

THE MAN IN TWO BODIES

Stanley Salmons

FINGERPRESS LTD
LONDON

‘What is a friend? A single soul dwelling in two bodies.’

Diogenes Laertius, Aristotle

PROLOGUE

I'd never seen his mother before. If there'd been a funeral I suppose I might have seen her there, but of course there wasn't one. All the same, I spotted her right away. She was standing at the front of the chapel: tall, dressed in black, waiting quietly for the memorial service to start. She looked sad—well, I mean you'd expect that, but what I'm trying to say is she didn't look grieving sad, just terribly lonely. She held herself straight, like she was going to show everyone she was still in control. There were quite a few people around her but she still looked isolated. Even when she sat down in the front pew with someone on each side it was like she was alone. Nothing could get near enough to touch her.

You know how it is when you meet a mate's parents for the first time? You're curious to see whether they take after their mother or father. Well I am, anyway. It wouldn't have been polite to stare but whenever I could sneak a look I suppose I did take a more than usual interest. She was handsome, aristocratic-looking. The hollows under those high cheekbones followed right down and outlined her jaw. That and the wide mouth gave her face a squarish, determined look. All the resemblance was in the lower part of the face, I decided. He had a square jaw and a wide mouth as well. Also he had these two creases running right down from the cheekbones. Her mouth was set, and you could see she had two dimples in the same place. I couldn't see the colour of

her eyes from where I was, but her hair was dark, almost black—unless it was dyed—whereas his was more of a straw colour. So I suppose the hair colour and the broad forehead came from his father. I'll never know that because her husband wasn't around. I don't know what happened to him. From what I understood she just had the one child and brought him up on her own. I was thinking how hard all this must be for her, but if it was she certainly wasn't letting anyone see it.

After the service was over, people filed out and a queue formed just outside the chapel, so they could say something to her before they left. I didn't know anyone there and I don't suppose he would have recognized the half of them either. I noticed there wasn't anyone representing the University, and I thought that was a bit bad, but I suppose they had to be careful about making it look like they accepted responsibility.

It had clouded over a bit by now and people were looking anxiously up at the sky, as if they might dissolve if a drop of water hit them. And then two minutes later they'd do it all over again. I suppose they just felt ill-at-ease, distracting themselves while they were waiting in the queue.

I wasn't thinking about the weather; I was wondering what I'd say to her. "Hallo, Mrs. Dukas. I'm Michael. I was a friend." That seemed too distant. "Hallo, Mrs. Dukas. I'm Michael. I was Rodger's friend." That was closer to the truth. Closer still if I told her we'd worked side by side. Only then she might ask me what the two of us had got up to in that lab. And if I answered truthfully they'd bang me up: in jail if they believed me, in an asylum if they didn't. So it's better all round if I keep my mouth shut. Which is a pity, because what we did together was truly amazing.

MICHAEL

Actually my Mum's the only one who ever calls me Michael; everyone else calls me Mike. And I never called him Rodger, either; it was always "Rodge".

We met in the first year of the course. University fitted Rodge like a glove. He was tall and self-confident and from day one he looked like he'd already been there for a full three years. The rest of us were milling around in those first few weeks, trying to find our feet. I certainly was.

To be honest, I wasn't sure I was supposed to be there at all. Physics may have been my strongest subject at school, but I wasn't brilliant at it, and the old place wasn't exactly top of the national league tables when it came to university entrance. So you could have knocked me down with a feather when Prince Albert University sent the acceptance letter, because physics is very big at Prince Albert. I was quite a celebrity with the teachers too, when they'd got over their astonishment.

Of course I started to wonder how I was going to cope. As it turned out, the first couple of weeks were fine, because they were covering stuff I'd already done at school and I was beginning to think, "Hey, this is all right". I didn't realize they were just bringing everyone up to speed. After that they switched to a higher gear and I don't mind telling you it was quite a struggle to keep up.

I made a few friends and we did some fairly serious

drinking in the bar down at the Students Union. Rodge never came; he couldn't be bothered with anything like that. He had a lofty manner and he didn't seem to need friends. The others sensed that, and steered clear of him.

