

See they come, post haste from Thanet by Jane Austen

See they come, post haste from Thanet,
Lovely couple, side by side;
They've left behind them Richard Kennet
With the Parents of the Bride!
Canterbury they have passed through;
Next succeeded Stamford-bridge;
Chilham village they came fast through;
Now they've mounted yonder ridge.

Down the hill they're swift proceeding,
Now they skirt the Park around;
Lo! The Cattle sweetly feeding
Scamper, startled at the sound!

Run, my Brothers, to the Pier gate!
Throw it open, very wide!
Let it not be said that we're late
In welcoming my Uncle's Bride!

To the house the chaise advances;
Now it stops--They're here, they're here!
How d'ye do, my Uncle Francis?
How does do your Lady dear?

Childhood by Richard Aldington

I

The bitterness. the misery, the wretchedness of childhood
Put me out of love with God.
I can't believe in God's goodness;
I can believe
In many avenging gods.
Most of all I believe
In gods of bitter dullness,
Cruel local gods
Who scared my childhood.

II

I've seen people put
A chrysalis in a match-box,
"To see," they told me, "what sort of moth would come."
But when it broke its shell
It slipped and stumbled and fell about its prison
And tried to climb to the light
For space to dry its wings.

That's how I was.
Somebody found my chrysalis
And shut it in a match-box.
My shrivelled wings were beaten,
Shed their colours in dusty scales
Before the box was opened
For the moth to fly.

III

I hate that town;
I hate the town I lived in when I was little;
I hate to think of it.
There wre always clouds, smoke, rain
In that dingly little valley.
It rained; it always rained.
I think I never saw the sun until I was nine --
And then it was too late;
Everything's too late after the first seven years.

The long street we lived in
Was duller than a drain
And nearly as dingy.
There were the big College
And the pseudo-Gothic town-hall.
There were the sordid provincial shops --
The grocer's, and the shops for women,
The shop where I bought transfers,
And the piano and gramophone shop
Where I used to stand
Staring at the huge shiny pianos and at the pictures
Of a white dog looking into a gramophone.

How dull and greasy and grey and sordid it was!
On wet days -- it was always wet --
I used to kneel on a chair
And look at it from the window.

The dirty yellow trams
Dragged noisily along
With a clatter of wheels and bells
And a humming of wires overhead.
They threw up the filthy rain-water from the hollow lines
And then the water ran back
Full of brownish foam bubbles.

There was nothing else to see --
It was all so dull --
Except a few grey legs under shiny black umbrellas
Running along the grey shiny pavements;
Sometimes there was a waggon
Whose horses made a strange loud hollow sound
With their hoofs
Through the silent rain.

And there was a grey museum
Full of dead birds and dead insects and dead animals
And a few relics of the Romans -- dead also.
There was a sea-front,
A long asphalt walk with a bleak road beside it,
Three piers, a row of houses,
And a salt dirty smell from the little harbour.

I was like a moth --
Like one of those grey Emperor moths
Which flutter through the vines at Capri.
And that damned little town was my match-box,
Against whose sides I beat and beat
Until my wings were torn and faded, and dingy
As that damned little town.

IV

At school it was just as dull as that dull High Street.
The front was dull;
The High Street and the other street were dull --
And there was a public park, I remember,
And that was damned dull, too,
With its beds of geraniums no one was allowed to pick,
And its clipped lawns you weren't allowed to walk on,
And the gold-fish pond you mustn't paddle in,
And the gate made out of a whale's jaw-bones,
And the swings, which were for "Board-School children,"
And its gravel paths.

And on Sundays they rang the bells,
From Baptist and Evangelical and Catholic churches.
They had a Salvation Army.
I was taken to a High Church;
The parson's name was Mowbray,
"Which is a good name but he thinks too much of it --"
That's what I heard people say.

I took a little black book
To that cold, grey, damp, smelling church,
And I had to sit on a hard bench,
Wriggle off it to kneel down when they sang psalms
And wriggle off it to kneel down when they prayed,
And then there was nothing to do
Except to play trains with the hymn-books.

There was nothing to see,
Nothing to do,
Nothing to play with,

Except that in an empty room upstairs
There was a large tin box
Containing reproductions of the Magna Charta,
Of the Declaration of Independence
And of a letter from Raleigh after the Armada.
There were also several packets of stamps,
Yellow and blue Guatemala parrots,
Blue stags and red baboons and birds from Sarawak,
Indians and Men-of-war
From the United States,
And the green and red portraits
Of King Francobello
Of Italy.

V

I don't believe in God.
I do believe in avenging gods
Who plague us for sins we never sinned
But who avenge us.

That's why I'll never have a child,
Never shut up a chrysalis in a match-box
For the moth to spoil and crush its bright colours,
Beating its wings against the dingy prison-wall.