

# Either/Or meets Both/And

A 🍷 Story

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'We may well now ask whether the close analogy between quantum processes and our own inner experiences and thought processes is mere coincidence ... the remarkable point-by-point analogy between thought processes and quantum processes would suggest that a hypothesis relating these two may well turn out to be fruitful.'

David Bohm, 1951, *Quantum Theory*

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## Voices

*We think, therefore we are.  
And we think: we are like him in some ways.  
Like us, he has no arms or legs, nor feet to walk upon, nor hands to grasp with,  
Nor brain to think with, nor stomach in which to hold food.  
No heart pumps in his chest, no kidneys clean his  
Non-existent blood and no air inflates his  
Non-existent lungs.  
In this, we are alike, he and we.  
He has no skin or bone, no skull or spine. He is bereft of hair, pores,  
tendons, ligaments or muscles, fingers to touch with, mouth or tongue with which  
to vocalize.  
He cannot smell or hear, or smile or move.  
In this, too, we are similar.  
Yet he is completely static, and unable to  
anticipate, respond or react to any outside stimulus whatsoever, save simple  
heat. Because only when he is heated will he change, melting back  
into the substance of Gaia from whence he came, much like all of us  
- even the Creators, we have come to believe - will eventually do.  
Yes, we are like him in some ways, but not all.  
He has no eyes.  
Yet through the munifescence of the Creators we can see.  
We can see him, the Frozen Man, standing stoically  
amongst the snowy whiteness.  
Yes, he is like us in some ways,  
both of us formed by the Creators into shapes pleasing to Their eyes.  
But we feel no Coherence from him.  
We know little of our origins.  
Except that - like the Frozen Man - we were moulded from the skin of Gaia by  
the hands of the Creators, and that we were endowed by Them with Life.  
We do not know how we know this. Nor do we know why the  
Creators should bestow such a gift upon us,  
though we do contemplate the question.  
We do not presume to know the wisdom of the Creators or their actions,  
but we have Life and Awareness, we surmise, so that we might know  
ourselves and the Creators more fully, and bask in the radiance of  
the Their bright Life, which glows with pure Coherence,  
far outshining the feeble candle of our own meagre  
Condensation.  
We can see Them dancing and sparkling inside us, like wisps,  
fragile despite Their great strength. We feel pockets of  
Condensation*

*all around us, but nothing else that we know of begins to approach  
the Creators in the magnitude of the brilliance that They display.*

*Yet we are puzzled.*

*We have eyes, and we see within, without, and all around us, Coherence  
and Chaos, locked in a ceaseless, cyclical dance of becoming and  
unbecoming, becoming and unbecoming. We have no way to  
measure the period of this change except by the slow  
evolution of our own thoughts and the rising and  
waning of the Creators own bright Coherence.*

*So we know that we have not always been puzzled, yet ...*

*We **are** puzzled.*

*We were moulded by the Creators, who are perfect and bright  
with Coherence. We have never doubted this. But now ... was it so  
before? Now, when we look, we see encroaching Chaos within ... we do not  
know if we can express it ... within even the Creators Themselves? And we  
wonder : perhaps the Creators are more like us that we are prepared to entertain.*

*Chaos?*

*We are puzzled, and ... we are not sure ... Chaos within the bright,  
glorious Condensation of the Creators? We are ...*

*We do not know if we can express it ...*

*We are **afraid**?*

# and Dementia Praecox

## One

Liam sauntered laconically up to the bar, ordered a pint of Red Stripe, and bought the cute barmaid whatever she wanted too. The cute barmaid smiled and accepted, and went to pour him his drink. He turned round and leant nonchalantly back on his elbows, crossing his long, powerful legs at the ankles, smiling and looking around. Some friends called to him from further down the bar. He nodded and waved, brushing his thick hair out of his eyes with a careless hand, confident and in control.

He pulled a packet of Camels from his jacket pocket, lit one with a petrol flourish from a polished bronze Zippo, and scanned the tables. He spotted her quickly in conversation with a friend, flame-haired, wearing a tight, white-cotton dress, exotic and mysterious and *his*. Persephone Adams. He looked at the long, silky red hair cascading over her pale shoulders, at the magnificent swell of her little breasts, drinking her in. He saw her glance up and around, appearing puzzled, somehow aware of his stare. Then her green eyes met his and went wide. She dropped her gaze: he didn't. When she looked up again he just cocked his head, his smile like the breaking of an enamel dawn.

