

Adeeb Kamal Ad-Deen

GUESTS

I don't know how to be skilled in leading your sparrows
To the water in the loneliness of remote night
And in leading your birds to the fragrant flowers
In the loneliness of a stump-nosed night
I used to have a devastated memory
And an impromptu sky
But when you left away
How had you left the door of the stone shackle
Open for the coward tiger, the drunken lark,
And the head-severed lion?



B. N. Oakman

AN AVENUE FOR ENGLAND

English oaks, grown large, lined up
straight and soldier-spaced
an avenue in the heart of nowhere
a tree for each lost boy of the shire,
more trees than people hereabouts today
with big acre farms of sheep and grain
a shrivelled hamlet, pub, grass and gaps
but thriving when they swaggered away,
farm boys all spruced in khaki
dispatched to kill the Hun in grey
who never came back to get moved on
to desks or lathes in cities and towns
when machines laid siege to their places.

With seedlings struck in nurseries of sorrow
christened with futility's tears
the shire replaced its lost boys
while the bereaved slowly stumbled away
down improvement's long road of displacement
until those first mourners were long gone
and in their turn no longer mourned
and none remains who might recall
an urgent summons of a distant king
to bind the wounds of a mother country,
the manly dread of a coward's feather,
heated prayers in England's stony church,
sweet promises to be true no matter,
burning tears, hiss of steam,
yearning last caresses at the station,
the crackle of the deadly telegrams.

Risen to broad magnificence, deserted, foreign,
flourishing alongside a road near unremembered
and shedding in season great swirling showers
of old dried blood
to fall upon the tarnished brass
of Jim and Bill and Smutty Smith
and on the cold crust of tarmac
to be blasted back at the naked limbs
of the lost boys of the shire
by a rush of hurtling metal,
perhaps a Mercedes Benz in sharp metallic grey.

