

XQ-28

The Story of a Gene

Chapter 12

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Adrian Challis



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Although he believes the concept of authorship to be dead, Adrian Challis asserts the contradictory and dubious moral right to be identified as the author of this work under the Copyright and Patents Act 1986.

To all the friends and family who encouraged it, to all the great minds that inspired it. But mostly, to Adrian & Anthony, who lived it.

Chapter 12
Midsomer Night's
Dreame

We were in the middle of nowhere, again. Martin had driven at terminal velocity, down country lanes bordered by high hedges, impossible to see what was around the next corner, but had seldom slowed to below one hundred miles an hour all the way. It was as if we were fleeing some mythical creature, that would scoop us up in metal claws should we slow to a reasonable pace. Despite the obvious danger, Martin seemed to be completely in control of the legendary roadster, its steering seeming to respond instantly to whatever improbable curve he threw it into next, and after a few miles I stopped gripping the edges of the soft leather seat in whitening fists and tried to relax into each curve, allowing the precision machine to do its job, Martin a master craftsman wielding it with concentrated disinterest. After miles of deserted country road, we finally turned into a dirt track that's entrance was disguised to the casual observer, and up a steep incline, the Maelstrom's heavy tyres spinning on the dusty, one-in-eight gradient until, with a flick of his thumb, Martin dropped a gear and whooshed us up the pathway in a flurry of impressive torque.

The engine suddenly silent, I tried to shake the feeling that I had just been thrown off the most terrifying funfair ride I had ever experienced. I shook my head and looked at Martin, and he smiled at me, acknowledging the contrast with a little nod.

-I take it you like driving? Insanely fast...

-What other way is there? Once you know where you're going, what's the point in hanging around? And besides, I was taking it easy for you...

I wondered what 'hard' in this context might mean, and quickly dispelled the question, unsure if I articulated it we wouldn't have shot back down to the road and done the whole journey at double speed in reverse.

-Where are we?

-Wales again. Only place this kind of thing is still possible. Everywhere else is sewn up, but for some reason we can still just about get away with it here. The cops have a much smaller budget, and can't be arsed wasting it on shutting down a solstice party.

It was an unfamiliar word, but suggested elements of pagan worship, and I said as much.

-The summer solstice is the longest day of the year, when night holds sway for the shortest time. You can call it pagan if you like, but to me it is about being in the world, about the way light hits the Earth for one day only - a peak event in the solar year. It's like the sun's birthday - and a good excuse for a knees-up!

I thought about all the events of the day so far, and acknowledged it had been a ridiculously long day already, the slow dusk underlining the sense that it was still not over, and had to agree there was more than enough to celebrate. Martin was reaching into his pocket, and retrieved a small plastic bag with an airtight seal, which he broke with a flick of his fingers. Inside were about ten clear plastic capsules containing a sandy brown powder.

-What's that? I had to ask.

Martin held one up, tapping the capsule until the small quantity of powder settled into the bottom of the cap, and looked at me through the distorting lens of its length.

-Chemical name: 3,4methylenedioxyamphetamine. Activity: entactogen. Family genus: phenylethylamine. Street name: ADAM. Ian, meet Mr Love.

He dropped the capsule in my hand, and bent forward to grab a bottle of water from under his seat. I rolled the capsule in my

palm - it looked innocuous enough.

-What's it do?

-That's like asking me to describe a colour I've never seen before, or a smell you've never experienced. There is only one way to find out.

He placed a capsule in his mouth and knocked it back with a slug of water, bending slightly to enable the raising of the bottle in the ergonomic cockpit of the Maelstrom, then passed me the bottle.

-Get that down your neck.

I hesitated, shooting him an unsure look.

-Trust me, he said, you will be very impressed, nodding his head in reassurance.

I thought for a second, and acknowledged that in all our time together Martin had given me little cause for mistrust. Today had been incredible - there was no other word for it, a day of new and exhausting experiences, and if Martin was to be believed, this too was a necessary part of the ride, and so I threw the capsule into the back of my throat, and hurriedly followed it with a mouthful of water before it stuck to my larynx, and tried to flush the capsule down. It stayed there.

-Argh, I hate taking tablets, they always get stuck, and growled to attempt to dislodge it, taking another swig of water and swallowing hard.

-Gone? asked Martin.

I nodded uncertainly, and felt a presence in my throat.

-Think so. Reckon it's just a memory...

-You'll know soon enough - MDMA tastes fucking vile. Bring that, he said, motioning at the bottle, and swung his door open.

I could hear a distant repetitive thud, augmented by a tinny percussive beat, and opened my door, a sense of expectation growing as Martin sealed the car with a push of a button on a small console he had likewise pulled from beneath his seat, and as we moved off in the direction of the music, I wondered if the capsule was already working, a bounce in my step and a warm excitement in my stomach.

-Is this supposed to be having an effect? I asked as we picked our way down a narrow foot-worn track, stepping over brambles

and vines of thorns and berries.

