

Tuesdays

Tuesdays I put on clothes that I think make me look attractive. Even though I know the person I want to attract will never see me in them. Tuesdays I put on aftershave that I think will make me smell attractive. Even though I know that the person I want to attract will never smell it on me.

But I hear her voices calling.

Tuesdays are when my heart opens. I hear silent, secret voices. They are the sound of sweetness and light. They are blind or rather they do blind all those that hear their calling.

And yet, I hear her voices calling.

I am fearful that others can hear her beguiling voices. I see them walk past, distracted by the bright, shiny colours of signs and billboards offering a fantasy life that appears within reach but will ultimately fall short of their promises. The other people are also distracted so easily by other voices less beautiful. They have a different calling but I need not be too fearful. Every Tuesday is the same, a slight glance; maybe a smile and then quick continuous walking.

I know instinctively it is nearly time without looking at a watch or clock. The other booksellers smile at each other but I hardly notice. I'm too excited, trying to control my joy. They turn a blind eye. I put down the book I was just about to shelve. It is a special edition of *Psycho* celebrating forty years. I look at the cover as though for the first time. They have reproduced the original dust jacket: *Psycho* written in large cracked white letters reading vertically on a deep blue background. One of the few novels where the film version equals its origins. I think of *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* and my mind is snapped to a rainy black night full of neon lights and tension. Deckard fires his gun; the beautiful android has no chance. She is hit in the back, her raincoat flaps as she smashes through the shop window. The world slows and she is dead.

Her voice begins to call.

The Sci-fi and Horror section will have to wait. I try to walk past the bestsellers and customers in a calm and measured way and up the wide stairs. I see the smallish window at the far end of the second floor. I see the rows of reflected books on the glass. The different coloured covers are blurred in my mind to create the finest stain glass that has ever been crafted. The sun streams through as though it wishes to celebrate my Tuesday rituals.

Her voices are strong, beautiful and draw me nearer like they have for the past eleven months.

My eyes narrow and I know where to look. I stare as much as I dare. The thrill rises and goes straight through my body. I feel giddy as always. I slowly open my eyes wider

and

I see her.

I dare not speak. She is standing in her usual place: in front of the small fashion boutique window. She is holding her violin with all the care that a mother holds a newborn baby. Her slim body is relaxed yet charged with energy. Her black curly hair flies in the wind as she moves frantically, creating her music. Her black eyes are fixed on her sheet music on her metal music stand.

Time does not exist for she is close and I am immersed in her. It does not matter she never notices me. Her concentration is unswerving and never breaks. She seems so distant, so locked in her own world, her own timeless sphere. Does she have space in her world for me?

Wednesdays

Wednesdays are the worst. It is a whole week before my beautiful violinist will play again. Wednesdays are the emptiness that consumes me. They return me to my real life and so the longing begins to emerge from deep within. I fill my life with other activities such as reading, watching films, playing my guitar but the yearning for her is too strong. Eventually I am overwhelmed. The intensity is too much my emotions are too heightened. My mind begins to fill with her presence. Am I mad? This is obsession. This cannot be healthy. Is this love or the notion of being in love with love and she could be anyone? Is this the basic need in us all, to love and be loved?

I do not know who she really is. I only see what I see. I have created an illusion of who she is. If I probe too deeply my own created world of her shatter and disappear. Her reality verses my illusion, my reflected, projected dream of her. What if I found out her name? Would I like it? Would it be as I imagined? My illusion would be useless against real life. Is it better to stay this side of the window looking out at her where the possibilities are endless?

The unknown wasteland of rejection is beckoning and yet fearful. Too many unknown factors in her real life whereas I have all the answers I care for in my illusionary landscape of love. Here, her name is Rose, Lemoni, Amelie, Ofelia, Griet. Her laugh is perfect, her voice is music, and her soul is deep. Her mind is sharp and intelligent. She is kind, warm, funny and loving. In my illusionary world we hold hands, kiss and love each other with passion, and a beautiful equality. Here, time does not exist and each moment is pure. Each moment is love.

But how to approach?

“Excuse me, I couldn’t help but admire your music...”, “I was walking by and thought I recognized that piece...”, “I was wondering if you would like a coffee with me?” Would she laugh and smile? Would she ignore me? No way in. Better to be safe. Better to be on this side of the window.

