

TENNESSEE WILLIAMS

---

## In Spain There Was Revolution<sup>1</sup>

**F**rom where he lay on the end of the dock, the river was like fluctuant diamond-paned glass of two colors, olive green and steel blue, leaded together by wavering white stitches of sun. The summer was dry. There had been a long succession of these flawless, brilliant days. It was now the middle of August but already the trees along the opposite hills were turning color. Reds and oranges and yellows stood like a motionless and smokeless fire above the intense, burning green of the river willows. Things were drying up in the earth. But it was a death that wore bright colors. It looked like a flaming opulence of life. Only the desiccated patches of pale yellow corn glimpsed between folds of the Ozark hills seemed willing to admit without any bright evasion the solemn fact of things dying.

Steve heard the rasp of oar-locks and the faint plash of a leisurely moving boat. The black blades lifted and caught the white reflection of sky and dripped a thin sheet of silvery water on each side. The girl rowed perfectly. Her approach had an air of quiet inevitability unhurried as time itself. There was no swerving, no unnecessary motion. There was perfect timing and absolute poise. It was herself graceful and shining and entirely at ease and not the clumsy wooden boat that moved toward him.

He breathed in deeply and felt his body expand against the warm, moist boards he was lying on. He raised an arm in casual salute. She didn't return it but the white gleam of her teeth became more distinct and the oars rasped with a quicker rhythm. The boat curved in slightly toward the shore.

The girl was a counsellor at the Idle Wild Camp a mile up on the other side of the river from the resort where the boy was life-guard. Every morning or afternoon she rowed or paddled down to see him. At night they met sometimes on the middle span of

<sup>1</sup> This previously unpublished story appears here by arrangement with The University of the South, Sewanee, Tennessee. Copyright © 2003 by The University of the South.

the new white concrete bridge, which was a lovely, unearthly place suspended between the dark water and the sky in both of which the stars were clearly visible. Being a long bridge, it was reasonably safe. When headlights curved out of the highway on either side of the river and wrinkled the dark with fiery prismatic radiations there was always time enough for the boy and girl to draw discreetly apart and meet the passing glare with blinking, unabashed eyes, and there were many long intervals between when the darkness was loud with cicadas and the flow of water and the silky, rippling soliloquies of owls. At about ten-thirty the double engined Red Ball freight thundered its forty or fifty car chain over the railroad bridge down the river. They waited until the red and green lamps at the end of the caboose winked finally out among the swallowing hills and then the girl raced breathlessly away to reach her camp before the bell rang for "lights out."

"How many lives have you saved this morning?" she called up to him.

"Nobody's been in yet. Wait a minute. I'll swim out."

He looked quickly around to see that the beach was still empty, then dove off the dock and reached the boat in a few easy strokes. He clung to the end of it and expelled a jet of water between his teeth. It trickled down her smooth brown legs.

"I've got the blues," she said. "I looked at the calendar this morning."

"You shouldn't look at calendars."

"I couldn't help it. It stared me right in the eye."

"What did it say?"

"Only two more weeks of this."

"Sorry?"

"Of course."

"So'm I."

"It's been so perfect here."

His eyes dropped from her face and traveled leisurely down the wet blue suit. His voice softened.

"It'll go on being that way."

"I don't know."

Her voice had lowered also and he could feel her awareness of his eyes on her body.

"That suit's a humdinger! Silk, isn't it? I can even see your belly button!"

"Shut up! Don't be disgusting!" she laughed.

He looked up and smiled.

"*Sure* it will be just the same."

"What?" she asked, her voice still shaking and her eyes not able to meet his.

"At school. The way it is here."

"I don't know," she repeated gloomily. "School isn't like here."

"I know it isn't," he admitted. "Here it's just perfect."

He pulled himself lightly from the river and into the boat. He stood over her, dripping water, and she frowned at him without conviction.

"I've got to get back."

"Not right now."

"I'm late. They'll ring the bell in about twenty minutes."

"What's the diff."

"Both of us are holding jobs, you know."

"We don't care if we get fired."

"Yes, we do."

"That's right," he admitted mournfully. "I wouldn't see you for about three weeks."

