

THE ORIGINAL ENDING OF *LOLLY WILLOWES* Sylvia Townsend Warner

In the 1970s Sylvia Townsend Warner copied out in longhand the original ending of Lolly Willowes on two sheets of notepaper for the American writer and academic Garold Sharpe. It reads:

There might be some questions that even the Devil could not answer. She turned her eyes to him with their question.

He pulled out his watch, and then began to speak in a kind but business-like voice.

“In a few minutes, Laura, you will leave this hill-top and get into the bus. You will then begin another life. The bus will be hot, crowded, and dusty. In fact it will be rather like hell. When you reach Barleighs you will get out of the bus and begin another life of walking home through the fields. It will be cool, sweet-smelling, and peaceful. You will listen to the trees and look up without disquiet at the stars. Your thoughts will be slow and loving and it will be rather like heaven. You will arrive at Great Mop. What will you do then?”

Laura had listened with all her heart. Now she answered, obediently and carefully, like a child.

“I shall have supper, and talk to Mrs Leak if she’s still up. And then I shall think a little longer, and then go to bed.”

Satan had risen to his feet. He picked up the flag basket and the shears, and made ready to go.

“Is it time?” asked Laura. He nodded and smiled.

She got up in her turn, and began to shake the dust off her skirt. Then she prodded a hole for the bag which had held the pears, and buried it tidily, smoothing the earth over the hole. This took a little time to do, and when she looked round for Satan, to say Goodbye, he was out of sight.

The original ending.

She got up in her turn, and began to shake the dust off her skirt. Then she prodded a hole for the bag which held the pears, and buried it tidily, smoothing the earth over the hole. This took a little time to do, and when she looked round for Satan, to say Goodbye, he was out of sight.