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Nicholas Moore

THE ORANGE BED

edited by Peter Riley

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## THE ORANGE BED

In the orange bed Miss Ollipester lies,  
Indolent and fat, a book within her hand;  
And by the bedside lies an apple, rare  
In green and red freshness; the curtains drawn;  
A shaded lamp above the bed; an air  
Of ease and lassitude, of warmth and compromise  
Not difficult to understand.

Outside those fat windows the glib moon shines  
In adoration and the lovers move  
Secretly to nefarious purposes.  
Miss Ollipester hears the distant squeak  
Of shoes or tongues, rustle of dress or kisses,  
The unforgiving giggles of the weak,  
Crazy with viciousness of love.

She turns the page: Mr. Detective Fax  
Follows the idiosyncrasies of crime,  
Skilfully, with his fingers on the facts,  
Lean, indolent, and knowing all the time  
How each clue leads to the indefinite end:  
And now Miss Ollipester dies with fear,  
Alone and mad, with no friend.

Page follows page until the air is still  
With an unease suggestive of despair.  
Outside the room a shrill, high laugh, a curse:  
Inside the room the cool, lamp-gentle air.  
Mr. Detective Fax, his final clue  
Picked up, hovers beside the windowsill,  
Not knowing what to do.

He fingers the rosy apple by the bed;  
Decides to eat it, falters, takes the book  
In one lean, anxious hand, and turns the page.  
He is amazed to find how the plot palls.  
Following with his mind each lover's look,  
He knows now that the dark conceals a rage  
More fierce, more sinister, more false.

## THE ORANGE BED

Outside the errant window weeps the yew,  
And in the rosebed dancing, classic nymphs  
Perform in their romantic pas de deux.  
And odour fills the night of hyacinths,  
And on the plinths of lawn tread rosy feet,  
Wet with the dew and washed with meadow-sweet:  
    The box-trees stand in rows.

Meanwhile there is a book beside the bed,  
A box of chocolate creams, and one red apple;  
The fat woman stretches, leaves the book half-read,  
And fills her mind with memories of people,  
As one soft hand creeps slowly toward the box  
And picks a new chocolate. Clematis knocks  
    Gently against the windows.

The bed is orange and the room is full  
Of perfumes; now at least the world resumes  
Its formal shapes. She reads again, the dull  
Triumph of murder, corpses in locked rooms.  
Outside she hears the whistle in the dark,  
Scuffle and cuff of lovers in the park,  
    Of which she disapproves.

The night is over and the day extends  
Into another day. Taking the pistol  
From the stiff hand, Detective Fax pretends  
He has left the story-book and the gypsy's crystal;  
He notes the apple on the bedside chair,  
The unfinished book, the chocolate waiting there  
    For the hand that moves and removes.

Mr Detective Fax is lean and bored  
With waiting; lifts the apple to his mouth;  
Thinks better of it; takes the book, that stored  
Hive of crime; remembers his bitter youth:  
Meanwhile outside the lovers pass again,  
With other honey, careless of all pain,  
    Or the crime between their loves.

The box-trees stand like gnomes against the moon,  
Tough little trees in twisted shapes. Presumed  
Suicide, of unsound mind. And soon  
The orange bed will be again illumed  
By the light of amorous revels: and the dead  
Be all forgotten, the detective story unread,  
And flesh be the fishes and loaves.

## THE ORANGE BED

More orange than the winter sun  
And more imaginative than the moon,  
Miss Ollipester in her orange bed,  
Wrapped in her orange night-gown, dreams away  
The days of orange murder, and enjoys  
Fates worse than death.

Outside she hears the girls and boys  
A-whisper in the icy dark, and sighs;  
Once in an orange spring she too had read  
Romances and had mooned whole weeks away  
With baited breath.

But now the orange on the plate  
Speaks of far islands of more tropic heat;  
Age has more murderous furs instead;  
And lies beneath

Comforting orange coverlets,  
Lit with the glow of luxury. Time whets  
Its taste for death.

