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The Seven Vales

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1. Search

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A land there is which is eternal in its dying, wakeful in its dreaming, material in its transcendence, motionless in its movement, instant in its transience. A land without food or hunger, without refuge or exposure, without fire or chill, without armour or carnivore, without control or excess. A land which all acknowledge as home but where none may linger. A land whose sole purpose is to channel the living water to the great ocean.

Some say there is more than one river, or more than one ocean, or both, but all agree that water is water no matter where it is found. And here there is water beyond thirst. Trickling, tumbling, gliding, gurgling, leaping, lapping, swirling, splashing water. Water that flows to the ocean. Water whose sole purpose is to reach the ocean. But to get to the ocean, the water and its passengers must first pass through the seven valleys.

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6 August 1994

Today, at last, I began the book. Thus begins a new chapter in my life. Seema says she will read it even if no-one else does. Asha says she will sue me if I write anything she disapproves of. My centre is giving way, my right is in retreat; situation excellent. I shall attack!¹

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Loneliness found Martyn, and with a mailed fist it squeezed his heart, until with loud sobs he filled the void within and without. Eventually, cheered by his misery, and confirmed that his martyrdom would remain unheeded, he took refuge in fiddling with himself. Thus engaged, his sobs subsided to a staccato snuffle, until with a sigh he focused his mind on the pleasing image of himself, in shining robes, distributing largesse to the generality of mankind. Any observer - and, much later, his mother did look in, just to make sure - would have concluded that the child was content, or at least, was no longer crying and his fingers were in healthy unemployment. The principle of intellectual quarantine, as enshrined in the British way of life, states that a child, starved of all sensory stimulation, can be reduced to a state of sleep. But even a mother cannot observe the maelstrom of the mind of a child who has been sent to bed before he is ready.

Martyn dreamt, or rather imagined, because by convention one cannot dream unless one is sleeping and Martyn was as far from sleep as his parents, who at that very moment were shouting at one another. They were arguing about the draught. It was an old favourite, undertaken by mutual contrivance and invariably triggered by his mother entering the living-room on some unnecessary errand. On this occasion the crusade was in order to stash Granny Trehunsey's latest letter, yet another catalogue of complaints and criticism, behind the clock on the mantelpiece. Much more complaining and the clock would be displaced entirely to smash upon the hearth, and a happy and ironic victory that would be, since it was a revolting object decorated with china bunnies performing the rites of spring and having a chime - if one could call it that - as tuneful as an elephant seal on heat, and which somehow contrived to ejaculate always at the wrong time. The irony lay in the provenance of the timepiece, which had been donated 'to dear Lorna, now mind you take care of this heirloom and don't let George sell it,' by the author of the vitriolic wedges which threatened its very existence. A fitting end it would be, if the person who had invented the clock's impeccable pedigree became the author of its destruction, literally writing it off. The

¹Attrib. Marshal Foch.

letter lodged, Martyn's mother made to return to her part of the house, neither offering nor receiving sensory stimulation from her husband, George, who in the absence of a willing victim was playing chess against himself, right hand against left, in his corner of the living-room, or as his sons preferred to call it, the dying-room. There was a time when George had thrilled at the presence of his beloved, but time had moved on, albeit to the rhythm of an elephant seal, and his senses were dulled to all but the opportunity to consolidate his personal space. With the closing of the door this chance arose once again. 'Dog!' shouted George in fair imitation of the clock striking four minutes to seven. A visitor to the house might have been surprised by this outburst, for the Langford family had no pets. Lorna was not surprised, indeed, her response was at the ready, honed through years of training: 'You do it!' On another day she would have given no thought to performing the tortuous contortions necessary to pull the door closed while bringing the dog (a yard-long stuffed knitted sausage with cloth appendages, in grotesque imitation of a dachshund) more-or-less into place behind it, but on this occasion her mind was ablaze with discontent, stoked up by her mother's mewling manuscripts. The dog was not a Trehunsey heirloom; indeed, whenever Lorna's mother visited she made sure that she gave the absurd object a sharp kick, in retribution for the two world wars. No, the dog came from George's side of the family and he was rather attached to it, although it failed miserably in its duty which was to prevent draughts entering the living-room from under the door. Again, visitors to the Langford household might have wondered why the dog was not placed outside the living-room, so that it was not always displaced by the opening of the door. The reason was simple enough: it had always been on the inside.

Lorna's fighting response was the cue for George's favourite gambit. 'I did the washing up!' he shouted, moving bishop to bishop four. Unusually, Lorna persevered: 'I thought you were going to fix the draughts?' Knight takes bishop. 'I have fixed them!' Pawn takes knight. 'Well don't complain then, you need more exercise!' Queen takes pawn, check, and George and Lorna were participating in an argument more serious than either had prepared for, worse even than the bitter engagement of that very morning. Meanwhile their progeny were confined to quarters. James was hunched over his homework, but his attention was divided between the hiss and whistle emanating from his transistor radio which passed for the top ten countdown on Radio One, and the sounds from below which indicated that his covert tune-in would not be discovered. He imagined that he was a resistance fighter listening for his call-sign, and doodled naked bodies. De-de-de-dah, this is London, he daydreamed; thus Fate knocks at the door,¹ so keep listening for a lull in the fighting, always a danger signal that they are going to check on your progress as you strive magnificently to glorious failure in the impending eleven-plus exam. Martyn, who was too young to do homework and therefore too young to stay up, was in his own world.

Whether sleeping or awake, most children dream, and of those who dream many dream of omnipotence. Martyn Trehunsey Langford, aged eight and half and very ordinary, was no exception to this trend, except that he had more opportunity to indulge than most. If he had tried to express his visions in written form - a task not altogether inconceivable since despite his tenderness of years his essays at school were a bright spark of hope amidst an otherwise grey prospect - then his visions might have developed beyond their repetitive theme of universal salvation. On a number of occasions it had crossed Martyn's mind that he could write down his ideas, such as they were, but this thought was swiftly banished by the memory of his all-loving, all-caring, and unfortunately all-seeing mother who would doubtless find the pathetic screeds and make a fuss of him, cooing and laughing alternately, thinking she was giving him tender loving care but in fact exposing his very soul to public humiliation and ridicule. Consequently Martyn wrote nothing, and his imaginings rarely progressed beyond the vision of himself, clad in royal robes, dispensing food to the diseased and hungry from the back of a *Blue Peter* Land Rover. And how they cheered! Cue for the second scene, only attained on particularly restless evenings, the vision of Martyn, clad in royal robes, dispensing gold coins to the poor and homeless from

¹Attrib. Beethoven (referring to the first movement of his Fifth Symphony).

the back of an open top Lincoln Continental, in stately procession through the ticker-tape of a New York procession in which he was the star attraction.

It was no good; he could not sleep. Martyn gave up the royal robes and the other trappings of state, and returned to the memory of the day's events. What day was it? Sunday. What happened? Kippers and church. As always, kippers and church.

Herring used to be plentiful in these waters, before the factory ships hoovered them up together with the crab and the dab, and the plaice and the dace and all the other wild wet things.¹ One of the benefits of modern living is that the miserable herring has been virtually obliterated. Perhaps if De Gaulle had not said 'Non' the fish would have been eliminated a decade earlier, and the junior Langfords would have been spared the delights of a creature which has been beheaded, dismembered, drawn, flayed, splayed, fumigated with toxic gases and yet - truly sadistic, this - allowed to keep a full complement of bones, fine shards designed to weed out life's failures, those runts who are too weak to choose or too stupid to refuse to eat the obnoxious object. But this was a Sunday morning in May 1971, the herring were plentiful, and following their brutal execution and post-processing two of the species had been directed by the Evil One to lie in wait, basking on their platters, as James and Martyn arrived for their breakfast.

The boys were not geniuses, but neither were they stupid. They knew how to play the game. They knew that while both of their parents believed in the benefits of kippers, only their father was sufficiently resolute to insist on the rite of consumption; furthermore, they knew that if they timed it right, one or both of them could appear the aggrieved party, drawing their mother to the rescue, and while cannon to the right of them and cannon to the left of them volley'd and thunder'd² they could make good their escape amidst the smoke and confusion. It was the old principle of Divide and Rule, perfect training for an Empire which no longer existed. So, as usual, Martyn took James' cue and tinkered with the leathered corpse on his plate, gradually reducing it to a grey mush. They had to be careful at this stage; if their inability to digest was too obvious their mother would take over the process of removing the bones, and if she had her way she would pre-masticate the edible bits, as an owl does before bringing it all up again for the benefit of its young. To avoid this nightmare scenario the boys distracted their parents by a variety of tactics. On this morning James unleashed their most devastating weapon: polite conversation. Looking around for inspiration, he could not help but light upon the large portrait of The Great Ancestor, whose miserable expression indicated that in his day he too had forced his children to eat kippers.

'Dad?'

'Mmmm?'

'Who was John Napier?'

'Ah.' George was pleased. At last his eldest son and heir to the noble middle name was taking an interest in his illustrious heritage. 'Do you know what, ah, 'peccavi' means?'

'Nope,' said James, already beginning to regret his choice of subject. But Martyn was ready to sustain the momentum. 'I know!' he exclaimed, rather loudly, to hide the rather loud squishing noise as he ambitiously mashed a major portion of his fish with his fork. 'Isn't it a large South American rat?'

James saw his chance. The tactic was well-rehearsed. 'Wassock!' he muttered scornfully, with sufficient nastiness to alert his mother to the defence of her Baby. 'Now then James,' she warned. James assumed an air of innocence mingled with indignance. 'Anyway, he's wrong. Pessary. That's what the rat's called. But it's not a rat, it's a rodent. We did it ages ago.'

'I thought a pessary was a thing you stuck up your...'

'Martyn!' his father interjected, just in time.

The stage was set.

¹Kipling, *Just So Stories*.

²Tennyson, *The Charge of the Light Brigade*.

'Don't shout, George.'

'I wasn't shouting!'

'Yes, you are.'

'What are you interfering for, anyway? We were having a perfectly decent conversation...'

'You and your Napier business...'

'Well, it's better than Trehunsey. Have you ever heard of Lord Trehunsey? General Trehunsey? Trehunsey the inventor of logarithms? Of course not...'

'If you would pay more attention to looking after the living and less time going on about the past, this world would be a better place!'

'I do my bit!'

Since George always interpreted 'looking after' as 'providing for', and since being the wage-earner was one of his few qualities to have survived fifteen years of marriage relatively unscathed, this last accusation hurt him badly. He stormed out of the room, muttering to himself, occasionally returning, as it seemed to Martyn, like Mr Tod, unsure whether to bash Tommy Brock over the head with a walking-stick or with a coal-scuttle.¹ Mother put on a brave face and contrived a conversation with James about football, in which she had absolutely no interest, but for her sake the boys kept the ball rolling. Occasionally she said 'eat up now,' but everyone knew that she didn't mean it and the kippers, now ground to an inedible pulp, were accorded the last rites and consigned to the bin. The younger generation had won - again. They grinned at each other and exchanged winks: a rare example of togetherness. It was time to go to church.

George liked church because it made him feel as if he was doing his duty. James liked church because it was a legitimate means of being passive. Lorna neither liked or disliked church - why does one always have to have reasons? - she just went to church because she went to church. Martyn hated church.

Of course he hated church, you say. It is quite clear (say you) that Martyn is the main character of the story, and he has to be made interesting by some device or another. So he hates church. Convenient, you think.

This is no mere story. Happenstance is meaningless, and without meaning there is nothing to believe, and without belief there is no reason for continuing. So choose; accept the following argument or stop reading. I'm not fussed; if you've got this far you must have acquired the book somehow, and I've got my commission whether you finish reading it or not. Up yours, dear reader.

As the youngest of a family Martyn is at the bottom of the chain of command. His father patronises him, his mother makes a baby of him, his brother is always three years older. Three people to obey, and no-one to command, no-one to direct, no-one to be the target of his pent-up frustration. So naturally Martyn hates church, just as he hates team games, cub scouts, and any other authority which organises people without respecting their opinion. Of course, while he was of tender age, Martyn never formulated this line of reasoning to himself or out loud, but that does not make it invalid. One can have a strong feeling about something without being able to express it, indeed, the inability to express might be the reason for having the strong feeling in the first place. Be that as it may, Martyn hated church.

Martyn did not hate everything to do with church.

