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Missing Inaction

by Martin Bourne

“Smart shoes bro,” said the man using the adjacent hand basin.

“Thanks, my wife bought them for me,” I said lamely.

‘Well, that’s a first,’ I thought. Being complimented on my shoes by another man in the gents. I never speak to, or look at another man while in ‘there’ it is the unwritten rule.

He left before me, and as I looked at his departing back, I thought, and let’s be clear I know I’m a snob, but you’re no brother of mine. He was dressed in a loose open untucked shirt, faded jeans and trainers. Don’t people know how to dress anymore for Christ’s sake? We were in a fancy restaurant in a fancy hotel and he looks like a tramp.

Seated back at our table I relayed the conversation to my wife.

“I know who you mean,” she said as I described him, “his partner has Morticia hair and an ambition to cover herself in tattoos.”

We exhausted the conversation and turned to our phones while awaiting our main course.

“Oh, I have an email from Ancestry.Com,” I said.

I passed the phone to my wife as I didn’t know how to access the site.

While she tapped away, I allowed my eyes to wander to another male diner dressed in a Hawaiian shirt and shorts.

“Oh...Oh,” said my wife. She turned the screen to me.

“Oh fuck,” I said, but quietly so as not to alarm others.

We quickly did the maths.

50% each parent, so 25% equals a half brother and their surname is Jelly. We both looked at each other.

“So that means my dad... was...not...my...dad!”

Since that moment, I have thought about the lost time. Time that could have been spent in getting to know a man. My biological father, who I knew as only my mum's boss was called George Jelly and I recall that he bought me a pair of football boots when I was 12. I didn't ask why. My birthday is 24th September, so counting back forty weeks, was I a drunken fumble at a Christmas office party. Possibly.

I am disjointed, all at sea. Did my dad know, who else knew? I was kept behind the curtain, shielded from viewing the truth. I'm reminded of that saying, 'you can't handle the truth,' well how do you know, if you don't know. And now, they're all dead. No one to ask, to fill in the gaps, to provide context. My dad died in 1976, George died in 2010. All that time was available to get to know him.

And now, well I'm still me but I move through the days like a severed head that finishes a sentence.

I can only die in the future, I thought; right now I am always alive.

Oh and I've gained a brother.