

## GLASS

He's absolutely normal in every other way, in fact he's too perfect to be normal, Sally Gordon wrote in her diary, and then quickly hid it beneath her underwear in her drawer, blushing and embarrassed at her thoughts. But she just had to get it out, she just couldn't bottle it up any longer, and Lord knows, she just couldn't discuss it with anyone, not even her mother, especially since she had nothing to complain about. Sally made entries into the diary about once a week, usually on those mornings when she'd be woken up whilst dozing with her eyes half closed, enjoying her gradual surfacing, when she would experience her husband Ted creep into bed ever so quietly, so gently that even a fly wouldn't be disturbed. He was so considerate and nimble but still he would penetrate her half consciousness. She'd know where he'd been. In his workshop messing around with his glass.

Sally's must have been the longest diary with the smallest amount of text. She just couldn't bring herself to write more than two lines at a time, but the few words she did manage to scribble were the only substitute for a confidante that she could allow herself. She spoke to herself through the little pink book which contained most of her life's worries and anxieties. Though it was tucked away safely under her night things, it made its presence felt whenever she got dressed; a prompt to remind her that there was always an extra little bit in her life that she would never be able to understand. She glanced at the family portrait resting proudly on the table. All five of them somehow hugging each other: Ted's long left arm reaching beyond Trevor to Michele's shoulder, while his right arm resting around her neck holding little Jim by his bottom. All of them so happy and smily, Michele's adolescent mock-indignation balancing Trevor's ten-year-old look of self importance. My, how Ted's temples have greyed over these last two years she thought, but look at him today, still the same baby face and creaseless forehead.

It was eleven o'clock in the morning, the two bigger children were at school and Jimmie had just begun his morning nap. She was lying indulgently on her soft bed gazing at the beams on the ceiling. Ted was in her mind, and at work in the workshop. He was polishing that huge glass disc in the middle of the room. He had ordered it to be specially made by the factory, and it had cost a fortune. The disc was two inches thick, and Ted had somehow balanced it on four glass poles.

What are you doing dear?  
I'm polishing this table, really it's a table can't you see? No tricks with a see-through table.

But dear you've been polishing that table for two and a half years, don't you think its smooth yet?  
Yes my love, it's smooth but it's not yet perfect for what I'm doing. Actually, I'd much rather use marble, but you can't see through marble, and there'd be suspicion of tricks with marble.

But Ted honey, what do you need with such a perfect table?  
I actually don't need the table, it's you and all the others who need the table, I really don't need it, especially not to sail through atoms, sail through dreams, please my love, believe in me. I only need the table to let you see.

Last night they had played in a league badminton competition. She had won the women's section, while her mother and Ted were runners up in the mixed doubles. How well they all got on, especially her mom and Ted. In fact it was her mom who had first introduced them: she'd been playing doubles with Ted long before Sally'd even met him. Her mother had a wild imagination, and she kept Ted in fits of laughter with her crazy stories and rude jokes. The rapport between them was fantastic, if sometimes exasperating. She loved and trusted her mom, who had helped a great deal to cement her strong bond with Ted. When they arrived home after the badminton they had found Michele was still up studying for her exams. She'd used their success at the sport to justify a break from her studies. She was so excited that they'd all done so well. After Milo, they all went to bed. Ted had made love to Sally in his special gentle way, drawing excitement from her depths and merging into her with love and harmony. After their orgasms, he had tickled her neck and rubbed her shoulders and escorted her safely to her dreams. When he was sure that she had fallen asleep, he got out of bed and went to his workshop.

Even the workshop was strange. Certainly there was no similar one in the world anywhere. Two rooms, side by side, one containing all the tools, the other housing nothing but the ten foot round glass table. And the facade of both rooms was a sheet of pure glass, so that one could see absolutely everything inside both rooms. It was somehow so utterly important to Ted that everything in the workshop was totally visible. The room which housed the table had a special kind of paint on the walls and floor that was harder and smoother than any other paint available. Its corners were completely square, and its light was a simple light bulb dangling from a wire. Ted made it obvious that there was nothing else in the room. The other room contained some very fancy machinery and tools. It was here that Ted did all his machining and building. It was very noticeable that there were no cupboards in either room, and that no object was concealed in either room.

