

Pithy Perspectives

A Smorgasbord of Short, Short Stories

by

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The Boat People

“Rueben, go and find a porter. We have been waiting patiently in our cabin long enough.”

“Yes, dear.” Rueben returns to say that he had not seen any porters.

“Where did you look?” asks his wife.

“All over the ship, dear.”

“Go and ask that miserable-looking Asiatic who calls himself captain. Tell him that we need at least two porters.”

“Yes, dear.”

A little later, quite a little later, Rueben returns, looking mystified. “There’s no one in the uniform of a ship’s officer to be seen” he tells Miriam.

“Nonsense,” responds Miriam. “Look more carefully below deck. The officers are probably hiding in their cabins.”

“Why would they do that, dear?”

“Because that’s what these Asiatics are like. They are not comfortable in the presence of white people, are they?”

Off goes Rueben. He knows better than to challenge she-who-must-be-obeyed, known by his close associates in Durban as Attila the Hen. At the farther end of the ship, he sees a lone laborer. “You,” calls out Rueben, “Where is the captain?”

“Gone, Sir.”

“Where are the other officers then?”

“Gone, Sir.”

“Rubbish. Where have they gone?”

“Off the ship, Sir. They are on leave.”

“Don’t be silly. They just can’t leave the ship unattended.”

“The engine room crew are locked in. And no one can take anything off the ship either without passing Customs and Immigration control, Sir.”

“What are you doing here? Come and take our luggage off the ship, and then find us a couple of porters and a taxi.”

“I am cleaning the ship, Sir. Not allowed to go ashore.”

“We’ll see about that,” fumes Rueben as he trots back to Miriam.

”Well, where are the porters?”

“I’m sorry, dear, but the situation is desolate and empty. In fact, it is quite dreary. There is no one about. We seem to be the only passengers on board,” reports Rueben angrily in his best adopted Afrikaaner accent.

To the uninitiated observer, the accent may as well have been German, Belgian, or upper-class English. Miriam and Rueben are wealthy escapees from a future black South Africa, seeking to continue their superior lifestyle in Australia. They had been told that Australians know how to keep the blacks and other colored people in their proper place. There was, they understood, no risk of the white man losing his place at the top of the political and economic totem poles.

Good breeding does not, of course, permit the display of anger. Quietly seething, Miriam directs Rueben, “Go and examine the wharf to see if there are any porters loitering about, would you?”

Off goes Rueben again, thereby obtaining the exercise necessary for portly rich men, who are normally loathe to indulge in any unnecessary movement. Thus, his elbows have not had any exercise for some time. In the meanwhile, Miriam allows herself the discreet thought that, while shipboard dances of the horizontal kind were no doubt appropriate for the lower orders, she might find suitable solace in suburban society in Sydney. Keeping a stiff upper lip in needy circumstances was no substitute.

Again Rueben returns, wheezing and a little red in face. "The wharf is empty, dear," he gasps.

Breathing deeply, an action which in earlier years resulted in Rueben's eyes swimming in rising waters, Miriam calms down enough to say, "Are we expected to transfer our luggage to the wharf and through Customs and Immigration all by ourselves? How ridiculous! Rueben, get down to the office at the wharf, find someone in authority, and sort out this nonsense."

"Yes, dear." And off ambles Rueben, as directed.

At the Customs barrier, he sees a bearded Sikh, resplendent in a most colorful turban, talking to a black man, as colleagues might. Approaching the latter, Rueben calls out "You! Come and give us a hand with our luggage. I will pay you well."

"Pardon?" responds the black man, with the accent of a native of north England.

"I need a hand, man. Let's go."

"Excuse me, sir, I am the Immigration Officer on duty here."

"In that case, where the hell are the porters?"

"There are none, sir."

"Don't be bloody stupid. Where have they gone?"

"We do not have any porters in this country."

"Why not? How do passengers manage with their luggage?"

"With difficulty, sir," responds the Immigration Officer with a sly smile.

Sighting the smile, Rueben explodes. He looks ready to depart Earth with a flush and a thud. "I will report you for insubordination," roars Rueben. He is not used to being contradicted, except by his wife. That acquiescence is a cultural tradition, reflecting the matriarchal tribe from which they had descended way back in Eastern Europe.

