

## Chapter Thirteen - The Glass Household

Gabriel's voice softens. The transmission continues.

'You know Leila was right, I was often confused. Angry and fearful too I expect. I could see where we were heading and I thought I would be the first to fail. I loved just being young and playing great music. Hanging out on the street in Acton with you and the gang still seemed like heaven. We'd had that gang since we were four years old. Do you remember that Josh? We played on railway tracks. Leila still had dolls. She was the only proper Muslim girl in our neighbourhood then. Every boy who has had his dog put down becomes an angry junkie, right? Well I did. I got angry because I loved my neighbourhood. I loved being free. It was our war-scarred parents who all had different Gods. Our own children would have no Gods at all. We had one God. A God made of several parts. A glue and string God. He was made of Art and Wire. Josh don't laugh.....it's not funny.'

Gabriel pauses; the unceasing uninterrupted monologue stumbles.

'Josh.'

He sounds very worried.

'Have you taken your medication?'

It is dizzying to relate these transmissions. How bizarre it is. Most must wait for death to make this transit – I travel from one mortal base, through the lower planes of my muddled subconscious reveries, and up then into the silent, endless plains where now I enjoy my private meditations.

Gabriel was born close to the spot where he had first heard the most complete spectrum of celestial choirs; by a double coincidence perhaps, also the place of his birth, and my own? Just up the river is BBZee studios, Damoo and my great adventure, inherited by our trio. All of us drawn back to the river. Will it elucidate to know that I anchored myself at Cleeve, by yet another ancient river crossing

mentioned in John Michel's 'City of Revelation' as one of the axes of convergence of the most powerful leylines in England? Whatever anyone might think of this, or that, and I thought nothing of it, this is nonetheless where I laid down my hat and heavy heart and – in a house entirely built of glass, with no curtains or screens of any kind – began to write the story of my life.

'My name is Ray High.'

I sang into the echoes of my cavernous kitchen.

'This is my last album.'

Psychoderelict – Ray High and The Glass Household had been the full title of my twisted, distorted, equivocal and deft last effort. Not so much an 'album' as a waterfall of music and stories with no true relation to reality, it was Josh who – reading my unpublished essays for the autobiography which formed the fulcrum of the project – suggested that they mortgage the title. So it was the trio found their name.

I must not confuse the chronology. I may journey through the planes where time is as meaningless and endlessly curved, indeed, as infinite as mathematical pi itself, but it was in 1979 that I began my idyll in the glass house on the Thames at Cleeve, where Romans, Celts and Normans had forded centuries before. Seventeen fans had died. Our gifted, knotted trio had been teenagers then: Gabriel and Josh 17, Leila 15. They were still at school, the three of them each pursuing private vocations, while the future conspired to further meld these separate souls together, and to consign them – in some uncertain way – to complete what I had started. And while in the Winter that straddled 1979 and 1980 I sat at my enormous teak kitchen table, the Vodka bottle half empty, attempting to replace a thin wire string on an acoustic guitar and deeply pricking my finger, the blood gushing powerfully and impossibly from the tiny wound, Gabriel endlessly and tirelessly practised the five manual and full pedal-board organ transcriptions of Bach; Leila studied the circuit diagrams of new semi-conductor processors and built her first computer and Josh listened to the voices of Job, Solomon and Moses and tried to write down their exquisite, coded cosmic poetry.

Only we, soaring here, can properly see who is who, and what is what.

*'Are we breathing out*

*Or breathing in*

*Are we leaving life  
Or moving in  
We are fragments  
Exploding outward  
Like broken glass  
We damage, even in defeat  
We are pieces  
Falling slowly  
Like snowflakes settling on the street, 'they sang.*

Gabriel, Leila, Josh, Phil, Dotty. The Glass Household. Free of the envious contempt the young sometimes held for older musicians, they allowed me my ultimate penury, my disgrace. Lesser stylists would sneer, revere only the lost souls of rock – the dead ones. Others would feel repelled by the cherished guilt and shame in which this old rocker indulged. Some envied my penultimate power and fortune, my ability back then in the good old rich days to grant charitable wishes, to fritter away money in patronage of unprofitable artistic causes. None need have worried too much; I never did return. Newcomers pillaged, usurped, stole and plundered the half-finished and unexercised jewels of my stilted career. It was left to our trio to complete what was truly worthy.

*'Exploding out  
Exploding in  
Ingrained in good  
Or stained in sin  
Are we the parts  
Are we the whole  
Are we the thoughts  
Are we the soul, 'they sang.*

And by the time they heard their music on the radio, and saw the first few photos of themselves in the trendiest, chicest magazines, I was lost here, where only you can find me. Then only in defiance of time and chronology.

*'I am the whole  
I'm in the hole  
I'm in the cold*

*And what I hold  
And this is true  
The parts of me  
Belong to you.  
I am the whole  
I'm in the hole .....,' they sang.*

And as they sang, the gifted trio and their two supportive side-kicks, I straddled their past and future.

