

"the mirror makes the bedroom twice as big"

chapter one - knocking

Love, true love, the old-fashioned hearts and flowers style of love, is low in supply and high in demand. Right now, at the beginning of the twenty first century, proper love is hard to find. When two people meet and it clicks, when both know there's something too precious to risk losing - that's as rare as rocking horse shit just now. So think how lucky Ben felt the day he bumped into Eleanor. Instant shockwave, chemicals pounding through his system as he smelled her perfume for the first time. Seeing her eyes, her smile, all for the first time - he had to have her. There was no question, she felt the same; within three months they married on impulse - head over heels in love. Nothing could get in the way of them; ten foot tall and bulletproof, there was absolutely no way that anything could go wrong. He was a recent media graduate, with a shiny new job in marketing at an independent film studio - she was still in her second year, they met at a mutual friend's party in the digs that smelled like a combination of fungus, cleaning products and weed. This story begins as they take their first real plunge as mister and missus; viewing a house together.

"Oh, it's a bit smaller than I thought it would be", mumbled Eleanor beneath her breath as the balding sales guy went through his routine. Ben had to agree - the bedroom in particular was half the size they'd ideally go for. As always, though, Eleanor looked for the positive. "Never mind, look at the size of the mirror on the wall over there! The mirror makes the bedroom twice as big." He didn't know whether he smiled or not, but inwardly Ben was beaming. He didn't deserve her.

Three months later, the happy couple moved in - the house was affordable and a bit of cash on the hip suited both of them. They had made the place their own. Ben found out what a 'woman's touch' really was - little plants and pot pourri weren't high on his agenda before this happened, but he took it all in his stride. One of the last things he had delivered was the bed, which Eleanor never really liked from it's arrival. It was impossible for her to have a proper night's sleep on it, it was lumpy and itchy sometimes. Ben didn't notice this at all - maybe bachelor training, single blokes in their mid-twenties can sleep anywhere you like.

One night, Eleanor was having a particularly restless night. Ben had noticed she talked in her sleep sometimes, little mumbles here and there. He thought it was cute - and she didn't mention other men's names, or else he'd have put his foot down. Tonight, her noises were more legible than usual.

Something about knocking, knocking...

something about charity money....

That was it. She turned over and went to sleep, but he lay awake for a while... "crazy bugger..."

Over the next few weeks, Ben's health began to suffer. Nothing unusual about that when you're trying to get to grips with a new life, nothing wrong with putting a brave face on things... Most of the time he just felt a little blocked up, nauseous, a little dizzy. Perhaps he was run down because of the sleep he'd been missing out on recently. Ben shrugged.

Another month or two passed like nothing. Eleanor seemed to be cruising through her course; Ben was very proud of her, he found himself boasting by proxy down the pub after work. Things weren't so good with Ben's health though. He'd started to get dizzy and confused occasionally through the afternoon, sometimes he was so groggy he forgot what he was working on. This meeting, that presentation... some days passed like a blur, then he would find himself driving back home again with little or no memory of the events of the day.

Eleanor was coming up to an exam, Ben was helping with some coursework having already passed with a first. As he opened the door, he could smell spaghetti bolognese. This 'being in a couple' lark was working out really well for Ben, barring the fact he was knackered all the time. He was looking forward to getting to bed already; it was only half past seven. The doorbell rang. Ben took the chain from the catch and opened the door. It was a middle aged woman with a wobbly, hairy mole and a bucket. "could you spare some change for the local hospice, son?" she said. Charity!

Coincidence, but she didn't knock.... Ben gave her the fifty pence he'd had in his jeans since Tuesday. The middle aged woman thanked him and walked away down the path. Her heel had come away, as she walked it flapped like a castanet. Knocking...

Knocking.....

chapter two - Heaven's Door

Time is the ultimate leveller. One minute you're Eddie the Eagle, next you're Paul Burrell. It's the same with relationships - once the perspective has gone you're struggling. As time went on, Ben's perspective changed an awful lot. Once he was the ultimate new age bloke, suave and sophisticated he shook but didn't stir - nothing he did was criticised. Next minute, the goalposts were moved and Ben found himself in frightening, uncharted territory. Physical love took a back seat as he did his best to keep the jigsaw of his life in one piece. Two, three weeks passed and the ritual turned into a rut, Eleanor got clearer and louder and sleep was well off the menu. One night, the words were extra-clear, as clear as the charity woman night -

"Bolton 3, Sunderland 7 (seven)"

Even the written number was there, as well as the actual number. Things were too weird at the moment, thought Ben, as he passed out on the settee.

When Ben woke up, the score was being confirmed on the television.

He blinked. Was that a dream?... No such luck. He was far too tired to deal with this, but he knew this had to be more than a coincidence. Tomorrow night he needed to be with it, to try and reason this out. Ben went to bed and found Eleanor hogging his pillows. It was just one more way for her to annoy him, he thought, before he passed out in a pile at the bottom of the bed.

The next week was far worse. Rut now firmly in place, Ben had grown used to sleeping with his hands over his ears - what you can't hear can't freak you out. Eleanor thought Ben was going 'a bit mental', causing a good number of arguments between them.

"Why does it have to be me?" it would usually go. "What's to say you're not dreaming all this bollocks yourself, Ben? I've never woken up halfway through some bloody prophecy!"

"It's you because I'M SODDING HEARING YOU!" Ben would scream at this point, on the verge of tears through frustration (and the fact there was a chance she might be right).