He loved the symbolic unity of the whole family walking together to and from church. He loved the grandeur of the high vaulted ceiling, the grandeur of the procession, the grandeur of the thundering organ. He loved the hymns, as long as no-one tried to make him sing audibly. He loved the acts of simple devotion: Miss Lupin, eighty-plus and nearly blind, but sure-footed in her trek to the Emmanuel, she had made the journey so many times

¹Beatrix Potter, *The Tale of Mr Tod*.

that she could navigate probably by following her footsteps worn in the pavement. He loved his mother's suede church coat, which he would brush this way and that with his finger, now creating a race-track, now a talisman to ward off boredom during the sermon. As a matter of policy Martyn liked the sermon; it was his device for avoiding being trooped out with the other children for Sunday School lessons, which comprised coercion and anarchy in roughly equal measure. Coercion meant having to do something together, an organised game or an organised play or an organised whatever. No-one could opt-out; everyone had to be seen to be enjoying themselves; Martyn hated it. Anarchy was no better, because it meant there was no recognition for completing the otherwise pointless tasks set the children by way of religious instruction, typically involving the colouring of a representation of Jesus, in shining robes, distributing largesse to the generality of mankind.

James did not share his brother's antipathy towards Sunday School, and without an ally Martyn could avoid the mid-service exodus only rarely, a feat requiring considerable diplomatic groundwork with heavy dependence upon the Divide and Rule principle. But on this particular Sunday morning, that which had worked for the kippers was not going to work for church, because mother had suddenly decided that she was going to stay at home.

She was standing at the kitchen sink. Bowl full of cutlery and crockery and hot soapy water overflowing like her tears. Plate in left hand, mop in right, going round and round and round like each day the sun rises and sets and nothing has changed.

George said nothing. She's letting the side down. Not doing her duty.

James said nothing. I always get the blame. Not my fault this time.

'Please don't cry, Mum?' said Martyn, standing at her side, eyes imploring for a sign that things were all right really. With difficulty, but for the sake of reassuring her Baby, Lorna suppressed her weeping. 'I'm all right. You'd better go now.' She affected a smile.

She remained at the kitchen sink as the menfolk made their departure. As they left, they could hear her humming her sad tune, *Stranger on the Shore*.¹ Many times before Martyn had heard it, and now it played on in his mind long after they were out of earshot.

George and his sons trudged gloomily down the hill to church. From Thornhill Gardens to Thornhill Way, left at Vapron Road then right at the main road, past the Mannamead corner shops, to the church known as Emmanuel. One of those not turned into a roundabout following the wartime erasure of the fair city of Plymouth.

'Good Morning, Miss Lupin. Not too bad, thank you. No, she couldn't make it. No, she's fine. Yes, I'll tell her. After you, ma'am. Morning, vicar. No, she couldn't make it.'

They took their pews. The organ blew, the procession processed, the clergy, choir and congregation chorused, and the only Son of God was pronounced the only Son of God, begotten not made, several times. It was time. 'Off you go now. And you Martyn. There's a good chap.'

'Dad?'

'Son?'

'I want to stay with you.'

For George it was one of those moments when the universe is squeezed into a ball.² Suddenly you are the focus of all the eyes that ever saw. The clergy, choir and congregation are looking at you. The cherubs and saints are looking at you. Those who

¹Acker Bilk's romantic theme.

²Eliot, *The Love Song of J Alfred Prufrock*.

you have wronged are looking at you. The stained-glass blood-stained Christ is looking at you.

‘All right.’

Lazarus is come from the dead.¹

Throughout the sermon George fiddled and fidgeted. First it was the stinging sensation in his eyes. He dabbed them. Then it was the heat. He loosened his collar. Then his underpants seemed the wrong size, but he couldn’t do anything about that.

‘Dad!’

‘Oh no. You don’t want the toilet?’ George nearly panicked as the stark choice of the lavatorial imperative - take Martyn out in the middle of the sermon, under those eyes, those eyes! - or do nothing until the next hymn, and risk a catastrophic leak! - seared through his mind.

‘Naaw. Can you stop jiggling your leg please?’

‘Ah. Sorry, son.’

‘S’alright.’

George’s unprecedented magnanimity had cheered Martyn to such an extent that he was unaffected by his father’s subsequent discomfort, except that this afforded the unique opportunity to reverse roles, with Martyn reciting the fidget critic’s liturgy for once, improving his humour further still. As a consequence he controlled his own genuflections and bestowed his attention upon the vicar, who, as it appeared to him, was making rather heavy weather of what was a perfectly straightforward parable. Eventually, as the vicar appeared to talk slower and slower and repeat himself over and over, Martyn’s faculties wandered. A little tune hummed in his mind, eventually formulating itself: Ooo-bee-doo... I wanna be like you...,² and Martyn found himself staring at Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

Jesus looked down from His vantage point high above the altar. Sunlight streamed through Him, illuminating the face of one who sat staring upward, trance-fixed. To see his expression, a casual observer might have wondered whether the lad was in receipt of a revelation direct from God; but the only person who could be in a position to observe Martyn was his father, who tended to notice only those things which displeased him, and who in any case continued to be far from casual; all of which was just as well, because the casual observer would have been wrong. Children rarely have the sensibilities of adults, and the spiritual yearning that leads to revelation does not come until its due time, which in Martyn’s case was a decade hence. Martyn stared up at the image of Christ, but his inner eye was turned elsewhere.

Ooo-bee-doo. Hacking my way through the thick undergrowth, with nothing but a loincloth to protect me, and there - right there in front - the monkey-strewn ruins of an ancient temple. Ooo-bee-doo. You want to be like me! Of course you do. I want to be like me. I am Mowgli, tall, dark and beautiful. You may kneel and worship. Let us pray. Take me to the top, so I can be king of the castle. The stone here is red, Devon red sandstone, and I am carved in the stone... well, not me exactly, more like Jesus I suppose, except He doesn’t stay the same... now He has several arms, waving adieu adieu to yeu and yeu and yeu...³ now two arms, folded in His lap, like Buddha in that book at school, sitting and smiling and sitting and smiling... this is boring.

Buddha, whose stillness made the circumlocutory sermon seem interesting by comparison, brought Martyn’s meditation gently to a close. For a little while Martyn remained still, puzzled by a series of voices that spoke to him quietly but insistently: Why only one Son of God? What about the others, the one with all the arms and the one sitting still? What about Mowgli? What about me? Shortly, however, his reverie was interrupted by the

¹*Prufrock.*

²Disney’s version of *The Jungle Book.*

³*The Sound of Music.*

necessity to all rise and sing. Thereafter to the end of the service Martyn was his usual self, much to the relief of George who, through the recitation of the don't-do-this-don't-do-that creed, was likewise able to return to his usual self. After the service they infected James with the same conservatism, not a difficult task since James, being easy-going, caught on to whatever scene was on offer, and to complete the rehabilitation they took a detour on the return journey, through Hartley Park to play on the swings.

Thus it was that when the menfolk arrived home, just as the elephant seal was barking six minutes past one, they were in a much happier state than when they departed. Mother, too, was restored to her usual cheerful self, having taken out her frustration upon the laundry, which now dressed the lines traversing the garden. At lunch conversation was without controversy as they planned the statutory Sunday afternoon outing, and not once did anyone refer to the earlier, darker events, for even young children can be taught to never look back, never face your fears, always turn away from them and pretend they have gone away.

Not a bad day, thought Martyn, as he settled on to his better side for sleeping. Ooo-bee-doo, I wanna be like you, mancub. I really don't see that Jesus is better than the others. Perhaps I am God. I wonder if Napier was a God? Funny... Dad never did tell us what a peccavi was.

* * *

7 December 1983

Father Descartes, you taught us that to embark on the search for Truth we should first cleanse our minds of all preconceived notions. With due respect, sir, you are wrong. There is no tabula rasa of the mind, and all one achieves by rejecting the more obvious ideas is to allow the weaker ones to take over. You thought you could have it both ways, didn't you? By proclaiming your method of doubt you could make your sanctimonious soul appear as pure as Persil, while with your ridiculous reasoning you could prove that God was alive and well and living in Flanders. Such ego! Such naïveté! Did you not know that we don't live in the best of all possible worlds? Did you not stop to think that one day someone might be less scrupulous than yourself? Did you not imagine that one day your own method of doubt would be used by the people against God Himself?

Sir, I humbly submit the proposition that just as a point is fixed in space with the assistance of Cartesian coordinates, so we must make our search for Truth with the assistance of a belief system as a frame of reference. That being so, even if a particular teaching appears defective, it is not better to hold on to it until one has found an adequate replacement?

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'Aao, bhaiyah. Eik chai. Shukriah.' A bony hand attached to a bony arm passed the earthen cup of earthen tea carefully through the open carriage window, skilfully negotiating the bars without spillage, returning whence it came clutching the grubby rupee note offered in exchange. The transaction completed, the chai-wallah continued his patrol along the platform skirting the 29 Up, intoning 'Chai, chai!' in a voice brittle and cracked like rust.

In the shimmer of a rust red sun rising to the rear, a rust red train was standing at a rust red station, its steam life-blood pulsing impatiently within its mighty iron heart, while its army of artisans, like rust red termites attending their queen, were stirring up the rust red dust in their eagerness to assist. The rust red tea in the rust red pot swiftly consumed, and the small dark man, the one who had called the chai-wallah 'Bhaiyah,' tweaked into perfection his brilliant-white stiff-starched khadi, adjusted his spectacles, hair and visage,

folded his legs concertina-like under him, opened his old copy of the *Gita* at random, and died to the world and all therein.

I am Arjun, I see old friends amidst my enemies, and old enemies amidst my friends. How then can I lead my friends into battle against my enemies? Lord Krishna says I must do my duty, and the duty of every man in this age is to obey Lord Krishna, and Lord Krishna says I must fight.

But I am not Arjun, thought Sohan, as he ritualistically polished his spectacles on one of his pyjama turn-ups. And if, as Lord Krishna says, each age has its Teacher, then it is possible that in the present age the Teacher is not Lord Krishna. Who, then, is my Teacher? Who is my Charioteer? What is the way forward?

The great train moved forward, the motion imperceptible at first, gliding out of the station like an ocean liner out of harbour, its motion considerably more stately than its complexion which was more like that of a tramp steamer. The rust red juggernaut gradually picked up speed for the last leg to Delhi. The other Juggernaut, in the mind of Sohan, remained rooted to the spot. This won't do, he thought. Nothing is still. If you cannot go forward then you must go back. Back to the very beginning.

The first witness, m'lud. Sohan chotu, village orphan boy, scion of the world. And what do you know of these miscreants? I know they drank and gambled so I broke their bottles and scattered their cards. And what did they do? They beat me. And what did you do? I broke their bottles and scattered their cards. Then I ran away to the big city.

The second witness, m'lud. Sohan shaitan, homeless city boy, heir to the world. And were you with these dacoits? Yes, they found me, they told me I must steal or I would starve. And did you? No, it was wrong. I ran away from them. So you starved? Yes, for a time. Then I found the temple. The sadhu beat me because I was dirty. He beat you? Yes. So you ran away? No. Why not? I would not run away because of a beating. I ran away when people were bad, otherwise they might pollute me. So the sadhu fed you? Yes, eventually. He fed me and gave me the *Gita*. And what did you do for him? He was my Teacher. I did everything for him. What did he teach you? He taught me to read. He taught me that there were laws, but the laws were weak because people were weak. He taught me that I should not run away. He taught me that many of the people and even the nations in the world were miscreants and dacoits. He taught me that it was my duty to study the law, so that I could uphold it. He taught me that I should not rest until the whole world was lawful. And did you study the law? Yes, he sent me away to college. I never saw him again. We exchanged letters often, but one day his letters stopped coming and I knew that he had gone. Gone? Died. What did you do? I shaved my head and wept for a week.

The third witness, m'lud. Sohan bhai, poor college boy, friend of the world. And what do you know of this woman? I know her face. I shall not forget her face. I know she wore a khadi sari. I know she studied languages. Did you approach her? No. I made enquiries. Her name was Jaya Gupta. I sent a message to Guptaji, requesting an interview. He surprised me by coming to my tin shed. I told him I loved his daughter and I wished to marry her. He liked my ideas about world order, he liked my eyes and my simple clothes, but disapproved of the tin shed. He said I should wait, but I knew that would mean losing my chance so I insisted that he let Jaya decide. Fortunately he said yes, and fortunately she said yes. It took me years to pay off the loans I raised to pay for our marriage ceremony. Everyone was there.

The fourth witness, m'lud. Sohan Sahai, junior state court lawyer, arbiter to the world. And what do you remember of that day? I remember the appellant was a man who wished to educate children for the good of the world, but the teacher unions were stopping him. I remember staying in the session, for his sake, despite the message on the scrap of paper which had been passed my way. I remember that when the court rose I left everything and

ran and ran all the way to the hospital. I remember the expression on old Rama's face. I remember gaining a daughter and losing a wife.

The fifth witness, m'lud. Sohan sahab, aspiring state politician, candidate to the world. And what are the facts of this case? Here is a man with no parents, no Teacher, no wife, and three children. Here is a man who wishes to set the law of the world aright. Here is a man cast into sudden and unexpected doubt by the sad fact that no law on earth can bring back the dead.

