

Manikin And Minikin

BY ALFRED KREYMBORG
(A BISQUE-PLAY)

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ALFRED KREYMBORG

Alfred Kreymborg, one of the foremost advocates of free-verse rhythmical drama, was born in New York City, 1883. He founded and edited *The Globe* while it was in existence; and under its auspices issued the first anthology of imagist verse (Ezra Pound's Collection, 1914). In July, 1915, he founded *Others, a Magazine of the New Verse*, and *The Other Players* in March, 1918, an organization devoted exclusively to American plays in poetic form. At present Mr. Kreymborg is in Italy, launching a new international magazine, *The Broom*.

Mr. Kreymborg has been active in both poetry and drama. He has edited several anthologies of free verse, and has published his own free verse as *Mushrooms* and *The Blood of Things*. His volume of plays, all in free rhythmical verse, is *Plays for Poem--Mimes*. The most popular plays in this volume are *Lima Beans*, and *Manikin and Minikin*.

Manikin and Minikin aptly exemplifies Mr. Kreymborg's idea of rhythmical, pantomimic drama. It is a semi-puppet play in which there are dancing automatons to an accompaniment of rhythmic lines in place of music. Mr. Kreymborg is a skilled musician and he composes his lines with musical rhythm in mind. His lines should be read accordingly.

MANIKIN AND MINIKIN

(A BISQUE-PLAY)

Seen through an oval frame, one of the walls of a parlor. The wall-paper is a conventionalized pattern. Only the shelf of the mantelpiece shows. At each end, seated on pedestals turned slightly away from one another, two aristocratic bisque figures, a boy in delicate cerise and a girl in cornflower blue. Their shadows join in a grotesque silhouette. In the centre, an ancient clock whose tick acts as the metronome for the sound of their high voices. Presently the mouths of the figures open and shut, after the mode of ordinary conversation.

SHE. Manikin!

HE. Minikin?

SHE. That fool of a servant has done it again.

HE. I should say, she's more than a fool.

SHE. A meddlesome busybody----

HE. A brittle-fingered noddy!

SHE. Which way are you looking? What do you see?

HE. The everlasting armchair, the everlasting tiger-skin, the everlasting yellow, green, and purple books, the everlasting portrait of milord----

SHE. Oh, these Yankees!--And I see the everlasting rattan rocker, the everlasting samovar, the everlasting noisy piano, the everlasting portrait of milady----

HE. Simpering spectacle!

SHE. What does she want, always dusting?

HE. I should say--that is, I'd consider the thought----

SHE. You'd consider a lie--oh, Manikin--you're trying to defend her!

HE. I'm not defending her----

SHE. You're trying to----

HE. I'm not trying to----

SHE. Then, what are you trying to----

HE. Well, I'd venture to say, if she'd only stay away some morning----

SHE. That's what I say in my dreams!

HE. She and her broom----

SHE. Her everlasting broom----

HE. She wouldn't be sweeping----

SHE. Every corner, every cranny, every crevice----

HE. And the dust wouldn't move----

SHE. Wouldn't crawl, wouldn't rise, wouldn't fly----

HE. And cover us all over----

SHE. Like a spider-web--ugh!

HE. Everlasting dust has been most of our life----

SHE. Everlasting years and years of dust!

HE. You on your lovely blue gown----

SHE. And you on your manly pink cloak.

HE. If she didn't sweep, we wouldn't need dusting----

SHE. Nor need taking down, I should say----

HE. With her stupid, clumsy hands----

SHE. Her crooked, monkey paws----

HE. And we wouldn't need putting back----

SHE. I with my back to you----

HE. I with my back to you.

SHE. It's been hours, days, weeks---- by the sound of that everlasting clock---- and the coming of day and the going of day---- since I saw you last!

HE. What's the use of the sun with its butterfly wings of light-- what's the use of a sun made to see by-- if I can't see you!

SHE. Manikin!

HE. Minikin?

SHE. Say that again!

HE. Why should I say it again--don't you know?

SHE. I know, but sometimes I doubt----

HE. Why do you, what do you doubt?

SHE. Please say it again!

HE. What's the use of a sun----

SHE. What's the use of a sun?

HE. That was made to see by----

SHE. That was made to see by?

HE. If I can't see you!

SHE. Oh, Manikin!

HE. Minikin?

SHE. If you hadn't said that again, my doubt would have filled a balloon.

HE. Your doubt--which doubt, what doubt?

SHE. And although I can't move, although I can't move unless somebody shoves me, one of these days when the sun isn't here, I would have slipped over the edge of this everlasting shelf----

HE. Minikin!

