

Champagne and Tea

By

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The Prodigal Son Story

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Cast of Characters

First: Claire McCracken

Second: Bethany Sam

From the Author

The original title of this piece was Prodigal Ladies, based from the bible story the prodigal son. The title came long before the piece. When I wrote it, it was about two sisters and their relationship with their father. In development a Christian asked me if the sons are now daughters, why isn't the father a mother?

I had no solid answer. It just felt right to me. So. Let all mentions of sister, daughter, and father, be interchangeable with brother, son, and mother. All gender variations should be explored. This is simply the way I imagined the story. One way of imagining the story.

Permission is granted to treat the Author as Dead.

Champagne and Tea

There are two women on opposite sides of the stage. They speak to the audience. And then, sometimes, to each other.

FIRST

There is a bottle of champagne sitting in my father's liquor cabinet. It has been there since I was a little girl. He always said he would open it on a special occasion, and I thought 'oh, he must mean when I do something special.' So I went to university and graduated - no champagne. I became a junior partner at his firm - no champagne. I got married - no champagne. It goes on. I've got two kids and my name on the side of the firm's building and still no champagne.

I began to realise the champagne was not there to be had. It was a myth. A white whale. It was never going to be drunk. This 'special occasion' didn't exist. It's not that I wasn't good enough - even if that's what I felt for years - it's that nothing was good enough. At least that's what I thought, but then he went and opened it. And I wasn't even there.

SECOND

When I was a kid I used to sneak into my daddy's study. I say sneaked - he blatantly knew. He used to drink this tea - one of those fragrant ones, and it would make the whole room smell. That scent got into his books, his clothes, and even into his comfy chair. Every hug - every memory I have of dad is closely linked with that smell. They say scent is the sense most associated with memory. I can believe that... because when I miss home - when I miss dad - it's that tea I crave, that scent that suddenly floods my mind.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

SECOND (cont'd)

It's funny the things that stick with you through life. The importance we put on inconsequential things. When I smell that tea I know I'm loved.

FIRST

It's funny how something seemingly unimportant can actually epitomise a period or relationship. It is a symbol. Of things gone wrong or right. A wedding ring is just a bit of metal but it means so much more. When it snaps or falls off or gets lost or stolen you can't really explain why you feel such a huge amount of loss. Usually you have someone there to help pick you up and move on but what if the symbol breaks and that's it. What if it breaks and no one comes to pick you back up afterward - or they just don't understand. That little unimportant thing just became a catalyst.

SECOND

It's easy to take things the wrong way

FIRST

It's easy to be misunderstood.

SECOND

It's easy to be so used to having everything that when things don't go your way you get your panties in a twist.

FIRST

You think this is about getting my way?

SECOND

Oh so now you're speaking to me?

FIRST

You're the one that dropped off the face of the planet and got welcomed back with open arms!

SECOND

I didn't expect that - I didn't ask for that -

FIRST

Do you know how much damage control I had to do for you - do you know the amount of litigation that had to be drawn up to deal with you?

SECOND

Actually yeah, I do- seeing as every time I see you, you shove it in my face -

FIRST

You're an embarrassment! You were an embarrassment when you were a kid and being every C-List celebs dealer was a stroke of press genius let me tell you -

SECOND

I know I've made some mistakes but -

FIRST

I can't believe dad let you be managing partner with me. Do you know how relieved I was to hear you sold your stock and ran off for Santa Barbra?

SECOND

Down right ecstatic. I saw the tweet. Don't think you behaved perfectly through this either.

FIRST

No, but I was here. Here when the recession hit, here when there were hostile takeovers. I kept this company afloat.

SECOND

I know! I know! I know I can't ever live up to your shining example of daughterhood. I don't expect to. You're obviously better than me. You've got your whole life together. Career and family life, all in perfect harmony and balance. You haven't got a clue - not a single fucking. Sorry.

FIRST

That's okay. I'm used to it.

SECOND

Yeah well so am I. Used to the way you sneer and shake your head and nod pityingly to others. 'It's just how she is, she doesn't mean it' well it's fucking true. And I know when I'm being mocked. You can put on the sympathy face for others but I'm not convinced. You care more about the fact that I say fuck than the fact I'm fucking homeless.

FIRST

Were homeless.

SECOND

Oh aye? Where's my home then?

FIRST

With father. He has plenty of space.

(CONTINUED)

SECOND

Tonnes of space. Nothing but space. Empty rooms. Don't think I can't tell you stopped visiting long ago.

FIRST

I've been busy.

SECOND

It doesn't feel like home without you.

Break

FIRST

I don't want to come between you and father. You're both still healing.

SECOND

No of course not. That'd be unseemly. Dad would notice. No you just keep me from dad's company. From dad's family - our family.

FIRST

I'm not trusting you around my kids.

SECOND

That might have worked when they were seven and I was using - but it's been a year since rehab. A year sober. And the kids are older now. They can handle the truth.