## THE ORANGE BED

The lovers walk so quietly under the elms,  
Aware of the nothingness that haunts their love  
And the thin reality of the moonlit air,  
That they do not see the detective leaning there  
In the shade of the box-trees or spot the diving bats  
Who hurl themselves round the eaves like acrobats.  
The detective is sad as he watches the window above,  
    And tired beyond caring.

The lovers talk so quietly she cannot hear  
From their chitterings what truths they have to tell;  
The fluttering bats flash darkly across the moon,  
As it starts to shine on her orange bed, where soon  
She'll be lost in strange realms of murder and remorse,  
And the ancient story will follow its old, old course  
Till life itself sighs out on a syllable;  
    While lovers are spooning

Out in the secret night, where their feverish palms  
Grow sticky as though with sweets, and the bats decide  
To hang upside down in the dark. For night is come.  
Nothing, the brother to night, booms like a drum  
In the ears of the silent Watcher. For now he knows  
That a nothingness he could only barely suppose  
Is actually happening, that Death is beginning to ride,  
    And his heart is thrumming.

It throbs with a subtle mixture of hope and fear;  
Hope of reward and fame; fear of the nothing  
He doesn't know except as another's loss.  
He watches the lovers silently walk across  
The pools of moonlight, and disappear in the dark  
As life itself might disappear in the stark  
Light of reality, and he feels a great loathing  
    For Time and its tossing

Of disparate facts together. To calm the drear  
Nothingness of things he thinks of the wry  
Contortions of acrobats and the squeals of bats,  
The high squeak of moonlight, heads hiding under hats,  
The criminal features of lovers or thugs concealed;  
And he doesn't know what murder will be revealed  
Nor whether the lady herself or her hopes will die.

He stands there, debating;

Then turns on his heel and departs for dearer realms where  
Nothing will happen that isn't prescribed in the book.  
Miss Olley turns the page, and picks out a chocolate,  
Safe in her aura of orange, not knowing her fate,  
As she hears a rustle out there in the undergrowth.  
Lovers, she thinks, and settles back lazy, and loth  
To take – as she ought – the most imperceptible look  
At Death where he's waited.



## THE ORANGE BED

Obstinate in the dark new lovers quote  
Old moonlight adages. Inside the bed,  
Orange, reflects the orange of the sun.

Outside, his head in the clouds, Detective Fax  
Strides in the moon's sight like a ghost who goes  
Immeasurably quicker after his fellows.

The lovers pause between their dark-set acts.  
The orange bed holds in its warm embrace  
A glowing body clothed in orange of

Imagination. The detective's face  
Bears a wan smile. He pauses, takes a note,  
Licks at his pencil, scratches at his head,

Considers criminals as though with love.  
With love Miss Ollipester too considers  
Criminals and their crimes, and with distaste

Hears how the lovers sigh at what they've done  
And glide away with pejorative haste,  
Leaving her in the doubtful life that's hers

To see death shooting starkly through the door,  
Detective Fax following as before,  
Notebook in hand, and orange suns no more.

## NOCTURNE

The lovers walk in their conceits  
Under the icy wings of death,  
Feeding themselves on their own sweets  
Like phoenixes. Alas! Time whets  
The appetite of those who look,  
Detective-like, for story-book  
Solutions to their dreadful tales.  
Detective Fax who never fails  
Leans on the darkling elms, and sighs  
To see them pass so perfectly  
In ignorance of where they go.  
He watches where the woman lies  
Behind her windows on her bed,  
Whose curtains are as white as snow  
Lit by the moonlight overhead.  
Detective Fax who cannot see  
More than a finger's-length away  
Knows that she turns the page, and finds  
Excitement in her dreams of sleuths  
More golden than the sun of day.  
Her orange bed is full of truths  
About dark gangsters with their minds  
Bent on the trivial acts of death.  
He waits for his expected call,  
But cannot reconcile his eyes  
To that strange enemy, whose all  
Is the giving and taking of our breath.

