

Chapter Twenty-three - The Black Hole

Behind the door, they will all have wine and canapés, in the end, in *The Black Hole*. Good little pub next to the little theatre; the pub is connected by a glass door directly into the mirrored back wall of the theatre stage. This is an actual door, set into the wall at rather an odd level, about six feet above the floor, so the staircase from *Trilby's Piano* has been very useful. There are indeed drinks and tidbits, and some have secured tables to which waiters bring cooked food. The occasion is, of course, that of an 'after-show' party that spans many years between 2004 and today - 2035. It will be some years before Leila and Josh join in the party. It will be over thirty years before I—old but nevertheless yet too young, wandering the sanatorium in pursuit of a well-turned calf—find my way there, if I ever crack it. Seeing the door is one thing, getting through it is another. This racket is from the sometimes noisy party that, along with Gabriels' irritating transmissions to Josh, occasionally disrupted my ethereal reverie. At least I now know where I am *ultimately* heading. My ether—new or old—is merely a holding pattern between the supreme forces: art begun, and art finished.

Many choose, as it appears I have done, to put off going back there. If I left the theatre, left the ether now to join the party, I would be unable to return to it. That is the way it is, that is how this after-show part of the plot was written, and that part of the plot cannot be changed. Once there, always there.

For the moment I am not up in the gods. I sit here in a real theatre with the remaining audience gathering their bits and pieces. Leila and Josh have already left. The theatre cleaners are already slowly creeping in, in twos and threes, trying not to clank their buckets, gossiping about each other.

Various members of the audience in the old BBZee studio theatre have left their seats and come onto the stage, but not one climbs the steps to join the party. Such events in the *Black Hole* seem to be reserved for a select few, and yet the mirror door is still partly ajar, beckoning at the top of the little staircase from *Trilby's Piano* that will soon be wheeled away again to one side. The stage darkens. A curtain closes. But most of the audience out there are leaving. They look up at the stage, nod to each other, feel they have more pressing business at home – they are probably doing the right thing. Life goes on, as they say. Or is it death, that goes on.....? Suddenly I hear a scuffle and an old fellow in shades and multi-coloured skullcap, hurries between the seats, mounts the stage, climbs the stairs and walks through the mirror door. It's Gabriel. I thought he was dead. If I'm not mistaken he appeared to be carrying my father's white rabbit. Wasn't that dead too? I hear a voice from behind the door.

Someone is asking for a note to which tune their guitar. The voice replies, 'We only have B flat'. Ha!

And Gabriel's beautiful music begins again. In B flat, the key of the hum of the universe. But this time, as the mirror door closes behind Gabriel, silence is reestablished. What I saw from my seat in the Gods, that time in New York, the big concert, the flames, the explosions, the children dropping from the wings of the black Good Year dragon blimp, a huge audience connected and joined by music and technology – I believe it really happened. I know now I only yearn for peace, for timeless silence. I long for a place where I can go where I don't have to see Gabriel's adolescent face gazing at me in ecstasy, his limp body the object of a newly reincarnated dog-sailor's lust. I wait patiently to arrive at a place I no longer see little Leila, a beautiful little bird, crushed into a filthy back alley, suffocating, bleeding. I want to find some place where little Josh's mind is not afflicted, where his father survives to nurture and guide him, where he does not go insane and murder his best friend - his only real friend. And of course I meditate to escape to a place where I no longer remember myself as a defenceless little boy, laying face down while a rampant, howling, fuck-witted voyeuristic fool.....I will say no more of this. I want this entertainment for the benefit of the bored Gods out there on the endless wire in the endless heavens to end. I wait patiently for the time I can stop time, reverse it, and start again. I am close. Very close.

'Here's some tea Miss Irani,' says the upright female nurse, smiling. 'Remember Josh has his group at six.'

'Thank you. We're near the end now.'

She looks out through the lounge windows at the mist gathering low on the surface of the river. Josh gazes at her adoringly. In the distance, over her shoulder, on the sweeping lawns of The Old Deer Park near Kew, a boy is throwing a stick or a ball for his dog. The dog, still a puppy, is jumping joyfully and the boy is copying him, egging him on. On the opposite bank of the river a lone fisherman is casting in the eddies from the nearby half-tide lock. Leila looked up at her old lover.

'The play was lovely. Just as I remember it.'

She bows her head, smiling, and – were the occasion less serious – would have laughed out loud. Josh is suddenly irritated by the river, by the trees, the mist defracting the evening sunlight on the water, the distant Pagoda at Kew. He prefers the window in his room, high, allowing light but no distraction. Leila breaks the spell.

‘Do you remember that book about plots?’

‘*The Thirty Six Dramatic Situations?*’

‘I brought it with me’.

Josh takes the book from her and flips through it.

‘What was that one about the theatre?’

Everything is quite simple. Gabriel had seen the great Brahamanic theatre rising into the flaming sky over New York. Gabriel had seen it. I had seen it. Maybe we had all seen it. And then, a few years later, while *Trilby’s Piano* was being revived in the Isleworth sanatorium, perhaps we saw it all again and time converged.

‘Where do you think he is now?’

‘Gabriel?’ She laughs. ‘Probably in the *Black Hole*! Piecing together the fragments with the help of a whiskey.’

The elderly pair sit silently together for a few more minutes. Then Leila reaches down to look for her keys in her handbag, a sign of restlessness. They needed to get things into proper perspective.

‘Would you like some more tea before I go?’

Josh glances at Leila, considering her offer. He shakes his head and smiles, it is finished at last.