This won't do, Sohan told himself. Think positive. Your children are intelligent and healthy. You have a home and a position in society. The world is a bad place but you must not run away. You are a politician now, and you can change the world. Anyone can change the world, if they set their mind to it. Whatever the mind of man can conceive and believe, it can achieve.¹ That's it. That's what you must tell the conference. That's the way forward.

Delhi at last.

* * *

'Old Park Road... Broad Park Road... Ganna Park Road... Edgcumbe Park Road... Thornbury Park AVENUE...', they recite as the old Zephyr, packed to overflowing with all their holiday paraphernalia, gathers speed along the familiar route. 'Endsleigh Park Road... Kingswood Park AVENUE... Wembury Park Road... Burleigh Park Road... Bickham Park Road... Torr View AVENUE!' then over the main road and up the hill, straining to be the first to see the bridge, 'Do sit down, it isn't as if it'll go away if no-one saw it!' 'There it is!' 'I saw it first!' then a right turn, and 'Wheeee!' down past the cemetery where Granny Trehunsey was cremated last year, and 'Yowwww!' up the other side, change gear, fork left, on a bit, and there they are at the gateway to paradise. A slight delay at the toll (in those days one paid to get in as well as out), then 'I.K. Brunel, ENGINEER!' and they are in Cornwall and singing the old songs, 'Doe, a deer, a female deer,'² 'Two wheels on my wagon,'³ 'I had a wheelbarrow, the front wheel went round,'⁴ 'Heigh ho, heigh ho, it's to Trevone we go, with a bucket and spade and a hand grenade,'⁵ and the occasional new one, 'I can't get no satisfaction, all I want is easy action BABY!'⁶ 'What's easy action?' 'Ah, sex without responsibility, son...', 'Oh GEORGE!' and before they know it they are through the Bodmin rain, 'Mum, why does it always rain in Bodmin?' and back into the sunshine, over the railway crossing, 'All clear, Dad!' 'I hate to disappoint you, James, but the line was closed years ago, thank you Doctor Bloody Beeching!' 'Language, George!' then fork left through Washaway, 'Dry up!' and getting a bit tired now, so they stop at Wadebridge, 'Tide's out!' 'I need the toilet!' and buy the best pasties in the world. After a break they move on again, the last few miles seeming endless, stopping at the petrol station to take in the view over the estuary and some Four Star, then through St. Issey, 'Izzy Wizzy, lets get busy!' Little Petherick, 'That was close!' 'DO look where you're driving, George!' and along the main road, past Padstow United Football Club where the grass grows as high as an elephant's eye,⁷ to the place where instead of following the main road round to the left, or taking the right turn to Padstow, they dive down the narrow lane directly ahead. Now they are on home territory. Confined on both sides by wild hedgerows, they seemingly hurtle along, through the Trethillick cowpats, arriving, at last, at the place known as Crugmeer. Left turn through the gate, up the gravel chicane, grinding to a halt outside the great

¹Napoleon Hill.

²*The Sound of Music.*

³Lonnie Donegan?

⁴Trad.

⁵After *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs.*

⁶T. Rex, *Solid Gold, Easy Action.*

⁷*Oklahoma!*

farmhouse. Everyone leaps out, how-do-you-do-ing, not-too-bad-thank-you-ing and ooh-arr-ing at every conceivable opportunity, renewing acquaintance with the dog, the goat, and dear old Mrs Trigg.

The British idea of holiday. You go back to the same place year after year, even though the beach is as clean as a refinery, the mattresses are as firm as blancmange, and the weather is as reliable as an elephant seal disguised as a clock. You do the same things year after year, getting covered in high-grade tar from the Torrey Canyon, stubbing a naked toe on the way down to the beach and another on the return journey, practically splitting your foot in twain as you dig for victory, having a stray dog wee on your towel while you swim, all the time getting marinated, windblown, sandblasted, sunburnt. There are a world of places you haven't seen, a lifetime of things you haven't done, and quite a few buildings you haven't been photographed in front of. But for James and Martyn, paradise was a beach and a windswept headland in North Cornwall.

As usual, they had a week, not long considering the list of experiences that had to be relived. First and foremost was the clambering experience, which was George's great contribution to the upbringing of his children. At low tide he would take them down the Round Hole and out through the natural tunnel to the foot of the otherwise inaccessible sea-cliff, then over the massive boulders, following the cliff round to the Cat's Back. One day it will all collapse into the sea, and only memories will remain of the knife-edge isthmus leading from safe ground out to a massive sea stack, itself undermined by three conjoined tunnels. Scaling the cliff at this point, by a track too treacherous to attempt in the other direction, they would undertake the Greatest Test: crossing the Cat's Back. George was not too fond of heights, but they had done it together a couple of years before and now it was mandatory. The boys were terrified, but for the sake of their father they affected nonchalance. Making their way back to the farm, a tremendous tiredness would come over them, more a result of the adrenaline they had expended than the exercise they had taken. It was the ultimate Boy's Day Out.

Following the clambering experience, the next priority was to undertake the never-ending civil engineering project. Again, George took the lead in building the great dams and canals which came to dominate Trevone, trapping the streamwater that would otherwise run down the middle of the beach to the sea. Every day there had to be a dam, and every day it had to be bigger and better than before. When each dam was about to burst from the sheer weight of water, it was Martyn's prerogative to make the fatal incision. Then they would stand there, leaning on spades or arms akimbo, watching the flood fan across the lower beach, catching unawares those folk who had foolishly encamped on the previously dry expanse, saying to themselves: 'There. We did that.'

Then there was the hike past Tregudda, rediscovering the gorge, the waterspout and the bottomless spring, all the way to Stepper Point, with its Day Mark Beacon and ancient rusted windlasses for rescuing ships from the peril of the Doom Bar, back through Hawker's Cove, peering through the windows of the old lifeboat station, rendered high, dry and useless by the victorious shoal, and finally the long climb back through Lellissick, stopping awhile to poke the pig. One day was set aside for a ferry trip from Padstow to Rock, and another afternoon for a boat trip round the islands or to go mackerel fishing. Trevone had to be swum every day, other places had to be swum at least once during the week: Harlyn, Cove, and the pool at Rocky Beach. The Mare Pool had to be dived into, a rare feat since it was only accessible at low spring tide. Then there were the people who had to be seen: Mr 'Who put the pepper in the cat's milk?' Wortle, custodian of the Cove car park at Tregirls, and the two peculiar old witches who, troll-like, claimed a toll whenever a driver risked his vehicle on the atrocious road to the Trevoise lighthouse. Every breakfast there was milk fresh and warm from the cow, every lunch comprised the best pasties in the world, collected by George from Padstow, and every dinner was a full roast.

One might have thought that there was enough on the agenda to keep everyone fully occupied. However, this particular year - when James was thirteen, and Martyn ten - there

was an added dimension: romance. Not, of course, between Lorna and George, whose relationship was creaking under the additional strain of having to be seen to be enjoying themselves. Nor even did it involve James, not in practice anyway, for he was embarking on the shy and carbuncular phase of life. The romance was between Martyn and a frizzy, freckled, bespectacled thing called Georgie, and to them it was a serious matter.

How do people meet on the first occasion? Sometimes accidentally, sometimes inevitably, sometimes intentionally. Long after the event Martyn analysed his first romance as something which had-to-happen-accidentally-on-purpose. In addition to the two protagonists, the key ingredients were lots of oil, a sheep fold, and a handful of blackberries.

The accident.

Smash. Whoops. I've, er, found the oil, mum.'

'Oh Martyn!'

Oil everywhere. Frying oil all over George's chin, the residue of the bag of chips which had caught his fancy while investigating the Padstow shops, passing the time in happy and splendid isolation until the lunchtime consignment of pasties arrived from Wadebridge. Sun tan oil all over Lorna. Torrey Canyon oil all over James. Eucalyptus oil all over the rocks, courtesy of Martyn.

'There's another bottle back at the farm. No - don't you go, James. I'm not having you trailing tar all over Mrs Trigg's stair carpet. You go and dig something. Martyn, you'll have to get the bottle, only mind you don't break that one as well, or I'll have your guts for garters. Mind the GLASS! All right. Don't be long, Dad'll be back soonish. And please don't go near that hole. Bye. No, don't worry, I'll pick up the bits. See you.'

The inevitable event.

Crossing the stile into the Round Hole Field on Trevone's Eastern cliff, Martyn gave a last wave to the two waving ants on the beach and, following close under the wall which neatly separated the headland from the rest of Britain, swiftly climbed the hill to the point where the wall stopped, the land fell away, and the Cat's Back stood in full glory. This point was a major junction, with some paths following the coast, some going inland to Porthmissen and some, ominously, leading over the switchback to the nascent island. The paths were confused by a proliferation of stone walls, a network of blind alleys designed to fool sheep into giving themselves up. The sheep were not the only ones to be fooled and Martyn took a wrong turn, bringing him to the heart of the maze and Georgie.

Quickly scanning the scene, Martyn realised that the only way out was the only way in, and to escape with dignity he would have to make conversation. 'Morning,' he uttered gruffly in his best West Country accent, turning a shade pink as he remembered it was just past noon.

'Wotcher,' said Georgie in her best Cockney accent. She looked up from whatever she was doing, and grinned. 'Nice 'ere, innit?'

If you like sheep's poo, thought Martyn. 'Ooh-arr,' he said.

There was a bit of a silence.

'Come 'ere offen, do ee?' Martyn ventured.

I'm 'iding, innit?' she confided enthusiastically.

'Ooh-arr?'

'You wot?'

'Who are you hiding from?' Martyn interpreted hurriedly.

'Oh... them,' said Georgie, adding 'innit?' as an afterthought.

There was another silence.

Silence is golden, it allows time to reflect on the changes and chances of the world. In this case, it gives the opportunity to break the narrative and consider the likelihood of Martyn meeting Georgie in a smelly sheep-fold in the middle of nowhere. First: their meeting was not at all unlikely, since they took the same path to the beach each day, Martyn from Crugmeer and Georgie from nearby Lellissick. Indeed, their paths had crossed several

times already, but out in the open and in the company of others, so neither had noticed. Second: before lunch the sheep-fold was Georgie's favourite haunt, a refuge from her big sisters who otherwise insisted on trying to teach her to swim. She emerged for lunch and played on the beach in the afternoon, safe in the knowledge that no-one, not even her sisters, attempted to swim on a full stomach. Third: Martyn's mid-day journey was unusual for him, but having undertaken it, there was nothing unusual about his getting lost in the sheep-maze. At this point you might wonder, with some justification, why the sheep-fold was not brim-full of little boys and girls. The reason is, they were elsewhere.

The intentional act.

'I best be off,' said Martyn uncomfortably. He did not move.

Georgie made up her mind. 'Guess wot I got?' she sang coyly.

'Blackberries?' said Martyn, who had already seen them.

'Ave one?'

Thus invited, Martyn could hardly refuse, but in doing so he was conscious of entering the frizzy one's sphere of influence. As a token gesture he picked out the smallest nodule he could find from the gleaming black pile cupped in her palm. The chosen fruit was unusually wizened and had a suspicious-looking hole. 'Thank ee,' he enthused fulsomely.

'I'm Georgie.'

'Ooh-arr.'

'Oo'r you?'

'Martyn... with a 'y'.'

'Why wot?'

'Spelt with a 'y'. That's 'ow they spells it in these 'ere parts.'

'You come from 'ere then, d'yah?'

'Sort-of,' muttered Martyn, clearly contradicted by his own complexion. He suddenly showed great interest in dislodging the blackberry pips stuck between his molars.

'I don't,' said Georgie carelessly, and not for the first time Martyn was bewildered by the strange self-confidence of this girl who was not ashamed of being an emmett. 'Guess what?' he said with a conspiratorial leer, in an attempt to change the subject.

'Wot?'

'Bet you don't know what 'easy action' means.'

'Sex without responsibility?'

'Ow d'you know that!'

'S'n old one, innit. Now you guess wot?'

'Wot?'

'Bet you don't know what 'sex' means.'

'Bet I do!'

'Yeah? Go on then.'

'It means... men and wimmin. You know.'

'Wot about 'em, then?'

'Well, s'obvious. Birds and bees and that.' Martyn was floundering.

'You don't know, d'you?'

Martyn fell silent.

'I'll show you,' Georgie said softly.

'See?'

Martyn saw.

He saw Farmer Trigg standing in the middle of the farmyard, holding a long whip, looking like a sadly neglected garden gnome. He saw the cow and the bull, apparently trying to circumambulate their master, but they were strangely handicapped. Then he saw that they were making the beast with one backside.¹

Martyn took Georgie to his tank.

¹Iago in *Othello*: '...your daughter and the Moor are now making the beast with two backs.'