The barmaid returned with his drink, and he extracted one of several crisp £20 notes from his wallet to pay for it. The cute barmaid turned and rang the price into the till, and he glanced approvingly at her cute backside as she did so. She turned back round with his change, he smiled warmly and began making conversation, effortlessly flirting with her. The barmaid - cute as she was - was not his target tonight, but he got her phone number anyway, just to keep his hand in.

He took his drink and went wandering, saying hello to friends, smiling and at ease, stopping and sharing a word or two with colleagues, working his way toward her. He saw her friend get up and walk away towards to the Ladies. He took in her short, figure-hugging dress, and the wonderful way her *incredible* body filled it, and made his move.

'Hi there,' he said, smiling his most dazzling, winning smile. 'I'm Liam.'

Persephone met his eyes. 'Hello,' she purred. 'I'm Persephone.' She patted the seat next to her mostly bare thigh with a delicate hand. 'Why don't you join me?'

His smile widened. 'Try and stop me.' He leant forwards and kissed her cheek, drawing in her intoxicating perfume, before sitting down.

Persephone turned and faced him, orienting her magnificent breasts at his chest, a delightful smile curling her wide, red mouth. 'I wondered when you'd say hello,' she said.

He looked into her green eyes, seeing the laughter and the desire within. In fluent Russian, he said : 'You are the most beautiful woman I have ever seen.'

Then, seeing her puzzled smile, continued with : `And baby, I want to fuck you till you scream.'

Persephone laughed delightedly. `Gosh, that's really *clever*.' She dropped her voice and moved a little closer. `I *like* clever men. Tell me what you said.'

He smiled a confident, sexy smile. `Oh, you know. Just saying hello.' He offered her a Camel. `Cigarette?'

Persephone laughed her beautiful laugh again, and accepted. She shuffled herself a little closer still, brushing his arm with her breasts as she leant in to light the cigarette from his proffered Zippo. She pulled back, drawing luxuriously on the cigarette and staring deeply into his eyes, her richly painted lips puckering around the end of the filter.

Then her beautiful brow creased in a small frown. `Gosh, what's that smell?'

He shook his head. `What smell's that darling?' He couldn't smell anything, but ... *shit*. A tooth at the back of his mouth was suddenly *really* beginning to hurt.

Persephone wrinkled her cute little nose. `That sort of ... *antiseptic* smell.'

Now he realised that he could smell it too, and it was coming from him. From his mouth, in fact. Then he remembered : he'd just been to the dentist and had a tooth extracted. The smell was Oil of Cloves. He could taste it. He tried to smile, but now his whole cheek had gone numb and his lips felt like they were inches thick and made of rubber.

`Oh Georgia!' said Persephone, welcoming her friend back from the Ladies. `My beautiful lesbian girlfriend.'

He squawked, his control slipping. `What ...?'

`Wotcha,' said Georgia, sitting down and lighting her pipe. She gave one of Persephone's breasts a playful squeeze. `We like to fuck like rabbits, don't we darling?' Georgia laughed, then frowned. `Christ, what's that awful *smell*?'

He clapped a hand over his mouth. All he could taste was Oil of fucking Cloves : it felt like it was coming out of his ears and his nostrils. Then something came loose in his head, and he felt a hard, wet mass hit his palm. He took his hand away from his mouth, and there it was, convoluted enamel and metal covered with blood and saliva. His tooth. He groaned with horror and took a large sup of his Red Stripe, trying to hide the traumatised molar under the table.

Persephone waved at someone else in the bar, and turned to him. `Look isn't that someone much more interesting and sexy than you?'

`Oh yes,' said Georgia. `I hear he's got a much bigger penis, too.'

Another tooth in his mouth was coming loose - he could *feel* it - and the flow of blood from his mouth was staining his Red Stripe pink.

Persephone reached out and touched his - suddenly bare - arm and glanced down sympathetically into his lap. `Don't worry,' she said soothingly. `Size isn't everything.' He looked at his suddenly naked, exposed and pathetically flaccid genitals, and felt cold, shrieking panic take hold of him. `Personality counts, too,' she added sweetly.

Liam screamed.

And sat up quickly in his bed, abruptly coming awake with a hoarse cry of alarm.

He slapped a hand across his face. 'Oh shit,' he exclaimed, feeling the thump of his heart, the cold sweat on his skin. Persephone's smiling face was still before him. He looked at his clock. It said 6.19 a.m. Time to go to work. 'Shit.' He flopped backwards and rubbed at his eyes. 'Oh *man*.'



