

William Plomer (1903-73)

11 *The Widow's Plot: or, She Got What Was Coming to Her*

Troubled was a house in Ealing
Where a widow's only son
Found her fond maternal feeling
Overdone.

She was fussy and possessive; 5
Lennie, in his teens,
Found the atmosphere oppressive;
There were scenes.

Tiring one day of her strictures
Len went down the street, 10
Took a ticket at the pictures,
Took his seat.

The picture was designed to thrill
But oh, the girl he sat beside!
If proximity could kill 15
He'd have died.

Simple, sweet, sixteen and blonde,
Unattached, her name was Bess.
Well, boys, how would *you* respond?
I can guess. 20

Len and Bessie found each other
All that either could desire,
But the fat, when he told Mother,
Was in the fire.

The widow, who had always dreaded 25
This might happen, hatched a scheme
To smash, when they were duly wedded,
Love's young dream.

One fine day she murmured, 'Sonny,
It's not for me to interfere, 30
You may think it rather funny
But I hear

'Bess goes out with other men.'
'I don't believe it! It's a lie!
Tell me who with, where, and when? 35
Tell me why?'

'Keep cool, Lennie. I suspected
That the girl was far from nice.
What a pity you rejected
My advice.' 40

Suspicion from this fatal seed
Sprang up overnight
And strangled, like a poisonous weed,
The lilies of delight.

Still unbelieving, Len believed 45
That Bess was being unchaste,
And a man that feels himself deceived
May act in haste.

Now Bess was innocence incarnate
And never thought of other men; 50
She visited an aunt at Barnet
Now and then,

But mostly stayed at home and dusted,
Crooning early, crooning late,
Unaware of being distrusted 55
By her mate.

Then one day a wire was sent:
MEET ME PALACEUM AT EIGHT
URGENT AUNTIE. Bessie went
To keep the date. 60

Slightly anxious, Bessie came

To the unusual rendezvous.
Desperate, Lennie did the same,
 He waited too,

Seeing but unseen by Bessie, 65
And in a minute seeing red—
For a stranger, fat and dressy,
 A trilby on his head,

In his tie a tasteful pearl,
On his face a nasty leer, 70
Sidled up towards the girl
 And called her 'Dear.'

At this juncture Len stepped in,
Made a bee-line for the lout,
With a straight left to the chin 75
 Knocked him out.

He might have done the same for Bess
Thinking still that she had tricked him,
But she was gazing in distress
 At the victim. 80

'It's a *her!*' she cried (but grammar
Never was her strongest suit):
'She's passed out!' he heard her stammer,
 'Lennie, scoot!'

'It's *what?* A *her?* Good God, it's *Mum!* 85
Ah, now I see! A wicked plan
To make me think my Bess had come
 To meet a *man—* '

'Now what's all this?' a copper said,
Shoving the crowd aside. 'I heard a 90
Rumour somebody was dead.
 Is it murder?'

Len quite candidly replied,
'No, officer, it's something less.

It's justifiable matricide,
Isn't it, Bess?

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1940

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