

## 1. Overture To a Dream

.....The Statues are standing with love in their hand

They're trying to live but they don't understand

Sarah-Jane was lost; not in the vast complexity of our synthetic society, but in the forests of her conscience, which were the downfall of all who ventured through it. She was alone, in the automated constituency of tomorrow's misfortunes. Lost like a goddess in search of vengeance. The red clouds of marmalade ecstasy had vanished from the swollen skies she was falling deeper into the abyss of night watched over by the peering eyes of the marmalade tree. Outside in the close the children were playing 'kerby' with a football. The constant thud of the ball as it hit the pavement edge was distracting to the point of annoyance. Sarah got annoyed very easily these days. Her headaches were getting worse; they had been for weeks now. She could see stars, and planets for that matter, without the use of a telescope.

The semi-drugged serpent slowly slithered downstairs to the sweet aroma of breakfast, which lay waiting on its white carpet. (Except that, it was not breakfast; but dinner!) The kitchen revolved around her hungry eyes and Sunday sneered beneath its mask. Yes, today was Sunday! She hated Sunday, and once she had abandoned the depths of her daydreams and sacrificed the soft euphoria of bedtime, she could begin to pluck the fruit from the over laden branches, which hung rhythmically from the ceiling of her room. Sarah-Jane Sullivan stared into the swirling coffee and once more her thoughts were on a journey in her blanket of dreams.....

She leant over towards him, aesthetically pleasing his whole body, his nerves stood out from their limbs and fervour racked within him. She cupped her hands and cradled his head inside them, each movement a work of art, each sign a sign of love. Mark washed his eyes in her beauty- Well it was better than Optrex! He pursed his aching lips towards hers: a kiss, the magic of the lover's mist, the soft sweet touch of gossamer from an angel's wing, frothy clouds of pink mush on the

horizon of her mind, well you know what I mean..... I'm sure you've read it all before and if you want that sort of thing, then please go off and read a Mills & Boon because you won't find it here.

It was twelve-fifteen when Sarah had leapt from the dark depths of cotton blankets to parade herself in front of the yawning mirror. Is this face, this the innocence of seventeen? Her dark hair bounded her slim face and curled up slightly, giving the whole visage an appearance of an Egyptian queen, and yet somehow she had never appreciated her own beauty, her own simplicity, until that night. 'God it's early' she thought to herself looking at the enamel clock on the dressing table. (Now you, the reader must appreciate that time as understood by teenagers is a different concept to that of normal mortals. The days do not officially start until midday and continue until 4am. Sundays do not exist at all and as such, they could be obliterated from the calendar with no detrimental effect. For Sarah-Jane Sullivan the only good thing about this particular Sunday was that she would be seeing Mark tonight; but that was eight hours away. Now, Sarah Sullivan she was not one of those women who require a week to get ready for a date, hers' was a natural beauty, and as such after along relaxing bath, she could be ready to face the world in less than two hours. (It is rumoured that this is something of a world record for a woman, and as the author, I am toying with the idea of contacting the Guinness book of Records).

Eventually she managed to find enough strength to raise her hand to brush her hair into its familiar shape. Her rounded face and large brown eyes spelt out her youth and gave her an elfin-like countenance. Her face glowed with the flush of youth, and even without makeup, she managed to look radiant and beautiful. Slowly, but surely the bedroom carpet carried her to the landing, where the crystal-cut stairway unravelled beneath her feet like, some giant escalator, as she slid down towards the ascending aroma of Sunday lunch.

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Mark stared blankly at the frost bitten windows wincing with pain from its icy touch. Darkness slowly, slipped away into obscurity without ever asking permission to leave; and dawn arrived whisking passed his yawning eyelids, stroking lawns of velvet grass; Dawn, lightly tapping on the windowpanes and sighing softly on the silver glass. Yes, Dawn arrived. - She was not expected that early in the morning but she came, nonetheless, and a lovely girl she was. - Well at last, he

divested himself of the soft silk sheets of his bedtime, exchanging them for the cold stark stare of morning, greeted as he was with the birth of a new winter's day. His nostrils twitched at the ascending bouquet of fried bread, eggs, and bacon seeping up from the flat below into his' room. How kind of his neighbour to greet him with the wonderful aroma of such a early morning repast.

Weakly the ripples of harlequin light tried to force its way into the flat through the cold glass of the window. The silver ray of morning had chased the exodus of night to the very gateway of the dawn, where the proverbial elusive butterfly brushed passed him on the way to the bathroom. Mark awoke to the semi-arctic greeting of that early morning sunshine infiltrating through the frost patterns on the glass, which now resembled a stained-glass window in the churches of yesteryear. Despite the cold Mark found the sight comforting and friendly.