Behind the cowsheds there was a strip of ground where Mr Trigg dumped his old agricultural machinery. The dump was overgrown with brambles and nettles, making it inaccessible to all but the very determined or foolhardy. But Martyn knew, from years of exploration, that near the centre of the wasteground there was a large metal storage tank, enclosed but for a child-sized round hole at the top and rust-holes at the bottom. Using a couple of old planks to flatten the nettles, Martyn now blazed the trail to his most secret hideaway.

'Nice in 'ere, innit?'

It wasn't; the tank was hot and claustrophobic, and to avoid hitting their heads, which would have been painful, or stooping, which would have been undignified, they had to squat.

'Ooh-arr,' said Martyn.

'What d'you fink o' that, then?'

'What?'

'Them cows doing it.'

'Mazing!'

'Ma 'n' Pa do that all the time.'

'Naah!'

'Don't yours?'

The thought had never entered Martyn's mind. 'Not too sure 'bout that,' he said doubtfully. 'Don't think so.'

'Go on then,' said Georgie.

'Go on then what?'

'Show us your thing.'

'What for?'

'Cos I say so.'

'Naah!'

'I showed you them cows, dinn'I?'

'Don't look, then.'

Georgie covered her eyes while Martyn struggled with his belt.

'G'wan. Quick now.'

Georgie looked. 'Cor,' she said.

'Thass' nuff.'

'Your turn then.'

Georgie dropped her knickers.

'Can't see!'

'I'm doing me best!'

'There's nothing there?'

'Mazing, that.'

'Yeah. You're the first boy ter show me 'is thing.'

'Yeah.'

'Not very big, is it?'

'Bigger'n yours!'

'That's different, innit?'

'Big enough, anyroad.'

'Yeah.'

'Mazing, that.'

'Yeah.'

'Wot'll we do now, d'you fink?'

Martyn suddenly remembered the oil. 'I gotta go!'

'Same 'ere, I s'pose... see yah then.'

Martyn dallied. He was troubled by something he couldn't precisely place. Something he ought to be saying, perhaps. Georgie saved him the bother. 'See yah tomorrer?' she propositioned.

'Yes!'

'Same place?'

'Yes!'

'See yah then.'

'See yah!'

Mrs Trigg wondered if the boy hadn't had a bit too much sun. Perhaps she had misheard, what with the whirring of the milk separator and the thumping of the butter churn in her little dairy, and the great thundering as he galloped through the farmhouse, first up the main stairs, then into his parents' bedroom, then down the back stairs; but she could have sworn that she heard him singing 'Nymphs and shepherds, come away, come away.'¹ Nymphs and shepherds?

'See yah tomorrer?... Yes!' But tomorrer was Friday, and Martyn had forgotten that Friday had already been designated for the family trip to Rock. That morning he attempted to make life miserable for the party in order that they might return quickly, but this had the contrary effect of encouraging his father to disappear on a long walk, ostensibly to rediscover Betjeman's church in the sand. They arrived back at Crugmeer hot, tired, bad-tempered, and only just in time for dinner. On Saturday morning, while his parents and James tried to squeeze the luggage into the car for the return journey, Martyn, at the risk of being found out, made several forays to the tank and the sheep fold, but Georgie was nowhere to be found.

Never mind, he thought. I'll see her next time.
But he never did.

* * *

9 December 1993

When I was a teenager I would demonstrate my independence by undertaking long, solitary walks through the countryside. There was a particular occasion when I followed a railway line until it came to a tunnel. I thought long and hard about whether to go through. What if a train came along? What if the tunnel caved in? What if there were rats? I could see the other end of the tunnel, a small but brilliant semicircle of light directly ahead. Since the hillside was heavily wooded, the route over the top seemed none too easy. It wouldn't take too long if I walked briskly, so I took the tunnel.

I had read somewhere that the singing of the rails gave one ample warning that a train was coming, so for the sake of speed I deviated from my earlier caution and walked on the sleepers. Every so often I looked back in order to check my progress, and each time the semicircle behind me was smaller than before, even as the semicircle in front of me was becoming steadily larger.

The tunnel was longer than I had imagined, but I set myself the target of not stopping to rest until I had reached the middle. It was not the nicest of places, and I did not rest for long. I set out again but a sudden doubt hit me. Which way was I going? A small semicircle of light in front of me; an identical one behind me. Which way was forward? Had I turned round? If so, how many times?

It seemed as if my universe had been squeezed into a ball. It was suddenly very hot. I couldn't breathe. I felt dizzy and sick. I was absolutely panic-stricken.

¹Trad.

I might have stayed there a long time, perhaps bumbling around and around like Dr Watson, perhaps looking for clues to differentiate forward from reverse like Sherlock Holmes. I did neither. My mind was gripped by fear, and in order to overcome my mental paralysis I took the pragmatic solution: I chose a direction at random, and marched.

By chance I emerged from the tunnel to unfamiliar territory and was able to continue the direction of my hike, although this objective was by now largely irrelevant. Taking big gulps of fresh air and feeling rather light-headed, I removed from the tracks and clinker and continued my journey on the grassy verge. It was as well that I did so; I was less than one hundred yards from the tunnel when the rails suddenly set up a tremendous buzzing, as if they had just been connected to the National Grid. One moment I was gaping at the rails, too startled to think. The next moment I was gaping up at the train, apparently bearing down on me. It was one of those occasions when one falls down in sheer surprise, and I did.

If I had given in to my emotional or rational promptings then bits of me would still be in the tunnel to this day. The moral of the story is evident: there are occasions in life when one should not procrastinate, rather one should follow the light obsessively, no matter where it shines. It seems to me now that this applies in the cases when one is searching for love or for Truth, just as much as it applies when one is trying to avoid being run down by a locomotive. It is my greatest regret that when I was young this wisdom did not extend beyond the instinct for self-preservation.

* * *

The ambitious agenda for the one-day conference on 'World Peace and Justice through World Government' was little more than half completed when the chief guest, a junior minister of central government, indicated that it was time he should move on to pastures new. It was to his credit that he had stayed for any period after delivering his irrelevant oration, though it was clear that he had delayed his departure simply in order to give the television crew time to overcome their technical difficulties. With the departure of the chief guest in a throng of advisers, admirers, chamchas, crawlers, policemen and photographers, there was a general exodus of the remaining politicians, looking like a flock of sheep in their khadi. Trailing the dignitaries were their extended families of servants, an entourage to cater for every eventuality, right down to the tiffin-holder-wallah and fly-swatter-wallah. Sohan knew his place: he was in the vanguard of the procession.

'Ah, Sahai sahab, yes a fine conference. Truly you have worked very hard. You know this man?' The question had been directed at one of the inner circle, but it was perfectly clear that the chief guest was waxing rhetorical and did not expect anyone to speak other than himself. 'This is Sri Sohan Sahai, a great man I tell you. I knew your grandfather, you know that? A great freedom fighter, oh yes. Keep up the good work. How about joining Congress, Sahai sahab? This independent seat of yours, it won't survive the next election you know. Namaste! Ah, Trivedi sahab, now I remember you as a baby...'

The procession moved on. Sohan did the rounds of the other politicians, noting as he did so that many were leaving before giving their scheduled speeches. He did not dissuade them, for they had already fulfilled their purpose. Indeed, he eased their departure through (as Shankar had once observed) 'the liberal application of ghee': greasing their egos until, wreathed in garlands and smiles, they felt that enough fuss had been made of them that they could leave in dignity. In time the confluence of politicians and Ambassadors¹ eased, and Sohan felt able to return to his conference.

¹To this day the Ambassador remains the car of officialdom in India.

Yes, he thought to himself, it is my conference. I had the idea, I funded it, I set up the organising committee, I saved them at the last minute when all seemed lost. Pity about his speech... but how he spoke about me just now, in front of all the others! I must invite him again. What was that about my grandfather?

Sohan's conference secretary, who had spent the previous two weeks dashing to and from Delhi carrying fresh and often contradictory instructions to the army of local support staff, was surprised to hear his master laugh out loud as he made his way into the hall. He's happy, thought the factotum. We've done a good job. Bonuses all round.

The conference struggled on, its ranks much depleted and its programme shot to pieces. To encourage the remaining speakers Sohan sat through the rest of the proceedings in the middle of the front row, but this expression of solidarity was rather spoiled by his habit of beckoning his assistants to receive instructions for a variety of tasks, none of them urgent or essential. Sohan would have fidgeted less if the information content of the talks had been greater, but the speakers had been chosen less for their merit and more because Sohan wanted a balanced ticket. All of the talks confirmed the maxim that the ability of a speaker to communicate is inversely proportional to the content of the message. The stronger speakers delivered weak talks, typically extolling the virtues of utopia, demanding a world government now, and complaining about the treatment of India at the hands of the West. Some talks began in a more thoughtful vein, but as a rule these were given by appalling speakers, some stuttering, some mumbling, some rambling the time away. Sohan's conference notebook remained largely devoid of notes and eventually lost most of its leaves as he scribbled out messages to his workforce.

Sohan had planned originally to stay the night in Delhi at a cheap youth hostel, but he could see that with its depleted list of speakers the conference would be over in time for him to catch the overnight train home. Accordingly he dispatched a reliable peon to the railway station to obtain, by hook or by crook, a ticket for the 29 Down, in return for his ticket on the next day's Gomti Express. A few minutes later he sent another peon after the first, just in case.

The last speaker ground to a premature and confused halt part way through an otherwise perpetual sentence, and Sohan took the opportunity to commandeer the dais and deliver a short but spirited vote of thanks to all concerned, formally closing the conference. A few minutes later he was in the back of a taxi on his way to the station via the youth hostel where he intended to take a quick shower and pick up his overnight bag which had been left there that morning. Unmoved by the imperial grandeur of the buildings and avenues of New Delhi - the President's House, the Rajpath, Connaught Circus - he leafed through the tattered remains of his notebook. Surely there must be something new? One page of his notes seemed relatively promising:

French Rev., start of mod. age, 197 years ago this week
Can't hear him.
Equality, Liberty, Fraternity
3 main mod. polit. ideologies: Communism, Nationalism, Racialism
Something Effendi?? Didn't catch it? Muslim?
Each ideo. represents an extreme
Comm. is excess equality
Nat. is XS liberty
Race. is XS fraternity
Interesting!
Breakdown of old world order - need new model, beyond 3 ideas.
Quote? Earth one country?! Baha something.
Can't hear him? Speak up.
Better P.A. next time? Refund?
Baha? Mod. Muslim sect?
Girls schools - La Marts, Loreto or CMS?

La Marts v. old. Does it teach anything? CMS pushes them.
Main thing high ideals, good morals (2) bookish learning (3) strong science side.
Will they be OK in Christian school? Check at Lions Club.
Send them all to USA?! Shankar first? Money?

Can't tell, thought Sohan. Maybe there's something there, maybe not. Hai Ram. He put away his notes and his spectacles, which he only needed for close work. Taking a short cut for the youth hostel, the taxi turned right into Canning Road. 'Driver! Ruko, ruko, stop!'

'Eik minute, driver.' Sohan got out of the car and walked back a few yards to read the sign again. 'Baha'i House.' Yes, that was what he thought it had said. Baha'i?

Sohan walked slowly up the drive. It was an old colonial mansion, but not dilapidated like the others. Flowers everywhere.

An old gentleman, his face wrinkled like a walnut, was watering the flowers with a rather limp hose. Sohan guessed from his features that he was from the Middle East. 'You like the flowers?' the old man said, giving a broad toothless smile. Sohan feared he was a simpleton. 'What is this place?' he asked.

'This is Baha'i House.'

'Yes. I read the sign. What is Baha'i?'

'Baha'i means Baha'i Faith.'

'A religion?'

'Yes.'

'Are you Muslims?'

'No.'

'It sounds Muslim.'

'Christ born a Jew. Baha'u'llah born a Muslim. Not Muslim.'

'Baha'u'llah?'

'Glory of God.'

'Yes I know what it means - Baha, glory, Allah, God. Who was he?'

'Glory of God.'

Sohan began to feel that he had asked the wrong person. He wished that he had followed his politician's instinct and asked to see the head man, whoever he was, rather than wasting time with this half-wit. There wasn't time now. He turned to leave.

'You are Mullah Husayn,' said the old man.

Sohan turned sharply. 'Kya bola?'

'You are Mullah Husayn. You are searching like Mullah Husayn. I see in your eyes. One day you find Truth.' The old man's eyes sparkled like the water droplets on his plants. For the second time that long day Sohan felt cast into sudden and unexpected doubt. Knitting his brows to cut out the irritating distraction of the dribbling hose, he made a final effort to extract information. 'I don't have long. You tell me this is a religion. Can you tell me, simply, what do you advocate?'

'What Baha'is believe?'

'Yes.'

'You want to know?'

'Hai Ram!'

