

Both Sides Now

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*But now old friends are acting strange
They shake their heads, they say I've changed
Well something's lost, but something's gained
In living every day*

*I've looked at life from both sides now
From win and lose and still somehow
It's life's illusions I recall
I really don't know life at all*

1. Block the Sun.

*But now they only block the sun,
they rain and snow on everyone.
So many things I would have done
but clouds got in my way.*

The first case of the Hames Virus was in Atlanta, Georgia in the United States and the name of that first victim was, of course, Albert Hames.

At first, the symptoms and the progress of the virus was kept from the public until a whistleblower in the research hospital leaked the news to the media.

Of course, apart from the sensationalist media, none of the serious outlets took it seriously. On the various morning television shows around the world, commentators made jokes about a virus that was supposedly turning a male into a complete female!

Nobody believed it and the news reports were discarded until one journalist travelled to the hospital and demanded confirmation or denial.

To her surprise, the hospital officially confirmed that Albert Hames, airline counter clerk at the Atlanta Airport was slowly and irrevocably transitioning to a female!

Then, a media explosion erupted and the entire world became glued to the day-to-day accounts of what was happening to Albert Hames.

The media conference, where Doctor Leroy Manson confirmed the transition, was televised worldwide.

‘I am here today,’ Doctor Manson began gravely as the cameras flashed, ‘to confirm that Albert Hames, a twenty four year old male is slowly changing into a female. The major changes occur while the patient slips into a deep coma for a periods that can last as long as two weeks. Minor changes such as softening of the skin layers, changes to hair and other minor areas occur gradually while the patient is going about his...ah...her...daily activities.’

Doctor Manson peered at the journalists over his glasses and then added, ‘we have no idea what caused this remarkable change and can only guess that this virus will continue to cause the mutations within the patient’s body until the changes are complete.’

He removed his glasses.

‘I’ll now take questions.’

Of course, Manson was immediately barraged with questions and the world gained more interesting information as Manson answered the questions truthfully.

Albert Hames had, it seemed, suffered an intense fever and when his doctor could find no reason for the suffering, quickly dispatched Hames to hospital. They identified an unknown virus raging in the body of Albert Hames and they kept the patient in the hospital while they struggled to identify the virus. It was while he was in

hospital that the nursing staff began to notice the changes.

Manson also revealed that he did not think the virus was natural and was, in all probability a so-called “designer” virus created by persons unknown.

‘Do you think,’ a journalist called, ‘that it was created by terrorists?’

That caused uproar but Doctor Manson was calm.

‘No, I don’t think so. It does not appear to be contagious.’

Of course, we all know *now* that the Hames Virus is contagious but in a selective manner.

‘So, Doctor Manson,’ another called, ‘you think this is a one off, just a freak of nature?’

‘I prefer not to use the term “freak”.’

‘Ah, sorry, Doc.’

‘We can not see that it is contagious so yes, Alberta Hames will be the only victim.’

Everyone breathed a sigh of relief and the journalist went on to ask the important questions such as does Hames now have a pair of big breasts?

The furore died down and then rose up again when Alberta Hames sold her story to the television channels and we all watched as the slim, self assured young woman handled the media. She then took her money and vanished from the public eye and everyone forgot about the Hames Virus.

Until the *next* case!

In fact, there were *two* new cases – one in Austin, Texas and the other in New York City. Both had been travelling around the period Albert Hames had been suffering the onset of his fever but was still working at the Atlanta Airport. The problem was, that one of the two men had *not* set down in Atlanta!

Manson informed the media the additional cases and confirmed that the Hames Virus was contagious while the initial fever raged within the victim.

‘It appears the contagious element is while the patient has the fever. In other words,’ he explained, ‘in the first three weeks, the patient is highly contagious, although we are not clear how the disease is transmitted.’

However, when two more cases appeared in California, research showed that the infected men did not pass the virus to other men but in fact, passed it on to *women* who were the carriers of the virus until it was finally transmitted to a suitable victim.

And the definition of victim soon became quite definitive! It was obvious that the Hames Virus *only* changed some men! All the victims were in the age bracket of 20 – 25 years of age. Men outside that age category were immune as were females.

The American Government was slow to react as most of the politicians were well above the age bracket of the victims but the media furore finally forced them to act. The government set up a fund to support victims and to enable more research.

They also attempted to identify where the Hames Virus had originated. Some hard line conservative politicians blamed obscure feminist groups while the feminist groups ridiculed the politicians in a media brawl.