A dark unshaven face stared blankly through the mirror, which hung helplessly on the wall, it frowned at Mark, and he frowned back. After a minute's visual discussion between the two faces, they met, and Mark proceeded to dress in his modestly conventional attire, after all, it was Monday and he did have to go to work. The shivering skeleton, for Mark was not a well-built lad, stood scraping his flesh with a well-used Gillette razor over a sparkling sink, which reflected his frustration.

By seven o' clock, Mark was ready to devour his insufficient breakfast, insufficient merely because he never got up early enough to cook anything, and anyway he had already sampled the delights of a full English breakfast through his nostrils courtesy of his neighbour. The ice-cold milk bottle stuck to his hand as he carried it from the refrigerator, and the corn flakes seemed to freeze as the white stream flowed around them. Mark got himself ready, wandering about from room to room, sitting down only briefly to gulp coffee and crunch large spoonfuls of Corn Flakes. Just as he was about to begin chiselling the dregs from the bottom of his dish, the ever-friendly voice of the BBC Announcer issued forth from the mouth of the transistor radio:

“The time is seven-fifteen...Attention all shipping here is a gale warning issued at.... and within seconds the figure that once sat silently eating cereal and drinking black coffee was gone into the coldness of the hallway. Mark clambered down the forty-nine steps (with apologies to John Buchan) of Spencer House; a journey, which would not normally be necessary, but City Councils being as they are, the lift, was yet to be repaired following several bouts of particularly vicious

vandalism. At the bottom of the stairs, Mark found the women of Spencer House immersed in a pool of idle chatter. The pangs of justice were probing the moral obligations of Chesford to the ‘degenerating adolescence’, but of course, such wide and varied topics also found their way onto the agenda: the incompetence of the council; the state of the economy; and where elephants go to die. Two main points were thrown up from this volcano of gossip, firstly the sensational activities of Sarah-Jane Sullivan in the Sacred Heart on Sunday morning, and secondly the news of a fight at the Roostertail on Sunday night involving Enoch Harlem. Enoch was the local Mr Fix-it, general Dogsbody and Big Time Organiser. If you want something, he can get it for you. There were not many West Indians living in Chesford at this time, so lets be honest one of them was bound to make it big, and rumour and suspicion followed him everywhere. Enoch was never one to fight shy of public recognition and often encouraged some of tittle-tattle because it suited his image. Public opinion being a slow moving animal was yet to connect the two major issues of discussion - that is of course assuming they are connected and as I haven’t written that bit yet your guess is as good as mine. However, despite the lack of detail in any of the stories, there was enough news to keep the editor of the Chesford Daily Mail happy for several days. What tabloid ever worried about the minutiae let alone facts and truth anyway? Never had there been so much excitement and no doubt, he would be able to publish a special lunchtime edition to celebrate the occasion. Whether or not Enoch was actually involved in any fight, seems at this juncture irrelevant, he was there, and that was enough for the tongues of Chesford to wag and the fingers to point.

As Mark whisked passed the coagulation of housewives he cast a cursory glance at Mrs Carver–Smith, please note the double-barrelled name, it may become significant later on. The rest of her supporters rallied quickly to her aid as they possibly and quite understandably, took an innocent, if cynical look as a gross insult, and many remarked on the “Gross impudence of the cheeky little bastard.”

“If he were my son I’d teach him a lesson or two.”

“Wouldn’t let my daughter go round with the likes of him, that’s for sure.” (It was obviously Mrs Carver –Smith who said this, note the lack of obscene language!)

“Wants bringing down a peg he does,” and so on and so on; the typical uniformed prejudice of the Victorian housewife against the younger, but obviously more educated generation. (Please note that this is the government’s contention and not necessarily mine)

“You know he goes round with that young West Indian lad from George St, you know the one who is so much trouble a couple of years back.”

“Never!!”

“Yes –I saw him and that girl of his only last week.”

What a shame she missed seeing them yesterday! And so the molehill becomes a mountain, the trickle becomes a stream, and all the dinners will be burnt because everyone is out talking to everyone else.

Midnight grass wave me goodbye, but leave the statues where they are

The shadowed surrounds like silhouettes of the burning bush

await their master on the horizon of the Velvet Sun Factory.....