I've no doubt there was a bit of resentment there as well. He could obviously cope so much better than the rest of us with the academic stuff. You know, he'd stick his hand up and ask a question in the middle of a lecture and I'd wonder how on earth he'd understood it enough to ask a question when I was still trying to grasp it at all. The lecturers soon found they couldn't fob him off with any old answer either, because he'd come back at them again and again till he was satisfied. He was hard on other students too, especially in tutorials. He had no time at all for people who thought they knew what they were talking about, but actually didn't. He'd argue them into a corner and make them look really silly. If it got too embarrassing, the tutor had to step in. Of course, that didn't exactly earn him a flock of admirers either.

After one lecture I was just as fogged as usual and I said to myself, "Hell, I've got nothing to lose". So on the way out I worked my way over to Rodge and moved at the side of him.

"You seemed to get the hang of that pretty quickly, Rodge," I said.

He didn't even glance round.

"It's not that difficult."

"Not for you maybe. But that last bit had me floored completely."

He stopped and stood looking at me, frowning. All the other students were pushing past us. I waited for the brush-off.

"That was the whole point of it. What was it you didn't understand?"

“Oh, I was all right until he got to Green’s theorem. After that he lost me.”

He looked thoughtful, as if he was working through the entire lecture in his head, which he probably was. Then he said:

“Well, do you want to go down to the common room and have a look at it?”

We sat down in the common room, and he took out a piece of paper and a fibrepoint and proceeded to work it through in a way I could actually follow. I asked him about something else a few days later, and again he didn’t mind at all. It was really good; even the lecturers didn’t have his knack of explaining things. By and by we sort of gravitated to each other. When it came to practicals we were expected to work in twos, and Rodge and I were an obvious pairing.

I tried to draw him into the social scene but he wasn’t the slightest bit interested. So ours wasn’t what you might call a friendship, at least not a normal one. We just expected to see each other every day, and we’d sit together in lectures and work together in practicals and go to the same tutorials. Come the weekend I never saw him.

*

There was an incident in the Final Year that’s worth mentioning. We were covering a lot of nuclear physics at the time and Rodge had a difference of opinion with the lecturer. The argument went on a bit longer than usual and the others got restless, coughing and shuffling their feet. Afterwards Rodge and I took up our usual places in the common room and he behaved as if nothing had happened. Then Malcom

Goodrich came by.

Malcom strikes you as being round in every way: round body, round face, round glasses. He's also on the short side, so as a specimen of manhood he doesn't have a whole lot going for him. Mentally—that's a different matter. As far as the rest of us were concerned he was one of the brightest guys in the year. So when he stopped by, looking at Rodge with a supercilious grin on his face, I prepared myself for fireworks.

"I must say you do come out with some surprising things, Dukas."

Rodge eyed him levelly. "I do my best." After an immaculately judged pause, he added, "Goodrich".

"You surely don't mean all that stuff about matter waves!"

"Every word of it."

He laughed. "The boys with the big particle accelerators had better pack up their bags and go home then. There's no future for that sort of physics. Rodger Dukas says so."

I glanced at Rodge. There was a muscle moving in that lantern jaw. A danger sign.

"I didn't say that. I said that particles weren't the only way of looking at matter."

Goodrich raised an eyebrow. Rodge sighed, then pointed at him. "Look, if you were working in optics—designing a telescope or a camera lens or something like that—would you be thinking of light as a wave?"

"You know I would."

"And if you were designing solar panels? Would you treat light as a stream of particles—photons?"

"Yes..."

"Well, there you are. Light has the characteristics of both waves and particles. You simply choose the model best suited

to what you're doing. The same's true for matter. For the sorts of experiment we do at the moment, it's easier to think in terms of particles. But it's only a concept. There'll be other experiments for which a wave treatment would be more appropriate."

"Schrödinger's equation?"

"Yes, and what flows from it."

"You're living in the Stone Age, Dukas."

And he marched off.

I glanced at Rodge, expecting him to shrug off the encounter, but he was muttering in a demented kind of way. I picked up the words "brainless" and "blinker". I wasn't even sure he knew I was there any more, he was kind of talking to himself.

And suddenly his head came up and he looked right at me. His eyes are a sort of ginger colour, but very pale, so he always looks a little bit wild. But this was a really piercing look, and it made the back of my neck prickle.

"I'll show them," he said. "I'll show them all."