I will have to be invited.

Thursdays

Thursdays are mildly better than Wednesdays. They are a slight comfort. The bookshop is generally busy and we receive our new arrivals. I love to book all the new books in. The smell of new print, the touch of embossed covers. New designs on reprinted classics, the latest bestseller from brilliant and not-so brilliant writers. Each book a world within itself. Each word a direct link to the author’s mind and into a new and creative place.

I tear open a new box of books and to my delight something happens that doesn’t happen often but when it does you know it is a small and significant moment. In my line of vision is a book that somehow connects. I read the title: *The Black Violin* and carefully pick it out as though it was so delicate that the slightest of movements would damage the pages. I place it on the bench and wonder at it. The detailed image of the wooden neck of the black violin is beautiful. The curves are perfect and I am lost in thought.

I start to hear her voice calling.

I envisage her reflected in the boutique window. Her mass of black curls, untamed, her deep, thoughtful eyes full of passion and wisdom. I see her perfect body in perfect harmony, not with her usual violin but with the black violin from the cover. I see sunlight shine and flood her every movement. But that is all. She looks so happy, so content whilst playing that I guess her real life must be the same. Elegance and grace. Does busking pay so well? I doubt it. Is she widowed or married, or has inherited wealth?

Married to a man who adores her and is wealthy. A man who she met at university? A man who is kind, sensitive and has a steady well-paid job. He is successful and able to provide a good material life. Whereas as I work as a bookseller on a low wage and rent my one bedroom flat. Love conquers all so I’ve heard. But what of a big house and new clothes? I don’t see love in her eyes though. It is if she is pouring her love solely into her violin. It seems to be the passion that drives her soul. Is there the longing when they are apart? The ache of desire she should feel for him?

These reflections are all that consumes my mind as the afternoon ticks by.

Fridays

Fridays are joyous for two reasons. The first is simply because it is Friday. The second is because Fridays are Returns day. The books that no one wants are collected from their temporary homes on the shelves to be returned to their place of creation. I feel sad for those books. Most are beautifully printed with lavish covers, glowing reviews on the backs or inside flaps with fascinating topics. They have been waiting patiently to be picked up and read. To be bought and taken to a new home where they will be loved and given undivided attention. The delight and pleasure they could and should have brought will never be known.

As I sit in the large rectangle shaped room on the second floor away from the gazing eye of the public. They are more than a product to be paid for and owned. They require a sense of respect. I've stumbled and stammered through so many social occasions wishing I could be polite and content with life. Yet I always end up saying inappropriate things. My tumbleweed moments.

When I was younger I was almost proud of my quick mind and razor tongue. Risking all to be funny and ultimately to be liked. I was in primary school and for some reason, lost in my memories I started to impersonate an old man whilst in the playground. I affected an old, croaky voice and began rambling. I distinctly remember hearing a girl laugh. Her voice shot out and touched me. It was infectious. I too, began to laugh. There, maybe for the first time, was a human connection unexpected and pure.

I thought I had been given a gift. All gifts come with two sides to them as I learnt. The elation I felt making my friends laugh was amazing. A high created from me to someone else and back to me. All school kids are trying to find their way. Finding out more about themselves and how they fit into their surroundings. I was no different. I had my fair share of teachers that didn't like me or were indifferent. Some teachers did like me. I responded best to them as I found I could be more than a kid trying to please with constant jokes. Inside was a serious aspect that for some reason had been pushed to one side. It never went away.

The fascination of watching copious amount of telly when I was a kid was ingrained in me. I had the illusion the programmes were real life and the characters behaved like real people. In those tender years I was learning how people interacted. That has never gone away.

Occasionally telly did reach out and put a finger on my heart to signal to me 'This is important, remember this moment because you will need it in the future.'

I remember watching *Dear John*, a comedy that revolved around a singles club. All the characters had their own hang-ups and problems. One guy called Kirk was flash, arrogant, and loved himself far too much. He wore a white suit with white shoes, gold chain and a black shirt. I had watched every single episode and felt somehow like him. I

deeply despised the bit of me that could so readily identify with him. Every sentence a joke, every reply trying to impress.

