



## *All done with mirrors (Part 2)*

**Leaning casually on his bedroom doorframe, I blurted out the truth: “*John, you’ve always known me as your uncle, but in reality I’m your brother,*” thus laying bare the astounding news that we had emerged from the same womb! Unceremoniously, he muttered a few dismissive syllables, and went back to sleep.**

*“OK,” I thought, “So much for that mind-blowing proclamation. Best I get on with my own life.”*

But later, with time to think it through, my brother’s voice came back to me, in the form of a heartfelt five-page scrawl, at times almost illegible, and beginning:

*Soon after you left, I went to stay with the parents. There was a film on about a girl who had a baby illegitimately, which was brought up by her mother. I noticed how mum focused on the film; but also wondered how much her own situation was a reality to her.*

*She may have been soft and loving to me; she wasn’t for very long to you. The fact she prolonged the deception to the point where she half believes it, is even worse! Fuck! Weren’t you conceived in love? I bet she enjoyed making you!*

It ended with:

*Bugger the ‘half’ bit. You are my immediate family now.*

*All my love,*

*Your brother*

Some years after receiving the true facts of my birth through the post, I summonsed the courage to confront my mother. The result was disappointing. No open arms to bring us back to reality, no acknowledgement of wrongdoings or lies, just a begrudging admission of guilt.

But in essence it was not her fault; caught by the lingering oppression of a Victorian era, and obligations laid down by parents for the whole family to follow (driven by my grandmother) to ensure protection for the first born, the most gifted and adored of six siblings (which with me added became seven).

After that confrontation with my mother, we both returned to the same fabricated playing field, with an inbuilt understanding to stick to the fake script: no disclosure regarding the true account of my birth and upbringing. In particular, she insisted not a word to her younger son and daughter (my half-siblings). Now into her fifties and having kept the lid shut tight on the reality box for a quarter of a century, she was afraid to either unveil or defy the status quo. To say she believed the myth wasn't totally true, but at surface level it appeared that way.

And I kept my word ... for several years. Then, that day leaning on my brother's bedroom doorpost it all spilled out. His subsequent letter, penned under the influence, was probably dead right. But I also came to understand that *our* mother was a victim, not just once, but thrice. First, when coaxed to forego her virginity for an assailant's false love; secondly by having to bear a plethora of controls from her parents, before, during and after birth; then finally, when faced with marriage and emigration to Australia, more pressure from parents (and her new husband) to leave me behind.

The most positive reward to come from the whole saga, is that my brother and I both relish the fact that brothers (albeit of the semi-variety) are by definition closer to each other than uncle is to nephew. The bond became strong enough for us to refer to one another, in occasional letters or later via emails and texts, as *bruncle* and *brephew*, with no hidden malice or jealousy.

But another important aspect to emerge, was that beyond my newly acquired brother and sister, other family relationships also changed. People who previously had been labelled brothers and sisters suddenly became uncles and aunts; nephews and nieces morphed into cousins; and though of course I remained the same person, it felt as if by a twist of fate, I had been gifted a younger persona.

I was genuinely pleased to be able to descend from youngest of the post-wartime generation - their men dressed in dark suits and sporting short-back-and-sides; their ladies in floral *frocks* and permed hairstyles - to become the eldest of a larger number of swinging sixties and cool seventies people, with bell bottoms and miniskirts, long hair and hot-pants: the rock and rolling generation! And they in turn were pleased to welcome me into their ranks, all of them keen to atone for the long-lasting deception played out by the older generation: their own fathers and mothers, uncles and aunts.

In the end, as the actor Jack Nicholson had said before me: *"If anything, I felt grateful"*.

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*Duncan Gregory*

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