# From *The House With Only An Attic And A Basement*

# Ladies’ Voices

*after Gertrude Stein*

***Curtain Raiser***

Everyone has gone

But the barbecue is here. Is someone coming back for it?

William is going back for it tomorrow

Ah that belongs to William. William is going back tomorrow

What a successful weekend overall

Did anyone see a white china salad bowl

I’m looking for a plastic container with a red strip around the edge

Weren’t we fortunate with the weather

Weren’t we lucky

Wow what a race

What a race indeed

***Act II***

Accident on the M4 by the exit to the M25

We’re stuck in it too

We are through

I’m driving Rupert, Henry & the dog

Are you there yet?

You will be fine, I was caught too

The rain is driving at an angle

Where are you all?

We’re all here, where are you?

***Act III***

First Brexit, now this

What a week, so sad

I feel the way I did last Friday, totally bereft

Those boys are lucky with their great British strengths

Calm under pressure, humility & humour

Nick was telling us how he read *The Odyssey*

That will stand them in good stead

***Act IV***

What a shame, big loss

It’s a very difficult time

Equally painful

I saw them laughing

***Epilogue***

His father has been given one month to live

He’s not ill at all

Does anyone have Nurofen?

Oh dear, was it raining?

Gosh I will miss it, and you, very much

Congratulations and best wishes for the future

What a fabulous memory

Wasn’t it just such a special and wonderful occasion

The baton is well and truly passed

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[‘Ladies Voices’ is modelled after a Gertrude Stein playlet by the same name; the overheard voices are from a Whatsapp group.]

# ABC

Identification is a highly important factor in the mechanism of hysterical symptoms; by this means patients are enabled in their symptoms to represent not merely their own experiences, but the experiences of a great number of other persons, and can suffer, as it were, for a whole mass of people, and fill all the parts of a drama by means of their own personalities alone.

– Sigmund Freud

Anne identified with Cate until it became a bona fide

illness, for Boris had left Cate, resulting not only

in psychic estrangement but an unconscious stream

of hostility directed not at Boris, but at his new woman,

Anne, whom Cate viewed as her rival. Cate remained

excessively tender with Boris, though Cate, for him,

had been a ‘totem animal’ from which he gained power

by ‘eating’. Whereas Boris was the patriarch,

Anne was the ego alien; and whereas Cate was Anne’s

fixation, Anne was no one’s obsession, so she was

admitted to a psychiatric ward with the unbidden

associations she could not be induced to abandon.

On the rare occasions she slept, the manifest and latent

content of her dreams was the dance of abandonment

between Boris and Cate, which Anne, in her waking hours,

projected onto the walls, as though screening a silent film.

She could not be induced to abandon this footage;

she could not be induced to abandon her object love

of Boris (whose own object choice was his

ego-libido); or her identification with Cate, who felt

no friendship towards Anne. Soon Anne drew a mental

triangle on every surface she saw, be it phallic or

concave, and sometimes this triangle was isosceles,

sometimes it was equilateral, and often it was right.

# Case study: Ms C

Ms C, 32, attended counselling with her father after discovering he was romantically involved with a woman her own age who bore uncanny similarities to Ms C in that they shared a birthday (a fact that seemed of significance to the patient), they had both attended Wharton, and both had worked for Ms C’s father, a figure of international prominence in the hotel industry. Ms C described her reaction as ‘devastated’ when her father announced his intention to leave her mother, whom the patient described as ‘a devoted wife for over 35 years’.

Ms C had no history of depression, and did not present with depressive symptoms. When asked if she believed herself to be depressed, she said she did not but that she believed that she had been ‘replaced by an immigrant who had all of her attributes’ and who would ‘inherit all the money’.

Ms C was given further tests to rule out Capgras Syndrome and was advised to seek one-on-one therapy for future monitoring of her moods and delusions.

**The X Man**

His superpower was that his testicles manufactured sperm

with exclusively X chromosomes & that was ironic because

not only was he a beast to women but his 40 baby girls grew

up seeking men like the father they barely saw unless they went

to his studio to be painted which wasn’t OK with their mothers

who were not only jealous but guilty of giving birth to girls

who were products of an X-chromosome-making monster

& would soon suffer at the hands of other monsters with X

type sperm thereby assuring the continuation of suffering

& meanwhile all the girls became writers who slouched

from sitting at desks & being daughters & lovers of beasts.

