



THE
GRIEF
OPERA
LOVE GOES ON

The Lyrics

And Explanatory Notes

You know all this will soon be gone
And you may see your works outshone
But know your love will ripple on
The work of love is never done

Nigel Linacre and
Vladimir Miller



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Busy Busy

Clarinet in Bb
Nigel Linaere

Vladimir Miller

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Introduction

“There are no words, no words to say, no words can make this go away”. Yet within days of my son’s death, I started to write about our last conversations, the events as they unfolded, and the searing experience of extreme loss.

I was in shock, unable to believe what we were told has happened. It made no sense. The purpose of the writing was not to feel better. I had no wish to feel better, not even to live. My only wish was to wake up from the nightmare.

Vladimir Miller and I had performed Poetry & Piano shows together. He’s a jazz band leader and composer with several albums, who performs in many countries. We had asked George to perform with us. George said no.

As the poetry, blank verse and narrative emerged, a grief memoir seemed feasible. But the three words, “The Grief Opera”, came to mind. Searching “The Grief Opera” bought up nothing at all. There’s a space. Vladimir said that grief is universal, music is universal, and they can fit. I didn’t know that decades earlier, Vladimir had lost a band member to suicide.

A tradition of “ballad opera” in England, a mix of spoken word and song, drawing upon the popular tunes of the era had started in the 18th century.

George Linacre was a musician, co-composing and playing bass with Eschar, a progressive rock band, until lockdown. Vladimir wanted to use George’s rhythms as a starting point for the composition. George would be in the Grief Opera. This was the moment it had to happen. It would be a grief dance with George. An unrequested epitaph. Vladimir would send the music, one song at a time, I cut much of the narrative and turned some of the rest of into verse.

As the shock diminished, it’s still there, I experienced the presence of love even in the presence of sorrow. The Grief Opera’s sub-title is “Love Goes On”. Grief is frozen love.

This has been the biggest discovery: love is here all the time. It is not mine, for it cannot be owned, it is not for anyone or anything, for it does not choose. It is in every moment, awaiting discovery, it is in everything, it transcends all, it is wordless, needless and deedless. It simply is.

Mysterious Man

George does it all his own way
As his actions seem to say
Calm as a child
Disposed to be mild
While his eyes said that life is OK

George never bothered to crawl
He'd sit and then shuffle, that's all
He knew things would come
From his Dad and his Mum
So he never needed to call

You never knew quite what George thought
It's likely that there was an ought
Some things were 'citing
Others just s'gusting
No subtlety, needed or sought

George is a mysterious man
He always does well what he can
He's no need to impress
Or himself express
For George is his very own man

A few days before Christmas 2020, the Government put Woking back into lockdown. He couldn't visit us.

I posted George a limerick, which arrived a few days after Christmas, but which made him laugh.

The first part of the limerick starts the live performances of The Grief Opera, but which is omitted from the time-limited recording.

The Threat

The threat that never went away
That in his life would always stay
That fixed him to his own defence
Avoiding any and all offence

The threat could any time take form
It had no need to meet a norm
He never knew when it might hit
But must rely upon his wit

No reassurance could be found
While threat itself was not around
For absence meant it may be due
There's threat in all things old and new

The Threat is drawn from a poem that Vladimir and I had performed. When first written, I thought it was about my late father Vivian Linacre, then realised it was autobiographical. After George's death, I learnt that he had told his bandmates of his anxiety about new situations.

Seeking George

Good morning, can I take your order?
Can I speak with George Linacre? ... I'm his father, he hasn't responded.
He's left, closed the door, he doesn't work here anymore.
Oh, when did he go?
He went weeks ago, you didn't know.
Oh, thanks for letting me know. *Father ends call.*
Must go see George, check he's OK, must go see George, can't waste a day!

Knock-knock-knock

Hello, I'm George's Dad... Is he in?
He'll be asleep, not a peep... Up until four am. Playing a fantasy game.
It's the first door... *points* down the corridor.
Knock, knock, knock.... Knock, knock
Hey... morning George, take your time, coffee in a bit.

Good to see you. How are you? How's work?
You've stopped. You felt stuck? How's the band? What you got planned?

We'll support. You understand. OK. Can we talk more often? Noted?
We're performing soon, come play with us! Remember when we played
Busy-Busy?

