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MAKING COCOA FOR KINGSLEY AMIS

WENDY
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Making Cocoa for Kingsley Amis

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To Arthur S. Couch
and everyone else who helped

Contents

Title Page
Dedication

I

Engineers' Corner,
All-Purpose Poem for State Occasions,
A Policeman's Lot,
Reading Scheme,
A Nursery Rhyme (*as it might have been written by William Wordsworth*),
A Nursery Rhyme (*as it might have been written by T. S. Eliot*),
Waste Land Limericks,
Triolet,
Emily Dickinson,
Proverbial Ballade,
Advertisement,
Lonely Hearts,
On Finding an Old Photograph,
Tich Miller,
At 3 a.m.,
From June to December,
My Lover,
Rondeau Redoublé,
Message,
Giving Up Smoking,
Manifesto,

II

Mr Strugnell,
Budgie Finds His Voice,
Usquebaugh,
The Lavatory Attendant,
E Pericoloso Sporgersi,
Duffa Rex,
Strugnell in Liverpool,
Narrative,
God and The Jolly Bored Bog-Mouse,
From Strugnell's sonnets
(i) The expense of spirits,
(ii) Not from the stars,

- (iii) My glass shall not,
- (iv) Not only marble,
- (v) How like a sprinter,
- (vi) Let me not,
- (vii) Indeed 'tis true,

*From Strugnell's Rubáiyát,
Strugnell's Haiku,*

III

Making Cocoa for Kingsley Amis,

Acknowledgement

About the Author

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Engineers' Corner

Why isn't there an Engineers' Corner in Westminster Abbey? In Britain we've always made more fuss of a ballad than a blueprint . . .
How many schoolchildren dream of becoming great engineers?

Advertisement placed in The Times by the Engineering Council

We make more fuss of ballads than of blueprints –
That's why so many poets end up rich,
While engineers scrape by in cheerless garrets.
Who needs a bridge or dam? Who needs a ditch?

Whereas the person who can write a sonnet
Has got it made. It's always been the way,
For everybody knows that we need poems
And everybody reads them every day.

Yes, life is hard if you choose engineering –
You're sure to need another job as well;
You'll have to plan your projects in the evenings
Instead of going out. It must be hell.

While well-heeled poets ride around in Daimlers,
You'll burn the midnight oil to earn a crust,
With no hope of a statue in the Abbey,
With no hope, even, of a modest bust.

No wonder small boys dream of writing couplets
And spurn the bike, the lorry and the train.
There's far too much encouragement for poets –
That's why this country's going down the drain.

All-Purpose Poem for State Occasions

The nation rejoices or mourns
As this happy or sombre day dawns.
Our eyes will be wet
As we sit round the set,
Neglecting our flowerbeds and lawns.

As Her Majesty rides past the crowd
They'll be silent or cheer very loud
But whatever they do
It's undoubtedly true
That they'll feel patriotic and proud.

In Dundee and Penzance and Ealing
We're imbued with appropriate feeling:
We're British and loyal
And love every royal
And tonight we shall drink till we're reeling.

A Policeman's Lot

The progress of any writer is marked by those moments when he manages to outwit his own inner police system.

Ted Hugh

Oh, once I was a policeman young and merry
(young and merry),
Controlling crowds and fighting petty crime (petty crime),
But now I work on matters literary (litererry)
And I am growing old before my time ('fore my time).
No, the imagination of a writer (of a writer)
Is not the sort of beat a chap would choose
(chap would choose)
And they've assigned me a prolific blighter ('lific blighter) –
I'm patrolling the unconscious of Ted Hughes.

It's not the sort of beat a chap would choose
(chap would choose) –
Patrolling the unconscious of Ted Hughes.

All our leave was cancelled in the lambing season
(lambing season),
When bitter winter froze the drinking trough
(drinking trough),
For our commander stated, with good reason
(with good reason),
That that's the kind of thing that starts him off
(starts him off).
But anything with four legs causes trouble
(causes trouble) –
It's worse than organizing several zoos (several zoos),
Not to mention mythic creatures in the rubble
(in the rubble),
Patrolling the unconscious of Ted Hughes.

It's worse than organizing several zoos (several zoos),
Patrolling the unconscious of Ted Hughes.

Although it's disagreeable and stressful
(bull and stressful)
Attempting to avert poetic thought ('etic thought),
I could boast of times when I have been successful
(been successful)
And conspiring compound epithets were caught
('thets were caught).
But the poetry statistics in this sector (in this sector)

Are enough to make a copper turn to booze

(turn to booze)

And I do not think I'll make it to inspector (to inspector)

Patrolling the unconscious of Ted Hughes.