One left-wing group claimed an anti-war fanatic must have created the virus, as it would decimate any army by selecting the age group the Hames Virus only attacked.

The rest of the world watched and comedians all over the globe with the exception of those residing and performing within the United States were making jokes based on the Hames Virus.

Then, there was a new victim in Madrid and a wave of panic and hysteria swamped Europe! Two more victims were identified in Paris and Dublin respectively and the British Government, along with other E.U. governments ploughed cash into support organisations and research.

Suddenly, a generation of young men were very wary about socialising with women and, as there was no immediate way to identify who the female carriers were, many young men opted for celibacy and strictly masculine company.

Even when early research claimed it would be relatively simple to identify which females were carriers, many young men didn't believe it and Men Only groups sprang up all over the globe.

Of course, the conservative religious right in America then claimed it was a virus designed to turn all

young men into homosexuals! There was talk of war but two things stopped *that* discussion. Firstly, the Americans had *no* idea who to fight but, as that had never stopped them before, the rest of the world watched and worried. Then, North Korea, China, Saudi Arabia and Iran all announced that they had cases of the Hames Virus as did other smaller countries.

Suddenly, the world had a common purpose and joined forces in a way never before seen to fight the fearful Hames Virus!

In a way, it was as if dark clouds had suddenly blocked the Sun in everyone's life!

2: Win and Lose.

*I've looked at life from both sides now,
From win and lose, and still somehow
It's life's illusions I recall.
I really don't know life at all.*

1.

I hurried out of the Camden Lock and Market Tube station and looked around for Viola. She had asked me to go to the markets with her but I had to work.

Viola was standing by the station and I rushed over.

‘Sorry I’m late.’

‘I bet! You just *hate* shopping, don’t you, Oliver?’

The fact was I didn’t feel particularly brilliant but, assuming I was just coming down with a cold, soldiered on.

‘No,’ I protested loyally, ‘of course not, I just got hung up at work.’

‘With Mickey, no doubt? Where *was* this work? At the Lion and the Phoenix Pub?’

‘No, honestly, the call centre was down on people so Mickey and I had to work.’

Mickey and I had been best mates since school and looked out for each other. When the Hames Virus began appearing outside of the USA, we kept to ourselves for a while, had many laughs but decided that we really did *want* birds! We were both twenty-two so birds, football and lager were really our only reasons for living.

We thought we were bullet-proof, that the Hames Virus wouldn't get *us*! It's all a bit of a joke now but then we thought we wouldn't get it if we were careful.

Cautiously, we went to the usual pubs where Government officials acted as bouncers. They weren't bothered about the blokes, just the women who had to show their identity cards and the card that showed the results of their latest Hames Virus Carrier Screen (HVCS). All women were compelled to attend a screen once a month. Without a clean HVCS card, they couldn't work, shop or go out.

That night, Mickey met Fiona and Fiona set me up with Viola so we went on double dates a lot. Fiona was all right, although she was a bit touchy, but Viola, for some reason, couldn't stand Mickey!

Mickey and I shared a flat and we got on well. I had come down to London in search of work and Mickey had just quit his job in an I.T. company as business was slow and as he said "boring".

Therefore, we both ended up in a call centre where the money was good and we could wear what we liked to work.

Now, Viola was pushing me to move in with her and the pressure was mounting everyday. I understood her determination. It was hard for women to get blokes in this day and age. The Hames Virus had created an even bigger battle of the sexes and more and more blokes just opted out of the entire war, went for the Men Only clubs!

I cut the evening short with Viola – something that definitely did not make her happy – but I wasn't feeling good at all!

Mickey was not sympathetic when I finally tottered into the flat that night. I could tell by the traces of perfume that Fiona had been there and I was so tired and feverish, I just wanted to crawl into bed.

'I hope you shagged her in your bed!' I snapped hoping to get past Mickey without him noticing I had a fever. A fever in the era of the Hames Virus was a dangerous thing to admit to.

'Hey,' Mickey said innocently, 'leave it out, Oliver! Course I bloody did! I wouldn't use your bed, mate, you haven't washed the sheets for ages!'

'Bollocks! Washed them last week!'

I sank down into the armchair with a sigh.

'Viola still nagging?' Mickey asked sympathetically. We had spoken about the pressure Viola had been exerting.

'Wants us to move in together as soon as possible.'

'Time to give her the old heave ho, mate! She's desperate for a sprog and she's one of those bloody high maintenance birds!'

