

*** A Distributed Proofreaders Canada Ebook ***

This ebook is made available at no cost and with very few restrictions. These restrictions apply only if (1) you make a change in the ebook (other than alteration for different display devices), or (2) you are making commercial use of the ebook. If either of these conditions applies, please check with an FP administrator before proceeding.

This work is in the Canadian public domain, but may be under copyright in some countries. If you live outside Canada, check your country's copyright laws. **If the book is under copyright in your country, do not download or redistribute this file.**

Title: You Broke My Dream, or An Experiment with Time [The eleventh story in Lewis's 1927 collection The Wild Body: A Soldier of Humour and Other Stories]

Author: Lewis, Percy Wyndham (1882-1957)

Date of first publication: 1927

Edition used as base for this ebook: New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1928

Date first posted: 28 January 2011

Date last updated: 17 June 2014

Faded Page ebook#20110116

This ebook was produced by Barbara Watson & the Online Distributed Proofreading Canada Team at <http://www.pgdpCanada.net>

This ebook was produced from images generously made available by the Internet Archive

YOU BROKE MY DREAM OR AN EXPERIMENT WITH TIME

by Wyndham Lewis

Do not burst, or let us burst, into Will Blood's room! (I will tell you why afterwards.) Having flashed our eyes round the passages with which this sanctuary is surrounded, lurched about in our clumsy endeavours, as unskilled ghosts, not to get into the one door that interests us, we do at last blunder in (or are we blown in; or are we perhaps sucked in?) and there we stand at Will Blood's bedside.

You are surprised, I hope, at the elegant eton-cropped purity of the young painter's head (he has been a young painter now for many years, so his head is a young painter's head). It lies serenely upon the dirty pillow, a halo of darkish grey, where the hair-oil has stained the linen, enhancing its pink pallor. Its little hook-nose purrs, its mouth emits regularly the last participle of the french irregular verb 'pouvoir,' as though training for an exam. The puckered lids give the eye-sockets a look of dutiful mirth.

However, his lips twitch, his eyelids strain like feeble butterflies stuck together in some flowery contretemps, then deftly part. The play begins. Will's dream bursts, and out pops Will; a bright enough little churlish flower to win a new encomium every morning from his great Creator! But the truth is, that he has been a slight disappointment to his Creator, on account of his love for Art, and general Will-fulness. Therefore this great Gardener frowns always as he passes the bed where Will modestly blows. Will has to depend on stray sensitive young ladies. But they are usually not very moved by him. The fact is that he does not smell very nice. Quite satisfactory as regards shape, indeed a roguish little bobbing bud of a boy, his smell is not that of a thing of beauty, but is more appropriate to a vegetable. This causes a perpetual deception in the path, the thorny path, in which Will blows.

The Creator has given him this smell as a sign of his displeasure, because of his fondness for Art, and his Will-fulness! But that is a figure.

As his eyes open, the pupils rolling down into the waking position, Will violently closes them again, tightly holding them shut. For a few minutes he lies quite still, then cautiously slips his hand beneath the pillow, searches a moment, draws out a small notebook and pencil. Now he circumspectly opens his eyes, and, propped upon his elbow, turning over several leaves, he begins writing in his notebook.

'A dark wood,' he writes—'I am lying in the shadow of an oak. I want to get up. I find I cannot. I attempt to find out why.—Children are playing in the meadow in front of me. One is tall and one short. One is full of sex. The other has less sex. Both girls. They are picking dandelions—pissenlits.—I find I can get on my hands and knees. I begin crawling into the wood. This makes me feel like an animal. I turn out to be an anteater. I attempt to make water. This owing to lack of practice is unsuccessful. I wake up.'

Poised above the notebook, he strains. Then at top speed he dashes down: '*A man with a hump.*'

He snaps-to the notebook and tosses it on to a chair at his bedside. Sliding two sensitive pink little feet out of the clothes, they hang stockstill above the carpet for a moment, then swoop daintily, and he is up. Pertly and lightheartedly he moves in dainty semi-nudity hither and thither. With a rustle, no more, he dresses extempore. He is soon ready, the little black-curved, red-bearded bird of talent, in his neat black suit, his blue eyes drawing him constantly to the mirror, and rolling roguishly about like kittens there. Oh, how he wondered what to do with them! A blue eye! Why should his lucky craftsman's eye be blue? All his visions of things accouched on a blue bed! The red road he knows through his blue eye! Who had had the job of pigmenting that little window? Some grandmother, at the back of yesterday, who brought her red cavalier to bed through her azure casement. No doubt that was it, or it was the result of some confusion in a ghetto, something sturdy and swarthy ravished by something pink and alert. A pity that Mr. Dunne's time-tracts are so circumscribed, thinks he, or I'd find out for myself!

