
Spring 1957

A Fling at Lunacy

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Recommended Citation

Hodgman, Douglas (1957) "A Fling at Lunacy," *Calliope (1954-2001)*: Vol. 4 , Article 5.
Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/calliope/vol4/iss2/5>

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name will be shouted up and down the length of the land. You have achieved immortality."

"What's my punishment in hell going to be?"

"You have already decided that. Down here, no one will ever know of you. All will scoff when you claim to have been a writer. Your fate is thus: You are condemned to an eternity of faceless anonymity. This is your hell, and it's all of your own choosing."

Useless tears coursed down my cheeks as the devil finished speaking and turned to go.

"One more question, please?"

"Of course, that's the least I can do for you."

"Whose soul did you sell me?"

"Why, I'm surprised at you. I thought you had figured that out for yourself by now. That was the soul of Edgar Allen Poe."

A Fling at Lunacy . . .

(Al, out of the spring dust, hunger and homelessness covered by veneer of youth, came to Betty's lunchroom where a memory melting span of years old Betty dozed moldy with hair, her chins steadily sinking deep between her gut glued breasts. Al's smile up welled something in her eyes like glinting water through a sheath of ice. That day, a local poet said, the moon was straddled by the sun. Many heat filled weeks the summer breathed on rippling muscles in the sand and words of love on surf, until one dawn a blackbird studded wind was full of leaves, and Al into the dust was gone.)

Down on the lonely, rain dark beach, Betty took a fling at lunacy (Don't go! Don't go!) On sand she whacked a bloody nose to feel his salty lips, and burrowed in thistles to kiss the nape of his neck (Don't go! Don't go!). She entwined herself in splintered driftwood to feel him bite into her flesh and held her ear against the earth to hear his moving body sing inside her head (Don't go! Don't go). Breathless she pounded up the beach in passion of a chase, collapsing presently knees first into the sleet burred waves sobbing, O please don't go! Don't go! not to Al but to a slender, toe-nimble Betty, skipping out so far into the Northern sea that even Al could never bring it back.

. . . Douglas Hodgman