George seldom took or returned calls or messages. He would go off the radar. If
he didn't respond for too long, I sometimes called him at work.

Busy-Busy

Hey you! You've got mail
Or a text or an app, or some kind of snap
Which may tell a tale
Of a half-forgotten happening
A moment or an opening
Hey you!
You've got likes
An emoji or an icon
Or some kind of con
Which may give a high
But too soon will be gone bye-bye
Busy, busy, busy
Are you busy? Are you busy?
Are you busy? Are you busy?
Busy, busy, busy
Are you busy? Are you busy?
Are you busy? Are you busy?
Hey you! You've got mail
Or a text or an app, or some kind of snap
Which may tell a tale
Of a half-forgotten happening
A moment or an opening
Hey you! You've got likes
An emoji or an icon
Or some kind of con
Which may give a high

But too soon will be gone bye-bye
Busy, busy, busy
Are you busy? Are you busy?
Are you busy? Are you busy?

Repeats

Far too busy for me.
Come play again George!
“No can do”, George says “No can do”.

Years earlier, my sons Tom and George had agreed to perform Busy-Busy with me. We performed at an invitation-only open mic in west London. George played bass, Tom percussion, and the audience joined in the choruses of busy-busy. George enjoyed the audience singing the chorus with us. A bright moment.

Police Call

This is DS No Name, no name. Are you the father of George Linacre?
Are you the father of George Linacre? Are you the father of George Linacre?

Yes.

Your neighbour gave us your details. Sorry to have to give you some news.
Your son was found 🎶🎶 yesterday morning...

No, no, no!

George’s aunt, Keri Farish, was starring in a show in Cumbria. We went up north, leaving home for the first time since lockdown. The following morning, as I prepared tea, the phone rang.

Rewind this Day

Rewind this day, awaken again, start this day again.
Rewind this day, awaken again, start this day again.
Rewind this day, awaken again, start this day again.
Rewind this day, awaken again, start this day again.

Repeats

Gone

Blast, force. Still, still, still
He blew, he blew up
Cross a junction. Green light
Car out of nowhere. Slams sideways.
Dust everywhere.
Crashed under foot
Life was good 'til the pain
Fragments fall like rain
The ceiling falls, plaster buckles
A world obliterated...
George leans in, orange jumper, jeans and a smile
The ground is flat, but he is here...
Gone. The son is gone. The son is gone.
Darkness swallows us.
Swimming in sorrow.
Bring on obliteration
Obliterate it all
Bring on obliteration
Obliterate it all

Being told your son is dead is like a bomb exploding. Film-makers show people on the ground, beginning to come to, unable to hear anything, surveying the dust and debris.

Survivors

Parents lost their son. Sisters lost their brother; Son has lost his brother; Uncles and aunts lost a nephew; Cousins lost a cousin. Cousins lost their cousin.

Parents lost their son. Sisters lost their brother; Son has lost his brother; Uncles and aunts lost a nephew; Cousins lost a cousin. Cousins lost their cousin.

Sleep, wake, not this, wait for sleep, not this, sleep, sleep! Click, click, close my eyes, open the same, sleep, wake, not this, wait for sleep, not this, click, click, sleep, sleep, close my eyes, open the same, wake, wake, click, click, sleep, sleep, wake, wake, close my eyes, open the same, sleep, sleep, click, click, click, click, wake, wake, sleep, sleep, wake, wake

Grief empties the chest; the mind is a mess.

From dusk to dawn to dusk, an empty husk

From sleep it wakes, each moment takes.
No fight, day's night and night is night.
Grief will break, on thoughts no brake.
No way to flee distress, save eternal rest

Waking meant re-encountering the nightmare meant a series of shocks every night. There didn't seem to be a way out.

Didn't Do Enough

Haven't done enough, haven't done enough, haven't done enough
You could do more!

Haven't done enough, haven't done enough, haven't done enough
You could do more!

Didn't do enough, didn't do enough, didn't do enough
You should do more!

Didn't do enough, didn't do enough, didn't do enough
You should do more!

What I didn't see, I didn't hear, What I didn't say was never clear
What I could've, would've done, should've done.

Repeat all lyrics

You could do more. I could do more. We could do more.

People asked me not to say such things, shouldn't even have such thoughts, but they seem to be involuntary.

