

This Side of Summit, by Alan Berks

Sounds of: outdoors, horses and carriages rolling along, cold footsteps, some Model Ts. Cold footsteps and the sound of a man trying to keep warm, a man who hates the cold.

GERALD

He thinks. Cold is unkind. A god who does not love you.

(Sound of: rubbing his hands together and blowing on them.)

And that gives him a start, like a Model T engine turning over. And he thinks,

We are young, alive, and the world will warm for us. He thinks,

I'll go inside.

(Sound of: entering a party. Glasses clicking, people shuffling by and talking. In another room, dancing.)

DOORMAN

Sir? May I take your coat?

HERALD

But he is lost in thought.

DOORMAN

Your coat, Sir.

GERALD

You look familiar to me.

(beat)

Did you serve overseas in the war?

DOORMAN

Yes, sir.

GERALD

And now here you are. Isn't this world unfair, that we could do what we did over there and then come back to this? And especially how they treated you and all of your race. I know that our commanding officers told the French not to treat you as equals, even while they sent you into combat. Don't you think it's unjust?

But, maybe he didn't say that out loud because the doorman only replies, again

DOORMAN

May I take your coat, Sir? I will keep my eye on it for you, Sir.

GERALD

Doorman does not reveal what he thinks, and I do not know. He does not comment on the hole under the arm or the threadbare gloves. I say, "a, thank you. . . a, have you seen. . .?"

DOORMAN

The daughter of the house is currently gliding around the edges of the ballroom, waiting for a gravity to pull her into the dance.

(GERALD enters a crowded ballroom with the sound of: dance music playing louder.)

GERALD

He is embarrassed for them, this music, that will be forgotten in 20 years. In 100 years, they'll all be forgotten.

ANNA

Hello, Gerald.

(beat, upbeat, lilting, false)

Cat got your poor tongue? Poor poetic Gerry, our sad Summit Avenue Tomcat.

GERALD (in love)

The cold froze the words on the tip of my tongue but they tumble out now. Nearness to you heats them up.

ANNA (sincere, calmed, remembering her genuine
feelings)
Dance with me.

(music. they dance.)

GERALD
She thinks

ANNA
Is it wrong that I want to dance and see myself kissing his raw, hungry lips, tenderly, all
night.

She thinks

Now that I have the right to vote should I think about other things? Am I frivolous?
Should I never dance again? Must everything always be about progress?

(out loud.)

Let's sit for a moment.

(They stop dancing and walk to a quieter place to sit down.)

GERALD
Here?

ANNA
Here.

(MOTHER enters, with a flurry of heel clicks and dress ruffling.)

MOTHER
When you leave the dance floor, Princess, you are noticed.

ANNA
Excuse me, Mother.

MOTHER (to GERALD)

and you.

ANNA

Mother, don't tease

GERALD

i, i

MOTHER

Since the war, you've grown so thin, An icicle, drip drip dripping away.

GERALD

i

ANNA

You don't understand him.

MOTHER

o princess, you don't think I understand the appeal of a man who needs a woman desperately?

ANNA

He is remaking the world in his stories. He will change the world.

MOTHER

When we're young, we always think we'll change the world.

GERALD

And we do.

I say, out loud.

(Pause.)

You have the right to vote.

(MOTHER laughs.)

MOTHER

And not to drink.

GERALD

Don't be so dismissive. Someone sacrificed for you.

MOTHER

Sacrificed? For me? I don't need others to sacrifice for me.

GERALD

You're blind. Your whole class. This is why the labor movement is winning. What did we do overseas if not sacrifice for you and your mansions and your--

MOTHER

I didn't ask anyone to sacrifice for me, Dearie. You'll discover, as you age--And eat. You must eat, Gerald.--It's best if we don't think, if we can help it. You'll discover that the roles we play keep us from falling into the abyss.

(The music rises again.)

No time for gloominess. You are both too young and too beautiful. Dance. Forget the rest. Dance!

ANNA

Coming, Mother.

(Mother exits in a ruffle and with clicking heels.)

ANNA (to GERALD)

Do you hate me?

GERALD

Hate you?

ANNA

Yes. Sometimes I hate myself.

GERALD

I could never hate you. I hate that I only am able to think of you.

ANNA

Not even to work?

GERALD

No work. Only you.

ANNA

But you must write. You must imagine everything better.

GERALD

Come with me.

ANNA

Yes! And we will make the world new together.

THE END