

## Chapter Twenty - I♥U2

I had only ever really had one dream: to demonstrate via some reflective system of composing how art itself actually functioned. I identified the ‘mirror-door’ through which we may or may not pass when art tricks us into letting go of our ego, our suspicion and our subjective and discerning critical faculties. But I don’t know what is on the other side – I myself had provided evidence for the existence of the door but *I have not passed through it*. The Glass Household grew up knowing that they would have the advantage of computer power and a global communication network that I was denied. They will now complete what I started.

Put on the radio.

‘Leila Irani revealed this week that Victoria’s monster hit .....

Have we not heard this audio clip before? Such are the reverberations in and around the O-regions.

‘Pirelli was unavailable for comment.’

Sure he was, thought the public, the dirty bastard.

Leila called Gabriel on the phone.

‘Congratulations.’ Leila’s voice was flat. ‘You’ve got a hit.’

‘Are you trying to be cunning?’

Gabriel was intimidated. But anxiety turned to irritation as he heard her sobbing.

‘Josh has always loved *me*. That little bitch Victoria has turned his head too. And – of course – the little slut has fallen for him. She is *me*, Gabriel she is just a little *me*.’

The dirty bastard—grown old and apologetic, less dangerous physically—simply by virtue of his great age—speaks from his Vox-Box.

‘I was stunned Josh. Because I too had once fallen in love with “Victoria”, or the idea of her, whoever she was. There had been music, real music, surely? Could

it have been Leila in the photograph? Leila flying through Damoo's fantasies of more than one wife? Leila in polythene? Raped?'

Josh took Victoria to New York, leaving Leila to her weeping, her empire and her religion. She sat in her own glass house, a penthouse on the Battersea bank of the Thames at Chelsea, and watched the sun glinting on the water, and wondered at the way the old and battered barges and little ships moored here and there, especially at Cadogan Pier, seemed acceptable in their semi-dereliction. If she could see herself from the vantage of the Pier, she would have quickly realised that it was her monstrous penthouse that might be deemed unacceptable.

I can, with the benefit of observation without a shred of immoral prurience or voyeuristic lasciviousness, watch this incredible woman move through her day. How? Here in the ether I have no loins, that's how. It is a Sunday. She rises from her bed naked, and this is the first revelation. Once a narrow-shouldered, straight-hipped little creature, who unlike me was gently and lovingly bathed by her grandmother, her short cropped hair clinging to her scalp—looked a little like a boy, she is on this morning a most voluptuous and erotic female.

Her legs are long and smooth. Her skin colour is warm, but even so, a grayish brown; the warmth, the glow, emanates from within her. She is full of light. The sprout of pubic hair is dark, and not thin, but although a tuft has been allowed to grow, she has allowed beauty parlour attendants to fiddle between her legs with wax and lotion and tape in their "bikini-line" ministrations. As she swings one leg to the floor, exposing her vagina, a man might gasp at the splendour. On the surface her loins scream "woman", "mother". Just below, it whispers "girl".

Her waist and belly are solid. She was a swimmer. It is true she is occasionally puffed up uncomfortably by menstruation or water-retention. But usually she looks very slightly muscular and athletic. Her breasts – once 'decent' in my own particular street parlance – are simply splendid. They are large, and she holds her arm under them as she rises and begins to move towards the bathroom. But when she yawns, and thrusts two arms into the air, each breast is gently repositioned, its lank, loose shape redefined. The dark, deep nipples look upwards, she becomes Amazonian.

She is not as tall as a man, but when she wishes to – with the right shoes – she can hit 5' 11". At such

times it is easy to forget that this is a woman who is often alone, who is, thus far, childless; who has been raped; has both resented the veil and regretted its passing. It is also easy to forget that she has become something of a sadomasochist in her sexual relationship to Josh. Secrets. Oh! Such secrets. A woman of such powerful, natural and generously beneficent imposition would not have been believed if she had shared such secrets.

But as her day begins, and her astonishing, proud dark head, her very slightly aquiline nose, sinks beneath the bubbles in her bath, as the twin buoyant globes of her magnificent breasts thrust through the lather, we forgive all that we know and everything we do not, and know only one thing for certain, we exalt her. We exalt her even though she has a plan to bring her ex-lovers into line - both of them. Gabriel was falling apart nicely without her help.

‘Josh? My head is full of fucking voices. Help me. What do you do when this happens? I can hear *Only One Hymie* playing over and over again in my head. I can hear Carl Jung, Satan and Jahweh. They have tea-parties on my fucking forehead.’

Gabriel was frantically and carelessly packing a suitcase as he spoke to his friend. He locked his country house, took a backwards glance at it, jumped into a limousine which took him to Concorde.

