

Four Characters (with implied narrative.)

Paul O’Kane 2010

(1,330 Words)

The Green Man’s feet walked planted deep in native soil. He invariably grasped a local ale and kept a merry quip close to his lip. It seemed a shame to shatter his lifelong reverie, formed as if from clouds of nostalgia and influenced by the one book he had thoroughly read - Robinson Crusoe. That literary figure provided the Green Man with a model of good Christian stoicism and inspired him to maintain standards and traditions against all odds and others. The Green Man tolerated the great parade of cultures that passed before his eyes in the complex modern world, but only as a panorama that - he assumed - assembled itself precisely for his entertainment. The moment his attention shifted these others ceased to exist and he would turn back to whittling away at some time-honoured craft, passing another contented day in his homeland. The Green Man was liked and likable, jolly and rosy-cheeked, as if all the health in the world were sucked in to him from those around. He had sparkling eyes and an infectious grin, was a master of sorts, or at least seemed born to rule some diminutive kingdom within the great kingdom he so loved. His own small world would always be the measure of the wider world and if you strayed into Green Man’s-land you were identified immediately, a mental tag applied for the purposes of order. You might become ‘the short one’, ‘the Mediterranean’, ‘the one who walks (or talks) like that’ and so on and, like it or not would retain that tag for as long as you encountered The Green Man, for as long as he remembered you, no matter how you or the world might change. Ultimately The Green Man saw others only as an

aspect of his own requirements and others could never see beyond his impervious surface. The Green Man compared himself morally and practically with the resilient figure of Crusoe but *we* are more inclined to compare him with Humpty Dumpty, albeit a version of that character who would never, never fall, nor ever be seen to fall - god forbid - a Humpty who would *never* be shifted from his very safe and very favourite place.

The Lascivious Orientalist never really knew his place, in every sense of the word. No loyalty or discipline ever adhered to him and he spent his life as if ever elsewhere. He couldn't distinguish his insides from his out and had a kind of lust for all things other. Women interested him only if exotic, and the more exotic the more interesting they were. He had a particular soft spot (if we can call it that) for Asian ladies and had studied reams and tomes of aesthetic theories trying to fathom why he found them so enchanting. Was it their generous and almost constant smiles, the mysterious curves that shaped their eyes, the button shine on their black pupils set in dark brown irises, which made the white gleam in contrast? Perhaps it was the subtle glow of their unusually tender skin, their straight black shining hair, or some invisible and enigmatic grace influencing the senses by means of magical messages? He did not know and knew he would never know and he knew that all the authors of all the knowledge regarding the science of beauty also had no conviction in this regard. At his balanced best, he considered himself sophisticated, progressive, even 'global' in his slightly frenzied admiration for all things other, but there were periods of loss, rejection or hurt pride when his passion for the exotic seemed almost an affliction, leading him into disrepute, all-but disabling him when his desirous mind concerned itself with one foreign face after another, leaving him dizzy and

directionless, like a bee drunk on an abundance of unfamiliar blooms. This preoccupation was unpromising for any woman of his own nationality who found him attractive for, correspondingly, he found not the slightest aesthetic or sensual interest in any woman of his own land, proud England. This fact sometimes perplexed him, fearing he had not outgrown the polymorphous perversities of the infant stage, and yet he rationalised it all away by considering himself 'anti-oedipal', recalling he had never once defied or competed with his father but only respected him as a man, *confidante* and friend. And though his mother was fair and thoroughly English he had never once - even in the wildest throes of pubescence - desired her.

The Queen of Hearts was named thus by her peers because she resembled nothing so much as Charles Dodgson's character interpreted by John Tenniel in his famous illustrations. Mr Tenniel had of course always intended his interpretation of Dodgson's words to be far from desirable and few would disagree that this Queen of Hearts bore a resemblance to the fictional character. In truth, even the most objective surveys would be unlikely to find her attractive. Both Tenniel and Dodgson -like the majority of artists – presumably based their representations on faces and characters they had encountered in real life, and if we are reversing or extending that tendency here I hope it is excusable. The Queen of Hearts spoke as one imagines Dodgson's character to speak, as perfectly English as it is possible to be while invariably announcing unshakeably righteous opinions with a pert nose held aloft. This meant, however, that in proud island England where men's fancies often turn exotic she went undesired by her own. Nevertheless, nature, in its fair and balanced way awarded her compensatory gifts. Her high-pitched

irony gave regal authority to her humour, which occupied a stratum only glimpsed by ordinary mortals as passing over and above them. Meanwhile, the tragedy suffered in the looks department conspired with her substantial sense of self-worth to create an inflated personal mythology as someone of not only great mind but great beauty too. And so, just as the Queen of Hearts saw every opinion of every other as wrong or unworthy of consideration, she extended this logic to the issue of her appearance with the result that, while her audience found her appearance discomfiting she regarded herself to be 'fairest of all' and regarded even the mirror as ignorant, inadequate or mistaken. Thus, when preening, powdering and puffing herself in some gilt rococo glass The Queen would smooth her hair in contemplation of an image no-one else could see; and this presents us with the fatal flaw in a character otherwise highly regarded and respected for its wit, humour and intelligence. But what need for objective reality would such a person have? The Queen of Hearts seemed to inhabit a unique and unattainable realm. She walked as if preceding a glorious train, leaving an invisible but turbulent wake into which none dared step. She proceeded as one who had lived and relived our tawdry lives long before us and thus mocked the folly of our stubborn and misguided persistence in this world.

Shino was an Asian girl with a certain something that snagged men's attention. Though diminutive she grew in stature in the mind of any man doomed to cast his eyes or turn his thoughts in her direction so that, in such men's imaginations she soon fleshed-out to the precise proportions of their ideal, even if she was no such thing in reality. Her complexion too was far from perfect, but this fact only drew enigmatic sympathies from those tempted by her magnetic essence. Shino's voice was oddly deep, so that words

formed with the slightly child-like accent of one speaking in a foreign tongue, appeared incongruous to her petite frame and sounded beguiling when formed by her vivid, sultry lips. Shino's hair was cut to a crisp bob that lifted artfully behind to frame a soft golden nape where -for some ancient reason- every member of the opposite sex imagined himself nestling, there to escape the cares of a responsible, orderly life and start out on some irresistible adventure.