But where was his waist-strap?

*'Goot heavens, Archivelt,
Vere is your Knicker-belt?'—
'I haf no Knicker-belt,'
The little Archie said.*

These famous lines passed off the unacceptable hitch: else he might certainly have displayed temper; for he was shrewish when thwarted by things, as who will not be at times. But, once assembled, they fitted him to perfection.

He crossed his fat short legs and made his tie. Out to the A.B.C. for the first snack of the day. The top of the morning to the Norma Talmadge of the new Buszard's counter. He felt as lively on his springy legs as a squirrel. Now for the A.B.C.

A.B.C. The alphabet of a new day! A child was Will. Tootytatoot, for the axe-edged morning, the break of day! Was it an amateur universe after all, as so many believed? Oh, I say! is it an amateur world? It muddled along and made itself, did it, from day to day? At night it slept. He at least believed that was it. Believing *that*, you could not go far wrong. Every morning he comes up as fresh as paint: it is evidently *creative*, is all-things. Oh, it is decidedly a novel, a great creative, rough-and-ready affair: about that there can be no mistake. He throws his hat up in dirty Kentish Town air, as he dances forward. 'Give me the daybreak!' his quick actions say as plain as words. Any one could see he was just up. It is ten o'clock. 'Isn't this the time for rogues,' says he, 'not the night, but the day?'—He feels roguish and fine, and is all for painting the first hours red, in his little way. And also he must remember Mr. Dunne.

The A.B.C. is cold. It has been sluiced by the chars, it faces north, its tiles marble and china repel the heat. It is an agreeable chill. He faces north, pauses and flings himself south and downwards on to the black leather seat at the bottom of the smoking-room. For some minutes he rides the springs, gentle as a bird on the wave, the most buoyant customer ever seen there.—A few black-sacks round the fire, like seamews on a Cornish Sabbath surveying their chapel of rock. Slovenly forces moved black skirts like wings. He is a force, but of course he needs his A.B.C.

But who will bring Will his burning eggs and hot brown tea? Who will bring the leaden fruit, the boiling bullet from the inoffensive serpentine backside of the farmyard fowl? Why, Gladys, the dreary waitress, in her bored jazz.

'I—hi! Gladys, what bonny thought for my name day?'

'What is your name?'

'Will, you know.'

Oh, what a peppery proud girl she is, with her cornucopia of hair the colour of a new penny. He observes it as a molten shell, balanced on the top of the black trunk. He models her with his blue eye into a bomb-like shape at once, associating with this a disk—a marble table—and a few other objects in the neighbourhood.

'Will!' What's in a name? Little for the heart of the mechanical slattern who bears the burning fruit of the fowl where it can be eaten by sweet Will Blood.

Will's a sprucer, thinks May, and tells Gladys so, as they sit side by side, like offended toys, at the foot of the stairs.

'I don't think he's right,' says Gladys. A combative undulation traverses her with dignity from toe to head. Her legs lie rather differently after its passage. She pushes down the shortened apron, upon her black silk sticks.

'He's balmy.' May cocks her eye Willwards, and lowers her voice. 'Yesterday he came to my table. 'Ere! What do you think he had the sauce to ask me?'

They eye each other with drifting baby-gazes.

'He asked me to go to his studio-flat, and be his nude-model!'

'I should say so! Then you wake up!' Gladys tossed her chin and nose-tip. 'He hasn't half got a sauce! I know what *I* should have said.'

'Chance would be a fine thing, I said: and he said he'd—I couldn't keep a straight face—there was an old girl at the next table who heard what he said. She didn't half give me a look——!' A few faint contortions ruffled May tenderly. She sheltered her mouth for a moment with her hand. 'He said he'd give me a strawberry leaf if I was a shy girl! He said all artists kept a stock, all different sizes.' May falls into faint convulsions.

