[ 7 minute read ]

Cars passed us but I knew they might just as well be illusions. The roads emptied.

In the town, everything seemed ‘normal’, just as a human in a human world might experience an affluent town in the UK. Hakim and I ‘browsed’ the population and ‘window-shopped’ the creatures in human form, slowly and carefully so as not to attract attention. The sun shone strongly and cast shadows where they should be; but I expected that. The shadows faded away. Observation, it seemed, changed the process or the facts of the circumstances. What was actually taking place was the positive transfer effect of my past experiences was interfering with new experience. In effect, expectation overruled surprise. The similarity between the world as we know it and this spiritual world was so compelling that I inadvertently acted as though I was at home. Of course, I was, but out of phase with the physical world. Hakim and I were somewhere in England but not with any physical substance.

‘Pretty difficult to grasp anything isn’t? offered Hakim.

‘Spirit fish, it all wriggles and swims away just as understanding wades in.’ I said. Heads turned towards us. Even though Hakim and I knew that if we drew attention to ourselves more focus would be applied to identifying us, that knowledge and understanding did not, as one might expect by now, stop them looking at us or following us. So, knowing that spirits are near will not make them go away, it just makes us more attractive to them. Somehow they can pick up when we perceive them and recognise and understand what we have perceived.

Hakim swore. Most of the staring ceased and only a couple followed us up to an open cafe door. There was a smell of herbs.

‘Nice!’ I conceded, ‘but why?’

‘You are so different to them because you don’t deceive. We need to blend in, be more like them.’ It made sense but I didn’t like it, not a bit. For me, that just stank of contamination. How long would it take for the leaching of automonous deception from them to reach into me and become self-denial, the seed for open lies to the rest of the world?

We were ignored by everyone in the half-full cafe, The ‘chase’ had stopped at the door and no-one inside looked at us. It seemed that Hakim had managed to shroud us from scrutiny with his swearing. We had, of course lost something about ourselves. We were tainted.

Despite there being a sign that said ‘We Seat You’, no-one came over. This cafe had leather sofas as well as tables and chairs. One sofa was available and Hakim and I were about to sit down when we both looked at each other remembering the stuffed creatures we had seen in the museum during the formal visit. We sat at a table that butted up to another, with three men seated at it.

‘I don’t think we will find anything here.’ I whispered to Hakim. He agreed and we started to rise. I never saw the movement but felt a hand grasp my right wrist. It was exceedingly strong and extraordinarily real.

‘Sit down.’ I looked from the hand to the man’s face seated to my right at the next table. It had an intensity to it that matched memories I had of a fervour to maintain a secrecy; the teeth were clenched and the words had escaped through only a small gap formed by his lips which still retained an slightly open shape despite the sentence being finished. The recognition and understanding I had of this did nothing to reduce the strength of his hold on my wrist. Struggling would have drawn attention from the customers in the cafe, and I was powerless to escape.

‘Sit down!’ Strangely the other two men seemed oblivious to my dilemma and continued to ignore us and chat to one another. My captor looked away from me and rejoined the conversation with his companions.

I sat and Hakim followed suit, both of us unsure what to do. Neither of us spoke. The hand released me, but I did not move to rise again. What was different about these three men, to the other entities, was that they were trying to hide any interest they had in us.

‘You’re visitors.’ The voice came from a man in a blue shirt across from the man seated next to me. “You’re clumsy. Why did you bring the Brownie?’

Hakim stared at him, infuriated, and suddenly realising that we were the reciprocal to spirits in our human world so we, ourselves, had no physical substance in the spirit world, he rose and walked away from our table towards a very large plate-glass window, where there were no tables, and passed clean through it, without breaking it, to the pavement outside. I hadn’t realised we could do that. When you think about it, Hakim, as a spirit guardian, should not be able to do it. He should have mass respective to his nature. Yet, he was a manifestation of my making; in essence, a piece of me, an extension of me if you will. That is how he is infinitely and solely connected to me and my sight.

Just as in the ‘real’ world we would feel a cold breeze and say something like, ‘Someone just walked over my grave’, or we might tell someone that our ears are burning and they respond with. ‘Someone is talking about you’, when Hakim walked through a window without breaking it, although it might not always be directly noticed as such, it could be heat-haze, there was a visible ripple in the air where the window was. A lot of heads in the cafe turned towards the window, alert to anomaly. They looked searchingly around themselves and settled on me, seemingly not concerned with the three men near me. I felt I had no choice. I didn’t know these men and had no idea what they might do. All I could think about was to flee. It was what we had done in the church and catheral grounds earlier. I used the same exit as Hakim and joined him outside. Every head in the street turned towards us and I realised that we were substantially visible. It had not occurred to me that by being calm and moving slowly we were not evident to passers-by. In the real world, we do not ‘see’ anyone on our pavements in towns, even though they are there and we avoid bumping into them, If one of them was naked or shouting we would notice them as an anomaly to our past experiences. We perceive other people but do not record them for immediate or later scrutiny.

By making two anomalies in quick succession, Hakim and I became obvious targets for attention. We had become the distraction of a woman in a red dress in an environment of grey-suited men. The problem we had was that the environment we were in was not on a human level of perception. Whereas humans will just brush off a quiver of strangeness because we have no reference points, the spirits here live what we think of as weird, they breathe weird, and notice weird, and don’t forget weird. Just like we, as humans, cannot pass through walls in our solid world and they can, Hakim and I were the reciprocal to this. As spirits with hosts in the physical world, we, to the free spirits were weird, and now very visible. I remembered Harrari’s words about being clumsy and not paying attention to any inadvertent effect I might have on my environment. I wish I had remembered it before.

Pandemonium broke out. Chairs clattered to the floor as the whole cafe erupted as one with ‘bodies’ thrusting towards the door. ‘The door, not the window or wall – interesting,’ I thought. We needed to fade, but Hakim went back through the window. Scared and frustrated, I gravitated to my former type and swore, bringing up energy to my muscles to run. The cafe customers ignored me and rushed back through the door into the cafe. Hakim came out through the wall of the building next door. I couldn’t help noticing that the three men in the cafe were still seated at their table. One of them had his head in his hands, another was slowly shaking his head looking at the table. The third just stared at me, a look of patient contempt scrawled across his face.