

The BOOKMAN

I 909

FRAGMENTS FROM THE ADOLESCENT DIARY

OF

Halcyon Van Moere

(*Scottish Women's Ambulance*)

MORNING

Early to rise

Dawn
Comes as a coral carpet from a splendid fire
(Dusk trips on a coral carpet to her funeral pyre);
Life is a wind-tossed ocean moaning low
Monitions whose true meaning I may never know.

A yawn
Of nascent consciousness — the day is young — yet I am old
As I am young. Mine is an eaglet's altitude, a cold
Survey of all that lies adrift upon this sea
Against the darker sea of sleep. What can there be?

As young
As I am old, as old as I am young,
My feet are cozy in my slippers — I have flung
My silk kimono like another self
About my rebel form, and mincing to my highest shelf

Have flung
 Its sheltering doors wide open to the sun.
 Herein, a little sanctuary all of sin. And one
 By one I draw its treasures forth. A scarlet box
 Of bold Pall Malls, and with metallic locks

A book
 That's mediaeval-bound, a gilt Boccaccio;
 And in the redness of the dawn I read. Oh
 Damn! I am too old to squander precious morn
 Upon sheer trash. From such a problem I was born.

A look
 Of bold defiance was my birthmark. Bright
 Of me to leave the matches on the shelf, for I shall light
 No cigarette nor thumb these timeworn tales. I need
 Assume no affectations! Heed, my silk-kimono self. Oh heed!

Now break
 That cigarette in two
 And shake
 This gilded smut away — must you
 Be told a second time that that
 Most natural to the moment is
 Most natural unto you!

Toilette

With slippers kicked into a corner of the room,
 And cold ascetic floor beneath my soles, I pass
 Over to the mirror. What shall I wear? A warm georgette,
 A crêpe de chine, or cold simplicity of calico? Why, calico,
 Of course, and I shall braid my hair in plaits. Two
 Twisted symbols of consistency, two staves of Mercury
 To designate my winged thoughts. And that is done.
 Ah well-a-day. . . . The day has just begun.

Breakfast

But dine with you, my family?
 No! For I shall munch upon the sideboard
 Where your formal drivel does not smear
 The damask fringe, and where you cannot squeak
 Your cricket news across a dear
 Arrangement of inanimate cut glass
 That's sharper far than all your wits together.

But still, I had not reckoned on the glass
 In front of me, for there appears the bland

Inanity of Uncle Hamlin. Inversion can contour
 No welcome change upon that face. His hand
 Serenely sails to rob the sugar bowl
 Of half its contents there. "Such pleasant weather

"We are having." You! Not I. Beware! beware!
 My barometer is falling. Aunt Celia's form now flits
 Within the mirror's range, and settles like a cloud
 Within her spacious chair. A cumulus she sits,
 A ghost of crinoline tranquillity. Oh beware!
 My mercury is rising, rising. There will leap a feather

Of pure flame, a scorching prominence from forth the sun
 That is my inner core, for you within this placid world
 Appear my gaolers — your frictionless serenity
 A smooth-walled prison all around. Destruction's furled
 In me as death lies latent in a lyddite shell or rests
 The edge of a crusader's sword within its sheath of leather.

Kitchen

In its tedium breakfast has been fast approaching the breaking point, but now its
 ordeal is nearly over, for which small favour let my many selves assemble for Te
 Deum.

Kindred souls of the coffee pot
 And kettles that bubble and boil.
 Pots that clatter and soot that resists
 My hands as they gratingly toil
 To cleanse an aluminum frying pan
 With coil on abrasive coil.
 Knives with edges that rush to a point
 And forks with a quadrant prong.
 (This saucepan might serve as a helmet bright,
 This spoon as a hollow gong.)
 A column that spurts from the water-tap
 To conceal it in clouds of steam,
 A cubic frost in the ice-box
 Preserving the other extreme.
 Attenuated cacophony —
 I clatter the dishes high.
 Thank God for the kitchen's chaos —
 Thank God. . . . What, dry
 The dishes after I have washed them? I
 Trust I still am sane. And uncle's in the bath? Why,
 I do all the dirty work around this house and can't
 Even have a morning tub. Now stop not to rant
 Your Christian theories. Your brother-love does not apply
 To uncles, legal uncles least of all, my aunt.

