



Excerpt from Blue

Lily, aged 70s. Dressed with artful elegance, a flowing skirt, blouse, scarf.

The Professor, aged 80. A yellowing linen suit, not immaculate, a handkerchief in the breast pocket.

The present. A garden seat. A table.

Props: Two coffee mugs, cigarettes for Lily.

Version: November 2015

[LILY AND THE PROFESSOR ENTER FROM STAGE LEFT. LILY CARRIES TWO MUGS OF COFFEE.]

PROF: Lark's tongues and dormice.

LILY: Down. [AS IN 'SIT']

PROF: Roasted parrot, Jericho dates. Fish and chips to the Romans.

LILY: Sit!

PROF: [BUMPS DOWN] The Emperor Hadrian ate with his fingers.

LILY: Better than his toes... Look at the state of you. Your lunch all over— [PLUNKS DOWN THE COFFEE. WHISKS OUT HIS HANDKERCHIEF, AND UNCEREMONIOUSLY SWABS HIM DOWN.] Nothing wrong with your appetite... Unfortunately. [SHE PUTS A MUG INTO HIS HANDS, AND SITS WITH HER OWN, SO THEIR SHOULDERS TOUCH, BUT THEIR BODIES ARE ANGLED APART.] So, here we are in the garden – Romeo and Juliet.

PROF: Hadrian built a wall to stop the barbarians. Up, up into the sky. A double column of soldiers marched along the top. Left-right, left-right.

LILY: I'd like to have some fun, just once before I die. I am in need of some overwhelming pleasure.

PROF: Hadrian used enormous stones. Stones like bullocks. He meant his wall to last forever.

LILY: So how's about it, Professor? Can you give me some overwhelming pleasure?

PROF: Anything you say... They carried catapults and what-d'you-call-ems.

LILY: My own mother said not to marry you. ‘Beware the Professor,’ she said. ‘Beware the man who talks for a living.’

PROF: They built aqueducts and– amphitheatres!

LILY: Ancient history. Like– [THE UNSPOKEN WORD IS ‘US’]. If only you could stop talking. It might be bearable if you stopped.

PROF: They had vision. They had stamina.

LILY: And frankly, old man, I blame you for everything.

PROF: A man does the best he can, brick-layer or engineer – but, but – I wouldn’t know how to lay a brick if you put it in my hand.

LILY: No. Neither would I.

PROF: [HE STANDS. POINTS TO HOUSE. THEN....] Look at those bricks. There. On the back of the house. One, two, three–

LILY: Count while you can, it’s crumbling in front of us.

PROF: Two, three–

LILY: The roof leaks; there’re birds in the attic.

PROF: Three, three–

LILY: A crypt not a house.

PROF: Three-ee– [BUMPS BACK INTO SEAT] Come on. Let’s hold hands.

LILY: Why not? Except we’re drinking coffee, I want to smoke, and I’ve only got two hands. [TAKES OUT CIGARETTES]

PROF: Smoke away. Let the smoke percolate your inner passages.

LILY: I'll do that.

PROF: [FEELING HIS POCKETS] Hold on, I have matches.

LILY: Don't bother.

PROF: Always carry matches. Sticks of ignition. Combustibles.

LILY: Don't bother.

PROF: [STANDS TO SEARCH MORE THOROUGHLY] My purpose is to supply illumination. A gentleman invariably sets fire to a female cigarette.

LILY: You ladykiller, you. You Casanova. I'll do it myself.

[AS THE PROFESSOR TURNS HIS POCKETS INSIDE OUT, HE DISCOVERS A HOLE IN HIS POCKET.]

PROF: Hah! Would you look at this? An aperture! An unanticipated aperture.

LILY: Yes, yes, I'll fix it.

PROF: How the devil did it get there? I'll be damned if I know.

LILY: And I'm just damned.

PROF: The sticks of ignition must have exited through this hole.

LILY: Undoubtedly. [LIGHTING UP, LEISURELY, TAKING WHAT PLEASURE SHE CAN] Well, *that* hasn't changed anyway – you never had what I wanted, not when I wanted it.

PROF: I don't know about that.

LILY: For sure, you don't.

PROF: [LOOKING OUTWARD] Lily. Tiger Lily. Lily of my heart. You fill me with happiness.

LILY: Words, words. I used to answer, 'You fill me with happiness too...' I was lying.

PROF: You should give them up the cigarettes. They're like lead to the Romans. They'll poison your innards.

LILY: [INHALING DEEPLY] I'll do that.

PROF: Good idea.

LILY: Bad God, heartless God! That this should have happened!

