

“Life”
Chapter 2

**Commissioned by The Pink Pavilion bijou guest house, 12 Madeira Place, Brighton,
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Chapter 2

The bathroom

Looking again at the image in the mirror. It was somehow different to the person she saw in the mirror, as if there was a woman, there was someone stronger, more thoughtful, yet unabashed, a clear sharp image, a being for itself. The imagination in reality that one is tied to of oneself, the being that is nothing. Me. It was also a stream of history, feminist movements following patriarchal conditioning, mixed up with frothy pop, reality shows where you were a spy on non-existent people chosen for their imperfect perfection. Music, inspirational and uplifting filled this haven of the ladies. She remembered Lacan’s untying of Saussure’s signified and signifier with the two doors of the ladies and gents. The very idea that two signs mean the same thing, yet a thing that filters different beings that are symbiotic and mutually necessary and exclusive at the same time. My being was why I am in here looking at myself in a mirror. Yet the fact that there was a sign on the door of a lady led this to be a place where my being changed, being a woman around women and only that. Safety in a family brought together by a sign. She examined a chain bracelet she had, expensive, given by a horrible ex-boyfriend. The little charms on the bracelet each signified something, a heart, a hoop, a sun, an arrow. The charms held together by a continuous relationship of loops in the chain, uroborosly giving itself a hold on her wrist. Yet it was such a dim and dented bracelet, a mockery of itself in its simple and unconnected discordance with reality. Lacan would definitely have disapproved.

Then a hand on her shoulder startled her, making her jump out and forwards towards the mirror. She twisted round as her eyes met Kile’s.

“We need to talk,” said Kile, almost friendly and soft as he’d ever been.

“I’ve already told you what I think about this. This isn’t the middle ages or something and I’m an intelligent woman. Do you think I’d just be your... your,”

“Don’t think I couldn’t make you! I’m a powerful man,”

“As if that’s power?” whispered Tanya under her breath, Kile oblivious to her words carrying on his soliloquy of man super tough hero,

“I’ve brought down members of Parliament, tycoons, I’m a grand and great skyscraper in this city,”

“Ever yearning for the sky yet never reaching it,” a whispered sigh from Tanya,

Kile still poignantly and insufferably deaf, perhaps more to how he his words sound.

“And I need you. I can’t work without you. You are the foundation of Mr Prospero’s plan.” With these words, Kile took her hand, which she withdrew from him, yet he held on, moving himself closer until he was pressed against her. She was between an elegant Victorian sink and his warm strong body. Tanya’s eyes left his, in shame.

“I can’t betray my family. I can’t, and if you are some kind of spirit of elements that will bring a storm to my country of origins, bringing people to destitution and disgrace, forced onto the poverty line,”

“It’s all about crossing lines. Rules are made to be broken. This is the city. People’s lives are not the important thing. It’s cold hard calculated cash, a formula of freedom. For me.”

The door opened and a young lady came in, surprised and shocked, wondering what story would explain this unusual, semi-violent, yet sexually tense coiling of these two hateful-lovers. Aeofie was a New York gal, so she knew what kind of tense situations happened in the quiet of the ‘ladies’, but there was something like a vortex around these two that sucked your gaze and fixated you to them.

“Am I disturbing something here? Cos if I am..” asked Aeofie.

Kile backed off and let go of Tanya, somewhat with a last minute mini-wrestle and turn of her arm, as if he wanted her to twirl around him but she was not playing his game. Not even for an instance.

“No it’s alright,” said Tanya, a little panda eyed with mascara.

“You two don’t seem alright,” puzzled Aeofie.

Trembling with rage as Kile instinctively put his hand over her mouth she broke free though her expensive bracelet fell into pieces onto the laminated floor.

“This man, this man wants me to marry some old bastard who’s sitting out there so they can both take over a company and use it to bring chaos and get some kind of childish, boyish revenge! And if I don’t then they want to destroy my so-called career!”