'Soppy-fool! I told you he's not right. I'd soon tell him off if he came any of it with me. I do hate artists. They're all rotters. Young Minnie works with an artist now—you know, Minnie Edmunds.'

'He's not an artist. He's sprucing. He's a student. Ernie says he's in the hospital.'

'In the hospital? Noaa! That's not right. Was that Ernie told you that? He must have meant he was a patient.'

Will has the two waitresses in his bright-eye-closet, where he makes them up into a new pattern. He sees them twittering their cowardly scandal, he flattens their cheeks meanwhile, matches their noses, cuts out their dresses into unexpected shapes at every living moment.

The attention of May and Gladys drifts to the extremity of the shop farthest from Will. May's head slowly turns back, vacillates a little, veers a few points either way, then swings back sharply on to Will. Gladys is nudged by May.

'Look at him counting his mouldy coppers!'

Will arranges two columns on the marble table, silver and copper.

'Solidi: Ten. Denarii: Eleven. Must go to the Belge for lunch: supply myself with the pounds—the pence will look after themselves.'

He signs to May, who nudges Gladys. Gladys looks at May.

'He wants you.'

The great copper-red queen of the A.B.C. approaches with majestic reluctance.

'Goot heavens, Archivelt,
Vere ist you Knicker-pelt!'

(She says, in her mind, to May: 'He said something about my knickers, in poetry. I gave him such a look.')

Standing at the side of the table, she traces perfunctory figures on her ticket-block. She redraws them blacker.

'I say, Miss. One of those eggs you brought me smelt high.'

('He said: one of the eggs was high. I said I would have got him another if he'd said.')

'It was blue.'

('Blue, he said it was.')

'We don't often have the customers complain of the eggs,' she observed.

'That was a red egg. Red eggs are always a bit off.'

('He said his egg was red. All red eggs is a bit off, he said. He's crackers.')

'I like them a little *faisandé*.'

('He said something in latin, he gave me a funny look. If he gave me much of his old buck——!')

'All people should be a little *faisandé*, I think, don't you: so why not eggs?'

'I don't see the conjunction.'

'Not between eggs and people? She sees no connection between eggs and people! Oh, lucky girl, oh, how I envy you!'

where ignorance is bliss!

Ignorant! Blood rushes to the face of the proud and peppery girl.

'I should be sorry to be as ignorant as some people! Do you want another egg?'

'Oh, don't be angry, Mabel. I admire your style of beauty.' He drops a bashful eye into his teacup, computing the percentage of vegetable dregs in what remains. 'I can imagine you quite easily in a beautiful oriental bath, surrounded by slaves. You step in. I am your eunuch.'

'Fancy goes a long way, as Nancy said when she kissed the cow.'

'I could easily be your eunuch. I don't understand your last remark. What cow?'

A bright and sudden light flashes in Will's eye. He leaps up. The blood has left the cheek of Gladys, and she steps back with apprehension.

'*Cow!* You've broken my dream! What colour was it?'

With a gesture with her fingers as though to bore into her temple, the haughty waitress returns to her chair by the side of May. Will follows eagerly. Standing over May and Gladys he exclaims:

'You broke my dream! What sort of cow was it?'

Gladys half looks disdainfully at May.

'He's not right.'

Will touches a variety of brakes; he has rushed into an impasse. He turns slowly round. That dream-double has been flustered, she who holds the secret of life and death. 'Gently does it!' thinks he and hoods his eyes. 'How horribly he squints!' thinks Gladys. Slowly up on to the surface steals a dark sugary grin. He leans against a table, nonchalant, crosses one shoe stealthily over the other shoe.

'I know it must sound funny to you, Miss Marsh.' (May smiles, and Gladys pricks up her languid ears. Miss Marsh! the sauce!) 'But you did say something about *kissing a cow*, didn't you, just now? It's this way. I dreamt last night *I kissed a cow*. I know it *is* a funny thing to dream. But that's why I sort of want to know, being of an enquiring turn. The cow I kissed last night is my first cow. That's important. Don't run away with the idea, Miss Marsh, that *every* night——!'

'Oh, no'oo!' Lofty withering lady.

'That's right, don't run away.'

May laughs and peers at Gladys. 'Oh, how I hate that man!' thinks Gladys, for he has put her in the wrong with all these cows.

'Of course I made a note of it when I woke up.'

