

Chapter Seventeen - An Answer to Job

In the studio Gabriel found Leila and Josh watching again the documentary footage of the rock concert at which seventeen fans of my band had died.

‘A terrible tragedy here tonight. Seventeen fans are believed dead, many hundred are badly injured’.

The announcer’s absurdly flat voice described the scene.

‘A stampede occurred when the doors were opened during the band’s sound-check. Many questions are being asked about the security at the hall, and why the concert was not cancelled.’

‘We have their details,’ said Leila, stopping the tape. ‘Each one of them that died trying to get into that concert. Each one of them wanting to hear some music, and see others like them, maybe feel reflected, hear an echo.’

‘There can be too much drive,’ said Josh. ‘It is important to know when to stop.’

I had stopped. I had been obstructed by events. Too many deaths. Stupid, wasteful deaths. I became angry after I heard that the organisers of the concert had gone ahead with the show while outside the hall bodies were being transported to the mortuary. I thought of my father, and his often sick rabbit. *The Show Must Go On*. I swore at reporters. Sarcastically screamed that of course the show had had to go on. Rock was a fucking circus. Why should the mere fact of seventeen kids dying stop the fucking show?

All I had done was anger the parents of the dead concert-goers. They weren’t ‘kids’, they were people. I was so far up my own backside I could have licked my own tonsils. My crash was not so much a crash as an internal collapse into snivelling acceptance. For our trio, despite their empathy with me, the main loss was that I dropped my big idea. So it was, that they picked it up. No one was better equipped to do what I had set out to do. And for our trio, the time – perhaps – was right. The litany of names threatened to be endless – but it would end. Not so many had died after all. On the screen the seventeen faces divided and multiplied until each one became a pixel itself part of the image of a face.

‘Is that that Rolo bloke?’ Gabriel nearly spat.

‘The name is ‘Bollo’,’ said Josh. ‘And no, I think that’s the face of a guy called Silverman.’

‘A mere mortal,’ said Leila, pleased with her software.

Silverman’s face began to deconstruct; how he himself would have loved that moment; the elements, the fragments of his exploded image assembled themselves into the word ‘Method’.

The marriage? To Josh, who might have felt spurned, the sound was only what he often heard inside his own head.

‘My two best friends,’ he started in his toast. ‘I wish them well. And today we heard that Leila has been promoted to Director General of the Grid. And will be a forty-nine percent shareholder in *Plus Bond*, the new company bridging BBZee and the Grid consortiums. A toast! To Leila and Gabriel. To the future

As he held up his glass he began to tremble. He held his head. He put his hands over his ears.

‘He’s ill,’ Leila ran to him. ‘Help me.’

‘Give him air, stand back.’

His two friends held him as he fell to his knees, voices closing in on him.

Josh is not unlike me. Here in my meditations I can find relative calm and peace but it stifles me sometimes and starves me of light and air. I am trying to run away from that future fear that afflicted me as a young man. Gabriel wants to run from the music in his head, Leila from the passion and power so at odds with her religion and her background. Josh wants to run but he can’t. Voices, stories, pressing decisions, questions. Filling his head.

Let me try to make this entire business as clear as I can. Stay with me, I am not the clearest thinking man I know. But I am old enough now, and have made enough trips up to the heights, to have some idea what is really going on. I can see the trio’s wonderful imaginings, music, words, flight.

In the beginning—it is said—God was bored. So he created creation. What is our function down here? We feel we are all separate souls: if we are one with our Creator we are unaware of the fact. We are here to entertain our Creator. When I get up there in the ether, I can sometimes see Him and his angelic cronies sitting looking down. His best entertainment is not what we do, but what we imagine. Why? Because our dreams travel up to them, the Gods are lazy. Our Creator enjoys us most when we ourselves attempt to create. He loves Gabriel for the music he hears. Josh for his voices. Leila for her ideas and ambitions. Did he enjoy me, in my halcyon days? Of course he did. We are all players in an imaginary play.

In that strange little book inspired by Goethe and put together by Gozzi, *The 36 Dramatic Situations*, the heading *Conflict With A God* suggests that all of our struggles with our Creator pivot on our willingness to sacrifice ourselves in some way to the whim of the watchers – to God, his angels, to the minor gods up in the cheaper seats. Here is precisely where it suggests all our earthly play takes place:

‘In that Great Theatre of Brahmanic Legend, inaugurated long before that of man, in which the Gods occupy the leisures of their eternity’.

Up here, in the ether, they have nothing to do. Nothing. This great theatre, this enormous proscenium in the sky that is indeed the sky itself, is the reflective setting for yet another wedding down there on the surface of the earth, another happy day, another fearful commitment full of hope and dreams. It is our hope and dreams that interest the Gods. Why? Because they get them free and because they are positive.

These three children had grown to be such extraordinary souls. I am not sitting in the company of the Gods, you know that, I’m just an old rocker in a trance. But if I am near the Gods, and I am as near as I can ever be in this life, I am in the Gods of the Gods. Today I have a seat in the cheap seats. In some ways they are the best seats. Poor, poor Josh. *Conflict With A God*. Yes, under that heading it also mentions the Book of Job. That troubled Josh so much when he was young. God asked Job to sacrifice his favourite son. Why would God play such games with his most loyal disciple? Attend to my thesis: because it *entertained* Him.

Later, Damoo sat with Josh, he looked ill-at-ease, Leila nodded at him.

‘My father has come.’

‘Satan. Trying to inspire me.’

‘There is no such thing,’ said Damoo, leaning forward. ‘Satan is just the evil actions of man.’