“I don’t think the management here would really like a guy being in the ladies,” Aeofie said to Kile, whose contemptuous fuming face went red as he realised that his glass skyscraper was now transparent in the blinding sun of venom.

Aeofie took Tanya by the arm and said, “I think we need to go somewhere else. Let’s ditch this loo-ser.”

Kile remained alone in the bathroom, a few of the lights had gone off, so there was only one spot light on him. He spoke to a non-existent audience, addressing like a prince, misunderstood, yet wily and wild.

“Fright or flight in the face of my might. All who see me tremble, yet as an earthquake’s memory quick fades, as all returns to its previous form, save a slight change to the landscape, all power erodes and is eroding. As power is always a house of cards, built by the obsessed, careful rationality, it fears its own shadow, such as a sun dial is ever encircled by the tempting link to give itself usage. Culture is meaning or culture is use. Can we find our hearts beyond some meaningless nightmare of the post modern, turning to power to overcome the gaping hole, can we become whole with just another? The shadow is an immortal level below, that is caused by the being in real, the being that takes control of such ghostly darkness, lining itself and aligning to me, the great, the strong, the man of all men. What mortal hand or eye? What breath of words to give a

man the thing he desires more than woman, for without it, am I without the reason for a girl to desire me? To want a thing in itself? What is that but the empty vampiric image in the mirror that is nothing. For when we build a being from an image of itself, do we not find empty, lonely and terrible purgatory? Alas, this is my tragedy. My solace is that it is yours too!"

Aeofie

"Stories should be liberating, have happy endings, thrilling twists of excitement and also lots of longing desire that gets your ticker going," said Aeofie to the class. A group of aspiring writers sat in a circle, watching her every word, carefully scribbling notes, some verbatim, some snatches to aid memory and one student in particular was writing an entire story using every second word she said.

"As you will see from our analysis of feminism there ain't a whole lot to say anymore," continued Aeofie, "women are already liberated, the fight is over, there's representation everywhere, yet there's an itch that feminism hasn't scratched, does anyone know?"

The student who had been writing a story out of words that her teacher had been saying put up her hand and opened her mouth.

"It's not what you say darling, it's what you don't," said Aeofie, holding Tanya's head on her shoulder, a dampness building up on her shirt as Tanya sobbed.

"I know, it's such a mess. I'd follow him to the ends of the Earth, it's like he's got a magical hold on me. I'd do anything for him if he'd just give me the time of day. I don't care about myself, but he just doesn't understand there's one thing I can't do. I'm not a commodity that he can trade like those things he does on the markets in the City!"

"You're not, but that's what this world's all about. My words in my novels sell for nothing individually but put them together, attach them to a person to understand this, a person who has a little bit of money to spend, and then they buy it,"

"But you can't compare me with a novel!"

"Why not, my stories are me, all of them. Some lonely women have cats. I have narrative. It keeps me sane in this stupid Earthy dumb planet,"

"So if I was a novel which one would I be?"

"Brave New World,"

"Why?"

"Well, firstly you're short, easy to read, deeply enigmatic and somehow you seem to make more sense when you've spent some time going over it,"

"I bet you say that about all the novels,"

"No, only that one. Just that one,"

Tanya woke up, a little giddy, probably a hangover. She looked around, in a

strange room, a strange bed. Aeofie popped up from under the duvet next to her. She smiled as Tanya returned a look of slight bewilderment and disorientation.

“Nothing happened last night?” Asked Tanya.

“Oh lot’s happened, but I’m sure I don’t remember it,” replied a cheeky, impish and somewhat purring Aeofie.

“I’ve really, well I’m quite a liberated person, I don’t judge anyone you know..” words meandering from Tanya like a swelling river,

“Not even yourself?” Asked Aeofie in her philosophical pondering yet incisive wit.