-Not yet, we've got about an hour before anything happens. Time to get our bearings while there's still light. And believe me we'll need to - this place can be treacherous in the dark.

We moved through a clearing, the music getting louder, voices and screams of excitement cutting through its mechanical monotony. Two people were walking towards us, a boy and girl holding hands and giggling excitedly, their eyes lit with a sparkly light as they smiled broadly at us, 'alright's all round. I moved closer to Martin as they passed, and looked over my shoulder to see them collapse on top of each other, shedding clothing as they rolled amorously in the long dry grass.

-Martin, I think they're fucking, I said, surprised by their lack of discretion.

He looked back and smiled.

-I think you're right, and grabbed my hand and led me along the path. Through an arch in the bushes I could pick out a plateau, and as we stepped onto it the full scene hit me. Below us a carpet of black slate covered a wide valley, populated by hundreds of twisting bodies that gyrated in the orange glow of sunset, animated by fast electronic pulses that pumped out from four enormous speakers and ricocheted off the quarry. As we walked along the lip of the valley, I was amazed how loud the music was, how it at least doubled in volume from one edge of the narrow path to the other, and realised the slate must be directing the sound almost vertically up. As we walked, my left ear was assaulted by harsh treble, my right considerably deafer. Everywhere people danced, on hard uneven surfaces, on craggy platforms up and down the valley's steep incline, gathered in clutches on huge rocks jutting up from the slate base. The music was intolerable; it seemed totally devoid of melody, composed of clattering beats that serpented over a bass kick of stultifying banality.

-Is this what we got to look forward to all night? I shouted into Martin's right ear before realising he could probably hear me fine. He winced and lowered his head in protection, and I put my hand on his shoulder to try and apologise, but he ignored my question and grabbed my hand instead, and led me in the

direction of a small, semi-derelict flint building, glowing a dull orange, reflecting the magnificent sky at dusk.

As we moved inside, a scene of bacchanalian abandon greeted me. Everywhere lay bodies in differing states of coma, laid across each other in languorous shapes, eyes half closed, arms around bodies, purring audibly. I instinctively attempted to disengage Martin's grip, but he held on, moving to whisper -It's okay, nobody gives a shit here. In the centre of the room, an older man stood behind a raised platform upon which stood two turntables, bordered by wedges of speakers, and he looked up from deep concentration, dropping a pair of headphones, his face breaking open in a wide, toothy grin, his arms shooting out in a welcome as he spotted Martin. Pulling me with him, Martin ran round to behind the decks, and embraced the man warmly.

-Ian, this is Jonny - or DJ Swain to his adoring multitudinous fans!

The man, still smiling ecstatically, offered a hand, and clicking his feet together bowed graciously as I shook it, his grip much softer than I had imagined. He pulled me towards him and kissed me on the cheek, a most unexpected gesture, and whispered - Good to meet ya Ian - heard a lot about ya, and smiled warmly before something occurred to him, and his hands shot to the turntable, and spun a record with a flourish, deftly knocking a slider on a rectangular box between the decks. The music suddenly spun out of control, and a deeper more insistent beat kicked in, and a few of the seemingly comatose bodies that covered the floor exclaimed yeses before slumping back into trance.

-Sorry about that, he said, laughing with the nonchalance of his own dexterity, and I found myself smiling with him - he was quite a charmer.

-Is this ya first party? he asked, as his hands expertly flicked through a box of records at his side.

I nodded, adding -I never knew anything like this existed.

-Well if anyone asks, it doesn't! I'll try and make it a good one for ya - have a boss time... and went back to checking records, our moment passed.

Martin was kneeling and talking to some seemingly heavily

sedated youth on the floor, who looked up at me and tried to focus, but his eyes were moving in different directions to each other, and I quickly averted my gaze, smiling and nodding uselessly. As we got outside, I turned to Martin to ask what was wrong with the kid, and he just smiled and explained that most of the people there had been partying since dawn. I did the calculation, and realised this meant they must have been up for some twenty hours.

-My God they must be fucked!

-Most of them are! We're lightweights in comparison - late arrivals. But we're here for the night time and that's the best bit...

I looked out over the lip of the valley, and saw fires being lit in unpopulated patches, the orange light deepening the now fading dusk. The sky was turning a pale lilac, the light flat and indistinct, and my eyes compensated as my gaze flicked from flame to black slate, suddenly transfixed by the contrast. Martin had moved off in the direction of a path, and he noticed my preoccupation, and came back to grab my hand once more and lead me down into the valley.

My tread was becoming a little less sure of itself, and I tried to lower my centre of gravity, as worn earth began to give way to slate. I was suddenly very nervous, and was convinced I was going to fall, but Martin sensed it and turned to hold both hands, and walked me down slowly, his back facing the slope. There was something so assured about his passage that made me feel stupid for my timidity, and I tried to focus and concentrate on stopping my legs from shaking, which they now seemed to be doing for no good reason - I wasn't *that* frightened. Martin just smiled at me, and bade me on as we picked our way down, and soon we were in the valley, the music now much louder, but lacking in the harshness it had had above. There was something very warm about the bass as it wrapped itself around me, and despite the uneven surface upon which we picked our careful way, I was starting to feel more confident of my footing.

