

GOLDEN AGE

Write a chapter between The Visit and New York and explore the last interaction between Frank and Elsa before they leave each other. (In Elsa's perspective)

The Reunion

She was sitting at the Leederville train station platform seat, bleary-eyed with her legs half-shaved wearing a dress. She was dominated by a profound darkness. Frank was leaving for New York and Elsa was leaving for Adelaide. She was going to study medicine, learn to overcome the diseases that had taken children all over the world, like her and Frank from their homes captured with affection, twisted and distorted their bodies, then handed them back to their naïve families who did not know what to do with their impaired children. This was the awful reality of polio.

When Elsa had been sent home from the Golden Age Hospital, she knew she was no longer the girl who fitted neatly into her life. When all the children had longed to see their parents, Elsa longed to see Frank. When all the children had longed to come back home, Elsa had longed to stay here. Because only for Elsa there was Frank. This was her home and the only time she could spend days with him. The only place where light existed despite that, behind these walls were in need of desperate healing.

At home, Elsa's family had yet to understand that she had become an adult crippled with a childhood disease. Sally had yet to apologise and Margaret had yet to come to terms with her daughter's condition. But they still carried on as if she did not exist in this house that was once a place she hoped to live in for years, where laughter would be shared endlessly with her family. She could not speak of the same now. Elsa was uncertain of where she belonged and desperate to escape. They made her feel different and were no longer the people she once admired. She was forgotten and unloved by the people she never thought would betray her. Loneliness had slowly sneaked in every day and left its ever-lasting mark.

Elsa had invited Frank to meet her at the train station, hear his almost-finished poetry and see his face again. But she knew it would not last long. She knew he would not miss her as much as she did. Because people change. There he was standing; the still-small teenager with knotted brown hair. Frank had no longer been in his wheelchair but still had pale fragile legs that limped each time he walked. Elsa was first to notice him. They somehow managed to sneak through the crowd and find an area where they could talk all things they desperately needed to let out. They had not hugged each other but stared for a few minutes. They were both silent. Even the trains had not hooted anymore and people stood without saying a word. The place was a little quieter, a little more sensitive.

It was as if Frank and Elsa were strangers who had been forced, under circumstance, to unite without an option, in the same way as Frank's parents had to. For their own sake. Frank's head lolled hopelessly against the cold and rough bricks of the train station. He rolled a cigarette from his pocket and Elsa refused for one. Frank was in need of a cigarette, which provided warmth in his shivering state and blocked himself from the realities of life. The only source of light came from his inconsistent clicking of the lighters. He seemed as if he was in a rush, as if something else important had come up. For some reason, Elsa hated this light and covered her face. For her, it was too bright.

The Gold's family, Elsa thought, were surrounded by lightness. Meyer had gone into doing incredible things. He found a job as running a family business and Ida, too, played the piano at more concerts all over the world. They were the lucky ones. Elsa's family were not the

same anymore. It was like they had been strike by a curse. Margaret had become angry with her children and no longer spent time in her garden. The melancholic cries of her flowers begging for water. But she did not do anything. She let them die in front of her eyes.

The air was dense and grey. A black bird flew over Elsa's head. She gulped the darkness, swallowing a life she thought she would lead, her brand-new future of solitude. She immediately backed up; swallowing her utter regret of the freedom she thought she would lose. Her mind was in a state of complete perturbation. All lines showing in her dark face, disguising her. Disguising the girl she once used to be.

She did not want to surrender to the darkness that enveloped the train station; there was no honour in that at all.

Throughout these years, Frank had gained strength and felt the necessity of being positive in this world of his. He wanted to spend the rest of his time fulfilling the life he owed to Sullivan. But Elsa was the opposite; she was lost, mortified and fragile as a feather. What had gone into her?

"Everything was genuine, without a doubt" he said quietly to her, taking hold of Elsa's hand. "What was genuine?" She was only asking to keep hold of his delicate and small hand, before she would have to leave him and begin her new life in Adelaide.

For all these years, the polio had taken her independence, but it had given her Frank. For Elsa, Frank was her escape, her refuge. She always felt better near him. All of her pain had ceased. She did not need the light to know what they were or where they stood in the future, only the memories, to know exactly what was in store for them.

Everything was happening as it should, she thought. Before she knew it, she had let go of his hand and he was nowhere to be seen. Before Elsa knew it, she had given Frank away, to allow him to pursue his career of being a poet.

Frank, she said to herself as she left the train station. She knew this could be nobody else. Nobody this special.

Only Frank and Elsa knew what love was. Because their parents' did not understand. They said love does not last forever. They were right.

Written explanation

Throughout my piece on Joan London's The Golden Age, I aimed to incorporate a missing chapter between 'The Visit' and 'New York.' Formal language was used throughout the piece with my intended audience to readers who are familiar with the novel. London does emphasise heavily on the character of Elsa, but she rarely writes in her perspective, and it is because of this that I wrote this chapter from Elsa's perspective to enhance my creativity in writing.

Elsa was a character who intrigued me from the beginning and therefore after London's unsatisfactory explanation of Elsa and Frank's last interaction before they leave each other, I chose to write this missing chapter and it was a great opportunity for me to create it on my own by writing in Elsa's perspective.

I commenced my piece with an introduction to Elsa at the train station in order to set the story for the rest of this chapter. Next, I did a flashback to Elsa's new life a few years after she leaves the Golden Age Hospital, which allows the reader to gradually understand the

reason behind the change in her relationship with Frank. Then, I introduced Frank and Elsa's interaction at the train station before they leave each other, which is an essential feature of this creative response that explores their tense-new relationship. The question that many readers ask of the Golden Age is why didn't Joan London end the novel with a happy ending? This chapter may explain one reason, because Frank and Elsa's life have both changed significantly after they left the Golden Age Hospital, a place where they shared numerous memories with each other and viewed it as their home, especially since all the patients were treated equally. Therefore, I believe that this chapter fits perfectly into the novel.

While the piece is told from Elsa's perspective, the observer is an omniscient narrator who is well-informed and is describing the interaction between Frank and Elsa at the train station in a non-biased manner, as London has also done within the novel. This is an unfamiliar or unknown person to both these characters and to the novel itself.

London uses very vivid details with the use of personifications, which I tried to mimic, such as "cries for her flowers" and "swallowing a life." This helps to relate essential ideas and objects in the novel to the characters, as well as evokes emotion from the reader. I have also used repetition of words such as "when all the children..." in order to create mood within the piece and reinforce the key message. London also follows the character's train of thought, and it was challenging for me at times to maintain a sequence of events throughout my piece. In unison with this, I also had to carefully incorporate the gradual deterioration of Elsa's mental state as she is nearly transitioning into adulthood and is still diagnosed with polio, as well as due to her new life after leaving the Golden Age Hospital.

Unlike the novel, I have taken it further in that I have broadened the description of the setting at the Leederville train station, a setting which is not described in detail within the novel. I tried to stay completely faithful to the original plot line by using past tense, as well as presenting the chapter from third perspective. This has the effect of the reader gaining insight into Elsa's thoughts, while past tense helps to draw a flashback before Elsa meets Frank at the train station, but also after she leaves the Golden Age Hospital.

London demonstrates the power and strength of love and its ability to transform lives. This new chapter explores the emotions and connections that remain unspoken and unsaid, analysing the novel's central ideas including love and the transition from childhood into adulthood. I have also incorporated the theme of darkness such as "the air was dense and grey" as London also frequently incorporates this essential theme in each chapter. Thus, in writing this piece, I have gained further insight into these themes. I have also learned more about the change in Frank's and Elsa's relationship due to their forced separation, including possible reasons for this change.