She smiled and met his eyes. His face was beaded with water that gathered on the stubbles of his chin and looked as though he had grown a bubbly golden beard.

"You forgot to shave."

"I know. I was too lazy. I had a strenuous night."

"What doing?"

"Dreaming about you."

"Was that necessary?"

"It is sometimes."

She looked slowly across the brilliant water.

"That suit of yours takes the cake," he murmured. "You might as well be completely nude."

"You're terribly vulgar sometimes."

"But you like it."

"I certainly don't like scratchy chins."

"Yes, you do."

"How do you know?"

"I can just tell."

"Get out now, Steve. I've got to row back."

"Not right now. Let's go under the willows a moment."

"No, not this morning," she said almost sharply.

"Yes, right now."

He looked around once more, very quickly, then seized an oar and turned them in toward the bank. She leaned against his shoulder and closed her eyes, feeling the warmth of the sun and of his body. He looked down at her as he rowed. She had tanned very deeply and smoothly. There were no visible pores in the skin and the fine hairs of the lower legs were bleached white. Rowing had pulled up the lower edges of her trunks and exposed half moons of untanned flesh. He loved to see the white parts of her body between shoulder and thigh that were supposed to be kept unseen. Their more private quality seemed to be expressed in that contrasting whiteness.

As soon as the willow shade had closed over them he caught the shoulder strap nearest him and jerked it down. His hand cupped her breast. She looked up at him with eyes half frightened and lips falling apart. It was always that way. She let things go until they had gone too far to be stopped. Then she felt herself absolved of the responsibility.

“Steve, it will be your fault.”

“I don’t care.”

“Just suppose.”

“What?”

“Something happened sometime.”

“I wouldn’t care. Would you?”

The wet shoulder straps dangled coldly over her legs. With a long fretful sigh, like a person twisting in fever, she arched her body and pulled them slowly away.

“Would you care?” he repeated softly. His words arched over her like the rook of a tunnel. They shut out daylight and the sky and the incandescent willows. The tunnel bored down without effort into the darkness below them. The day was left a long way behind. The sun was glittering on the other side of the world. The boat and the lake and the humming dragon-flies had slid away with one complete, lubricious gesture from under and around them and in that cavernous darkness their bodies grew larger and larger till they had outgrown everything but each other.

“Would you care?”

“Not much if you didn’t,” she answered without hearing her own voice. He laughed softly. Their bodies stirred a little to make a closer embrace. All the while her eyes peered dreamily through the interstices of their green-gold-curtained alcove. He laughed

at her whispered protestations which she herself did not listen to and felt her breath coming faster.

From up the river he heard very faintly the tolling of the camp bell. But it was she this time who was altogether lost to the world outside. Her eyes were closed and he knew that she didn't hear. For a moment he selfishly planned not to warn her. Then he remembered what the loss of her job would mean. The sacrifice of two more weeks together. . . .

He tightened his arm.

"Darling, it's ringing."

"I know," she smiled.

"I thought you didn't hear."

"I did. I just couldn't move."

Now she sat up and straightened her blue silk suit. The lovely white parts of her body disappeared.

"I never would have thought things like this could happen to me a few months ago."

"Neither would I."

"Hmm. I bet you're an old hand at seductions."

"I learned about women from you."

"I'm just the first lesson, am I?"

"First and last."

"Get out, you liar!"

He dove off the end of the boat and she made a wide arc from the hidden bank.

Sun and water widened between them. He clambered up the ladder and resumed his place at the end of the Bide-A-Wee dock. A fat man with an inner tube was waddling down from the shore. It was the morning swimming hour. Resorters descended behind the fat man in little clusters. Family groups and week-end parties. He knew some of them. Some of them were strangers.

He sat up alertly on the folding chair, expanded his naked chest and adjusted his sun goggles.

The girl was nearly around the bend of the river. He could still see her body rhythmically bending to the oars and sunlight flashing on the wet blue suit. Out there in the glittering distance was the girl shadowed by willows. Then the curving bank intervened and he could see only the rippling forked trajectory of the boat.