## NIGHT-PIECE

In search of facts, not wayward moons  
Or orange suns,  
Mr. Detective Fax stands by the rows  
Of darkling yews.

In her luxuriant orange bed  
Miss Ollie lies,  
Dreaming of murderers and dead,  
Unhappy eyes.

Victims lie everywhere, their breath  
Quite stilled by death.  
Detectives look for telling clues,  
But find no news,

Except of lovers in the park,  
Who sadly lurk  
Tingling at the romantic moon,  
Leaving no sign

Except the sibilance of leaves.  
Miss Ollie grieves  
For them and for their fragile hopes.  
The Watcher steps

Out from the shadows of her book  
And at his look  
She screams and faints. Detective Fax  
Runs in and knocks

The novel off the orange bed.  
It falls and bangs  
The floor and poor Miss Ollie's died  
From frightening things.

## THE ORANGE BED

The appearance of a classic afternoon,  
Of an apple on the plate, the bed laid  
With an orange cover, the indolent eye  
Running over the lines of the figure  
Reclined upon that bed, bright orange,  
Reading of Mr. Detective Fax.

The starry evening is betrayed  
By talk of lovers, the susurrations  
Of whispers in the dark, and the form  
On that bed, that bed of orange,  
Turns from a preoccupation with  
Mr. Detective Fax to matters of horror.

Early in the morning by the orange bed  
Detective Fax stands, lean, immaculate,  
And takes the pistol from the twisted hand.  
He yawns; removes the apple from the plate,  
And starts to chew, thinks better of it; turns  
The lamp-shade towards the ever-sleeping face.

The morning gleams with orange sun.  
Time turns the clock and hurries  
Through the day: at night, the curtains drawn,  
The sibilance of lovers' tongues  
Disturbs Mr. Detective Fax,  
Reminds him of the apple eaten.

And, while the gods in arguable postures  
Go through their superhuman loves,  
The lovers speak about the night;  
Fingers search; find; range; destroy.  
The classic beauty of Her face  
Lights up the night for every golden boy.

## THE ORANGE BED

Chocolate of rose, chocolate of violet  
Finds each its way to that down-curving mouth;  
    A soft white hand hangs down  
Over the dropping book, the tired eyes close  
On thoughts of murder and wild dreams of youth;  
Mr. Detective Fax rides through the town;  
    The box falls on the carpet,

Spreading a litter of chocolates, paper, and gold  
Wrappings over the flowers and the curlicues.  
    The woman sleeps like dead,  
Like the dead she's been reading of, and you'd suppose  
That the lean detective himself in his velvet shoes  
Was creeping up the stairs with some clue in his head,  
    As the night grew colder.

Outside the voices of the retinue  
Of the great god Amor swathe their whisperings  
    In dark moonsilver, turn  
Each love to each, as happy as a rose,  
Without a thought of murder or the things  
That motivate the sleeper's thought, and burn  
    In perpetual renewal,

Each time one dream ends entering another,  
Until she wakes to find the gunman there,  
    The gun at hand; and cries,  
Her screeches echoing the noises close  
Beside the house of huddled lovers where  
The goddess Moon blesses the squeaks and sighs  
    With her limpid mothering.

Mr Detective Fax turns at the gate, as its hinges  
Squeal, and he enters the room, and treads on the carpet.  
    Chocolates are everywhere,  
And the sweet perfumes of luxury dispose  
Ironic fragrances. He finds as yet  
That it's difficult to pinpoint such a bare  
    Crime in an atmosphere so dingy.

His hand moves to an orange by the bed,  
As deeply orange as its eiderdown;  
    Sucks it, and contemplates  
The greying silver of the moonlight's shadows,  
All gods and goddesses of night laid down  
To rest. He turns. He holds some felon's fate  
    Between his hands; squeezes; and knows already.

## VERSIONS OF FACT

### I

Taking a few facts, spread out on the bed,  
The keen detective hovers like a fly  
Over his serial and swift perceptions,  
Making a plot of something in his head,  
The book, the open page, the apple by  
The bedside. If he eats it, with a sigh  
He'll note his misdemeanour, eating clues  
Not being part of his duties, nor deceptions  
So sweet as these. He needs the night outside  
With its flattering lovers and impossible moon  
To keep the buzzings of his heart in tune  
With the heady professionalism of his pride.