Sally strolled into their gorgeous kitchen and fixed herself a snack. Her life sure was easy. She hadn't worked since Michele was born, busying herself with courses, arts and crafts, and socialising with her good friends. Ted's importing business was steady and very lucrative. He was into the sole distribution of sweaters from the Scottish Hebrides, and his line was very sought after. In fact he had to limit his supplies so as to keep them exclusive and expensive. He had virtually no competition, and his business life was medium-paced and comfortable. And he sure wasn't tight with the money he earned, giving Sally a limitless budget with no strings attached. In fact he was a model husband, and all the people she knew continually reminded her how lucky she was.

Then why did he have to get out of his bed every night, rain or snow, hot or cold and work till dawn in the damn workshop?

To sail through atoms, to sail through dreams.

Lately he'd begun turning some extremely thin glass beams on the laser-lathe that he'd built.

See if you can hold one of the little beams without it breaking it, he had challenged her laughingly.

Sure enough, the beam had snapped in her hand. It was thinner than a hair, thinner than anything she could think of, yet it could be seen.

It's only a few molecules in diameter, he'd said, proud of himself, I need these beams for the ship's rigging and for the spike on the front.

He'd pointed to the extremely finely built model of a Spanish Galleon that he'd nearly completed. Lord! it was beautiful. So finely crafted. So perfect. The glass it was made from was so thin and fragile she didn't want to look too hard lest she break it with her glance. The delicate ship had taken him five years to build. It was symmetrically impeccable: everything on the left side was exactly the same size as its counterpart on the right. Ted's state-of-the art measuring equipment made sure of that. He'd made certain parts over and over again, some of them even a hundred times until they were right. And if he broke something, it didn't seem to bother him at all. He just began making another one again.

Their good friends had also watched him at his craft, at one time or another, maybe after movies and coffee they'd ask him to let them watch him at work. Ted was always ready to oblige and would set about polishing the table top with his purpose-designed machine, but they'd be bored within a minute. Always patient, Ted would close the workshop and return with them to the living room to chat. And always they'd ask the same question: why Ted, why Ted?

What I'm building is just to show you all what I'm really doing, my friends. It's the only way I can show you. I don't really need to build these things for myself at all. But if I'm going to show you what I'm really doing, then I must build them.

To sail through atoms, to sail through dreams.

She'd given up long ago trying to figure out what that meant, because he was unable to explain it himself. The only way he could explain it to her was to build the glass things. Like the night last week when he'd taken Trevor to rugby and they'd watched their favourite team score a great victory over their opponents. When the final whistle had blown the two of them hugged each other, overfilled with glory, and pumped up with excitement, and Ted had whispered in Trevor's ear, this is what I mean, this is what I mean. And Trevor had been perplexed, but not frightened.

Sally went to the studio where she resumed work on the carpet she was weaving. The walls of their house were covered with her original designs. They were quite valuable and could have been sold for a fair amount, but Ted loved them so that he begged her not to sell them. Yet the offers came in weekly. She had learned the Persian carpet weaving technique and had combined it with modern patterns and bright colours. The effect was incredible. Now she sat at her table gazing into her reflection subtly evoked in the black enamelled Chinese tray she'd made months ago. The tray still sat on the table and she had come to enjoy watching herself in it, escaping the vanity of a real mirror. She always needed to remind herself who she was: she could never get used to the way men found her so attractive, her doll's face and thin figure somehow not really telling anyone what sort of person she was. She always regarded herself as a thinking sensitive being, and when Ted came and swept her off her feet she was only too happy to give herself to his warm confidence, as opposed to her constant fighting off of all the bombastic Romeos who had tried to woo her.

She often stared into that tray and asked herself how did she get there, to be a mother of three kids, a lucky, shielded and nurtured woman who lacked absolutely nothing in the world, but still was not altogether at ease. One the thing that worried her was that Ted never seemed to sleep.

