

Pavane

by Iain James Robb

The shadows hang fast on the downs this day:

And I hang like the darkness, over heath and down;
Since the air there is clearer than the clouds, men say,
And I'm lost in the country, I shall turn to town.
If the heather is restless, then the fete is best
To turn my footsteps nearer to my path's desire:
Past the kingcups lifting in their folds of fire-
To the gale-borne nothings that will lapse with rest.

It's a sort of 'done it and I'm done now' day,
And it seems that there's little left to do but die:
And "The sun rests higher than the glade", I say,
"But the shade wrests dominion over all", say I.
At the prime of knowledge, that my road returns,
I would sooner be restless as a prince of Tyre-
Than to hold my court here, like a country squire,
And to feel my fall beneath a month of suns.

I have come from a prison in a windowed spire,
That is not the saffron's in the meadow's cell;
I have sought my refuge over thorn and briar,
From the concrete courtyards where the dead men dwell.
Though these bear no faces that enchant my star,
To pine for, shine they will through throngs of fire:
And the starling starts abroad and twitters nigher
To my art, than shadows, where the lack-hearts are.

Had God flown me mercy He had shown my way,
That I passed temptations of their arts: but I
Have none to trust more than the birds, in play,

Whose words make a minion of the moonless sky.
Though the flower may falter and return to weeds,
There is no dusk always to their county choir:
And I paint false comfort, like a country squire
Who has cast his standard, from a crown of reeds.

Though the roof of the world has its lid of tin,
It can shine blue-brighter if the clouds forgive
My straitened hungers that the mists begin;
I shall go down town-wards where the thistles live.
Where the dusk plays hangman on a dead man's cell
There is no word fluttered as where tongues won't tire,
Of the kingcups floating through their thrones of fire,
In the soft-lipped winds that on the meadows dwell.

It's O for the flax that sparks the harp-hung hay:
And it's O for the rose-torn and the stillborn sky.
"Oh, and if I weren't doomed to part my way-
From her, towards where she was sought", say I,
"I might keep endless here till far moons fly,
And turn with those who turn their hands to hire:
And seem winged, in riches, as some lord of Tyre,
Or as rich and swift as days that flash and die.

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The crimson mists that shroud the town today
Have left the feathered haunts my footsteps fly;
"If I passed for good now, have their sails," I pray,
Not bury me but bear me. Let men pass", say I,
"And know me, drifting there adown the downs,
To greet and meet them, on a raft of fire":
On a float of flames that flank a country squire,
Or by moon's light straddled by a thousand crowns.