"Before you do that, sir, I need to examine your entry papers most carefully. We do not want any more illegal entrants," says the public servant silkily, with suave satisfaction.

"And I will need to examine the contents of your luggage equally carefully," interjects the Customs Officer, looking as bland as only an Oriental can, but with a broad Scottish accent. He is careful not to smile, although his turban seems to tremble slightly.

Realizing that he is now outmatched, and remembering his manners, Rueben calms down. Getting off his high horse is not easy for one accustomed to abject service from colored people. With calm courtesy, he asks where he might borrow a luggage trolley. Both officials simultaneously point to a row of trolleys leaning against the outside wall. Rueben had not noticed them in his indignant march into the building.

As a former rugby player, that strange game played by rich young men rolling in the mud for much of its duration, he has a few usable muscles. He drags the trolley to the cabin, loads their luggage, and takes it all into the Customs & Immigration office. Shocked out of her mind at seeing a white man, particularly her husband, doing the work of coolies, Miriam decides that she would compensate for the more brutish life of the future by buying a yacht, as her former compatriots now resident in coastal Sydney had done.

She is not to know that these new arrivals have already been described as the second-wave boat people. Where the first wave had arrived illegally by boat from East Asia in order to escape a 'red' regime, the second wave arrived legally to escape a 'black' regime, and promptly bought a boat.

The Ferocity of Stillness

The weighty wall of water advanced most majestically with a massive decorum. It was silent, strangely silent. It was also as wide as the eye could see. It was very, very high. The only path of escape was up. But how? Linlin screamed. She woke up sweating. What a crazy dream that was. A terrifying wall of approaching water seemingly a mile or so high and so wide as to deny a view of anything else?

Ridiculous, she said to herself as she sought to dowse her anxiety with a cup of hot oolong tea. Watching the sun rise over the Pacific was also pacifying. Although she was a confirmed communist, her anxiety led her to carry out an ancient practice. She lit a few joss sticks. Claspings them in her hands, she prayed to her ancestors in front of their red-painted imagined abode hidden in the back room. Genuflecting again and again, she sought, in loud prayer, help from those long departed from Earth in preventing any serious disaster.

In doing so, she was not aware that her sister in fright, the mulatto Eunice, residing in one of the many Caribbean islands, had had an identical dream about 12 hours later. Eunice was just a worker with no political views. She had then sensibly prostrated herself, with a great fervor reflecting deep fear, before her statue of the Virgin Mary. She did not want to surf to heaven on that massive wave.

Yossi, on the US-supplied gunboat controlling the Mediterranean, had nodded off to sleep while on night duty. His nightmare was the same as that of the two women. He woke up in a cold sweat, thinking that the wall of water would be a more fearsome threat than the prospect of all the Arabs in the Middle East rising in revolt after about three centuries of bullying by European buccaneers. He would rather die on the cross, in the ancestral way.

At about the same time as Yossi's great awakening, Baladev, a guru, in deep meditation at the water's edge in Colombo, suddenly saw through his third eye, not nirvana, but its opposite. He fell to the ground, kissing it with reverence, for he had seen it rise and bury him alive. He preferred cremation to burial, but only after death. Being interred alive was not consistent with his cultural beliefs.

In Kamchatka, Yuri was busily exploring for ivory tusks below the frost line. There, he was visited in a day dream by one of the archangels of his forebears, warning him that the fate of the mastodons of history awaits him. He knew what that meant; instant freezing. But he managed to chuckle about that absurd notion. He thought, "If I am to be prevented from carving out a commercial empire in ivory products, I would prefer to freeze to death in space, enclosed in the vacuum of a satellite-turned-coffin. I would then be famous."

In Central Australia at about the same time, a white carpet-bagger of an art dealer and a sozzled indigenous tribal leader laughed when one of the female elders spoke, with an insightful fear, of her dream. It was a replica of that experienced in other places. Water covering their desert-barren land to great depth? Haw, haw, chortled together the two men in their alcoholic daze. "Would be cooling," they intoned with great mirth. In their bucolic joy, their passage to another world or existence would not bother them, even if they became aware of the event.