'I tell you. One minute please.' The old man slowly, slowly bent to the ground, placing the hose gently so that the water trickled on to the border. Then he slowly, slowly stood straight again. 'Baha'i Faith means oneness. One God. One religion. One people. One world.'

'Meaning what exactly?'

'One God means one God. Not two Gods. Not three Gods. One God. Some say Allah. Some say Jehovah. Some say Ram. All one God.' The old man paused, wheezing slightly.

'One religion means all religions from God. Zoroaster. Moses. Christ. Mohammed. Krishna. Buddha. His Holiness Baha'u'llah. In thousand years someone else. All from God. All same person.'

'All from God?'

'Yes.'

'Coming back, like Lord Krishna says? Returning when man needs guidance?'

'Yes.'

'Who gives guidance today?'

'His Holiness Baha'u'llah.'

'What does he teach?'

'One people. We are all one people. All same to God. Black white doesn't matter. Male female doesn't matter. Muslim Hindu doesn't matter. All God's children. Everyone is flowers in garden. Nice if not all the same flower.' The old man proudly surveyed the scene.

Sohan remembered his scrawled notes. 'The Earth is one country. Is that one of the teachings?'

'Earth one country. Mankind citizens. Baha'u'llah said so. World Government. World have Government soon.'

'What!'

'One world. World Government. Solve big problems. World peace. World law.'

'Wait.' Sohan's heart was pounding. He could feel it as he delved into his breast pocket and extracted a calling card. Choosing his most reliable pen from the impressive array in the same pocket, he scribbled on the back of the card as best he could without the aid of his spectacles: 'I believe in Baha and World Govt. More info. please. Sohan Sahai.'

'I'm in a hurry. Please give this to your priest...'

'No priests.'

'None at all?'

'No priests.'

'Theek hai. Then just give it to the person in charge.'

'Mr Jain?'

'The top man. I must go.'

'Allah'u'abha.'

'Kya cheez?'

'Allah'u'abha!'

'You're sure you're not Muslims?'

'Everyone is flowers in garden. Allah'u'abha.'

'Allah'u'abha!' said Sohan.

Whatever the mind of man can conceive and believe, it can achieve, Sohan remembered. Yes, I needed to know the way forward and within the day the answer is given. But how is it that I have not heard of him before, this man who teaches World Government? I have found my Charioteer! What was his title? Baha?

The rust red train was ready to pull away. Sohan peered out of the carriage window. Sellers of fruit, paan, roasted corn cobs, Campa-Cola, chai-chai and lottery tickets. Relatives waving goodbye. Porters, laden high, weaving skilfully through the crush. A family, stranded ticketless, sitting forlornly on their boxes. A digitless leper trying to beg. Ragamuffins running riot. Sohan looked out at the rust red world but his attention was elsewhere. With his inner eye he saw he was moving from the darkness towards a brilliant light. If there is a paradise on earth, he thought, then this is it, this is it, this is it!¹

* * *

'Colours of the spectrum anybody? Martyn?'

Richard Of York Gained Battles In Vain, recalled Martyn. In a somewhat slurred staccato he rattled off the required response, 'Red orange yellow green blue indigo violet,' which would have been a fair description of the progression of his complexion as he struggled to overcome the acute embarrassment he felt as a result of his three seconds in the limelight. One or two classmates tittered.

¹Attrib. Shah Jahan.

'Ah... right. Now can anyone remember which colour the prism refracted the most? Fiona?'

Fiona, Fiona, Fiona, Martyn recited to himself. My Fiona. He gazed lovingly at the back of her head. How cool she is! How clearly she answers! How refined, the way she runs her fingers through her hair! How alive, the way she smiles, the gestures with her hands, the movement of her eyebrows! Her flashing eyes, her floating hair!¹

Having taken his part in the ritual classroom catechism Martyn knew he was safe from further interrogation, and allowed his attention to wander. Oh Fiona, just the mention of your name sets me on fire. Am I battling in vain for you? Don't you know I love you? Can't you tell? Haven't you guessed?

Martyn's spectacles had steamed up, so he removed them for polishing on the fat end of his tie. There's another thing, he mused, his mood swinging suddenly from ecstasy to despondency. My specs. All the King's horses and all the King's men aren't going to bring my eyesight back. Then there's my teeth. My Kingdom for a straight set of teeth! I hate this brace, no-one can understand what I'm saying. And I wish I wouldn't go red. When will it ever end? Do these external things matter to you, Fiona? Surely all that matters is that I love you!

And that you love me, whispered a subversive little voice inside his head. Martyn groaned audibly to the perplexity of his neighbour, who politely enquired after his health. Martyn said he was 'Not too bad, thank you,' and resumed his meditation in a more composed vein.

I have known you for years. You used to be in my class at junior school and I liked you then, although that was before Georgie taught me to take any notice of your kind. Georgie changed everything. I remember the feeling of excitement that I would be seeing you again on the first day of term following that momentous holiday, and I remember the feeling of dismay when you didn't appear. Someone told me that your family had moved to Scotland because your father had been transferred from Devonport to Rosyth. So many things happened during the two years you were away: secondary school, my eyes, my teeth, my voice. Worst of all, my blushing. I used to like answering questions or reading aloud my essays in class or acting or singing. I used to like out-staring others in the class - you know, I used to out-stare you enough times. I used to like telling jokes and laughing out loud. Now what happens? Anything I do which involves an audience is likely to be wrecked because I turn red so easily. How can I tell a joke when my face is crimson? People don't laugh at the joke but at me! And they can be so cruel! Now that everyone knows this happens, I can't speak up in class or join in the game without someone poking fun at me so that I light up. Even the teachers do it sometimes. Now my friends have taken to just sitting and staring at me in class like we used to do in junior school but in those days it was never malicious because in those days no-one got hurt. I feel betrayed by the teachers, betrayed by my so-called friends, betrayed by my own stupid body that lets me down like this. It makes me hate classes where I have to speak out, hate plays, hate singing with my awful croaky voice, hate telling or hearing jokes, hate joining in, hate staring. It makes me hate many of the people we know and it makes me hate myself. I make life sound rather bleak, don't I! I suppose there are some aspects which are more positive. Because my feelings are so sensitive, I am sensitive to the feelings of others. Because I know what it is to be humiliated, I avoid humiliating others. Because it is so easy to embarrass me, I am indebted to those who avoid doing so, particularly those who do not suffer from the same affliction, for their mercy has no self-interest at stake. For example, I am particularly indebted to you, Fiona.

What a surprise when, last September, there you were again in class on the first day of term! How you had changed in two years: no longer the tomboy we could rely on to make

¹Coleridge, *Kubla Khan*.

up the numbers, you had become so cool, so composed, so measured, so mature. How my heart leapt when I saw you there! How I longed to laugh and run and play and fight with you as in the old days - or even to say hello to you in a friendly way. It is a measure of my esteem for you that I held back, for I could not bear the thought of you laughing at me like the others. It was on that very first day back at school that I realised how often you had been the focus of my thoughts during the two lost years, and I realised how dearly I loved you.

Now the school year is nearly over. You have had a string of boyfriends, nothing very serious, though my heart bled to see them enjoy your precious company. Clearly you felt nothing for them and clearly they were not devoted to you as I have been, or they would have made a greater effort to stay in favour. You and I have come to converse easily enough, for unlike many of the others you do not tease me, whilst I have kept my love for you a closely-guarded secret behind a palisade of polite formality. Closely-guarded, that is, until last Tuesday.

Oh Fiona, my Fiona! What did I do wrong? Was I indiscreet, or should I not have presumed¹ to love you?

Never in our modern era have I known you so friendly as on last Tuesday. You who have been so aloof, so superior! Tuesday lunchtime and I am a sandwich filling between you and the wall. You are pressing close, no daylight between us, caressing the lapels on my blazer, giving me your 'I'm-going-to-eat-you' smile. Our faces are that close, I scarcely dare to breathe. You are trying to talk me into going out with your best friend Lizzy. What was it we said?

You: 'Go out with Lizzy or I'll have your testicles for teacakes.'
No, that wasn't it. Concentrate, Martyn.

You: 'Go on, Martyn. She's really nice.'

Me: 'Well...'

You: 'Saturday afternoon, the cinema. Okay?'

Me: 'Not really...'

You: 'Why not?'

Me: 'She's not my type.'

You: 'How do you know?'

Me: 'I have my preferences.'

You: 'She likes you.'

Me: 'Bully for her!'

You: 'Go on, Martyn. Don't be so... mean.'

Me: 'Mean?'

You: 'How do you think she feels?'

Me: 'With her feelers?'

You: 'You what?'

Me: 'Never mind.'

You: 'Are you going out with her or not?'

Me: 'She's picking her nose, look!'

You: 'Don't change the subject.'

Me: 'She IS the subject!'

You: 'Martyn, what do I have to do to make you agree?'

Me: 'Well...'

You: 'Go on, Martyn. I promised her I'd talk you in to it.'

Me: 'What's the film, anyway?'

You: 'No idea. Look, me and Chas will be there.'

Me: 'Oh yes?'

¹*Prufrock*: 'And how should I presume?'

You: 'So you'll come?'
Me: 'Not with her.'
You: 'What's wrong with her?'
Me: 'I told you, she's not my type.'
You: 'That's no reason!'
Me: 'Well, I dunno.'
You: 'Martyn?'
Me: 'Mmm?'
You: 'Please?'
Me: 'Hmm.'
You: 'If you won't go for her sake, please will you go for my sake? Because I asked you really nicely?'

You were that close. I suppose I felt safe enough to say, very quietly and rather indistinctly, the words that had been going around and around in my mind from the beginning of the interposition. I suppose I felt safe enough to expose my true feelings for the first time.

Me: 'I'd go with you.'

You: 'Excuse me?'
Me: 'That's all.'
You: 'Go on, say it again?'
Me: 'Nope.'
You: 'Martyn?'

It wasn't what you said, it was the way you said it. There you were, with an enticing smile and laughing eyes, as if you were a purveyor of fine chocolates. Come hither, I have someone who would like to eat you. Then I say my words. Those words which still haunt me. I'd go with you. I'd go with you. My words. Your smile remains but sets a little hard, and your eyes - was it that their expression had changed, or was it that I had succumbed to the shame of my indiscretion, that I could no longer look in your eyes? It seemed to me that they had acquired an unbearable intensity, and in that critical moment I averted my gaze and my cause was lost. You heard my words, I know you did. It just took a little while for your smile to fade.

You gently patted one ruffled lapel, eased away, and rejoined Lizzy who had been hovering hungrily at silly mid-off, waiting to be tossed a tender morsel. You gave me no further glance and I busied myself with a shoelace or some other useless thing.

We have talked since, but how stiff and proper we have become, as if we are mourning the passing of a life. Oh Fiona, my Fiona. Was I so wrong? Should I only ever admire you and never possess you? Perhaps I should never have spoken my words, then we would still be the friends we were. Better your company as a friend than a doomed and presumptuous declaration and our unspoken estrangement. But how was I to know the power of my words? How was I to know that there are some words which, having been said, can never be retracted?

Perhaps you know all too well that I love you, and you are too proud and condescending to think me anything but a fool. I am sorry Fiona, I may be a fool but I love you and I am proud of it, and you are also a fool for rejecting such genuine devotion. Perhaps you misunderstood my intentions, in which case may my present and future courtesy demonstrate my respect for you. Perhaps you are merely holding out until I escort the unlovely Lizzy, but how can I both obey your will and remain true to you alone? I wish I knew what you were thinking.¹ Do you know I love you? If so, are you inhuman that you

¹Eliot, *The Waste Land*.

neither accept me nor reject me outright? If not, why has our former friendship died? Oh Fiona, my Fiona, I would not presume to request your love for me. All I want to know is whether you have guessed that I love you.

Martyn finished his imaginary epistle in time to copy down the catalogue of chores to be completed at home. The bell rang for the end of the lesson and the day, he packed his bag and went the long way home.

The clock was croaking eleven minutes to five. Martyn kicked off his shoes in the hallway, shouted a greeting to his mother, and escaped to his bedroom to bury himself in his homework. Ten minutes later Lorna arrived with a cup of milk and a biscuit, 'to keep the wolf from the door.'

'Nice day, dear?'

'Not too bad.'

'What was it today? Physics?'

'Yes. We did p-prisms and things.' With difficulty Martyn suppressed the waver in his voice.

'It's Toad in the Hole for supper today. Your favourite.'

Through constant exposure Martyn had become generally immune to his mother's simple acts of devotion but on this occasion, when his emotions were surging like the Atlantic waves at Trevone, her gastronomic gesture took him beyond breaking point. The floodgates opened, the dam broke, and Martyn wept like the child he really was.

