

Stephen Robertson

The Lady's Maid

Under a gray and lowering sky
The fields that by the river lie
Are rough and unkempt. Buzzards fly
Above the weedy hedgerows, by
 The once-proud towers of Camelot.
Few people walk the brambled way
And fewer still will pause or stay
To gaze down on the ruins gray
 That scar remote Shalott.

In the duck-weed-smothered edges
Skinny rats sniff out the ledges,
While between the stream-floor ridges
Now a bottom-feeder dredges
 Through the silt of Camelot.
But what is this small beaten path
Between two beds of clean-raked earth
Where tender shoots may venture forth
 On weed-o'er-run Shalott?

She who hath this garden laid
—Nurturing the wayward seed,
Planting out this cabbage-bed—
She was once a lady's maid
 In gracious, towered Camelot.
Then, as winds of fortune blow,
It was arranged that she should go
And take her place in service to
 The Lady of Shalott.

Working all day at her loom,
Her mistress never left the womb
That was the fastness of her room.
Only through the mirror's gloam
 Dared she look to Camelot.
Not until the fateful day
When, gleaming in his knight's array
And gaily singing on his way
 Rode bold Sir Lancelot.

Years have passed. The winter's chill
Lies fast upon the land so ill.
Seldom now the skylark's trill;
No longer do the people fill
 The wharfs and ways of Camelot.
Only one remains to shiver
On the island in the river,
Tending her cabbage patch forever,
 The hermit of Shalott.