



OLD FAMILIAR FACES

A love affair with blank verse

By Nat Cassidy

Where are they gone, the old familiar faces?

*I had a mother, but she died, and left me,
Died prematurely in a day of horrors—
All, all are gone, the old familiar faces.
—Charles Lamb*

*I had a sister
The devil kissed her
And raised a blister
—Charles Lamb*

*Anxiety may be compared with dizziness. He whose eye happens to look down the yawning abyss becomes dizzy. But what is the reason for this? It is just as much in his own eye as in the abyss, for suppose he had not looked down. Hence, anxiety is the dizziness of freedom, which emerges when the spirit wants to posit the synthesis and freedom looks down into its own possibility, laying hold of finiteness to support itself. Freedom succumbs to dizziness. Further than this, psychology cannot and will not go. In that very moment everything is changed, and freedom, when it again rises, sees that it is guilty. Between these two moments lies the leap, which no science has explained and which no science can explain. He who becomes guilty in anxiety becomes as ambiguously guilty as it is possible to become.
—Søren Kierkegaard, The Concept of Anxiety*

*There is no subtext in Shakespeare.
—Acting teachers, everywhere*

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

1834, London:

Mary, *late 50s/early 60s*

Charles, *late 50s*

2012, New York:

Lee, *30s*

Oliver, *30s*

(Diverse casting is highly encouraged for Lee and Oliver)

Old Familiar Faces was originally produced by Tin Drum Productions as part of the 2013 New York International Fringe Festival. It opened at The Players Theatre in New York City on August 11, 2013.

The cast and crew were as follows:

MARY LAMB.....Tandy Cronyn
CHARLES LAMB.....Sam Tsoutsouvas
OLIVER.....James Patrick Nelson
LEE.....Marianne Miller

Director: Nat Cassidy
Stage Manager: Mark Brystowski
Assistant Director: John Moriarty
Lighting Designer: Kia Rogers
Costume Director: Izzy Fields
Gore Supervisor: Stephanie Cox-Williams
Stagehands: Alexis Thomason, John Moriarty

PRESS FOR OLD FAMILIAR FACES

"[A] wise and moving new play ... Cassidy's perception into a dimly distant time is matched by his insight into the always even harder truths to see about our own ... The frankness and feeling we get from both pairs of characters, behind the veil of legend and with the guard of the fourth wall down, is remarkable. ... The play enacts some of the most tender connections and most honest and aware accounts of mental illness and disintegrating relationships I've ever seen ... As heartbreaking as anything in the theatrical canon." - Adam McGovern, Fanchild

"Magical ... masterful ... [Shakespeare's] verse is so beautifully illuminated by Cassidy's storytelling, knowledge of Shakespeare is not a pre-requisite for enjoying the show. ... Cassidy's own words resonate with poetry and meaning so much so that he can move from Shakespeare's words to his own without anyone but a Shakespeare scholar knowing where each begins and ends. ... So poetic, so full of insight and understanding ... Exquisite ... So much brilliance on stage. ... Old Familiar Faces is a can't-miss show." - Sarah Tuft, Usher Nonsense

"Brimming with acerbic wit ... Ingenious ... The counterpoint here is spectacular, not to mention ballsy. It takes a lot of nerve for a playwright to put his own text right next to – literally – the greatest words ever written for the theater. Cassidy pulls it off, mostly thanks to the dry sense of humor sneaking through the piece and giving it mischievous life. ... I will have to show up for Reverend Cassidy's next sermon." - Mitch Montgomery, Surreal Time Press

"Cassidy is a seismic talent ... He is a craftsman of the stage, and earns one's trust from the start. ... The world of this play is messy and of the gut, not the brain, and yet still manages to articulate the magic of Shakespeare's work without resorting to didacticism. I can't imagine another contemporary playwright who would think to use the slang, insults, and bawdy humor of Shakespeare as a way to inform the inner and outer lives of his non-Shakespearean characters. It's a gutsy move characteristic of Cassidy, and one that perhaps only he could pull off successfully." - Nathaniel Kressen, nytheatre.com