'Martyn, Baby, Baby! It's all right! I'm here. Shh now. There, there. There, there. Don't cry, my Baby. It's all right. All right now. There, there.' Her son's face buried in her apron, Lorna ran her fingers through his hair and rocked gently from side to side. It was the first meaningful physical contact between mother and son for a decade.

'All right now.' Martyn indeed felt much better, almost happy.

'What is it? What's the matter, Baby?'

He who had been brought up to always hide his feelings felt that he had been sufficiently indiscreet for one lifetime. 'It's all right, really. I'm just a bit tired, that's all.'

'Oh Martyn? Can I do anything for you?'

'Really, I'm fine. Fine.'

'You're sure?'

'You're a good mum.' Martyn grinned and gulped some milk. That was better. He smiled up at her again. 'See? Fine!'

'I do love you Martyn.'

'So do I said Pooh.'¹

'Silly old bear!'

'I'm fine now,' Martyn insisted.

'All right. Come down soon.' Lorna gave her Baby's hair one last ruffle and departed kitchenwards. Perhaps he's in love, she mused. However, it was not long before she had rejected the unlikely notion for a simpler explanation: hormones. As it turned out, the latter hypothesis was to receive physical confirmation sooner than she had imagined.

Martyn began writing a letter to Fiona, but it turned into a poem and then into a prayer. He thought of saving it in a secret place but he could not risk the small chance of its discovery. He tore it to tiny shreds and recommenced his homework with a will. 'I have my books,' he mused, 'and my poetry to protect me.'²

In bed that night he had his first nocturnal emission. Since this was a phenomenon of which he had been completely ignorant, and which even after further frequent occurrences during the subsequent months and years remained a taboo subject in the household,

¹A.A. Milne, *Winnie-The-Pooh*.

²Simon and Garfunkel, *I am a Rock*.

commanding a conspiracy of silence even between fellow-suffering siblings, Martyn came to feel that he was unusual, perhaps not cut out for the same life as other humans. Increasingly he sought refuge in his studies, which tended to exacerbate the situation by further polarising his isolationist view of the world and by substituting the only legitimate safety valve for teenage testosterone: strenuous physical activity, in the form of sport.

* * *

Why, oh why, am I, doing this, left, right, don't, stop, I, wish I, were dead, left, right, left, ouch, why, oh why, oh why, oh thank God!

The flat rock in the lee of the tor's crowning outcrop became home to a second exhausted pilgrim as Martyn collapsed next to Smiler's prone body. They did not remain still for long, for even out of the biting wind the February chill quickly reasserted itself. Gasping with the effort, the friends threw off their rucksacks and with fingers deadened by the cold struggled with straps and toggles, eventually extracting the clothing they had jettisoned before the ascent. Their last stop had been the stream, according to the map only seven hundred feet away as the stone flies, but the team were convinced that there was a cartographical conspiracy concerning the true height of the infamous Great Mis Tor.

Sleeves unrolled. Come on! Jumper on. That's it! Now the jacket. I hate this zip! Would you believe it. Oh, thank you Lord of Heaven. Now for the Mars Bar.

Choking down some instant energy, Martyn watched the others toiling up out of the gloom. 'Gobbo shouldn't stop. Won't get anywhere if he stops.' For uphill work, Martyn was a great believer in the tortoise principle. Downhill, he believed, one should run as fast as possible or risk a broken ankle. In formulating and demonstrating improbable new laws of motion Martyn invariably took the lead, as indeed he did with most things wayward and inherently dangerous. If you needed to prove that two legs were better than four down the North face of Yes Tor, there was Martyn galloping after the sheep. If you needed to know whether an unusual patch of bright green ground was a bog, there was Martyn to test it out. If you needed to know whether it was quicker to cross the stream without using the stepping-stones, there was Martyn to wade the depths. If you needed someone to puncture a brand new butane gas canister with a half-inch spike, again Martyn was your man. The team loved Martyn for the risks he bore, and he loved them that they did admire him.¹ For his foolhardiness he had earned the proud sobriquet of 'Leadbrain'.² It was a strange symbiosis, to gain appreciation for actions which potentially spelt disaster for the group. Much later, Martyn analysed his role as being similar to Roger's in *Lord of the Flies*:³ the court jester who maintained his position by being that little bit more mad than the rest of the tribe, who in his society's acceleration towards insanity naturally became the chief executioner. Frightening, is it not, that madness can have the same nature as rationality, differing only by degree. The ego is a dangerous weapon indeed.

One by one the others arrived at the flat rock: Grope, Turd, Elephantiasis and, bringing up the rear, Gobbo. Outcasts from the high society of soccer and rugby, together the six misfits had found solace in their fortnightly retreat to the barren wasteland that is Dartmoor. In so doing they had gained excellent training for the annual Ten Tors yomp, for which they could boast that they were bested only by the teams from the Forces, who could be discounted on the grounds that they were subhuman. Notching up the Ten Tors in record time was no mean achievement for the team members and an unexpected addition to their other source of pride, their intellectual ability, for if the results of the mock A-level exams were a reliable indicator then come the Autumn the six would be leading their school's contingent to Britain's top universities.

¹*Othello*.

²Originally from the film version of Dickens' *Little Dorrit*.

³By William Golding.

Fed, watered, swaddled and saddled, the team set off on the last leg of the day's journey, a gentle stroll down to Merrivale where they would camp. In the gathering gloom of a wet mist they each acquired a masochist's good humour, and in the absence of a steep incline to muzzle them their customary repartee began.

'Anybody want to come marching up and down the square?'¹
'Ya-Vole, mein Obergruppenfuhrer!'
'Hors d'oeuvres will be obeyed at all times!'²
'One-two-three, Hitler...'
'Has only got one ball...'
'The other...'
'Is in the Albert Hall...'
'C'mon chaps, I had a wheelbarrow...'
'Himmler...'
'The front wheel went round...'
'Had something simmler...'
'I had wheelbarrow the front wheel went round...'
'But poor old Goebbels...'
'I had a wheelbarrow...'
'Has no balls...'
'The front went round...'
'At all!'
'I had wheelbarrow the front wheel went round!'
'I've got a blister.'
'By gum, you're lucky!'
'I used to dream of having a blister!'
'I had a blister so large they amputated me leg!'
'And you tell that to the kids of today and they...'
'Won't believe you!'³
'Ere. You see that sheep over there?'
'Sett un gert biggun, nest par?'
'Ar wee. Does it go, then?'
'Nudge, nudge, wink, wink!'⁴
'Does it go!'
'You gorra laff, eh?'
'Elly's disappeared... Cathy? CATHY?'
'Heathcliffe!'
'Cathy!'
'Heathcliffe!'
'Oo est voos?'
'J'ai weeing dons le moor!'
'Ah, wee!'
'Voos poo-ez aussi?'
'Non.'
'Fart-ez?'
'Mind your own!'
'Ohh, bitchy!'
'Never mind him, sugar-drawers, he's jealous.'
'Hi there, this is Eddie you shipboard computer, can you get a move on please?'⁵
'Hurry up please it's time!'⁶

¹Monty Python's *The Meaning of Life*.

²*Fawlty Towers*.

³*The Secret Policeman's Ball*.

⁴Monty Python's *Flying Circus*.

⁵Douglas Adams, *The Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy*.

⁶*The Waste Land*.

'At last! Enter a bleeding captain!'¹
 'What bloody man is that?'
 'Hurry up please it's time!'
 'Mother I am dead bracket dies bracket!'
 'The Thane of Fife had a wife...'
 'Out out God-damn dawg!'
 'Where is she now, eh? Tell me that!'
 'It's raining again.'
 'One, two, there's another!'
 'If there was a bit of rock...'
 'Any old bit of rock...'
 'But there is only water!'
 'Who is the nerd who walks always beside you?'
 'Good game, good game!'²
 'Over to the old scoreboard...'
 'I've definitely got a blister.'
 'Shh! Everyone will want one!'
 'It's only a scratch! Come on, you coward, fight like a man!'³
 'I am Arthur, King of the Britons!'
 'African or European Swallow?'
 'I hope you don't mind but I'm feeling a bit depressed today...'⁴
 'Remember, dulce-et-decorum-est-pro-patria-bleeding-mori!'⁵
 'Always look on the...'
 'Bright side of life, de dum, de dum de dum de dum!'⁶

In no time, as it seemed, they had reached their destination.

'So why are we doing this, then? What's the point?'
 'Ahh, quit whinging. Another round, everyone?'
 'Yeah, but don't you get it, you look too young. Smiler, you miserable bugger, you'd better go.'
 'Same again?'
 'Better get milk for Leadbrain. Guinness just makes him whinge.'
 'Ah, come on! It was a serious question!'
 'Same again or not?'
 'Yeah, yeah. Just get a move on.'
 'So why are we doing this?'
 'Oh give over, can't you?'
 'You got a better subject?'
 'Could just drip in miserable silence I suppose.'
 'Okay then.'

'He's taking a long time with the beer.'
 'Trying to chat up the barmaid.'
 'Not him. Bent as a nine-pound note, he is.'
 'Naah, really?'
 'April fool!'
 'How would you know, anyway?'
 'Ve hav vays.'¹

¹*Macbeth.*

²Bruce Forsyth's *Generation Game.*

³*Monty Python and the Holy Grail.*

⁴*The Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy.*

⁵After Horace, and Wilfred Owen.

⁶*Life of Brian.*

'At last!
 'Does she go, then?'²
 'Bit of a crush. Whoops! Oh, sorry mate!
 'Like hell!
 'Children, children.'
 'Hush up, they'll throw us out in a minute.'

 'Good stuff, this.'
 'Does it go, then?'
 'You gorra laff.'
 'So why are we doing this?'
 'Leadbrain!
 'I really would like to know! Here am I...'
 'Brain the size of a planet...'³
 'Exactly... you put your finger on it. Since I am a bear of little brain⁴ I need a good reason for doing something. As I stands I have no idea why I'm here. Come on, be serious. Smiler, you're the boss. What motivates you, my dear sir? Speak into the mike.'
 'I dunno. Bit of exercise I suppose.'
 'But why get wet and cold? Why not walk up and down stairs all weekend?'
 'Tradition. Done this for years, I have.'
 'All right, so there's one reason. What's yours, Grope?'
 'Don't call me Grope.'
 'You called me Leadbrain just now!'
 'That's different. Leadbrain's a nice name.'
 'He's drunk, forget him!'
 'All right; Elly, what about you?'
 'I just like weeing in the open air.'
 'The call of nature? Fine. Turd?'
 'Never thought about it. Reckon if I did then I wouldn't enjoy it any more. Some things you do for their own sake. Best not to think about it.'
 'Ah! Better to go for a walk than to get anywhere. Means-not-ends-oriented. Excellent! Gobbo?'
 'Same as 'im.'
 'Not good enough, mate. Try harder?'
 'Cos my religion says so.'
 'Ahh come ON!'
 'Strewth. Gotta laugh or else you cry, gotta live or else you die.'⁵ Gotta do summat. Might as well do this.'
 'Not what I'd call religion, but never mind.'
 'What's your definition of religion, Lead?'
 'No idea. But I reckon it has to be more than just a way of life. That's so passive. No future.'
 'Do you go to church?'
 'Not since I was a kid.'
 'Well then. A way of life is better than whinging. And all that stuff about the National Front.'
 'I dunno.'
 'Is that what you believe in, then?'
 'He must do, he carved 'NF' on his desk.'
 'Do you believe it?'

¹*Rowan and Martin's Laugh-in.*

²*Monty Python's Flying Circus.*

³*The Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy.*

⁴*Winnie-The-Pooh.*

⁵From a pop song of the time.

'Naah. Course not. Just makes me look cool, dunnit?'
'Leadbrain was a good name for you, mate.'

I can't sleep. It's cold. There's ice growing on the inside of the tent walls. How can they sleep so easily? I never get to sleep. I'll be a wreck tomorrow. Come on, Martyn, concentrate. Tell yourself a story. Once upon a time, I don't know what. Ooh my knees are stiff. That climb up Great Mis was agony. I ought to write a book about it some day. Why I climbed Great Mis Tor, by Martyn Trehunsey Langford, BA. Strange that none of them had any good reason for going hiking. Perhaps they're right. It's better than rock climbing, anyway. Better than the Dewerstone.