FIRST

The truth is you sold us out and abandoned all of us. You took the money straight out of this family the moment you could. Our stock prices plummeted! And what do you have to show for it? Did you buy a house? A car? Did you get anything? You don't even have a friend to show for it! Was it worth it?

SECOND

No! Okay, no! I messed up. I screwed up completely and I know it and I'm sorry. I just want to start over. You're my sister -

FIRST

And? I don't see how that's relevant. Sure we're sisters but that's it. That's all we have in common. One little detail like father does not make you family. You will never be in my family!

Break

SECOND

I didn't come back for a handout. I didn't. I came back for a job. The mail room at the firm is always hiring.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

SECOND (cont'd)

I was going to see if they would give me a chance. Do it quietly. I was so hungry and so... alone. How I managed to scrape enough cash together to get back home is. Well. It's best not to talk about it. It's something that won't leave me.

I just wanted to be a kid again and play with my dolls at my dad's feet. To feel safe. Dad always made me feel safe. Like nothing could ever touch me. Like nothing bad could ever get to me.

That's a lie we like to tell our children. We may never say it ourselves but... it's there. In movies and books. Everything will be fine. Good things happen to good people. Everything happens for a reason.

What's the reason then? If there's a reason for everything then why hunger? Why pain? Why suffering? Why do I wake up some nights and think about what I could steal from dad and sell for enough cash to get high? Why? Where's the reason, cause I sure would love one.

FIRST

Because you're a junkie and you're broken.

SECOND

I don't feel broken.

FIRST

That's cause you don't know better.

SECOND

I think I know broken better than you. I think I've stared in the face of brokenness, lived beside it, shared food with it. Your pedestal is far too high up for you to notice what broken is.

FIRST

I don't think knowing brokenness is something to boast about.

SECOND

And I don't think being perfect is something to boast about.

FIRST

That was always your problem. Oh I'll never be good, why even try.

(CONTINUED)

SECOND

Whereas you have such a tight control over your life one stray thought could shatter it.

FIRST

And you have no semblance of control!

SECOND

And you have no semblance of your own brokenness!

FIRST

There isn't a single part of my life broken you stupid child!

SECOND

Not our relationship? Not you and dad? Not you and your kids -

FIRST

You don't know the first thing about my kids, you haven't been around for my kids. I have.

SECOND

But dad hasn't. Do you even tell them why they don't visit their grandpa? What do you tell them about me? Do you teach them if they make mistakes you'll still love them? Or do you let them think they'll be shut out like me and Dad.

FIRST

I get to decide for what's best for my children. Who's best for my children.

SECOND

And when they're older, do they get to decide? Or are they going to have a dark patch in their family history too?

FIRST

I'm not going to hide anything from them.

SECOND

But will they hear the whole truth?

FIRST

They'll hear my truth.

Breathe.

FIRST

And by the way, the reason we don't visit is because I've been busy with Dad's firm - you know the business he created from the ground up? His life's work?

(CONTINUED)

SECOND

So you've been busy with dad's work?

FIRST

I just said.

SECOND

Too busy to actually visit dad?

FIRST

It's like talking to a wall.

SECOND

Now you know how I feel.

FIRST

Ah yes, lets make this more about you and your feelings.

SECOND

At least I don't ignore mine.

FIRST

Better to ignore them then let my life be ruled by every fleeting feeling.

SECOND

But your life is ruled by them.

FIRST

Doubtful

SECOND

You let you anger temper our relationship -

FIRST

I let experience temper our relationship. If Dad wants to trust you enough to rebuild that's fine, I won't stop you, but I will not trust you. You've torn down my life too many times.

SECOND

Will you ever trust me? What if I go three years sober? Five? Ten? When I'm dead? When will I have done enough to be worthy of your trust?

FIRST

You were fifteen when you first stabbed me in the back, lets make it fifteen.

SECOND

Fifteen?

(CONTINUED)

FIRST

Yes

SECOND

You mean... When I came out?

FIRST

All anyone could talk about at my birthday was you and your rebellious phase.

SECOND

It wasn't a rebellious phase, it's just me and -

FIRST

I do remember the speech from last time. I didn't choose to be like this blah blah blah.

SECOND

The only reason it was such a big deal is because you made it a big deal

FIRST

Then you changed your mind less than a year later to some made up thing.

SECOND

It's not made up and I didn't change my mind, I discovered -

FIRST

Ah yes, self discovery. How to get high in three easy steps.

SECOND

Oh would you just shut up! This is why I can't talk to you, you don't take what I say seriously - less than that you don't care enough to listen to what I say. Like you're perfect and I'm the antithesis of everything that's wrong with the world! Why are you so angry!

FIRST

Because I am perfect! Because I have done everything right! I have my life together. I'm healthy, married, kids, career - and I make sure female salaries match males! I donate to charity! I support our veterans, I bake for the PTA, I do everything right!

SECOND

So why are you so unhappy?

(CONTINUED)

FIRST

Exactly!

