



## The Sundays of Satin-Legs Smith

BY GWENDOLYN BROOKS

Inamoratas, with an approbation,  
Bestowed his title. Blessed his inclination.

He wakes, unwinds, elaborately: a cat  
Tawny, reluctant, royal. He is fat  
And fine this morning. Definite. Reimbursed.

He waits a moment, he designs his reign,  
That no performance may be plain or vain.  
Then rises in a clear delirium.

He sheds, with his pajamas, shabby days.  
And his desertedness, his intricate fear, the  
Postponed resentments and the prim precautions.

Now, at his bath, would you deny him lavender  
Or take away the power of his pine?  
What smelly substitute, heady as wine,  
Would you provide? life must be aromatic.  
There must be scent, somehow there must be some.  
Would you have flowers in his life? suggest  
Asters? a Really Good geranium?  
A white carnation? would you prescribe a Show  
With the cold lilies, formal chrysanthemum  
Magnificence, poinsettias, and emphatic  
Red of prize roses? might his happiest  
Alternative (you muse) be, after all,  
A bit of gentle garden in the best  
Of taste and straight tradition? Maybe so.  
But you forget, or did you ever know,  
His heritage of cabbage and pigtailed,  
Old intimacy with alleys, garbage pails,  
Down in the deep (but always beautiful) South  
Where roses blush their blithest (it is said)  
And sweet magnolias put Chanel to shame.

No! He has not a flower to his name.  
Except a feather one, for his lapel.  
Apart from that, if he should think of flowers  
It is in terms of dandelions or death.  
Ah, there is little hope. You might as well—  
Unless you care to set the world a-boil  
And do a lot of equalizing things,

Remove a little ermine, say, from kings,  
 Shake hands with paupers and appoint them men,  
 For instance—certainly you might as well  
 Leave him his lotion, lavender and oil.

Let us proceed. Let us inspect, together  
 With his meticulous and serious love,  
 The innards of this closet. Which is a vault  
 Whose glory is not diamonds, not pearls,  
 Not silver plate with just enough dull shine.  
 But wonder-suits in yellow and in wine,  
 Sarcastic green and zebra-striped cobalt.  
 With shoulder padding that is wide  
 And cocky and determined as his pride;  
 Ballooning pants that taper off to ends  
 Scheduled to choke precisely.

Here are hats  
 Like bright umbrellas; and hysterical ties  
 Like narrow banners for some gathering war.

People are so in need, in need of help.  
 People want so much that they do not know.

Below the tinkling trade of little coins  
 The gold impulse not possible to show  
 Or spend. Promise piled over and betrayed.

These kneaded limbs receive the kiss of silk.  
 Then they receive the brave and beautiful  
 Embrace of some of that equivocal wool.  
 He looks into his mirror, loves himself—  
 The neat curve here; the angularity  
 That is appropriate at just its place;  
 The technique of a variegated grace.

Here is all his sculpture and his art  
 And all his architectural design.  
 Perhaps you would prefer to this a fine  
 Value of marble, complicated stone.  
 Would have him think with horror of baroque,  
 Rococo. You forget and you forget.

He dances down the hotel steps that keep  
 Remnants of last night's high life and distress.  
 As spat-out purchased kisses and spilled beer.  
 He swallows sunshine with a secret yelp.  
 Passes to coffee and a roll or two.  
 Has breakfasted.

Out. Sounds about him smear,  
 Become a unit. He hears and does not hear  
 The alarm clock meddling in somebody's sleep;  
 Children's governed Sunday happiness;

The dry tone of a plane; a woman's oath;  
 Consumption's spiritless expectoration;  
 An indignant robin's resolute donation  
 Pinching a track through apathy and din;  
 Restaurant vendors weeping; and the L  
 That comes on like a slightly horrible thought.

Pictures, too, as usual, are blurred.  
 He sees and does not see the broken windows  
 Hiding their shame with newsprint; little girl  
 With ribbons decking wornness, little boy  
 Wearing the trousers with the decentest patch,  
 To honor Sunday; women on their way  
 From "service," temperate holiness arranged  
 Ably on asking faces; men estranged  
 From music and from wonder and from joy  
 But far familiar with the guiding awe  
 Of foodlessness.

He loiters.

Restaurant vendors

Weep, or out of them rolls a restless glee.  
 The Lonesome Blues, the Long-lost Blues, I Want A  
 Big Fat Mama. Down these sore avenues  
 Comes no Saint-Saëns, no piquant elusive Grieg,  
 And not Tschaikovsky's wayward eloquence  
 And not the shapely tender drift of Brahms.  
 But could he love them? Since a man must bring  
 To music what his mother spanked him for  
 When he was two: bits of forgotten hate,  
 Devotion: whether or not his mattress hurts:  
 The little dream his father humored: the thing  
 His sister did for money: what he ate  
 For breakfast—and for dinner twenty years  
 Ago last autumn: all his skipped desserts.

The pasts of his ancestors lean against  
 Him. Crowd him. Fog out his identity.  
 Hundreds of hungers mingle with his own,  
 Hundreds of voices advise so dexterously  
 He quite considers his reactions his,  
 Judges he walks most powerfully alone,  
 That everything is—simply what it is.

But movie-time approaches, time to boo  
 The hero's kiss, and boo the heroine  
 Whose ivory and yellow it is sin  
 For his eye to eat of. The Mickey Mouse,  
 However, is for everyone in the house.

Squires his lady to dinner at Joe's Eats.  
 His lady alters as to leg and eye,  
 Thickness and height, such minor points as these,

From Sunday to Sunday. But no matter what  
 Her name or body positively she's  
 In Queen Lace stockings with ambitious heels

That strain to kiss the calves, and vivid shoes  
 Frontless and backless, Chinese fingernails,  
 Earrings, three layers of lipstick, intense hat  
 Dripping with the most voluble of veils.  
 Her affable extremes are like sweet bombs  
 About him, whom no middle grace or good  
 Could gratify. He had no education  
 In quiet arts of compromise. He would  
 Not understand your counsels on control, nor  
 Thank you for your late trouble.

At Joe's Eats

You get your fish or chicken on meat platters.  
 With coleslaw, macaroni, candied sweets,  
 Coffee and apple pie. You go out full.  
 (The end is—isn't it?—all that really matters.)

And even and intrepid come  
 The tender boots of night to home.

*Her body is like new brown bread  
 Under the Woolworth mignonette.  
 Her body is a honey bowl  
 Whose waiting honey is deep and hot,  
 Her body is like summer earth,  
 Receptive, soft, and absolute ...*

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