

# **Rashomon Amour – Aspects of Veracity in Everyday Suburban Life**

## **1**

Kick-to-kick, two rolled-up socks for football, is being played in the dining room by my cousin Michael and my brother Norm. The dining room is everywhere glass and china and delicate porcelain. The inevitable happens. A figurine is knocked down, breaks in two. A harlequin, A shepherd. Perhaps a maid at her spinet, a gypsy, a laughing cavalier. If it's 1965, which I think it is, my brother is sixteen, our cousin a year older. Boys.

To backtrack. Our parents are dead, mum a slow cancer, a year in bed, dad a brain haemorrhage, a rapid two months later exactly to the day. And when their house finally sold, able to be sold, all personal property packed up and gone, Norman and I in a flat together, me an advertising copywriter now, he still at school. A year like this, maybe more, until enough is enough, the scream of passing life unstoppable, impossible to silence, to ignore, I sail to Europe to write, to become a writer, to be a writer, Norman taken by

our fruiterer uncle to grow up alongside his own three sons, Michael the youngest.

It's a Friday.

Late.

Uncle Chaim and Auntie Sonya any minute home from their long day in the shop.

Think fast, boys, think fast.

They do.

The broken figurine is wrapped in newspaper, plunged to the bottom of the kitchen tidy, all manner of untouchable rubbish slammed on top.

And?

Now the tricky part.

But quickly, quickly.

Any minute it's already too late.

Each and every figurine in the dining room – also the vases, the bowls, the plates and platters, the sprays of ceramic flowers, the groupings of papier-mâché and plastic fruit, you have no idea how many, how crammed and crowded, the aunt's treasure, her pride and joy – moved, shifted, nudged, this one a fraction this way, that one a whisker that, backwards and forwards, trial and error, get it right, until the what was an obvious and unmistakable unsightly gap – voila! – perfect, never was, ceases to exist.

Whew.

In the absolute nick of time.

Without a leftover second to spare.

Before even the dampness upon the brow can be mopped away, the pearly shine of exertion, the blood flush of rush, the aunt sets first foot inside the door.

And looks to her left.

Fourteen hours on her feet, you understand.

Beyond human exhaustion.  
Friday the longest day.  
“Something’s different,” she says.  
And now to her right.  
Hands heavy with shopping yet unreleased.  
“Something’s not the same.”  
The jig, in a word, is up.  
The football.  
The figurine.  
The pieces in the kitchen tidy, full confession, no detail  
spared.  
The aunt is a statue of astonishment.  
“In the house?” she cries.  
And then again, this time in italics.  
“Football? In the house?”

## 2

More and more the telephone tells us the same story. An aunt, an acquaintance, a cousin, a friend. At Michael’s funeral I see his two brothers, contrary in every manner of behaviour and performance all their known lives, in character, in morality, by every defining action and trait, standing now side by side stamped with the sameness of grief.

Angers?

Injustices?

Egocentric unawareness of the workings of the world?

The sun falls this bright day without mercy or favour on this new and growing suburb where we assemble – these recent fields bought by the Chevra Kadisha, a moment ago farmland, now the stone-marked allotments of the relent-

lessly increasing dead.

He had the car last week!

You cheated me of money!

Why is it him, him, him, why is it always him, why do I  
always have to give in to him?

We go inside, a new building.

The women sit separate, ritually screened from sight.

The prayers are said in Hebrew first, in English after.

Neither rabbi, there are two, both hatted, full bearded,  
wears a tie.

Modern times.

The modern way.

The service smells of wood.

The middle son, Abe, delivers the eulogy, the traditional  
summoning of the departed in remembered life.

And he is not long embarked when it is required, in  
relief to us as it is to him, that his son comes to stand beside  
him, to support him, to comfort him with an encircling arm,  
with his closeness, with his presence and love, Abe's words  
otherwise quite unable to be issued, to be audibly uttered  
into the awaiting air.

Michael.

His appetite.

An eagerness.

For food.

For films.

For friendship.

For fun.

Well, maybe not quite for everything.

For school – they lived over the road, there it was, across  
the street – invariably late.

His carefree casual way.

He was our father's favourite, Abe tells us.

(Here his son has to step up alongside.)

And now this story.

