

The Dinner

Melvin Cranfill

"Why of course I'll pass the bread, Doras. And the meat and potatoes and salad. Why, no it doesn't bother me. You're sure that's all?"

Yes, of course I'll pass her the meat and bread and potatoes. And I'll pass her the salad and the pie and the jam. In fact, I'll probably be passing her my hat before I'm through. No, of course it doesn't bother me. I've passed so much stuff now that my arms are completely worn out. So far I haven't had time even to unfold my napkin. And now, just when I am getting ready to take one nice bite of something to eat, Doras has to sit down at the table and have everything passed all over again.

Yes, the dear girl has been out in the kitchen helping ten or twenty of my little cousins get themselves fixed. Wasn't that just too awfully sweet of her? It just goes to illustrate the motherly instinct that lies within her. Heaven knows that she has plenty of material with which to illustrate her motherly instinct when she starts messing around Uncle Barry's children.

Uncle Barry has been married about fourteen years, I guess; and out of those fourteen years, he has worked about five. He's dependable, though! Very dependable! With every spring, I can depend on being told that a new "little stranger" is coming to visit Uncle Barry's. So now the dependable old boy has brought friend wife and all the little kiddies over to eat dinner with us. And so here I sit, wedged in like a sardine, between two hundred and forty pounds of Uncle Barry and two hundred and ten pounds of Grandpa.

"Why no, Uncle Barry, I don't mind your elbow. It's not in my way

one bit. I don't even notice it."

No, of course I don't mind his elbow. The good Lord knows that no one minds having two inches of bone jammed into his ribs when he's trying to eat. No, it doesn't bother me one bit! Why should he think that it bothers me to have a person jar the food off my fork just when I have almost reached my mouth with it? Why, it's a pleasure! It cultivates, within one, the art of being alert. Pugilists shadow-box to keep in shape; acrobats stick to plain calisthenics; but for a good general condition-keeper, give me a half hour of lively elbow-dodging at a crowded dinner-table. Ten minutes is really enough when this horse of an uncle of mine is doing the pitching.

"What's that, Uncle Barry? Would I like to hold little Everett? Sure, you bet I would, I'm simply nuts about kids. I guess I inherit that from Dad. Just hand the little tyke over to me. Cootchie-coo, honey. Cootchie-coo, Everett."

Yes, "cootchie-coo" you little devil. Didn't you ever hear the word before? It's a word originated to make brats like you chirp up and smile. I sit here and "cootchie-coo" until I'm black in the face; yet, you don't even bat an eye. That's it! Grab at my new fifty-cent tie with your gummy hands, and then wipe it all over my face.

But maybe I shouldn't feel like this toward you. After all, you're too little to help yourself. You were dragged into this howling mob of Indians without being consulted the least little bit. I guess you're not so bad after all. Why do you look at me like that? You look for all the world like Mark Anthony must have looked when he was planning revenge on Brut....Oh!

"Oh, that's all right, Uncle Barry. Yeah, maybe you had better take him. No, you won't either. I was just telling Mother yesterday that this old gray suit of mine should be sent to the cleaners."

"What's that, Mother? Sure, I'll dish the ice-cream. No, no help will be needed. You remember last reunion, don't you?"

Yes, I'm tickled to death for the opportunity to shovel this cement. I'd even play with snakes to escape that mob of hoodlums for a while. We ought to have a hotel for this congregation of Uncle Barry's, so

one could hear himself think. Oh, Oh! here goes that dirty old wash-cloth. And was it wet! Oh, well, what they don't know won't hurt them.

"Now is everybody served? Well I guess I'll go upstairs and get some lessons; these teachers have to be humored, you know. No, I don't think I want any ice-cream. I'm full to the top. Well, so long. I'll probably be studying when you leave. And do come over for dinner more often, won't you? We always seem to have so much fun."

Four Thoughts On Four Themes

Charles Aufderheide

I

Just now, across the street, a black cat jogged along. It stopped for a moment; silent, soft, its tail a slightly moving velvet rope. Suddenly the house opposite wasn't a house at all, but a jungle of trees; and the cat was no longer a cat, but a bundle of wild emotion—a lithe, black panther, crouching, tail twitching—. But quickly it turned and was over the fence and gone.

II

I saw a pair of young lovers sitting uncomfortably on a solid, hard wood bench. I, living on a six by six grass plot, saw young lovers in unbroken moonlight. Mentally, I saw a huge tree felled, sawed up, cut, nailed into hard park benches. With my eyes, I saw in the distance a stunted tree surrounded by an iron fence. And I saw the lovers in unbroken moonlight, sitting on a hard, wood bench, look longingly at the distant tree.

III

We have a huge bunch of paper flowers in a black wall-pocket. They are red-orange and purple-blue. Outside, there are huge bunches of real flowers, red-orange and purple-blue. They are alike, yet different. I pick a real one and it wilts. The paper one still stands bright and stiff.

IV

(From Amy Lowell's "Patterns")

Christ! What are patterns for? Lady in a garden with echoes of the cannon-boom in her ears. She steadies herself with a thin hand touched to a rose and with dry eyes stretches herself to the pattern. Turning ever so slightly she dismisses the messenger with, "See that this fellow has refreshments." With steady eyes she watches the messenger depart, while in her ears there is the continual boom of the cannon and his "So sorry, miss." Then she walks stiffly down the path of her garden, very erect, very calm. Christ! I think, what are patterns for?