In the last episode, John (the lead character) went to Kirk's house. I was amazed to see Kirk answer the door in a brown cardigan, his hair combed flat, no gold chain and no flash white suit. Deep down Kirk was a shy and lonely human who was vulnerable and needed love. I could feel both sides of me in Kirk and knew that somehow I wasn't showing the world the person I that was deep inside. Thousands of miles separated the outer me and the inner me. Somehow I needed to take off my white suit and wear the brown cardigan. Little did I realize that I would spend the rest of my life struggling to fuse my two personas together.

When it did it happened it was like shock therapy. A thousands volts of realization crackled through me. It melted my core being and forged the me I had longed to be. It ripped me apart and left me wounded. A deep burn mark on my heart. A girl dumped me. I had thought that my two personas were fused whilst I was with Elizabeth. The relationship was lovely. She was everything. Or so I thought at the time. We were together for about a year. She had expressed doubts but said it was her and she wasn't ready to be in a long term relationship after healing a broken heart.

One night I got drunk and somehow, my two personas split. I had put my white suit on again and was truly obnoxious. I slept on the couch and so began a long and painful break-up that was stretched out over a year and a half. My two personas were firmly fused again but it was too late, the damage had been done. I look back now and I am grateful for the experience. I learnt a lot from Elizabeth about who I am and I hope she learnt more of who she is. I am happy to say that my white suit is burnt; the ashes are a reminder of my former self.

Saturdays

Saturdays are great. They are my sleep in and sod-the-world days. After spending several hours a day being helpful to people no matter how stupid, thick, rude, nice, funny or intelligent they are, it is a godsend to be alone. I sleep until I wake, get up, make some tea and toast, hop back into bed and read. I'm half way through *The Time Traveller's Wife* and loving it. I get the impression that most of my relationships are like this. Fractured moments of happy time that, ultimately, doesn't last. But I haven't finished the book so I wonder if there will be a happy ending. The theme of two personas crops up in this book, the man's present self and his past self. I can't but help make connections throughout my life. Somehow this all has to make sense. Surely there is a reason for all this? Or maybe there isn't. Maybe life is all about filling time. I intend to fill my time with things I enjoy and reading in bed is definitely one of those.

Saturdays is also a day to dream of her. I imagine she is lying next to me in bed. Her big, beautiful hair is sprawled on the pillow. She too is reading. Occasionally she will sip her

black coffee and take a bite of her toast. I will smile as I continue to read. She would read poetry, short stories, travel writing, feminist writing, essays on literature, essays on sexuality, classic, contemporary, science fiction and horror. Today she is engrossed in *The Shipping News*. Her eyes are narrowed, concentrating as she does when playing her violin. She is even more beautiful. The sunlight spills onto her face through the wooden slatted blinds. The silence of us is wonderful.

What are mind, body and soul? Saturdays can lead me down this way of thinking. Too hard a question, though, for a sleepy morning that is slowly drifting towards the afternoon. How do all three elements of the human condition fuse together to make us who we are? If indeed we do have souls. I wish I could think of a quote from some cool and obscure writer who died young but had lived beyond their years. I wish I had the type of brilliant brain Stephen Fry does that remembers amazing quotes for all occasions. I watched a documentary about him and saw he suffers from tremendous depression. Even clever minds are prone to this I thought. How complicated life is and that isn't even thinking about people who are born in horrendous places across the world.

But I don't have Fry's wonderful memory for the quotable and so I let myself slip down into my bed finding the spot on the page of *The Time Traveller's Wife* and let the words take me back to their world. My bed companion has remained silent in her world. I sense somehow she is searching too.

Sundays

Sundays are mostly and nearly always film and friends days. Lunchtimes are spent in the pub with mates, booze and food. Evenings are for films. I've got FilmFour's *100 Greatest Films of All Time* printed out and have been slowly working my way through the list in no particular order. I am doing this for two reasons. Firstly, I love films and secondly this is a good way to watch films that I wouldn't normally watch. A way of educating myself and broadening my filmatic landscape if you will.

The Good, The Bad and The Ugly being a classic example. Never been into Westerns with all that running around shooting people mostly in the desert. Just reminded me of a rainy Sunday mornings when Western films were staple TV diet. I never got the point of it. Lots of blokes after another lot of blokes for something one of them had done. How I was mistaken! What a fantastic film. So glad I forced myself to press play and let the DVD spin. I was totally disarmed by the beauty and hypnotic tension of the film. It lists number 46.