Bring Him Back

What can be said to death? Take him not, take me

On this let us swiftly agree, do not, do not, dismiss a father's plea

Seize me fast, take me back, a simple, easy heart attack

I won't resist, will gladly go,

This plain request, you surely know

Bring him back, bring him back, brighten this world, don't make it black

No need to make a grave mistake, do not take, do not take the son

Bring him back, brighten this world, don't make it black

No need to make a grave mistake, do not take, do not take the son

Take me away, this can't be OK, let it not be this way

I can't go on, let me be the one

Do not close the darkest door; the natural order fast restore
One for one, do not ignore, but do not take the son!
Bring him back, bring him back, brighten this world, don't make it black
No need to make a grave mistake, do not take, do not take the son
Bring him back. bring him back, do not take, do not take the son
Do not take, do not take, do not take the son
Bring him back. bring him back, do not take, do not take the son
Do not take, do not take, do not take the son
Do not take the son

The bargaining phase of grief. I had believed the world makes sense, but George's death made no sense, just a mistake. So petitioning for his return made perfect sense.

Empty Letters

Police say they'll be in touch Sunday. Family gets a missed call. Number withheld, that's all.

Family walks to the nearest station, Sergeant calls to get the situation
It's getting better, He says there's a letter. Something from George,
Anything from George.

George left a letter. It's not all bad, George left a letter to Dad.

George left a letter. It's not all bad, George left a letter to Dad.

Another call. She knows of no letter to Dad. Just letters *from* Dad.

She knows of no letter, there may be no letter, there may be no letter to Dad.

She knows of no letter, there may be no letter, there may be no letter to Dad.

The family want to get to his flat.

Keys are in storage. She'll try to get them back. She does. They're back.

Family drive to the flat.

He'll have left a note.

There must be something he wrote.

Where's the letter, any note will do, any note will do, any note will do.

Dad's letters on the floor. Nothing more. All clear. Nothing here.

Had a bit of a barney with George. Nothing major. Haven't spoken in weeks. Heard a bang that night. About 3am. Door. Maybe George went out.

George's brother Tom was sure he would have left a note. A note might provide some kind of an explanation for events that entirely escaped me. The hunt was on.

You Didn't Say

We got to talk, you didn't say
I really thought, you were OK
Was sure you'd go on anyway
There always seemed so much to do
Too many things shouted new
Wish I'd made more time for you...
How did I miss your pain and bliss?
For what we did was reminisce
But what you saw was an abyss
There always seemed so much to do
So many things shouted new
Wish I'd made more time for you...
This could not be, and yet it was
We couldn't find what was because
No reason for, forever loss
No reason for, forever loss
This could not be, and yet it was
No reason for, forever loss
No reason for, forever loss
We couldn't find what was because
Wherever you may be above
I don't know what this world's made of
I've tried to send you deepest love
I've stretched to pull you close to me
In my heart, you're always close to me
How did I miss your pain and bliss?
For what we did was reminisce
But what you saw was an abyss
There always seemed so much to do
Too many things shouted new
Wish I'd made more time for you

You broke our hearts when you went away
You broke our hearts when you went away
You broke our hearts when you went away
Repeats

This Can't Be

Too much, unbearable, stop it all.
This can't be, won't be, must not be, no such fall.
Not this, start again, shock eclipses pain.
Shock denies, why, why, why, no idea why.
How did I miss? I saw him, I saw nothing.
So much missed, now missed forever.
Too final, far too final, irrevocable, undoable, inescapable.
No wish to live, no wish to die.
No right to live remains. Nothing.
Just emptiness. Numb inside. Nothing at all.
Hard to move, breathe, to face the day.
Life brings yet another day
What will I hear, what will I say
No chance to see this world anew
What to think, what to do?
So much has happened yet
But it remains an unknown bet
I cannot live with such a loss
My life destroyed, a field of dross
Time to rise and go about
While in my mind a quiet shout
The briefest pause, closing doors
How many things can yet go wrong
It won't take long
Before my mind is filled with worry
It makes me see the world all blurry
Life brings yet another day
What will I hear what will I say
No chance to see this world anew
What will I say what will I do?
Tears & tears. Eyes that want to cry run dry.