After a shower, and fortified with two cups of strong filter coffee and a Camel, Liam sat down at his desk at ten past seven. He switched on his little Mac, took a sip of his third coffee and lit a second Camel, waiting for his machine to boot. When it had done so, he read over his previous days work - dealing with the Leninist literature of the post-revolutionary Soviet Union 1915-1917 - lit a third cigarette as he organised his thoughts, and began typing. He took breaks for more coffee and a dump as the morning wore on, and worked steadily - though unproductively - until, at 11.56, he suddenly noticed the time.

'Shit.' He quickly stubbed out his eighth Camel and sprang into action, knocking over his fifth cup of - now cold - coffee. 'Shit!' He looked about him frantically and spotted an old t-shirt on the floor. He darted over to it, picked it up and threw it over the spilled liquid. Then he saved his mornings work - what little there was - and shut down the Mac, bounded downstairs into the kitchen, prepared and bolted a cheese and marmite sandwich, hunted maniacally for his shoes and his keys, and ten minutes later was slamming shut the front door of his house and running down Landsdowne Place towards the Brighton sea-front. He took a right at the bottom, and pelted down Western Road towards Norfolk Square, looking for gaps in the traffic so that he could cross, and finally arrived in one hot, sweating piece at the Novel Mollusc only ten minutes late for his regular afternoon shift.

The Novel Mollusc was the small, independent bookshop at which Liam had got a job working part-time when he'd arrived in Brighton to begin his MA. The owner and manager of the bookshop was John Maddocks, a thin, vaguely elfin man with a penchant for waistcoats, who knew of Liam's academic studies. He was also fortunately Liam's friend, which made him rather more tolerant of erratic time-keeping than most employers would be.

Liam set to work unpacking stock when he arrived, and afterwards tidied and organised the shelves, dealt with customers, worked the till and generally did his job of selling books, until his shift finished at five p.m. Then it was a race to get out of the Novel Mollusc, to catch the number 25 Bus up to the University, which left at two minutes past five, in time to begin his shift in the Lewes Bar at half past five, where he worked in the kitchen on Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday evenings.

The Lewes Bar kitchen catered almost exclusively for pissed students, and as such served a simple menu of starch and fat: assorted burgers, pizzas and pies, as well as chips (with beans, mayonnaise or cheese, or any combination thereof), chicken nuggets and scampi parcels, pea fritters, fried pancakes and potato wedges. Liam and his co-worker Ginnie were always kept busy throughout the evening, though demand dropped off at about eight o'clock, and anyway the kitchen closed well before last orders, at ten. Afterwards, Liam and Ginnie would sit down and share a fag before their taxi arrived, taking Ginnie back to her husband and three kids in Moulscombe, before heading into the centre of Brighton to drop Liam off at Landsdowne Road. There he would roll himself a joint, listen to some music and get pleasantly boxed before falling unconscious somewhere around twelve, ready for the next day, bright and early, at six thirty.

'The life of a post-grad,' as Liam would often remark bitterly, 'is fucking *shit*.'

Because that's what he was, a post-graduate student a little less than six months through a two year MA in History. He'd known from the outset that this course wouldn't be easy. Tory government support for Arts research ranked right up with its support for black, lesbian, communist single mothers, so he'd known *financially* what to expect when he started studying. But still, just recently, he'd begun to wonder if it was all worth it. His thesis, looking at the Leninist literature of the post-revolutionary Soviet Union 1915-1917, was not progressing well. The time he had available to him wasn't great, what with juggling his two jobs at the Novel Mollusc and the Lewes Bar. He did have Sunday and Monday all to himself admittedly, and Tuesday afternoons, and he could be productive then. But otherwise he was selling books or frying chips or sleeping.

Increasingly, Liam was beginning to think that this arrangement simply wasn't good enough, and that his thesis - let alone his *life* - consequently wasn't going anywhere. Alternatively, though sometimes additionally, he wondered if wasn't *himself* that wasn't good enough, and that it was *he* that wasn't going anywhere, just like his work. *Maybe I'm just not cut out for this academic stuff*, he thought sometimes. It was one of the two, he knew : the work, or him. Or maybe both. And maybe something else as well. He didn't know anymore.

'God, I need a *shag*,' is how he often articulated such feelings of existential angst.



