The Family Business UK

Inspired by a Captioned Image

By Maryanne Peters

Let me tell you what the family business used to be. Shit. That was our business. Pumping shit. Granddad used to have a saying from up north: “Where there’s muck there’s brass” (meaning money). And he would add to that: “And where there’s more muck, there’s more brass”. There is plenty of shit, so we did pretty well.

Granddad always said it was honest business, but our father never liked it as a living. He used to say: “Who wants to do stand in a pit of poo when you can dance with the stars?”

We never knew exactly what he meant, but we knew he was unhappy. I suppose that he waited until his two sons were old enough before he just walked away from it all. Away from the family business and away from his wife and family. All we knew was that he was probably up in London doing what he wanted to do - “dancing with the stars”, whatever that meant.

Our mother was very bitter about the whole thing. She refused to have any contact with him, but she allowed us to keep in touch with our father by email. He always remembered our birthdays, but there were only a few of those. We were getting restless too. Life in the north can be what Dad called “a triple D” - dark, damp and depressing. And when you add the smell of shit to that … well, we could see why Dad left.

Our Granddad said that his son had let him down, but we had a bright future ahead of us. A future in shit. Somehow it did not sound so appealing.

While our father did not give us all the details of what he was doing, he did say that he was doing very well and having a lot of fun. He was always upbeat. He did not give us all the details but he said he liked living in London. He said it was a place that made him feel alive. He used that word a lot.

Our town seemed the very opposite of that. The only thing dirtier and more unpleasant than our town was what flowed out of its sewers, and we knew all about that. What kind of future did that offer? Certainly “bright” is not a word we could easily use when you are down a stinking hole.

Dad said that he was running his own business, but it was very different from the old family business. He said: “You might say it is the complete opposite.”

That was sounding pretty good to us, but Dad said: “There is a place for young men in my business, but young men like I was, not men like you.” What did that mean?

Anyway, we were helping Granddad after school breaking up a fatberg (if you don’t know what that is you can look it up). It was hard work dealing with something that was beyond disgusting. We worked into the night and hardly made a dent. Granddad said: “There’s weeks of work in this, so lots of pocket money for you boys.”

We were still at school, so this was just part-time – the night shift. We got paid well enough but nothing like the proper wage. After all, as Granddad always said: “One day this will all be yours, and because you father gave it all away, it will be yours sooner rather than later.

When we got home after dragging out the last chunk, we were both gagging, and it took hours to scrub the smell off our bodies. It seemed hard to think of “all this” as being a positive.

We talked about it that night. We decided that we would run away to London in the early hours of the following morning. Surely, we were young men just like our father? He could find us a place in his business. Any business is better than shit.

We emailed Dad on the way. We didn’t hear from him until we were already in the city, onto our second pot of tea at Kings Cross Railway Station.

He sent us a text message with an address not too far from there. It was a bar called “Risqué”. We were travelling light so we walked it.

You might think that we have nothing like this up north, but you would be wrong. We could see immediately what it was. It was written outside. It was a bar and nightclub with a “Drag Revue” and transvestite waitresses. It seemed hard to believe that our father would be involved in a business like this, but it did not look unsuccessful. Even in the morning the door was open and there was a large opulent reception area with a buzzer if nobody was in attendance.

A woman came into meet us. She was middle aged but well maintained and attractive, with long blonde hair and large breasts squeezing to escape a tight V necked top. Stout by shapely legs were more than obvious with a skirt way too short for her age, and heels way too high. Her face was only lightly made up, with bright lipstick framing a broad grin, and heavy eye makeup wet with coming tears.

“Boys,” she said. “It’s been way too long. Please forgive me, but I am so happy to see you. Come and give your old man a hug!”

We looked at one another. It was the WTF moment to beat all and any WTF moments. We barely had time to step forward before she had her arms around us and we were enveloped in soft breast and perfume.

Her happiness was there for us to see, and I suppose that our shock gave way to the same feeling in seconds rather than minutes, but we were floored.

“I have to tell you everything,” she said, because she clearly was a she. “I had to leave. They did not want me to talk to you - your mother and my father. They only allowed email contact on the basis that I tell you nothing about my new life. Otherwise I would have been there over the last few years. Please believe me. You are my greatest joy. Please believe me.”

We did. It was obvious. The blubbering woman loved us more than our own mother. It was written all over her face.

“Come into my office. See the pictures of you on my desk and over there. There is not a day that passes that I do not think about you both and the wrong that I have done you. But some things are stronger even than love, and I had to be the person I needed to be. If I could have done it with you beside me I would have preferred that, but up there it would have been hell. Here in London, everybody loves a queen.”

