

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 80  
    At the victim.

'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*

(From *Collected Poems*. London, 1960)