How true, thought the lookout on the edge of the ethereal platform in the spirit world when she heard the conclusion of the art dealer and his drunken mate. "Must get a lot more furniture soon for the new arrivals," she said to herself. As an immediate afterthought, she decided to arrange for more conference rooms, counseling chambers, de-conditioning submission tanks, as well as a few whips and restraining equipment for the few recalcitrants for whom reality was

either what had been, of what they had been brainwashed to believe. For the latter, the value of an Earthly existence or the pleasing vista of the promised Heaven might not coincide with the environs of the spirit world in which they might now find themselves.

This lookout in the spirit world was aware that homo (totally irritating) sapiens has no idea that Heaven is only a way station, an R&R post (as were Hong Kong and Sydney during the Vietnam War, providing great profit for ladies of the night). She realized that the Muslims had almost got it right, with their buxom beauties and smooth-skinned new-age men, as well as the tinkling waterfalls, cascading fountains, and ethereal music. She knew that sitting by the side of the Celestial Father or Mother would not be an option yet for those who were about to enter her realm and that the Buddhists and atheists would need pharmacological psycho-counseling to accept that finding a state of nothingness after a human existence is also not an option in the forecast circumstances.

Soon after the dreams, the sun over China and its environs stopped at noon. For about four days it did not set. Way over the other side of Earth, the sun did not rise for the same period. What happened after those four days was of little relevance to the few, here and there, who survived. They were so terribly traumatized that they, *en masse*, lost their minds.

For the sun to seem unmoving, the Earth had to become still. With the sudden loss of movement by the planet, the normal forces of rotation on its surface raised massive walls of water from all the oceans. These then went on to cover vast areas of the planet. Indeed, one major wave, going north, went over the Himalayas and inundated central Asia. In the known history of mankind, this formerly lush productive land had been made desolate by the Mongol Khans in retaliatory vengeance against the Muslim Turkic people for their denial of Mongol suzerainty. It would now turn into an inland sea of great beauty. It would, of course, be very cooling.

The noise of global destruction was horrific for those who heard it just before they were drowned by the water or buried under the debris of both man-made and natural structures. There really was no purpose in any of them asking themselves: how did stability in the heavens become shattered? Then, there was stillness, a stillness so ferocious and frightening. The remnants of the human species still alive were however beyond awareness of the universe outside their tortured minds.

In any event, they would soon join another stillness, the stillness of silent non-existence, most probably after a few sessions of pharmacological psycho-counseling by spirits qualified to provide such counseling. The cross-cultural environment of peace then available to them in this stillness would cocoon them to a state of spiritual sanity.

Grounded

“It is not fair” said Abdul, “not fair at all.”

“What is?” responded Falconio.

“I repeat, it is simply not fair” replied Abdul.

“What?”

“That I cannot take off into yonder space.”

“Excuse me, I have heard of the stratosphere. But where the hell is yonder space?”

“Let me explain, Bird-brain, that yonder space is up there.”

“In that case,” said Falconio waxing eloquent, “why don’t you say ‘up there’? In fact, up anywhere will do, as long as it is off the ground, right?”

“How is it that you are so pedantic?”

“Ah, is that like being pedestrian or pederastic or um, my alter-ego seems to be running out of puff.”

“Listen, I don’t want any religious mumbo-jumbo like altars and altar boys intruding into my thoughts.”

“What! Are you a priest now? I was referring only to my subconscious self, my inner spirit who guides and drives me...”

“Wait a minute! You make as much sense as an egg burnt onto a hot plate. You are not offering me any food for thought.”

“Well, Falconia says...”

“Who on Earth is Falconia?”

“My inner self.”

“Oh, this is going to be one of those conversations, is it? Okay, what does Falconia say?”

“She says that you are well grounded, indeed too well grounded, to have any hopes of taking off into upper space. Anyway, why do you need to take off?”

“Well grounded, you say...”

“No, no, it is Falconia who says.”

“Okay. Okay . Speaking for mankind...”

“Excuse me, Abdul the Bul-bul, you are one puny man. You dare to speak for all men?”

“Mr Bird-brain Falconio and Mistress Inner-self Falconia, I had intended to present to you a metaphorical picture...no, no, forget that...I will paint you a simple picture about what you call being grounded. Okay?”

“Okay. I say that on behalf of both my outer and inner selves.”

“How nice of both of you.”

“Get on with your picture, my dear fellow.”