Life made sense, no longer makes sense.
Ideas crash on the rocks of death.
I'm standing in a pit, an empty pit.
Senses slither on sand.
The mind, unhinged, a little unhinged,
could take control. The vortex isn't far away.
It's pulling, it's pulling.

Survivors of bereavement by suicide may find themselves in an unfamiliar pit, in which their own survival is not only uncertain, it is unwished.

There Are No Words

How are you? Awful... We've had terrible news... our son, George... he's gone. What? ... I don't know what to say
They may not know, no need to say, no need to sadness spread
Cross the road, on that side stay, collar up, nothing to say
They may not know, no need to say, no need to sadness spread
There are no words, no words to say, no words can make this go away
There are no words, no words to say, no words can make this go away

They may not know, no need to say, no need to sadness spread
Cross the road, on that side stay, collar up, nothing to say
They may not know, no need to say, no need to sadness spread
There are no words, no words to say, no words can make this go away
There are no words, no words to say, no words can make this go away.
Any time you need to talk. Any time you want to talk
I'll stay, I won't look away. I'll stay, I won't look away
Meeting people was difficult. The question "How are you?" became very hard. Did they already know? When asked, am I OK, OK, felt very far away.
I let a beard grow, turned my collar up, and hid under a hat.

They Don't Tell

What can we say, what can we do?
Check in on friends and family too
And listen well...
They say they're OK, but they won't say

They're falling apart, they're not OK
They don't tell
All of us trying, all of us slide...
All of us struggle, all of us hide...
It's life again.....
All of us trying, all of us slide
All of us struggle, all of us hide
It's life again.....
You think that you're not enough
And life's far too tough
But here's the thing, you're not alone
Look around, pick up the phone
The pain is just unspoken love
There is only love
Here's the thing, you're not alone
Look around, pick up the phone
All of us trying, all of us slide
All of us struggle, all of us lie
That's life again...
All of us trying, all of us slide
All of us struggle, all of us hide
It's life again...
Reach out and touch somebody who
May be struggling, someone like you
Reach out and touch someone
Reach out and touch somebody who
May be struggling, someone like you
Reach out and touch somebody who
May be struggling, someone like you
What can we say, what can we do
Check in on friends and family too and listen well
The pain is just unspoken love
I tell you there is only love
Look around... pick up the phone
All of us trying, all of us slide
All of us struggle, all of us lie
It's life again...

All of us trying, all of us slide
All of us struggle, all of us hide
It's life again...

After the first performance, Vladimir said we needed another big song. We wrote They Don't Tell and Just One Word, as late additions. They Don't Tell abandons autobiography and invites us to reach out to those who may be struggling.

Mysterious Man

George never wasted a word
With a hidden sense of absurd *pause*
For he'd make us laugh
Bring a smile and a half
With a look, a pause then a word

But in the field of sound
His thoughts take shape and abound
With a melody here
And another riff there
We're uplifted, and then spun around

And so George himself is transformed
Surpassing all previous norms
For when he plays bass
There's no longer a trace
Of shyness or something unformed

George is a mysterious man
He always does well what he can
He's no need to impress
Or himself express
For George is his very own man
George is his very own man
George is his very own man

The second part of the 2020 Christmas card starts the second half of the show. Throughout this period, George would occupy my mind.

Band Together

I must understand. How was the band?
Tell me, you were with him in the band.
We made music as a group, one instrument, another, layered together
Ten years, two and a half albums, progressive rock together
George's bass brought rhythm and polyrhythm, held it together
We played gigs in Britain and Germany, always together
Musical complexity with a perfect harmony, together
Until lockdown...lockdown
We couldn't meet, compose, play. Just zoom calls, in touch we'd stay
Too much sound delay. We stopped. We couldn't play
We knew his day job was tough. We tried to help, he said enough
Said he was apprehensive of anything new. Guess that was true
He never said he'd resigned. We never saw a sign
Saw him online just before he seemed in good spirit
The third album's nearly done, we'll finish it, just like we're together

We met with the surviving members of Eschar, George's progressive rock band, who kindly provided further reflections on George's music.

Company Treasure

You worked with him. Tell me about him.
The most reliable worker, never a shirker
Made every shift a pleasure, the company treasure
Employee of the year, a star, that's clear
Whenever we're down, turned our frowns upside down
A teacher, a mentor, an accident preventor
Turned down all promotion, didn't want the commotion
His career was stuck, that's a thing... he felt stuck!