Tanya blushed, loathe not to what could have happened, might have happened, but merely the fact that it might just have been Kile next to her, his breath, his rough skin, his ruffled air surrounding beautiful eyes. She noticed Aeofie had very large, anime doll like eyes, like a Japanese cartoon character, cute, yet somewhat mysterious. Kile had introduced her to those Japanese cartoons for adults, with their deliciously strange, surreal nature that came from untranslatable concepts. Somehow it reminded her of the chain that held men and women together that simultaneously kept them apart. As if we were roses from different stems bonded by the same root yet reaching in opposite directions.

Tanya spotted a thumbed through romance novel on the bedside table, half open from being read to much. She reached to get it and looked at the cover. She noticed the author ‘Aeofie Clarke’.

“Is this your novel?” Asked Tanya, “I mean is this a novel you wrote?”

“It’s one I’ve been meaning to rewrite. Never sold any, so I thought I’d look through and see what I missed out,” smiled Aeofie.

“What’s wrong with it?”

“Like I said, it didn’t sell. Not one copy!?”

“It’s like a woman who can’t find the right guy. There’s nothing wrong with her, but she’s not selling. That’s where the big bucks come rolling in,” rolled Aeofie.

“I still don’t get how a woman is a book,”

“It’s the entire meaning of life, women are books, men pick them up, check they like the contents and then buy them. Some girls are expensive, some are cheap throw away types. I’m kind of a special interest book myself.”

Tanya shook her head, giving a slightly tilted look at Aeofie, “I seem to remember you saying you were a feminist!”

“Well maybe I’m kinda cynical, but I just tell the story like it is, in my head anyway. I think that’s the problem with you and Kile anyway.”

“You mean he’s never going to really treat me like an equal because he see’s me as being too expensive. High maintenance or something?”

“Oh, you are definitely cheap my gal!”

“Now stop it!” Said Tanya, somehow feeling like she was in some high school sleepover and thrashing her pillow at Aeofie’s face.

“Now do you want me to give you a buck for your pages?”

“Look Aeofie, seriously, I’m not really into all this. Had a few experiences, you know, but really, the only person I want is Kile,”

“You don’t need to waste time on that loser. He’s nobody. You might think he’s

the greatest emperor in the whole world but he's just another crook doing time in the prison of capitalism."

"That's the thing, it's not that he's somebody or anybody. It's the fact that in a small yet huge way he is there. I've always felt that there was something I had to say, a button I had to push, a string to pull. My life had something really vital missing until I met him. Saw him every day. Even though he rarely said more than a few words to me, I'd hear him talk on the telephone, be there when he had meetings, see his whole, amazing and tremendous world. If he just gave me the time of day I'd be happy no matter what the size of his pay check was," said Tanya.

"You're starting to talk American. It should be wage packet. I've noticed you Brits lapse into American English when you're heads are being unusually.. vociferous,"

"Well it's all a big soup of words and signs and stuff. All your bloody tv and films we get,"

"Now you're starting to sound French!"

"Ok, enough now. I've really got to get to work," Tanya said as she got up and began gathering her clothes.

"Sure, I know, your super Kile, master of the fuck-up-I-verse, dealer of swashbuckling under the weight of his ego lover boy!"

Tanya looked at Aeofie, this wonderful yet petite woman, so tepid to watch, yet if she were a man, well who knows? As Tanya went out the door she turned and asked,

"What was the name of your book that didn't sell?"

"Rational Lesbianism, a methodological approach."

Back Office

"Seen that story about the mountain climber whose made it up to the top of Everest every year for the last twenty years. He's called the 'Snow Leopard', Nepalese guy, Sherpa. Doesn't use any equipment at all," said the taxi driver to a highly dosey Tanya sitting in the back of the cab.

"hmm, yes, er, sure,"

"Oh, it's okay, I guess you women will never understand what it is to want to climb a big mountain. Not that I'm a sexist or anything," groaned the cab driver.

"Oh sorry, drifted off there for a sec. Ah, stop here, just here."