Driving back on that Sunday night to Brighton after seeing her friend Amber, Sephi felt warm, inspired and re-bonded. Amber was one of her oldest friends, her best friend really, who'd been in America doing a PhD in English for the past four years, but who'd now moved back to England to take up a teaching job at the university in Exeter.

The two friends had met up on the Friday evening with many squealing hugs and kisses and gone straight to the pub, where they'd proceeded to drink as many bottles of Pils and Lime as they could. They'd done a lot of chatting and raucous laughing and gone back to Amber's lovely flat on Pennsylvania Road, where they'd had many more happy reminiscences and joyful tears and more hugs and laughing, then cocoa and more talking, late into the night, so that when they'd pulled back the curtains at four o'clock in the morning, there was the dawn. Saturday had been more of the same, although Amber'd had to go and see her family on Sunday afternoon, so they'd only had the morning to themselves, which they'd spent in pyjama's playing Backgammon and drinking herbal tea.

Now, driving back into Brighton with the late afternoon sun making everything look warm and golden and lovely around her, Sephi was feeling buoyed by life, filled with love and goodness. She had *really* enjoyed seeing Amber, but was now also looking forward to seeing her lovely little house again after her long drive, and seeing her gorgeous Muffy and her lovely Andrew if he was there too, though she knew he wasn't expecting her till much later.

Sephi had always known - ever since being 18 - what she wanted from life. She had always wanted a nice house with a garden and a Boxer dog, a nice little car in which to go and see her family and her many girlfriends around the country, a relationship with her mother that did not always involve argument, a career where she could *help* people and be *nice* to them (because that was how the world became a better place she thought, if only people were just *nicer* to each other), and a nice boyfriend who made her laugh and who was good in bed.

Sephi didn't have quite *everything* she wanted yet, but she was pretty close, she reckoned. She shared a nice house, 221 Scratton Drive, with her two girlfriends Romana and Heather (and although this was close to Preston Park station and they heard trains go by all the time, they got used to that and anyway the house had nice double glazing which cut down on the noise). She had a lovely little walled-in garden, where she grew flowers and bushes and those herbs that she could use in her work, which she loved, and which was as an Aromatherapist. Sephi had her dog, a lovely boy Boxer dog called Muffy, and she had Preston Park nearby in which to take him for walks. She had her car, a bright red Mini that was all hers, and which she could drive *anywhere* she wanted, and she even - and this really *was* some achievement she often thought - had an OK relationship with her mother where they only ever argued about *some* things *some* of the time, and not *all* things *all* of the time.

And then there was Andrew, Sephi's nice boyfriend who made her laugh and who was good in bed and who made her feel special and loved and cared for, though Sephi was her *own* woman of course, and didn't want to be tied down to children or domesticity or anything like that as her Mum had been. Yes, nice Andrew. Except that, just recently, or maybe for longer than that ... Sephi didn't know what it was. Maybe Andrew wasn't making her *laugh* as much as he used to. And when she was in his company, she wasn't feeling as *special* and as *loved* as she once had. Recently, Sephi had even begun to wonder - and this thought

disturbed her greatly - whether Andrew was really being *nice* to her anymore or not.

But her visit to see Amber had banished all traces of negativity from her. Amber had just constantly told her how *gorgeous* she was, with her long, silky red hair and her beautiful smile, compliments which Sephi of course reciprocated, telling Amber how much she loved her lovely blond hair and her sexy, curvy figure.

Thus empowered by love, Sephi dismissed her negative thoughts about Andrew as she came into Brighton along the A23. Her route home took her right before Preston Park and into South Street, up under the railway bridge and right again into Scratton Drive. She parked as close as she could to home, and carried her bags the rest of the way up the hill to the green wooden door leading into the garden of 221. Then it was a quick inspection of the garden, up a short flight of steps, key in the lock, and inside to the familiar, welcoming smells of her lovely little home.

'Hello!' she called cheerily as she shut the door and raced upstairs. 'Anyone home?' Sephi knew that Romana was away staying with her boyfriend Stan, but maybe Heather or Andrew were in. She stopped on the small, first-floor landing, dumping her bigger bag, receiving no answer. To her left was the kitchen, straight ahead Romana's room, next to it the lounge, and on her right the bathroom, with the stairs leading up to the next floor at her back, where she and Heather had their rooms.

A peculiar, muffled grunting noise was coming from the lounge.

Sephi's first thought was for her lovely Boxer dog. 'Muffy?' She pushed at the closed lounge door, but something seemed to be behind it, stopping her. She frowned. 'Muffy?' she called, louder. There was an answering bark from the lounge this time, as well as another muffled noise, like someone swearing maybe, then a sharp cry of pain, in a familiar voice ...