The videos he could watch in a single weekend.

Advice to his daughter:

Always have spare batteries for the remote.

And this story.

The Chinese meal.

One of everything on the menu, what the hell, why not?

And this story.

And this story.

And this story.

And yes, here's the football story, the sock, the smash, the auntie – his mother – coming home.

Except – what's this? – the minute it's broken out they rush, Michael and my brother, a fresh figurine purchased and placed, which fools the auntie – his mother for less than a second.

“Something's different. Something's not the same.”

If even that.

### 3

Norman and I don't speak for years and years and years. How can I put this? Writers are not necessarily the best kind of brothers to have. No blame attaches. The freedom or necessity of invention, of lying, if you like, if you must, is not always readily understood or perceived. Or not easily. Interpretation is all.

Nevertheless a lack, a loss.

A sadness.

Which condition, call it that, seems outside of healing, a permanency, leave it alone, how it is is how it is.

Illness unfreezes the embargo.

We speak an unbridled time, an easy half-hour? over? but who's consulting his watch? of his retirement, his involvement with horses, riding, a passion, a love, this after he's asked how it is with me, prognosis, progress, limitations, changes to life, the joy of a grandchild, a granddaughter, in more than balancing compensation.

Michael is not mentioned, and why should he be? He's still alive.

Where Norman's next phonecall is when he's not.

But he's not calling for that, about that, the funeral four days ago, in excuse for his absence, or apology, or explanation, as you require, what you will.

No, Norman's news is quite otherwise, his daughter, Esther, the birth of a first child, Ivy, a daughter.

Embargo quite forgotten, never existed, over and done.

Our mouths flow with words.

Weight.

Wellness.

Mother and daughter.

And eventually, eventually, all in good and proper time, no rush, Michael.

And now we have some stories.

How he slept in the bungalow at the back of the house and after a hot night under a tin roof sneezed his false teeth into the pile of dirty underpants Auntie Sonya had ready to wash beside the sink and Mike! Mike! had them instantly back inside his mouth sans benefit of even a rinse.

How he scored one Saturday night and in the openness

of that democratic household told all at the table in the morning, replacing only a Mary O'Brian with an invention of Eva Binder, a touch of Jewishness to please his mum and dad.

("Binder? Binder?" said his mother all morning, "I wonder if it's the Binders from Bialystock, beautiful people, I remember them well.")

How it was eight pieces of toast when a hunger seized him after television watching, always eight pieces, never less, and what he couldn't somehow stuff down his throat, stand back, into the rubbish it went, not for you.

Never one girlfriend at a time, always at least two.

The smoking.

The horror videos.

The slabs of beer.

But that was after, later, we're talking boys.

"A privilege to be in that household," my brother tells me now, whether to assuage my abandoning guilt all these years who can say, but no matter, no matter. "I couldn't have wished for a better place."

And the playing football, the socks, the auntie's figurine, the dining room kick-to-kick?

I relate the version as Abe had it at the funeral, as opposed to the real way it was, which I tell him also, in case he's slipped a detail, to refresh his mind.

"Naah," he says. "It wasn't the kitchen tidy. As soon as I saw it was broken, I rushed it out the back to the garden and buried it."

Oh?

"And then I thought about it, that's no good, and raced up to this place in Malvern, had it glued together, got it back

there just in time, except you know what? it looked like two pieces of shit, the auntie spotted it at once.”

Oh.

“And she didn’t say, ‘Football? In the house?’ She said, ‘In the dining room? In the dining room?’”

Ah.

“Actually,” my brother rounds off his remembrance, “I wasn’t playing kick-to-kick. I was just fooling around. Michael wasn’t even there.”

# The Mechanics

Everywhere hurts  
a hip the calves  
the shoulder a side  
an important finger  
good only on certain days  
occasionally a foot as well  
sets up its separate song  
the planned activity of each day  
shortened by the length of prior consideration  
am I ready can I do it  
given to each contemplated move  
which I'm not talking anything major here  
a simple stand up a sit down  
a toilet visit  
a step a stair  
god in heaven  
an overall performance I tell you  
you wouldn't tolerate in a car  
one owner seventy-five years  
and if that's the genuine mileage on the clock  
as I'm sure it is  
what can I say but  
happy birthday.