To Your Scattered Bodies Go

by angevin2

Summary

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Notes

Part of the Sweet Fortune's Minions AU.

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It had been over a decade, and Edward didn't actually talk to Harry that often, but he didn't even have to guess at what Harry meant. He would never say that his grief for Richard was as profound as that which Richard had felt for his Anne, or indeed for Robbie Vere -- Richard in mourning had been a source of awe and terror, his grief all-consuming. Edward wondered -- although he was generally glad not to know -- what it was like to be the sort of person who felt so deeply about things, to face loss in some way other than going through the motions of everyday life until the hole in it ceased to feel unusual. And it almost had, by now. It very often did.

After Richard died Edward had tried reading some of that strange poetry that he had loved so much.
He couldn't make heads or tails of what it was that John Donne meant about love, but the things he said about death -- that was something else again. There was one line that always stuck with him, about all the dead people ever on Judgment Day -- *to your scattered bodies go* -- everyone who had lived and died in all of time, lying about on the earth like leaves in autumn, and he seemed to recall that some poet or other had used that image too, but it didn't matter whom. Richard would have known, of course.

"The ironic thing," Harry told Edward later, "is that I only figured it out at all because it was important to my father that Richard should be buried in sanctified ground. It was the sort of thing he only really cared about after the fact." He ran a hand through his sandy hair and smiled, after a fashion, the sort of fashion that requires only half of one's mouth, and Edward nearly started: for a second, he'd seen Richard sitting there swishing his brandy about in a manner that was as bitter as brandy-swishing could possibly be. "Didn't stop him from having him killed, after all."

"You really think he did it, then," Edward said, in a way that he hoped sounded non-committal.

Harry nodded, and then took a swig of his brandy, which meant he wouldn't have to talk about it for a few seconds, and Edward lit a cigarette, remembering, as the faint odor of phosphorus caught his nose and dissipated, that awful night at Shene House fifteen years ago, the acrid smoke that clung to Richard's hair and the heat of his body as Edward pulled him close, and his words: *There's nothing you can do to save me, Ned.*

Edward knew that Harry had never believed the official explanation of what had happened to Richard. In the years following Richard's death, he'd gone back and forth between sympathy and a kind of grimly amused indulgence of Harry's naivete. It was hardly implausible, after all, that Richard might have committed suicide: indeed, he'd *tried* it, that night at Shene House. That he had, in the last few years of his life, left off spectacular gestures like that didn't make much difference, for he'd seemed determined to do it by inches instead, with drink and opium and pretty but unscrupulous young men.

(Edward had always tried to please Richard, in all things, and it had never been truly enough.)

"I suppose I've always hoped you were right," he said, finally, staring into his glass and contemplating the way the liquid made his fingers appear deformed.

Harry watched him for a few minutes, unusually grave. It was amazing how much he'd changed: Edward wasn't the only one who'd seen Richard alive again in Henry Lancaster's son, but upon Henry's death, Harry had assumed his father's distant chilliness. It was like he had no personality of his own but rather took on the form of the dead to unsettle the living.

"You don't believe me, do you," Harry said. It wasn't a question.

Edward took a long drag on his cigarette before answering. "I don't know, Harry," he said. "Even if you're right and your father had Richard killed -- I wonder if he didn't just hasten the inevitable. You're probably too young to remember --"

Harry lifted an eyebrow at that. "Oh, I remember it perfectly well," he said, bristling a bit.

"Of course," Edward said. "But you were at Eton. You missed the worst of it. You weren't the one pulling him out of Limehouse at three o'clock in the morning --" He broke off there, deciding that more brandy was on balance preferable to the memory of Richard's unfocused gaze, pupils opium-narrowed, as he stared through Edward, as though he not only didn't recognize him but wasn't even sure *what* he was.
(You do me wrong to take me out o'the grave, he had said, staring up at Edward from where he lay curled on the gritty floor. Don't you know me, Richard? Edward had said. It's me, Edward. Richard smiled and shook his head: it can't be Edward. He died when we were children.)

Harry continued to regard him with an impassivity that was only slightly less frustrating for Edward's knowledge that it was probably largely a front. "I don't suppose that, strictly speaking, there's anything to be done about it." He shook his head. "Not only because Father is dead, but because before he died he burned most of the records on the whole thing. I suppose he saw it as a form of exorcism. Rather like selling the house. If all the evidence was gone, he could almost pretend it never happened. Not that it worked, mind you."

Edward nodded mutely as he snuffed out his cigarette, feeling a nauseating kinship with the late Henry Lancaster in that moment: he couldn't help but sympathize with Henry's willingness to do anything in order to forget.

If he had learned anything from Richard, though, it was that forgetting was impossible.

(He had scarcely noticed the cold as he tore through Belgravia in his shirtsleeves like a madman, the only thought in his mind getting to Henry before his father could tip off the Yard. It was nothing so piercing as the cold he felt later, when his father, wringing his hands and wiping his spectacles repeatedly, came to tell him that Richard was dead, that he had somehow -- no one had been able to explain where he got it -- managed to take arsenic, that when he could bear the pain of it no longer he had cut his wrists. He remembers noticing that his father looked like he'd been crying, and how strange that was, especially since Edward couldn't possibly do it. It was as though he'd been turned to stone, or like the part of him that could weep had died with Richard.)

"No," he told Harry, "I don't suppose it did."

Harry didn't answer at first, and for a moment he looked older than his thirty years (it was strange to think that Henry Lancaster's son was now thirty years old, but then, Edward was forty now, much older than Richard had lived to be, and he still couldn't believe it). In an apparent effort to stave off creeping melancholy, he reached for the brandy and refilled his glass.