“So what is this place, Dad,” I asked her. “Can we call you Dad?”

“Please, please call me Dad. I always will be. I am not a man anymore but I will always be your father. That will never change and that is my happiness.” She dabbed away tears with a mascara stained tissue.

“Not a man anymore?” My brother had found a voice at last.

“I have had an operation. I am all woman now. It is what I always dreamed of. One or two of the girls who work here are the same. Others just live as women. And some don’t. I cater for all types. But there has to be a strong feminine side inside you to work here.”

It seemed like he was harking back to the warning in his email to me when I first raised the idea of escape: “There is a place for young men in my business, but young men like I was, not men like you.” It seemed as if he was saying that if we were looking for work with him, we were not qualified.

“We can do anything, Dad,” my brother said, with a whisper of desperation.

“We are not going back to the shit business, that is for sure,” I said.

“You can stay as my guests,” she said. “I can afford it. I am doing very well. In fact I have two other clubs in other parts of the city. Have you boys finished school? I can get a place here for you if you haven’t. We should let your mother know you are safe. She will not be happy. Your grandfather will be furious. What is that smell? Is that your clothes or is it under your skin? I wouldn’t be surprised. It took me months to get that smell off my body. Now I hardly know what faeces smell like. My world is glitter and perfume…”.

My brother and I were drawn to look at one another as we often do. We smiled because we had the same thought. He had told us in a message: “You might say it is the complete opposite.” It was. This place was bright and happy and full of sweet-smelling promise. We were not going back. There might have been a subtle nod between us.

Dad said: “The good news is that you boys have your Daddy’s good looks, the bad news is you smell like fourth generation turd turners. You are going to need to sit in a bath of carbolic for hours to get you clean. And then we are going to make you smell so sweet that even your very own shit will smell like body lotion”.

There was a flat upstairs and it was huge and luxurious with two guest rooms, with a bath in each one. But in Dad’s own room the bath was a double and she had us both it, naked because “it’s nothing I haven’t seen before” and being having the skin steeped in sewage scrubbed from our bodies.

“I have burned your clothes,” she said. “And I took one whiff of what was in your bags and I burned that too, and the bags. No amount of washing could rid that fabric of that awful smell. There are robes to wear. You are both the same size, but I have no male clothes in the place. If we are going shopping we will need to find something that passes for gender neutral.”

But as we dried off she came back with the news that there was nothing except some tight jeans G-strings to be worn under, and blouses that she hoped might pass as shirts.

“At least down here nobody knows you,” she said.

My brother said: “I can wear that, but I am not going to look like a guy after that shampoo.”

It was true that the deep-cleaning shampoo had turned or greased down mops into fluffy balls.

“There is more treatment required there,” she said. “Hair hold’s smells so we either shave it off or leave it looking like that through the treatments. But we could always venture out as three lady shoppers, just until we get to the first menswear store.”

But it seemed like we never got there. Dad only knew the local ladies’ boutiques, and it seemed that she could not walk by any of them without calling in, where she seemed known and liked.

“These are my sons,” she said. “Staying with me for a bit.”

“Chips off the old block,” one lady said. “You should introduce them as your daughters. Such good bone structure. And great legs from what I can see. I have just the thing. Would you like to try it one young lady?”

However did we get caught up in this. But how could Dad say no when a boutique says: “Anything for your daughters you can have on approval, given how much trade you have brought our way.”

We just sought of fell into it. I don’t think either of us ever made the decision: ‘I am going to work for Dad as a transvestite cocktail waitress’. We just got caught up in the whole thing. I mean everybody around us was girly.

And as we soon discovered, there was nobody who had anything to do with any of the “Risqué” clubs who did not walk about without a smile on their face, us included. Everybody smiles when they are surrounded by beauty and music, and a little liquor helps too. Nobody smiles when they are shovelling shit.

Who would choose a life of joy and loveliness over a life of depression and ugliness? Who wouldn’t choose sweet perfume over the odour of dung? Even if we had consciously made that choice, which I cannot recall us ever doing.

We made a decision on the breast implants. I remember that. People sort of expect a little more cleavage, and it is a place where the tips can be pushed down into. Maybe double if you let them kiss one.

Don’t think that we are whores or anything. Dad would not approve. We are performers – dancer and comedians, and comperes of the show. Managers too. There are two other clubs and Dad likes to keep it in the family. But she likes us all together too. She likes to put on a show with all three of us. “A family in the business and a business in the family”, as she likes to say.

And it’s like she said: “Who wants to do stand in a pit of poo when you can dance in the stars?”

And Daddy says that one day this business is going to be ours.

The End

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