

Godgifu Wakes.

By Fiona Clark

Who stirs me from my long night's dreamless sleep?

I brush the cobwebs from my face; my hair

In slanting moonlight, hangs in matted streaks.

I yawn, shake off the grave-clothes, free as air-

Sheer nakedness, they say, defined my prime

Here are my limbs, smooth as a child's, new-born .

Death's odd: you're old and young at the same time-

Both fresh spring water and a seasoned wine.

But as for nakedness ? I shed my gown

And mounted horseback in an old brown shift,

Then clattered over cobbles through the town

And shamed my husband Leofric by this.

He wouldn't yield to rational argument;

The poor were starving, shivering with cold-

I begged the stubborn tyrant to relent,

Then stripped away my ermine and my gold.

Good people, out of kindness, turned their backs,

I bore no blood-stained banner, but they'd trust,

I rode to rid them of that bitter tax

Which ripped them ragged, ground their bones to dust.

There was one in the Bull Yard, peeping Tom,

Who'd planned to tell his friends he'd seen my breasts-
God struck him blind, they say, for looking on-
When all he saw was my old tattered vest!

Perhaps he sold his dismal story on,
To ballad makers, in the hope of gain-
Justifying what he'd almost done,
And fabricating what he might have seen.

Shame chastened, where compassion couldn't save.
I made my husband listen: poor were fed.
They clawed their children back from open graves
And in their grateful hands grasped new-baked bread.

But can I hear the cries of poverty?
Now must I mount my ghostly horse and ride
Once more into the streets of Coventry?
This time, good people, follow by my side!