

ANNA SMITH

*The Score Diary of Billy Bishop*

1.

E

FFIE PILCHER, behind her father's hay-field. Pushed her skirt up and she kicked her knickers to one ankle and said, Make me a real woman, Billy, you make me a real woman. Looked easier than it was. Every time I get near those legs like a steel trap, squeeze me right damned out. Afterwards was nearly sick at the sight of her, one vanilla-pudding tit forced out of her top and face and body slack. Slick. Shot nine squirrels this morning in the orchard, personal best, and now have blood on shrunken cock and in palm prints on my trousers. So I roll to one side and feel quietly sick and Effie Pilcher starts praying over me, for my soul, adulterer to a husband-yet-to-come. Told her to piss off. Told me she never loved me. Told her fine. Told me fine, but not to come sniffing round later looking for her hand in marriage. Told me her father'd whip me if I did. Told her I knew pigs I'd ask first. Told me fine. Told her fine. Relented. Told Effie loved only her. Told her don't know any pigs. Was slapped. Am in love.

2.

Redhead who was standing near Margaret Burden (mother's name also Margaret, slightly disturbing?) when she turned me down at the dance. Margaret stunning in taffeta and pearls and am leaving tomorrow to Become Man. Post-Margaret, leaped too quickly to redhead and discovered anew: always look before you leap. This is a lesson I

seem to have some difficulty in remembering. Redhead near Margaret had gap between front teeth big enough to slot a quarter through. Did. Didn't make her any more attractive. Later made mewling sounds like horrible parody of kitten so that all I could think was, In the sack, In the sack, In the sack, In the sack like a train gathering steam.

3.

Blonde. Smelled vaguely of cloves. Royal Military College is nightmare.

4.

Pool-hall woman, possessor of motherly breasts. Lay head on great pontoon-pillows and snatched nearly an hour of sleep during which was not awakened, was not cold, did not rise to march squares around the yard and was not hit, beaten, rolled or kissed by upperclassmen. Late back to school and was hit but, all in all, fairly victorious.

5.

Only other human being in Kingston for the summer. Received letter yesterday, discovered Margaret Burden in Owen Sound and can't remember why any sane man would choose to stay in hell-hole when home was warm and comforting and (I suspect) less concerned with marks, grades &c than makes out. Meet Kimberley nightly at pool hall after work, play until closing, walk to Kimberley's parents' house without speaking, fuck, walk home. Some nights fall asleep almost on way back and climb into bed with the wonderful warm feeling of a man who has slept forty-five minutes before bed. In mornings trudge through mindless job and routine repeats.

6.

Self, though self would not usually count (for reasons feel are obvious). Was caught sneaking out to meet not-self with E.J. E.J. feeble-minded, tipped both of us into lake before we were halfway to the island where the girls were meant to be waiting. E.J. says girls were never there but I know better, E.J. is only saying this because of own bad luck with fairer sex coupled with fact he ratted me out. Did not

mention rattling out until too late, so that while he was only charged with drunkenness and leaving school grounds without permission, I was also called a liar. Will spend month entirely within compounds of RMC, greater punishment than they believe. Is day six.

Is day twenty. Have heard can achieve unbelievable orgasm after undergoing extended period without. Now wish had foregone self in favour of nimble long-legged brunette or blonde with great tits, soft plumpness of the belly and wide sensuous hips, one finger tucked between her teeth so that elbow pushes tits together and just the flicker of the tip of that tongue and oh Lord, Lord.

7.

Long-legged brunette. Passable. Wish could master temptation.

8–19(?).