‘The evil here isn’t man’s fault. It’s all God’s doing. God has failed us. He made me like Him, and then cut me off, subjected me to this. Jahveh told Job to let Satan have his son,’ Josh looked at Damoo accusingly. ‘He told Satan Job would never lose faith. God let Satan cover Job with boils. When Job finally got angry with God he was denounced by everyone around him – I don’t understand.’

‘Yes. The God of the Old Testament was a harsh God. Or so it seems. But you know, Carl Jung – who was a Jew of course – wrote that Christ was perhaps God’s answer to Job. God’s apology or gift to man, if you like. God himself became Christ, and suffered like a man, in reparation for his harshness and jealousy in the Genesis years. And Christ and Mohammed were probably the same man – surely you can see that?’

‘Muslims don’t believe Christ was divine.’

‘Josh,’ Damoo allowed himself to smile. ‘There are many branches of Islam.’

‘I’m not a Christian anyway. But what does Christ have to say about evil? Is it man or God?’

‘Christ said – in the Book of John – and I paraphrase a little: “Whosoever believes in me can do the works I do, and greater works than these.” In the Book of Romans it was said that the believers or chosen ones are children of God and “fellow heirs with Christ”. It’s not so important that we are capable of evil, but that we actually capable of being like Christ. Do even greater work than Christ.’

‘Christ.’

Josh broke down. He was a tortured soul at best. But the wedding had unhinged him. Suddenly he looked at Damoo as though he'd just walked into the room.

‘Aren't you Elvis? You're dead’

But Josh did not fall after the wedding. It seemed as though he might, but he did not. Instead he looked at the woman he had always loved, who had that day married his best friend, and he allowed himself a sneer.

‘And you, you want to bring children into *this world*?’

Leila wanted to reply that even in the early days of Israel there was a Mother. Nature, in the shape of Sophia, the gentle, loving voice of the Psalms. Josh had introduced her to its beauty. Instead all she could do was repeat something I myself had once said. Me. Ray High. Their phantom mentor.

‘A mirror door. We will all pass through it one day, and find peace. You'll find peace.’

‘Josh. Do you remember? We felt it had been proven to us.’

Gabriel pops his head out of his multi-coloured Vox-Box and beckons to me, my disembodied head hovers, my eyes closed in a trance, just above the haze of the lower astral trash layers.

‘Rock music is often called a Rite of Passage,’ I say suddenly, my eyes popping open.

‘Where does it take us? We have come to believe that all art – especially dramatic art – offers a *mirror door* that reflects darkness, transforming it into light.’

'Unless you're Irish'.

Gabriel interrupts, peeking from behind his blackout curtain.

‘Then it's the other way round.’

‘But the mirror-door we best understand,’.....

I continue contrapuntally, I seem to be reciting my 1985 speech at the art school.

..... ‘is most effective when opened up by music, and most actual – most visceral and real – when opened up by rock.’

'We knew those sixties hippies had been right all along.'

Gabriel is transmitting hopefully to his old friend. Not to me.

'It was hard to admit. But we knew, didn't we Josh? And where they had failed, we could take up the banner and succeed. Leila had the channel now, absolute control of the Grid. In our Method, everyone would eventually hear music that we three would ensure reflected them; that would lead them to a perfect, and right place. Everyone would hear music and poetry and be able to fly. We would ourselves be like gods. Like Elvis. Christ himself had said it was possible. Yeah, maybe we were all three of us starting to go a little crazy - Ray High flipped completely after all.'

In the ether time runs at a different speed. That is established now. But even in the real world time passes quickly, and show business marriages are always held in close scrutiny. A private conversation between our lovebirds, whenever it takes place, will be of special interest to anyone counting the years that pass as Gabriel and Leila keep their secrets.

'So, they've promised us everything we want?'

'Everything we need. Fifty million dollars. Open access to the Grid's direct Metaband connections to every personal jack point. World-wide. They believe we can attract a billion new subscribers. We will play to the Gods at last.'

'*The Method*. Your new baby.'

'Our new baby,' Leila corrected.

'You will never admit it.' Gabriel looked to one side, his voice softening.

‘Admit what?’

‘That above all, more than anything in the world, more than being in love with me, or pleasing your Dad, or the band being huge, or becoming the first woman to control the Grid – you want to have a baby.’

‘I told you,’ Leila’s voice hardened. ‘What I wanted.’

‘You tried to explain it all away as impulse, biological clocks ticking, hormones – but Leila, it’s your fucking *dream*.’

‘What part of my dream did I not share with you? I fell in love with you.’

‘You loved Josh too.’

‘This is childish.’

‘I knew you wanted a child. I just didn’t realise how much. I had no idea you would have dropped *everything* – the band, your career, your research – everything, in order to have my child. Not just a baby. But my child.’

‘It really is a woman thing. It seems too risky to let everything come out.’

‘I was a man with no fucking sperm!’ Gabriel flew to his feet and began pacing angrily.

‘Thanks a bunch for helping me to find that out and then dumping me.’

‘I didn’t leave you because you had no sperm. You’re an addict. You’re a mess. You drink yourself into oblivion whenever life gets tricky. You are afraid of pain. It’s crazy. You are the bravest man I know, one of the smartest, and yet you live in fear. Fear of what?’

‘Fear that I’ll have my life taken away from me by a woman.’

‘That’s not me Gabriel. That’s your mother. Or a fucking Sea Scout. It’s your childhood,

not this life.'

'Why are you fucking him? Why him?'

'You had sperm.'

'We tried for years. Nothing happened.'

Gabriel spoke the truth. But Leila knew something he did not yet know.

'You had sperm.'