The card his colleagues brought to the funeral included a number of testimonies. George had been employee of the year across southern England. In his previous day job, he had been employee of the year across the south-west. But George spurned all offers of promotion. He didn't want to have to face what he thought would be difficult customers.

Feel His Misery

I want to feel his misery
For I am he and he is me
I want to feel him deep inside
Ask that he stands here by my side
I want to take his pain away
Drink it deep and with me stay
I want to hug him once again
Ask that he'll with me remain
I want to feel that he's alive

Repeats

Without him, I cannot be
I want to feel him deep inside
Feel him standing by my side
I want to take his pain away
Drink it deep and with me stay
I want to feel his misery
For I am he and he is me
I want to feel that he's alive

Repeats

It wasn't just that he had been in a suicidal state, it was that he must have been in a difficult place for a much longer period of time.

No Body

No news... Nothing from the GP's practice
No medical record so no post-mortem
No post-mortem so no death certificate
No death certificate so no body
No body so no funeral. Stuck!
In separate news the Priest visits. He knows loss.
He doesn't try to fix us. He's just with us
In breaking news...
The medical practice has replied
A mail had gone to junk
A post-mortem can be booked

An interim death certificate can follow
The funeral can follow.

Navigating post-death processes when nothing makes sense can be profoundly difficult.

Undertaker Knocks

The undertaker knocks on our door
“It’s time to follow me”
Walk across Saint Mary Street
Up stone steps, past worn graves
To the small side door
Glimpse George lying in the nave
No-one would save
Slowly step towards a seat
In touching distance of his feet
Stop it all, let us be, this funeral it cannot be
He is not dead, he sleeps, just let him be!
His song, falling faintly through the universe
A prophetic voice
Beyond the sobs, the service starts
With words that penetrate our hearts
Priestly words, then a hymn
Words won’t come, all thoughts of him
A life of beauty, a supernova
Unbelievably, a life that’s over
Please George, beloved George
Oh God George, I’m sorry George
Fly George, be free George
Oh, why George
Brother and Sister eulogize
Sister reads He is Gone
Aunt sings him Into the West
Hymns and song too briefly sung
This awful moment’s just begun
The moments fly, they lift him high
The inner scream, “Why, why, why!”

His music plays again
Flies above our pain
It's time to Contact Light
Hear me, it's not alright
Coffin can't be seen
For tears that fall, carried
Along the aisle and out of Church
Bodies buckle, bend and lurch
They do not stop, they must not drop
Place him fast within the hearse
This cannot be, it is the worst
Place our hands upon the lid
To say last words where he lies hid
Go with our love, go far from here
Pray you are free from any fear
The door is closed, the hearse it goes
Turns left along the London Road
Our boy, a man, no more our load
One frantic stare, he is not there!

"Falling Faintly through the Universe" is the title of an Eschar song, drawn from James Joyce. George's aunt, Keri Farish, sang "Into the West".

You Hid Away Pain

You didn't have so much to say
But you seemed to be strong, steady, OK
A smile that said fun, a quip or a pun
No surplus words to spoil the day

You found meaning in rhythm and beat
The music of bass from your head to your feet
Danced with drums and guitars and hums
A symphonic pulse neat and complete

Never ever heard you criticise
Show off or make yourself sound wise
Never ever heard you complain

You showed us love and you hid away pain
Never ever heard you criticise
Show off or make yourself sound wise
Never ever heard you complain
You showed us love and you hid away pain
You showed us love and you hid away pain

You wouldn't push yourself forward
Even when given another award
From the limelight you tried to hide
Inwardly strumming another chord

You wouldn't argue or do conflict
No beliefs upon others inflict
No need to suppose or ever impose
You wouldn't another restrict

You wouldn't win if someone would lose
Why compete if in life we could choose
To love one another as sister, as brother
But this life does true lovers bemuse

Through these tears I realise
Perfection hidden from my eyes

Never ever heard you criticise
Show off or make yourself sound wise
Never ever heard you complain
You showed us love and you hid away pain

Never ever heard you criticise
Show off or make yourself sound wise
Never ever heard you to complain
You showed us love and you hid away pain
You showed us love and you hid away pain

The rest of the family were willing to perform various roles at the funeral, including the eulogy. I wanted to do something and wrote this as a poem.