Oh, what a hateful man! and that cat May. What's the girl looking at me for, I should like to know?

'You broke my dream!'

'Oh! fancy that!'

A customer calls and May jumps up: away she hurries, for what, she wonders, has that Gladys been saying about kissing a cow?

Gladys looks after May. She has been put in the wrong. Why does he stop there? Why doesn't he go, I should like to know? he's got his bill.

She won't say, thinks little Will, that she said 'kissed a cow.' I've torn it. I shouldn't have seemed so anxious. Now I've

put her back up. Something else must be found. Let's see. He looks round inside his mind. Ah, ha, the very thing! for he catches sight of a red egg, blue inside, and at the same time a faint familiar smell glides into his nostril. He coughs.

'Did you charge me with that egg?'

Gladys immediately alters: her colour jumps up, her eyes fill with dignity. She is back in her classy shell instanter.

'Yes. But if you like I'll deduct it, as you say it was bad.'

'No, please don't: it's quite all right, Miss Marsh.'

'Not at all. If you're not satisfied, I'll deduct it.'

With great dignity she rises and holds out her hand for the check.

'No, I really couldn't let you do that. I meant I hoped that you *had* charged me. That's what I meant.'

'Yes, I did. But I'll deduct it,' she drawls. Every minute she is farther off. He looks at her with his sheep's grin of foolish offence: she bridles and gazes away. He is baffled. What next?

May returns: she settles herself stealthily.

'Won't you tell me before I go about the cow?' Gladys does not mind, she *did* say 'kiss the cow.' She looks away from May, very bored.

'It's an old country saying. My mother uses it. Haven't you ever heard it?'

'So you *did* say "kiss the cow"?' he shouts, standing on tip-toe.

Gladys's best proud manner is not proof against his shout quite. She will not relax towards May, but she cannot keep her eyes from casting a quick glance. That cat May's laugh, I do think it's soppy! 'No, I said "kissed the cow."'

May acts a spasm of pent-up mirth, the potty cat: 'kissed the cow! kissed the cow!' she rocks herself from side to side, droning to herself, she dies of laughing; she is dead.

'That's what I wanted to know.—Well, I must pony up with your firm, now. That's another old expression! Tralala!'

'Is it really!' A lady's simple bored reply, the last shot.

May has developed hysteria. Gladys rises in offended silence and goes over to the table. Will has left. But Will darts swiftly to the desk. An amiable oblique Jewish face that has only one flat side at a time, or else is an animated projecting edge, receives with flattering vampish slowness his ticket on which the half-crown lies, and bakes him slowly with a cinema smile. 'A nice morning, isn't it? *Thank you,*' softly sliding three coppers and a shilling towards him.

He thanks the innocent bird in her cage at the receipt of custom, and darts erect through the door, out on to the shining pavement, where he skids through the dazzling light to the nearby P.O. Buying a postcard, he goes to the writing-desk and fills in the morning bulletin:

Last night I dreamt that in crossing a tiny meadow I met two dappled cows. As I passed the second of the two I took its muzzle in my hands, and before it could say *knife*, I had kissed it between the horns. Going as usual this morning to the A.B.C. for my breakfast, I happened to engage in conversation there with a waitress, known as Miss Gladys Marsh. (I can obtain her address if you require it.) Being quite full of blarney, since it was so early in the day, I remarked to this high-spirited girl that I could see in my mind's eye her graceful perfumed form in a Turkish setting descending into a beautiful bath. I represented myself as a eunuch (not to alarm her) participating in this spectacle at a discreet distance. At this she remarked:

'Fancy goes a long way, as Nancy said *when she kissed the cow!*'

For the accuracy of this statement I am prepared to vouch. Time is vindicated! I offer you my warmest congratulations. It is certain that in our dreams the future is available for the least of us. Time is the reality. It is as fixed as fixed. Past, Present and Future is a territory over which what we call *I* crawls, and in its dreams it goes backwards and forwards at will. Again, my congratulations! Hip! Hip!—Further Bulletin tomorrow.

Signed, WILLIAM BLOOD.

This he addressed to

R. DUNNE,

Esq.



TRANSCRIBER'S NOTE

Other than the addition of a missing period, minor variations in spelling and punctuation have been preserved.

[End of *You Broke My Dream, or An Experiment with Time*, by Wyndham Lewis]