Paying the cab driver she looked up, felt the feel of the sun sparkling down the shimmering glass towers around her, the grand lifts elevating and enlivening. It's a zone where people bring together pieces of words and contracts and numbers to make a meaning for themselves. Work, work, work. And there, at the top of the building, perhaps visible as a silhouette, was Kile. Though we may climb in a person's mind, to reach their heart, we often do not realise that the very difficulties of the ascent are because the mountain grows, the peak moving from us as we move towards it, that the tension perhaps that brings love to life, like conception, is itself a concept that cannot exist. This statement is a lie, Tanya thought to herself. As gleaming arrows of glass drove through the skyline, she knew where her place was. Somehow free of sexual frustration she knew she could face Kile down, and perhaps seduce him. He was a man after all. And they have their needs. There was something temptingly erotic about a man's insatiable lust, a finding of power within a woman, which she could play with to

produce the result she wanted. A ring on her finger and to be held in high esteem by him. Higher, ever higher, till she reached the top. She could be a goddess of small things, a lady of the house, a princess of the castle tower, all by being a woman dressed in beautiful crisp white flowing down the aisle of a church, a model on the cat walk of society. Awaiting to be captured on a camera or in a marriage. A ring on her finger, flashing lights and thumping music. Applauded as love and beauty become as one, such longing as a girl to be these things they call feminine, feline, felicitous. Is this a felony of felatio, as opening wide to show perfect teeth. Magical and glamorous. Hostess, nurse, lover, mid-wife of child birth. To herself and no other. Milton said that the mind is a place of its own, yet to be alone was to simply look at oneself in reflection, neither happy nor sad. Neither hell nor heaven. Aeofie's words last night came back to her. To find herself she needs to find the other who does not treat her as the other. And in that bond of chemistry, to swing as ballroom dancers do in endless whirl and thunder. No, she would not settle for some mirage marriage. She'd seen her face in the distant glass spires of the skyscraper, and now she really could look through the mirror to see what was beyond them, rather than what was behind her. She knew who she was, she was now malice in wonderland, and what a wonderful time she was going to have.

"Your late!" Remarked Kile to Tanya as she sauntered in.

"Sorry, it's just a few minutes past nine," answered Tanya. She looked at her watch, still blurry with a heady mix of residual alcohol, lack of sleep and the image of the tower outside.

"Oh, not nine o'clock, I have my watch on back to front. It's three," bumbled in a high, sweet, voice. Kile shook his head, more annoyed than his usual look of utter disbelief he seemed to have whenever he glanced at her. He allowed himself a limited amount of time to compose himself, as if somehow he had given up.

"Do you know how much bedlam it's been without your usual incompetent handling of my diary. I've just had to lose the big deal with Mr Prospero."

"You mean it meant that much to him to have me marry him?" Asked a dewey eyed Tanya.

"Oh don't give yourself too much credit. Women like you are ten a penny," blurted Kile, derisive and decisively nasty. Tanya looked down, almost disappointed that somehow she was off the hook. As if drama and tortuous conundrums were in some way the loom of life. Lust, as always simmered but love needed to come at some point in her life. And now it seemed like an ending to a bad movie that never had a plot. She knew the next statement, it seemed to be floating in the air above Kile ready to strike.

"You're fired!" Shouted Kile, "Unless you can tell me why you are so miserably late, so bloody stupid and a complete mess!"

Tanya held her head in her hands, the memory of last night, drinking, bars, more drinking, a taxi, then dancing. Maybe in a club. Some cute guys feeling her up on the dance floor, then an image of an angel with a sword. Or was that Aeofie slapping one of these guys, then going back to her place. A bed, a tustle, a tumble and then somehow loving sensuous love. It was easy, simple, like looking in a mirror, her soft feminine body against her. Yet somehow it wasn't a struggle, and that is meaning itself. To wait and challenge. To be bold and bolder still, as a avalanche of mixed feeling climaxed.

"Well, I'm waiting! Do you have any idea what you did last night?" Clamoured

Kile.

Tanya smiled. She'd had a thought. Honesty was sometimes the best snare, as held within it a lie, as a nut had strength around soft, crunchy deliciousness.