And now

Down the tactual perspective of the darkened hall
 I creep to vent my rage where night is still intact,
 And like an exclamation point to all
 The train of my unsentenced thoughts the keyhole
 Glows. A point of light. The end of all my thoughts. The end
 Of nowhere. Nowhere's end. Oh here my soul,
 Far from the stabbing revelations of the sun, can blend
 Itself deliciously with darkness — swiftly pour
 Its trinity (unpressed by legions of detail,
 Their hostile numbers howling with the dance of hours)
 Exhausted to the friendly floor. One glimmering trail
 Of light remains of the defeated sun — no more.
 March on, O muted rhythms of the day. Go flay
 The rigid door in vain, you trillion silent rays
 Of light. Go dance your savage circle of the day
 Around some other victim, O you gambit hours.
 No varied sound from all the world
 Of mutable detail, no single sound save all my heart
 In primal rhythm thunderously apace of time,
 Can enter here. No sight save Memory, apart
 From all the steel-knit congruence of clanging streets
 With chiming hours. Here sanctuary, let me lie
 Till my struggle with the problem of existence
 To accepted mystery with my sheer exhaustion die
 Forever. Here I am mated. Here with the darkness I am one.
 The darkness is my devil. My deity — the sun.

Songs from a Darkened Hall

Oh here

The pattern of my mildest thoughts
 Objectified in tiling
 Would a maniac-mosaic be,
 Perhaps of Moses smiling

That his commandments unto me
 Were made for sneers and slighting,
 And God Himself a subject for
 This frenzied stir of writing.

There is a God —
 There is a God —
 And I a mythic clump of sod
 Enembered of His mystic fire,
 Aflame with an unknown desire,

To find the key,
To be the key
To things that are and are to be,
To all His haunting mystery.

I am a message in the sand,
The work of His unknown Hand.
Within my eyes, within my eyes
This world around seems paradise.
All with the world this morn is well.
This noon 'twill turn a raging Hell
And he a lie upon the sand
Inscribed by my unwitting hand.
Oh blind, my eyes, oh blind, my eyes:
There's no such place as paradise.

There is no god —
There is no god —
I am my own supernal rod,
Omniscience prescient with the past
(Each day is pregnant with the last).
There is no god —
There is no god —
The fire that is alive in me
My sole and only deity.

A threshold of delirium
And four-dimensioned dreams,
A mind that is a shuttlecock
Between its own extremes;

Hysteria in hurricane,
Thoughts of trebled thunder,
Hour-high castles in the air
Split-seconded asunder.

And now the rampant griffin of my rage
Lies a recumbent lamb. My hand no longer clasps
My jaundiced throat in fingered flame nor seeks a graphic scroll
Of hidden meanings in the empty air. I slowly rise
To shake a myriad clinging griefs away. I pass
Down where the pendant keyhole shoots its glimmering trail
Of light, a point exclamatory to the seething mass
Of my unsentenced thoughts, into the leering void
Of night. I clutch the door-knob's cold sphericity. The Day!
And all its muted rhythms like an orchestra
With my percussive pulse now leap to a symphonic play
Before the stage that I must face indifferently (a masked
Intolerance), the tinsel jangle of the mad highway.
I go.

Oh!

Noon

Jabs like a flaming brand into my brain;
Great agony is local anesthetic — pain
Persistent through the morning yields reluctantly
To worse. Fierce murmurs now return to promise me

That soon

There will come worse, far worse than of the worst renown;
Faint murmurs from that tinselled jangle of the town.
Oh this is my eaglet's altitude, this is my cold survey
Of all that lies adrift upon the restless rhythms of the day.

AFTERNOON

Songs from a Littered Desk

A Mes Amis, A Mes Amours

To the Iceman

(A Study in Hidden Rhymes)

Today I may not study, for
My text to garish white now fades!
Small wonder for all day, and this
Pervades me like the meaninged thunder
In the bliss of nearness you became
Short hours ago within my ear,
Your step a glittering echo
Through all the clear remembrance that
I had of you — the undetailed
Ecstatic whole of you, sustained
Me and entailed a vivid hope,
Unstained by any fainter qualm,
That you would come again — you saw
A calm of hours an aspen quake
Become — oh draw not back in haste.
Oh take not swift departure from
This waste of passion-twisted words!
You faced the trembling truth in plain
Reality — you came! You came! No laced
Lines in a restless skein can fright
You now. I love you! Impose no fine,
However light, of absence on
The crime of my confession. Never
Once deny you haunted me. The time
We met conjured a ghost to fly

Behind my wandering thoughts as leaves
In whirling sheaves pursue a train —
We met again! Your presence then
Was violent thunder in my ears;
The strands of your tempestuous hair
A subtle tremble in my searching hands
Ensnared! These very lines are vaguer image of
A love my trembling self less verbally declared —

And now let rhyme be undisguised and meter
scorned, oh darling, do
Bring ten pounds next, for while we kissed,
five pounds were melted into two.