Martyn shuddered involuntarily as he relived that awful moment of last year when he had led a climb up the Dewerstone Rock. The pitch was only forty feet or so, but since it began two hundred feet above the ground the chances of surviving an unchecked fall were slim indeed. So off he sets on this v. diff. route, supposedly a gentle introduction to shinning up a rock, except that he cannot find any place to site his belays. Up and up, and still no worthwhile crevices or protrusions. Down below and now out of sight, Smiler pays out the other end of the rope that will be of no earthly use if Martyn slips. Then comes the coup-de-grâce: the lover's leap. The only way to complete the climb is to stand erect on the top of this exposed needle of rock, falling sheer on all sides, take your life in your hands and a big stride over the abyss to the main rock wall, from where you can scramble up the last few feet with relative ease. Martyn looks down: treetops, then the rocky ground. The same on the other side. His right knee begins to shake uncontrollably. He waits for the shaking to subside but finds that it recommences whenever he puts weight on the leg. And not a belay in sight, he frets. Nothing for it but to take the risk. In a panic-induced impulse he performs the manoeuvre perfectly. However, it is not until he has top-roped the last of the team up the pitch that the shaking in his leg, hands, heart and voice subsides. Although it is early in the day he takes no further part in climbing, preferring instead to make the tea. Not for the first time in his life he has been scared witless.

That's the last time I go climbing. Oh, man, it's so cold! Come on, Martyn. Think positive. Happy thoughts. Once upon a time. Once upon a time there was a beautiful girl called Fiona. Oh Fiona, what has become of you?¹

The facts are as follows. Martyn's love for Fiona is unrequited. For the first couple of years after his pathetic declaration he wilfully ignores or is genuinely blind to her indifference, and he attempts to perpetuate some semblance of friendship. Fiona gains some relief as a result of the meritocratic realignment of the classes in the run-up to the O-level examinations, with Martyn going into the cleverer stream. Gradually the lack of feedback saps Martyn's endeavour, although his ardour remains as intense as ever. Knowing that Fiona is unlikely to continue into the sixth form, Martyn decides to confront her immediately after the O-level examinations. Characteristically his style of confrontation is decidedly oblique. He writes a long letter, explaining every nuance of his behaviour over the years, apologising for all sorts of sins he hasn't committed, and declaring his love for her in a roundabout way. Then he tears up the letter and writes another, 'Fiona, Please meet me in Hartley Park by the swings, 3pm this Sunday, We need to talk, Martyn,' and actually mails it to her. 3pm this Sunday comes and Martyn approaches Hartley Park sans specs because he wants to look cool. Entering the park, he sees several figures at the swings. Thinking Fiona not to be among them, he doubles back and takes a turn around the block, entering the park from the rear entrance, this time with his specs out of his pocket and on his nose. The people are still there; they are ex-classmates; Fiona is among them; they are laughing at him. Martyn returns home like Piglet running from a Heffalump.² He has not seen Fiona since that event eighteen months ago. Needless to say he thinks he loves her still, but she no longer dominates his dreams and his aspirations.

¹Pink Floyd, *Vera*.

²*Winnie-The-Pooh*.

Oh Fiona, my Fiona. I don't think you ever really understood how much I loved you. I exposed my heart to you and in the end you betrayed me. Well, I won't make that particular mistake in future. I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be.¹ Well, so what? I have made better friends than you are ever likely to have, and I will be the first in my family to go to university, while you stick around in perishing Plymouth. Then you will see what you have lost. These people here are pretty clever but even they don't think about why they do things, what motivates them, while to me it's the most important question. For sure I have a talent for philosophy. At university I will start a new life with fresh hope; that is, if I survive this night. It's so cold! What's the time? Four-thirty? Not so long till morning, I won't sleep now. I wish I could go outside for a wee. I'm just going out, I might be some time.² No, it'll have to wait, I don't want to wake the others. Oh, why am I doing this?

* * *

10 December 1983

There is a time for everything.

What an easy thing to say. A tranquil phrase, suggesting that one can afford to make haste slowly. A comforting phrase, suggesting that every dog has his day. No-one will argue with that.

That is not what I meant at all.³

Consider the statement carefully. It does not refer to you, to me, to haste or to hounds. There is a time for everything, but that time may not be now. It may not be within our lifetimes. It may be far into the future or it may have passed already. Perhaps we are ahead of our time and our chance will not come until it is too late. Perhaps life is a succession of missed chances. It is all a question of timing. To be the right person in the right place at the right time.

'If Jesus Christ were to come today, people would not even crucify him. They would ask him to dinner, and hear what he had to say, and make fun of it.' Perhaps you are right, Brother Carlyle, but so what? If what you say is true then it would make little difference whether Christ has returned or not. That being the case, your statement has little meaning because it cannot be tested and proven one way or the other. However, there is one useful conclusion we can glean from your remark. You imply that today would not be convenient for Christ. By contrast, it is clear from subsequent events that there was a period nearly two thousand years ago which was most propitious. Manifestly, the historical Christ was the right person in the right place at the right time. Who knows how many times He has returned, only to discover that He was in the wrong century or on the wrong continent? Verily, there is a time for everything.

As with people and prophets, so with ideas. Thomas Kuhn describes the development of scientific knowledge as a discontinuous process, with periods of normal science punctuated at irregular intervals by revolutionary periods when one interpretative framework or 'paradigm' is supplanted by another.⁴ If Kuhn is correct, then what are the secret formulae which determine the success or failure of a particular idea at a particular time? Kuhn based his arguments on examples from the history of science, and we can do the same. Consider Charles Darwin: a clever chap no doubt, but the evidence suggests

¹*Prufrack.*

²Attrib. Captain Oates.

³*Prufrack.*

⁴T.S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions.*

that if he had not set out the theory of natural selection as the basis of the origin of species then it wouldn't have taken very long for someone else to succeed in his place. Wallace was waiting in the wings, and the ideas had already been set out in one form or another by earlier, unrecognised scientists. Perhaps the earlier expositions were occasionally incorrect or ill-phrased, but in many ways the same could be said of Darwin's books. Why did the earlier authors go unrecognised? Why did not Darwin also go unrecognised? Clearly, the theory of evolution was an idea whose time had come and Darwin was fortunate and skilful enough to be the right person in the right place at the right time. If Darwin did not exist, it would be necessary to invent him.¹ And the process underlying scientific revolutions? Che serà serà;² all the world's a stage;³ if the time is right it will happen and if the time isn't right then it won't. It seems that there are historical, sociological and market forces at work in the world which defeat a narrow interpretation of closeted scientific communities waging paradigm wars according to precise rules.

There is a time for everything. Consider the wayfarer, he who is searching for Truth or love. How does he know this is the right destination, or the right path, or the right girl, or the right thing to say to her, or the right time to say it? He doesn't. All he knows - often by bitter experience - is that if he messes it up he is unlikely to get a second chance, and will have to begin from the beginning with a new destination, new path, new girl, new lines and better timing, or in brief, a new life.

May the paradigm be with you.⁴

* * *

Lucknow, 30 July 1981

My dearest and most auspicious Shankar beta,

Allah'u'abha! My most precious child, the apple of my eye, the beloved of Baha'u'llah. You are a very very great person and a world VVIP. May God bless you. You are very very loving, caring, respectful, generous, talented, super-intelligent, well-spoken, forthright, attractive, highly-motivated, moral, spiritual, and God-fearing. You are doing God's work and God is with you always. Abdu'l Baha says: 'If in this day a soul shall act according to the precepts and the counsels of God, he will serve as a divine physician to mankind... such a virtuous soul hath, to befriend him, the unfailing help of the Company on high. Thus shall a sorry gnat become an eagle in the fullness of his strength, and a feeble sparrow change to a royal falcon in the heights of ancient glory.' I am sending a new compilation of Baha'i Writings which has many wonderful promises. I know you are very very busy doing God's work so I have marked the passages which have been a great inspiration to me. It is the bounty of God that we can serve Him in this day. Our lives are short but the need of humanity is so great. Really we should not rest until this world becomes a paradise.

I have received your most loving letter dated 16 June. By now you will have completed your A-level examinations. I know you are top of the class and I have the greatest confidence that you will achieve top marks. Every day I pray to God to assist the examiners. Your beloved sisters and I are eagerly awaiting the results. Shankar beta, do not worry that you are short of money. God is with you and with His help all your problems will be solved. Napoleon Hill says: 'Whatever the mind of man can conceive and believe, it can achieve.' I am also sending you his book under separate cover. Beta, never be downhearted. Already you have achieved so much more than I. For one year you have

¹After Voltaire.

²In Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus*, and in common parlance.

³As *You Like It*.

⁴After *Star Wars*.

been in the great London metropolis and already you have surpassed every expectation and taken A-levels. Truly Lucknow is like a village compared to London. When I ran away from my village to the city I was also very frightened. To earn money I had to be a dhobi and a skivvy. You are very very talented. I wept and cried for joy when I read that you have taken work washing dishes at the 'Mahatma Tandoori Restaurant'. I thank God for His gracious good favour to you, for it is only when we have truly suffered that we can love the world and dedicate our lives to the service of humanity. You are a very very humble and devoted servant of mankind. Perhaps you can also take tuitions in your spare time.

You have very kindly sent a list of universities in England. Shankar, you must pray to God for guidance as you decide your future. God is unfailing in His help. If you think that Oxford and Cambridge are not the best for Law then I am sure you are correct. The London School of Economics and Political Science is also a very very well-known name and it has the advantage of being in London. I was interested to read that President Kennedy studied there. He was a very very great man and worked for the good of the world. Beta, I cannot guide you in this but I will pray God that He assists you in your decision. I have the greatest confidence that whatever you decide is the best. You must aim to be on the top of the world. As a lawyer you can join the United Nations and even become the Secretary-General which is not a political position. As you know I had to leave politics after I declared my faith in Baha'u'llah because the Baha'i Faith does not get involved in politics. This was the most difficult decision of my life because I had believed that as a politician I could help to bring about World Government. But then I prayed to Abdu'l Baha and learnt that God's ways are different, that the World Government will come about with or without the assistance of the politicians. Abdu'l Baha has promised that it will come soon, perhaps this century! There will be a new world order, a new race of men born to the world but this will mean great birth-pangs and much more suffering to come for the world of humanity. Shankar, it is our sacred duty to assist this divine process, to serve mankind and to be like a divine physician. You must strive day and night to be at the very top of your profession, so that you may help in the birth of the World Government which will solve the problems of all mankind. You have a heaven-sent opportunity because you have started from nothing in a new life in London. The same happened to me when I left my village, and again when I became a Baha'i. When we start a new life the heavenly bounties shower upon us and opportunities arise which would have been unimaginable before. I know you will achieve great things.

I have some very exciting news. I have decided to allow your beloved sisters to join you in London. You must help them to find good schools, the best money can buy. They will also earn money to pay for schooling. Perhaps Sri Joshi can advise you about schools, he seems to have high principles and he has daughters. My ambition is that all three of my children become world VIPs from top-class London universities. Beta, you are a great man and I know that you will be able to look after your sisters in my place. Now you are the head of the family. I am arranging their tickets by Syrian Arab Airlines, I will advise on telephone their arrival date and time. Please prepare a list of the things you would like your sisters to bring from here.

My dearest son, every day I pray God that He keeps you safe and in good health. I am glad you are eating at the 'Mahatma Tandoori Restaurant' and that the food is good. One thing, please explain to me in your next letter why the restaurant is called 'Mahatma'? Surely an eating house has not been given Gandhiji's esteemed title?

Always remember you are in my heart and my prayers. I am always very very busy with court cases but if you need me at any time I will come to you. If there is anything you need I will turn every stone to get it. You are my son and a great great person, and I am your humble servant. Whatever you want I will do.

My greatest love to you,
Your loving Papa,
Sohan Sahai.

Dearest Shankar bhaiyah,

What money do they use there? Mr Hawker was telling us about pounds, shillings and pence but he hasn't been to England since he was a boy and he could be wrong. Is there anything else we should know? You will be pleased to know that Rama is giving us a crash course in cookery. We are also composing Baha'i talks to give at summer school. Can we go to a summer school when we arrive? We have promised Papaji that we will be nice to you. Is there anything we can bring? Can you get nice sweets like burfi and rasgulla? Much love from Seema.

Hi bhaiyahji!! See you soon!! Isn't it exciting!! Love, Asha!!

* * *

At university Martyn found liberation in a strong lockable metal box. The box was his own, it was his first major expense on arriving in London, and he put his secrets in it. Naturally the reason for the purchase was more to do with basic security than with concealment, for at the time Martyn had nothing to hide, at least, nothing which could be written down and locked away. Indeed, it was not until the end of his first year that he began to achieve the freedom of thought that grows out of guaranteed privacy. As for Martyn's first year, any observer - and there were many - would not normally associate it with concepts such as liberation or freedom. Apocalyptic would be a better description.