Even for Rodge it was a bit extreme. Evidently he had a bee in his bonnet about matter waves, but then he had strong feelings about a lot of things. I didn't attach too much importance to it at the time.

*

"That's it, then, Rodge. Last one finished. I can't believe it's all over."

We were strolling away from the examination room. We never discussed the exams themselves; it was a sort of an understanding between us. For Roger, exams were beneath

his dignity anyway. I think he once called it “trotting out clichés so that the pigmies can match your knowledge against theirs”. For me it was simpler: if I’d just made a pig’s breakfast of what I thought was my best question there was no way I wanted to find out straight afterwards.

“You’ll be off home, then,” he said.

“Yes. I shifted most of my stuff last weekend. I just have a few things to bung in my suitcase. I’ll go back tonight. What about you?”

“Oh, I think I’ll go to France. There are a few people I can look up over there. Change of scene—you know.”

“Well, I suppose I’ll see you at the graduation, then.” Something about his expression made me add, “You will be at the graduation, won’t you, Rodge?”

“No. I shan’t be coming back for that. You know how I feel about these pantomimes.”

“What about your parents?”

“My mother you mean?”

“Er, well, yes—whatever.”

“It’s not for her to decide, is it?”

I was thinking, *it bloody well would be in our house.*

“I guess it’s goodbye, then. Well, thanks for all your help, Rodge.”

He actually winced.

“I didn’t give you any help, Mike. We had some chats that’s all. Anything you’ve achieved you’ve done on your own.”

“Okay, okay, I found the chats helpful, is all I was trying to say. Right, then. Best of luck, Rodge.”

“You too, Mike.”

He strode off. No slapping of shoulders. We didn’t even shake hands.

2

I got my degree: Second Class, Lower Division. Even though Rodge said he hadn't actually helped me I don't know if I'd have managed it without him. Don't get me wrong. I may not be lightning on the uptake but by the end of the course I could handle Maxwell's equations and vector algebra and Boltzmann statistics and stuff like that—even a bit of quantum mechanics—I couldn't have got a Lower Second from Prince Albert otherwise. But I couldn't push those things further, go beyond existing frontiers—I'm just not original enough. Whereas Rodge was, and you could see that right from the start.

If he'd come to the degree ceremony I suppose I'd have met his mother there. In a way it was a shame he didn't because everyone had their cameras out and it would have been nice to have had a picture of the two of us on the steps afterwards. Mind you, I was pretty busy prancing about in my gown, and my parents trying hard to look more pleased than surprised at what they'd brought into the world. I was the first one in the family to get a university degree so it was all a big novelty to Mum and Dad. To make things easier I booked them into a small hotel, and we had a meal and went to a West End show that evening. Made a bit of an occasion of it.

We're a pretty average family, I suppose. Mum and Dad have a two-bedroom house in Dagenham—that's right on

the edge of London. Dad's a foreman in a local factory. They make kitchenware and he works on quality control. One thing we're not short of in our house is kitchenware, though I don't think there's a single item that doesn't have some sort of production fault. Mum doesn't mind. She says it doesn't matter what they look like as long as they do the job. She works part-time as a secretary in an accountant's office. She doesn't enjoy it much but she says it gets her out of the house, and the money's handy.

Dad is very stocky, strong in the chest and arms. He doesn't talk much, and I've never heard him raise his voice, but anyone would know at a glance it wasn't the best idea in the world to try to mess with him. He's put on a few pounds in recent years but otherwise he doesn't seem to change a lot. I suppose I take after him a bit in build, although I'm nothing like as strong.

Mum's very different: very energetic, always darting around, busy doing something. She runs the show really, paying the bills and making all the big decisions, like the move to where they're living now. Dad's happy to leave all that stuff to her. He sees his job as bringing home a regular wage. And substandard kitchen ware.

I have a sister, but she's much older than me. She married and went to live in Canada and we haven't seen her since. They've had a couple of kids out there. She stays in touch, sends photos of the family, and remembers birthdays, but that's about all. I was never close to her so it doesn't make much difference to me. I don't think Dad minds one way or the other, but it does seem to bother Mum.

"I don't know why they couldn't come over for a visit once in a while," she'll say, sighing over the latest batch of photos of gap-toothed kids with red-eye.