'No, she's not,' I protested, although, deep down, I knew he was right.

'Suit yourself, mate, but I reckon you should do a runner on her. Time to tell her to find some other bloke that wants to get sprogged up!'

‘It’s not just about babies...’

‘No? She has sprogs in her eyes, chum, she thinks of nothing else! Once Viola’s up the duff, she’ll be off on you. Mark my words!’

‘Where did romance go?’ I asked theatrically, inching towards my room.

‘The Hames Virus killed romance, mate, killed it stone dead!’

‘Has it?’ I said wistfully.

‘Yep. Look blokes don’t even do the flower thing anymore, thank god! I could never see the sense of giving birds flowers. What if they’re allergic or something? I have a rule,’ Mickey said firmly, ‘no flowers!’

‘I’ve heard that before,’ I said sighing. ‘What will you do if I move out?’ I asked cautiously and Mickey shrugged.

‘Suppose I’ll move in with Fiona.’

‘Would she have you?’ I asked, cheekily and Mickey grinned. ‘Maybe she has a rule not to move in with blokes that don’t give flowers? She mightn’t want you to move in.’

‘Bollocks. She’d have me like a shot, mate. Do you know how many available blokes our age there are that aren’t hooked up in the Men Only clubs? It’s hard for birds to meet eligible blokes like us.’

The Men Only Clubs were everywhere and society was dividing rapidly into men and women in a way never seen before.

‘I know, I saw that bit on the TV that the birth rates are well down.’

‘Exactly!’

‘I’m going to hit the sack,’ I said, stretching.

‘Fancy a pint?’

‘No, I’m knackered. It’s been a long day.’

‘No shift tomorrow, my lad, so you can have a lie in.’

‘Thank god!’

‘Come on, just one pint,’ Mickey pleaded. ‘We’ll have an early night.’

‘I bet!’

‘Just one.’

‘Nah, I really don’t feel like it.’

‘You got a cold coming on or something?’

‘I think so. Just want to have a sleep.’

2.

I woke in the middle of the night, feeling I was baking in a desert. The heat was incredibly intense but my forehead felt cold and clammy to me.

Mickey was immediately concerned when I staggered out of my bedroom mid morning.

‘*Cripes*, what’s up with you?’

‘I just feel weird.’

‘You haven’t got a fever have you?’ Mickey warily asked.

I avoided his eyes as we both knew the ramifications.

‘No, don’t think so. My forehead just feels clammy.’

Mickey stood up and felt my forehead.

‘Fuck, you’re burning up! You’re red hot,’ he said, frowning.

‘It’ll pass,’ I said desperately. ‘Must be something I ate...’

Mickey seized both my shoulders and looked me in the eye.

‘You *have* a fever, Oliver. You know the law.’

‘I don’t feel hot...’

‘Bollocks! You *are* hot! So hot, mate, there is steam coming off you! Oliver, we have to ring the Bill, it’s the law. If I don’t tell the police you’ve got a fever, they’ll throw me in the lock up!’

‘I know,’ I said quietly, remembering all the television commercials from the government. ‘I fit the guideline they’re always yabbering on about – male, in the age bracket and with a fever! You’d better call the Hotline, Mickey,’ I said listlessly.

I sat down with a sigh and Mickey nodded as he fished his mobile out of his jacket pocket.

‘I’ll give them a bell now. They’ll send someone around to look you over. Not that you’ve got *the* virus, or anything,’ he hurriedly added.

A look at his concerned face told me that Mickey thought I had *something*!

‘I know,’ I said with more confidence than I felt, ‘how could I catch it? There hasn’t been any cases of the Hames Virus in London, has there?’

Mickey shook his head as he listened to the telephone.

‘Yes,’ he said in a suddenly formal voice, ‘my flatmate has got a fever. Yes, a *real* fever. He’s bloody hot! Right, here’s the address.’

Mickey disconnected the call and turned to me with a sad smile.

‘They say they’re on their way. They’ll be here in a few minutes.’

‘What, have they got a teleportation machine or something?’ I said at a weak attempt at humour.

Mickey played along and pretended to laugh.

‘Ah, ha ha, funny, mate.’

We sat in an uncomfortable silence until the doorbell rang stridently.

‘That’ll be them,’ Mickey said, leaping to his feet. ‘I’ll go let them in. I’m sure there’s nothing to worry about.’

My stomach turned over as I sat waiting, I heard the door open, voices and then loud feet.