In the centre of the valley, a man with long grey hair was on all fours, selecting slates and arranging them in a neat tessellation. As we got closer, I realised the slates had markings on them, roughly scrawled patterns made of ovals and transecting lines.

-What's he doing? I asked Martin, and he looked over and smiled.

-That's Jamie, and if I know him he's making a dancefloor!

We continued walking towards him, the design taking form as we got closer. It was a huge, intricate sigil, made up of seemingly hundreds of smaller designs, but from the look of it, now near completion, it would soon coalesce into something whole and beautiful. Martin walked up to him and placed a hand on his back. The man sat up into a kneel, and a rough Cockney voice greeted him with a warm -Allo Mart, y'alri'?

Martin smiled and squatted, and motioned over for me to join them. Introductions complete, accompanied again with a very limp handshake, Jamie explained what he was doing.

-Ah tried to do vis for laast nite, but we got too factk on the way ere! He smiled, his head nodding. Typical init...

I had to ask.

-What is it?

-It's a tribute to the Movver Yoni, a space for ritual to asha rin va age of Aquarius... He looked at Martin. Ah know ya don't believe me but it's really comin vis time... a smile acknowledging his own uncertainty.

I looked at the composition - it stretched in a circle about twenty feet across, and each slate had white markings on it, overlapping into the next. There was a pile of similar slates beside him, about four feet high, and as I watched him take another and turn it over to reveal a series of letters and numbers, pause and place it neatly next to one on the floor, its design matching neatly, I could only marvel at its complexity.

-Fuck man how long you been working on this?

-Started a year ago today, actually - bin layin it since dawn. She only deserves va best...

-Can I stand on it? I asked, unsure if it wasn't an insult.

-Corse ya can, it's wha it's for - well not standin - darncin!

I stepped onto one of the tiles, and was amazed at how solid and flat it was.

-Jamie, you're a genius, I exclaimed, a genuine respect rising in my belly, colouring the audacity of the gesture of making a dancefloor in the middle of nowhere.

-Nice ya fink so - I prefer va tittle painter and decorata...

I look at Martin, obviously impressed, and he smiles back and winks, and pats Jamie on the shoulder and stands, asks him if he needs anything.

-Spliff's always welcome, he says, and we move off in the direction of a huge mixing desk at the mouth of the valley, waving 'Laters' to Jamie as we go.

-That's fuckin' amazing, I say as we move out of hearing distance.

-Jamie's a star, and has changed history at least once in his lifetime, says Martin, but before I can ask him to elaborate he spots someone else and nods his head. I look up and see a line of black faces, but none seems to have received the gesture. We walk towards the desk, in the centre of which stands a very tall black man, with neat dreadlocks cascading down his back. As we move around the desk I realise they stretch past his knees, tied at the top in a white band barred with sections of red, gold and green. He still doesn't acknowledge us as we move towards him, and it is only when Martin places a hand on the man's shoulder that he turns slightly and nods a muted -Alright.

I get closer, and Martin introduces me, but the man barely moves, merely flashing a quick sideways glance and drawing heavily on an enormously long spliff which he takes from his mouth in long slender fingers capped by nails of ridiculous length, so that it is difficult for him to place his fingers close together, and sucks in a huge cloud of smoke, backlit by flame from the fire that flanks the valley. He flicks his head back, and a tiny high pitched yelp exclaims a hello.

-This if Kif, says Martin, but the man is already engrossed in his task of tweaking a slider, his ear turned toward the slate face a hundred feet in front of him, and as his long nails fight to grasp a nob above the slider, the sound coalesces into a sweet blend of cacophonous treble and a bass boom that suddenly moves my chest without me. My eyes close, and my head begins to swim, and I feel slightly nauseous, and Martin notices it, and as Kif smiles and nods we walk together to a rock, and I try and steady my legs against it.

-What was his problem? I ask, nausea suddenly evaporating.

-Kif? He hasn't got one, s'just Kif!

I had read somewhere that Rasta hated people like us, thought us an abomination befitting murder. The memory threatened to make my legs give way, and I realised that everything seemed to be slowing, except my breath that came in gasps, rushes of energy flooding my back but failing to clear my head. My eyes close as Martin's voice is saying -Nah Kif's not like that, he may like to give the impression he's an unreconstructed homophobe but it's only 'cause he thinks it's part of the image - he doesn't give a fuck really...

