

Chapter 4: Lamp Store

Darien had worked for five years as the assistant manager of his father's lighting store before the business went under due to his older sister's poor management and the unstoppable propagation of big box corporate stores. Darien never wanted to work for his father, so when the business closed he went to school for botanical philosophy, a major that was offered for only four years at an experimental college in northern Kentucky that managed to get accreditation for ten years before losing it and shutting down for good.

Darien was starting a new job as an office manager for a recruiting company that placed people in corporate jobs. He was offered the job with the company after several failed attempts one of the agents at the firm had in trying to place Darien in executive assistant positions. His resume was a jumble of past experiences that had no place in an office culture like the ones available. After six months with no successful placement, BridgeBrooks Consulting offered him a job as their office manager. The company had a 90.02% success rate with placements, and if they hadn't placed Darien somewhere, their reporting would have taken them below the 90% rate and they wanted to ensure they stayed competitive. Darien's job would require him to manage all in house filing, communications between agents, mail, supplies and some of the marketing. He was a catchall for the low risk office tasks that came up. His predecessor had left him an opening and closing list covering some of the daily tasks and duties he would be responsible for and detailed what would be expected of him.

His first day was daunting even though Darien was, at this point, familiar with the office and the employees. The last person to leave that day was Elaine, one of the younger employees at the firm and a fairly quiet reserved looking person. They said, "goodnight, see you tomorrow" simultaneously and Darien watched Elaine walk past the tall shelving near the exit and waited to hear the door close shut before he looked down at the closing list and wondered how long it would take him to gather the trash and clean the floors and communal areas. Deciding to start with the vacuum, he started the path for the first time, knowing that this would be the testing period before he developed a routine system that he could repeat as a nightly choreography. Closing down the shop was his favorite activity at his father's lamp store.

He'd gotten it down to such a perfectly staged dance that he'd managed to invent an entire theatrical scene with a chorus of characters reciting their final lines of dialogue as he put each of the lamps to rest, one by one. Darien plays Gery, his father and the original owner of the store as he remembers him, peeking up from his studies as a child and watching his father's nightly careful work of putting his store to rest.

Closing down the Lamp Store

Curtain rises to reveal a brightly lit scene with twenty one characters posed in frozen stances as Gery, the lamp store owner, slowly raises his head to face the audience. Gery walks stage left, each character, a lamp, lights up as he walks past them. He stops in front of the flower, making a crown behind his head and lighting him from behind. When each lamp speaks, it lights up before turning off when Gery flips the switch.

Gery: People of the Uncaring World

Chorus: Beacon Beacon

Gery: All to myself is what you are!

Chorus: Lamp Store, Lamp Store

Gery: Guys, Do we need as much money as we have?

Chorus: Beacon, Beacon

Lamp number 1(La Bamba,1987): I thought you were somebody

Gery turns the rotating switch and the pink light with the green and brown base turns off

Chorus: Lamp Store, Lamp Store

Lamp number 2 (La Bamba, 1987): He always said you were gonna be somebody

Gery pulls the chain chord down on the wall sconce and turns the sconce off

Chorus: He always said it

Lector Spector: Out of the root from which it sprung*

Gery reaches into the red seance trumpet and presses the press switch and turns the lamp off

Drupe 1: Root Root

Gery switches the white toggle switch off

Drupe 2: which which

Gery switches the white toggle switch off also

Archive Box: In the List Of Suspects, I saw your name twice!

Gery steps on the floor switch and the light in the box shuts off

Chorus: Twice but not in error!

Dollhouse Lamp: THE LIGHT IN THE WINDOW**

Gery: What of it?

Dollhouse Lamp: NO PLACE FOR AN ARGUMENT**

Gery pulls the long beaded chain down and the small chest of drawers briefly touches ground. The light behind the green walls goes off.

Broom lamp: Do this while I wait

Chorus: ok, while you wait

Gery leans down to lift the white toggle switch off the floor and flips it off. The broom lamp slumps down at a steeper angle after Gery drops the chord.

