

*Elvis and the moths*

His name was Graham and he looked like Elvis. I wasn't the only one who thought so, I commented to my nurse Chris that one of the other patients reminded me of Elvis and he knew immediately who I was talking about.

It's true, I was seeing archetypes everywhere at that stage. I only had to cast an eye around the patients and staff of Millview Psychiatric Hospital, Brighton, and there was not only my chubby, slightly dreary Elvis, but a tall, elegantly thin Helen of Troy, a feisty French Marilyn Munroe, a cheery Italian waitress called Maria.

Of course there was also me, sometimes Mary Magdalene and at other times the representative of all artists' life models throughout the ages.

My Elvis was slightly portly, had a great quiff and a wicked wandering eye, as Johnny Cash would say. He was very soft spoken and also, very depressed. His relationship had recently fallen apart.

When choosing a lunch or dinner companion I would gravitate towards him. I loved how he was so gentle. He spoke like a country and western song. But he was a conversation dominator and a conversation downer and I would try so hard to have the last word or prevent him bringing me down.

As one hot afternoon became a balmy evening I decided to try and relax in one of the green plastic hospital deck chairs. When you're coming down from florid mania, relaxing is hard work. It takes great concentration and will power. I took my chair and placed it in the centre of a concrete circle in the garden.

Which way to face? Weather vanes, compasses and direction were obsessions at that

point in time. West would be towards the fence, towards where the children played in the park, (and yelled "Loonies" through the shrubbery). Facing West and listening to the children, mostly boys, playing football in the park would be a tribute to my two baby boys whom I'd had to leave to come into hospital. Yes I'd face West.

Then I remembered that there were soft, thick cushion covers for the deck chairs in a cupboard near the nurses' station. Should I get one? It would make the job of relaxing for the rest of the afternoon all the more easier. But what if someone stole the deck chair while I was getting the cushion? It would provide an opportunity to test out being more assertive as the nurses have been telling me I should.

I went in for the cushion through the non-smokers' television room.

Waiting at the nurses' station my heart pounded every time someone went through the TV room, they were obviously on their way out to my deck chair. I really needed to relax as I was trying so hard to get better. I needed to get out and be with my boys again. Did I have to have the cushion? Waiting, waiting, phone calls, pagers, keys, sign out books and finally I got it.

You beauty.

Thanked Claudia my nurse and ran back out to my deck chair. It was still empty. I wedged the lusciously thick, full-length cushion on and started to tie it on. Tying knots was hard work, not just concentrating but also focusing my eyes and hand-eye coordination. Tongue between teeth, I'd get one done, then realise that it's probably easier to maneuver the chair into position, that is lying flat, before tying on the cushion. So I did that. It took so long. The valium made me clumsy and tried my patience even further. But

I finally completed it and relaxed back into the chair.

But facing west meant my back was to the hospital and they'd done so much for me I didn't want to block them out. Turn my back on them. They might think I was turning my back on treatment and keep me in for even longer. Part of me wanted to face south, towards Brighton Beach, sea gulls and Australia my home.

I turned my chair to face east, the hospital, also signifying that I'd make myself more open to eastern philosophies in the future. East where the sun rose. But I was turning my back on the children. And I'd also be facing the doors when they opened and other patients would come out and try to strike up conversations with me just when I was just starting to relax. Eyes shut. Force them to stay shut.

Then out came Grahame. I shut my eyes.

"Mind if I join you?" he might have said.

"No," I probably replied, "But I can't talk, I've got to relax. You realise I won't talk to you, please don't talk to me."

He pulled the only other deck chair over and set it up so that his head was level with my waist. He had decided to face west. I only noticed this through squinting eyes.

"Yeah sure he probably replied, I won't talk to you. We're not talking now in fact. I promise not to talk to you."

"O.K" I replied.

"You talked." He was probably trying to be witty. I never thought at the time that he might have been sexually attracted to me but in retrospect he did hang around me a lot. There was that time in Occupational Therapy when I was sitting on a tiny little lounge,

one of those horrid foam ones which collapse like a banana chair when you sit on them and he came and wedged his bum in next to mine. Two chub bums together. I couldn't move without offending him.

This deck chair stand off went on for what seemed like hours. Me trying so hard to relax and lie still without talking. Trying so hard to keep my eyes shut, not look at him and the people coming out of the hospital. I couldn't do it, I had to change my position, I got out of the chair and turned it so my feet were facing west, towards the children. I could still see him if I opened my eyes.

Dusk came slowly and the air became chilly. So many times he tried to crack open a conversation and many times I relented and joined in and then told him to let me be.

As it became quite dark and other patients had come and gone after trying to strike up conversations with Grahame and I, mostly only succeeding with him, I noticed that there were moths in the air. They weren't hanging around a garden light close just a couple of metres away from us, instead they fluttered around my shoulders and head. They weren't clumsy, they didn't smash into my face, they just seemed attracted to me. I felt blessed like Blanche Dubois who put a paper lantern over the light. Or Estella. I was attracting these special creatures. I snuck a look over at Grahame, they weren't interested in him at all. Only me. What could it be about me? My scent, I sniffed my wrists and the violet toilet water had long evaporated. My own animalistic smell? I didn't want to sniff my underarms with Grahame so close. The Mary Magdalene colours I was wearing, black shirt, black pants, crimson red cardigan?

No they were attracted to me because I was special.

I opened my eyes and watched them flash about me.

Sam and the Fire Fly. Blanche Dubois. Estella. Moths to a candle. Me the candle.

"I've got to go inside." Said Grahame as he hauled himself up, re-tucking his crisp white cotton shirt into his cargo pants and smoothing back his quiff. "I can't stand these moths buzzing around me, see you."

"See you." I think I said out loud... then I to myself, "You're having yourself on baby. Those moths weren't interested in you. Only me. I'm the special one. I'm the candle. I am the light."