“When I was a boy,” began Abdul, “I walked everywhere. Then my father began to give me a lift to school on his donkey cart every day. The journey took much longer, but I was off my feet. How grounded was I? Then, in upper school, I was taken by horse cart and, later, when the country became richer, by bus, I was less and less grounded, was I not? Now, as an adult, and a successful sheikh, I travel by car within my country and to other countries by plane. When I go hunting, it is, as you know, by horse. So, please ask Falconia to re-think her view about my alleged grounding. More importantly, could she ponder my complaint that I cannot take off by myself?”

Then said Falconio, with bitterness in his voice, “You seek to deny your nature by breaking out of your Earthbound cocoon. Yet, you deny my nature by denying me freedom and the right to view my surroundings in all its beauty. Take the hood off my head and unchain me. Am I in Guantanamo?”

With a fright at the thought of US military justice, which he knew to be harsher than Arab justice, Abdul awoke. He was immediately awake. Fear is the greatest stimulant to an active person. Yet, he did not jump out of bed in the customary manner of men who sleep alone. He knew that his subconscious mind had spoken as never before. And it had chosen the medium of dream to do so. Since dreams represent the pathway for messages from external sources, for example, from the spirit world, could there have been another correspondent as well? He would need to consider that question later, he said to himself, as he eventually eased himself out of bed.

He did that with great concentration because his conscience now bothered him. He had hitherto not given any thought to the traditional practice of keeping pet hunting falcons chained and hooded. There, in the far corner of his very large bedroom, was his falcon, hooded, chained, and sitting on its perch silently. Now that he was no longer a boy growing up in the desert, but a sophisticated and educated young man, he donned a dressing gown over his gaudy pajamas. He then walked across to the falcon, removed its hood, and looked at it with great interest. Could he and this falcon have had the conversation that he remembered? Surely that was highly improbable. He then became aware that the falcon was returning his scrutiny with what seemed a quizzical look of its own. So, he released the falcon from its chain. The falcon remained seated.

Following his ablutions, prayer and breakfast, his subconscious spoke to him again, but directly. Did you have a dream, or did you actually converse with your falcon in the early hours of the morning, it asked. Indeed, could there have been a four-way dialogue, with a third party who was the instrument or the facilitator, of that conversation? This intrusion occurred when Abdul and the falcon were again eyeballing each other with mutual interest. All of a sudden there was a subtle transformation in the atmosphere. In the manner of a summer’s sea mist sneakily infusing itself into the structures of the seashore, there was an indefinable change in the electromagnetic configuration affecting the room.

To Abdul’s amazement, his falcon seemed to shimmer and, in the aura now surrounding it, develop into a two-faced bird, akin to that three-faced cosmic Hindu god. Abdul saw the Falconio of his dream, now manifesting his inner self, Falconia. She, who had been spoken of, but had not spoken during his dream, had appeared, he felt, in response to his plea for her to reconsider his state of being grounded. Yet, through his belief and experience of the mysticism of the Sufis, his rational mind understood that there had to be a hidden instigator of this tableau.

In the meanwhile, his nameless subconscious self wisely kept silent, preferring to remain the internal and intimate observer of psychic experiences that some of the Hindu writings speak of. A faith lacking authoritative scriptures does allow multifarious interpretations of matters and issues of relevance and interest to humanity. Within this feast of probable understanding and possible explanations, one could credibly cherry-pick a concept which facilitates an enhanced relationship or which enables a useful action. An observer within oneself, noting the doer that one is functionally, can give insights into both the observed and felt worlds of existence. It could be expected that Abdul would be enlightened by his subconscious at some appropriate time. But not yet. Things had to happen first.

Suddenly, things did happen, as Abdul had part-intuited. Accompanied by a small flash of light, a Djinn materialized. To prove that he was a Djinn, the arrival initially displayed four legs, then two legs, then one leg with two tails to provide balance, with the number of arms oscillating

between two and four, at random, and asynchronistical with the display of legs. The Djinn's face, which was near human, remained unchanged and gleeful. He seemed to be enjoying himself.

"What ho, Cocko!" said the Djinn to Abdul. Turning to the falcon, the Djinn added "Beg pardon, my feathered friends, for treating you as subsidiaries. But it is Ab here who has a problem."

"Excuse me, I am a sheikh. You will address me, with respect, as Sheikh Abdul" interjected Abdul.

"Ho, ho, ho, Ab. Do you want my help or not? Anyway, I am answerable only to the angels. However, did you not call me?"