### II

The lovers see a sad car as they pass,  
Perturbed as loons by sifflings of the wind  
And the moon's cold eye and its proliferations  
Of maddening thoughts. They lie here on the grass,  
All wet with dew. Their voices rise, and find  
An answering echo from the batty, blind  
And undiscoverable night, whose use  
Is theirs and the detective's, but whose passions  
Are darker and more devious and less known.  
Mr. Detective Fax can hear them move  
In their divine, discoverable love,  
And for a moment feels their world his own.

### III

The crimes alas! are less discernible.  
The actions of the lonely and the mad  
Provide only a dotty dislocation  
Of normal thought. They never ring the bell,  
But creep like aliens round the orbs of sad  
Detachable stars, neither the good nor bad,  
But just the nothing. And this is what the obtuse

Minds of detectives, lovers, seek relation  
For, bend to, and try to emulate,  
Seeking the answers that the mad have found  
Already, lying helpless on the ground,  
Or buzzing inwardly with thoughts of fate.

#### IV

The lady heard the lovers as she lay,  
Douce and delightful, murmuring in the dark  
Among the leaves of night, and thought of action,  
Inactive there herself, but full of gay  
Deceptive thoughts. She lay as in an arc  
Of the moon's light, and felt her nerves cry Hark!  
To the lazy sounds of delight that carried news  
Through the whispering night of distant satisfaction.  
And the distance became the present. The absurd  
Detective story dropped from her lifeless hand,  
As she understood in a flash what the hero had planned  
And the meaning of every slowly discernible word.

#### V

But life in fact continues. Lovers go  
Back home to warmer beds. Detectives glean  
New information. Time is the serial,  
and Time itself is telling its story. Slow  
Or quick, the steady footsteps pace the mean  
Or moonlit streets where all detectives lean  
Gaunt in the shadows, and where facts refuse  
To fit the situation, and material  
Clues still elude the Watcher where he stands,  
Or the hurrying lovers, saying good-bye and good-bye.  
Only the one herself will know how to die,  
And what book to drop from her ever-despairing hands.



## EDITOR'S NOTE

These texts have been assembled from typescripts and holographs found among Moore's papers, supported by two published sources. They were probably not conceived by the poet as a distinct sequence or group of poems, and he never gave the work a title. What we have is more like ten attempts to write the same poem, or ten independent poems all involved in the same story, of Miss Ollipester who is murdered in her orange bed by a detective novel, and Mr Detective Fax who arrives too late and eats an apple. The contexts in which they were found and the character of the typing and holograph suggest a date in the latter half of the 1940s for all of them except the last.

The starting point was the first poem, "In the orange bed Miss Ollipester lies...", which was published in 1945. Probably not very long after this Moore wrote "Outside the errant window weeps the yew...". He added to the typescript a hand-written note pointing out that this is a completely different poem from its predecessor.

The next six poems (The Orange Bed x 3 + Nocturne, Night-piece + another The Orange Bed) were found together in the order in which they are printed. The second had a hand-written note under it defining it as a re-writing of "In the orange bed Miss Ollipester lies...". Only three of the six exist as uncorrected typescripts signed by Moore, which was how he usually indicated a final text.

"Chocolate of rose, chocolate of violet..." was discovered separately among the papers, and it is pure conjecture to insert it among the others at this particular point, except that it probably precedes the last poem in date.

The final poem, Versions of Fact, was published in 1968 and on one of Moore's lists of his own poems it is dated 1967. The continuity of substance and manner from the earlier poems is noteworthy in view of the fact that Moore suffered a lapse in his career by which he wrote almost nothing between 1950 and 1967.

## TEXTUAL NOTES

The Orange Bed. "In the orange bed Miss Ollipester lies..."

Published *Poetry (Chicago)* LXVI, September 1945

Typescript, identical to printed text.