It's enough to make a copper turn to booze

(turn to booze) –

Patrolling the unconscious of Ted Hughes.

after W. S. Gilbert

Reading Scheme

Here is Peter. Here is Jane. They like fun.
Jane has a big doll. Peter has a ball.
Look, Jane, look! Look at the dog! See him run!

Here is Mummy. She has baked a bun.
Here is the milkman. He has come to call.
Here is Peter. Here is Jane. They like fun.

Go Peter! Go Jane! Come, milkman, come!
The milkman likes Mummy. She likes them all.
Look, Jane, look! Look at the dog! See him run!

Here are the curtains. They shut out the sun.
Let us peep! On tiptoe Jane! You are small!
Here is Peter. Here is Jane. They like fun.

I hear a car, Jane. The milkman looks glum.
Here is Daddy in his car. Daddy is tall.
Look, Jane, look! Look at the dog! See him run!

Daddy looks very cross. Has he a gun?
Up milkman! Up milkman! Over the wall!
Here is Peter. Here is Jane. They like fun.
Look, Jane, look! Look at the dog! See him run!

A Nursery Rhyme

as it might have been written by William Wordsworth

The skylark and the jay sang loud and long,
The sun was calm and bright, the air was sweet,
When all at once I heard above the throng
Of jocund birds a single plaintive bleat.

And, turning, saw, as one sees in a dream,
It was a Sheep had broke the moorland peace
With his sad cry, a creature who did seem
The blackest thing that ever wore a fleece.

I walked towards him on the stony track
And, pausing for a while between two crags,
I asked him, ‘Have you wool upon your back?’
Thus he bespake, ‘Enough to fill three bags.’

Most courteously, in measured tones, he told
Who would receive each bag and where they dwelt;
And oft, now years have passed and I am old,
I recollect with joy that inky pelt.

A Nursery Rhyme

as it might have been written by T. S. Eliot

Because time will not run backwards

Because time

Because time will not run

Hickory dickory

In the last minute of the first hour

I saw the mouse ascend the ancient timepiece,

Claws whispering like wind in dry hyacinths.

One o'clock,

The street lamp said,

'Remark the mouse that races towards the carpet.'

And the unstilled wheel still *turning*

Hickory dickory

Hickory dickory

dock

Waste Land Limericks

I

In April one seldom feels cheerful;
Dry stones, sun and dust make me fearful;
Clairvoyantes distress me,
Commuters depress me –
Met Stetson and gave him an earful.

II

She sat on a mighty fine chair,
Sparks flew as she tidied her hair;
She asks many questions,
I make few suggestions –
Bad as Albert and Lil – what a pair!

III

The Thames runs, bones rattle, rats creep;
Tiresias fancies a peep –
A typist is laid,
A record is played –
Wei la la. After this it gets deep.

IV

A Phoenician called Phlebas forgot
About birds and his business – the lot,
Which is no surprise,
Since he'd met his demise
And been left in the ocean to rot.

V

No water. Dry rocks and dry throats,
Then thunder, a shower of quotes
From the Sanskrit and Dante.
Da. Damyata. Shantih.
I hope you'll make sense of the notes.

Triplet

I used to think all poets were Byronic –
Mad, bad and dangerous to know.
And then I met a few. Yes it's ironic –
I used to think all poets were Byronic.
They're mostly wicked as a ginless tonic
And wild as pension plans. Not long ago
I used to think all poets were Byronic –
Mad, bad and dangerous to know.

Emily Dickinson

Higgledy-piggledy
Emily Dickinson
Liked to use dashes
Instead of full stops.

Nowadays, faced with such
Idiosyncrasy,
Critics and editors
Send for the cops.

Proverbial Ballade

Fine words won't turn the icing pink;
A wild rose has no employees;
Who boils his socks will make them shrink;
Who catches cold is sure to sneeze.
Who has two legs must wash two knees;
Who breaks the egg will find the yolk;
Who locks his door will need his keys –
So say I and so say the folk.

You can't shave with a tiddlywink,
Nor make red wine from garden peas,
Nor show a blindworm how to blink,
Nor teach an old racoon Chinese.
The juiciest orange feels the squeeze;
Who spends his portion will be broke;
Who has no milk can make no cheese –
So say I and so say the folk.

He makes no blot who has no ink,
Nor gathers honey who keeps no bees.
The ship that does not float will sink;
Who'd travel far must cross the seas.
Lone wolves are seldom seen in threes;
A conker ne'er becomes an oak;
Rome wasn't built by chimpanzees –
So say I and so say the folk.