"I was with that girl you saw. We had a few drinks," Tanya started to look down, soft innocent eyes, yet devilishly naughty, twiddling her fingers round, "Then we went back to hers. One thing led to another..."

Kile's eyes opened, tongue slightly tempted to lick his lips. It seemed that a woman's ability to shock a man in this age needed some great boundary to cross. And she saw the sexual hook of lust draw out of her mouth, through her fingers and into his, well, anyway.

"What's wrong? Look like you've seen a ghost or that you're investments have lost value," said Tanya. "It's not like this is the fifties or anything. What's wrong, you're not a bit of a Nazi or something?"

"I.. I don't, so, unusual," Kile said, "It's not that I disapprove, it's really that you're not what I expected," there seemed to be a tear in his eye, "I have to tell you something. It's not. You've always been here, here. For me. I.. I don't want to share you,"

Tanya's heart dropped a beat, as she looked longingly in Kile's eyes. Those poor child-like eyes, the one thing in a man and a woman that does not change in adulthood. The soft, gentleness of someone's eyes when they are clear, pure, as a child. Yet somehow, it didn't seem to be right. As if it wasn't that this was everything she wanted, everything she had ever wanted. Yet somehow, though she knew what he was going to say, it didn't mean anything, it wasn't really how she's imagined so many times in the bath. As if a spell had somehow been broken, as if a rose unrooted in a dark room in a dark vase didn't seem as beautiful as a rose in bloom on a summer's day.

"I just, it seemed so," said Kile. The alarm bells started to ring. I mean really, not clichéd metaphor any more. Sprinklers fitted in the office started going off, and somehow in this jilted, warped romance, there was streams of water pouring down upon them.

"We better get out," said Tanya.

"No, I need to tell you something, it's the other night. I never wanted you to marry Prospero, I was only trying to find an..."

An office temp burst in shouting, "You've got to get out of here. There's been a bomb go off, downstairs, we're all, there's a fire and the lifts aren't working!"

"Bloody hell, come on get out of here!" Shouted voices from outside, "This isn't another 9/11?" "What the fuck?!"

"I think we'd better finish this off later Kile," soothed Tanya as panic began to spread, as if somehow the zone of capitalism had been transmuted temporarily into the zone of the front line of the war. The city view caught Tanya's eye as they scrambled like fighter pilots, a strange pathwork of intertwined streets connecting different patches on a quilt, yet somehow this cracked mirror of place, both reflecting its hierarchy of power and human meaning, as troubles from afar became troubles at home. Like a tin can telephone connected by a string, there was a call from the elsewhere, the excluded from this place by immigration law, without franchise and vote. Those who were in the place, the palace and court of today's stronger world, versus the cries of outcry burning

explosively into the cityscape.

“We, us, I mean,” stammered Kile as they rushed down the fire escape stairs.

“What us? There’s never been a we,” replied Tanya, somewhat irritated at the complete lack of romance to this.

“I know I’ve been harsh with you,” said Kile, “But I have to say something,”

They stopped on the landing and Kile threw open a nearby door where he pushed Tanya into. Somewhat swept away by this sudden thrust of his hands against her body, sending her backwards through the door, her little steps quick into the light of the outside, an old fire escape, metal railing stopping her from falling, slightly arched around them. Kile made to hold her, wrapping his arms around her stunned and shocked self. The lips, full and frank leapt to hers in an instance, locking themselves together, making Tanya reel in a lusty, dizzy yet somehow light and sugary syrup of saliva and sensuous, relentless passion.

“I’ve been waiting for this,” Tanya said when the embrace had worn away, below were a host of chivalrous emergency services, blaring sirens, people looking up, smoke and shouting. Yet amidst chaos and charred remains of a building down the street, as smoke twirled in a dance, curling round. The ballet of smells of the city melted away as Tanya inhaled Kile’s sombre aftershave that was almost paternal in her mind. As he held her she felt somehow in a midsummer nights dream, perhaps the sandy beach’s velvet supporting touch.