Nightshirt Lamp: “the spirit of the lady again flickered up as the flame within the socket of the lamp”***

Chorus: Who wrote that?

Nightshirt Lamp: Helene Cixous

Chorus: Who?

Nightshirt Lamp: It could have been Tolstoy

Gery: Of course I have no reason to write to you again

Gery turns off the small fluorescent lamp. Gery flips the toggle switch behind the hanging stencil shade and the cool fluorescent bulb turns off.

Rock Salad: The language lamp

Chorus mumbles nonsense

Gery rotates the switch and the purple light turns off.

Chorus: Who writes the story?

Flower Lamp: CarefulHomonymsIndexCosmicKnowingOfReluctantYearning

Thickening Agent Lamp: The plot the plot

Chorus: When was it on?

Blue bag lamp: Approx 1980-2023 with lingering traces in the following years.

Gery steps on the floor switch and flower goes dark, turning, he pulls the long chain chord down and the glowing pant leg turns dark. Gery makes a sharp turn and in five large steps makes it over to the blue bag. He reaches inside and switches the toggle off. One left.

Pink Lampshade: Her mouth like a rock tumbler

Chorus: Mouth a tumbler

Gery reaches his hand up and turns the switch to off, the pink glow dies down slowly, fading to dark.

Gery: Let's get together when the reign ends

Drop curtain

Darien's parents owned and operated the lamp store that they bought from an Italian family in 1962. Gery had been working for the electricity company and decided to make an offer on the business instead of the house he had promised his young wife. They were living in a studio apartment and she was growing impatient. Knowing nothing about design but enough about electric circuitry to continue the repair service part of the business, he slowly started to replace the inventory of antiques and mid to low end consumer lighting designs left over in the stock from the previous owners and replace it with his own creations. The creative opportunity that the business provided him was unexpected and his wife had no idea what to make of his newfound commitment to his work. Nonetheless he eventually began to earn more money and they were able to buy the building and renovate the upstairs apartment. Later, after the birth of their second son, Darien's youngest brother Elvis, they were able to buy a home and expand the store to the second story.

The lamp store became a kind of local legend and in later years it was featured on regional travel guides and even a couple of travel shows on TV. The lamps were inexpensive but unusual and commissions gave them the chance to work on unusual projects and charge higher rates.

Many of the lamps were nothing out of the ordinary, but in certain corners of the shop, the monotony of plastic wrapped plain white lampshades would be interrupted with caricature-like objects that happened to light up. Darien asked Gery once what the idea was behind these gestural forms made from any number of random lamp parts and other scraps of daily life over a holiday dinner. It was clear Gery didn't want to talk about it then. Darien imagined it was the presence of Gery's brother that made him unwilling to share the more eccentric angles of the otherwise fairly successful business. All Gery said was that it gave people a curious reason to stop in and find themselves buying something. Darien had watched his father working for a long time and knew that Gery's lamps were more than random oddities. He noticed a practice of collecting and caring for things left behind: out of the lost and found and the local

corner free store, Darien noticed many objects migrating from forgotten or abandoned to being incorporated into a brightly lit object. He had also observed Gery's more secretive ways of collecting material for these assemblages that only expanded Darien's curiosity for his father's motivations. Gery had an old spaghetti can next to the sink in the store's workshop that was always being filled with peach pits. Darien asked Gery where they came from and he just said Laura leaves them here every morning before school.

Darien wondered who Laura was but assumed it was one of the many school-age children over the years that had made a routine out of visiting the lamp store and talking with Gery before or after school. Darien wondered how long Laura had been visiting Gery as the peach pit lamps started to accumulate rather suddenly. Darien remembered Annette telling him about a woman she read about who made home decor out of moose pellets after she saw Gery's first peach-pit lamp pull. That grossed him out and he decided not to tell Gery about it even though Annette and Gery's senses of humor were similar and neither of them found Darien very funny most of the time.

* ("Light from beyond" Patience Worth(1923))

** (Some Senses of the Commonplace, Robert Creeley at New College of California, February 21, 1991: an edited transcription)

*** Helene Cixous, Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing (1990)