Orgy of despair. Numbers approximate; have been drinking, and as soon as am in bed with one—call her Martha—immediately begin lusting after another (call her Julia). The moment enter Martha's bed am disgusted by Martha, horrified by Martha's shrill breathing and loose drawers (rattling, my father would say, har har!) and want only to be with the Divine Julia. Hurtle to finish and leave faster than is proper, even for a drunk. Rush-stumble desperately from bar to bar looking for Julia, Julia, Julia, Julia, Julia. Worth has been sent up to fetch me home and while perfect son, perfect student, perfect in every way does not even have decency to be terrible brother. Hauls me home when am too drunk on whiskey and bitters to fuck, cleans vomit from my shoes and tells Father I am in bed with fever, har har!

RMC too difficult and too harsh (these things are not the same). Understand am not brightest fenny in pountain, have been told before, but am without doubt smarter than E.J. and T. and countless others beaten less frequently (though less often fucked). Never could pass exams. Could never pass finals but without college, must become orchardist like father and grandfather before. Am meant for great things. Great things.

Sat exam in room too half dark to see own paper, too dark to cheat. Tucked crib notes into uniformed sleeve and under ridiculous pillbox hat. Looked suspicious to be forever fiddling with both—Headmaster striding down the rows of bent-backed boys (men, in a few short days,

graduates). Took a gamble: laid cheat-sheets on desk with exam paper and in half dark, half-blind Headmaster never saw a thing. When exam finished, Head came to stand by left elbow. Stacked papers neatly together. Fingered cap. Fingered sleeve. Handed papers to Headmaster.

Am to be expelled of course: diplomas are for sadists (Crichton), rapists (Briggs), and murderers (Head, is rumoured) but not for cheats and liars. Cheats and liars are expelled after suitable period of psychological torture, i.e., summer vacation. In fall will be thrown out of RMC, rejected by universities, and relegated to apple-picking life. In summer chase Julia, Julia, Julia, Julia, Julia and then Camille and Evelyn and Sarah and Elise until Worth writes Father, says fever is broken, and hauls me onto a train that stinks of stale beer and fuel leaks.

### 19(?)–23(?)

Orgy of relief and celebration. Spend hours wrapped in the arms of familiar women and warm glow of impending war. Am saved. Plan to enlist immediately though somewhat delayed in name of love. Queues of wide-eyed women form at the doors of any young man who promises to write them from the Front. Nothing could be more romantic than this. One girl (blonde?) brings a slim volume of poetry to keep my spirits up: If you can keep your head when all around you are losing theirs and blaming it on you, &c &c, which I throw out the window in vague hope that bonfire is burning below. Young blonde-ish unimpressed.

### 24.

Self (am including in count for complex emotional reasons).

I signed up, told Margaret.

Margaret smiles in manner of redeeming angel. Promise to be forever true. Promise to be better man. I knew you would, says Margaret.

Wait for me.

Margaret is waiting, perfect angel. Plans to knit socks for cold nights in France. Preparing parents (rich) for announcement of marriage to philanderer and cheat turned cavalry officer (poor). Considered celebration—am saved again, even better than war—but felt could not, could never, viz. everlasting love for Margaret and only Margaret.

25.

Waitress. Committed diner's deadly sin, the dine-and-dash. Flirted with waitress while the boys hopped out the bathroom window, then skedadddled myself, or tried to. Got stuck halfway through. Caught by manager, who pulled hell out of my legs—S. pulled me out the other way and limped home. Met officer halfway home with window frame around midsection and one shoe missing. Officer called restaurant but waitress swore it was another man. Made love in ecstasy of thankfulness and hope that if waitresses can be kind, world can be gentle, wine strong, beds soft, and wind always at my back. Am in love (with Margaret, of course—but also).

26.

Self (is becoming pattern), on board cattleboat-cum-troop-carrier. Self, boat, and possibly world stink of vomit and horseshit. Infidelity (with self? Possible?) is only way to forget stink and win a few moments of sleep. Aim towards floor already awash with bodily fluids and experience extra, bonus wave of nausea at how fast it disappears into the slime.

27.

