

William Plomer (1903-73)

8 *The Self-Made Blonde*

1

The self-made blonde
A woman of affairs
Was sitting alone
In a room upstairs

Waiting alone 5
According to plan
For the weekly visit
Of her steady man

For her sturdy Fred 10
The fitter's mate
Who never failed
To keep the date

Wiry black hair
And dead-white skin
His big broad bones 15
And his wicked grin
For these she craved
Like a cat grown thin

2

Fresh from the bath
With her powdered snout 20
Her small brown eyes
And her painted pout

Behind each ear
A dab of scent
Too chastely named 25
'Lilies in Lent'

She sat like a bride
That Tuesday night
Playing patience
By a shaded light 30

By a rose-pink shade
Her bleached gold head

Was bent intent
As the minutes sped
And her heart went thump
For her fatal Fred 35

3

She plays the queen
A move that fails
So she cheats at patience
With her long red nails 40

With her long red nails
She diddles herself
Glances at the clock
On the mantelshelf

She pats her hair 45
As bleached as tow
The king on the queen
Alas won't go

The game goes badly
She is ill at ease 50
The ace of spades
Has fallen on her knees
Fred is late
Has she failed to please?

4

She ran to the glass 55
To look for a flaw
But a yearning beauty
Was what she saw

She ran to the window
But all was dark 60
Only one star
Like an icy spark

Hope was running through
Her heart like sand
'Oh let him stop the flow 65
With his strong white hand

'I am only young once
Let him break every bone

I will ask him to kill me
I cannot live alone 70
I cannot live without him
Or a telephone.'

5

Cut off since birth
From the telephone
The self-made blonde 75
Is as deaf as a stone

And mute as a doll
Or she well might scream
To know that a curtain
Has fallen on her dream 80

Insulated
From electric Fred
Her hands grow cold
And she feels half dead

She feels half dead 85
With a nameless fear
She cannot speak
And she cannot hear
But she goes to the cupboard
For a bottle of beer 90

6

She puts two glasses
On a fumed-oak tray
But that was the night
The dam gave way

She picks up the bottle 95
But feels no thirst
Tuesday was the night
The dam-wall burst

A one-pint bottle
In crimson talons 100
Inaudible roar
Of a billion gallons

How can she know
That the flood is rising

Cows are swimming 105
Cars capsizing
Or find a light ale
Appetizing?

7

The waters thunder
At her own front-door 110
Wrench it asunder
And submerge the floor

But up above in silence
The self-made blonde
Endures the tortures 115
Of the over-fond

Breaking up her home
Comes the muscular flood
Carpets the carpets
With a carpet of mud 120

Lifts off their feet
The straight-backed chairs
Takes the barometer
Unawares
And rises darkly 125
Fondling the stairs

8

Against the walls
Jostles an assortment
Of objects that have lost
Their usual deportment 130

Like unread symbols
A gate a ladder
A wireless set
And a football bladder

Are churned around 135
With an overcoat
A branch of lilac
A bottomless boat

And the corpse of a man
By the lamp's last beam 140

As it floated in
She saw it gleam
And gave her first
Last only scream

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