One end of the factory was taken up with three voluminous sheds, under which hung the mixers for varnish making: bright silver rings, sharp silken blades spinning forward and backward. The noise was incredible; almost deafening, but as long as the managing director didn’t have a headache, which incidentally was frequently caused by the warehouse door banging shut when left ajar, the varnish plant continued to produce its fuss, fumes, and confusion. The two men employed in this unique area of the factory seemed somehow immune to the smells and sounds of bubbling resins, atmospheres filled with clouds of black locusts and dust that infiltrated every mouth and lung within a five mile radius. There were worse jobs of course, the technicolor lungs of the colour-mixers told their own rainbow story: chemical pigments distilled into undiluted air and overalls awash with every colour imaginable to mankind. It was not that conditions at the ‘Velvet Sun factory’ were bad; they were on a par with the rest of the industry. Ink making was a messy business and poor health seemed scarce compensation for a large bank balance and profit for the ‘Fat Man’.

The sun glinted through a crack in the ceiling of white cloud and smiled on its subjects below, the wind whistled its way across the exposed yard hurling empty oil-drums against the factory wall. As Mark peered into the blank wastes of landscapes that surrounded him, the mechanical sliding

doors pushed their way open and the 'Fat Man' appeared. Mark had never bothered to learn his name; everyone called him the 'fat man' so it just stuck. It suited him. The broad shoulders, stubby beard and unbreakable plastic face, he was not the sort of gaffer you questioned too much. He was not too bad as bosses go, and how many people could say they have Pavarotti as their manager?

Mark stared towards the Fat Man who was well aware of the turmoil he created within the chapel. Mark for his part was amazed at the apoplexy within the union, indeed indifference. They even call the union 'a Chapel' he thought, southern softies! The Fat Man was happy to keep his workers divided; it played into his hands. Only a few outspoken individuals ever dared voice an opinion. Ex Capt. Bobby Womach was one such forthright soul, recently discharged from Her Majesty's paratroopers after spending five years in Margate (owing to a clerical error in the spelling of Marrakech). Yes, Bobby (I was a captain) Womach often spouted forth spurious rivers of unanswerable gibberish intelligible only to higher forms of animal life such as snails and green men on Mars.

James Porter-Brown was another of the outspoken characters, a stocky man (that means he looked like a gravy cube), experienced in the ways of the world and a person not easily moved from his goal. He usually had his say whatever the odds and seemed afraid of nothing except perhaps his own eloquence. Then there was the 'Snake' Larry, so expert in the field of managerial manipulation he had earned a nickname for his worm-like activities. Larry Yesman was a driver or so we are led to believe, the fact that no-one ever saw him do any driving seems at this point irrelevant; his case for being a driver does seem to be strengthened somewhat by the frequency of battered lorries returning to the depot.

Another face in the sea of troubled waters was that of Jack Starr, the foreman who was always in the limelight and at the forefront of any 'ex-curricula' activity. Unfortunately, he was a close friend of the Chapel steward. This led to many awkward if not impossible situations; management was able always to mysteriously head off any potential problems from the work force. To describe Jack as an amiable young man would be an exaggeration- in fact it would be a downright lie, he was intensely disliked by all and sundry, and particularly sundry.

.....Sunshine smile of tenderness

and Sarah-Jane finds happiness

The morning, and quite a beautiful morning it was now that the frost had disappeared, soon slid gracefully into the afternoon with no one ever noticing. Marks' dinner break was at 12-30 and so promptly at that precise hour, he placed himself at the main gate to await the arrival of Sarah-Jane. (It is worth noticing how punctual a man can be where a woman or his stomach is concerned).

Soft, soft sighed the wind sweet, sweet love and Sarah-Jane smiled at the depressed face of her loved one, who was really too engrossed in his sandwiches to notice the sweetness of the smile or indeed the motives behind it. However, woman is a subtle creature and thrives on petty things, they like playing with words and toying with emotions. A smile like that must have ulterior motives. Eves' daughter was still clutching the fruit of Eden. Believe me, the serpent was not the only villain of the piece in that famous garden.

“Mark” the word seemed to come like water from a spring

“I was wondering” (a typical feminine trick opener).

“If we could getaway, you know holiday or just for a few days don't....”

Mark exploded, much to the disgust and discomfort of a passing cyclist who possibly did not like tuna salad, and certainly not raining on him from the pavement.

“Holiday...When...? Where...? “And not forgetting “Why?”

“Well I was thinking about next weekend, Bank Holiday and all that, its half term and you're on holiday anyway.”

Don't argue boy this has been well planned. She's good this one, don't ever play chess with her!

And despite protestation there followed a well thought out and logical explanation of why they should get out of Chesford for a while, see more of each other, and have a real fun holiday. Sarah eventually

concluded “We could hitch it'll be fun”

“As in Hitch-hike?” Mark mumbled between mouthfuls of sandwich

“Yeah, why not?” Sarah replied tossing back her hair in the sunlight

“Hmm”

This first sign of enthusiasm was a mistake, Sarah Jane hung herself ecstatically round Marks' neck pushing his lips towards hers, only to be told he was still trying to eat his dinner, and would she refrain from love-making at mealtimes.

“Yeah okay it should be a good laugh” said Mark finally, thinking this would be enough to satisfy his love-leach, allow him time to eat his sandwiches and, more importantly, think of a perfectly good reason for not going. Although deep down Mark did not think, it was such a bad idea. He needed some space from this town, particularly now after last night's escapades.

Therefore, all was settled, except for Marks' stomach, which occasionally gave way beneath convulsions of undigested food, making him feel most unpleasant as he said goodbye to his happy, happy sunshine girl. Sarah walked off down the road into the delightful afternoon sun, Mark turned, and trundled back into the 'Velvet Sun Factory' like a maximum-security prisoner returning to his cell after a futile attempt to escape. Sarah-Jane was so buoyant, mainly because she had gotten her own way and that in the eyes of any female creature was true success. The sun shone brightly from its blue-framed skies but the light that shone from her eyes seemed even brighter as she thought of what lay ahead. She had no worries, no cares, just the occasional headache, which she ignored, along with the phantom calling of her dream, that she cast it into a haze of euphoric mist, where it slid like a serpent beneath the feet of its master, waiting and biding its time, poised to strike out at any moment.

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Only the soft sighing of the bushes, swaying in the gentle breeze broke the silence of that misty morning. White patches of frost stained the dew damp grass and the night owls flew off to their lofty nests. All was quiet, and then suddenly the sound of a car horn drifted in on the wind from the bypass and disturbed the birds as they roosted in the trees. On the other hand, perhaps it was the chime of the bells from St Michaels. But whatever it was; the black shapes soared into the sky hovering over the tall elms, which lined The Avenue leading to the square. Most of their leaves had now disappeared and the trees took on a weird appearance of living statues, stretching out their arms up towards unsuspecting victims. To the rear of them, an egg-shaped pool was home to several species of freshwater fish. Later in the day, youngsters would gather there. They always did, but it was quiet now just the odd fisherman attempting to land an exaggerated sized perch. The weeping willows that lined



the pool hung their weary heads, and in the half-light of dawn took on the appearance of old men leaning on their canes to survey the rippling waters. The path that came from Parsons Pool turned almost back on itself and split into two separate ways one took you back to The Avenue whilst the other meandered across the meadow through a little copse and back towards the town. On its route through to the other side of the little wood, it passed an old oak where legend said the King hid during the Civil War. Its hollowed out trunk was certainly big enough, and provided shelter from the elements for many a traveller. They had built a car park now at the front of the oak but it was still an imposing sight. No one saw the stranger as he crept from the shadowy depths of the trees to leave a package in the bowels of the giant oak, and only the whispering wind bore witness to its retrieval later that morning and she couldn't tell anyone.

## Serenade to Southsea

.....The statues are speaking to her out aloud

They're standing alone with their heads bowed

Milky morning mists mingling with the choking fumes of passing banana lorries - never ending carpets of spring blossom and waste paper, bustling crowds of faceless nobodies going nowhere. This was Saturday morning in Chesford. Mark and Sarah walking hand in hand through mellow sunlight, laughing at fat old ladies on bicycles, kicking neatly piled mountains of brightly coloured autumn leaves into billowing fountains and smiling through chattering teeth.

The clock on the front of the Town Hall beamed down on the early morning crowds (alright there were only four people around at that time of the morning its poetic licence okay? and three's a crowd) The clock unmercifully boomed out the hour of six o' clock. Mark and Sarah seemed to quicken their step and miraculously managed to cross the road without getting themselves wrapped around the wing mirrors of a passing double-decker bus. They staggered up the curb and slumped breathlessly against the wall of somebody's front garden. Mark groaned as he slipped the bulging haversack from his aching shoulders and dropped it with a thud on the pavement. Trembling he slipped a bent 'Embo' between his dry lips and managed somehow to force a smile; Sarah giggled back. She grabbed him by the hand and dragged him forward, but dismay suddenly replaced her unexpected burst of enthusiasm and registered as a muttered curse on her sweet lips.

Thundering towards them through the belching cloud of smoke emitting from the exhaust was something resembling a Vauxhall Victor, pearly-whites grinning at the wheel. It was Enoch Harlem. Mark's troubled face broke into a somewhat relieved smile and dragging the haversack behind him, he half ran to the edge of the road frantically waving his free arm as he did so. Sarah watched unbelieving as the spluttering wreck came to a more than sudden halt opposite her and astride the white line in the middle of the road; angry motorists, unable to get past remonstrated and shouted

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