By this time Eleanor would be halfway out of the door, shaking her head. Off to her friend's house once more, with tales of what an utter nob Ben was turning into. This was Ben's cue to curl up on the bed and get some more sleep. Dreamless sleep.

It was after an argument much like this that Ben woke up with Eleanor beside him. She began to speak.

Something about....."one hundred and fifty three"

Something about....."trust Peter....." - the last bit trailed out

Something else, very faint.... "knock knock knock"

Ben thought about this, a little confused. They didn't know anyone called Peter, the rest could mean anything (or, hopefully, nothing). For once, he didn't feel a chill or sense of foreboding and buried himself under the duvet. Sleep soon came, full of visions and strange images, none of which he could remember by the time he was sipping his coffee in work the next day.

Nine 'til nine thirty was the news on the radio, which Ben listened to by habit while sifting through emails. There was too much junk getting through to his inbox - he'd have to have a word with that geeky tech guy two floors up. Something suddenly made Ben's ears prick up. The radio - what was that headline? A sense of dread came over him, red-flushed with fear he listened to the main story of the day.

"We are getting reports of a major air crash at a residential estate in the Peterborough area; one hundred and fifty three people are reported dead at the scene, including ninety passengers, the entire crew and an estimate of forty local residents. Peterborough housing trust are holding a meeting with emergency services and local MPs as we speak - and we'll bring you more on that story as soon as we can."

Cold and numbed, Ben had one thought going through his head. I'm sure my missus could bring you more on that story. He changed station, tuning into a Sixties special. Bob Dylan was playing exactly what Ben expected he would be playing; "knock knock knocking on heaven's door...."

chapter three - the mirror

Ben and Eleanor's relationship had gone from sixty to zero in two seconds. Fresh as their love for each other was, the baggage they had made for themselves was too heavy for them to cope with. They started leading separate lives, merely sharing a house and a bed together, Eleanor trying to put the facade of normality on things. Too tired to complain, Ben just kept bringing the pennies in and kept his mouth shut. Eventually, even that was too much for him. The doctor signed him off work with fatigue and stress; trying not to listen to stories of fortelling the future, he prescribed him some Prozac. Eleanor never believed Ben's story about the plane crash, she thought maybe the doctor was right and some rest and pills might be just the tonic for him. Ironic that he should be advised to rest, given he couldn't stay awake most of the time. At first Ben had just felt numbed by the terrible news his wife appeared to be predicting. Now, he felt numb towards a lot of things. His career, his relationship, himself. Eleanor went back and forth to University as he lay, weakened and breathing lightly, in their bed. Funny enough, Eleanor seemed to get used to the bed once the visions had started coming, which only occurred to Ben on the night which marks the end of this story.

Eleanor wasn't herself that night. She was strangely quiet and withdrawn, even for her. Ben was already in bed of course, half zonked. She came in from the living room and joined him. sometimes Ben regretted the way things had gone. Maybe he could have tried harder to work things out between them in a more civil and loving way. They were supposed to have been in love once, after all. Some of the good times came back to him as he lay next to his Wife, he stroked her cheek with memories of affection. Quickly, he whipped his fingers back from her pallid skin; she was stone cold and breathing slowly, slowly. She began to move; something wasn't right about it, like she had splints on or something.

Eleanor turned to Ben and grimaced. Her face was a sour, terrible parody of the beautiful face he knew. When he closed his eyes a few months ago, she was there in all her glory, hanging around behind his eyelids winking at him playfully, purely because of the love he felt for her. Now, he would see this, and every day would involve screaming inside like a frightened child. In a terrible, rasping voice, she started emitting noises that he eventually recognised as words, words which paralysed him with fear. He was too tired to resist, and there was something about being close to Eleanor that dulled his senses, like going under an anaesthetic.

Something about "Knock Knock Knock..." - Knocking in every prophecy, he hadn't noticed before.

Something about "you finished now, both done"

And a final something - the last words Ben ever heard. He realised now that his wife was gone and probably had been for a long time. Softened up and ready for the kill, he listened to his beloved Eleanor's voice for the last time, a grotesque imitation. "the mirror makes the bedroom twice as big"

Her head twisted to one side - Ben heard a crack and her eyes moved slightly, as if they didn't fit in the sockets any more. She reached toward his head, grabbed him like a rag doll by the hair and dragged him toward the mirror. As they got closer Ben stared at their reflection through the blood, pumping down his forehead like a hot, slow leak and stinging his eyes. In the mirror he thought he could see a blur, a shape, standing between Eleanor and the mirror. A tendril of the shape seemed to be attached to Eleanor - or was it coming from the mirror itself? The couple approached closer and closer, as if being reeled in by some grisly, unseen angler through the bedroom wall. Ben's breathing became more and more shallow. More and more blurs seemed to be coming out of the mirror, hurrying like tourists rudely pushing out of a tube train. In a timeless moment they were inches away from it, staring at their reflections; Ben was hypnotised like a rabbit in headlights. There was another timeless moment.

Eventually he felt his head thrust forward like a jackhammer, smashing into the glass. Knock. Knock. Knock.

When Ben's studio alerted the police three weeks later, the police found two bodies, a young couple. He signed off depressed, she flunked out of Uni some months ago. It seemed as if they'd pretty much killed each other during some sort of manic fight, friends had told the police about their marital problems but they hadn't mentioned that the pair of them must have been absolutely mental to do that sort of damage to each other. The only question was where did the wounds on Ben's head come from? They were consistent with injury from glass, but every window in the place was intact and the mirror in the bedroom looked brand new. Good choice of mirror that. It was quite a small bedroom, but with that there...

The mirror makes the bedroom twice as big.