‘You can hear *music* now?’ He shouted incredulously into the phone. ‘Did we make some reciprocal psychic deal? Enjoy it. Take the music. I’m on my way. Put on the concert. Leila told me she has lost you. Move on. Be in love. Have Victoria. I’ll be there.’

As Concorde banked over West London and sped towards Cornwall, Ireland and the Atlantic, Gabriel, his brain wet with alcohol, began to lose all contact with sanity, and started to endure delirium-tremens even as he continued to pour Cognac down his throat before lunchtime in either London or New York, indeed, before lunchtime in Honolulu.

As the paper dart banks in the sky over Surrey, Leila stands up in her bathtub with suds and water streaming down her body. With tears diluting the foam, she towels herself as she sings.

‘... no one else can hear me – S.O.S. When you’re gone, how can I, even try, to go on?’

Leila was beautiful, kind, smart and, if she was lonely it was not because she despised men or feared them, but because there would only ever be two she truly loved. You must know women. They can marry, bear children and live a good life but never love their husband as much as they may have loved

“The One”. Men are misunderstood too, for they understand this about women. Some of them are content to receive crumbs. A little love is enough. The important ingredient of love is like the non-existent quantity of gentle poison in a homeopathic remedy.

How could she love those *two* at once? Ask a woman. Or ask the angels. Gaze at them and you will see only wings, shining hair. You may *believe* you saw breasts, or genitalia, but what use would such appendages be to them? Remember there are no loins in the ether.

Gabriel lay naked on the bed. Somehow his body had not suffered as much, at least on the outside, as his face. His eyes were darkly lined, his mouth clenched and bitter as he drew deeply on a cigarette and an impossibly huge cloud of blue smoke filled the air, hardly dispersed by the powerful breeze blowing from the open window. He had always stayed at the Ritz Carlton Hotel. He had tried others, the Pierre, the Carlyle. He preferred the rooms at the less expensive Ritz Carlton that faced centrally and directly up the full length of Central Park, its views superior even to The Plaza. He was lean and pale, his body long and powerful. His belly was flat and ribbed, through all his self-abuse he had continued to exercise on the river, rowing a light skiff, always to the point of collapse and painful muscular distortions. On the river he continued to hear the best of his music, the ripples of water transformed into the widening circles of genius. Distant car horns began to blare. Traffic seemed unusually bad in the street twenty-eight storeys below. He turned and looked at the girl laying beside him. She was dark haired, looked South American. He rarely deviated from this favoured type.

‘New York.’

He was drunk, his words not slurring, but his voice was full of the absurd and meaningless passion of the inebriant.

‘I love this hotel. Look at the view.’

He waved at the window, but did not raise his head, he could see only the crisp clouds and fine blue sky.

‘You look like my ex-wife.’

He pulled back his head as though to bring the woman into focus, and screwed up his eyes.

‘I do?’

The girl missed the disdain, the accusatory tone: within a few hours of arriving in New York he had

found, and bedded, a woman who looked like his wife.

‘I really like you,’ said the girl snuggling up to him. ‘*Really.*’

‘God it’s hot in here.’

He struggled awkwardly to his feet and pushed the window further open.

When in the ether, I rarely express any emotion but irritation, and that only when I am quite violently distracted from my meditations by the impudent invasions of personified or disembodied entities from below. Otherwise, I am a celestial stalwart. Intoxicated I may sometimes have been, but I have also been a rock of indifference, not only to the insignificant events in the real world, but also the fripperies of those who dabble in the multi-layered planes of astral trash. I am often visited and challenged by ‘familiar’, those otherwise unemployed spirits who most enjoy offering support and suicidal drive to the odd neophyte witch or apprentice wizard. I have come close to being diverted, but my absolute surrender as a young man to Bollo – the smiling guru from Calcutta – has kept me centred and safe from such danger. I am inured to the comfort of the ether.

I suffer distractions nonetheless, and my patience, in particular, with Gabriel and his God-Awful Vox-Box, is thin. Nevertheless, I retain great affection for the earthly Gabriel of my younger days, and fear for him. I know that where I myself had screamed my challenges at the hosts of familiars that gathered on one fatal Halloween on which Beelzebub himself had made a showing, and they had fled, when Gabriel was recently so tested he offered little resistance. He has become possessed.

It seems now, does it not, that it is only Leila – magnificent, tearful, lonely in her bathtub – that is sane? Damaged, lost, found, diverted, loving, manipulative, regretful; is she, at least, in that at least, a little normal?

I can look around me and see only the evidence of abnormality, proof of the abnegation of that both-feet-on-the-ground tried-and-trusted practicality on which mortals so depended. I see only what is not real, what is not tangible. But what I see is nonetheless true. But imagined passions, spiritual longings, these crash most violently into my serene ethereal waftings. And, as you have seen, I am also diverted by the smell of lunch.