Envoi

Dear friends! If adages like these
Should seem banal, or just a joke,
Remember fish don't grow on trees –
So say I and so say the folk.

Advertisement

The lady takes *The Times* and *Vogue*,
Wears Dior dresses, Gucci shoes,
Puts fresh-cut flowers round her room
And lots of carrots in her stews.

A moss-green Volvo, morning walks,
And holidays in Guadeloupe;
Long winter evenings by the fire
With Proust and cream of carrot soup.

Raw carrots on a summer lawn,
Champagne, a Gioconda smile;
Glazed carrots in a silver dish
For Sunday lunch. They call it style.

Lonely Hearts

Can someone make my simple wish come true?
Male biker seeks female for touring fun.
Do you live in North London? Is it you?

Gay vegetarian whose friends are few,
I'm into music, Shakespeare and the sun.
Can someone make my simple wish come true?

Executive in search of something new –
Perhaps bisexual woman, arty, young.
Do you live in North London? Is it you?

Successful, straight and solvent? I am too –
Attractive Jewish lady with a son.
Can someone make my simple wish come true?

I'm Libran, inexperienced and blue –
Need slim non-smoker, under twenty-one.
Do you live in North London? Is it you?

Please write (with photo) to Box 152.
Who knows where it may lead once we've begun?
Can someone make my simple wish come true?
Do you live in North London? Is it you?

On Finding an Old Photograph

Yalding, 1912. My father
in an apple orchard, sunlight
patching his stylish bags;

three women dressed in soft,
white blouses, skirts that brush the grass;
a child with curly hair.

If they were strangers
it would calm me – half-drugged
by the atmosphere – but it does more –

eases a burden
made of all his sadness
and the things I didn't give him.

There he is, happy, and I am unborn.

Tich Miller

Tich Miller wore glasses
with elastoplast-pink frames
and had one foot three sizes larger than the other.

When they picked teams for outdoor games
she and I were always the last two
left standing by the wire-mesh fence.

We avoided one another's eyes,
stooping, perhaps, to re-tie a shoelace,
or affecting interest in the flight

of some fortunate bird, and pretended
not to hear the urgent conference:
'Have Tubby!' 'No, no, have Tich!'

Usually they chose me, the lesser dud,
and she lolloped, unselected,
to the back of the other team.

At eleven we went to different schools.
In time I learned to get my own back,
sneering at hockey-players who couldn't spell.

Tich died when she was twelve.

At 3 a.m.

the room contains no sound
except the ticking of the clock
which has begun to panic
like an insect, trapped
in an enormous box.

Books lie open on the carpet.

Somewhere else
you're sleeping
and beside you there's a woman
who is crying quietly
so you won't wake.

From June to December

1 Prelude

It wouldn't be a good idea
To let him stay.
When they knew each other better –
Not today.
But she put on her new black knickers
Anyway.

2 A Serious Person

It's nice to meet serious people
And hear them explain their views:
Your concern for the rights of women
Is especially welcome news.

I'm sure you'd never exploit one;
I expect you'd rather be dead;
I'm thoroughly convinced of it –
Now can we go to bed?

3 Summer Villanelle

You know exactly what to do –
Your kiss, your fingers on my thigh –
I think of little else but you.

It's bliss to have a lover who,
Touching one shoulder, makes me sigh –
You know exactly what to do.

You make me happy through and through,
The way the sun lights up the sky –
I think of little else but you.

I hardly sleep – an hour or two;
I can't eat much and this is why –
You know exactly what to do.

The movie in my mind is blue –
As June runs into warm July
I think of little else but you.

But is it love? And is it true?

Who cares? This much I can't deny:
You know exactly what to do;
I think of little else but you.

4 The Reading

In crumpled, bardic corduroy,
The poet took the stage
And read aloud his deathless verse,
Page by deathless page.

I gazed at him as though intent
On every word he said.
From time to time I'd close my eyes
And smile and nod my head.

He may have thought his every phrase
Sent shivers down my spine.
Perhaps I helped encourage him
To read till half past nine.

Don't ask what it was all about –
I haven't got a clue.
I spent a blissful evening, lost
In carnal thoughts of you.

5 Some People

Some people like sex more than others –
You seem to like it a lot.
There's nothing wrong with being innocent or high-minded
But I'm glad you're not.

6 Going Too Far

Cuddling the new telephone directory
After I found your name in it
Was going too far.

It's a safe bet you're not hugging a phone book,
Wherever you are.

7 Verse for a Birthday Card

Many happy returns and good luck.
When it comes to a present, I'm stuck.
If you weren't far away
On your own special day,

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