

Strained Relations

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I. Peckham Cemetery

The god of the sun and the god of the west wind both loved,
Both treasured, adored, the handsome young Spartan prince.
Yet in a fit of jealousy, the god of the Spring, the husband of Cloris,
Slew, killing the very being he worshipped.
The decedent body of this youth of extraordinary beauty,
Lies, limp and lifeless, against the wall of the chapel in Peckham.
Oh, Apollon, stricken with grief,
Drowning in sorrow, longing for the deceased loved one,
Honours the boy's death,
Transmuting the departed youth into wreaths of funeral flowers,
Blossoms of the most unspeakable splendour,
And there amongst the funeral floral tributes are messages:
Amongst the declarations of sympathy,
And proclamations of prayers,
And assertions of deep sadness,
A note from two brothers to a grandfather,
That he will always be in their *foughts*.

The second-hand car dealer, the road sweeper,
The North London branch of the family, the innkeeper,
At a funeral of unflattering realism,
Devoid of the great and the divine,
Absent of any pretension, ostentation,
He was no king, saint, hero, eminent citizen,
Thus, no design, no opine for sentimental rhetoric.
One would think that at this point,
The point at which the soul departed,
Ascending to the heavens,
This moment of transcendence,
That the bells would toll,
Flights of angels would sing him to his rest,
That the sky would weep,
The sun would pierce the grey Gothic gloom with a shard of light,
Shine a spotlight on the open grave.
In the stillness of this sacred place,
The last grain of sand in the hourglass,

Drawn by gravity, fell.
The passage of time,
That God had granted had ran out,
Thus, a promise to destiny kept.

The hat gently dropped down into the grave,
Handful of dirt on the casket,
His body returned to where it came from:
The earth in this consecrated ground,
His being to Aether's bound.
The shell returned to live among the insects of the underground,
For it has been fixed for him there,
Amongst the beetles, ants and the worms,
The departed now coupled, united, with those that live all, or part, of their life cycle,
In dead, decaying, fungoid wood.
If the living could, the living would
Let it go
*Surrender.*¹

In the churchyard, the two gravediggers,
Look on, from the side line, speaking riddles,
Of a gallows maker's frame outlasting ten one hundred tenants,
Of a grave digger's house lasting until Doomsday.²
When the two are called to action,
To hurl spadefuls of earth,
To fill the house that belongs to no man, no woman,
Hamlet³ shoots a threatening finger,
Hamlet instructs: *Oi, gently!!!*

II. Wake

II.I Lounge. Day

The second-hand car dealer, the road sweeper,
The North London branch of the family, the innkeeper,

¹ *Bad* lyrics © Universal Music Publishing Group, Songwriters: Adam Clayton / Dave Evans / Larry Mullen / Paul Hewson

² Hamlet, Act V, Scene I

³ Hamlet cigars have been a popular cigar in the UK since the 1980s.

Gathered to celebrate a life,
One last party to honour the deceased,
Assembled to offer solace in the face,
Of the brothers' broken-hearted loss.
The dearly congregated unsure of how to lament,
Are they to wail and weep, recite poetry,
And by doing so let the dead and alive be bound together,
To tether the departed with those present?

Trays of sandwiches and platter of vol-au-vents,
Served up with storytelling, witticisms, yarns and natter,
Because sometimes it is hard to know what to say,
How to pray, allay the heartache.
So, they celebrate his third birthday,
All part of the send-off,
To ease the suffering of the suffers,
To palliate for the bereavement.
And amongst the hilarity and bighearted hospitality,
The honesty and generosity of South Londoners there on the 12th floor,
The Elder, heavy-hearted masquerading as the light-hearted,
Because he does not know how to express the pain,
Caused by this wound,
Doomed, to be consumed, in silence and singly, by the sorrow,
Today, tomorrow, forever.

The frustrated Elder looks across the room to see his brother,
Wants to follow, and explain to him,
But understands, there are no words that can do this.
Apprehends the impermanence of permanence,
The need for armistice in this time of turbulence,
The conflicting loyalties.

II.II Corridor/Hall. Day

The Younger seeks refuge in the corridor,
A place, a space, a corner, where a mourner,
Can drown in overwhelming desolation,

Submerged in tiredness and exhaustion,
A corridor, a hall, flooded with anger and guilt.
An Uncle, who will recount nautical narratives,
Colloquial, archaic, seafaring tales,
Naval sagas that are biblical, epic hexameter poetry,
Shakespearean tragedies,
Sits with nephew, here to untangle the grief.
He notes that the Elder was engineered with a design feature,
That mitigates the unsafe consequences of the systems failure,
To soften the aftereffects of the loss of a loved one,
A safety valve, releasing the pressure,
When it exceeds the stipulated limits,
Relieves the static compression, the heaviness,
Opening completely, discharging the density, which emits as laughter.
But the Younger does not think it right,
Of the hilarity, merriment, mirth in sight,
Vows to himself that he won't laugh today,
Pledges that he won't laugh tomorrow,
An undertaking, in sorrow, that he won't laugh for the rest of his life.