Nurse, older. Has skin like an apple half eaten and left in the sun. Suspect is point-of-origin of many diseases cured in Sussex hospital—all others attributable sheer number of men. Attempted to jab needle into my arse to ward off every disease I've ever heard of and a few I haven't but was put off in favour of different kind of jabbing (is possible have now contracted every disease I've ever heard of and a few I haven't, anyway).

28.

Nurse (different one). Rendezvoused in hospital storeroom—floor was thick with tromped-in mud. Worried, at first, that smears on uniform would catch someone's attention. Soon realised every uniform is smeared. War is a bubbling cauldron of mud. Remarkably, more horseshit everywhere (parade ground, officers' mess, inside boots, hair) than on board *Caledonia*, which would not previously have

believed possible. Am constantly in hospital. Never thought of self as fragile but never thought of self as here—when it rains, mud and shit everywhere, everyone has the runs; when it stops, the dust drives men mad (literally—there is a thing called Desert Madness which is as bad as it sounds, and worse). The food is rotten (lit.) We barely sleep, and that outdoors in all weather. I will never see a battle—either the hospital will get me or the horse (fell on me the other day), that mad-eyed equine sonofabitch (possible?) will haul itself through the mud too late and everything will be over. I have been issued a sabre for reasons that have not been made clear. The Germans have machine guns.

29.

Nurse (different one) in vain hope that could somehow smear some of my own mud off and onto her. If succeeded, imperceptible.

30–38.

London, in every bar on the same street as the War Office. Have seen a thing (dare I say?) more beautiful than Margaret: a little single-seater plane, snouty, fragile, swung into our field one afternoon while we struggled below and the pilot hopped out to ask for directions. He had a sheepskin coat and clean boots he lifted out of the mud like he wanted to keep them that way. We only had him for a moment and then he was gone—a hundred, two hundred, a thousand feet up above this base and dirty war. Such a thing seems too good to be true.

39.

It is true. I have fucked my last nurse.

40–43.

Nurses. In Owen Sound and later in Kingston I had met precisely two nurses, ever, and one was also cook and cleaning lady; France is full of them. Are necessary for scores of men limping home with holes where bits should be. Flew up today in plane so heavy that we had to take off guns to get off ground. N. was pilot; self, observer—his job, to fly the plane and shoot the machine gun (if we had one); mine, to report to Artillery on the position of the Hun, and, now, to defend boat of a

plane with a pistol that fouls when damp (i.e., always). Tried to smuggle frying pan underneath my seat cushion (have heard stories of men losing testicles to shrapnel. Doctors insist on sewing these men up so they will live, and fight—another symbol of the cruelty of war) but was overruled. Clanked into the air in the old tub and eagle-eyed the Howitzer—reported its position to Artillery and three tries later, cheered over smoking German crater. Excitement unlike any I have known. Have tried fucking (standby) but cannot reproduce moment of perfect bliss when plane banked over smoking ruins and we were alive, alive.

44.

Nurse, dull. Am pilot. Have replaced sex with kills.

45-54.

Blur. Crashed plane at feet of inspecting officer. General round-faced, red-faced, vain flop of hair (toupee?) perched on his head like a cap on a mountain. Plane is a write-off. Self ditto, as soon as replacement arrives. Plan to spend entirety of intervening time a. flying b. killing c. fucking. Planes limited therefore am carrying out plan in somewhat conventional order: women first.

55-65.

Everyone. Everyone. Scored first victory—Albatross D III Scout, snarly beast, pointed like a torpedo with the cross on the tail and a sound like an earthquake—heard it above the roar of my own engine. The bastard faked a hit, tumbled a thousand feet and tried to right himself but I was quicker, brighter—forced him down shooting, saw the plane slam into the ground and explode, whoosh! Over. Good night, Wolfgang. *Guten nacht*.

Small problem, engine failure. Stalled. Crashed. Made a mad dash for the trenches and spent the night in a swimming pool while the rain came down but I couldn't sleep for nerves. Sat late in the night with a grin like a watermelon slice.