To an Organ Grinder

I'm glad I couldn't love you,
For I'd hate a dirty swain;
And your soul, the soul of beauty,
Looked on my own in vain.

I'm glad I couldn't love you —
But, my dear, there's still a hurt,
For I'd love you oh so dearly
If it weren't for the dirt.

Oh you're rude and most unmannered
And I more gently bred,
And I couldn't live on cloud bits
In a world of cheese and bread.

I'm glad I couldn't love you —
Yet I haven't told the rest:
For, my dear, though it may hurt you,
'Tis your monkey I love best.

To My Pastor

With you I watched the moon rise as it never rose before.
For all your nearness you were further from me than the stars
That were my thoughts. To touch you was to prove you were not there.
Your vision and your voice are all of you I hold. No more
Was ever mine, yet these are vividly remote as spars
Distinct against the dying sun, or laughter in the air
From mirth unseen, or lasting as the rich unbelievable perfume
That haunts the candle-dancing stillness of your chapel's quiet gloom.

To a Sinner Reformed

Oh, after swilling vigil, after glass on glass,
I've often seen some limitless capacity arise
And lurching through the swinging doorways pass,
Upon the snow a sinuate design, to — early mass.

Thus you have drained the dregs of year on wanton year
Of life, till now some drowsy instinct bids you rise and kneel
To tell your beads, to pray, and thus you too I fear
Now, penitent before an altar, end your sinuous career.

Lines in a Dress Suit

Lundi

How much I love my darling
My darling does not know,
Nor that I hold my darling
Wherever I may go.

I'll deem her twice as —— to me
The miles we are apart . . .
Oh sprig that dash with antlers,
You've the secret of this hart.

Jeudi

Last night I held my darling
Within long-frustrate arms —
The harder that I crushed her
The faster fled her charms.

The higher sped my ardour
The more her own did lag.
Such treatment from my darling!
Tonight shall be a — stag.

Thoughts from an Open Window

Nineteen-nine,

Oh nineteen-nine, the year is an internal rhyme.
Yet I shall have no rhyme at all in thinking on
Its essence, and how calm, how tranquil is its lull
Of omnipresent domesticity. Oh love, marriage
And divorce, these are its essence. In cinemas
Projected polychromes illustrate amorous songs
And audiences join "In the Good Old Summer Time".
It is the summer time! And men with broad-brimmed straws go down

To town each day, and Harlemwards return. Staid Harlem lies
 With all its brownstone houses and its grey apartments round
 This window where I write. The Norman spire that leaps
 In conic silhouette from Memorial Wards nearby is flushed
 With sunset tint; Eighth Avenue is like a moat, and trams
 Go armourously by (— a coined word that rings
 Resoundant in its line). Oh nineteen-nine, oh 1909, gay skirts
 Go rustling widely from waists narrow and necks high,
 Down pleasant ways, and courtship, marriage and divorce
 And children's voices, sailor suits on little boys
 And ruffles, ribbons, fluffs and frills to cover
 Sugar-spice-and-all-that's-nice, this is your nectarous essence,
 Year of quiet, nineteen-nine.

“Oh the Bowery, the Bowery —
 I wonder who's kissing her now,
 I wonder who's buying her wine.
 It won't be a stylish marriage,
 I can't afford a carriage
 In the good old Summer time.”

From the top storey an unstuffed pillow case is shedding us an August storm of snow
 . . . and other things of less pleasant imagery. And so, my diary, I must close — first
 the window, and then your covers in time to get the tea.

NIGHT

Twilight Lullaby

(For Wildrake)

Night

Over your drowsy eyes now drops its darkling veil,
 Dear Heart. There will be no livid bruises on your frail
 White limbs from fancied rompings on the soft wan sweep
 Of twilight sands that lie against the darker sea of sleep.

Light

Will not dazzle, there will be no haunting murmur in the waves
 To stir a fearful wonderment. Soft echo from the caves
 Of some conched shell this song now seems, the shore
 Is fading . . . fading . . . till day's restless playground is no more.

