

OLD BERTIE

by Harry Dunn
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I'm just back from an old mate's funeral,
The kind we all know well,
Of an old reprobate cum friend,
To bid my last farewell.
And my condolences to extend,
But he was past eighty, near as I can tell
And he'd lived his life like it would never end,
Raising Cain and raising Hell.

Old Bertie was a drinker and a heavy smoker, too,
And he had his wilful way with women
Not what you'd call fat, just *slightly* weighty,
He wasn't into exercise, like runnin' gym or swimmin'
So, everything considered, you would really have to say
That Old Bert was lucky to live 'til he was eighty
Before he hit the clay.

I was talking to another aging mourner,
Whose name I have forgotten,
I knew the face of course, standing in the corner,
But my memory for first names,
Is these days worse than rotten.
We reminisced about old times
And that little flat we shared, just off snooty Toorak Road
Eating take-aways and drinking lager-lime
Which was very *a la mode*
Back in the Swinging Sixties, when we were in our prime.

Old Bertie was a frequent visitor and guest,
He'd arrive, often late and unannounced, with half a slab
And a gorgeous blonde in tow, sometimes one on either arm,
In these matters, Old Bertie seemed to be twice-blessed;
He was often on a high,
Perhaps on substances frowned upon by law,
But Bert was always welcome; he didn't need an alibi,
Because he never was a pest,
A freeloader, or a bore.

He was always dressed in style,

Like those chaps you see in Vogue,
He wore a pork-pie hat,
Like an Arthur Daley rogue,
He had a neatly-clipped moustache
And sported two front teeth of gilt;
He drove the latest Porsche,
- Always mortgaged to the hilt.

When I was twenties-five,
Bert was more than thirty,
So he *did* seem rather old,
An aging extrovert,
So I referred to him as 'that old Bertie',
Never just as 'Bert.'

Back then - the swinging sinful Sixties,
Some girls lost their bras, and discovered mini-skirts,
The skinny ones were 'Twiggies.'
And most were shameless flirts
They drank cocktails made from Pimms
And smoked Sobranie cigarettes.
They wore green and black eye-shadow -
Black on the bottle-blondes
And green on most brunettes.

Some dyed their hair peroxide blonde,
Travelled overseas, to London
And then across The Pond
To Gay Paree and Nice;
They discovered French perfume
As if it was just invented.
And returned a few months later,
Speaking mangled French, and preaching peace,
Under-dressed and over-scented.

These girls also spoke another lingo,
A strangled West End English
Which in those days was very in-go
And when they uttered 'Yah' or 'Nah'
They were saying 'Yes' or 'No'
And when a girl said Nah, and that was often,
Or perhaps 'No Way, Shove Off' or even worse,
Like 'Get back in your coffin'

And other two-word phrases
Too robust for this verse.

A man could be mistaken - mistaken and misled
At what was meant by Nah,
It depended on the way the word was said,
And if he wasn't tall, and dark and handsome
He needed to be smarter, like a sly old silver fox
To be competitive, if not a step ahead.
Yes, of course inherited good looks
Were worth a Royal Ransom,
So the plain old fox must use his brain
To get amongst the chooks
For his fair share of what we called romancin'
Just like they did in books.
Now, Old Bertie was more knave than knight,
And had a pick-up strategy, which he said never failed;
I saw him play it out one night,
At a party where he wasn't known, so he went unassailed:
Bert was seated in a corner,
Looking sad and all forlorn,
When a kind-hearted, sweet young lady sat down with him
And asked "Why do you look so sad, and who is it that you mourn?"
And Old Bert, to this good lady's real dismay,
Declared in mournful tones that he would *always* be unhappy
If Mother Nature had her way
Because he had an *incurable* malaise ,
It was a real abomination -
He was one of Nature's *gays*.

This gullible young lady, bright as a summer morn
Kind- hearted and unfazed,
Said that the man had not been born
Who could for long resist *her* feminine wiles and ways,
And that included several like himself,
Who said that they were gays.
She was sure that she could cure him,
As she had several chaps before,
She'd turned them right around, she said,
As she lead Bertie, un-convincingly protesting,
By the hand, out through the door.

They were gone for quite a while,

Old Bert and this young wench,
Not lacking in experience, but no match for Bertram's guile.
They were seen again much later, with Bertie off the bench,
Fully cured, so it seemed,
Of the pain which he'd been suffering, all his life erstwhile.
Dancing with his savior, up close and cheek to cheek,
I remember well that evil little smile
And the recent convert's fervid cling and clench.
You had to hate his rank duplicity, but still admit
That old rascal sure had tenacity and cheek
And was never one to quit.

Reminiscing, I also then recalled,
The time that Bert drove up the Hume
In an aging Holden ute, which boiled and later stalled:
This motoring excursion, to take three days, I presume
Was self-indulgent, undignified and gross.
It seems that Bertie and a corpulent acquaintance.
A bloke I knew as 'Pottsy' - full name Pottsy Bloody Close,
Decided that they'd drive to Botany Bay,
In the Harbour City of romance,
To celebrate Australia Day
With much pomp and circumstance,
All the way to Sydney, along the King's High-way.

Like boy scouts, these travellers well prepared
And armed themselves with essentials and provisions;
A nine-gallon keg, a pluto and several bags of ice,
This was the first and most important of their provisioning decisions;
Two cartons of those Havva-Winfield smokes,
And for sustenance, a dozen Four 'n' Twenty Pies,
A natural and nutritious food of health
For a pair of travelling Aussie blokes,
Should the need for food arise.

The expedition departed late on Friday,
In conditions hot and humid.
They set a cracking pace
No time to dilly-dally,
But the Holden's motor over-heated,
Somewhere north of Seymour, climbing Pretty Sally,
So with sixty miles completed
They pulled into a truck-stop, to let the motor cool,

And decided there to tap the keg,
Still nice and cold and full.

Time passed, of course, and the motor must have cooled,
But Bert and Pottsie had by now acquired the taste,
So they decided to stay there over- night,
They could see no reason now for crass, indecent haste.
So they slept there at the truck-stop,
Which was shady and inviting,
And continued working on the keg,
As if it wouldn't wait,
For their thirst demanded full and regular requiting,
But they also smoked and ate.

Needless now to say, because you must have guessed,
The Sydney expedition stalled just north of Seymour,
Where the travellers paused to rest.
The keg gave out on Monday,
Monday morning, I've been told,
The last two gallons rather frothy
And by now no longer cold;
The fags were smoked and the pies were soaked,
So they headed back to Melbourne,
Older but no wiser, as two monumental hang-overs
Started to take hold.

My late friend, Bertie, less than one week dead,
Was a romantic true at heart,
Or so he often said,
So he married late in life
- Three times Bertie wed,
He had no kids, thank goodness,
And just as well, his best friends said,
Because Bertie's marriages were short-lived
And he often turned up unexpected
In the wrong four-poster bed.

His three ex-wives attended Bertie's funeral, by the way
They even sat together,
Just to spite him, I heard some cynic say,
They didn't look at all unhappy,
To see the old boy dead and gone.
And heading for the clay.

I spoke to Bert's first wife,
I think her name was Millie,
And asked her why she came;
In the circumstances, that question might seem silly:
Her answer quite surprised me,
"You might think I'm here to mourn him"
This charming lady said,
"But no, that's not the reason why I'm here,
I just came to make absolutely sure
The old bastard's well and truly dead!"
Her opinion of the late lamented was vocal, loud and clear,
So the last word on my old friend Bertie
Has sadly now been said.