

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

2

Fresh from the bath 20  
With her powdered snout  
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

(From *Collected Poems*. London, 1960)