

Homosexuality vs. Genesis: An Analysis of "Solsbury Hill"

by Brandon Kruse & Jameson Simmons

When I moved to Florida in 2006, Brandon was nice enough to give me a mix CD for the cross-country drive from California. But when one of the first tracks was Peter Gabriel's "Solsbury Hill," I started to worry. At that point, I'd only heard the song in sugary movie trailers for romantic comedies. Its swelling chorus ("my heart going boom, boom, boom") underscored so many heartwarming moments that it was the linchpin of a famous [parody of rom-com trailers](#) around that time. "Solsbury Hill" made me think maybe this mix CD was a gay come-on. (Giving a mix CD to another dude is already three-fifths of a gay come-on.) But Brandon insisted it was actually a song about life changes; it has long been reported that Gabriel wrote the song about his decision to leave Genesis, which was apparently a band.

To this day, the debate rages on. We've decided there's no way to settle the issue without returning to the source material. Herewith, a line-by-line evaluation of "Solsbury Hill".

Brandon's Take:

Climbing up on Solsbury Hill
(I suppose it could be a clandestine gay sex location... but come on, it's the first line!)

I could see the city light
(not at all gay)

Wind was blowing, time stood still
(he's pensive, clearly thinking about leaving Genesis)

Eagle flew out of the night
(what could be less gay than an eagle?)

He was something to observe
(wait... was "Eagle" the code name of a gay lover??)

Came in close, I heard a voice
(unclear where voice is coming from – possible gay orgy?)

Standing stretching every nerve
(huh... if only there were a part of the male anatomy that stretches and is filled with nerves...)

Had to listen had no choice
(fairly innocuous)

I did not believe the information
(re: leaving Genesis)

I just had to trust imagination
(re: leaving Genesis)

My heart going boom, boom, boom
(fuck you, stupid movie trailer jerks!)

"Son", he said, "grab your things,
(unfortunate choice of father-related language if read in a gay context)

I've come to take you home."
(gay kidnapping?)

To keepin' silence I resigned
(use of apostrophe pretty gay)

My friends would think I was a nut
(for leaving Genesis or having anonymous gay sex up on Solsbury Hill?)

Turning water into wine
(Jesus was really more of a Phil Collins-era Genesis fan)

Open doors would soon be shut
(unfortunate potential reference to closet doors if read in a gay context)

So I went from day to day
(as we all do, whether we're gay or leaving Genesis)

Tho' my life was in a rut
(reference to unhappiness in Genesis undercut by further gay use of apostrophe and gay abbreviation of "though")

Till I thought of what I'd say
(to your wife, or your bandmates?)

Which connection I should cut
(marriage or band?)

I was feeling part of the scenery
(still unclear)

I walked right out of the machinery
(could apply to either)

My heart going boom, boom, boom
(seriously, you movie trailer cocksuckers don't even listen to lyrics beyond the chorus, do you?)

"Hey," he said "grab your things,
(fortunate use of "s" on "things" to prevent gay innuendo)

I've come to take you home."
(gay love shack?)

When illusion spin her net
(gay imagery)

I'm never where I want to be
(having more anonymous gay sex up on Solsbury Hill?)

And liberty she pirouette
(dancing – very gay)

When I think that I am free
(breaking up is a long and painful process, whether you're gay or leaving Genesis)

Watched by empty silhouettes
(gay voyeurs?)

Who close their eyes but still can see
(gay audio voyeurs with vivid imaginations?)

No one taught them etiquette
(clearly not)

I will show another me
(your solo career or your penis?)

Today I don't need a replacement
(finally, we're back on Genesis)

I'll tell them what the smile on my face meant
(gay post-coital bliss?)

My heart going boom, boom, boom

POOP READING

(those last three words are all you movie trailer assholes will hear when America rises up to pummel you!)

"Hey", I said, "you can keep my things, they've
(possible identities of "they": gay lovers from Solsbury Hill orgy, eagle-headed imaginary new bandmates, or officials from British mental institution)
come to take me home."
(just go already)

Jameson's Take:

Climbing up on Solsbury Hill I could see the city light Wind was blowing, time stood still Eagle flew out of the night
(Our narrator may not be doing anything gay, but he describes a night hike to the top of a hill in painterly terms: pretty gay. Also, City Lights is a well-known bookstore in San Francisco - gay!- and he said "blowing.")

He was something to observe
(a synonym for "he was easy on the eyes" or "I checked him out and liked what I saw")

Came in close, I heard a voice
(closeness, whispering in ears - there's romance in the air)

Standing stretching every nerve
(I think we've covered this; now I just gag whenever I think about it)

Had to listen had no choice
(sounds like someone is a "bottom")

I did not believe the information I just had to trust imagination
(either he's talking about some kind of safe-sex pamphlet that he's choosing to disregard, or he's just muttering to himself)

My heart going boom, boom, boom
(did Meg Ryan just run out of a brownstone doorway and hug someone on a rain-slicked street ringed by Christmas lights?)

"Son", he said, "grab your things, I've come to take you home."
("Bring your toothbrush, we're staying at my place." TOTALLY platonic.)

To keepin' silence I resigned
(hmm... a secret affair?)

My friends would think I was a nut
(love makes us nutty sometimes!)

Turning water into wine
(Is he talking about making toilet wine? Maybe this song isn't about beautiful, consensual gay sex, but prison rape instead. Time stood still, indeed.)

Open doors would soon be shut
(back doors?)

So I went from day to day
(working in the prison laundry, sleeping with one eye open...)

Tho' my life was in a rut

(rut (n.): the annual period of sexual activity in deer and some other mammals, during which the males fight each other for access— oh God, I just threw up.)

Till I thought of what I'd say
(revisiting his silent shame, trying to put it into words...)

Which connection I should cut
(Should I quit the Aryan Brotherhood and seek protection from the Mexican Mafia?)

I was feeling part of the scenery
(a wallflower, too ashamed to mingle with the other inmates)

I walked right out of the machinery
(license plate printer)

My heart going boom, boom, boom
(I swear I just saw Reese Witherspoon go by on a scooter with Ryan Gosling, kicking up fall leaves in slow motion.)

"Hey," he said "grab your things, I've come to take you home."
(Paroled! Finally they can't get at me any more.)

When illusion spin her net
(every night when I dream...)

I'm never where I want to be
(it's good to be out, but now I'm alone)

And liberty she pirouette
(like Scott Hamilton! He's straight, right?)

When I think that I am free
(a man is never free from his deepest carnal desires)

Watched by empty silhouettes
(this is straight out of Eyes Wide Shut)

Who close their eyes but still can see
(closed eyes, backs arched, throats wide with ecstasy...)

No one taught them etiquette
(How do you work lyrics like this into a non-gay song? You don't, that's how!)

I will show another me
("I'm comin' out!")

Today I don't need a replacement
(...battery for my vibrator)

I'll tell them what the smile on my face meant
(it meant today was conjugal visit day!)

My heart going boom, boom, boom
(Richard Gere and Diane Lane have troweled Vaseline onto the lens, and they're either making out or weaving a rug, I can't see.)

"Hey", I said, "you can keep my things, they've come to take me home."

(It's pretty obvious he breaks his gay lover-slash-former rapist out of prison and they buy a place in Nantucket, but you can read it your way if you want to.)