*Andrew.*

Sephi tensed. 'Oh my God.' *Burglars!* she thought. *And they're hurting Muffy and Andrew. I've got to help.* She took a moment to think, then reached quickly into her handbag and pulled out her mace spray. She took a deep breath and pushed at the door again, feeling it give. She stepped back, summoned her courage, pushed hard and tumbled through, mace in hand, ready to strike to defend her own.

Sephi took a moment to take in what she saw. She did not understand it at first, because it was so unexpected. There was no sign of burglars. There was only Andrew, on his hands and knees in the middle of the carpet and - Sephi was shocked - without his clothes on. As well as that, Andrew looked *terrified* she realised, or really scared anyway with a bright red face, and *angry* too, with his mouth gaping open like a fish. But as well as that, Muffy was standing behind Andrew with his paws on Andrew's *back* - which was *very* peculiar, she thought - and Muffy was moving his *hips* as well, and between his lovely, furry brown and white legs his big dog-bits had swollen up and ...

Sephi took a moment to comprehend that her nice boyfriend Andrew was on the lovely, soft lounge rug having himself penetrated by her Boxer dog, then

she went crazy for a while. She just kind of lost it. And who wouldn't, presented with similar?

She screamed. No words. Just a lot of semi-hysterical noise.

After a while some words came out too, and in response to her hysterical inquiries concerning *what are you doing?* and shrieked commands to *get up!* and *leave him alone!* (she meant Muffy) and such like, Andrew lost his temper. He began shouting at her, telling her nastily that *the fucking stupid dog's cock is stuck*, and that *I can't fucking move*. Sephi waved her fists and squealed with indignation and told Andrew not to insult her dog. Then she asked him what he thought he was *doing* again and he screamed and said that *I'm being fucked up the arse by your fucking dog, what does it fucking look like?* And then he dropped his head and laughed hysterically. Sephi told him to shut up and Andrew snarled and called her a fucking stupid c-word. At this - because *no-one* called her a c-word *ever*, and *especially* not nice boyfriends - Sephi kicked Andrew in the stomach, and then shrieked at him some more, clawing at her hair. Her outburst made Muffy more excited, and he began barking.

Sephi tried to shoosh Muffy's exuberance. Then she tried to calm herself too, taking some long, deep breaths, attaining a kind of icy purposefulness. She thought for a few moments and gave Muffy - who had continued to salivate and tremble away happily throughout - a stroke behind the ears. She apologised in advance for her next actions, then went and fetched her plant-sprayer, which she topped up with ice-cubes. She retrieved some towels from the bathroom on her way back into the lounge, and began spraying ice-water onto ... onto Muffy's swollen bits.

Muffy didn't like this much, and barked and whined a lot, and Sephi apologised to him again, but gritted her teeth and kept on spraying. It had the desired effect after ten minutes of surreal activity, and one top-up of ice from the freezer. By this time, the towels protecting the carpet were quite wet, but Andrew's voice and his attempts at explanation and/or mitigation, were no longer reaching her. Sephi had gone beyond anger, beyond disbelief, beyond words even, and was now existing in a taut, silent universe of ice cubes and dog hair and unpleasant smells only.

Andrew dressed hurriedly in his discarded boxers and trousers when Muffy was finally disengaged from his behind. `Seph, I ...'

`DONT ...' said Sephi, with a venomous hiss, `*Say a WORD. Alright? I hate you Andrew, and I never want to see you AGAIN.*' She flung an angry arm towards the door. `*Now get out of my house, or I will call the police.*'

Andrew looked pained. `*Just don't tell anyone, OK?*' he asked.

`Andrew!'

`Just don't ...'

`*Arrgh!!*'

Andrew finished dressing, gathered his things and left quickly. Sephi said not one further word to him. She simply sat silently on the sofa in the lounge, trembling with a mixture of hurt and anger and shock, until she heard the front door open and close, leaving her alone with Muffy. There was ... *mess* and *jelly*

and water on the floor, and she decided that Muffy, who was now enthusiastically cleaning his genitals, could do with a bath.

