

Title: A body tells

### Sipping a Mojito with Sandi at the shore

'I never intended to get the torso. It just happened. I fell in love with trapeze and it seemed to suit me. I'll tell you on the way back from that PSD conference, I couldn't stop staring at the bars. On that damn pedestrian Jersey shuttle. I kept seeing them, the curves, my palms sweating. I could FEEL the grip. I was like a man possessed. There were a couple of suits dozing and I just got up. Into position, found the grips, and over I went. A life-giving skinning-the-cat. It was like a vial of crack!'

### Nursing home fiesta

'Go anywhere Sheyman?' quizzed the nurse.

'No, nowhere at all, ma'am.' he replied. An hour later he was showered and ready, standing at the back. His feet were twitching inside their eighty year-old carapace. His arms felt the fire of the run from the shore. His arms fake Norwegian poles, had swung him. His voice was warm, from yodelling to the gulls before. A stretch at the beachfront and a stern talking-to had had him prepped in no time. Nothing like brutal early training to keep you doing your exercises into senility and beyond.

'One two one two', began the conductor. The powerful speakers essayed forth the main tune and Shey's friend Candice swayed happily as the Cuban teasing got her ready. He knew her joy and watched the female dancers up front began their rotations. Pom-poms whirled around and Candice opened herself to the song.

'No way – you can fight it every day. But no matter what you say – the rhythm is gonna get ya'. Shey was gingerly flexing his body, tuxed up at the back with the other men. He had not a drop of Latin blood and neither did his friend (a retired educator who's found the Life), who was definitely singing this bit for him:

'No clue, of what's happening to you, but I know it, the rhythm is gonna get ya'. He came through the ranks of retirees. Since he transferred to the New Jersey dance school at 11, he was always ready for these moments: rhythm definitely got him. He swung up his arms and his bold tap shoes rang out a staccato pulse which gave Candice even more reason to throw herself into the song. The pom-poms whirred and whizzled as the septuagenarians gave it their all for the empty auditorium. Shey and his belle threw in a samba, and soon the other retirees in and above the orchestra pit were clapping their hands, dying out in a thunderous and uplifting

'Tonight!'

As the imaginary curtain closed, Shey thought for a minute of the two people from his illicit beach trip. Would they find this happiness he wondered?

*To go, to stand, to run, to swing, to stretch, to dance, to thrust.*

### Turkish delight

In another country.

He woke late, his head ablaze. The diary was clawing its way back in. Appointments, dependencies. He laid a hand on the pillow, leaving his necklace on the side table. Today could not be stolen by yesterday. He closed the front door, so quietly; feeling its solidity with a sigh. The bus trundled into the centre and he sat. He was late and dirty and the wrong side of town; his tongue did not regret its taste of ash and swollen nature. He gave a yawn and fell to reading the quotes; kissing his teeth and giving low whistles over the prices, snarling, and then smiling. A stranger leaned over,

'You dropped these.'

'Oh thank you', he said, gulping, reminded of a husband elsewhere. He fingered the box of toothpicks gingerly, wondering what else he was forgetting apart from good oral hygiene. His mouth seemed *hungry* more than anything, for conversation, for...

'Do you have a smoke?' asked his companion. Cigarettes! He rummaged in his top pocket and found the airport Rothmans.

'Here.' The bus jolted to a stop and Henry licked his lips.

'Can we...?'

'Of course.' His companion ate the space between them, fixing the cigarette, and then his own. He shook out the lighter, and the air again expanded. In a fog Henry pushed open the doors with a rattle, breathed in the morning air, and stood outside the bus, on the pavement. He spat out the tobacco and walked for ten minutes. That was close. First he would call at the library and then the cultural centre.

*To close, to taste, to yawn, to read, to kiss, to whistle, to snarl, to smile, to gulp, to hunger, to smoke, to lick, to eat, to open, to breathe, to spit, to call.*

His quotes secure, his Kumon ideas in danger of becoming real, Henry allowed himself fifteen minutes in the airport disabled toilet. He brushed and scrubbed and changed and washed and rinsed, soaped and soaked. He dried and wiped and cleaned and flushed and binned.

'I have occupied the whole toilet', he thought.

'Used every bit of surface of this tiny place. How can my body have consumed it all?' He had scrubbed his face, changed socks and trousers, soaped away musks, trimmed beard, picked up his briefcase and was ready for boarding.

'So what am I going to tell Mike?' he looked in the mirror and a pair of cool grey eyes met his, but he broke the gaze.

## Blind date

Her throaty tones tickled his ardour as he divined the cabbage that found its way down his gullet.

'I'm serious', he said, as her laughter subsided.

'Get out of my pub!' she gurgled. He couldn't help a smile, unseen as it was. He painted a stagecoach, and took her on a trip down to Cornwall in her mind. Conversation halted as they tackled the soup. He heard her breathing in this quiet space. His own shout still rang in his ears as he recognised her back view at Liverpool Street station.

'Kate!' A short reckless cab-ride and they were here. This certainly beat tonight's planned poker game with two fellow coppers.

'In my hand I have three cards. Queen, Ace and Knave. – Diamonds', he said, sharply, forestalling any girlish interruption.

'Pick yours'. He fanned the cards as Kate flicked between them.

'Have you chosen?'

'Yes', said Kate, as she shyly took one.

'Well, what is it?' Kate found her beau's hand across the table and traced out the features of the Queen on the surface of his palm, and a small diamond, near the wrist.

'Katharine Onslow', he whispered, 'I may be old and sightless'. To disprove the point he carefully felt his way to her left ear and brushed back the hair he knew would be there. 'But you are still my Queen. And will you come with me to Lamorna?'

Kate took the card and pressed it between her husband's lips.

'Not until I finish my cabbage I shan't', and she gave a wasted wink.

*'Twas down in Albert Square I never shall forget. Her eyes they shone like diamonds and the evening it was wet. I lifted up her veil, her face was covered over...'*

## Letters (1)

From the Marriott Hotel, Istanbul, Turkey:

'I should have written you before. Can you see us growing old together in Jersey? I gave you my best years, but I have some good ones left. My brain hurts thinking of the work I have to do. With the money saved living together, I've capital to burn. I really thought I'd come back. I met the prettiest sweetest lady who's got a place with her brother in Istinye. My grandpops was from here and I fit in pretty well. Write and tell me how you get on with school and what else is new. I'm sorry it didn't work out. Henry.

PS Your obsession with your body bored me. When are you going to get on and live?'

## Letters (2)

A postcard.

'My dear Sandi. Your father and I met quite by chance after many years. I was as surprised as you will be to learn that we missed each other. Or rather our bodies did, and the minds are playing catch-up. We have been back to Cornwall and are going to surprise you in Jersey. Do you have good friends my girl? Keep them if you can. Your ever-loving Mum.'

## By the shore, again

John-Michael sat by the ceramic night-heater: the sun long gone down. So many possibilities. On impulse he ate Henry's letter, and feeling a bit sick, he remembered the older gent from earlier. Simple pleasures being the truest, he left his briefcase with the waiter, tightened his laces and went out into the night, running to the distant lights of the bay's end.