

The Accident

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Freely but dramatically (♩=130)

The musical score is written on four staves of music. The first staff begins with a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a 3/4 time signature. The tempo and performance instruction 'Freely but dramatically (♩=130)' are placed above the first staff. The lyrics are written below the notes on each staff. The music consists of a single melodic line with lyrics underneath. The lyrics are: 'We both had our rea-sons for wish-ing her dead. Our rea-sons were dif-ferent. Their cause was the same. Though she'd been dis - creet and re - vealed no man's name, And Jim-my did not know she'd been to my bed, He knew there'd been some-one. The week she took sick Each time that we stopped for our late mor-ning tea, I saw his eyes dart to the place she'd grow thick. His range of sus - pic-ion did not in-clude me.'

We both had our reasons for wishing her dead.
Our reasons were different. Their cause was the same.
Though she'd been discreet and revealed no man's name,
And Jimmy did not know she'd been to my bed,
He knew there'd been someone. The week she took sick
Each time that we stopped for our late morning tea,
I saw his eyes dart to the place she'd grow thick.
His range of suspicion did not include me.

A poor lad who fixes machinery can't
Just hand her a purse, like some mill owner's son,
And say to return when the whole thing is done,
As if she'd been visiting some favourite aunt.
And even if I'd had the money to give
For either solution, the long lying-in
Or else the quick doctor, she wanted to live
With child and husband, absolving her sin.

It isn't that I'm not the marrying kind:
I'd set my sights higher. You see, I've got dash,
Instead of good prospects or slowly saved cash,
And some of those rich girls, now, they wouldn't mind.
I'd give one some thrills of a sort she'd get less
From some judge or banker's son — stiff, dull young man —
And then she would plead till her father said yes,
But hint of a scandal would scotch such a plan.

Now, Jimmy'd been courting her six months by then,
And most of us figured they'd marry next spring,
But so far, she hadn't accepted his ring.
He thought he should wait before asking again.
So, when she said yes, quite unasked, in that voice,
And hinted elopement might well be arranged,
Poor Jimmy, who'd once have had cause to rejoice,
Refused, in his certainty why she had changed.

He stood at my door with five fresh squirrel pelts,
And shifted from foot to foot, tense, ill at ease,
Confiding he'd also shot nests out of trees
Pretending that they — then he said nothing else.
Though accidents happen, they cannot be planned,
But sometimes blind chance can be shaped to our ends.
Our everyday actions cut paths for fate's hand
When creatures of habit go where the creek bends.

On Saturday morning, I stopped for a word.
I'd meet her an hour past dawn the next day:
A spot on the creek bank where once we both lay.
She silently nodded to show she had heard.
She wore her grey dress with the white apron front,
The nice one, for church, that she'd recently sewn.
A boat leaves no footprints: I came in my punt.
It later would seem she had been there alone.

I pressed the long pole in the soft bottom mud
To hold the punt still in the flow of the creek.
I sent words as harsh as I knew how to speak:
Such daggers would draw only tears, never blood.
I called her a child and a whore and a fool.
I said Jimmy wanted to marry a saint.
The mist hugged the water; the day was still cool.
Her knees would not hold her when she became faint.

I left her to lie where we once had embraced
And drifted downstream as I said nothing more.
From upstream came Jimmy along the same shore,
And two male mallards hung down from his waist.
A man who is desperate will see what he needs.
In just a few moments, continuing on,
He'd glimpse, through the screen of the mist and the reeds,
Her apron in white just the height of a swan.

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