

Classic Poetry Series

**Marjorie Lowry Christie
Pickthall**
- poems -

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A Saxon Epitaph

The earth builds on the earth
Castles and towers;
The earth saith of the earth:
All shall be ours.

Yea, though they plan and reap
The rye and the corn,
Lo, they were bond to Sleep
Ere they were born.

Yea, though the blind earth sows
For the fruit and the sheaf,
They shall harvest the leaf of the rose
And the dust of the leaf.

Pride of the sword and power
Are theirs at their need
Who shall rule but the root of the flower
The fall of the seed.

They who follow the flesh
In splendour and tears,
They shall rest and clothe them afresh
In the fulness of years.

From the dream of the dust they came
As the dawn set free.
They shall pass as the flower of the flame
Or the foam of the sea.

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Castles and towers.
The earth saith of the earth:
All shall be ours.

Marjorie Lowry Christie Pickthall

Adam and Eve

When the first dark had fallen around them
And the leaves were weary of praise,
In the clear silence Beauty found them
And shewed them all her ways.

In the high noon of the heavenly garden
Where the angels sunned with the birds,
Beauty, before their hearts could harden,
Had taught them heavenly words.

When they fled in the burning weather
And nothing dawned but a dream,
Beauty fasted their hands together
And cooled them at her stream.

And when day wearied and night grew stronger,
And they slept as the beautiful must,
Then she bided a little longer,
And blossomed from their dust.

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Daisy Time

See, the grass is full of stars,
Fallen in their brightness;
Hearts they have of shining gold,
Rays of shining whiteness.

Buttercups have honeyed hearts,
Bees they love the clover,
But I love the daisies' dance
All the meadow over.

Blow, O blow, you happy winds,
Singing summer's praises,
Up the field and down the field
A-dancing with the daisies.

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Exile

I chose the place where I would rest
When death should come to claim me,
With the red-rose roots to wrap my breast
And a quiet stone to name me.

But I am laid on a northern steep
With the roaring tides below me,
And only the frosts to bind my sleep,
And only the winds to know me.

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Finis

Give me a few more hours to pass
With the mellow flower of the elm-bough falling,
And then no more than the lonely grass
And the birds calling.

Give me a few more days to keep
With a little love and a little sorrow,
And then the dawn in the skies of sleep
And a clear to-morrow.

Give me a few more years to fill
With a little work and a little lending,
And then the night on a starry hill
And the road's ending.

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Kwannon

[Kwannon, the Japanese goddess of mercy, is represented with many hands, typifying generosity and kindness. In one of these hands she is supposed to hold an axe, wherewith she severs the threads of human lives.]

I am the ancient one, the many-handed,
The merciful am I.
Here where the black pine bends above the sea
They bring their gifts to me --
Spoil of the foreshore where the corals lie,
Fishes of ivory, and amber stranded,
And carven beads
Green as the fretted fringes of the weeds.

Age after age, I watch the long sails pass.
Age after age, I see them come once more
Home, as the grey-winged pigeon to the grass,
The white crane to the shore.
Goddess am I of heaven and this small town
Above the beaches brown.
And here the children bring me cakes, and flowers,
And all the strange sea-creatures that they find,
For "She," they say, "the Merciful, is ours,
And she," they say, "is kind."

Camphor and wave-worn sandalwood for burning
They bring to me alone,
Shells that are veined like irises, and those
Curved like the clear bright petals of a rose.
Wherefore an hundredfold again returning
I render them their own --

Full-freighted nets that flash among the foam,
Laughter and love, and gentle eyes at home,
Cool of the night, and the soft air that swells
My silver temple bells.
Winds of the spring, the little flowers that shine
Where the young barley slopes to meet the pine,
Gold of the charlock, guerdon of the rain,
I give to them again.

Yet though the fishing boats return full-laden
Out of the broad blue east,
Under the brown roofs pain is their handmaiden,
And mourning is their feast.
Yea, though my many hands are raised to bless,
I am not strong to give them happiness.

Sorrow comes swiftly as the swallow flying,
O, little lives, that are so quickly done!
Peace is my raiment, mercy is my breath,
I am the gentle one.

When they are tired of sorrow and of sighing
I give them death.

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Marching Men

Under the level winter sky
I saw a thousand Christs go by.
They sang an idle song and free
As they went up to calvary.

Careless of eye and coarse of lip,
They marched in holiest fellowship.
That heaven might heal the world, they gave
Their earth-born dreams to deck the grave.