"This new play reinvents and thrills. ... Cassidy weaves an ornate tapestry full of little gems of searing humor, haunting violence, deep regret, and profound love. As the play unfolds you are constantly surprised how much in common you have with all the characters he has created. ... The non-linear structure hooks you in from the beginning, teasing you with bits and pieces of bait along the way. ... Cassidy's language envelops you. At times, it is reminiscent of Christopher Durang and even Tony Kushner. One moment you are laughing hysterically and the next you are questioning everything you know." - Shawna Cormier, Theatre is Easy

"Combining quotations from Shakespeare and his own blank verse, Cassidy presents us with much that is beautiful and moving. To combine his own writing with Shakespeare's takes, what?, daring, courage, ego, balls? But Cassidy pulls it off, and the play is an aural pleasure. ... I hope the future brings Old Familiar Faces back to New York for longer than a Fringe-length stay." - Wendy Caster, Show Showdown

"Romeo & Juliet with Orlando Bloom and Condola Rashad is opening soon. But seriously, do we need another rendition of this play? If you, too, would rather see innovative, original work then head to Old Familiar Faces by Nat Cassidy. It will both satisfy your hunger for blank verse from the Bard and expose you to one of the hottest young playwrights in town. ... We're nearing the point that when Nat Cassidy is in something or writes something or produces something, we just show up without needing any further information." - Maxamoo

ACT ONE

[Darkness. The faint sound of the ocean. NOTE: During the preshow, before the curtain speech, we see MARY enter, walk onstage, and stand in a corner, very still.]

MALE VOICE 1 (*CHARLES*)

When shall we come to the top of that same hill?

MALE VOICE 2 (*OLIVER*)

You do climb up it now: look, how we labour.

MALE VOICE 1

Methinks the ground is even.

MALE VOICE 2

*Horrible steep.
Hark, do you hear the sea?*

MALE VOICE 1

No, truly.

FEMALE VOICE (*LEE*)

*Why, then, your other senses grow imperfect
By your eyes' anguish.*

MALE VOICE 1

*So may it be, indeed:
Methinks thy voice is alter'd; and thou speak'st
In better phrase and matter than thou didst.*

FEMALE VOICE

You're much deceived—

MALE VOICE 2

*—in nothing am I changed
But in my garments.*

MALE VOICE 1

Methinks you're better spoken.

FEMALE VOICE (*overlapping; interrupting*)

Thou must be patient;

MALE VOICE 2

—we came crying hither:

FEMALE VOICE

*Thou know'st, the first time that we smell the air,
We wawl and cry.*

MALE VOICE 2

I will preach to thee: mark.

MALE VOICE 1

Alack, alack the day!

MALE VOICE 2

*When we are born, we cry that we are come
To this great stage of fools:*

MALE VOICE 1

*Ay, but to die and go we know not where,
To lie in cold obstruction and to rot,
To be—*

MALE VOICE 2

Or not to be;

FEMALE VOICE

*That but this blow
Might be the be-all and the end-all here,
But here—*

MALE VOICE 1

MARY.

MALE VOICE 2

That is the question.

MALE VOICE 1

MARY WHAT HAVE YOU DONE?!

FEMALE VOICE

In sooth, I know not why I am so sad.

MALE VOICE 2

Then, kill, kill, kill, kill, kill!

[Long pause. The surf fades away. We are still in darkness. Lights rise on a bare stage. A woman in her late 50s/early 60s, MARY LAMB, is still facing the upstage wall. She is completely still. We hold here for a good, long while—and I mean a good loooooong while. An uncomfortable, unsettlingly long time. Then, we hear

offstage, CHARLES, her younger brother, asking: "Mary? Mary?" He enters and sees her.]