It's Not True

Nights are worst.
Grief envelopes. Clasps.
Death won't be undone.
Clings as we cling to him.
I don't believe it. Others believe. I don't.
It can't be true. I won't believe it.
They can't say it. I will not say it.
It can't be said. He's not.
It's OK. It didn't happen.
It didn't happen because it can't possibly have happened.

I'll wake up soon. I'll wake up soon.
I can keep you safe. I can't keep you safe.
George was funny. Some kind of joke, a sick joke.
Sorry for every moment of misery. The hurt I didn't see.
Nothing else matters now. No wish to create.
No wish to do anything.

He's about to fall. His hand is outstretched.
My hand is outstretched but I cannot reach him.
He's not there, he's not anywhere
I can't see him. Wherever I reach, George is not there.

Rattle

The mind writhes, death rattles
Nonsensical slithering.
The self is destroyed
Lost fragments swept away,
Air scrapes the respiratory tract
The body's incessant demand
Each unwanted breath
Inhaled and swept away

Repeats

The air scrapes my tired eyes
Eye vein bursts turns white to red
Sadness stills the battered will
Swallowing the sense of self
The projects lie upon the shelf
The projects lie upon the shelf
Let them be swept away

Repeats

Let it be swept away

Let it be swept away

Repeats

Falling apart, I'd stopped all work on all projects. But as the self fell apart, I was becoming aware of something else.

Coroner's Court

In breaking news...

The Coroner's Court is open.

The coroner comes in. All rise!

Questions asked. Who, when, where, how,

But not the why's.

Statements written and read.

Details must be put to bed.

A process, tries to get to truth, before a recess.

Hearts torn. A little legal closure.

This and other parts of the Grief Opera are brought to life by Gavin Macrae, who knew such courts, having lost his son, Owen, to suicide, some years previously.

Born Again

If I must stay

Don't let me live my way

Make me forget pathetic self

And seek to serve above all else

For something has arisen here

That takes away the strands of fear

Within life's earthly tragedy
A deeply hidden majesty
All around and deep within
Lies love that vanquishes all sin
I have but shed an earthly skin
In death, new life begin

The self I knew of yesterday
I will let go it falls away
It's loss I easily conceal
For it was never, ever real
It must in time be crucified
That is the way the old self died
For you must let the new self grow
Tho' it's not anyone you know

*The self I knew of yesterday
I will let go it falls away*

I realised that most things are unimportant. If that is not immediately obvious, most things are not important compared with the death of a son. The last long stanza is from Confessions, the full version from Time and Again.

Waltz with George

How are you?
I'm OK
You are gone from me
I didn't want to be
And yet you are here
As close as can be
I love you so much
This is love
My heart is heavy
Lighten up
This feels too hard
You are strong
It hurts

I know

I want you back George
What would you say?
Life isn't as hard as it seems
You have it
But right now, it is so hard
It was for me
I get it. I'm so sorry
I got to do stuff
You have done great stuff
So not a waste
No, absolutely not
Well, then.
God George, I love you.

That's the conversation in the Grief Opera, with George's voice brought to life by his brother Tom. Actually, the conversation continued:

Love the world.
OK, I'm trying.
You can do more.
But it is you I feel for.
I told you. M'OK.
So I should get on with it?
What else would you do?
This makes no sense.
You are sensing it.
I should have saved you.
Really, Dad?
I really should have saved you.
I wasn't yours to save.

All you had to say was I'm struggling.
I'm struggling.
You're late!
Timing wasn't my strong point.

Except you had great beat.
I got beat.
It needn't have happened.
Some things do.
That's it?
It was hard.
It seemed harder than it was.
Really
OK, sorry, I don't know how hard it was.
Accept it and move on.
That's super tough.
Life is tough.

I loved you so much.
Change the tense.
I love you so much.
Better.
I love you more than ever.
I feel it.
I'd love to know that's true.
I feel it.
I can't bear to think of you as gone.
Don't.
Because it's not true!
Who are you thinking of?
You.
Be real.
Your death is shocking because it's not true!
If you say so.

I'm struggling here.
You're feeling better.
True! I want you back.
You haven't quite got it.
Not got what.
As close as your next thought.
You haven't gone!