And something twists my neck, and I wonder where the last few sentences came from, because I'm sure I didn't say anything about Kif, and I suddenly feel really drunk, and messy with it, and my head drops and I slide down the rock to the floor, and feel Martin's cold hand on my neck, and moan with an icy shiver as my head rolls from side to side, and I can do nothing but moan continuously and feel the warm vibrations in my throat, and be grateful the rock is protecting me from the full glare of the music, and suddenly I feel fine again, and look up at Martin standing above me, and into his smile, benign and approving and hear him say -You're coming up bigboy, and find myself smiling and having to agree, even though I have no idea what he's talking about, and another sudden wave of drunkenness returns my chin to my chest and I moan again, but this time the moan causes a wave of tingly excitement to pass up and down my legs, and I flop them out in front of me, and feel them moving spastic and uncontrolled, and I'm sure if I tried I *could* control them, but... why bother? and I slump and my head rolls back and heavy and another wave of pure sensation breaks down my body, and this time I have to breathe in more deeply to cope with it, and raise my so heavy eyelids and see Martin smile again, but this time less sure, and he drops to his haunches and moans as well, rubbing my head in his hands but it's not so nice and I drop my head so that his hands fall off me, and he too slumps to the floor, and I try hard to swallow and wonder what the fuck is wrong with us but without urgency - every thought seems to register then fade, like I know I am thinking something but it requires neither articulation nor response, and Martin is similarly miles away, and his hands rest

on my arms resting gaumlessly in my own lap and my legs begin to fidget involuntarily which feels really nice and sends more of the same waves throughout my tingling body so that I can only marvel at the pleasure they are causing, and I'm aware it's slightly sexual, and twitch my cock but nothing happens except for a delicious tingle right at its tip, and again I smile and moan and wonder what the fuck is happening to us but can't be bothered to ask, then a rush shoots up my spine and the words pop out

-Martin what's happening but he just moans and aspirately laughs and... oh of course we took drugs didn't we and this must be them and I say it

-...it's the drugs isn't it and moan a yes to myself and add they're working aren't they

and I see Martin nod one big nod and laugh again then nod a few more times and add -oh fuckin ell are they and despite feeling sick and drunk beyond all experience I feel calm and momentarily quietened to know where this is leading, just slumped against a rock as alien music undulates an inarticulate bubble of sludge around me...

and without knowing how I'm suddenly wrapped around him, and I feel electric blue crackles paint our skin where we touch, like the first time ever, and I open my eyes and the sky is a deep navy lit with a thousand stars, and flickering flames light every surface in dew drops of orange and crimson and I drop my head again to lay it against Martin's and smell his perfect smell and a rush of excitement melts me and I hold his face in my hands and stare deep into his huge black-brown eyes and wonder why they're not blue as usual and say -Martin your eyes have changed colour and he laughs and nods and says -I'm not wearing my lenses and I stop and marvel that even after all this time there are amazing things I do not know about him and look again deep into them and am staring into a teddy bear face of such ecstatic beauty familiar and yet more beautiful than any I have ever seen and it feels like my stomach will burst with love for him and I shift slightly and feel a rush up my spine that threatens to take my head off and just gaze open-mouthed at his beauty and watch as his mouth says what I'm thinking -You're so beautiful and we both just stare at each other and laugh silently as the music

pumps around us oblivious and I move my mouth to his and we lock in a soft exploding kiss and I run my hands through his hair and shiver at each touch and look as he is surrounded by flame and look beyond him to where a new fire has sprung up behind us and feel its heat on my face and feel icy beads of sweat break on the shore of my brow and see similar beads on Martin and stare open mouthed at the opalescent crystals like jewels covering him and shift my weight and consider stripping naked and fucking him there and then but the thought makes me realise this is not a sexual moment, each stroke we share enough, and the orange and crimson around us reminds me suddenly of the scroll from the dream I had when was it my God it was only last night and I swallow and pull my tongue from my palette to say -I had the strangest dream last night this scroll opened in front of my eyes and there was this text on it that said... and Martin interrupts me with -Blind Milton saw the regality of Hades and I sit back and stare at him gasping for air and -How did you know? and he smiles and closes his eyes and says -Because I had the same one, and there is something so other and magical and unexplainable and just plain right about it and I wrap myself further around him and kiss his neck and feel his hands and my hands all over each other and the beat starts to insinuate into my consciousness and I'm aware my body's moving in time and my body becomes agitated like I remember from being a small child my growing limbs hungry to test the cool fresh air and somehow we stand together and sway rhythmically and look into each other's puppy dog eyes and leap together laughing holding each other in time to the music, and I shoot a look at the space where I last saw Jamie and see darkness and a crowd of people dancing maniacally and we run hand in hand to the slate floor and begin moving to the music. I don't know how but my body seems to know what to do, and I do not need to watch anyone as my feet plant themselves into the slate and my head twitches from side to side and my arms flail wildly and my body and the music lock in perfect harmony and a scream grabs my chest and I hold my head in my hands and my voice shouts -You fuckin lie!!! as a new peak hits and I'm lost adrift in a sea of popping bodies and wild ecstatic whoops and cheers as the tune shifts seamlessly into some

deep bass throb, the rhythm speeding and nothing is wrong the beats gel perfectly and I look at Martin who is dancing his arms at head height and his face lost in smiling abandon and I wonder if there is anything more perfect than this and just dance and dance until thirst hits me hard and I must have water and I shoot a look at Martin who sees it too and joins me and we run off together in the direction of the DJ.