"No, I did not" responded Abdul with strength. "Then it must have been your subconscious self."

"No, I did no such thing" whispered Abdul's subconscious to Abdul.

Seeing Abdul shake his head, the Djinn turned to the falcon. Both faces blinked, and the head shook in denial. Caught out in his lie, the Djinn smirked and blinked simultaneously, presenting thereby quite a nice personality.

That decided Abdul. He decided to trust the Djinn, saying, "Jinni, I am in your hands. You know what I desire most." The falcon shook its head in disbelief; bad move it thought. No Djinn is ever helpful without indulging in a hidden motive. Otherwise, he would be an angel, wouldn't he? That would, of course, require a sex change, but not an insurmountable problem for those in the spirit world.

At Abdul's submission to his guidance, the Djinn's eyes glistened. Was it purely with joy? Only the Djinn knew. With a click of his fingers, he conjured up a carpet. The design on the carpet indicated clearly that it was not one of those made in the Western world from synthetic fibers, with the pattern printed in synthetic ink. It was indeed a genuine Persian carpet, because it looked as if a million people had walked on it or prayed on it. Abdul examined the wear pattern on the carpet to see if it might have been weakened in structure for he guessed why the carpet had been conjured up. Of course, he did this surreptitiously. He did not want the Djinn to feel that he, Abdul, did not trust him or, worse still, was a coward. Little did he know that Djinn had read his anxiety-ridden thoughts. In fact, why hadn't Abdul intuited that it might have been the Djinn who had initiated that dream conversation between Abdul and his falcon? If he had realized that, would he then have asked himself why the Djinn had done that?

The world and life on it being full of mysteries, one cannot afford to spend much time on those not of immediate import – except, perhaps, when one is seated on one's private throne with appropriate reading material near to hand. Falconio, now seemingly imbued with some psychic skills, including intuition, did dimly discern that there had to be a play behind the surface drama. Was this not comparable to that scenario sketched by a modern biblical scholar (the one accused by literalist believers of not being a proper Christian) of a dual message in parts of the Bible?

Did not this scholar claim, using a methodology named the peshet, that behind the symbolic mystical message of appeal to the masses of believers, there lay a history of real people involved in real events? And that this dual-purpose writing had been done in the interests of intelligent people who would not be satisfied with religious flim-flam, as well as for an accurate historical record. The reality of political intent underlying dogmatic diversions of the religious kind will indeed seep through any historical veils.

So, the falcon watched as it waited. Things were going to be very interesting soon, it felt. Yet there was nothing eventful about the way Abdul stepped onto the carpet at the Djinn's gestured invitation. He was at ease sitting cross-legged without any cushion or support below or

behind his body, as is the way of life in the desert. On Abdul's whistle, the falcon flew off his perch and settled on Abdul's left shoulder. The right shoulder had, of course, to be left free to defend himself, if necessary. As ever, the weapon of choice, a dagger, hung on his belt within easy reach. In tribal territories, hand on hilt was the posture of normality. Hence the tradition in both the Middle East and the Western world of the out-stretched action arm in greeting another, indicating the absence of any threat or evil intent.

In contrast, in the Hindu civilization of old, the palms of the hands touched each other in the posture of prayer in such greetings with a slight bowing of the head. This greeting was, however, restricted to those in the same or higher class or caste. And in the former Chinese civilization, the hands were clasped together in front, accompanied by a deeper bow. Again, the ethos of egalitarianism did not apply in much the same way as in the alleged democracy of ancient Greece. In the city-states adjacent to the Aegean and Adriatic seas, slaves did not have democratic rights. Indeed, even in the USA, freed slaves were historically sought to be denied equal civic rights. Significantly, this great Western nation, now seeking to forcibly impose its peculiar form of democracy on developing nations everywhere, has yet to overcome its long-term racist record and to convince more of its citizens to exercise their legal right to decide who will govern them by voting in elections.

All this was beyond Abdul's current reality. Issues of civic equality and any right to participate in choosing one's rulers were totally irrelevant in his culture. Abdul's immediate reality was that he would take off into yonder space, but not of his own volition. Nevertheless, unlike his previous experiences of taking to the air in the cocoon of pressure-controlled mechanical monstrosities in the form of airplanes, he would, he assumed, be flying on the Djinn's flying carpet. This he expected to be at a lower and safer height and at a speed allowing him to see, hear, and smell the life of the people and their animals below him.