Closer.
You haven't changed.
Why would I?"
The same old...
George."
Thank you, son.
For what?
For being.
For being?
For being wonderful.
..
What's that?
A shrug.

George was still teaching me. I wanted to tell him that life wasn't so hard, but I hadn't understood that life had become too hard for him, as he saw it, even when life had become too hard for me.

Surrender to Amour

What must be done before we go, before we go
Along the path that we don't know, we don't know
Beyond life's stuff of maintenance, maintenance
Of this and that, will you dance, will you dance

Something, somewhere calling you
To greater knowing of what is true
Some simple reason to have come
A way of knowing it's been done
A way that's found for all of this, all of this

The basic point of all that is, all that is
A chance to fleetingly express, to express
The possibilities of yes, of yes
Something, somewhere calling you
To greater knowing of what is true
Some simple reason to have come
A way of knowing it's been done

Let go of everything you know, all you know
If you'd into the future go, future go
Drop the old and creaking armour, creaking armour
Surrender to the greater amour, amour

Something, somewhere calling you
To greater knowing of what is true
Some simple reason to have come
A way of knowing it's been done

We may not know why we are here and what life is about, but we might be aware of something beyond ourselves. Love may be waiting for us all.

The Gift

If every moment was a gift
In which we have the chance to lift
The spirits of each life you touch
What could matter half as much
You let fly, No silent wish
An empty dish
You let fly, No silent wish
An empty dish

Each instant that you did not see
The life in you, all things and me
Instead with mind preoccupied
You thought, and then the moment died
You let fly, No silent wish
An empty dish

We could yet see a paradise
If we would look with freshest eyes
Surrender all the thoughts that stray
And we will write another play
You let fly, No silent wish
An empty dish

I had come to think of life as a gift. Fragile, precious, gone. In truth, it may be no more than a loan. The full poem is in Time and Again.

Don't Think I'm Gone

Don't think I'm gone, as you go on
From day to day, let this thought stay
Love is the creed, and when you need
Bring me to mind, I'm here you'll find

The joy of life, is far too brief
And yet feel me, there is no thief
Between us now, we are somehow
Connected not without regret

It was so fine, in its own way
Yet as it was, I couldn't stay
This time and place we're aware of
And still feel this, the force of love

Rebecca Dorsey created the tune of this haunting funeral poem, written while George was around, but somehow capturing the moment.

The Work of Love

The police call.
There's a note on his phone,
Typed hours before he was found.
His last words,
"I'm so sorry. I love you all".
You know all this will soon be gone
And you may see your works outshone
But know your love will ripple on
The work of love is never done
The work of love is never done
The work of love is never done

The last four lines are from Love Knows Love.
The full poem is in Time and Again.

We added Just One Word after the first show. A request to George and all who are suffering. Words recovered from my own troubled adolescence.

Just One Word

When you think you're all alone
Suppose life is yours to own
When the problems that you find
Could destabilise the mind
When you think you must be strong
But you feel you don't belong
When you don't see any way
But believe you cannot say

There's just one word I want you to say
There's just one word I need you to say

When everything's a mess
And you feel you're in distress
When the overwhelming feeling
Is that life has no more meaning
When life is far too tough
And you think you've had enough
When love feels far away
And believe you cannot stay

There's just one word I need you to say
There's just one word I'd love you to say
Whisper help, say help!
Sing help, shout help!
Whisper help, say help!
Sing help, shout help!
Just one word I want you to say
Just one word I'd love you to say

You only know a world of pain
And think there's too much to explain
You think I wouldn't understand
But take my hand
Your struggle is not yours alone
Do not face it on your own
Send a message, pick up the phone
Do not face it on your own
Just one word I want you to say

There's just one word I'd love you to say
Whisper help, say help!
Sing help, shout help!
Whisper help, say help!
Sing help, shout help!

Life can be hard. But we can ask for help, and even get it. There may be someone among your friends and family with whom you can talk. There are great organisations you can call or text. Get in touch.

For those of you who have been devastated by losing someone to suicide, Cruse and Suicide and Co offer one-to-one sessions, and Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide offer group sessions where you will meet others who have suffered this grievous loss. Sadly, you are not alone. Do not face it on our own.

You can come and see The Grief Opera live, and follow on Facebook, Instagram and YouTube.