And Dad will grunt from behind the paper, “Leave them be, love. They’ve got their own lives to lead.”

One way and another you could say I enjoyed my time at Prince Albert. I made a lot of friends and although it was hard I coped with the academic side, thanks to Rodge. But nothing lasts for ever, does it? Towards the end of the course I could see the time coming when I’d have to get a job and I thought I ought to do something about it. Actually I didn’t need to exert myself too much because the companies who have a lot of vacancies for graduates send their people along to places like Prince Albert to give talks about how great they are to work for, and they’ll often conduct interviews at the same time. The “Milk Round” they call it. I put my name down and that’s how I got recruited by Telex Engineering.

The pay wasn’t marvellous at Telex but they were supposed to have a good in-house training scheme. What that meant was, as soon as you started getting interested in what you were doing, and maybe even a little bit competent at it, they moved you to another Section. There were some bits I liked. The radiofrequency transmitter work was good; you got to design real power circuitry. But then they moved me to microelectronics, and I was spending all day in front of a computer, simulating what would happen if I ever got to make this little square of silicon for real. Then there was antenna design, which was quite interesting again, but they moved me off that into production engineering. And so it went on. You know those old war films where there is this planning room that has a big table with a map on it, and a lot of girls in tight blouses standing around it with what look like billiard cues, and they’re pushing counters around on the map, moving a fleet to here and a squadron to there and a division to there? Well, that’s what I felt like: one of those

counters being pushed around. If anyone did have the big picture, they certainly weren't telling me. I stuck it out for two years and then I left. I worked in computer sales for a bit, but that didn't suit me much either, and I considered teaching, but it's not really my bag. On one of my visits home my parents asked me what I wanted to do and I just couldn't tell them because I hadn't a clue myself.

Then Mum had one of her bright ideas. "Why don't you speak to your Uncle Douglas?" she said.

Uncle Douglas is Mum's elder brother. He's the only one in the family who has a head for business. He ran this hospital supply company for a number of years and he landed a large National Health Service contract, so it did pretty well. In the end it was taken over and as part of the deal he left with a large lump sum. Now he gets his broker to make more money for him while he plays golf. I can't say the golf does much for his waistline, but that only adds to his general air of solidity. He's not so much large, Uncle Douglas, as weighty. If he sits down in an armchair it looks like it will take nothing short of a crane to shift him. When he makes a gesture it's only from the wrist. He reads the *Financial Times* and I think he's still on a couple of company boards, so he stays reasonably in touch with the business world. The whole family looks on him as some sort of guru; when he speaks, everyone listens, and no one dares to contradict him. You can imagine the sort of conversation I had with him.

First of all he told me it was time to make the acquaintance of the real world—you know, like I'd been living on Mars—and then he kept asking questions that could only be answered in one way—his way, of course.

"Where do you think the money is these days, Michael?" (I forgot to say that Uncle Douglas calls me Michael as well.

A lot.) He knew the answer to this one wasn't coming from my direction so he supplied it himself. "Venture capital, Michael. Mark my words. There are a lot of rich people out there, and they're looking out for ways of investing their money in new start-up companies with new inventions or new processes or new drugs."

"But I don't have anything new, Uncle."

A flash of irritation crossed his face.

"No, Michael, I know that. But there are people who have these things and they are looking for financial backing. And they know perfectly well that no one's going to give it to them unless they're covered legally. Inventions have to be patented, Intellectual Property Rights have to be protected, drugs and devices have to meet regulatory standards in every country where they are to be sold. There's your opportunity. It's an unlimited market for someone who has some scientific skills combined with expertise in those branches of the law. What you have now is half an education; what you need, my boy, is the other half."

Well, it seemed like good advice, and I didn't have any better ideas, so I thought I'd better see about getting the other half. I signed up for an M.Sc. course in Inventions and the Law. At Prince Albert University, of course—well, where else should I go? I knew they had a School of Business Management, and it turned out that one of the courses was tailor-made. I knew the ropes there, and I was a graduate, so getting admitted was no big deal. I expect you think I was just trying to recapture a part of my life that I'd actually enjoyed, and looking back on it I suppose you could be right, but at the time I thought I was making a career move. Don't laugh.