The loom

Of hidden thoughts now weaves nocturnal tapestries;
 What day-time shuns as darkly evil night-time sees

As splendent arras-work against its own dark wall
And sunrise as a distant evil to eclipse it all.

Entomb

Me somewhere then forever mid the dusk and dawn;
Let symbol'd nymph and centaur, faun and leprechaun
Dance endless rings around the rosie of unending rest.
Fix Time forever at soft twilight, hang the sun forever — West.

Oh damn!
The buzzer for the garbage!
Up a little higher, please,
Down a little lower!
Down a little lower!

There!

No, we put *no* broken glass in the pail.
No, not last time or any time!
No, I didn't, I know, and Uncle Hamlin
wouldn't *touch* a piece of broken glass.
Well, all right, if you're so positive of it,
there — !

Slam!

(The old sow of a janitress'll produce another
litter of vituperatives for that, but I should
sneeze. I can't hear her.)

"Malbrouck s'en va-t'en guerre,
Mironton, mironton, mirontaine."
Or apropos of my Latin
which I've yet to finish,

"Caesar in Gallia vincit,
Caesar in Gallia vincit,
Caesar in Gallia vincit
Videre quid posset."

Latin, did I say?
Heads I study, tails I go for a walk.
Heads, damn!
Well, make it two out of three.
Heads again, damme.
Oh well, fooled myself that time.
I go for a walk any way.

"Caesar in Gallia vincit
Videre quid posset."

Songs from an Evening Stroll

Love in a Doorway

I am afire, I am afire.
Oh how can I control
The raging flood of red desire
Beneath this cold gray rôle
Of purity — false purity?
Oh fate, my changless fate,
This febrile urge within me now
I crush . . . I wait . . . I wait.

To My Tutor

Hell's Kitchen

These things, O brother mine,
We have together known:
The music of another age
Descended to our own,
Commercial streets a-glimmer,
Night-distorted, grown
Delirium-titanic,
Mist-blended, yet alone.

Here smoke like muffled thunder
Across the starlight sails
From five fantastic chimneys
That plunge to deep entrails
Where starlight for a city springs
And brightest starlight — fails.

Upon a counterpoint of lapping waves
We've harked the winding of a river horn
And heard a Klaxon's startled gargle sound
As from the street-deserted silence torn
And watched the swift beam of a searchlight pierce
The darkness of the dawn near morn.

We've heard an eerie convent-bell announce
To filling streets, a once unearthly hour,
And crouched within the yawning portals of
(By man-made laws evolved) a tall straight tower,
At base a symbol of our pygmy selves
Against the sky, a shadow of our power.

Within the ursine cavern of the underground
The lion's roar of a draconic train
Between mad lights that moved with our own speed
To linear design, we've heard, and strain

Of glistening wheels upon a bright parabola
Of rails against a shadow-intersected plane.

Mauve tracery of elm-trees in the morning pink
Fell round us on our daybreak way to home
Across the glaucous sea of Morningside;
The morning sidelong fell upon that Norman dome,
St. John's, high temple of this concrete Babylon —
This cubic Nineveh, this tessellated Rome.

There is a symbolism in the seven arts
That you, in all its fathomless significance, have taught
To me. Deep shadows, silences and sights and sounds
Conceal another age; whatever we have sought
Of art's futurity within this ageless atmosphere
We will have found no more than we ourselves have brought.

Such things, then, Don, on these dark ways
We have together known:
The music of another day
Half hidden in our own;
Commercial streets a-glimmer,
Night-distorted, grown
Within ourselves to seven arts
Mist-blended — yet alone.

Dock

The moon, the moon,
The mystic moon
Oh once a month is given this boon —
Unto its sphere of cratered cold
A passionate mood of mellow gold.
And so we women move in tune
Unto the movements of the moon —
Or so I'm told,
Or so I'm told.

Powerhouse

Down this thunderous thoroughfare
I am celerity aflame;
In silhouette, in silhouette
The very lamplight turns to jet
Beside my thought-candescent glare.
They do not care, they do not care,
These twice-illuminated folk who wear
Clothes whose styleless rags beget
Theories I'd as soon forget.
They do not care, nor do they dare
To probe the depths of my despair
That they should live by toil and sweat

Alleyway

To keep a lightning silhouette
Against this thunderous thoroughfare.

