

Chapter 8 - The Mirror Door

What else then can I do? I can show my audience to the gap in the hedge. Demonstrate that even two dimensional characters on the printed page have depth and distortion that have meaning. I have tried. Like Silverman tried, I went on with Rosalind and others like her to try as a teacher. I once believed I would never stop trying; it is in the nature of the artist to facilitate joy and disturbance, to engage the moment of uplift and inspiration. How strange it is, to realise ultimately that inspiration is not something for which one waits patiently, that plants ideas and energy into the artistic soul like a life-force, but rather the great reservoir of creation itself: the matter of life; the Big Bang.

A shower of water cascaded over Gabriel's body; filling his ears and eyes it was icy cold. Water. Music. Delirium. What was happening? Unlike other boys, Gabriel had never enjoyed an orgasm. The music had always carried him, precious and supportive, effulgent and embracing, an effective substitute for sexual sensuality. And yet now, from within his swooning ice-cold reverie, he began to buckle over as his loins warmed and filled with a surging sweet energy that increased and vibrated until he felt it could surely get no more intense. But even then it deepened, and as he zoomed upwards through his own half-conscious body, which became more physical with every moment, more animal and less mental, more alive than dreaming, his loins seemed to collapse and the helpless jerks of ejaculation shook him.

‘Then I woke up,’ Gabriel was sitting with Josh, the two thirteen year old boys together confidently, conspiratorially, half-joking, secretive and excited.

‘In the shower,’ Josh completed.

‘With one of the older scouts’

‘Inside your’

‘*Outside* my’ ‘Inside your outside?’ They both burst out laughing.

Up in the ether I can feel my tears begin to fall.

From that incredible musical reverie Gabriel enjoyed, that sublime ecstatic sleigh-ride, he had been

shuttled to his first orgasm. Then he had awoken. Cold, withered, empty and confused, with a man standing over him in the shower room, his fully-developed erection massive by comparison to his own still developing organ, and before him on his knees the Mate, wiping his mouth with a smirk as he looked up at Gabriel. What he would forget for many years to come, was that there had been a camera.

Almost in anger, the Vox-Box in the middle of my otherwise tearful ether throbs and rocks, itself a kind of phallic monstrosity.

‘You are the only person I told.’

Gabriel’s ponderous voice, the old man now, is still transmitting blindly to his old friend.

Children can help each other to survive such traumas. Gabriel told his friend Josh, who did indeed laugh, but in his eyes was the spark of the sincere empathy that springs from real love. Josh too had *suffered* his own first orgasm while having his hair shampooed in the bath by an attractive older female cousin. Ruth (no relation to my Ms Streeting) had laughed when he had cried out as his unwilling body rose to her presence. Josh knew what he had *endured*, he knew too what he had *enjoyed*. What neither of the boys knew at that vital moment in each of their lives was that in the countless times they would orgasm in their lives ahead, the experience would never again be so intense, so surprising, so exquisitely and humiliatingly imperfect. One day the fact that he had enjoyed the moment would cause Gabriel shame beyond all understanding.

‘No, we like you, we really do.’ Gabriel barred Leila’s way.

‘You’re the prettiest,’ added Josh.

‘I’m the cleverest,’ said Leila.

Suddenly, she took both of them by surprise when she whirled from Gabriel who was practically pressing himself against her, and kissed Josh quickly, effectively and quite passionately. Josh was still crying out in shock and mock disgust when she turned and kissed Gabriel too. The two boys stood in disarray as the composed young girl, nowhere near a woman, walked steadily and purposefully away, expecting no comment, certain she would not be followed.

That evening the three of them sat by Gabriel’s favourite spot by the river at Kew.

‘I don’t hear music all the time,’ he searched Leila’s eyes for incredulity. ‘But I hear it a lot. It’s much more beautiful than anything I can play.’

‘I can hear voices,’ Josh continued the confessional declarations that the two boys felt would either frighten Leila away, or allow her to be a true friend—entirely in their confidence. ‘They tell me to do things. They tell me stories. I hear poetry. Even God speaks to me.’

The two boys waited for Leila to laugh, or instead for her to ingratiate herself with them by pretending to believe and understand. She looked from one to the other, as though trying - they thought - to decide which one to mock first.

‘Well,’ she began. ‘I can fly.’

Gabriel and Josh looked at each other and found the tables turned as they fought the urge to laugh; for the two of them, despite the dangerous conspiratorial solace of their established contract, this new revelation was just that: revelatory, a disclosure, a rather dangerous secret. She had become a part of the club.

‘I don’t do it much these days,’ Leila went on, still waiting for their ridicule, which never came. ‘I used to fly all the time.’

She looked again from face to face.

‘..... you don’t believe me do you?’

Gabriel spoke first.

‘We do believe you.’

‘We all believe each other,’ added Josh.

‘Good,’ said Leila simply. ‘That’s very good.’

And then, with a surge of relief that to each of them was indescribable, they all laughed at last.