CHARLES

Mary! *(No answer.)* Mary. *(No answer.)* Mary. *(No answer.)* Mary. *(No answer.)* Mary. *(No answer.)* Mary. *(No answer.)* Mary, you sloppy cunt, if you're going to cull me forth in your dreams, the least you can do is pay attention to me.

MARY

Charles.

CHARLES

There we are!

MARY *(Looking around)*

I'm *here* again, aren't I?

CHARLES

It appears so.

MARY

I'm here again.

(Sighing, close to a sob.) Oh ...

CHARLES

Oh, God, none of *that*. So you're here, let's not get lachrymose. You know the solution, Mary Lamb. Good boys and good girls must *engage* themselves and see what can be done to get through the situation as it stands. No amount of tears shall wash away—

[MARY blows a long, juicy raspberry.]

CHARLES

All right.

MARY

How is it that even in my dreams you're so bloody prosaic?

CHARLES *(stung)*

I thought you liked my prose.

MARY

I'd rather dream of poetry.

CHARLES

You read too much Shakespeare.

[*Beat. She begins to pace, really realizing where she is.*]

MARY (*trying to be light*)

Oh, my Chuck. You're in for a hard time when I awake. Are you ready?

CHARLES

May I tell you a secret?

MARY (*begging*)

Make it a good one.

CHARLES

I wait for this every day.

MARY

(*Painfully crestfallen.*) Oh, Charles, why does this happen? // It's so unfair. To both of us. I am nothing but a curse to you. I am Samuel's albatross, dangling from your neck, curving your spine, dragging you down—

CHARLES (*overlapping*)

Why? Oh, Lord. Now who's being prosaic? Mary! Mary! For God's sake! If I'm to be saddled with a madwoman for a sister, might I at least be spared the pathetic melodrama? (*Beat.*) And let us not forget the *point* of Samuel's albatross. Transcendence will come.

MARY

"If it be not now . . ."

CHARLES

Precisely. "Come what come may . . ."

MARY

"Time and the hour run through the roughest day."

CHARLES

You are brilliant. (*Beat.*) So. Shall we begin?

MARY (*begging*)

No.

CHARLES (*chuckling, sinister*)

I'm sorry. But yes.

[*He exits.*]

MARY (*calling off to him*)

I can run, Charles!

CHARLES (*offstage*)

Ha! So do it!

[She does not. He comes back on a moment later—he is carrying a bucket. He puts the bucket down and pulls from it a huge carving knife, dripping with blood—in fact, we can see the bucket is brimming with blood. He hands her the knife. She resists, he insists, and finally she takes it from him. He dips his hands into the blood, and then begins to smear the blood all over her with his hands and arms.]

MARY (*barely a whisper*)

Please don't.

CHARLES (*smearing her with blood; with cruel relish*)

Ahem. Here's rosemary. That's for remembrance. Pray you, love, remember.

MARY (*hardly protesting*)

No.

CHARLES (*more blood*)

And there's pansies. That's for thoughts.

MARY

Please.

CHARLES (*more blood*)

There's fennel for you. (*More blood.*) And columbines. (*More blood.*) And rue for you. (*Beat. He holds an upturned hand out for her to place something in it. A moment—they both know what's going to happen.*) And here's some for me.

[Pause. MARY must say the next line.]

MARY

Oh, you must wear your rue with a difference.

[She weakly reaches out with the knife. CHARLES grabs her wrists and forces her to thrust the knife into his own belly. MARY, helpless, close to tears but unable even to weep, cannot close her eyes. He wrests the knife from her and continues to stab himself in the gut, slice at his wrists, his neck, &c.—he never breaks eye contact, but stares intensely at her and screams at her as he stabs. We hear the sound of the blade hacking through flesh and viscera, blood spilling to the floor. Lights crash to dark—the sounds and screaming continue.]

[Beneath the sound of CHARLES screaming, we hear another voice shouting – or, more groaning than anything. A sort of “You’ve got to be fucking kidding me, I can’t believe this is happening but I always kinda figured it would be like this” groan that punctuates itself with bemused laughter. Lights cross-fade into OLIVER’s apartment. LEE, his ex, is standing in the doorway.]