Laughing up the slope I slip a little, my foot failing to grip and Martin holds me strong and fast and I pull myself up all fear evaporating and wonder where it ever came from. The flint cabin is now devoid of comatose bodies, everyone is animated and dancing eyes shut hard just locked into a groove, the same groove that seems to move them all distinctly and for a moment I forget my thirst and lock with their movements and dance and jump and DJ Swain sees it and punches the air a look of ecstatic positivity on his face I find my own mirroring and we sway together across a writhing room of bodies until again he seems to remember something and switches his attention to the decks and I look around and remember Martin and wonder where he is and I suddenly want to be beside him and the thirst is now total and I try and produce a little saliva to ask a guy dancing aggressively beside me his face girning obscenely chewing the insides of his mouth and think better of it and step outside the mild breeze causing a wave of sweat to break coolly on my face and step into the darkness away from the cabin, and something reminds me there is a drop in front of me and look down into the valley and realise I was one step away from a very long fall, and the thought forces me backwards and I slump down against the wall of the cabin and just sit there, lost momentarily and feeling very alone.

My head falls onto my knees, and I moan again as the waves of pleasure begin to subside, and wonder where Martin can be, and flash a look around me and see only darkness. He'll come and find me I know he will, and he'll bring water it's what he does, and my mind flicks through all the moments we have shared and how he makes me feel, how alive I can be now he has bestowed such life upon me, and a wave of pure love shoots my head back and I want him here now so I can tell him what he means to me, how hopelessly dead I was without even knowing

it, and how much I want water and I stare in front of me as a shape coalesces in the darkness, and a boyish face of such stunning breathtaking beauty is illuminated in the light of the fires below, and the face keeps coming towards me and bends down and kisses me, and my eyes close as the kiss ends, and I feel cold life-giving water cascade over my face, and gasp and open my eyes to see this beautiful boyish but female face smiling at me, and she hands me a bottle from which I draw huge swallows that burst in beads of sweat all over me until I can swallow no more, and she kisses me again, and steps off into the night.

I sit blinking for a few moments, unsure if I hallucinated everything, but look down at myself to see and feel patches of cool water amidst the hot sweat soaking my t-shirt, and stand to walk back down the slope and suddenly catch a glimpse of Martin sat crossed legged in the valley, and run over to him and land on top of him, and he kisses me passionately saying -I missed you and I nod -I know and hold him and laugh, and I suddenly remember the water and ask if he found any, and he says some beautiful girl came and gave him some, and I smile and ask -Did she kiss you too? and he laughs and nods and we sink into each other's arms and hold each other for long minutes of nothing but joy.

I'm starting to feel a little normal again, the waves of wordless ecstasy becoming less sustained, and Martin suddenly looks at his watch and breathes in hard and reaches into his pocket, fiddling with something which he places in his mouth and says

-Kiss me and wish me happy birthday

and I kiss him and another cap is pushed into my mouth by his slippery tongue and he swigs from the water bottle we brought and has retrieved from God knows where and kisses me again and fills my mouth with liquid which I flush down my throat, the capsule this time making a smooth entry to my stomach.

-What do you mean anyway? I ask, still reeling from the whole process.

-It's my birthday! he says, then looking at his watch again adds -Has been for fifty minutes to be precise...

-But Martin why didn't you tell me? I could've got a present.

-Don't be so silly, this is a gift enough, but I must have looked hurt because he grabbed me and pulled me to him, and stared deep into my eyes with a look that threatened to stop me breathing all together, and said so seriously

-Ian. You gave me the best present anyone could. Something that no matter how long you live you can never give anyone else, and it meant more to me than anything I have ever had before.

I thought to that afternoon, and squirmed with the memory of our lust, my head spinning like I had just been catapulted into another reality, and flashed open my eyes to bring me back to here and now, and looked at him, and kissed him, my lips trembling with total love.

-You are so amazing Martin - how did I ever find anyone as amazing as you?

-You took the words out of my mouth again - we must stop doing this, and we laughed easily, so completely happy until a new feeling gripped me and I sat up suddenly and said *-I have to piss!*

Martin motioned out into the darkness, and I picked my way into some trees and reached to my fly. On opening it, however, I fished around inside and found my trousers empty. I panicked, and grabbed myself, to find a tiny worm in the place of my usual manhood. An involuntary squeal emitted from my lips, as I tried to grip this sorry excuse for a penis and pull it beyond the zipper. Then try as I could nothing would come. Eventually a pathetic dribble sprayed itself onto the grass below me, missing the tree by inches, and I had to lean forward to stop myself from urinating down my trouser leg.