# Report card: Classics

*Autumn*

When she is in the spotlight, she produces

the goods satisfactorily enough.

She is not a committed Hellenist

it has to be said

which is a shame but not shameful.

\*

*Spring*

The focus and drift of my comments have not changed

in the brief interval since they were written.

If I stand over her with a weapon

of mass destruction she does what she has to –

but I would rather not.

***THE HOUSE OF ATREUS***

**I am signing none of the emails with an ‘x’**

*Electra*

I am signing none of the emails with an ‘x’ because

whatever affection he feels for me is not being

transferred. Affection is not a currency. I can’t

make him feel affection just as he is failing to make

me feel affection. I am anxious about my appointment

with the GP though I feel better than I did last year

and the year before. I arrived Saturday. The flight

was fine except for snafus at JFK: immigration queues,

misplaced bags, then Orestes didn’t turn up

so I hailed a taxi. We got lost because I don’t know the way

from the Northern State Parkway. Dad scolded the driver

for lacking a GPS then gave him $100, which sums up

my dad: first the meanness and then the reward.

**I’m obsessed with my health which I guess**

*Clytemnestra*

I’m obsessed with my health, which I guess is a capitalist

construct. I put a codicil in my will in case my son

is orphaned. I bought a bed with my husband’s Am Ex after

my Visa was declined from overuse. The salesman misheard

the ‘X’ in my postcode as ‘S,’ so I said ‘X like exit’

& Aegisthus shook his head because ‘exit’ doesn’t really

begin with ‘x’. I transferred money to my husband’s account.

**I bought flowers on the Clifton Road because**

*Iphigenia*

I bought flowers on the Clifton Road

because I think I might be dead?

The severe light and wind are exactly

as they were when I was a little

girl and I wrote DANGER on an oak,

believing our branches to be

perilous & public. Once my

grandfather tried to explain the blood-

lines between me & Helen of Troy

but I don’t speak good Greek so he may

have said something else. He was the only

man who ever loved me & offered

to be buried with me but I said no

I said I would be married with the wind.

**Because I want to be around negativity**

*Orestes*

Because I want to be

around negativity

as little as possible,

I avoid my sister,

though I wish she were more

hospitable. I’ve made a

scrupulous dossier of

her insanity &

I bcc my parents

on all our correspondence.

Quoting Melanie Klein,

she claims she's the family

scapegoat, when we all know she

inherited bad genes.

I’m not married to our

father, as she unattract-

ively taunts, but I do

respect his business

acumen, especially

the hotels. No one

sacrificed anyone:

my unfamilial sister

gave herself willingly to

whatever she worshipped.

**At family dinner we talked politics**

*Agamemnon*

At family dinner we talked politics.

Electra, now nine, supports the Liberal

Democrats because her friend said they’re best.

Orestes, aged 12, was visited by

constituency MPs at school and

was most impressed with the Conservatives.

When I said what I felt were the downsides

of the Conservatives, Electra cried:

she seems to have some guilt about money,

a trait she shares with my Clytemnestra.

**Then we had the best meal of our stay**

*Clytemnestra*

Then we had the best meal of our stay,

a place you could pass without noticing,

a small establishment with a single woman

serving a whole room of diners & I wept

as we ate, *I have felt so fretful for so*

*many years, not believing I’m loved*.

He countered with his own frustration:

our constitutional differences.

I tried again: *I want us to be*

*a family or I’ll go back to my*

*original one.* When we left, the

proprietress kissed us on both cheeks.

[I’m constricted on this Eurostar,

two bags at my feet & suffering from wine.]

**She’s a pain in the arse but she’s nice to look at** [variations]

*Aegisthus*

she’s a pain

in the arse

but she’s nice

to look at

she’s a pain

in the arse

but she’s (still)

nice looking

at 40

she’s a pain

but she’s loyal

and nice

she gets pains

I’m patient

I’m nice

she says

I’m an arse

I want sex

with the daughter

of my ex

**We had a big row yesterday**

*Iphigenia*

We had a big row yesterday:

I was agitated because

he keeps mentioning the self-harm

in such a selfish way, as though

to slice up my veins was violent

to *him.* When I asked him to drop

it, he claimed I want to ‘control’

him. As I left, I shouted, *Why*

*can’t we just be together?* He

said, *So I can live in this hell*

*all the time?* and I said *On the*

*contrary* [yes I used those words]

*don’t you see I’m only like this*

*when you leave me, which is always*.