This is his time for the purification and purgation of emotions,
Looking for someone to share this lamentation,
A grief born of regret and mourning.
He sits sorrowful and in tears,
A sword piercing his heart,
The solemnity, the soberness of loss,
Over his granddad's descent from the cross,
And his entombment.
And in his world of sadness and melancholy,
He ponders and reflects of the articulation of entire creation,
Hopes that death is not the complete annihilation of the being,
Hopes that this moment in time is transitional,
Hopes that this moment in time will lead to something new.
Inside him an infinite emptiness,
A darkness unhidden, a void uncovered,
A hollowness born from what once did not exist.
If he could, yes, he would, out of loneliness,
Split himself into two,

To create a companion who would listen to his silence.

II.III Lounge. Night

The brothers sit at table,
Plate of sausage unt ala the old mash,
The house speciality,
Yet the Elder's inability,
To make it taste like grandad's did,
To make it taste horrible.
Both had formed long-term, declarative memories,
Consciously recalled by a dish of food,
Biographies of the departed that they carry around in their heads.

The brothers resolve,
To give this quarter full bottle of scotch,
This *water of life*, a good 'iding,
If only they could have spilt it over the corpse,
Resurrected him, bought him back,
Back to be seated, in front of two TVs.
The Elder and the Younger, alone in the flat,
Now just the two against the rest of world,
Both brothers be nothing like each other,
Yet both the sons of a mother, an ice cream maid at the Ritz cinema,
*"As like each other as two drops of water"*⁴.

Poltergeist phenomena, a physical disturbance in the privy,
The activities of a loud spirit, a noisy, rumble ghost,
They clamber for a hammer,
To silence this exteriorization of their subconscious minds,
To quash this supernatural delusion, which has resulted from,
*"The affective and cognitive dynamics of percipients' interpretation of ambiguous stimuli"*⁵.
As a pair of watchmen, Bernardo and Marcellus⁶,
On a dark winter's night, in the heavy darkness of their consciousness,
Worn out and weary, funeral fatigued, apprehensive,

⁴ "The Two Brothers" a Fairy Tale collected by The Brothers Grimm.

⁵ Lange, R and Houran, J. (1998). *Delusions of the paranormal: A haunting question of perception*. Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease 186 (10), pp. 637–645.

⁶ Hamlet, William Shakespeare

Stand watch, waiting for an apparition,
To turn the door handle,
And appear before them on the castle ramparts.
The ghost that materializes is not a phantasm,
An illusion, hallucination, wishful thinking.
The sailor that steps out of the khazi,
Steps out to make port,
For he is a mariner not doomed to sail the seven seas forever.
Clutching his cognac-soaked head,
He finds that his ship, his crew, have long sailed,
To leave him moored at the Port of London,
The inner East of the capital.
The Elder declares that the uncle will have to stay the night,
Driven back to North London tomorrow.

Their granddad's room, a sacrosanct hollow,
A deep-rooted space, spiritual, spatial connection.
Granddad's room, now a context, to help maintain his memory.
A westward-descending stairway falling away into the bowels of Mandela House,
Down the corridor and the antechamber,
Deep down into a subterranean world,
Deep down into the burial chamber,
Guarded by the Anubis shrine,
Lies the spirit encased in the sarcophagus,
Amongst the funerary furniture,
Amulets and other jewellery,
Imiut fetishes, oars and fans,
Jars inscribed with funerary prayers,
The texts are utterances, incantations, invocations,
For the soul to leap and fly into the afterlife.
Granddad's room, a 3-D expression to the intangible,
A form to which both brothers,
Sense, see and cognise as untouchable, within or mystical,
A locus for healing.
The Elder proclaims the room to be a shrine,
Dedicated to the memory of their grandfather.

There is to be no desecration of the consecrated bedroom,

The uncle will have to sleep on the chaise lounge,
The nicked batteries warehoused in the newly sanctified space.

III. Boomerang Trotter

The Trotters' Lounge. Day

The Younger turns and yawns,
Wakes from a night slumbered on sofa,
To find an Uncle has returned carrying a canvas navy holdall.
The son of Laërtes and Anticlea⁷,
Abandoned by Stan and Jean,
Is consumed by a fearful feeling,
A debilitating anxiety that he will suffer the loss of his furthestmost prized object:
A familial bond.
Wanting to resolve this constant fear of being forsaken,
Well at least *just for a couple of days that's all*.