Horror films are another genre that has passed me by. I say passed by but I have chosen not to watch them. Too much gore. I have to admit to being a lightweight when it comes to horror. I do have memories of my older brother loving horror films and secretly watching some dad left lying around with his friends. I was far too young to see those images. I guess my natural instincts kicked in and I decided I didn't want to see people

get chopped to bits or have holes drilled into their heads. But horror does span a wide spectrum. It wasn't until I studied the gothic novel at university that I realised that horror does appeal to my dark side. I discovered that there is an inner horror, a horror of the soul.

I have still shied away from watching the occasion horror film that finds its way onto the list. For me, there has to be something intelligent about a film. It doesn't matter what type of film but clever. I make no defence for this. I am what I am and I know this much about myself. A friend of mine says that the films you have on your self define you. It also applies to books and music. That is just one aspect. The interests we have all neatly lined up for everybody to see. Obviously there is the hidden self. The hidden self we know about but few others do and the hidden self that we do not know about that slowly over a lifetime emerges and can be quite surprising.

I have a few films lined up on my shelf form the list waiting to enthrall me. I shall face my fears and watch *The Exorcist* tonight. If only I could face another fear, the fear of her rejection.

Mondays

Mondays are the second best days after Tuesdays for obvious reasons. Mondays glide, Mondays float, Mondays come and go in a blink of an eye. I don't suffer the weekend blues. I'm at the bookshop once more to serve the book loving public and to feel connected to those thousands of worlds I haven't entered but will hope to soon. There is never enough time. Even if I read from morning until night I still would never read all the books I want to. Where would the time for watching all the films be found? Let alone friends and family. And for love? I can hear the words of my long departed grandma as in my head, "Choose your time wisely, for time waits for no one."

How true she was. I've also noticed how time is speeding up the older I get. How does that work? I remember as a child how the school summer holidays lasted forever. Now as an adult, with a job and an adult perspective on life a year can feel like a week. I can already hear the soft, faint voice of time reminding me that life is passing me by and how I get anxious that I haven't achieved much, that I haven't created my masterpiece or reached my true potential. But that had been half my trouble. What should I be focusing on to reach my full potential? I'd tried art, I'd tried acting and I'd tried writing.

I was even in a band called *The Beards* that had our one and only gig cancelled because of a local newspaper article hyped us up and said loads of fans would be 'beard-stomping'. We didn't have any fans. The band had only been rehearsing for five months in my mum's garage and the lead guitarist's girlfriend who was on work experience and wanted to cut it as a music journalist wrote the article. The venue got jittery and backed out but failed to tell us until we had arrived with all our gear and a handful for friends who thought it would be a laugh.

So where was I now in the huge, unknowing ocean of life? Drifting and with no visible landmarks to conquer and claim my own. No area to be an expert in, no talent that would shine and bring joy to others. Not much to ask really in life. Give me *something, anything*, please. I had watched my friends disappear to art college and to university meeting up with them in their breaks to hear and see them grow and unfold like a flower who had finally been splashed with water after years of drought. I watched their bright, animated faces light up as they told of their adventures and of their new loves. How come all of this good stuff was happening to them while I sailed from one desert island to another?

The other booksellers could see deep within me something burning and, as yet an unawareness of what that could be. Some thought I was weird, some creepy, some thought I took drugs and some could get was I was about. Those booksellers also had the deep desire of something else burning inside. To be away from the confines of the bookshop to enjoy the freedom of elsewhere and anywhere. Even if I reach the old age I'd still be searching. I'd still want to reach my full potential. I'm probably too hard on myself. I can list achievements in my life but the desire to carry on and achieve more is still hungry. Maybe that burns out or maybe it increases as the years fly by, as you are painfully aware of death.

And what of the desire of love?

Tuesday

Tuesday, *this pacific Tuesday*, is not like any other Tuesday. This is the Tuesday where my life imploded and exploded. I first knew something was different as I walked along the river. The birds seemed unusually quiet, the trees still and the air felt thin in my lungs. The colour of the town as I walked through various alleys, past other shops, had changed. Everything was soaked in an unearthly light blue shimmer. All my senses were heightened as I walked past *her* empty spot in front of the small fashion boutique.