"You know, this was his," he said, gesturing towards Edward with the decanter. "Almost the last of the hidden stash."

"Behind The Bard." Edward smiled despite himself. "So that's where it went. I checked for it before they emptied out the house -- God knows I needed a drink. Or four."

"It was imperative, I thought, that Father shouldn't get hold of any of it." Harry smiled back in that sideways fashion again. "It seems vaguely petty now, but I was seventeen. And it's very good drink."

It was, at that; Edward was almost able to laugh.

"Anyway," Harry said, "it's amazing what you can learn from a desk blotter. I've written to Pomfrey House Hospital -- that's where he was, you know. In Yorkshire, of all places. I suppose Father would have wanted him as far away as possible, wouldn't he." Once again, it was not a question.

"I don't imagine any of us have ever quite got away from him," Edward said, and for the briefest of instants, Harry looked very nearly stricken, before his expression hardened into an extremely smug mask.

"Of course not," he said. "It must have been quite difficult for you; I know you and he were -- " he paused just long enough, and lifted his eyebrow just high enough, to make the insinuation
"It's hardly becoming of you to gossip," Edward said, lighting another cigarette, striking the match rather more vigorously than was strictly necessary to ignite it. Of course he had no intention of confirming Harry's suspicion, accurate as it was, but neither did he feel particularly compelled to deny it; Harry had nothing to gain by the knowledge, after all, and perhaps it was in recognition of this that Harry laughed mirthlessly.

"One does acquire certain poor habits during a misspent youth in Whitechapel taverns," he acknowledged, in a way that appeared to admit no concession whatsoever. "And gossip about this particular subject is hardly uncommon even in better social circles. Even my father followed Mr. Wilde's trial assiduously."

Edward rolled his eyes: it was unlikely that any interest in the trial on Henry's part had much to do with an appetite for scandal for its own sake, although he'd had no particular reason to know that Richard had kept up an occasional correspondence with Wilde. "Did you have a purpose in inviting me over beyond making impertinent inquiries about my personal affairs?" he finally asked.

"Of course," Harry said. "I apologize for my presumption." He was clearly not at all sorry. "I did think that, as his close friend," -- and there was that nearly-involuntary quirk of the eyebrow again -- "you'd like to know that I mean to have Richard reinterred. He should be at Kensal Green with Anne, after all."

For once, Edward could find nothing to argue with. He nodded mutely -- part of Richard always had lain in the earth beside Anne. It had been frightening to see him at the funeral; he stood rooted to the spot as though he hoped to sink into the earth, and when Edward took his arm at the end of the service he looked into Richard's eyes and they seemed as empty as if he were the one who had died.

He was not sure that he could bear to see Richard buried.

(Edward had never been particularly devout, but the starkness of Ash Wednesday suited well with his grief. It was fitting that Richard's death should herald the coming of Lent, that a world without him should be marked with ashes. He knew that Richard, by any reasonable standard, was an inveterate sinner, and that in all likelihood his body now lay in unsanctified ground -- but when he thought of Christ crucified, Richard's image would not go from his mind.)

"At any rate," Harry continued, "I've seen to most of the arrangements; I'm only waiting to hear back from Pomfrey House. If there's anything I should know, do tell me, and I'll consider it."

Edward found it incredibly unlikely that Harry would, in fact, consider any advice Edward gave to him, about this matter or any other, and so he only extinguished his cigarette and remarked, "You seem to have the matter well in hand."

Harry smiled thinly, swirling his brandy a bit. "After Father died, I thought it important to lay the past to rest," he said. The effect was almost unbearably sanctimonious; Edward was reminded, for a horrible instant, of his cousin Beaufort, and he shuddered: Beaufort had been vocally of the opinion that madness and suicide were the inevitable end of an unrepentant sodomite such as Richard had been, and had shaken his head with lugubrious relish as he announced his pessimism regarding the whereabouts of Richard's soul, until Henry had finally taken him aside and, evidently, convinced him that, whatever judgment had been passed in the hereafter, until Henry had finally taken him aside and, evidently, convinced him that, whatever judgment had been passed in the hereafter, it was at the very least not polite to go about announcing it to the world. Edward had been unusually grateful; it had spared him the embarrassment of bludgeoning a man of the cloth with his walking-stick.

"Of course," Edward finally said, standing to go. "Now, if you'll excuse me, and since you have no
real need for my counsel -- I have important matters to attend to." It was an awkward way to end a
discussion about the final resting place of the man who, he could only admit to himself after the
fact, was the love of his life, but he supposed I can't stand your presence for another minute counted,
if barely, as business, of a kind.

"Certainly," Harry said. "I have business of my own. I've been keeping a close eye on the situation
with the Dutch in Africa -- I have plans that would certainly not benefit from increased tension in the
area. But we should talk about that another time, I think. Do give my regards to your brother," he
said, by way of parting, "and his family. How old is young Richard now? Six?"

"Almost seven, in fact," Edward answered. Edward's brother Robert had become friends with Harry
in recent years, to the extent of being involved in Harry's nascent African ventures -- much to
Edward's surprise, given that Robert had married into the Mortimer family, and thus little Richard
was, theoretically, in line for a not-inconsiderable fortune. The entire thing made Edward desperately
uneasy: keeping one's enemies close was, after all, a Lancaster family tradition.

Harry smiled. "Where does the time go?" he asked.

"I couldn't say," Edward replied, as he turned to leave the study. "There is one thing I should like to
know, though."

"What's that?" Harry said.

"Are you doing this to defy your father, or to lay claim to Richard?"

He didn't wait for Harry's reply, or even to see his expression. As he left the Lancaster house the
solid oak doors closed behind him, heavy as the grave.

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