Break

SECOND

The only thing my sister wanted for her 21st birthday was a bottle of champagne. I was thirteen at the time and I remember thinking 'wow, that's it, my sis is now boring old' I thought that's how it worked. Age means adulthood.

(And I was right. She became exactly that. She had it together got everything together, her whole life just flowed naturally. I had this impossible example to follow. Every thing that went wrong I just thought 'when I'm older, I'll be able to do this' It never happened. I grew up different. I wasn't ready, I didn't have a plan. It took me a long time to realise, that was okay. So long as I still had a goal, a purpose. But I was drifting, and I got cast out to sea.)

Dad got her this magnum sized thing. Biggest bottle ever, nearly bigger than me, and you know what? She wasn't happy. Crazy right? So I decided when I became an adult I was gonna ask for what I truly wanted, no matter what. So when dad named me partner I knew what I wanted. I had to get Dad to sign a few forms but it was my birthday, and I wanted money. All of it. So I took it. Unashamedly.

FIRST

I was still a kid when my dad first took me to the office. It was still a small operation back then. Twelve people, before the merger. I sat in his chair and I thought... I want this. I want to be in charge, be the boss, save the day, have the answers, find the solution, win. It took a lot of hard work, and a tiny bit of string pulling, but I got there. I earned it.

SECOND

I think we have trouble knowing what we want.

FIRST

I deserved it.

SECOND

I think that's because we want what will make us happy, right now.

(CONTINUED)

FIRST

I got to the top through sheer will and determination.

SECOND

And it does make you happy.

FIRST

I was basically running the company when dad announced his retirement plans.

SECOND

But happiness is temporary.

FIRST

Then he announced who he was naming as his successors.

SECOND

Because we change, grow, and gain hindsight with each passing second.

FIRST

Not just the one who worked to deserve it.

SECOND

It's not happiness we want,

FIRST

But to the person who literally could not wait to tear it to pieces.

SECOND

We want to be content.

FIRST

Then ran away.

SECOND

We want something to be enough.

FIRST

Out of reach.

SECOND

It's why we do crazy things for love.

FIRST

Could have been dead for all we knew.

SECOND

It's why we have dreams.

(CONTINUED)

FIRST

Abandoned us.

SECOND

Why we create family.

Break.

FIRST

Dad waited for her. Every day thinking she'd just show up. He'd wait for a call. A text. Anything. She knew where we were after all. She was the one who'd have to decide to come home. It crushed him, it killed him. He wanted his whole family together and whole, while I worked to try and keep our company afloat after half our money got stolen. We fought about it. We fought after she came back. How we could possibly let her back into our lives, how we could even begin to let her back into the family?

SECOND

When dad opened up that champagne I was in complete tears, complete shock. I didn't think anyone had missed me. I mean the way I left... It was practically criminal the way I took that money. Then I completely trashed the family's reputation, left the country, and just... went wild. A huge fucking bender that I can't even remember before I hit hospital, draining away the last little trickle of money I had.

I nearly died. I lay in that hospital bed for weeks. No one... no one came to - I got one text message that read 'You good for tonight?' When I said I was in hospital, that was it. No reply. I lay there, so rotten and so low. I was barely better when the money ran out and they chucked me out the hospital. Chucked out the hospital. I needed to come home, I mean, even the poorest people get the NHS here. So I got home.

It's amazing how much perspective you gain once you lose everything. To see what stands after a storm.

FIRST

Prodigal.

SECOND

That's hope by the way.

FIRST

An old fashioned word.

SECOND

The hope I wouldn't be turned away.

FIRST

It means the opposite of frugal.

SECOND

How could I have possibly doubted my dad?

FIRST

To give away extravagantly

SECOND

He's always been a safe harbour.

FIRST

To spend everything you've got, recklessly,

SECOND

My anchor.

FIRST

And not care about the consequences.

Break

FIRST

I don't really speak to my sister anymore. To be honest we were never really friends. She was always too little. I remember playing with her when I was young. I remember protecting her - and I still protect her. I will. I just... Can't be around her. Or talk to her. Or look at her without being unbearably angry. I stayed on the straight and narrow, she flung caution to the wind and left.

SECOND

It never became a party like what I would call a party, but looking back now that's what it was. Dad and I in our front garden. Then neighbours started appearing and word got about, family got texted, people at the firm came round and suddenly we were having a barbeque in the garden for forty or fifty people. It was a gathering. Of people who had come to see me.

I freaked out. Too overwhelmed. To think that only a month ago I was lying alone in a hospital bed... With no one? Dad wrapped me up in his coat when he saw me shiver and hustled me into the study, popping open champagne, and having me sit and just... Everything. I was so stretched and tired and low and all I could think was... Man, I could murder a cup of tea.

(CONTINUED)

FIRST

She doesn't care. She doesn't know and she doesn't care and it's almost stupid to hold a grudge about some champagne bottle. But it's everything. It's a culmination. She doesn't appreciate what she gets. Parties ever other night - did I ever party like her? No. I had work to do, and studying, and my kids to look after. Dad forgives her for everything. I don't know if I can.

Fin