OLIVER

Ohhhhhhhhhhhhhhh. *(Becomes laughter.)* Oh, oh, oh, oh—

LEE

Okay! Okay. Fine. Forget I even asked.

[Pause.]

OLIVER

Just like that, huh?

LEE

Yup!

[She leaves.]

OLIVER

Thanks for stopping by! Thanks for ... stopping by ...

[OLIVER sits, thinks, jiggles his leg. After a moment or two, his phone beeps. He picks it up. Looks at a text, laughs. Calls her back.]

OLIVER

Yeah, I’m still here, where would I have gone? You spelled “there” wrong, by the way, it’s t-h-e-r—okay.

[He hangs up. Fixes his hair. Rolls his eyes with a “what are you doing” grimace.]

OLIVER

Oh, for a muse of fucking faaaahhh ...

[After a moment, a knock on the door. He opens it up, it’s her.]

LEE

Take two?

[He lets her in. She enters, sits. Pause.]

OLIVER

You look good.

LEE

Hey, let's skip all of that!

OLIVER

Measure for Measure, huh?

LEE

Yes.

OLIVER

You want to make a movie of *Measure for Measure*.

LEE

Yes.

OLIVER

I mean, Shakespeare works so well on film.

LEE

You know me, I'm impulsive.

OLIVER

Yeah. (*He gets up, an over-exaggerated groan.*) You want a soda? Beer? Something?

LEE

No, I'm, I'm fine. I can't stay too long.

OLIVER

Ah. (*He grabs a drink.*) Hey, how's him?

LEE

Him's fine.

OLIVER

You're fine, he's fine. I can see what drew you two together. Although, you guys've gotta be due for a divorce now, right?

LEE

Okay. (*She gets up.*)

OLIVER

I'm just asking! Fifty percent of all marriages—hey, what, almost seventy percent of the marriages in this room, even.

LEE

We //never got married, Ol—

OLIVER

You know what happens to the other fifty-percent of marriages, by the way? How they end up?

LEE

No.

OLIVER

Murder-suicide. True fact. Look it up.

LEE

I will.

OLIVER

How do you even have time for a new project right now? Aren't you busy rebooting the fucking *Green Lantern* or something?

LEE

I'll make the time. (*Beat.*) I have really good ideas. I can't stop thinking about it. And I'm not gonna be able to play Isabella much longer, so—

OLIVER

Already pushing it. What are you, 35 now?

LEE

34.

OLIVER

Kind of a shitty part, too.

LEE

It's not a shitty part.

OLIVER

And pretty tiny for a name.

LEE

It's going to be a small picture.

OLIVER

Who's directing it?

LEE

Bradley White? He did *The Monk* a couple years ago.

OLIVER

And the funds are already lined up, huh?

LEE

The funds are already lined up.

OLIVER

Wow. That's ... So, all right, you want to get the band back together. You and me, Isabella and Angelo. Could be fun. Who else //do you have in—

LEE

I want you to play the Duke.

OLIVER

Huh?

LEE

The Duke. I want you to play the Duke.

[*OLIVER gets up. Opens another soda.*]

LEE

You already have a can right here.

OLIVER

I know, I wanted this one. The Duke? That's a ... the Duke?

LEE

Yes.

OLIVER

That's pathetic, Lee. That's a pittance of a role.

LEE

I know.

OLIVER

I would be a fantastic Angelo. Or, fuck, even what's his name?

LEE

Pompey.

OLIVER

You think I could just sit and watch someone else butcher Angelo? On film? *Forever*? Did you learn nothing about me? Who are you looking at? Who?

LEE

James Tatum.

