

MARK MANDELL

**Diary
of a Twentieth-Century
Elizabethan Poet**

**Illustrated by
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Preface

My wife and I recently bought a house in foreclosure. It was a real mess, covered in filth and with many of the previous owners' possessions strewn around. Tucked in the corner of a closet I found what follows in the form of a stack of papers. I sent them to a publisher/editor in the hope that she would take an interest and place them in some kind of order.

I have to wonder if such a person actually existed or if this is someone's idea of a joke.

—Mark Mandell

From the Publisher

As if it's not enough that he's pestered me into publishing it, he also expects me to read it and make some sort of sense out of it? I've got a business to run here, not a freaking library. Here are his silly notes in the same order he handed them to me; he'll never know the difference. Forsooth, indeed. Amateurs . . .

—Olga Gardner Galvin

The lecture I was scheduled to attend at that juncture was zoology, a complete waste of my valuable time, being wholly unrelated to Elizabethan Poetry and found wanting time and again as a source of inspiration. Thus, I left the library, and, in high spirits, drove home to my flat to begin the process of selecting the attire in which I would sally forth to the "Pub." After much deliberation, I settled on a smoking jacket and ascot, befitting, I felt certain, the leisurely pursuits of which I was about to partake.



Having no trouble at all finding the "Pub," I smiled with glee when I took note of the Union Jack painted on the door, entered, and announced myself forthwith:

"What, ho! goodly friends! I am Percival Hogsbottom, Scribe Extraordinaire of contemporary Spenserian sonnets! Perhaps you've heard tell of my many feats of poetic dexterity?!"

This greeting, Dear Diary, was met with a silence most profound from the denizens of the dark and smoky Pub. From the jukebox, some chanteuse with whom I remain unfamil-

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iar caterwauled about being “crazy for loving you.” As mine eyes adjusted to the lack of light, I could make out several of the ruffians at the bar eyeing me suspiciously. Obviously, Dear Diary, this was not at all what I had anticipated, much less hoped for, and my new-found friends were nowhere to be found. As a simultaneous Student and Master of Elizabethan Poetry, I am, by definition, endowed with incredible intuition and a profound understanding of the inner workings of the human soul. I quickly surmised that the rogues and scalawags around me felt threatened by my presence, and decided to show them that I, too, am subject to the whims and willies that brought them here to seek out the company of others.

“Ho there, Pubkeep!” I shouted with gusto. “A cup of your finest meade!”

“Look, buddy, this ain’t Beowulf,” the pubkeep replied. “The beer list’s over there.” And then, under his breath, but still audibly: “Goddamn freak.”

“Yes, of course,” I intoned, both confused and shaken by his belligerence, “the beer list.”

Woe unto me, Dear Diary! “Woe,” and yet again “woe”! Forsaken by my new friends and belittled by the pubkeep, I felt that surely I had just begun to live out what would no doubt prove to be one of the darkest chapters of my life! I stood stock still, unable to proceed towards the locale of the beer list, yet also unable to turn and run. My mind told me the latter was the more sensible course of action:

“Run! Turn ’round and run like the wind, young bard! Run back, back to the sanctuary of thy desk and quill!” it exclaimed. And yet I could not form to move my slippered feet! Something held me as though I’d gazed into the eyes of Medusa and turndeth to stone . . .

So often, Dear Diary, we count the Fates cruel. “Ah, cruel Fate!” we are liable to exclaim, “what doth thou intend by making it so?!” Not so on this early eve, Dear Diary. For even as I stood frozen in my tracks did the haze of smoke that hung about the room part as the Red Sea before the Children of Israel with a mighty blast of the “air conditioner”! revealing unto me the vision of my Faerie Queene for the very first time . . .

Ah, but how my heart leapt from my bosom like mighty Pegasus taking flight! Her shoulder-length tresses, stringy, limp, and of a purplish-reddish hue did at once serve unto me as a sign that royal blood did course through her veins. Her sunken cheeks and delicate features, framed by this majestic coiffure, did radiate with a garish, greenish glow à la Henri-Marie-Raymond de Toulouse-Lautrec, and, coupled with the slightly pock-marked condition of her skin, did bring to mind the concave form of Selene herself on a cloudless night. To quote The Master in contemporary English:

Her angel's face
As the great eye of heaven shined bright,
And made sunshine of the shady place;
Did never mortal eye behold such heavenly grace.



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She wore the garb of a tavern wench, and, as I neared her, I could see from the identification “tag” pinned to her bosom that the Christian name of this Faerie-like creature was “Lulu,” and that the eatery at which she plied her craft bore the fanciful name, “The Clock” . . .

Our eyes met, and we held one another’s gaze for an instant. What passed between us in that instant!

“Surely,” mine eyes spoke silently. “Surely a woman—nay, a goddess—such as thee need not sit alone in an establishment such as this, among cretins and rapsallions such as these. Away with me. Away! and I shall bear thee upon my shoulders, a humble shepherd-servant, to surroundings more deserving of thine regal and deific presence.”

Ah, but my coy Queene did break off our optic connexion, and then, shaking her head slightly from left to right, did turn back towards the “bar.” In a most bizarre drinking ritual did she lick her thumb (Oh, to be that thumb!), sprinkle salt on the wetted area, then pick up a small wedge of what appeared to be some sort of green citrus, perhaps a lime, with the hand upon which she’d sprinkled the salt. In one fluid motion did she lick the salt from her hand, raise a small glass to her lips, throw her head back slightly whilst simultaneously swallowing the elixir in the glass (Oh, to be that elixir!), and bite down upon the wedge of citrus.

“Yes,” methought, “yes, my Queene. Surely one look is not enough to win a heart such as yours, smitten though I may be, with one chanceful glance from thee. Surely, surely, I must prove my worth if I am to serve thee and join the ranks of what is undoubtedly a legion of other worthy suitors determined to win thy love—or die trying!”

I took another step towards her, towards my Monarch, then froze as I had before.

“What if, young bard,” methought to meself, “what if she will not but speak to thee? Will thou have the strength to push on in thine pursuit of poetic perfection—nay, much less, to continue to draw the breath that sustains thee? Would it not be better to love her from afar? To take that which hast already been granted thee and ask no more? Hast not

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the vision of this chaste Aphrodite, this Avatar of Erato, provided thee already with inspiration fit to last a lifetime?"

And then, just then, Dear Diary, as if I had needed proof of this inspiration, did the first four lines of what would become one of my finest works appear in my head, as if conjured there by some sort of poetic alchemist:

I left my house and drove there in my car,
To a place where the air of smoke was stinking.
I looked and saw my Queene there at the bar.
She sat alone, silently adinking.

Ah, ah, Dear Diary, but the young bard is bold—bold and not easily sated! His love knows no bounds, and though he may plunge to a depth of despair and longing heretofore unheard of if he is spurned, plunge he must.

Plunge! Plunge, young bard! Plunge into the unknown . . . !