*'The parts of you  
The parts of me ..... ' they sang.  
'Belong to you.'*

'I believe we will all be connected by a global grid of computers.'

I had been the speaker, a man of about twenty-five; scruffy, long black hair and beard in the gentle hippy style of the seventies' musician or art-teacher.

'I believe entertainment on this grid will be just like life. I believe that on this grid we will experience more lives than one in this lifetime. I believe this could be a fucking nightmare.'

The trio laughed at the man on their video screen.

'Like when your satellite dish gets blown down?'

Gabriel was silenced by Leila.

'Shush! There's more.'

'I believe music is our only hope. I believe music can reflect who we really are – like a mirror. I believe that each of us has our own unique music.'

As I paced the dais at whatever art-college it was I lectured, an eccentric young man, Gabriel began to stare intensely at the screen. I continued.

'I believe that that music can help us open a door in the mirror. I believe we will all eventually pass through this door. I believe that on the other side all our music will make a perfect symphony. I believe that that perfect music, that Perfect Music, will reflect God.'

The videotape sputtered. Leila turned to Gabriel and Josh.

‘He got the first bit right, didn’t he?’ she said. ‘I’ve been thinking. What if the entire global network of art, entertainment, philosophical thought and spiritual renewal – what he calls "The Grid" – what if it all stopped expanding and began to compress? What if everyone on the Grid began to move in towards each other?’

‘How could they do that?’

Gabriel felt Leila was now hijacking an idea of Josh’s that she had once ridiculed.

‘The Grid is merely a medium. It doesn’t exist, except as a means of connecting people, and feeding them.’

‘They would literally start to travel towards each other.’

‘What, physically you mean? Get on bikes?’

‘We know where they went wrong. We know that some of the things they wanted to do then they couldn’t do – because there was no Grid. There were no domestic computers. People weren’t linked the way they are today. We are capable today of making a reality of what once seemed like a metaphysical brainstorm.’

‘His critics called it a brain-fart,’ said Josh.

‘It was a premature vision. We can complete this work. But we need a method. A method with a capital ‘M’. We need a Method.’

Josh and Gabriel looked at each other bemused. They both loved her, each of them knew that. They were rivals. But they also feared her. She was a fearsome and masculine thinker. In this new matter they suspected Leila had already devised what she exhorted them to consider; she had researched my first lectures on the subject; they knew she would not at first fully share what she had learned – not until she was certain it could work.

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Sometimes in the apparently hectic career of Glass, as their more intimate fans called them, nothing happened at all.

‘Look! A young fox!’

Leila pointed as the three sat on a wall by the side of a quiet back-road near the studio. As she jumped down, and took a step towards the skinny creature, it vanished. A white van had slowed down and the driver leaned out.

‘You’re pretty,’ he shouted. ‘You’re very, very pretty. Phwoar!’

His voice faded as he drove around the bend towards the gates of Syon House, where the acres of pasture, meadow and woodland, and the river Crane nearby, must have provided the urban habitat for dozens of ‘wild’ country animals. Leila put her hands on her hips.

‘Did he mean the fox?’

She was wearing a sleeveless white T-shirt and jeans. She stood upright and struck a pose, displaying her decent breasts and slender waist. She flicked off the headscarf she still wore most of the time in deference more to the feelings of her grandmother than her faith.

‘No you silly bint,’ shouted Gabriel. ‘He meant you.’

He moved up behind her and slid his arms around her waist. Inexplicably, Leila began to cry.

‘What’s up?’

‘I can’t believe Hymie died. They were only married for a year. It’s like Josh’s fucking play. Poor Trilby. Life is so fucking sarcastic sometimes.’

‘My mother loves Trilby now,’ said Josh. ‘I think my mother loves Trilby almost more than she loved Uncle Hymie. Some of our family friends have been asking if Trilby will ever marry again. But they don’t know Trilby.’

‘Josh....’

Leila put a hand to her face and gazed into the distance.

‘What is it?’

‘You don’t think we’re being punished do you?’

‘We didn’t die. Yet.’

‘No, I meant all of us. The family. All of us. Do you think maybe we were all never meant to be together – to be different? I have a terrible feeling, there’s trouble ahead. How could God .....?’

‘Let Hymie die?’

Gabriel turned her to face him.

‘Twice?’

He smiled gently.

‘Look, that fox again!’

They watched as the hungry, intent creature trotted rapidly but casually along the pavement opposite them, moving from dustbin to dustbin.

‘You are pretty Leila,’ said Josh.

It was a strange moment. Gabriel was holding her as though she was ‘his’ girl.

‘That fox was scraggy.’

‘Not at all foxy.’

Gabriel whispered into her ear, re-establishing his claim.