The man with the inner tube had waddled onto the end of the

dock and was seated beside Steve, waiting to be given some notice. That was mostly what they came down for, men of his sort, to be looked at and listened to. At work they were stooges. White collar nonentities. But on their vacations, at their play, they wanted to be vital and specific personalities. They wanted to disentangle themselves from the soft, spongy webs that had grown around them and the way they went about it was very silly. They overexercised frenziedly the first two or three days, exposing their moist white skins immoderately to the sun's indifferent burning, and then they slumped helplessly into exhaustion, smearing themselves with creams and lotions and complaining about the mineral taste of the water and the weak coffee and the uncomfortable beds. Steve looked at them with contemptuous pity, these men that lived narrow, slavish lives in cooped-up places, men caught in ruts, graves with both ends kicked out. . . .

He avoided the fat man's searching squint, kept his eyes fixed stonily on the water. He wanted to think of the girl. Nothing else.

The man was not to be snubbed. He cleared his throat.

"What do you think of this trouble in Spain?"

The life-guard shrugged his coffee-brown shoulders.

"Trouble in Spain? Didn't know there was any."

"My God, man, what's the matter with you? Don't you read the newspapers?"

Again Steve shrugged.

"Not lately. What's going on?"

"*Revolution,*" said the man. "*Next it will be the whole world!*"

He gave Steve a disgusted glance and then climbed awkwardly down the ladder and plopped into the shallow water. He waded carefully out with the inner tube girdling his middle. Water rose to his arm-pits. Then he pushed himself gently forward and moved out with the sidewise paddling motions of a fat turtle.

Steve looked down at him and shook with noiseless laughter.

## Afterword

To begin with, I turn back time. I reverse it to that quaint period, the thirties, when the huge middle class of America was matriculating in a school for the blind. Their eyes had failed them, or they had failed their eyes . . .

In Spain there was revolution. Here there was only shouting and confusion. In Spain there was Guernica. Here there were distur-

bances of labor, sometimes pretty violent, in otherwise peaceful cities . . .

With these words Tennessee Williams addressed theatrical audiences in 1944, through the voice of “Tom Wingfield” at the opening of *The Glass Menagerie*. So it was with some anticipation and curiosity that we first examined an unpublished story entitled “In Spain There Was Revolution,” the writing of which may be dated to the period depicted in the play. We found the typescript filed and indexed among the Tennessee Williams Papers at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center at the University of Texas at Austin. On the first page, in the top right-hand corner, Williams himself has written down a retrospective judgment on this early effort. “Not a bad story. Rather prophetic. T. W. (Written about ’36).”

“In Spain There Was Revolution” is thus a contemporary record, more immediate and direct than the memories later staged in *The Glass Menagerie*, of the young writer’s feelings about the relationship of Americans to the wider world. Those feelings were often politically charged, responding to the sufferings, uncertainties, and global ideological struggles of the 1930s. While the protagonists of “In Spain There Was Revolution” seem scarcely aware of these realities, in the final dialogue Williams emphasizes the fragility of the luxurious isolation that makes their summer idyll possible. Perhaps, then, by the age of twenty-five or so, “Tom” Williams had begun to view the selfishness of youth ironically—as a symbol of the narcissistic impulse that makes America a place so alluringly, yet dangerously, self-indulgent.

“Rather prophetic.” Sometime after the outbreak of the Second World War, Williams remarked how his early story resonated beyond the limits of its original inspiration. (In fact, during the early 1940s he would reuse the “In Spain . . .” phrase in another, still unpublished typescript at HRHRC, an allegorical one-act play entitled *Act of Love*.) When we brought “In Spain There Was Revolution” to the Editor of *The Hudson Review*, she likewise noted its relevance to our own times. We can do no better than to call upon Tom Wingfield for a conclusion:

In Spain there was Guernica! But here there was only hot swing music and liquor, dance halls, bars, and movies, and sex that hung in the gloom like a chandelier and flooded the world with brief, deceptive rainbows. . . . All the world was waiting for bombardments!

We are grateful to the Estate of Tennessee Williams and to Casarotto Ramsay & Associates Limited, especially Tom Erhardt, for permission to publish the text, and to the staff of the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center—especially Pat Fox, Tara Wenger, and Rich Oram—for their continual assistance and support.

NICHOLAS MOSCHOVAKIS AND DAVID ROESSEL