

Womb. Bloom. Groom. Gloom. Rheum. Tomb

He was late. Very late. He ran up the path towards the crowd of people surrounding the open grave. Stealthily, he joined the back of the crowd trying not to draw attention to himself. Everyone was too absorbed in their grief to notice him anyway. He breathed a sigh of relief. Craning his neck to see over the balding heads, he noticed an elderly woman attempting to speak through floods of tears. He edged his way through the sea of weeping wrinkled figures to the head of the grave.

He cleared his throat, "Can I say a few words?" Many of the mourners looked to him in bewilderment, but he had already begun his passionate speech.

"Gary was a true friend of mine. Since birth we have been best buddies, partners in crime and I cannot imagine a life without my great mate Gary! So what did this great man achieve in his short life. I can't begin to tell you..."

A small voice in the crowd spoke up, "Excuse me?", but he continued oblivious, submerged in his memories.

"When we were around 15 he found his dream. The problem was it was Ballet. The idiot decided he wanted to be a dancer! I told him, 'Gary you ain't never gonna pull in a tutu'. But he didn't listen. His dance teacher described him as a blooming flower. He stuck to it, despite what people like me said, and that's what I admired about him. I was wrong about the girls. He married the ballet teacher. She was a bit old but they were happy together."

"Excuse me!" said the little voice from the crowd, slightly louder this time, yet once again he carried on oblivious.

"When she died, I thought Gary would fall apart, but he was a strong lad, he pulled through. Although it was hard for him, he kept on with his dancing and found a new partner, this time also a male dancer, Barry. Barry was so good for Gary. Before they met his cooking was hopeless, but now his soufflés are legendary and I remember when..."

"Excuse me? Who..."

"...I saw the obituary. It said he had rheumatoid arthritis. I didn't even know he had it! I thought old people got it, he was only 30!! I saw him dancing just yesterday, he was fine and he's dead!" Between sobs he gasped, "I don't know what I'm going to do without you, Gary! ...I – I – I love you, Gary!" The crowd now looked visibly distressed watching him break down into uncontrollable tears.

"Excuse me, but who exactly are you?" said an elderly man stepping forward.

Sniffing, he spluttered, "I'm John, his mate from school."

"Excuse me, but I believe you may be at the wrong funeral. George Smith was 82 and never danced in his life. His wife" – he gestured towards the woman on his right – "is this lady just here!"

"Oh, sorry."

By Aman Ubhi and Alice Monypenny.