Raging in the Elder's mind,
Inner turmoil,
Fulminating, wild,
The wrath as a part of grief,
Asserting his aggression to avoid,
These feelings of vulnerability,
Less forgiving because he wants to avoid more hurt.
No charioteer guide⁸, no supreme being to guide him,
To help frame the immortal dialogue between the human self and the divine,
As he stands, in sorrow and distress, on the battlefield,
Wanting an answer on the nature of life, Self, death, afterlife and reality,
Betwixt two assembled militaries,
Between whom he was, and who he now finds himself as,
An indignation amid, among, amongst in his depth,
A strange sense feeling not like the inhabitant of his soul,
And yet is in him,
An insane root that has taken the rational, compassionate, him as prisoner,

⁷ Odysseus, legendary Greek king of Ithaca and the hero of Homer's epic poem the Odyssey

⁸ The charioteer guide Krishna, an avatar of Lord Vishnu, in Bhagavad Gita

Very much seems corporal,
But will vanish, effervesce like bubbles *into the air*⁹,
When the expelled anger is vehemently displaced upon those he cares.
For the Uncle has garnered the ire of the sea god,
And in a fit of merciless temper, and of vindictive nature,
Bursts forth,
Poseidon's proclamation, pronouncement,
That the uninvited be turned out into the wilderness,
Exiled to a life of wandering.

When words are redundant,
The Elder reaches out to mix his soul with that of the departed,
By reaching out to connect through touch,
The unoccupied armchair,
Upholstered in blackness and silence.

Both brothers grieve because they loved,
Both suffer the agony and the angst, anguish, the affliction,
It is said that pain bares itself in a multitude of ways,
And both endure the pain that abrades, wear aways, any acceptance of the loss.
Yet Elder and Younger have contrary coping mechanisms,
To deal with the vulnerability, brutality, the extent of the torment they both feel.
The Younger wants to abide in isolation,
Send an invitation to Shaytan,
To become the sufferer's companion.
The Younger finds it hard to compute,
How the Elder could banish an Uncle who is seeking refuge?
How the Elder is not repentant and contrite,
Having laughed and drunk last night,
Had he forgotten it was Grandad's...?
How could he get over it so easily?

⁹ Macbeth Act 1 Scene 3, Shakespeare

The accusation stings, the Elder finds voice:

*“He was supposed to come and wipe away the tears in my eyes,
Declare that death was to be no more,
Proclaim the end, forevermore, to mourning, crying and pain.*

*I stood at his grave but did not know how to weep.
If I could shed a single tear,
A single secreted solitary droplet,
This saline spheroid could flood the entire world.*

*I stood at his grave but did not know what to say.
If I would whisper a single word,
A single note of denial, anger, bargaining,
A single expression of the depression, of acceptance,
This utterance could drown out the entire world.*

*I stood at his grave but did not know who to hold onto.
If I could embrace someone at his rite of committal,
A single person to clinch, clutch, grasp, clasp,
This would banish the loneliness that haunts my entire world”.*

The Younger whispers an apology.

III. The Nag's Head. Night

The brothers enter the public house,
Malibu and tonic with some lime and ‘*alf of lager*’.
Granddad's brother,
Driven thence by foul winds,
Which blew him off course,
Carry him into the pub.
He sits, warming himself with a tot of rumbullion,
A dram of kill devil,
If only this was a nip of sweet peaceful apathy,
That would prevent him thinking no further of his return home,
That would leave the reality and his worldly cares outside of the establishment.

The Younger wants to bear the pain of the Uncle,
To alleviate the old man's suffering,
Pleads with the Elder,
For compassion, wisdom, and the Path.
The Elder had the recognition of the old man's suffering at a distance, from the very first encounter,
To feel what the ill-fated feel,
Yet anger had temporarily blinded him from seeing any other's pain and burden,
The rage had momentarily left him sightless to the callousness of all human affairs.
Sorrow drips, drop by drop, on all suffering souls,
Each droplet further corroding, eroding,
Bead by bead, filling us with cynicism and despair,
Until the point of saturation when the contagion commences to poison itself,
Consume, bit by bit, the doubt and desolation,
Whereupon we begin to recall wisdom, compassion, and justice.
For the Tragedian¹⁰ was right, for *time heals all*,
Words have a profound power to nurse our hearts.

The Younger and Elder,
Wisdom and Compassion,
The Intellectual and Emotional,
Two wings in synergy allowing them to fly,
Two eyes coordinate to see more deeply,
To allow for reconciliation, a practice of eternal justice,
The three agree to get a takeaway and eat it at home!

¹⁰ Sophocles

