

# To Elsie

By William Carlos Williams

The pure products of America  
go crazy—  
mountain folk from Kentucky

or the ribbed north end of  
Jersey  
with its isolate lakes and

valleys, its deaf-mutes, thieves  
old names  
and promiscuity between

devil-may-care men who have taken  
to railroading  
out of sheer lust of adventure—

and young slatterns, bathed  
in filth  
from Monday to Saturday

to be tricked out that night  
with gauds  
from imaginations which have no

peasant traditions to give them  
character  
but flutter and flaunt

sheer rags—succumbing without  
emotion  
save numbed terror

under some hedge of choke-cherry  
or viburnum—  
which they cannot express—

Unless it be that marriage  
perhaps  
with a dash of Indian blood

will throw up a girl so desolate  
so hemmed round  
with disease or murder

that she'll be rescued by an  
agent—  
reared by the state and

sent out at fifteen to work in  
some hard-pressed  
house in the suburbs—

some doctor's family, some Elsie—  
voluptuous water  
expressing with broken

brain the truth about us—  
her great  
ungainly hips and flopping breasts

addressed to cheap  
jewelry  
and rich young men with fine eyes

as if the earth under our feet  
were  
an excrement of some sky

and we degraded prisoners  
destined  
to hunger until we eat filth

while the imagination strains  
after deer  
going by fields of goldenrod in

the stifling heat of September  
Somehow  
it seems to destroy us

It is only in isolate flecks that  
something  
is given off

No one  
to witness  
and adjust, no one to drive the car

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