With souls unpurged and steadfast breath
They supped the sacrament of death.
And for each one, far off, apart,
Seven swords have rent a woman's heart.

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Song

I shall not go with pain
Whether you hold me, whether you forget
My little loss and my immortal gain.
O flower unseen, O fountain sealed apart!
Give me one look, one look remembering yet,
Sweet heart.

I shall not go with grief,
Whether you call me, whether you deny
The crowning vintage and the golden sheaf.
O, April hopes that blossom but to close!
Give me one look, one look and so good-bye,
Red rose.

I shall not go with sighs,
But as full-crowned the warrior leaves the fight,
Dawn on his shield and death upon his eyes.
O, life so bitter-sweet and heaven so far!
Give me one look, one look and so good night,
My star.

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Stars

Now in the West the slender moon lies low,
And now Orion glimmers through the trees,
Clearing the earth with even pace and slow,
And now the stately-moving Pleiades,
In that soft infinite darkness overhead
Hang jewel-wise upon a silver thread.

And all the lonelier stars that have their place,
Calm lamps within the distant southern sky,
And planet-dust upon the edge of space,
Look down upon the fretful world, and I
Look up to outer vastness unafraid
And see the stars which sang when earth was made.

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The Lamp of Poor Souls

[In many English churches before the Reformation there was kept a little lamp continually burning, called the Lamp of Poor Souls. People were reminded thereby to pray for the souls of those dead whose kinsfolk were too poor to pay for prayers and masses.]

Above my head the shields are stained with rust,
The wind has taken his spoil, the moth his part;
Dust of dead men beneath my knees, and dust,
Lord, in my heart.

Lay Thou the hand of faith upon my fears;
The priest has prayed, the silver bell has rung,
But not for him. O unforgotten tears,
He was so young!

Shine, little lamp, nor let thy light grow dim.
Into what vast, dread dreams, what lonely lands,
Into what griefs hath death delivered him,
Far from my hands?

Cradled is he, with half his prayers forgot.
I cannot learn the level way he goes.
He whom the harvest hath remembered not
Sleeps with the rose.

Shine, little lamp, fed with sweet oil of prayers.
Shine, little lamp, as God's own eyes may shine,
When He treads softly down His starry stairs
And whispers, "Thou art Mine."

Shine, little lamp, for love hath fed thy gleam.
Sleep, little soul, by God's own hands set free.
Cling to His arms and sleep, and sleeping, dream,
And dreaming, look for me.

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The Sailor's Grave at Clo-oose, V.I.

Out of the winds' and the waves' riot,
Out of the loud foam,
He has put in to a great quiet
And a still home.

Here he may lie at ease and wonder
Why the old ship waits,
And hark for the surge and the strong thunder
Of the full Straits,

And look for the fishing fleet at morning,
Shadows like lost souls,
Slide through the fog where the seal's warning
Betrays the shoals,

And watch for the deep-sea liner climbing
Out of the bright West,
With a salmon-sky and her wake shining
Like a tern's breast, --

And never know he is done for ever
With the old sea's pride,
Borne from the fight and the full endeavour
On an ebb tide.

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The Wife

Living, I had no might
To make you hear,
Now, in the inmost night,
I am so near
No whisper, falling light,
Divides us, dear.

Living, I had no claim
On your great hours.
Now the thin candle-flame,
The closing flowers,
Wed summer with my name, --
And these are ours.

Your shadow on the dust,
Strength, and a cry,
Delight, despair, mistrust, --
All these am I.
Dawn, and the far hills thrust
To a far sky.

Living, I had no skill
To stay your tread,
Now all that was my will
Silence has said.
We are one for good and ill
Since I am dead.

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Thoughts

I gave my thoughts a golden peach,
A silver citron tree;
They clustered dumbly out of reach
And would not sing for me.

I built my thoughts a roof of rush,
A little byre beside;
They left my music to the thrush
And flew at eveningtide.

I went my way and would not care
If they should come and go;
A thousand birds seemed up in air,
My thoughts were singing so.

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Vision

I have not walked on common ground,
Nor drunk of earthly streams;
A shining figure, mailed and crowned,
Moves softly through my dreams.

He makes the air so keen and strange,
The stars so fiercely bright;
The rocks of time, the tides of change,
Are nothing in his sight.

Death lays no shadow on his smile;
Life is a race fore-run;
Look in his face a little while,
And life and death are one.

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