These window tiers, like hydra's teeth
Pulled out and set in line,
A fungus-phosphorescence through
The rows of houses shine.
Behind their light what darkness lurks,
Dark fen within a fen?
Behind drawn shades what drama damns
The haunted hearts of men?

Oh though I catch their wind-tossed words,
I cannot stop to trace
Them to their pregnant source or pause
A second's thought to place
Them in my ambling mind. O God,
Am I as one of these —
These brainless bodies wrangling to
And fro the night? No peace

Is mine; my nervous thoughts
My fevered tongue would tear
Out by its roots if uttered to
The cold unfriendly air;
No peace is mine and no release;
No rest from self-aimed blows;
No radiant inertia,
No ecstasied repose.

" — makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise."

Till now reluctantly I turn to home.
The day is dying, its recessive rhythms flow
To caverned midnight where for all its lure
Of gravid voids I must not, must not go.

For coming home alone the stroke of twelve
Is unpropitious as proverbial thirteen;
I run until my footfalls sound as one,
And shadows like the ghosts of relived days between

The arc-lights rise and fall. And now I reach
My room, resign my hated clothing, leap again
Within the occult toga of my gown
Upon the magic carpet of my counterpane.

O far-off sound of voices at my side,
O nearer lullaby of whispers far away,
The darker sea of sleep is rising round
Me now upon my languorous voyage to the day.

[The End]

ELSIE DINSMORE: A STUDY IN PERFECTION

or HOW FUNDAMENTALISM CAME TO DIXIE

By Ruth Suckow

MANY years ago there was born in a remote corner of our land a little girl-child endowed by the angels and Martha Finley with every qualification for a perfect heroine of fiction. Charm, beauty, background, complexes — all were hers. But we doubt if even the angels hovering that night over the snowy mansion could have foretold for the newborn babe the long life and longer influence that were to be hers. She was entered according to Act of Congress in the year 1868, but in 1927 she is still to be found in flourishing state and new bindings, while she will never cease to haunt the minds of millions of women. The name of the child was Elsie Dinsmore.

There can be no comprehension of Elsie without some knowledge of the background whence she sprang. Although Congress was not aware of her until 1868, her childhood was passed in those halcyon days befo' de wah. Her home was the Sunny South — the precise spot we are not told and no shaft of purest marble marks the holy ground, for thus does America in its hurly-burly pass by those who have helped to make its history; but situated in such wise that her own little sitting-room opened out upon "a grassy lawn . . . and beyond, far away in the distance, rolled the blue sea". It was that South which has ever furnished to American fiction the most saintly and brilliant of its heroines: Little Eva, Edna Earl, the Little Colonel and the Hard-Boiled Virgin. It was the South of pillared mansions, mint juleps, banjoes, jasmine, mammies, goatees and Colonels, highbred gallants and horses, and faithful old black Catos crying "I'se comin', Massa!" wid de misery in de back. Yet we are told that it was but a worldly region where the young folk danced in the evening, rode out for pleasure on the Sabbath, read secular newspapers, and engaged in worldly

conversation before the coming of the little Elsie.

To cast no hint of shadow upon the auspicious entrance of the child into fiction, the mother died upon giving her birth. This mother's name she bore; and so closely did the little Elsie resemble the departed Elsie that the heart of the father was often troubled when he gazed upon her and a deep sigh escaped his lips; while around her neck she was thus privileged to wear a miniature set in gold and diamonds which she frequently drew from her breast at crucial moments and raised to her lips. Of the father, Mr. Travilla once fittingly said: "Were I asked to describe his character in a few words, I should say he is a man of indomitable will". His honor was unstained. Yet he was proud and worldly, seeing himself "not for what he really was in the sight of God, a guilty, hell-deserving sinner — lost, ruined and undone, but as quite deserving of the prosperity with which he had been blessed in the affairs of this world, and just as likely as anyone to be happy in the next"! In a word, a Southern gentleman. Horace Dinsmore — for such was his name — on his part acted well the rôle of ideal male parent of our heroine. Blaming the innocent child for the mother's death, he hastened instantly to Europe there to wander many years, perhaps in company with St. Elmo and those other Southern heroes whose hearts were but ruined fanes, leaving the small Elsie in the custody of others and granting her no place in his proud but passionate heart. Thus he paved the way for one of those complexes vitally necessary to the interpretation of any really great character: a sense of inferiority. The passionate adoration of the love-starved little heart for the unknown father supplied the other with splendid largesse. Of it we may say: