Black soul rose

By

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Origins

In the middle of the Pacific ocean there lies an island, four miles long and three miles wide. I say in the middle. It's actually two miles South-West of the actual centre, but no-one cares. Three quarters of it is jungle.

Anyway, this place is not on any map, and even satellites in the sky barely register it. It looks like just another ocean island, albeit very tiny. Of no real significance.

Back in 1759, it held very real significance for seven medical practitioners in London, whose methods of research ended with them being cast out of their university, but that didn't stop them trying to learn.

Not long afterwards they were to serve a life sentence for taking vagabonds from the streets and experimenting on them. They preferred them alive. The authorities, whilst not caring about the homeless and beggars decided to show that they were doing something and that this was wrong and immoral, hence their jail term.

However, the Mayor at the time had wanted to be seen as compassionate and seen to be trying to change violent criminals into feeling regret and remorse. So a separate unit was set up three miles away where they would undergo therapy to turn them into good citizens. Citizens, that if seen to have changed into good people, could then be let out into the community.

Along the way however, in their horse drawn carriage, they were not even chained, the mayor placing trust where there was none. Trust in that they would be enthusiastic about trying to become better people. Excited about the opportunity to have their life sentences over-turned and to walk free. What a great opportunity this was. Thank-you Mayor, you really are a forward thinker. You even trusted us enough to only have two guards over-seeing seven violent murderers.

They were not the first to travel to this new unit. Other violent criminals received the same treatment as them, and reports were good from inside. The felons were making progress.

None had tried to escape en-route.

Except for the seven medical practitioners, who slaughtered their guards easily, as well as the man in control of the horses of the carriage. They caved in his skull with rocks and threw his mangled brain to rats and cockroaches. There was nobody around along this narrow road, midway between the prison and the new building where they were to have their therapy.

They used the rocks on the guards heads to make them passive, not to kill them. They wanted to see if they could control the horses enough to roll the wheels over their necks. To see if it was heavy enough to kill them.

It turned out, it was.

So out into the world they went. The Mayor lasted another two months in his post before he was ousted, and the unit was closed.

They didn't go their separate ways however, and were not pursued. No wanted posters ever appeared. In those days escaping was easier, and criminals vanished into the night.

They continued their 'experiments' on people, and execution methods, for many years, not staying in one place, until they kind of began not so much to go their separate ways, as to just come together only once every week, every two weeks, every month, until one of them decided to go abroad. To see the world, to travel.

His name was Jason Fleetham. One of those go-getter types, who would say yes to anything.

Would you like to drink this strange substance? Yes.

Would you like to fight a bear? Yes.

Would you like to climb this active volcano? Yes.

The kind that once he gets a bee in his bonnet, nothing is going to stop him until he decides on something else. So he thought he would like to be an explorer, discovering new lands and species.

Well, he found something that could have far-reaching consequences for humanity.

On the coast of Chile, he bought a rickety rowing-boat which he himself made sea-worthy, and off he went, heading to the Pacific horizon. Fear and apprehension barely registered inside him, even when a curious blue whale

followed him for three miles, or when he saw shark-fins in the distance. The sharks couldn't be bothered however, perhaps they just weren't hungry that day. There were some merchant ships that passed nearby on their trade routes, but after a while there were days and days of nothing, of the ocean horizon surrounding him. His rations were lasting though, but he suspected there might be two weeks worth left.

Eventually, he sighted an island.

On that island was a tribe of natives. The Nurabi. He tried to integrate himself with them.

They were not hostile, but didn't welcome him into the fold.

He camped on the beach for three days, but Jason was the kind of man that chipped away until he got what he wanted. The Nurabi slowly but surely came to realise he was not a threat, and gradually allowed him inside.

Where they made their biggest mistake.

He 'was' a threat.

They came to trust him, and after a week he discovered that the Nurabi were keeping a secret from the rest of the world. They were keeping it to themselves.

The black rose was a real flower. Not modified or manufactured as could be found in society. This was genuine, made by nature, and only grew on that island.

The tribe had discovered a long time ago, maybe 500 hundred years, that if you swallow one of the seeds, and somebody else close by also swallows one of them, the consciousness of one can be transferred to the other. Like the soul, or spirit of a person passing through teleportation portals inside the mind.

The consciousness of the other, however, is pushed out, and their body is then 'possessed'. The other soul goes on into the afterlife as normal.

Jason stayed for a further two days. He couldn't let this go. He had to take this to his colleagues.

Yet he knew the Nurabi wouldn't let him take it off the island.

So he killed them all.

All 62 of them. Cutting their throats as they slept.

He put as many of the black roses into the boat as he could, and sailed back the way he had came.

Then had them packaged up in Chile, because as far as they were concerned, they were just some different coloured roses, so what?

He wound his way back to London and met the others, where they all agreed to keep, and use the roses for themselves.

They of course, had to test it out. So they did it several times, and it worked. Knowing that if it got out into the public, the whole world could be plunged into pandemonium.

One of them owned a greenhouse in an allotment where he grew tomatoes and carrots. The black roses could be grown and cultivated there. They all put their finances together and bought the place, much to the chagrin of the other gardeners who had to leave.

They couldn't stay however, and didn't want to, there were so many young, attractive bodies out there to possess. Other lives to lead. From youth to old age. They would enter society and live the life of somebody whose body they took over, integrating as best they could into their families as the personalities changed. They would all stay in the same area, each promising to keep the secret of the black rose.

They grew the plants at the allotment, and cultivated the seeds, filling hip-flasks with them, and as much as it pained them to do it, they destroyed the remaining flowers at the allotment, making sure none grew back. They could grow them anywhere now, but only needed the seeds to possess others. Forcing one of them into the throat of a victim who would have no choice but to swallow, and taking one themselves, pushing out their soul from their body.

The victim would be so shocked by becoming an ethereal soul, looking down at their body, that they would be in a state of confusion, and that would be when their spirit would drift into the afterlife. The possessor however, used that minute before the soul departed to drive themselves into the physical brain of the victim, taking control of their body, and living as them until they decided to change bodies again. It was risky however, so they decided to live the life of the possessed, before embarking on soul transferral again.

With all the flowers gone from the allotment, and all the seeds in hip-flasks, soon to be transferred to one vacuum flask which they hid and treasured,

needing it when it was time to change bodies again, they entered society, and would sometimes continue their 'experiments', travelling around the country, settling in communities, satisfying their bloodlusts, their medical curiosities until it was time to move on, find new lives to lead.

When they reached the age of pensioners, it was time for new blood…

"If he comes any closer, we'll kill him,"

"Yes," his companion replied, as they watched as a hiker tourist looked at a map on his phone and compared it to a dog-eared laminated one he also held. They were in a wooded area, and two eight-year old boys were stood at the top of a slope, peering over a bush that was almost as tall as them, watching the other man down by a pathway about forty metres away, looking confused.

After a few more moments, something must have clicked for the tourist as he smiled and stepped back onto the pathway and continued on his way.

"I'm almost disappointed," said one boy, "think I might have liked to get the blood flowing". He flexed his hands, then turned. They both walked back through shrubs and trees to an old abandoned bowling club, long reclaimed by nature, the bowling green itself on the far side a haven for wildlife.

Around twenty years ago the last member locked the place up due to dwindling membership, and the fact the place was difficult to get to. The founders wanted the place fairly remote but close enough to society, an 'exclusive' place, members-only, but still, it had been picked over by squatters, by people chancing upon it, and those curious to explore derelict places.

Anyone could come and go, the doors were broken and there was no electricity. It was just a building, a shell, a skeleton. If the place was once alive, it was now dead.

The two boys entered back into the lounge area, where they rejoined five other eight-year olds. Two were walking slowly around, and the others were looking down at the dead bodies of seven pensioners.

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In the small car-park where the only vehicle was a phthalo blue transit van the children gathered together. The tallest of them, with blonde hair said:

“You all know we need to hide this,” and he held up the metal vacuum flask full of black rose seeds, “but where?”

One of the girls pointed to the square overgrown grass beside the building where the game was once played. In the far corner was a large Beech tree. It looked as if it had seen the place being built, seen all its comings and goings, seen every match, and its doors close.

“At the base of that tree, we’ll bury it,” the others agreed, and they traipsed across the grass and weeds, and came to the tree where there were some rocks and stones and twigs.

“We’ve nothing to dig a hole with,” one said. The boy with the flask got on his knees and moved a large stone, then began digging with his hands, scooping out soil until he’d made a hole about two feet deep. He put in the flask, and covered it all back over, replacing the stone. Then he stood up.

“So that will be dug out in about eighty years. Of course we need to periodically keep checking this to make sure the tree is still here, this stone, and that it’s not getting bulldozed to make way for a housing estate”.

“Yes,” said another, “we need to keep our eye on it, but it should be okay there. The place hasn’t been touched in years by the looks of things”.

“Still, it’s always a precarious moment, letting them go. Well hiding them. Alright, make a mental note folks. Look around. Get this place in your memory”.

They wandered around for a few minutes. Looking at the tree, the building, for when they returned here, they would know what to look out for.

“Also when we go into the village, we need to know the route. How to get back here, but we’ll do that over time. Alright, regroup at the van”.

They walked back to the small car-park where their van was open, inside the maps the children had been using for their orienteering venture.

“Alright, we’re going to have to be found. If we make our way back to where these kids were taken, then maybe someone will recognise us”.

“But they were taken out in the country”.

“They were map-reading weren’t they,” said another. “I think they were on some field trip”. One of the two girls stepped to the side of the van and looked at the maps they had left, along with pencils and compasses.

“I think they were orienteering. Anyway, here we go, one of them has marked different places, and that place looks like it could be a building”. She handed out the maps.

“Yes,” said another, “could be the base where there will be teachers panicking now cos’ they’ve lost some kids”.

“Looks about three miles,”

“Alright,” the tall blonde said, “we’d best get going. Remember, when we’re discovered, we’ve lost our memories because of the trauma of being lost”.

“Will that be believed?”

“Well we’re kids aren’t we? We can get away with anything”.

“I wonder what my name is,” said one, “but I’ll find out soon I suppose”.

They didn’t speak much as they made their way along many country lanes and across fields featuring lazy cows and sheep that barely batted an eyelid as they traipsed past.

When they reached a well-worn stile into another field, the blonde boy stopped and gathered them together.

“I’m bloody knackered,” said one of the girls, “how far to go?” One of the others looked at the map, confused for a moment, then said:

“It looks like there’s another path on the other side of this field. I think that’s where we were taken”.

“Okay,” said the blonde boy. “Remember to act like kids. It’ll be difficult but we’ve got to, we’ve done it before. Stick together as best as possible. I’m guessing we all go to the same school, so we’ll meet up in the playground at breaks and whatever”.

They all knew they didn’t need to stay together. Each knew the location of the flask, but because of the implications of such a scientific discovery, it had initially frightened them, and when people collectively get frightened, they stick together. Their friendship was strong before the discovery, even despite them

not initially staying together after their jail term, but they would have been life-long friends anyway, united in murder, in learning about the human body. Now they were together in their collective secret, bonded potentially forever. They chose to stay with each other. Similar to a gang, or a support group, in the same boat, bound by the black rose, by their secret, and would protect it until the end of the human species.

They entered the empty field and rambled until they came to another stile and all gathered together on a country lane, one of them looking at the map.

“Oh my…there you are!”

They all looked in the same direction, to an adult about sixty-feet away waving his arms and heading towards them, looking panicky even from that distance.

“There you are where have you been? Where have you been?”

“Alright folks,” the blonde boy muttered, “here we go. Here we fucking go”.

Brett

He had a sour look on his face. Finding out for the umpteenth time that adults rarely believe children when they came up with tall tales, because, you know, adults were always right weren’t they?

“I’m not telling lies,” said Brett Lockley to his older brother, Kieran, 19, sitting on a garden wicker chair in their small conservatory.

“Well they were found yesterday, and said they just got lost”.

“I was there. They didn’t get lost. They got kidnapped by some old men who had knives and threatened us to get in a van. They said they didn’t need me and one came at me with a knife. I turned and ran. He chased me but I got away, I was faster, he got out of breath. I ran across a field and escaped”.

“So let me get this right. You and your class-mates were orienteering across the fields. Then you reach a path, and a van pulls up with pensioners in, and they threaten you with knives to get in, then say they don’t need you, so you run off. One chases you with a knife but you outran him”.

Brett nodded, arms folded, staring at Kieran in the hope he will be believed.

“And now come back and say they just got lost. No mention of kidnapping. Our parents didn’t bring us up to tell lies”.

“I’m not,” Brett said, exasperated, getting up and walking into the back room, clearly giving up.

“Don’t forget I’m running you and Jordan to karate class tonight. We can ask him then”.

Brett was moping for the rest of the day. His parents had no reason to believe him over the school deputy head who had rang them to say the children were back, and safe after several hours of being lost in the countryside.

Brett had ran and ran as fast as he could, three miles back to the supervisor who had his feet up on an outside tavern bench where he saw the red-faced panicky boy dashing at him.

“SirsirtheothershavebeentakensomeoldmenhavetookthevantheyhadknivesandthreatenedsoIranaway..!”

The teacher was the kind to try and be the young, trendy type, although he failed dismally, wasn’t too hygienic and was always eating crisps and never sharing any with the children, always wore dark brown.

They were missing for around three hours. Others were called in for the search just shy of calling the police. One panicky teacher had to be persuaded several times to not call the police, they were probably just lost somewhere, and if it goes on too long then the cavalry would have to be called, and she reluctantly handed over her phone. The police would not have appreciated being asked to send a search party out for a group of children who have been missing for three hours. It would be a case of:

Where did they go missing?

In the countryside.

What were they doing there?

Orienteering.

Orienteering? Map-reading out in the fields. Hmm, let me think, maybe they’ve got fucking lost. Have you thought of that? Maybe you should go and look for them rather than getting us out to find some kids that went down the wrong path. When they really have gone missing, call us then.

However, they were found before the police and any of the parents were called, because if the parents were called then that would be that, the world would know and some of them would go into panic mode if their child was missing for ten seconds.

Still, when they were found by their red-faced not-so-trendy really supervisor, they looked lost and distraught, blaming the trauma of it for their memory loss.

The ‘adults’ at the school had gone into panic overdrive after they returned, with meetings, informing the school board of governers down in London who dispatched three members and a child psychologist to get there as soon as possible. The headmistress was called in from her break in Cornwall, and poor old trendy teacher was out. Sacked instantly. Lack of supervision. Losing children. Easily a sackable offence. All within the space of hours since they returned. The children were to do a four-mile round trip following their maps. No phones allowed. It was all countryside and lanes. Reach the sundial at the top of Blueberry hill, then follow a route back to the tavern.

They all had trauma counselling, people coming and going, parents arriving in panic mode, nurses checking them over before they were allowed back to their respective homes.

Jordan

Jordan Northington was the smallest of the group, shorter by a centimetre. He looked to be an ordinary boy, one who would probably end up being a boxer, or a security guard. He had buzz-cut hair, and nobody would be surprised if when he left school he joined the army. He lay on the bed in his small room, contemplating, looking around at the posters on the wall, of the solar system, and of course, most children’s obsession, dinosaurs, with unrealistic plastic stegosaurs and tyrannosaurs on the window shelf. There were also posters of people in martial-arts poses.

His brother Alistair, older by two years looked in.

“Are you sure you’re alright? You’ve been very quiet since you came back”.

Jordan tapped the side of his head.

“Trauma of getting lost”.

“You were only gone for a few hours. It’s not that traumatic,” Jordan simply smiled and said nothing else.

Moments later, their mother Daphne popped in. One of those fussy mothers that wraps their child in cotton wool. Asking if they’re alright or if they need anything every five minutes.

The doorbell then rang and she went down to answer it.

“Jordan,” she called up the stairs.

“It’s Brett and Kieran. Come for your karate class”.

“What?” Jordan said, standing up and going to the top of the stairs. Brett was stood on the step in his karate gi with yellow belt. Kieran out in his silver Fiat Punto.

“I forgot,” his mother said. “it’s time for your karate lesson”.

“I forgot as well,” he said, looking annoyed.

“Are you up to it?” she said, “you’ve had a major trauma so are you feeling alright? Even though you know I don’t really like you going to karate as you could get hurt and it’s violent, but I can’t stop you and I know it does you good and you love going, so, it’s up to you especially tonight after your incident. You could stay and I’ll make you a nice cup of hot chocolate”. He wanted to turn and walk back into the bedroom and close the door, but the wide-eyed look on Brett’s face, full of expectancy, made him think it may be good for him, as he needed to integrate, and Brett was the one that got away.

“Alright,” Jordan said, sighing, “for fucks sake,” he muttered under his breath, but it went unheard, and he slowly walked down the stairs.

“Got your bag,” asked Brett. Jordan simply stood, looking confused.

“Go get your bag,” his mother said.

“Sorry, I don’t remember where it is”.

“Oh love, you’ve had such a trauma. I even had to tell him his name, didn’t I?” She then went to the door beneath the stairs and retrieved his bag with his freshly washed karate suit and fluffy towel.

She gave him a hug.

“You be careful now, don’t do anything you don’t want to do. You can still change your mind you know”. Brett’s expression had not changed.

His shoulders slumped. “I’ll be fine,” and they left. His mother watched them walk to and enter the vehicle. Kieran waved and drove away.

Jordan sat on the back seat, arms folded, quiet.

“You alright?” Kieran asked, looking in the rear-view mirror, “you’re quiet”.

“Yep,” Jordan said, looking out of the window, “I’ve been through a trauma”.

“Yes, I heard you got lost. Actually, you know what Brett thinks here. He thinks you got abducted by some pensioners”.

It was clear Brett had been aching to say something, and now his opportunity came he couldn’t stop himself:

“What happened?” he said loudly, turning as much as he could in the front seat.

“What happened? You got taken by those old people in that bus and they said they didn’t need me, and I just ran all the way back. What happened? What happened..?”

Jordan laughed, and laughed loudly, almost sarcastically.

“You think we got taken by some old codgers in a bus. What have you been smoking? We got lost, don’t you remember? It happens, we couldn’t read the maps properly and we went off in a different direction. You were there, we lost you. Then we got found after three hours. That’s it”.

“No..! it’s not. You got taken by old people in a bus”.

“I’m sorry Jordan,” said Kieran, pulling up at lights. “He’s been like this since you got lost. Everything’s fine now. You all say the same thing. You got lost. It’s only Brett here who got confused”.

“I didn’t get confused. I was there. They got took”.

“Nope, sorry Brett. No-one will believe you. We got lost, and we were so traumatised we lost our memories,” Jordan said, with a look on his face that transitioned from a smile to a smirk. Then he winked, and Brett just looked at him for a moment longer, then sat back in his seat, folded his arms and stared at the road ahead.

Kieran though, had been looking in the rear-view mirror then, and thought perhaps Jordan wasn’t really his true self.

‘Old’ Jordan would have been chatty throughout the journey. He loved his karate class and would have probably been talking about going in for his grading and what it must be like to be a black belt.

Kieran became quiet too for the rest of the journey. Something he guessed didn’t add up with Jordan, and it had nothing to do with the trauma of being lost.

He found a place to pull up outside the church hall where other children and some parents were heading for the building, some already in their white karate gis.

“I’ll see you in a hour,” Kieran said, as he left them on the pavement to walk to the church hall.

When Kieran had driven away out of sight, Brett stopped and turned on Jordan.

“Okay, what happened? I know you got taken by those old men,” Jordan took a step towards Brett so his nose was an inch from his.

“We. Got. Lost. Okay? That’s it”. Then he stepped back, hoisted up his bag, smiled and said:

“Let’s go and do some chop-socky,” then he headed for the hall.

It was quite well attended. There were approximately thirty children, and those that didn’t turn up already in their suits had to use the toilets to change. Jordan emerged with a grin on his face and joined Brett on the mat.

“What is this?” he said, in his white cotton gi with yellow belt, “I look like I’m wearing pyjamas”. The class leader lined them up and they all bowed, except Jordan.

“Bow to the sensei,” whispered Brett. The sensei didn’t notice.

“Bow to the sensei?” said Jordan, “why?” Brett simply looked at him, confused.

“Memory loss mate, trauma. Remind me”.

“Respect for the teacher”. The sensei wasn’t the thinnest karate teacher there ever was. His well-worn black-belt strained against an emerging beer belly, and he sported an uncombed mullet. He came across as a frustrated rock-star wannabe.

“Okay class we’re gonna start off with some stretching exercises, then we’ll go through forms”.

“Forms? What are we doing paperwork? Have I got to sign something?”.

“Your memories not that bad, surely,” Brett whispered. They then began to do what basically amounted to yoga exercises. Jordan noticed that the sensei wasn’t joining in, just wandering around with his hands behind his back. Perhaps dreaming of performing on stage. Why do I have to be here, fucking about in pyjamas when I should be rocking out?

After their warm-ups, they regrouped, and the class leader, still with hands behind his back wandered up and down.

“Remember students why we do this. To become respected members of society. For self-discipline, and to grow and transform your balance to transcend and grow your spirit. To use your chi for the force of good where it can be honed and trained to boost your aura where people will automatically trust you. You will excude an aura that puts people at ease, and those who would be hostile will sense it, and they will not attack you. They will hide and be humble around you. Your mental attitude is boosted by the power of the chi which instills automatically the notions of empathy, compassion and patience”. He continued in this vein for a few minutes, and Jordan folded his arms and sighed.

“What’s he on about?” he whispered.

“He does this every lesson,” Brett whispered back, “you’re usually really into it”. Jordan tapped the side of his head.

“Trauma mate,” he said, and continued to listen to ten minutes of karate philosophy.

They were then separated into their respective belt colours, and Jordan noticed the teacher heading towards him.

“Jordan, hope you’re feeling better after your ordeal”.

“Some memory loss”. The teacher nodded. “Brett, you’ll help him won’t you? you’ve both got your grading in two weeks, so you need to be going through your katas”.

“My what? Yes I think I’ll need a bit of a reminder on that,” Jordan said, looking at Brett. The tutor nodded and walked away.

So Brett effectively had to show him the moves from scratch, believing or wondering that his traumatic event really had more of an effect on him than he first thought.

It was as though he had never had a karate lesson in his life.

Jordan managed to get through it though, and soon went back out to find Kieran parked up nearby.

They were back on the road after a few moments and Kieran asked Jordan:

“Everything okay?”

“No I’m not doing that again. I’m knackered”.

“But Jordan,” said Brett turning in his seat, “we’re going in for our green belts soon, we need to practice the kata. I’ll come round after school tomorrow and we’ll go through it in the garden like we do sometimes”.

“No thanks mate,” he said, folding his arms, “I’d rather jump in a canal”. He then looked out of the window, and Kieran and Brett guessed it was futile to continue, but it was very unlike Jordan, the chatty karate enthusiast.

Kieran dropped Jordan back, and on the drive home, couldn’t help but mention that he didn’t seem himself. It wasn’t just that Jordan wasn’t himself.

He ‘really’ wasn’t himself.

Kieran mooted that he seemed possessed by somebody else, but quickly dismissed that. The trauma of being lost and maybe thinking you’ll never see home again could be quite traumatic for an eight-year old, but honestly, amnesia, severe memory loss to the point where he had to be reminded of his own name, and not just Jordan, but all of them.

No, thought Kieran. Something’s not quite right. That was not Jordan, nor even part of him. Could the event of getting lost have had such an effect as to change personality?

Kieran didn’t know much about psychology, but he guessed that couldn’t happen. You get lost, it traumatises you, and you completely change personality.

No, Kieran, thought. Absolutely no chance.

When Jordan got back, his mother, as she did every time he came back from a lesson smothered him with too much affection, as if he’d come back from battle.

Were you hurt? Are you alright? Would you like a cup of tea?

His ‘father’ Keith had returned from his radio-controlled model boat appreciation society weekly meeting, and on his way upstairs, Jordan heard him talking exasperatedly to Daphne.

“…I can’t invite him, you know I can’t. Until he apologises…”

He walked into his ‘brother’s’ room, who was on a tablet with headphones sat at a small cheap desk.

“Forgot to knock as well,” Alistair said, taking off his headphones. Jordan hooked a thumb over his shoulder.

“What’s that about?” he asked, “Dad…mentioned that he can’t invite who to what?”

“You really have forgotten everything haven’t you? You were only gone for three hours, what happened?”

Jordan said nothing.

“Don’t you know?” Alistair continued, “fourteen years ago, Dad and his brother had a major falling out, and neither of them will apologise. They haven’t spoken to each other since”.

“Over what?”

“Football,” his brother said. “They both support the same team and one night they were watching a match, and a player got tripped in the penalty box. Claimed a penalty. His brother said he dived, and it wasn’t a penalty. Dad said he didn’t, and it was. They argued and started shouting in the pub. His brother stormed out, said Dad made a show of him. Neither will apologise. Won’t shake hands. They’re both really stubborn”.

Jordan laughed.

“Are you kidding me? They fell out over that. What a pairing of bone-headed fucknuts”. Alistair shrugged.

“They’re both as stubborn as each other. Neither will apologise, and he’s not inviting him to his presentation ceremony at the club he goes to for some certificate he’s getting”.

“Amazing what adults will fall out over…what the fuck is that?” said Jordan pointing to a small fish-tank on a shelf above the cheap desk. There were no fish inside, and over the top was a wire mesh.

Inside was a few leaves and a Brazilian black tarantula.

“Don’t you remember? It’s Tommy. Tommy the tarantula”. Jordan shook his head and sighed. “That’s a pet is it? Isn’t it really boring? What does it do except fuck-all?”

“Jordan! Language. You never swore since before you got lost”. He shrugged, stepping across to the spider.

“Hello Tommy,” he said, “what’s it like being trapped inside a glass box?” Jordan turned his head, concentrating.

“He’s speaking to me in my mind. He’s saying it’s fucking shit. Get me out”.