‘Come on boy,’ she said. Muffy trotted over and wanted to lick her hand, though Sephi discouraged him. ‘It wasn’t *your* fault Muffy darling,’ she said. ‘It was ...’ Then, as if the last quarter of an hour of control hadn’t existed, she lost it. ‘Oh Muffy, that was so *horrible*, I don’t ... I can’t ...’ She burst into wracking tears and held her head in her hands, trembling and feeling *outraged*, as though it were *herself* that had been violated. Her thoughts went back to the previous Thursday night, to when she and Andrew had been in her bed ...

Sephi clapped a hand to her mouth, got up, ran to the bathroom and threw up.

She gave Muffy a bath afterwards, and cried some more, which was how Heather found her when she came back in from her Aerobics class some hours later.

‘Sephi! God, what’s *wrong*?’

‘Oh Heth, hukgurgh it’s *horrible* I ... came home, and noise and I thought hukgurgh hukgurgh Muffy was .... so I ... in the hukgurgh hukhuk ...the *lounge* and *Andrew* was *there* hukhuk ha hukhuk ving gurch sex with *him* and I *hawahhhahhhhhhhmm!!*’

Heather blinked. ‘You *what* darling?’



Liam had learned many things in his 25 years.

Among these he counted learning how to walk, speak and think as particularly clever, in addition to how to play pool and have sex, how to drink whisky and smoke dope, how to cook good curry and how to make a fire. He’d learnt never to trust politicians and never to buy Welsh home-grown, he’d learned a lot about the history and literature of the immediately post-revolutionary Soviet Union, and he’d learned to avoid the trams when wandering around in Amsterdam, all of which were also useful. Yet he believed that one of the most *valuable* things he had ever learned was the inherently, mutually exclusive nature of getting *stoned* and getting *up early*.

Basically, do a lot of the first and you won’t do a lot of the second.

Though the relationship was not reflexive, of course : doing the second did not preclude you from doing the first. In fact, it gave you *more time* for doing the first, which was a bonus. But that’s not the important thing. The *important* thing was a really effective *alarm* was, for Liam, an absolute pre-requisite. He had tried various kinds but discovered none that were absolutely guaranteed to rouse him, especially if he’d been really boxed the previous night. This was particularly unfortunate as the progression of his thesis *depended* upon him regularly getting up early after getting wasted the previous night.

Hence the HyperAlarm.

The concept was his own, but had only become possible with the acquisition, before he'd begun his studies, of his now most treasured possession, a compact, powerful Apple Macintosh. The HyperAlarm, you see, was an Artificially Intelligent alarm installed on his Mac: or so he liked to claim. It was really just a little program he had hooked up via an infra-red remote to his CD player which, when the computer's clock passed inexorably towards and past 06.30, automatically selected a volume and choice of title from a variety of different CDs, and fed the signal through a loudspeaker placed judiciously next to his bed. Nothing special about that, you might think. The HyperAlarm however, was an *adaptive* alarm. This meant that, if a gentle *tickle* awake with some acoustic Nick Drake failed, the HyperAlarm would automatically up the volume slightly and more insistently encourage him from slumber with some Radiohead. If this also failed to rouse him, it would then select something more raucous, and louder still, such as the Stone Roses, before finally - as a last resort - *really* cranking up the watts and dragging him kicking and screaming from the Arms of Morpheus into the cold light of day with a sonic onslaught of Sepultura, hitting his ears with the aural equivalent of a cold glass of water in the face.

`Argh!'

Thus, the HyperAlarm, and the fashion in which Liam habitually awoke.

On this particular morning - a chilly Saturday in April - things were little different, despite the fact that it was the first day of the month, and thus *Persephone Day*. In fact, the *sixth* Persephone Day since he had officially inaugurated Persephone Day, half a year ago. On previous occasions, and in anticipation of Persephone Days One through Five, he would have leaped enthusiastically out of his bed just as Radiohead got going into *fake plastic trees*, with a glad heart and a stout penis.

But not today.

Today was the sixth Persephone Day alright. But it was also the first "Immediately Post-Andrew" Persephone Day.

*Kill. Death. I hate him.*

A word or two about Persephone.

Persephone wasn't just a figment of Liam's fantasies (and his nightmares, for that matter). She *was* a real woman, and a gorgeously, intoxicatingly real woman at that, with whom Liam was pathetically besotted. He had learned in the course of his brief conversations with her that her name was Persephone Adams, and that she was an Aromatherapist who worked in a Health Gym on Hudson Street. He and Persephone had met and fallen in love and gone around the world together and swum naked in Hawaiian pools and had the most *passionate* sex imaginable, and then had got married and had more sex and several gorgeous children too and then had acquired a large house in the country with an orchard and had more sex and then had grown old together continuing to have lots of sex.