The Orange Bed. "Outside the errant window weeps the yew..."

Two typescripts, identical, one signed and with a holograph note (see above)

The Orange Bed. "More orange than the winter sun..."

Typescript. Final section scored through and an ending added in virtually illegible holograph.

Before amendment the typescript continued from the fourth stanza as follows:

Comforting orange coverlets,  
Lit with the glow of luxury. Time whets  
The appetite for lives detectives led  
In search of facts, not wayward moons  
Or orange suns.

Yet, when the lean detective finally comes  
Who's there to welcome him? Miss Ollipester  
Herself lies silent dumbly contemplating  
Not lovers in the park, but her own death,  
And, if a heart is beating,  
At all it is the harsh heart of the realist,  
Mr. Detective Fax who finds his clues  
In this or that, in chocolate or apple;  
Who never has a mind to look at people,  
Only at death itself. And if she's kissed  
In death by anything it's only moonlight  
Fresh from the lovers' breath;

Where in the heather the detective bends  
To find not luck, but the laces of his shoes,  
And these he ties, tying up all loose ends,  
Leaving the girls and boys to face their night  
And the orange sun of morn to rise and light  
Small wicks of faith.

The last line of this earlier version was achieved by cancelling first 'Some icy faith' and then 'Its wicks of faith'

The last line of the final version, 'Its taste for death', is a conjectural reading from a rough holograph intervention. The first word could be 'This', the second word could be almost anything, including 'knife', the third word consists only of a downward stroke with a forward tail attached, and could among many other things be 'of'.

In the margin opposite 'In search of facts...' are two lines in holograph, the second indented, which may read something like :

Dream[s] up Detective Fax and [?lets]  
[?Out] [ ] but [?breath/?truth]

The subject of this sentence is presumably 'Time'.

The Orange Bed. "The lovers walk so quietly under the elms..."

Two typescripts, the first with holograph amendments, the second with a holograph note, crossed out.

The following readings are found in the earlier typescript, all changed by pen to the later:

*Title* THE ORANGE BED AND THE ACROBATS

2/2 truths / truth

3/3 *originally* dark *changed to* loft

3/5 Watcher / watcher

4/1 throbs / thrums

4/8 Time / thought

5/2 wry / dry

5/3 squeals / pitch

what murder / which murder

6/1 dearer *inserted*

6/2 prescribed / *originally* there *then* described

6/3 Miss Olley / The woman

6/5 out there *inserted*

*last line* At Death out there waiting.

The Orange Bed. "Obstinate in the dark new lovers quote..."

Two typescripts, the second signed.

The following readings occur in the earlier typescript, mostly corrected to the later:

2/3 quickly / quietly

3/1 dark-set / meaning

5/3 crimes / acts

6/1 the lovers / ghost lovers

6/3 doubtful / *originally* feeble *then* waning

7/1 shooting / shoot her

7/3 suns / sun

Nocturne

Typescript, signed, and earlier holograph with identical text.

Night-piece

Typescript, amended at the ending, and earlier holograph.

Before amendment the typescript ended:

The floor and / The floorboards –

From frightening / By frightening

Readings in the earlier holograph text:

5/4 Watcher / watcher

7/3 The floor and / *as final version of corrected typescript*

The Orange Bed. "The appearance of a classic afternoon..."  
Typescript.

The Orange Bed. "Chocolate of rose, chocolate of violet..."  
Two typescripts, one signed.

Readings in the first typescript:

4/1 ends / ends,  
4/6 Moon / moon  
5/4 luxury dispose / luxury. [And yet] dispose

Versions of Fact.

Published in *Outposts* no.76, 1968

Signed typescript, identical to printed text except that the stanzas are numbered in the typescript only.

THE TRIP. Orange Bed. 4 years ago4 years ago. thetrip.Â Current track: Orange BedOrange Bed. Like. Drop your files here. Bed. Comforters. King Comforters.Â Visit our shop to see all the amazing products. Best sellers. Best sellers.