray,
And when she came to her father’s hall
It was just three hours ‘til day.

A parrot being up in the window so high
Hearing her lady did say,
“I’m afraid that a false man has led you astray
That you tarried so long away.”

“Hush now, hush now my pretty Polly-bird
Don’t you tell tales on me,
Your cage will be made of the very-beaten gold
The door of the best ivory.”

But then up bespoke her father the King
In the chamber where he lay,
“What’s the matter, what’s the matter with the pretty Polly-bird

She's talking so long before day!"

"Well there's two black cats at my cage and door
And my life they would betray,
And I'm just calling for my pretty fair maid
To drive those cats away."

"Well turned, well turned my pretty Polly-bird
Well turned were thy words for me,
Your cage it will be made of the very-beaten gold
The door of the best ivory."

He's followed her up and he's followed her down
And into the room where she lay,
She hadn't the strength for to flee from his arms
The tongue for to answer him nay.

Brian Boru's March (with Monologue)

Traditional tune, vocal arrangement by Laura Berlage

Monologue from Laura Berlage's musical "Legends of the Troubadours" ©2008

Tell a knight never to ride horse again, or a priest never to pray. Tell a dancer to forever stand still, or a baker to abstain from his profession and you take the very heart out of the man. Some of the foundations of our souls are constructed by circumstance, breeding, or training...but others are those to which we are simply and unconditionally drawn. You cannot help it. 'Twould be like asking your body not to grow hungry...or thirsty...or tired. The world is a place where occupation is more often taken by necessity rather than choice...but perhaps, some day, there will be greater freedoms for everyone to pursue that which makes them truly come alive.

The Water is Wide

Traditional. Musical arrangement by Laura Berlage and Tom Draughon

The water is wide, I cannot cross o'er
And neither have I wings to fly,
Give me a boat that can carry two
And both shall row, my love and I.

There is a ship that sails the sea
It is loaded deep, as deep can be,
But not so deep as the love I'm in
I know not if I sink or swim.

I leaned my back against an oak
Thinking it was a mighty tree,
Well first it bent and then it broke
Just as my love proved false to me.

Oh love is handsome and love is kind
Love is a jewel whilst it is new,
But when it's old it grows so cold
And fades away like morning dew.

The water is wide, I cannot cross o'er
And neither have I wings to fly,
Give me a boat that can carry two
And both shall row, my love and I.
My love and I.