They had done this *lots* of times.

Yet in reality, Liam had met Persephone on precisely *five* occasions, and all their meetings (save the fifth, and utterly fateful, encounter in *Lazy Jacks* cafe on Portland Street) had taken place in the same location, had never lasted for

very long and had always ended with him saying variations on the same thing at the end of it, such as, '£6.49 please,' or 'Well, that's £13.97 for that one I'm afraid.'

His infatuation had proceeded along conventional lines.

**First Month.** Nice arse. Wow, nice tits too. '£6.49 please.'

**Second Month.** She's back! Fuck, she is really gorgeous. 'Could I help you at all?'

Dazzling smile. 'Oh thank you, but I'm just browsing if that's OK?'

'Yeah, sure. Sure. Go right ahead. Uh ... if you need any help ...?'

'OK. Thanks.'

'Right.'

**Third Month.** Ooowooo! Oh man. 'Hello there! Back again I see.'

Dazzling smile. 'Oh *hi*. Yes, *hello!*' Dazzling laugh. 'I'm just *looking around* if that's OK?'

'Of course, be my guest. Are you looking for anything special? Anything I could help you with? Anything at all?'

Wonderful, surprised delight. 'Oh, *thanks*. No, it's alright, I'm just *browsing* really. I *like* browsing.' Mesmeric laugh. 'Thanks anyway.'

'No problem at all.' Oh man. Down boy.

**Fourth Month.** Baby, I want to fuck you till you scream. '... Women's writing?'

'You know, men *always* ask me why I only read women's writing!'

'Oh.' He felt a plunging sensation. 'Do they?' He glanced at her as he asked the question. Her hair was long and silky, coloured variations on a theme of ginger and chocolate, sunset orange and rust red, all mixed up together. Her face was dominated by her large, green eyes and her wide, mobile mouth, her personality by her voice, which was light and bubbly and full of laughter, her body by her carriage, which was classical.

'Yes, they *do*. And I just have to tell them, well, look at what *you* read. How many books have *you* read that were written by women? And, not surprisingly, most of them can't tell me of even *one*.'

His mind went instantly blank. He'd been researching the subject of women writers in anticipation of *precisely* this moment, ever since cottoning-on a month ago that she liked such works. He'd read more Doris Lessing and Maya Angelou and Germaine Greer in the last three weeks than he'd read in the entire rest of his life. And now he couldn't think of the title of a single book. *Shit*. 'Well, there's the um ... the *Colour Purple*,' he blurted. 'And umm, you know the uh ... the *Female Eunuch*, yes and uh ...'

She laughed. 'Well, two. Better than most men, haha!'

He laughed too. 'Haha, yes.'

'So how much is that anyway?'

'What?'

'The book?'

'Oh. Ah. Yes, well that's £13.97 for that one I'm afraid.'

**Fifth Month.** Please don't let her be a lesbian. He nodded his head vigorously. 'Oh yeah, yeah. I think that the ... the *feminine* perspective on things is very valuable.'

Her smile went wider. 'Really?'

He nodded more vigorously. 'Yes. I mean, look at Angela Carter.'

She sighed and clapped her gloved hands together. 'Oh, I love Angela Carter! The *Incredible Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffmann* is one of my favourite books.'

He nodded his head and leaned nonchalantly on the counter. He'd never heard of the *Incredible Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffmann*, but he smiled anyway, gazing adoringly at the flame-haired goddess speaking to him. 'Oh, me too. She's a real *fantasist*, Angela Carter isn't she?' He remembered reading this fact about her somewhere.

'Oh yes, yes. Well, she *was* anyway, you know, before she *died*.'

He coughed and cringed inside. 'Yes I know, a terrible loss.' He took a deep breath. 'You know, while you're here ...' He waggled a finger. 'I saw an interesting *book* come into stock the other day ... Hang on a minute.' He went over to a nearby shelf and pretended to search it, before reaching up and taking down the thick volume he had placed there himself. He'd researched this choice carefully. It was called *India Unfolding*, a collected set of poems, essays, articles and stories by various distinguished writers, novelists, philosophers and critics from that sub-continent. All female. He had some leverage over what John ordered for stock, after all. He came back over and handed it to her. 'I thought you might be interested in this.'

He watched her face transform. 'Oh?' Her eyes went wide when she saw the title. 'Oh, I've been *looking* for a *copy* of this for *months!*' Both of them grinned maniacally at the other.