-My God it's disappeared! I exclaimed as I ran back to Martin, who laughed and agreed.

-It does that, a worthwhile side effect of something so pleasurable, no? And besides, it's not as if we're using 'em right now is it.

I had to agree all sexual thoughts were long forgotten, replaced by a sensuality all pervading - a pleasant re-prioritisation given the past three months, when we had difficulty looking at each other without dissolving into waves of coition.

Suddenly I was lost in a miasma of nausea, and a panic spread over my face which Martin spotted and grabbed me by the hand

and pulled me to my feet.

-It's okay you've just done too much too soon, and pulled my whiting-out corpse through hot bodies to the dancefloor, picking up my lolling head in gentle hands and shouting *-DANCE!* into my face.

And dance I did; danced through the sickening dislocation my body felt from my head, danced through a physical illiteracy, danced until I knew neither who nor where I was, danced until I was ugly, until cold dawn broke the sky, and I stared through clouding eyes as mist surrounded us, and the music was just a haze of beats that sped us to oblivion, and suddenly the beat stopped, and a rising tide of slooshing keyboards caught me alone and neutered, like a fish gaping on a hook, and a child's voice intoned five words that twisted me and struck me dumb, my mouth gaping repeating the same line

We had the same dream

rising through a cloud of hiss until it was insistent, and said everything there was to say

We had the same dream, last night

We had the same dream...

and I wonder if I'm really hearing it, and my bloated eyes flick open, to look at Martin, and he's heard it too, and we both mouth the words in time to the tune's incessant insistence

We had the same dream, last night

We had the same dream

and I shout at him *-Martin they're playing our tune!* and he flashes a joyous smile, and we spin off into the void and fall onto soft grass, and hold each other and roll together swaying in time to the music, as the sun rises above the valley, and we grip each other like cuddling koalas, and fall over and over locked in each other's embrace, and lie there lost in reverie, until nothing, not even the sun, exists.

As my eyes flick open I'm blind. Nothing to see but white. Then as I blink, an amorphous image begins to take shape, a pale blue outline of a figure. I scrunch my eyes a few times and I'm seeing double. Two identical figures stare down at me. I lie there blinking trying to make the figures become one, aware that my eyes seem to be moving independently of each other, and remember the youth I saw in the flint cabin - only the night before - and wonder if this is some by-product of the substances we've taken. Then something delicious occurs to me, and I turn my head to look at Martin, to see if there are two of him, the prospect enticing, but there is only one. One's enough. I turn my head lazily back to look up, and as my eyes clear there are still two of the beautiful girl who appeared from nowhere and gave me water. As I lie there, one of them, the left one, bends down and kisses me again, shutting my eyes with the lightest of touches on my lips. I moan - am I dreaming? Then she speaks.

-I'm Pandora. This is my sister, Eve.

I somnambulantly turn my head to look at this double, but my eyes stay locked on my water-bearer as her features fix in my vision, the brightness of the day causing my retinas to stop down, her cool blue figure contrasting elegantly with the deepness of the blue sky behind her, so that as my eyes flicker she has a deeper, orgone blue halo surrounding her body. As my gaze finally alights upon her sister, I realise they are completely identical, and a slightly sick feeling of uncanniness flips my stomach, and I raise my head to place a hand beneath it as this double likewise bends down and kisses Martin's sleeping lips, that open slightly, a premonition of his eyes that uncover smoothly to stare at Eve's straightening form.

-I'm seeing double, he says, and the twins turn to each other and smile and raise their eyebrows in unison, so that it as though we are privileged spectators to a mirror image, unsure as to which side of the looking glass we are on.

I look at Martin, and a smile breaks my face.

-Morning, I say, aware of the bathos.

-It would appear so, he likewise laughs, and we look back at the vision above us, both eager to see what magic comes next.

-We're going for a shower, says Pandora, her position the only

way of telling who she is. Wanna come?

I wonder - there surely can't be showers out here? But as my mind recalls the dancefloor of the night before it occurs to me that anything is possible, and cross my legs and sit up in one smooth movement, and feel my muscles tight and aching, and realise I must have had more exercise the previous night than in the whole year so far. My skin feels hot and tight, and I look at my forearms exposed to the sun's now intense rays, the skin pink and angry, and know my face must be similar, feel the heat glowing from it, and look at Martin to see if he is burning too, but realise his skin is more suited to sunshine, and notice he is a slightly richer hue than the night before. As I sit there, Pandora nonchalantly reaches into the pocket of her hipsters and retrieves a small tube of something, and bends down and spreads cooling cream over my face, her head slightly on one side as her eyes scan me, alighting on my lips. Despite my accepted sexuality, there is something totally seductive about her behaviour, and I laugh to break the moment, unsure where it may lead, and ask

-Who sent you?