OLIVER

YOU'VE GOT TO BE FUCKING—! Get out, get the fuck out of my house! That's—the Duke is a joke, Lee! The Duke is like Edgar, he's just—

LEE

He's the hardest fucking role in the play! Like Edgar. (*He starts to protest.*) Making him work is almost impossible, you know it. But he has to work. And, I can tell this is what you want to hear but that doesn't make it any less true: you're the only person I know who's good enough.

OLIVER (*with venom*)

You could hold auditions.

[*She glares at him.*]

OLIVER

What about the love scenes?

LEE

There are no love scenes between the //Duke and Isabella.

OLIVER

He proposes to her at the end, there have to be love scenes.

LEE

They're not in the text—

OLIVER

The proposal is in the text!

LEE

And her accepting it is not.

OLIVER

What, you're gonna have her, what, walk away, or—you're not going to have her walk away, are you?

LEE

I don't know. I'm thinking ab—

OLIVER

JEEESUS.

LEE

Just, please, will you shut up and just think about it, please?

OLIVER

Why? Why are you itching to do this, Lee? To do *this* again?

LEE

I just need it, okay?

OLIVER

You need it.

LEE

The words. I need the text. Nothing else feels right on my tongue. I ... (*she laughs*) I miss my language. Nothing else sounds right.

OLIVER

Huh.

LEE

Oh, don't fucking, with *that*.

OLIVER

With what?

LEE

Stop fucking flattering yourself. I'm only asking you because you can do the job, I didn't come here to—two seconds ago you were bitching about the role and now—hahaha, why am I even surprised? Let's all stand in awe at the fucking parthenogenesis of your delusion!

OLIVER

The parth—wow, that's—what book did you read that in? I can just picture sitting there, your eyes scanning across the page, you bump into those words, you curl the cover back, "Oh, I've got to use that," and you just think about it all day so you don't forget it, you rehearse it so you can use it so casually, like a rapier, like "The parthenogenesis of your delusion." Wowie, I am impressed.

[*She kisses at him on the forehead.*]

LEE

Darling. Your attempts at cruelty were always my favorite things about you.

OLIVER

I can't imagine how you would try to pick a favorite thing about me.

LEE

Sounds like you have a lot to think about. (*She goes to leave.*) We need to know soon, but ...

OLIVER

The fucking Duke.

LEE

Yeah. It would mean a lot to me. (*Beat.*) I'm ... I'm dying, Oliver. I don't have much time.

OLIVER

What?

LEE

Yeah. They think it could be a year, maybe less. I ...

[*Pause.*]

OLIVER

Really?

[*Pause.*]

LEE

No. That just seemed like a good tactic to try.

OLIVER

Ah. Ha. Yeah, it would've been.

LEE

Yeah. But ... I need—

OLIVER

The language. Right.

LEE

Okay.

[*She heads for the door again.*]

OLIVER

Lee.

LEE (*slightly annoyed*)

What?

OLIVER

You and him, do you ... talk?

LEE

Yes.

OLIVER

And do you tell him things?

LEE

He's my husband—(*realizes that's not a smart thing to say.*) Yes.

OLIVER

Do you tell him things about you? Does he know about, you know, all about you yet?

LEE

Oliver—

OLIVER

Have you *shared* everything with him? Like a good little gatekeeper?

LEE

I have to go.

OLIVER

Hey, this isn't from *Measure*, but it feels appropriate. "Never. Never. NEVER. (*LEE exits.*) NEVER! NEVER!" YOU CAN'T JUST HAVE ISABELL WALK AWAY, THE RSC DID IT IN THE 70s AND THERE HAS TO BE A ROMANCE! I HOPE YOU ARE DYING, YOU FUCKING—!

[*CHARLES enters.*]

CHARLES

A plague of all cowards, I say, and a vengeance too! marry, and amen! Give me a cup of sack, boy. A plague of all cowards!

OLIVER

Peace, ye fat-guts; lie down.

CHARLES

A king's son! You!

OLIVER

Why, you whoreson round man, what's the matter?

CHARLES

Are not you a coward? answer me to that: and Poins there?