PROF: Happiness. Happiness.

LILY: Bad God, heartless God.

[PAUSE. LILY'S SMOKING IS A FORM OF SELF-MEDICATION.]

PROF: So what do I do now?

LILY: Sit. Sit! [HE BUMPS DOWN.] Drink your coffee. Stay quiet for a bit. You're better company when you're quiet.

PROF: Anything you say. [BUT IT'S IMPOSSIBLE] Hadrian built his tomb upon the Tib—

LILY: —Dear God, shut up.

PROF: No civilisation endures forever.

LILY: Let it fall, let it crush.

[SHE JABS OUT THE CIGARETTE.]

PROF: [DRAINS HIS MUG] Finished. Empty. [LOOKING INSIDE] Nothing but dregs.

LILY: [GETS UP, MOVES SLIGHTLY STAGE LEFT, LOOKS TOWARDS PROFESSOR.] And I thought we'd be going places we've never been. Talking art, talking books. Listening to opera. Or sometimes just sitting by a lake, watching fish shimmer like silver in the shallows... Shut those eyes now. Have a nap.

PROF: [WIDE-EYED] I'll do that.

LILY: [MOVES BEHIND HIM] Shut them. [GENTLY CLOSES HIS EYES WITH HER HAND] Those beautiful eyes. The Professor's eyes. Blue, bluer, bluest. One look and I was gone. You mesmerised me. You talked; I listened, swallowing every syllable, blinded by blue... Life's disappointments are so easy to remember. [MOVES FORWARD AS BEFORE] I should have put arsenic into that coffee.

PROF: [EYES SNAP OPEN] Good idea.

LILY: I should have married Henry Molloy in Foreign Affairs, like my mother said.

PROF: Good idea.

LILY: I could push you in, off the Pier.

PROF: Good idea.

LILY: Hah! Demented Professor floats out to sea on a tide of words... At least the sun is shining.

[THE PROFESSOR WIPES HIS NOSE ON THE BACK OF HIS SLEEVE. HE MIGHT LOOK AGAIN AT THE HOLE

IN HIS POCKET, BEFORE TUCKING IT AWAY. HE STANDS, MOVES SLIGHTLY STAGE RIGHT. HE LOOKS AROUND UNTIL HIS EYES SETTLE ON LILY. HE CLEARS HIS THROAT.]

PROF: Sugarloaf.

LILY: Hmm?

PROF: The Sugarloaf. We climbed it. You and me. Up, up into the sky.

LILY: So we did. I'd forgotten.

PROF: On your head, a black beret with scarlet trimming.

LILY: You remember?

[THE PROFESSOR GIVES HER A LOOK, AS IF TO SAY, 'OF COURSE I REMEMBER.']

PROF: Early spring. Cold.

LILY: It was freezing. You said we should do it, while we were still able.

PROF: Professor Monaghan. Lily Monaghan.

LILY: You and me, on the Sugarloaf. The two of us. Alone, on top of the Sugarloaf. A brisk wind. A dusting of snow. Overhead, the shimmering sky, icy blue. In the distance, the water – Bray, the Bay, the Irish Sea. We kissed.

PROF: Kissed. Kissed.

[FOR ONCE, HE HOLDS HER GAZE. SHE CROSSES TO HIM.]

LILY: [SOFTLY, STROKING HIS CHEEK] Well, maybe I did have a little fun, once upon a time.

PROF: [STEPPING BACK FROM HER TOUCH] What is fun, only waggish diversion?

LILY: Your eyes, your beautiful eyes. Blue as ever.

PROF: Blue. Cobalt blue. Blue like a seagull's nose.

LILY: Like a seagull's what? Are you joking? [BUT THE PROFESSOR'S GAZE FALTERS.] I might as well laugh. It's better than crying.

PROF: [WITHOUT HUMOUR] Ha. Ha. Ha.

[HE CROSSES IN FRONT OF HER. SHE GRABS HIS ARM.]

LILY: Wait, talk with me! Please. We were talking just now, really talking. [BUT HE SHAKES HER OFF] Please, do it! You can if you want to, if you really want to.

PROF: [HALFWAY OFF, HE STOPS.] Tasks in the garden require my— [AS BEFORE, HE HESITATES, BEFORE PLUNGING] —perspicacity.

LILY: But you're going towards the house.

PROF: The stars in the sky direct us. My cap is wanted on the top of my head. Required to fend off the what-you-might-call-ems. [HE EXITS STAGE LEFT.]

LILY: Oh, those eyes. Those heart-breaking, murderous eyes.

[END]

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