SHE. And fallen to that everlasting floor into so many fragments, they'd never paste Minikin together again!

HE. Minikin, Minikin!

SHE. They'd have to set another here--some Minikin, I'm assured!

HE. Why do you chatter so, prattle so?

SHE. Because of my doubt--because I'm as positive as I am that I sit here with my knees in a knot--that that human creature--loves you.

HE. Loves me?

SHE. And you her!

HE. Minikin!

SHE. When she takes us down she holds you much longer.

HE. Minikin!

SHE. I'm sufficiently feminine--and certainly old enough--I and my hundred and seventy years--I can see, I can feel by her manner of

touching me and her flicking me with her mop--the creature hates me--she'd like to drop me, that's what she would!

HE. Minikin!

SHE. Don't you venture defending her! Booby--you don't know live women! When I'm in the right position I can note how she fondles you, pets you like a parrot with her finger-tip, blows a pinch of dust from your eye with her softest breath, holds you off at arm's length and fixes you with her spider look, actually holds you against her cheek--her rose-tinted cheek--before she releases you! If she didn't turn us apart so often, I wouldn't charge her with insinuation; but now I know she loves you--she's as jealous as I am--and poor dead me in her live power! Manikin?

HE. Minikin?

SHE. If you could see me--the way you see her----

HE. But I see you--see you always--see only you!

SHE. If you could see me the way you see her, you'd still love me, you'd love me the way you do her! Who made me what I am? Who dreamed me in motionless clay?

HE. Minikin?

SHE. Manikin?

HE. Will you listen to me?

SHE. No!

HE. Will you listen to me?

SHE. No.

HE. Will you listen to me?

SHE. Yes.

HE. I love you----

SHE. No!

HE. I've always loved you----

SHE. No.

HE. You doubt that?

SHE. Yes!

HE. You doubt that?

SHE. Yes.

HE. You doubt that?

SHE. No. You've always loved me--yes--but you don't love me now--no--not since that rose-face encountered your glance--no.

HE. Minikin!

SHE. If I could move about the way she can-- if I had feet-- dainty white feet which could twinkle and twirl-- I'd dance you so prettily you'd think me a sun butterfly-- if I could let down my hair and prove you it's longer than larch hair-- if I could raise my black brows or shrug my narrow shoulders, like a queen or a countess-- if I could turn my head, tilt my head, this way and that, like a swan-- ogle my eyes, like a peacock, till you'd marvel, they're green, nay, violet, nay, yellow, nay, gold-- if I could move, only move just the moment of an inch-- you would see what I could be! It's a change, it's a change, you men ask of women!

HE. A change?

SHE. You're eye-sick, heart-sick of seeing the same foolish porcelain thing, a hundred years old, a hundred and fifty, and sixty, and seventy-- I don't know how old I am!

HE. Not an exhalation older than I--not an inhalation younger!
Minikin?

SHE. Manikin?

HE. Will you listen to me?

SHE. No!

HE. Will you listen to me?

SHE. No!

HE. Will you listen to me?

SHE. Yes.

HE. I don't love that creature----

SHE. You do.

HE. I can't love that creature----

SHE. You can.

HE. Will you listen to me?

SHE. Yes-- if you'll tell me-- if you'll prove me-- so my last particle of
dust-- the tiniest speck of a molecule-- the merest electron----

HE. Are you listening?

SHE. Yes!

HE. To begin with-- I dislike, suspect, deplore-- I had best say, feel
compassion for what is called humanity-- or the animate, as opposed
to the inanimate----

SHE. You say that so wisely-- you're such a philosopher-- say it again!

HE. That which is able to move can never be steadfast, you understand? Let us consider the creature at hand to whom you have referred with an undue excess of admiration adulterated with an undue excess of envy----

SHE. Say that again!

HE. To begin with-- I can only see part of her at once. She moves into my vision; she moves out of my vision; she is doomed to be wayward.

SHE. Yes, but that which you see of her----

HE. Is ugly, commonplace, unsightly. Her face a rose-face? It's veined with blood and the skin of it wrinkles-- her eyes are ever so near to a hen's-- her movements, if one would pay such a gait with regard-- her gait is unspeakably ungainly-- her hair----

SHE. Her hair?

HE. Luckily I've never seen it down-- I dare say it comes down in the dark, when it looks, most assuredly, like tangled weeds.

SHE. Again, Manikin, that dulcet phrase!

HE. Even were she beautiful, she were never so beautiful as thou!

SHE. Now you're a poet, Manikin!