There's no time for it he giggled, too much to do. Anycase I get my rest when I do my excercises. Before he began working with his tools Ted always spent about half an hour in his workshop doing his warm-up excercises. He had developed his own mixture of yoga and aerobics, which he performed for at least twenty minutes. At least ten minutes were dedicated to wrist and finger stretches to make his hands strong and supple in readiness for the most delicate work on the glass. Ted's hands are steadier than the worlds' most famous surgeon Sally often thought proudly. But what can happen to a man who never sleeps?

Laying down her weaving needles, she went to test the bell. There was the weird little bell that they'd bought on a trip in Japan at a bell factory and she'd picked out this particular one because of the sweetness of its tingle. Ted had taken a personal interst in the bell, tinkling it and playing with it throughout the trip; and when he'd gotten home he'd worked on it and honed it so that it's sound was even better. He'd hooked up an electro-mechanical shaker which he could operate by remote control. Almost daily she would test the remote control-unit to be assured that it was working properly, and also to be sure that she recognised its song. Now Sally feared the bell, even thugh Ted assured her every night not to worry about it, and urged her to have a positive attitude towards it.

If you ever hear this bell ringing at night my love, gently wake the children and bring them quietly to the workshop. You'll all be able to see what's going on through the glass wall. But my love, promise me that you won't panic, that you won't be afraid. If ever I summon you with that bell, it'll mean that something very good has happened, and I swear to you that no harm will have come to me. Always remember, we bought that bell on a joyous occasion, and it'll be a joyous occasion when you hear it. It'll mean that my project is completed.

Sally often heard the bell in her dreams, but as she fought down her panic and distress she realised that it was only ringing in her imagination. The bell had not yet been rung.

Little Jim stirred somewhat and she went to tuck him in. He looked more like Ted than her other kids, and his nature was more similar too. He cried less, and loved his mechanical toys so dearly. Ted had given him models of atoms and molecules which he really seemed to understand even though he was still younger than three. Some Saturday afternoons when the other two kids were out Ted would turn him loose in the workshop. At first she had feared that little Jim would hurt himself on all the glass, what with chips, filings and shavings all over, but no, Jim was happy to play with his toys in the section Ted cleared for him and watch his dad in action. He would use his plastic toys to imitate what Ted was doing with his tools. And both of them always had grins on their faces.

That night Ted was extra attentive to all of them. He listened to the poem Michele had composed for school and added some useful criticism to iron out a problem she had with its meter. He threw Jim around the room in the way he loves best, extracting squeals of laughter from the little blighter before putting him to bed. He played a long hard-thought game of chess with Trevor and watched some T.V. with him.

Later he made love to her and though she was not really an excessively sexual person he had turned her into a wildcat. The warm touch of his precise hands on her breasts drove her to the limit of her pleasure. She drifted into a blissful sleep and was not surprised when she was woken by the gentle tinkling of the bell.

Quietly she got out of bed and roused the children in her most gentle manner. The air was filled with the aroma of roses which seemed to follow her from room to room and the pleasant fragrance was almost a spell on her. The four of them crept like little mice out their back door to view the workshop.

The bare lightbulb glowed brightly in the moonless night, illuminating the two rooms side by side. In the centre of the exhibition room stood the giant glass table. On a glass stool, completely in view, sat Ted stark naked. He was smiling in the aura around his pink skin cast by the light bulb. His palms were facing upwards and his eyes were fixed on the fragile model of the Spanish Galleon. It was sailing round and round the perimeter of the glass disc six inches above its surface. Ted moved his hands and the ship changed course, going left then right. Then he made it sail through the air right out of the workshop and let it hover above their heads. The ship was completely transparent and it was obvious that there was no motor driving it. No tricks with glass: Ted was the force propelling it.

Ted called the ship back into the workshop and set it at rest nose up, balancing on one of the tiny spikes he'd been making the whole week. He left it balanced impossibly on one of the beams that broke when you looked at them too hard.

To sail through atoms, to sail through dreams.

Ted rose from his chair ever so slowly and came out the workshop to hug his stunned wife. She melted into his body in a wave of extacy. Oh Lord! I married the right man.