66.

Nurse, twenty-two, virgin (!!). Not recommended. Hard work, messy. Stared at me with eyes the size of bomb craters and counted out loud to three hundred and twelve to take her mind off my efforts. Experiment I do not wish to repeat. Prefer girls with their minds firmly on my efforts. Have proved that ace, hero can have any woman. Have not found substitute for flying nor killing. Name turns out to be Maggie—another Margaret, second virgin, and a third waiting (of course, angel) at home.

67-74.

London. High-born ladies at balls and functions. Accent is gone and many don't believe a hero can be Canadian, have never heard of Owen Sound. Have never heard of Ontario. Some seem shaky on the concept of Canada altogether.

Record is climbing, more so now that am allowed to fly lone wolf. Patrols have their place but there is something to the openness of an empty sky. B. says the greatest thing is to die in battle and knows an aerodrome just waiting for us—sitting ducks, he says. Short flight, no time at all to get there. There sounds easy, I say, there, ok, how about out? Out, says B. Out? Not sure I agree with B. on this. Am flight commander, flying ace, hero—much sought-after by the ladies of London, welcome into every bar and club. I eat well, I drink, I choose women at will and wine is strong, beds soft and the wind ever at my back.

75.

Nurse. B. dead. Burned his violin.

76.

Princess Marie Louise, under influence of champagne. Wants to take me home to meet her father—normally would refuse (is no Margaret) only father is King. Suspect her dress worth more than my father's house (perhaps slight exaggeration). Am worth more than dress.

77.

Waitress, after fight in pub. Yokels here have no idea—imagine RFC a kind of nursery maid, imagine they know war. Took two teeth from him.

78.

Nurse. Flights with 60 Squadron a joke. Fly laps over half the Earth, never see a thing—nothing to fight, nobody left to kill. Too many of us. Land, refuel, head out again alone—much better, open skies. I've got the eyes for it. Boys restless. Bloodthirsty. But I'm the one with the record—they're young, eighteen, nineteen, not a fucking clue, and it's a service, a service to lead them the wrong way. Clear skies. Nobody left to kill.

Planes are liars, shoot the man—shoot the pilot out and the plane'll go, take the observer if there is one. Fly a pass to be sure. Strafe the bodies. There are more dead in this war than people in Canada.

79–93.

Rose early and still drunk with an Albert Ball instrumental in my head. Mechanic didn't want to start the plane but mechanics have very little say. Flew to B.'s aerodrome and he was right, easy to get there. Easy to fly over—nothing there. Flew loops. Flew laps. Drunk and cold half to death and if you land again what then? What then?

Saw the landing strip. Eagle-eyed. The new German base.

Just like B. said, one pass, two passes, pick them off as they try to rise. Fight two in the air. Here B. would die for King and Empire but I've met the King and he isn't up to much. Fly home with a plane like a washing line, all metal strip and slices and flaps of fabric. Land, perfect. The boat'll never fly again but she won't need to—this is the cherry. This is the moment. Fuck everything in sight and win the Victoria Cross.

94–98.

A barmaid, a housewife, the heiress to a publishing fortune and the girl on the desk at the Continental. Am returning to Canada for a

to Margaret. Will not miss killing and fucking at all. Will be the perfect husband.

**99.**

Margaret (at last). Throws her arms around me in front of her parents (the Eaton fortune) but in private rubs one hand over the bones of her left shoulder again and again. Doesn't know me. How can she: cheater, philanderer, ace, hero, con man. Not long on leave before return to skies: will fly again, chase Hun. May die, or war may end. Today in our apartment, Margaret runs her fingers over the delicate bones of her shoulder and tells me that I met a lot of people, and she stumbles over met and people. I fucked a lot of women. She asks me if I wouldn't rather have married Princess Marie Louise and I tell her I've met pigs I'd rather. She slaps me, but not hard. Am in love.