In answer she smiles, and kisses my forehead, her lips slipping on the now oily skin, and puts a cool hand on my neck and pulls me to my feet. Eve reaches for Martin's hand, and he rises with me, and in tandem we allow ourselves to be lead out of the valley, picking our way over the human litter strewn in every part of the quarry, the mixing desk and speakers gone, birdsong the only music.

At the top of the path we pass the arch that welcomed us into this other world, and walk on to the far side of the lip and over rocks through a gap where bisecting outcrops meet in an uneven V-shape, and holding hands, led by Pandora, we slip and slide down scree to another valley, this one deeper and populated by tall trees. In the distance I can hear running water, and the sun filters green through the leaves, and the breeze of a perfect morning plays on my face, and I feel Pandora's hand in one hand and Martin's in the other, and a warm happiness spreads over me as we walk easily through the woods. Up an embankment, we break the brow and look down, and see a wide waterfall cascading onto a small pool below, the light of the midsummer

sun fracturing through the water, tickling my eyes, and pause, all four of us transfixed by the vision. I look at Pandora, and she smiles and nods, a silent agreement that this is perhaps the most picturesque place any of us has ever seen, and as we move off in the direction of the water, Pandora lets go of my hand, until I'm holding only Martin's, and the twins move in harmony to the edge of the pool, and strip.

Unsure what to do, or where to look, I look at Martin - when in doubt it is my best option, but realise he has no such qualms, and a smile plays on his lips as he watches the girls disrobe, and as if checking to see I'm allowed to follow suit, I turn my gaze to the two of them as they slip deftly out of their clothes, to reveal boyish slender bodies, completely identical, small pert breasts above flat tummies, their hipsters falling over glabrous legs to reveal small pubic v's, their slightly different colouration the only distinction. As we watch, they hold hands and move through the ankle-deep pool to stand beneath the waterfall, and hold each other, kissing languidly.

I am surprised to find something stirring in my trousers, unsure if this is some indication of impending bisexuality, of the arousal inherent in taboo, or merely the total perfection of the morning so far. Martin is already pulling off his t-shirt, and my eyes shoot to his fly instinctively, and notice his too is filling out, and the vision makes my cock leap, and dispel the timidity I was feeling, and pull off my clothes, shooting a look at the twins as they hold each other, their faces sideways together, watching us approvingly as our semi-erect cocks flip out of our pants, and we pick our naked way to the pool, and share the water.

As I step beneath the torrent, the cold water takes my breath away, and we both stand gasping until we find a space of bright sunshine to stand in, which makes the water tolerable, and I pull Martin to me, and feel his hard cock slippery against my stomach, as we lean back and allow the water to cascade between our bodies, the impacts massaging our cocks standing erect against each other, and the drugs must still be working because the sensation is like the most amazing massage I've ever had, and I throw my head back and let my mouth fill with water, and stare through the deluge, the sunlight making rainbows to see Eve and

Pandora locked in a kiss at the centre of a circle of prismatic light, and I look at Martin as if to ask him what we should do, and he looks over at the twins as they turn to look at us and guess our question. We move towards them, but they look at each other and back again and shake their heads together, and then it is Eve who speaks, and in a light voice devoid of order looks me straight in the eye and says

-Fuck him. We want to see you fuck him.

I look at Martin as if to ask his permission, and in answer he pulls me hard to him and burns his lips into mine so I have to gasp around them to not be drowned, and we fall onto the moss that covers the smooth rock platform beneath the waterfall as he wraps his legs around my waist, and my cock is so hard it finds the spot almost instantly, and I move my hand to press it against his hole, and as I press it there I look sideways to see Eve and Pandora part slightly, a hand each between the other's legs, rubbing angrily in synchronised thrusts, and I push harder as Martin hitches his legs up higher and clutches at the moss and rubs loam into his hole, and its silky lubrication aids my entry, and enraged I feel myself slide into him, and hear Martin gasp and watch as he too looks over at the twins who are breathing hard, their eyes lit with a shining light that seems to come from within them, and feel him open wider with the excitement, and I push myself into him awkwardly until he grabs my buttocks and forces me harder and more rhythmically and presses his hot mouth against mine, and the water beats down on my back sending vibrations through my body which I can feel in my cock buried deep within him, and again I look over at the twins, who are gasping and rubbing each other with wild abandon, and we all seem to melt like film sticking in a gate, and as Martin humps my body in and out of him, his thick thighs wrapped around me I can feel myself bunching up, and four mouths begin to moan in unison, two voices higher, and at the instant we all seem to peak together, a duetted cry pierces the valley, and I hear birds scatter as the echo fades, and lie wrapped inside Martin's heaving body, and know nothing else until the coolness of the water makes me disengage with a shiver, and stand and wash myself, the sunlight warming me back to normality.