Having previously changed into clothing appropriate for travel, Abdul looked forward to whatever experience the Djinn might expose him to. Since plane travel does not expose one to the life of the people on the ground, he was looking forward to an aerial view of the way of life in whatever terrain he might fly over. Sitting on the carpet outside his palatial home, he waited for the Djinn to join him and to fly the carpet magically. While he waited, both his subconscious and the falcon were as silent as they are in normal circumstances.

Suddenly the carpet rose. The Djinn was nowhere to be seen. Had he become invisible? As the carpet rose majestically, Abdul noted that it was as firm as a sheet of solid material. It remained horizontal in the manner of the basket of a hot air balloon. It was totally silent. Abdul learned that he could control its direction and height by the movements of his left hand. This he discovered quite accidentally. While the falcon was not interested in what was happening below, having seen it all before, Abdul was fascinated by what he could see, hear, and smell.

His pleasure in being able to rise up off the ground, albeit with the aid of some bestowed magic, was substantially diminished by his observation of life below. "Oh dear," he said aloud, "I did not realize that there is so much poverty among my people."

To his immense surprise, the falcon responded, in the voice of the Falconio of his recent dream. "Abdul, your eyes have been neither on your people nor on matters of higher polity. I believe that while your thoughts have been on play, including that available from nubile maidens of an appropriate voluptuous configuration, your eyes have been stored in the seat of your voluminous pantaloons." Abdul looked askance at the falcon, wondering if it was the Djinn who was speaking through the falcon.

"No, I am the one who is speaking," said Falconio, indicating that it had read Abdul's mind.

This is ridiculous, thought Abdul, before he realized that Falconio could read that and other thoughts of his as well. He decided that he would confide his concern to Falconio, seeing that he was already in a magical world and that his falcon had no doubt seen much, much more than he had of the people below in their deserted environs and of their lifestyles and life chances.

So he spoke. "In my youth, my family was poor. Most families, apart from the sheikhs, were poor. By hard work, successful trading, my marriage into a royal family, and the grace of Allah, we are now very well off. And I had erroneously believed that our people had all risen, at least in economic welfare, with my family." He did not stop to think whether the erudition of his speech might fly over the head of the falcon in much the same way that the falcon had over-flown everything else in the land.

The falcon replied thus: "Did you not know that most of the leaders in this and the neighboring countries were put upon their thrones by marauding Europeans? They created nations whose geographical boundaries were indifferent to the ethnic dispersal of the various tribes affected. They crowned petty rulers who were willing to be subservient to the extent of giving the foreigner control of our oil resources. Between them they had exploited the people most harshly, ignoring the teachings of both Jesus and Mohammed to love their fellow men."

"No, I was not adequately aware of all that. The rise from poverty to riches closed both my mind and my eyes."

"Perhaps it was written on your forehead (as said in the Koran) that your eyes would now be opened through your desire to rise into yonder space, as you expressed it," said the falcon.

Abdul was impressed with the wisdom of his falcon. I must remember not to address him as Bird-brain, he realized. Yet, he felt there had to be a third participant in this play, taking him along a predestined path. Alas for such foibles in thinking that there is always a purpose in the paths followed by humans. This is equivalent to believing that there is purpose, leading to predetermined ends, in the events and movements in the Cosmos. Poor Abdul! He was, however, in good company. Many a speculative physicist tends to hold comparable views, perhaps more in hope than allowable by the facts. But then, is not faith an essential ingredient in human existence?

So, Abdul, accompanied by his free but faithful follower, the falcon, sailed along and around, becoming more and more depressed at the sight, sound, and smell of abject poverty and the wholly desolate prospects for survival by those embedded in this morass. He decided immediately that he would do whatever he could to improve their life chances. Just as he thought that, the hitherto solid structure of the carpet tore apart as if by a whirlwind. Down fell Abdul toward the ground with the falcon hanging on to him. As he was about to be grounded, so to speak, he did wonder why the falcon had not taken wing.