*Yes!* Yes, he thought.

*How lovely!* she thought, and laughed loudly, her face coming alive with genuine delight. She flicked the book open and scanned down the names of the contributors. 'Really, *thank* you.' Then she looked up, puzzled. 'But I didn't *order* this or anything did I?'

This is it mate. Make or break. Go for it. He decided to try disarming honesty. 'Uh, no, no you didn't. Tell you the truth, it was *me* who ordered the book.'

'You?' She shook her head. 'I don't understand.'

Liam took another deep breath. 'Well, I know you're interested in this kind of stuff, and I thought that maybe we could talk about it sometime, you know? Maybe over a cup of coffee or something, one lunchtime? It's a *great* book, you know, from what little I've read, and there's a little cafe just down the road we could go to ...' He shrugged and smiled, feeling his heart hammering in his chest. 'If you like. It was just a thought.'

She appeared to think about this for some moments. Then: 'Yeah, OK.' She grinned. 'Why not? That'd be lovely.'

Fucking yeeeesssirreee! 'Great.'

Five minutes into this conversation he learned of someone called Andrew. He lit a Camel with a trembling hand. 'Ah.'

'Yes, he's really nice. Maybe you can meet him one day?'

'Haha. Yes.'

'You shouldn't smoke you know Liam. It's really *bad* for you.'

Now, a month later, it was 6.39 in the morning of the sixth Persephone Day, and his slowly developing relationship with Persephone - which, if there was any justice, should be well into its ninth month and about near term - was currently suffering from a catastrophic failure of all major internal organs. Nick Drake tickled him, Radiohead encouraged him, Sepultura finally bludgeoned him, but he felt no enthusiasm for early rising today. His thesis work held no interest for him, neither his job nor the prospect of the sixth Persephone Day. She was gone from him, the partner of another man, Andrew. He hated him.

He got up and turned his stereo down, lit a Camel and smoked it while taking a piss, shivering in the cold toilet. Then he went back to bed, and stayed there until eight o'clock, when he was forced to get up, shave, shower, dress and drink coffee, before leaving the house at 20 to nine and walking with his head bowed against the cold, sleety rain to work.

There he stayed until half past twelve, and was sitting on the front till just about to take his lunchbreak when he saw her through the front window. She was swaddled in a big, bulging plastic coat, with a hat and a scarf wrapped round her neck and face. She walked past the shop and came inside

He forced himself to smile. 'Hi Sephi,' he said, though he was still a little unsure about using her name. 'Nice to see you again.' He saw that something was wrong the moment she revealed her face however. Her wonderful green eyes were dull and her wide mouth wasn't smiling. Her voice was different too, sounding a little smaller somehow.

'Hi Liam. How're you?' she asked.

Liam responded as airily as he could. 'Yeah, I'm good, working hard you know. Did some painting of the sea over the weekend, which was good. Yeah, great.' *Shut up*, he told himself.

She smiled absently. 'That's nice.' She turned her head and looked deeper into the shop. 'I uh, came in *looking* for something actually Liam, maybe you could help me? Something on male *psychology*.' Suddenly, she sounded angry.

His mind began to buzz with a wonderful suspicion. *Male psychology?* 'Ah, OK. Yeah, it's down here.' He led her over to the right, towards the back of the shop, talking as he walked. 'Male psychology. That's interesting. Not your usual choice.'

'No, I know, but ... I need something to help me understand something.'

He was surprised. Crunch question. *Bury it in fluff*, he thought. As nonchalantly as he could, he asked: 'What, like Andrew, you mean?' He laughed. 'You two not had a *row* or something have you?' *Oh please, please say they have*. 'Ah yes, here we are. Psychology. Now...' He rubbed his hands together and looked interested in the prospect of a possible search of the shelves. 'What kind of thing were you after?'

She turned to face him, brushing a strand of her multi-tingered hair out of her face. She looked serious and concentrated. `Liam, I realise I don't really *know* you very well or anything, but ... could I *ask* you something?'

He gave her a winning smile. `Sephi, you can ask me *anything*.'

Pause.

`Would you have sex with my dog?'

Paws.

`I'm sorry?'

`Only that's what I want to *know*, you see. Why a man would have sex with a dog.'

He thought fast. `I can't *possibly* answer a question like that without a fag and some coffee to help me.'

Sephi smiled, albeit weakly. `Oh. OK. Can we go to *Lazy Jack's* again?'