As Gabriel dozed on the hotel bed in New York, his whore lay by his side munching a burger with one hand, and with the other stroking his rich, dark, thick hair, dreaming of the romantic and lust-filled life she would now enjoy: endless free burgers, an expense account at Bergdorf Goodman, a house in the Hamptons, she might even get to meet *Prince*. Then, perhaps, she would move on to even leaner, greener, cleaner pastures.

‘I♥U2’ she would say. ‘CU2moro.

In November of 2002 Gabriel dreamed his own drunken dreams while the girl beside him, with flecks of sperm in her hair, dreamed of an *Artist (Formerly Known As Prince)*. Several pigeons had mustered on the windowsill, keen to get at the half eaten burger and pastries on a trolley near the open window. A few had bravely ventured in and were fluttering confused around the room, finding themselves disoriented in a corner, or stunned by an attempted escape through a wardrobe mirror. The satiated couple wheezed in the heat. Gabriel dreamed of Trilby, the river, his son – back to life, and grown into a man.

His eyes opened as all the beautiful music he had ever heard began to resonate again in his ears. White light filled the room, and the birds flying around seemed to him to be moving in slow motion. The music became grand, powerful, massive – Gabriel’s heart filled with a joy and physical pleasure he had never known. He might have wished to hang onto that moment forever, but it was not to be. For the paradise he enjoyed was that same as my own ironic, generous momentary epiphany – and remember you scholars that King Antiochus declared himself a God at such a moment and invented the word ‘epiphanes’ to describe it – just prior to the total collapse of my liver and entry into that shocking world of delirium-tremens in which I had once challenged Satan and made the devil flee; entry into the legions of those made insane through the social joys of alcohol as they pass into hell through gates that sound clarions promising even greater joy. So it was for Gabriel as he listened in rapture to the celestial music he heard. ‘What is this music made of?’ After so many years of listening it was a strange thought.

It was a strange question. What is any music made of but vibration and air? It is nothing, the purest of nothings, the most ethereal of insubstantialities, the most airy oscillation of the ether. He plunged deeper and deeper. A pigeon took off, and flew into his face, a flurry of feathers and dust filled his mouth, choking him for a second. The girl woke up, thrashing at the air.

‘A fucking bird ....’

‘Oh my God,’ Gabriel spat.

‘You OK?’

The girl fell onto him, brushing at his lips with the corner of a the sheet like a mother cleaning up a baby.

‘This beautiful music.....’

He said this coldly, not caring that she knew nothing of what he heard, what he had lived with all his life.

‘My music of the spheres. Do you know what it’s made of?’

‘I don’t hear anything.’

‘It’s children’s voices. Screaming in agony and terror.’

‘You’re sweating – you’re ill,’ she held him as though he might be dying. ‘It’s just a dream, a New York nightmare. Let me help you baby ...’

Somehow, they had sex. Gabriel surprised himself with a sudden burst of energy and brutality. As he thrust into the nameless girl he heard nothing. In this respect sex was a medication that, unlike booze, which had long since failed to calm his mind, quietened the discordant music developing in his head. But before his orgasm came, and dehydrated and emotionally detached as he was the moment of release was proving hard to achieve, he began to hear individual children’s voices. He had heard this before, but something was different this time. He began to feel that certain voices were coming forward from the celestial throng and screaming into his ear.

‘Children, children, millions of them, hanging from the wings of a great, dark angel like rooted feathers, they’re screaming, it’s hell; I’m in fucking hell.’

He came deeply inside the distracted girl’s now passive body.

‘You,’ she spoke flatly.

She rolled him off and got up briskly and began to dress. The phone rang.

‘Josh! How’s it going?’

As he spoke the building shook. It felt like an earthquake. Several distant explosions rattled the chandelier.

‘I can hear explosions. And voices. These are your voices Josh. Why can I hear them now?’

The girl grabbed a stash of one hundred dollar bills lying on the beside cabinet.

‘You’re a fucking nut.’

‘Hey – my money.’

‘Don’t try to stop me you shit-head – I’m underage – I’ll call the cops.’

Gabriel collapsed back, half laughing, half weeping, covering his ears.

‘Voices. Take them away. They’ve shot John Lennon. Just over the park. Over there. I can see the spot from the window. A little pool of blood. He’s dead Josh. I am alive.’

Another huge explosion rocked the building. Gabriel looked at the girl as she looked back at him from the open door, willing him to call her back. She appeared to him to have become a gross cartoon frog. Her great reptilian head belched at him. He looked out of the wide, open window towards Central Park West. The park was calm and green in the descending darkness. He began to move towards the window. He started to flap his arms like wings.

‘We believe you. We believe you.’

He said this as he readied himself for his glorious, freeing flight over the trees. Suddenly, there was a distant gun-shot, a sharp crack that sputter-echoed around the city.

‘They’ve shot John Lennon, I remember now, I was drunk, the window .....,’ he staggered to the ledge.