*I close all the doors
Because if I’m alone*

*I can fly,
And nobody knows.
The secret is mine;
When I fly from heaven to here
In the blink of an eye,
Through space and though time,
Invisible wings, impossible high[1].*

Leila lay in her bed that night secure in the knowledge that finally she had found friends worthy of her. The way the boys had chosen to be honest with her, in the first instance of their childlike intimacy, had deeply touched her. She had, prior to that moment, told no one of her ability to fly. She had never attempted to fly outside the house, as she did so often in her dreams like any normal child, but she felt sure that one day in the future she would do so. She would leap from a cliff-top and drop a hundred feet before gliding out and away towards the infinitely unreachable horizon. She heard her father Damoo coming up the stairs, she closed her eyes and pretended to be asleep. She heard the door open and expected him to simply peep around as usual. But this time she felt him open the door and stand in the doorway. Could he actually sense her conspiratorial sexual precocity even on this, the very day it had been awakened? Or could he smell something? Was he some kind of animal, scenting, searching, sniffing for evidence of pheromones?

‘Sleep well, my beautiful Leila,’ she heard her father whisper. ‘How I miss your dear mother. If only I lived back in Iran I could have another wife. Another wife, or even two,’ his voice wavered and Leila blushed at her father’s gross self-pity.

‘Father,’ she whispered. ‘Are you OK?’

‘Go to sleep my darling. Sorry to wake you – go to sleep.’

Up in the ether where time runs at an entirely different speed to what we call the real world, the wise, slow voice of the old man Gabriel speaks up.

‘You and I fell in love with her. I believed Leila must love you, because you were beautiful. You believed she must love me, because I was musical. Leila? She was quite certain we both loved her.’

I begin to actually *see* the words Gabriel transmits to his old friend. Strange, they emerge from the Vox-Box and seem to come straight toward me in a stream of letters and shapes, as though Gabriel's transmissions are intended for me not Josh. But it's clear now that Josh and I are – in our aged, corporeal, earthy mortal forms – very close neighbours. Thump, thump, thump: the tennis ball against our adjoining wall.

Damoo longed for order, for stability, but he was not like other men and Leila was not like other girls. In West London there were in the 70's just a few pockets of Iranians like Damoo who, - because they were doctors, or lawyers, specialist scientists or physicists, - could afford to live comfortably in any part of the established community they chose. They were not driven to cluster in semi-ghettos near a mosque, nor to become involved in loan-shark chains to buy a grand house in one of the more well-to-do districts. Damoo had chosen Acton because a Polish engineer at the broadcasting studio at which he got his first job had been brought up there. He had said it was a town free of prejudice, with a homogenous mix of Jews and Gentiles; it could absorb a few Muslims. Damoo knew that, in other circumstances, Leila could have been betrothed by now and realised that if she had been, she would – in this modern, multi-cultural society – be as good as dead. And yet he knew that his daughter had an energy and a spark that without the restraining influence of a well-chosen husband could lead her into terrible danger. It was ironic that if Leila's mother had been alive, a number of husbands would already have been introduced; ironic, because the proud independent edge and intelligence that Leila exhibited, that would cause her to refuse all-comers, reminded Damoo very much of his late wife. But Leila was not frail.

Damoo wanted Leila and her new friends under his eye and, on a grey day in 1975, had thrown open the door to a nondescript industrial building in Isleworth. Outside, interested and eager, Leila had brought Gabriel and Josh to look around her father's workplace. Gabriel had not failed to notice that the building fronted the Thames, that on the opposite bank, in the distance could be seen the Pagoda at Kew. The studio was near the scene of his Sea Scouts ordeal.

'Welcome to BBZee Studios,' announced Damoo grandly. 'Come in, come in, come in.'

On the home turf of his beloved studio Damoo was not only at ease, but more serious than usual. He showed the children around the building.

'Is BBZee a word-play on 'BBC'?,' asked Josh.

‘Our first studio was a tiny one in South Acton. A small unit in Bollo Bridge Road. My business partner was a student of mysticism. A seeker. Someone with no specific faith and an open mind he was keen to close.’

The children looked confused. Damoo went on.

‘I’m teasing, he was a sincere seeker. We had this little studio, and one day one of his artist friends commented that ‘Bollo’ was the name of a Guru he had heard about. So my partner took this as a sign and found out – at least to his own satisfaction – that this Bollo was the genuine article.’

‘What?’ asked Josh. ‘A genuine spiritual master?’

‘No. A genuine *article*,’ laughed Damoo.

‘So what about the ‘Zee’ bit?’ asked Gabriel.

‘It just means ‘Zee’,’ laughed Leila. ‘Like ‘whee’ when you go down a waterslide.’

‘Nonsense,’ Damoo held up his palm. ‘It is the Dutch word for sea, even for inland seas or large lakes. When we moved here to this spot by the Thames, we liked the idea that our new studio would have a name that reflected both our humble origins in Acton, and our trans-oceanic prospects.’

‘And the name of your partner’s spiritual guide,’ asked Josh. ‘Who *was* he? Your partner, I mean.’

‘You can do that research yourself one day - he was a pop star who posed before the mirror with his guitar, pretending to be Elvis.’

‘He was practising?’

‘Admiring himself. You know the kind of thing. In the end he turned out to be one of the

lucky few who find that the mirror they preen in front of is actually a door?.

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