The year began badly and swiftly deteriorated. One might even say that it started badly before Martyn arrived in London, for he committed the cardinal error of following the printed instructions and arriving at the University of London hall of accommodation on the day before the beginning of term. On arrival he was surprised to find that the loud and the strong had been in residence for several days, embryonic relationships had been formed following an alien archetype, and a skeletal social structure intolerant to diversity had been established. The pattern of this primeval society may be described using a dualist model: one was either 'in' or 'out'. Those that were 'in' received their view of the world from the tabloid press, conversed in tabloid phrases on tabloid subjects, consumed gallons of cheap beer, played football and guitar and came from North of Watford Gap. Students everywhere will recognise this description, with the exception of the final clause which admits regional variation; at Exeter, for example, the bulk of the undergraduate population hail from East of Heston. Despite its numerical inferiority the 'in' crowd were the aristocracy of academic society, for the 'outs' - which included some of the women, all of the overseas students, and those like Martyn who were inexperienced in socialising outside their narrow academic circle - were too diverse to constitute any real challenge. By most criteria Martyn would never be a member of the dominant clique, but this would not have mattered if he had been content with his lowly status and confined himself to the company of like-minded individuals. However, he had left home under the mistaken impression that life at university meant the opportunity to broaden his horizons, and he lacked the experience to appreciate that in looking for alternative companionship, the dominant group is not necessarily the best starting-point.

Martyn had been brought up a *Daily Telegraph* reader; he liked to talk about the meaning of life, although what he had to say was not particularly edifying; he could drink plenty of beer, but had an attitude problem in that he did not see the need to drink himself into a state of paralysis; his position in any football team would be as goal-post; he was musically incompetent; he did not come from North of Watford Gap, so the warden had considerably roomed him with a teetotaler Taiwanese whose only English appeared to be 'Price Waterhouse'; and he arrived at his accommodation the day after the socially-determining pub-crawl. Nevertheless, he tried his best to enter into the spirit of things, inviting himself to the drinking parties and attempting to get as pickled as the others. Strangely, none of the nobility asked him to go out with them, and once installed in an inn he would not be invited to join their table, or their beer round, or their conversation. Occasionally they would thoughtlessly leave him behind and forget to tell him where they

would next be stopping on the long journey back to the hall. The police were not so careless, and on one occasion Martyn, wandering alone in a befuddled stupor, was picked up by a Black Maria and spent several hours in a cell, but even this brave adventure somehow failed to impress the loud and the strong.

With life at hall progressing so swimmingly, Martyn's next challenge was the Societies' Fair. Again we may use a dualist model to describe the behaviour of Freshers at this event. Some initiates - a minority - counter their trepidation of things unknown by becoming uncontrollably aggressive. They visit all the booths, begin with a blitzkrieg bellow of 'What's this, then?', pretend to comprehend the reply and set about trying to contradict it. By contrast, the majority of Freshers are so scared of being talked into joining the Troops Out Society, the Gay Society or the Mujahaddin Society that they carefully mug up the precise location of the particular Societies they intend to join and make a bee-line for those alone, pretending not to catch the gorgon's gaze or hear the siren voices of the remainder. Naturally, Martyn fell into the latter category. Aiming for a balanced portfolio of physical and mental exercise, he joined the Ten Tors Team and the Bridge Society. Nothing came of either; he dropped out of the former after the first meeting, when he realised that their idea of training was to walk around Hyde Park on the way to the pub, and when the self-appointed team leader failed to ask whether there was anyone in the room who had twice been in the quickest team around Dartmoor; he ultimately dropped out of the latter after arriving at the first session without a partner and finding himself inextricably coupled with his unintelligible roommate, who appeared to be under the impression that he had joined the Astrology Society.

In comparison with his social life, Martyn's academic life was successful, although he had enrolled for the wrong course in the wrong college. Being the first in his family to university, or even to A-levels, he suffered from the lack of a role model and the lack of practical advice. George, a cautious man, held that unless Martyn knew precisely what he wanted to do, he should keep his options open by staying with the core subjects. Sensible advice, but it would be wrong to portray Martyn as a person who did not know what he wanted to do, for he would occasionally get a very clear picture of his future self, clad in shining robes, distributing largesse to the generality of mankind. However, the nature of the largesse rarely stayed the same for any length of time. Apart from wanting to be good like Christ or *Blue Peter*, when he was very young Martyn wanted to be a great writer like A.A. Milne, then he wanted to be a great soldier like General Napier, later he wanted to be a great farmer like Mr Trigg, later still he wanted to be a great engineer like I.K. Brunel. On average he wanted to be everything and nothing, so George's advice prevailed and he took English, Mathematics and Geography at A-level. When the UCCA form arrived Martyn still had every idea and no idea what he wanted to do at university. Then it emerged that his choice of A-level subjects was too broad to indicate whether his talents were in the sciences or the humanities, effectively excluding him from the best universities specialising in either. On the form Martyn listed, amongst others, English at Norwich, Geography at Southampton and Mathematics at London's King's College, his fifth and final choice and by an unfathomable procedure his eventual destination. King's turned out to be good for mathematics but Martyn turned out to be not so good, as he realised within his first week. Disaster loomed, so from week three Martyn switched to computer science. King's was not so good for computer science, which was why Martyn got on the course, but there is nothing like being in a paltry pond for making one feel like a fabulous fish. A diligent if unremarkable scholar, Martyn's confidence recovered and he made the best of a bad job.

As the year progressed Martyn came to appreciate that the loud and the strong did not cherish his presence. No, that is unfair: he knew from the first week that he was an outcast, but it took him half the year to accept the fact, although even then he did not take his rebuttal very seriously. Unable to earn the esteem of the aristocracy and now too late to seek more congenial company, he took to drinking on his own, specialising in Plymouth Gin. On each such occasion he made sure that he took a late-night tour around the common room just to show everyone that he had a tortured soul, before finally knocking the day on the head with the remains of the bottle. He was saved from this seductive

routine by his only remaining source of self-esteem, his reasonable academic performance. With first-year examinations approaching Martyn renounced the path of self-pity and left off the bottle for a month or two.

The exams came and went; the end of the year approached; the students tanked up in preparation for a ten-week summer holiday back home in Wolverhampton or Walsall or wherever. Meanwhile Martyn had been assessing his situation. He had been comparing his experiences of university with his vaguely-remembered expectations formulated a year before, and he was not a happy person. Deep and meaningful conversations about the purpose of life: none. Inspirational friends of the likes of Grope and Turd: none. Friends of a different gender: none, as per expectation. A new life: you cannot be serious!¹ But all these considerations paled into insignificance compared with the devastation Martyn felt as he stared at the scruffy piece of paper pinned to the notice-board.

For much of the year and despite every discouragement, Martyn had persisted in harbouring an unanticipated ambition, that of being considered one of the 'in' crowd. The crowning confirmation of noble status was that one became a 'hack' - one who had been granted a second year in the hell-hall. In the land of the blind drunk, the blind drunk old hack is king. Since less than one in ten of the residents were 'hacked', the competition was intense. And who decided who should stay and who should go? The incumbent hacks, of course. It was a fiendish system, designed to perpetuate the control of a debauched aristocracy. Imagine the bribery, the servility, the obeisance, the imperative to excel in the skills of alcoholism and four-letter wit in the presence of the masters! Martyn, having sacrificed much of his student grant, a considerable number of his neurones and all of his social standing in pursuit of the ale grail, doggedly held faith in the fantasy that his pals, the hacks, would recognise his true worth. Not a bit of it. A week after the last exam the notice-board carried the long-awaited list of the worthy successors to the sacred cup-bearers, and Martyn's name appeared nowhere, not even in the long list of substitutes necessitated by the anticipated high rate of exam failures amongst the brightest stars. At first Martyn thought the list to be a hoax, but as the truth sank in he became overwhelmed with despair. He thought of lodging an appeal but decided instead to consume a bottle of gin. Somehow, however, it disagreed with him, and when on the following morning he was still vomiting to the extent that he was bringing up bright green bile, he decided that enough was enough.

The gin and its aftermath having robbed Martyn of all emotion, he was able to assess his situation in a more balanced fashion than before. The beginning and the end of it were summarised on that scruffy piece of paper, which he had gone to investigate for the umpteenth time. There it was, sprawling on a pin, pinned and wriggling on the wall² and no, his name had not magically appeared. Why not? Why not? What was wrong with him? At that critical moment he began to see himself as a hack would have done, and what he saw was not at all to his liking.

There is a joy in realising how far one has sunk, for therein lies the prospect of recovery. Rightly or wrongly, Martyn soon came to interpret his situation as being a just punishment for his egotistical attention-seeking. He began to see the entire year as a cleansing, purging process, culminating in that great gin-induced disgorgement of self. But now he had reached the bottom. Now he had wiped the slate clean. Now there was nothing to salvage, no reputation, no friendships, nothing. Now he could begin again. Now he could rebuild a new Martyn, a new personality, his own creation, not based on the values of the loud and the strong but based on his own values, whatever they were. He was free at last - free from the judgement of others, free from the fetters of self.³

¹At the time a well-used phrase, following John MacEnroe's example.

²*Prufrock*.

³Similar to a description of Mr Toad in Disney's version of *The Wind in the Willows*.

Exultant, it did not take Martyn long to decide that he needed time on his own in order to bring about his rehabilitation. He realised that he had to stay in London over the summer. As always when one is following the right Way (as it seemed to Martyn), the opportunity to stay presented itself on cue: rooms in the hall would be made available to the public as short-let accommodation over the summer and students were required to do the bedding and cleaning. Martyn applied, got one of the jobs and the free room that went with it, cleared a space in his metal box, took pen and paper, and began to rewrite his life.

* * *

Midnight plus a bit, 3 August 1982

Idea #9: Telepathy, again.

(Attempt to combine theories after looking back on them.)

It is probably OK to say that the next evolutionary step will be to a state of telepathy. Whether or not this step is possible only time will tell.

If the telepathic state exists:

- (1) Mind can triumph over matter, so physically impossible heights can be achieved, so extraordinary forces exist, so God exists!
- (2) The physical communication barrier would be broken, so there would be harmony between telepathic beings, they would have achieved (our) utopia, so if we (humans) evolved into them (telepathic beings) then we would have achieved our utopia!

If we don't blow ourselves up then by natural evolution we shall become telepathic. (Is the transition sudden I wonder? Probably.) Utopia shall be achieved. God will exist. Utopia and God are one and the same!

If the telepathic state doesn't exist:

- (1) Man believes he exists as matter only, so he believes only in the physics that created him, so everything is material, so God doesn't exist!
- (2) Mankind does not evolve into anything very different, so life has little evolutionary meaning, so even if conditions improve it will never seem as if utopia is achieved.

Non-existence of God and non-achievement of utopia go together.

Not really a lot of choice! **THUS:**

- (1) I believe in God.
- (2) I believe that mankind will evolve into a race of telepathic beings (if given the chance), and when telepathic he shall be in his utopia and will recognise God's form. Meanwhile I shall remain agnostic.
- (3) To enable our genes to reach utopia, we must each make our best efforts in our lifetimes to ensure firstly that we produce offspring and secondly that they have a chance of life (try to avoid nuclear wars). We will never reach utopia ourselves - we do what we do for our offspring. That gives us some happiness which is our reward.

NB. Telepathic beings with human bodies may be my idea of utopia, but THEIR idea of utopia would be to do away with the bodies altogether. It doesn't matter much, since it is

merely another link in the evolutionary chain - nothing I can do about it! - not my generation.

These ideas are SO GOOD! Perhaps they're not mine at all. Sometimes it seems as if they just come to me out of the blue. Perhaps I am communicating with God! I am a genius and an undeclared prophet after all!?

I finished reading Kipling's *Kim* today. Buddhists in Tibet believe in the Wheel of Life, ever improving till the perfect state is reached. Worth investigating as a parallel theory?

11pm, 6 September 1982

Idea #22: Buddhism, again.

Frankly, Buddhism is so boring. Eight-fold path and what-not, over-rated if you ask me.¹ It just seems so obvious!

One interesting thing though. (Why didn't I think of this before?) Ever since I read *Kim* I've had this picture in my head of an Indian, like on the front of the book except I'm sure I saw him in real life. A really beautiful face. His eyes! All I have to do is just close my eyes... Thank you Pink Floyd.

I think I'm in love with that face. Am I a homosexual?! (What's sex got to do with it, anyway?) Where did I see him? Come to think of it, I've been seeing that face in my mind all year, on and off... where was it? Concentrate, Martyn! Can't remember. Goodnight, my sweet dreams.

2am

I know where it was. It was in the Fresher's Fair last year, he was on the stall next to the Bridge Club. That's what it was. I must see him again! This time I won't mess it up. There's nowt wrong with me now. Not such a big ego, for one thing! Just remember the lessons: (1) Don't drop your guard. (2) One need not have every lousy experience in order to understand the meaning of life. The downtrodden are not necessarily the wisest people, despite what Dad says (why is that relevant?) (3) Forgotten. Too tired.

It feels like it's the end of a very long search! (Why? And why can't I stop that bloody *Jungle Book* music going round in my head? I've always been mad, I know I've been mad... that's better! The Floyd saves the day!)

I'll go and see him. For sure I will.

¹After Eeyore in *Winnie-The-Pooh*.