We lay shivering on the bank of the pool, until the sun dries us, and we dress in silence, unsure what to say. There is a shared understanding between us that this was something that seemed to come from nowhere, was the product of a perfect moment only, the only thing preventing our embarrassment the knowledge that it was unlikely to happen again. We were at ease with each other, and as I looked at Martin he smiled at me and winked, well-wasn't-that-fun written on his face. I smiled back, and then it was time to leave, and we held hands again, this time as friends, and let go of each other only when the scree that covered the hillside made it dangerous to persist. Back on the lip of the valley, we stood facing each other, Martin's arm around my shoulders, Eve's around Pandora's; happy couples.

-Where do you live? asked Martin of the twins.

Pandora answered, and looking at Martin to confirm he knew the place, we agreed to meet up sometime. It seemed we all meant it, but no further arrangements were made, and as Pandora kissed me again, and Eve kissed Martin, we turned to take one last look at the slate valley, still littered with party-goers in varying states of consciousness, and turned back through the arch.

-What time is it? I asked as the soft leather seat enveloped my body. Martin pointed to a clock embedded in the Maelstrom's fascia, and I was shocked to see it say half-past four.

-Blimey, we must've slept a long time.

-Could do with some more if you ask me, said Martin, and I considered this, and felt little waves of excitement spread over my skin, and realised despite a certain confused tiredness there was no way I was sleeping.

-Are you okay to drive?

-No problem. I've been in worse states than this, and besides it kinda focuses the body. Your head can be elsewhere, but it's like your body knows what to do.

The thought disturbed me, but again I had to remind myself that Martin seemed to know what he was doing, and suddenly thought about how I had felt the day before when I had been on the receiving end of a good deep fucking, and wondered how he was coping.

-Fine thanks, monsterboy. You certainly made up for lost time!

I blushed slightly, my own abandon a surprise to me.

-You were magnificent! I can see we'll be doing that one again...

-Mmmm, I moaned, and asked if he'd managed to clean himself.

-Nope. Got that to look forward to. I love the feeling of cum trickling out of my arse, but despite the thought making me twitch involuntarily, there was something about his comment that made me slightly jealous, and I tried to dispel the thought of somebody else's genetic material bedecking Martin's most private place. I was shocked to realise I hadn't ever contemplated this before, and tried to change the subject in my own mind. I found a suitable topic, as Martin fired the engine with a push of a button on the dash.

-Hey, it's still your birthday!

-Oh yeah, I'd forgotten myself.

-We should go for a meal or something, celebrate some more. In fact let's never stop celebrating!

-Not sure I could face food though.

I thought about it, and knew there was no hunger inside me - instead, the thought of food seemed alien and slightly sickening.

-And besides, best not be seen in public...

The realisation that what we had shared, so easily and without self-consciousness, would find us arrested in the city, made my heart sink to a new low. Without being aware of it, I had accepted our new freedom absolutely, and thought it irrevocable. To be amongst friends, amongst people for whom whatever you wanted to do was more than acceptable, to freely show love for this man who defined the word, had been the most natural thing I had ever known, and the realisation we were returning to the city, where such behaviour was not only frowned upon, but practically criminal, made me want to grab the wheel and send the car spinning back up the hill, and reside forever in a state of perpetual solstice, darkness at its weakest point. But I knew it wasn't possible - the liberty we had just experienced was temporary, perhaps even necessitated ephemerality to be so brightly glimpsed. I had thought of solstice as a state of mind, and realised instead it was for one day only, and followed the train of

thought until it dawned on me that, from now on, darkness would increase, imperceptibly at first no doubt, but exponentially nonetheless. A sudden feeling of unbearable sorrow gripped me, rooted me to the seat, so that even the steep curves Martin navigated at breakneck speed could not shake me, and Martin noticed, and asked me what was wrong.

-I don't know, I said, my voice breaking with emotion, I suddenly feel totally bereft, and I burst into sobs.

-Hey hey hey, come on mate, what's the matter?

But I can only shake my head, and sob silently, until he pulls the car over and holds me, and I cry uncontrollably, and try and say -We were just so happy, and now it's over, and he shhh's me, and strokes my head, and whispers soothing words that fail to shake the feeling of total loss, like something I never dared hope for was gone, until he took my head in his hands, and kissed my tears and said

-Look, you're just coming down. What goes up has to you know, it's a law of physics!

It made me laugh, and ask -Really?, and he nods and says

-Course it is. It's a chemical see-saw. You went higher than the sun last night. Stands to reason you gotta pay a little today. I promise you you'll be fine again soon. I'll take really good care of you, and when we get back to the city you can have anything you want.

-Bless you, I said, and tried to stop the tears, but then realised it was Martin's birthday, and I should be giving *him* whatever he wants, and felt shameful that I hadn't got him anything, and then realised what I wanted he couldn't give me, and started again, and said as much.

-You can't give me freedom. You can't change the world. You can't make it okay for us to be, just be, happy, together.

-Don't you bank on it sunshine...

There was something very strong in his voice, and as he threw the Maelstrom into gear and hit the accelerator, I looked at him, and he winked at me, and the tears stopped, and I slumped against the window, and sleep engulfed me.

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