The falcon did ultimately take to the air, but only just before Abdul was effectively pancaked with a thud and a squish. Since it is not seemly to discuss whether or not his body parts had been fragmented, suffice it to say that his soul took wing on bodily impact. The falcon, now free to join his feathered fraternity, thought he saw Abdul's soul move rapidly into yonder space and beyond at a rapid rate of knots. The falcon also thought that he heard the Djinn's chuckle. As it flew off in search of a new abode, it did wonder whether the Djinn had been merely an agent of Destiny, that necessary intermediary facilitating what had been written on Abdul's forehead – that his soul would be brought to the joys of Heaven when his bodily eyes became open to the reality of the harsh life of his people. For Heaven awaits those who, irrespective of religious affiliation, wish to better the life of their fellow humans, either in their current or future lives.

It All Went Terribly Wrong

“That’s a great prospect,” he thought to himself with silent glee. He was peering through the convenient slit in the curtains across the bay window. There she was – a sight to behold. Solidly built, languishing on the sofa with her eyes closed. What was uplifting was that she was nude. In the soft pinkish light, she looked delicious. On a warm night, her nudity was unexceptionable.

The huge house was as noisy as a mausoleum. A mausoleum might, of course, be filled with the silent screams of the ghosts of some of the dead interred therein. But the house gave no indication that there might be a ghost, or even a silent scream, to welcome him. His intention was to rob the house owned by a wealthy couple. Yet, another ambition now began to fill his mind and one of its instruments. Such is the fate of the mere male; the testosterone is ever ready to bubble forth. A sight, a thought – and the itch begins. Then the testosterone flows.

He tried the back door. It was unlocked. Guided by intuition, fuelled by hope, he walked along a couple of corridors to arrive at the open door of the lounge. He had taken the precaution of wearing a black cotton-knit balaclava, a black long-sleeved cotton skivvy, black running shoes, and black polyester slacks. The last was now unzipped – partly by necessity. He sneaked up on the woman silently. Her long blonde hair further cushioned her head. Bending over her from behind, he clamped a hand over her mouth. Her soft lips were parted. With the other hand, he grabbed her by the throat.

Then it all went terribly wrong. He heard a terrible scream. It had burst from his brain. It had then worked its way to his lungs and then to his throat. Blindly, he rushed out of the room. He found himself in the master bedroom. In the soft green light, he saw yet another unclad body. But this one was different. It did not attract him as had the other dead one. A huge knife handle was sticking out of the back of the male body. This time he heard no scream.

Wiping his hands on his slacks, he ran. As he ran, he could smell the blood on the hand which had closed on the woman’s throat. He remembered, most unwillingly, the feel of her windpipe as his fingers had entered the deep cut in her throat. This memory had no place for his previous vision and rising appetite. Worse still, in his innermost being, he could hear the silent screams of the two souls so brutally released recently. As he ran, he felt the souls following. He feared that they might believe that he was the one to blame for their sudden exposure to the terrain of the ghosts.

Still running wildly, with the testosterone now replaced by bile rising into his throat, he found an exit. It was the side door. He rushed out, only to trip over the dead body of a very large dog. “It all went terribly wrong” was his thought as he crashed to the ground. As he fell, his head hit a concrete pillar. As he lost consciousness, he felt a strange sense of gratitude; the dog could not bite him.

In the meanwhile, a neighbor had rung the police. She was an elderly woman, made slight by wear and tear. She was in poor health, with weak eyes, but with excellent hearing. She had told the police that she had heard screams from next door. These screams were different from the usual Saturday night screams. The latter were screams of joy, she had said to the police. Even in her present physical condition, she was able to remember her own experiences. For memory is not a function of age but of significance. She was another one of those who just have to let the Cosmos (and the neighbors) know that life can be ever so beautiful in a certain situation. For orgasms were not the normal outcomes for many wives in earlier generations. So she had read. And had therefore rejoiced at her good fortune.

The police finally arrived. They usually do. The place was too quiet for them. With all the excitement that phlegmatic policemen can arouse, they broke through the front door. The sight of the woman in the lounge led one policeman to rush through the side door. He was holding his revolver in a ready-to-fire grip. Unsurprisingly, he tripped over the dead dog in the dark. As he fell, his revolver was discharged accidentally. The bullet hit the man in black just as he was trying to get up.

As he collapsed again, and as the policeman got to his feet, both unknowingly shared a single thought: "It all went terribly wrong." The ghosts, seeing all and hearing all, including private human thoughts, giggled to themselves with silent glee as they glided away gracefully to that gargantuan garden for ghosts.