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Londell Gonsalves

### The Design of Connection

*There There* is filled with several webs of interconnection regarding relationships, associations, and blood. We are taken on a journey through the eyes of twelve characters who are all attending or attempting to be at the Big Oakland Powwow. Two of the individuals that we learn are connected, as well as related, are Edwin Black and Blue (previously known as Crystal). Blue is taking lead as event coordinator for the Powwow in Oakland, and Edwin is her intern. They have been working together for a whole year yet do not know they are both half-siblings. Their biological father is a man named Harvey, both of whom they do not meet until the Powwow. Despite not knowing of their relation, the two manage to keep things platonic between them. The reality of their unknown siblinghood and what their relationship has developed are aligned in this story of connection. Along with the blood relation, these two are intertwined in ways they are not even aware of.

The relationship of Edwin and Blue develops throughout their time working on the Powwow, and they even spent time on a “non-date date” (Orange 237). While Edwin makes his attempts to pursue Blue, she has made it clear on numerous occasions that she sees him as just a friend. She even makes a reference “there is something about him that feels like family” (Orange 237). There is an “awkward silence” (Orange 237) when they go out together, and a sense of discomfort in the eyes of Blue. Despite these feelings, Blue does like Edwin as a person and as a possible friend. She can relate with him, too, as she grew up with “an absent father” (Orange 198). They are both looking for something deeper to connect with while both are unsure of their biological families, as well as their Native origins. Blue has “gone all the way to Oakland to find out where she came from” (Orange 237). Edwin feels a sense of disconnect from his mother, not

only because of her white descent but in his eyes “she never did a single thing to try to connect me with my dad” (Orange 69). This is why Edwin has studied Native American literature and why Blue takes the position at the Indian Center.

Blue, whose original name is Crystal, was adopted as a baby by a white family. Blue speaks of racial insults from school during childhood years, having money, a backyard pool, and having an uninvolved father. She knows nothing of her roots except when her adoptive mother tells her that Jacquie Red Feather is her biological mother and that she is of Cheyenne descent. As the reader, we know that Jacquie Red Feather gave up Blue for adoption because she was young and “stupid” (Orange 110). Blue and Edwin can both relate to living with a white family while knowing and feeling there was more to their ethnicity and culture. Blue speaks of knowing she was not white but feeling white inside, “I see myself from the inside out. And inside I feel as white as the long white pill-shaped pillow my mom always made me keep on my bed even though I never used it” (Orange 198). Before leaving him, Blue married Paul, who was controlling and physically abusive towards her. She stopped counting his abuse after a few times, “I stayed and kept staying. I slept in the same bed with him, got up for work every day like it was nothing” (Orange 199). This can be compared with Edwin and his eating habits; he continues to eat unhealthy things such as old pizza and Pepsi while he feels unhappy with his appearance, “But it’s true. I’m swollen. I see my cheeks at all times” (Orange 68). They have both, previously, found themselves in cycles of unhealthy routines with lack of self-care.

As Edwin moved back in with his mom from college, he seemed to have lost a sense of control over his life; he lost his ambitions, goals, dreams, and hopes he had previously had. “When I moved back in with my mom, the door to my old room, to my old life, it opened up like a mouth and swallowed me” (Orange 64). He hides away as his life lacks structure and

employment for four years. This can also be associated with Blue lacking a stable environment for herself and lack of control as she chose to stay with Paul. It is almost as if Blue and Edwin were both avoiding change and their unhealthy lifestyles became their norm.

It is evident that Blue and Edwin are linked with where they are at internally. We see that they both have some internal emotional conflicts. Despite Edwin earning his master's degree, he has lived in isolation behind a computer and is eating away his feelings. He once had dreams of being a writer. The only friends he mentions having are on Facebook and people which he does not know personally. Edwin identifies with having an addictive personality and refers to having withdrawals from the internet and all its glories; Blue is also a cigarette smoker. Edwin lacks knowledge of his father which ultimately intertwines with lacking in many other areas, social life, job, self-esteem etc. Blue also lacks self-esteem which would explain her staying involved in a toxic relationship and emotional turmoil. It seems that the lack of knowledge of their roots does have its domino effect, possibly both having abandonment issues, leading to making poor choices. They both indicate to the reader, indirectly, that they were at one-point lacking hope. Blue expresses that what she has prayed for "got turned upside down and in came in the form of Paul's fists" (Orange 199). She also makes a reference, "I'd been gone since that first time he laid hands on me" (Orange 199). This is indirectly saying she was emotionally detached from the relationship. Edwin implies that he, in real-life he is hopeless while referring to his *Second Life* 3D online version of himself having hope. This is one of the few indications that Edwin does deal with thoughts of depression. Edwin makes a note that he feels there is something wrong with his serotone levels and questions if he might need to take anti-depressants. They both identify with having another version of themselves. Edwin speaks to his virtual 3D self as well as Blue referring to another version of herself. In the eyes of Blue,

Crystal was who she was before Paul came into the picture, a stronger version of herself. After a year of separation from Paul, “She sees a version of herself she thought was long gone, someone she’d left behind...Crystal. From Oakland. She’s not gone. She’s somewhere behind Blue’s eyes in the rearview” (Orange 236).

Blue eventually finds out that Edwin is meeting his father, Harvey, for the first time during the Powwow. It is during this meet and greet that Blue sees Jacquie Red Feather and Harvey sitting together. This moment is how she begins to speculate Harvey also being her father. The text does not confirm but hints that Blue realizes Harvey could be her father, “He really does look like Edwin. And if Harvey and Jacquie are together, then does that mean...? No. Blue doesn’t allow that thought to finish” (Orange 283). As the reader, we know this is true due to Harvey forcing himself on Jacquie during their time at Alcatraz, but Blue is not certain so says nothing.

By the end of the text, there is a moment of confliction in the eyes of Blue. This is at the hospital, where she arrives with Edwin who has been shot at the Powwow and comes to see Jacquie holding Orvil, who has also been shot, and Harvey is also with them. She is torn as to whether she should let Jacquie holding Orvil go ahead of Edwin. As she is processing all the relations between everyone, in actuality, she is questioning which family member she should initiate medical attention to first. Before she can make a decision, the nurse comes along, while putting Orvil on a stretcher. Harvey then helps Edwin with Blue, while trying to signal for help. Despite her desire to ask, Blue does not have the words to say to Harvey, Opal Viola Victoria Bear Shield, or Jacquie during this moment. They wait in silence. As the reader, we do not know if Edwin or Orvil have survived their injuries. We do know they have both been shot in the

stomach and could be suffering from similar injury. This also speaks to the design of connection between Edwin and Orvil who are also linked in this web of interrelations.

Edwin Black and Blue ultimately both know what it feels like to be missing a part of themselves, not knowing where they came from, and trying to fit in society under these circumstances. Edwin lived with his white mother, knowing that his father was of Native descent, nothing else. Edwin does try to flirt with Blue, but she intuitively and gratefully declines as she has no romantic attraction toward him. They both also seem to make a shift for the better during the end of the book. Edwin gets a job, gains purpose/direction in his life, while reconnecting with his father. Blue also gains control back in her life after leaving Paul. Edwin and Blue might not be fully aware of their relation by the end of the text; however they are interconnected. Blue and Edwin spend time searching and trying to find themselves on a deeper level when little did they know, they were the answer for each other. Sometimes we try looking for answers that are in front of our very eyes. There are signs all around us and sometimes it is the connection of disconnection that brings us together; we are all part of a bigger picture, connected by design, even if we are unaware of the how.

## Work Cited

1. Orange, Tommy. *There There*. Vintage Books, 2019