HE. Even were she so beautiful as thou--lending her your eyes, and the exquisite head which holds them--like a cup two last beads of wine, like a stone two last drops of rain, green, nay, violet, nay, yellow, nay, gold----

SHE. Faster, Manikin!

HE. I can't, Minikin! Words were never given to man to phrase such a one as you are-- inanimate symbols can never embrace, embody, hold the animate dream that you are-- I must cease.

SHE. Manikin!

HE. And even were she so beautiful as thou, she couldn't stay beautiful.

SHE. Stay beautiful?

HE. Humans change with each going moment. That is a gray-haired platitude. Just as I can see that creature only when she touches my vision, so I could only see her once, were she beautiful-- at best, twice or thrice-- you're more precious than when you came!

SHE. And you!

HE. Human pathos penetrates still deeper when one determines their inner life, as we've pondered their outer. Their inner changes far more desperately.

SHE. How so, wise Manikin?

HE. They have what philosophy terms moods, and moods are more pervious to modulation than pools to idle breezes. These people may say, to begin with-- I love you. This may be true, I'm assured-- as true as when *we* say, I love you. But they can only say, I love you, so long as the mood breathes, so long as the breezes blow, so long as water remains wet. They are honest-- they mean what they say-- passionately, tenaciously, tragically-- but when the mood languishes, they have to say, if it be they are honest-- I do not love you. Or they have to say, I love you, to somebody else.

SHE. To somebody else?

HE. Now, you and I-- we've said that to each other-- we've had to say it for a hundred and seventy years-- and we'll have to say it always.

SHE. Say always again!

HE. The life of an animate--

SHE. Say always again!

HE. Always! The life of an animate is a procession of deaths with but a secret sorrowing candle, guttering lower and lower, on the path to the grave-- the life of an inanimate is as serenely enduring-- as all still things are.

SHE. Still things?

HE. Recall our childhood in the English museum-- ere we were moved, from place to place, to this dreadful Yankee salon-- do you remember that little old Greek tanagra of the girl with a head like a bud-- that little old Roman medallion of the girl with a head like a----

SHE. Manikin, Manikin-- were they so beautiful as I-- did you love them, too-- why do you bring them back?

HE. They were not so beautiful as thou-- I spoke of them-- recalled, designated them-- well, because they were ages old-- and--and----

SHE. And--and?

HE. And we might live as long as they-- as they did and do! I hinted their existence because they're not so beautiful as thou, so that by contrast and deduction----

SHE. And deduction?

HE. You know what I'd say----

SHE. But say it again!

HE. I love you.

SHE. Manikin?

HE. Minikin?

SHE. Then even though that creature has turned us apart, can you see me?

HE. I can see you.

SHE. Even though you haven't seen me for hours, days, weeks-- with your dear blue eyes-- you can see me-- with your hidden ones?

HE. I can see you.

SHE. Even though you are still, and calm, and smooth, and lovely outside-- you aren't still and calm and smooth and lovely inside?

HE. Lovely, yes--but not still and calm and smooth!

SHE. Which way are you looking? What do you see?

HE. I look at you. I see you.

SHE. And if that fool of a servant--oh, Manikin--suppose she should break the future--our great, happy centuries ahead--by dropping me, throwing me down?

HE. I should take an immediate step off this everlasting shelf--

SHE. But you cannot move!

HE. The good wind would give me a blow!

SHE. Now you're a punster! And what would your fragments do?

HE. They would do what Manikin did.

SHE. Say that again!

HE. They'd do what Manikin did....

SHE. Manikin?

HE. Minikin?

SHE. Shall I tell you something?

HE. Tell me something.

SHE. Are you listening?

HE. With my inner ears.

SHE. I wasn't jealous of that woman----

HE. You weren't jealous?

SHE. I wanted to hear you talk----

HE. You wanted to hear me talk?

SHE. You talk so wonderfully!

HE. Do I, indeed? What a booby I am!

SHE. And I wanted to hear you say----

HE. You cheat, you idler, you----

SHE. Woman----

HE. Dissembler!

SHE. Manikin?

HE. Minikin?

SHE. Everlastingly?

HE. Everlastingly.

SHE. Say it again!

HE. I refuse----

SHE. You refuse?

HE. Well----

SHE. Well?

HE. You have ears outside your head--I'll say that for you--but they'll never hear--what your other ears hear!

SHE. Say it--down one of the ears--outside my head?

HE. I refuse.

SHE. You refuse?

HE. Leave me alone.

SHE. Manikin?

HE. I can't say it!

SHE. Manikin!

[The clock goes on ticking for a moment. Its mellow chimes strike the hour.]

CURTAIN