

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 unattrac-
tively taunts, but I do
respect his business
acumen, especially
the hotels. No one
sacrificed anyone:
my unfamiliar 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.*