

## Canals Tell Tales

Canals tell tales

Not pretty, riverside tales

With their twists and their turns and their tinkling streams

Their meanders, rapids, and moss-covered boulders,

But plain-talking tales

Told straight from the shoulder.

Canals tell tales

In shades of grey and brown.

No painter's palette

The rustic hues of distant hills

But of rust itself

Of silt

And dark, Satanic spills.

Canals tell tales

Not lying back on some grassy bank

With wistful stories told as if in a dream

A languid picnic, a dainty spread

Fine wine chilled by a crystal stream

But with an honest ale

And crusty pies

On paper plates

Under louring skies.

Canals tell tales

Far from lofty crags or mountain cliffs

And tumbling waterfalls

But in the shadows of mill and furnace

And crumbling factory walls.

Canals tell tales

Not shallow fine-spun yarns

Florid fripperies, edged with lace

Of bucolic idylls, and alpine tarns

Dished up with urgency apace

But calm, collected, recollections

Deep and misty-eyed reflections

Slow-poured personal selections

To honour the people, their boats, their place.

Canals tell tales

Told in iron, in brick, and in seasoned wood

Tales of the maligned, the outlawed, and the sometimes good

In sepia, brown, black and white

They talk of hunger, hardship, struggle and fight

It's in the faces of women with rolled up sleeves

In the sweat of the horse as the boat he heaves

In the shoeless, mud-streaked, grinning child

His schoolroom the wet and windy wild

It's in the eyes of the man, in the lines on his face

As he ups and he leaves for some distant place.

So, canals do tell tales

Not set down in a weighty tome

To grace the shelf of some stately home

Copperplate hand

In a fine-bound book.

But they're plain to read

If you will but look.

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