I heard her voices calling.

I waited outside the bookshop with the others waiting for the manager with the key. They were not as chatty as usual. Somehow I felt they had foreknowledge of what was to happen. I began to feel resentful towards them. Why didn't they share in their news? I sensed the same feeling I've watched in cats when they know someone is going to die. The manager was apologetic as she unlocked the door and we filed in. The quiet of the books calmed me.

And yet, I heard her voices calling.

Time was strange that morning. It bent and distorted, it curved and straightened. I could see from inside the bookshop the town was filling up with people in their own worlds,

criss-crossing like ants with purpose. Spilling into our shop, browsing the books, soaking up the hushed calm only found in libraries and religious temples. I was courteous, helpful and patient despite being asked the same question, “Do you have a book, don’t know it’s title or the author. I heard it on Radio 4 the other day. It’s about war?” at least 6 times. But I knew something more was in the air.

Her voice began to call.

I found myself inching towards the wide stairs. There was no excitement, no thrill that normally whirled through me. I could hardly see the smallish window at the far end of the second floor as a temporary display had been erected. The light was dull and flat against the window as it came into view.

Yet her voices sang strong, were beautiful and draw me nearer like they had for the past eleven months.

My eyes narrowed and I knew where to look. I stared as much as I dare. I felt sick like never before. I slowly open my eyes wider

and

I could not see her.

I dare not speak. She was not standing in her usual place: in front of the small fashion boutique window. Someone else, an impostor was flipping the locks on their violin case and easing out a foreign violin. I heard the gunshot of my mind, my thoughts imploded: *Deckard fires his gun; the beautiful android has no chance. She is hit in the back, her raincoat flaps as she smashes through the shop window. The world slows and she is dead.*

I’m not sure how I found myself in the street staring at the violinist. She was lost in concentration but a different kind. A mechanical kind, cold and methodical. Where was her love, her passion her desire? I was oblivious to people flitting either side of me save their energy clashing with mine. It felt like tiny daggers stabbing, darting. Where was *my* violinist? Her slim body relaxed yet charged with energy. Her black curly hair flying in the wind as she moved frantically, creating her music. Her black eyes fixed on her sheet music on her metal music stand. *Where was my Rose, Lemoni, Amelie, Ofelia, Griet?*

Time began to be cruel. Instead of ‘normal’ time, it slowed like a mangle was stretching it. I was neither courteous, helpful nor patient. I was lost at sea. I was gone. I was a walking body with no mind or soul. I sensed the other booksellers glance at me with sympathetic eyes. I avoided looking at them and barely looked at the steady stream of customers. I was a violin with no strings.

And still her voices called.

My gaze was fixed on the wooden counter. I could hear soft murmurs in the distance as customers exchanged their book opinions. It was though I had a thick blanket over me, all my senses were dull. My joy was gone. My mind offered hopeful glimmers of comfort: *she's on holiday, she's ill today, she's visiting a sick relative*. I knew none of them were true. She was gone. My hesitation had caused her to slip out of my life. I would never know who she was or what she loved in life. I would never know her name. I had waited on the pavement, waited behind glass, and never dared to ask her the simple question that would have at least spared me the pain of not knowing. Spared me another *what if* in my life. If only I had asked her for a coffee. Even if she had declined I still would have known. I would have closure and moved on. Each Tuesday her music would have become less and less vital to my heart. Her voices that called me would not reach my ears as they once did.

Nearer and nearer.

The explosion happened as suddenly as a firework. I noticed the change in light on the counter. I inhaled sharply. My body moved, felt like my limbs were pulled upwards by strings. My head tilted back slightly and my gaze was interrupted. A small, thin book slid into view. I recognised the cover instantly: the detailed image of the beautiful black violin. The curves perfect, new curves were added. A slim, elegant thumb seemed to follow the contours of the black violin. I followed the new curves off the edge of the book. My blood was racing, my heart thumping. My mind was faster than my eyes as I gently gazed at her slim relaxed body. Her curves of her face absorbed me, and were framed by her black curly hair. Her deep black eyes were whispering. Our eyes met.

Her soul was inviting me.