

# Willow

by [Lucius Falkland](#) (July 2024)



Evening in the Cotswolds, Sir Alfred East RA (1913)

## Willow

I think of that sandstone Cotswold inn  
Where we re-enacted scenes from *The Wicker Man*,  
Where we betrayed our Anglican spouses,  
And I see its thatched roof, the trusses all around,  
The café next door, the cottages near the green,  
Alight like that final scene,  
Where the spindled head fell:  
A frosty evening

Pretending to be the First of May,  
As bright "as the midday sun at midnight."

Naked, you sang me Willow's eldritch verse  
As I lay on our bed.  
The very thought of you,  
So "young and fair," was Bramley apples,  
And ginger bread and childhood holidays  
On country coasts where the sky was clear  
As the fairy tales they read as I warmed  
Beneath the duvet in the home they'd rented.

But now the thatch is on fire,  
It flickers in the whites of your eyes  
As I recall your Willowy thrusting.  
I must never forget,  
As Great Tew turns to cinders,  
Who offers those Oxfordshire apples  
That taste just that bit too sweet.

## **Clan Tobacco**

My eyes sting as I make my way  
Through clouds of Clan tobacco  
Exhaled from Church Warden pipes  
All chortling round the saloon bar.  
Tweed caps, the odd moustache still,  
Harris jackets, ties in Windsor knots,  
Beneath Army-style-washed faces:  
That's where they learnt to drive their cars.

As I'm led inside the children's room  
And given a glass of Tizer

I don't mind that burning in the eyes  
I won't "give *them* what for,"  
Though they say at school it's bad for you.  
Their Billiard pipes, their Trilby hats  
Reassure me. They run this place  
And they fought and won a war.

Tad tipsy in *The Royal Oak*,  
Named after English Monarchs,  
One talks of Maharashtra,  
One racing, under fire,  
To shelter; some Salerno church  
Where they gulped the Holy Water;  
Or sister lost to measles,  
As they suck upon their briar.

Then home to housewives; terraces  
Put up when they were toddlers  
In a town named for a Saxon Jarl,  
Or a church beyond the bales of hay,  
But they passed from power as he did,  
To ash, like burnt tobacco.  
*The Royal Oak's* smoke-free these days  
And the streets are now Bombay.

## **Devolution**

I'm sitting here bereft of motivation,  
Of passion and of vigour and resolve.  
He's fired the gun. There can be no cessation.  
Unstoppably, you've started to devolve.

"Girl Power," and all that rigmarole Post-Modern  
Is setting light to brassieres far away

And you've become a chamber-maid down-trodden  
By a Duke who, almost certainly, is gay.

And now the engine hasn't been invented.  
The only form of transport has a tail.  
You've beauty spots and wigs like you're demented  
And corsets made of little bits of whale.

Stuart times, the Tudors, Medieval.  
Your clothing has become a dreadful mess.  
This devolution must be an upheaval  
As constantly you're having to undress.

And now, my dear, you've turned into a primate.  
At least, with that much hair, so it would seem.  
I'm sensing quite a violent sexual climate  
As I hear you moan and wail and scratch and scream.

Sex has now become your only interest.  
You've purchased all the make-up in the land.  
You've done it all! (Apart, I think, from incest).  
But there's one thing that I don't quite understand.

It wasn't God that caused this ghastly process.  
Darwin? Albert Einstein? Not the case.  
But a Physics undergraduate from Bowness  
With an eye-brow that goes right across his face.

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Lucius Falkland is the *nom de plume* of a writer and academic from London.

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