



THE WAY BACK



Shérine

THE VILLAGE main street is our river. The stream of life. We indigenes, at our window, peering out, watch the explorers wandering past. Us: circumspect and bored.

I'm the primitive: – history forgotten, hanging on to junk, cosmology busted, rusted out, my head a jumble, too much dope and booze and suicide. Unloved, unlovable, a lush. Too far-out to be sexy.

Village life: the settlement, the long house in your head. Digging. Weeds.

Some visiting families paddle by, old-time mums and dads with squawky kids. Gawping at us banal oddities.

They don't appreciate our demotic architecture, the rare plants cossetted like cats.

There's single women. Not following the map, but curious, looking for a hook to hang on. Curious and wispy. If I asked, would one come in?

I'd love to talk, explain why I'm here, alone. My little house? Me, a female, an alien, a trap. Foreign. I had a reputation once – maybe someone's found it lying in the road?

I think ... those who'd come in would be terrified, and think it's some commercial trick, or else they've misunderstood – the invite comes from someone who doesn't speak their tongue. And tongue is what they absolutely wouldn't want to show or have it used, as a toy, a sweetener, a token of love or lust or both.

Or – they might be a thief. Or mystified, quite unafraid – to see your scruffy interior, thinking no harm can come from me, a woman seemingly alone, and maybe there are pickings of something, a posy or a recipe, or just nothing, a trip around the curio shop: – 'I'll think about it ...' they'd say, sidling out. Not specifying what they might have wanted or what kind of thinking they are capable of.

Perhaps when I'm not here, or I'm asleep – someone comes in ... a sneak, not thieving – leaving a presence, a whiff of somewhere else. Police? Landlord? A nemesis?

Speculate. Don't make a sign. They've corrupted you, generations back; nothing is left. Other people? – know nothing, call you an Indian. Where's India? Here or everywhere.

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I'm lonely, always have been, a consequence of not enjoying company, still less intimacy, and carrying on a kind of symposium in my head, of questions classic but not resolvable – deep questions but not immediate, can easily wait for you to die before they're raised again, and you know all the human talent goes in practicalities and running squads of people; making plans that are not read, or disregarded, even not written down. Plots, conspiracies, in-the-know – and blow-them-up. Or, making an analysis, preparing a report on sexual improprieties in some big corp – people enjoying themselves or others, too extreme, or overstepping, causing misery in offices ... creating pseudo-slavery...

You need knowledge, that's for sure. And there's creation. It's supposed to grow from knowledge. That's what knowledge is for – knowledge in the sense of knowing what you want, which means knowing what other people may have wanted. Is there a way of going straight to creation? Knowledge ties you to the ancestors, their thinking, judgements, and the stuff they've left.

You invent a tank, a bomb – for wars interminable they carried on, and we inherited ... our faces the patrimony ... us drawn in every cave and on every boulder. Warriors, stick-men.

Let's be reasonable – creation with the slightest scent of knowledge.... Would this be the naif, the spontaneous – already experienced and now dull routine ... copied out ... surrealism, always starting a club to share the mystery ... the prodigy, plays, invents nothing new, just possesses youthfulness – so what? Creation – must be recognisable – a copy. Or a fake.

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