

Contemporary Literature

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Six degrees of separation, we continue from page 75. If you remember what we were talking about the last time, there is a confrontation between the children of these rich people and their parents. So, we have a Doug who is a child of Dr. Fine and then we have Kitty and Larkin, Mr. and Mrs. and their children and then we have Tess and Woody Kittredge's and the commotion is all over about the identity of this so called Paul Poitier.

So, the guy who goes around claiming to be the son of Sidney Poitier. Now, if you remember where we stopped last time, page 75. The parents leave speechless, defeated. The kids look through their high school yearbooks, test spots of face.

Got it? This is the point, you know the departure of parents and we also see that it is not just the parents are not just concerned about the identity of this Paul who has been coming to their homes and identifying himself as the son of Sidney Poitier, but there is also a deep disconnect between the parents and their own children. So, through Paul Poitier, now we also get a glimpse into the lives of these very rich people who apparently have everything, but there is still a sense of dissatisfaction. There is still a sense of alienation and this is what Guo wants us to ponder over. All the kids, sorry Tess, Trent Conway, all the kids, Trent Conway appears. Tess, Trent Conway, look at those beady eyes staring out at me.

Trent Conway, he is at MIT. Now, in reference to another very important, very prestigious institute, we have been talking about Howard, we have been talking about other great institutes and now MIT. The children of these very rich people who go to MIT, who go to Harvard, who go to Princeton, they talk about they wear their money very lightly on their sleeves. They take pride in these prestigious institutes, but what are they getting out of it? That is what Guo wants us to look at. Now, Trent Conway, look at those beady eyes staring out at me.

Trent Conway, he is at MIT to us. Now, Tess looks at us and says, so I went to MIT. He

was there in his computer room and I just pressed him and pressed him and pressed him. I had a tape recorder is trapped to me. Now, tape recorder, this reference to tape recorder tied on one's body, does it remind you of anything else? Yes Abhay, spying on someone, but any political incident, anything that you are familiar with? Yes, water gate.

Water gate. So, what happened during the water gate? We are talking about the Nixon period, when president Nixon was there and it was believed that Nixon was having the phones and the rooms of his political opponents tapped. So, this surveillance into right into the, you know, drawing rooms and into the very private spaces of people and this is against human rights. Now, the irony of this situation is that Tess Kittredge, just a moment ago, she has been accusing her parents of as if, you know, they are questioning her as if they belong to KGB or McCarthy. KGB is the Russian spy system and McCarthy period, of course, you know, when everybody was under suspicion because of their so called communist tendencies and the same Tess goes to her friend's room with a tape, with a tape recorder tied to her body.

So, do not you see the irony there? The girl who is so much for human rights, she does not even trust her friend that much. So, she wants to put him on record. So, it is all about the hypocrisy. Now, again the disconnect between friends, you do not like, you do not love your parents enough, you do not trust your friends enough. So, who do you like, who do you connect with, that is the question.

Now, Trent's voice tape, now this is also quite interesting dramatic strategy where you do not find the conversation happening between Tess and Trent, but it is the voices that the recorded, the mechanical voices that you hear and what you hear? Yes, I knew Paul, Tress's voice taped, but what happened between you? Trent's voice taped, it was the lights come up slowly, Paul and Trent appear, rain, distant thunder, jazz playing somewhere off, Paul is dressed in jeans and a tank top, high top sneaker. So, it is a flashback within flashback strategy. So, Tess is recalling her meeting with Trent Conway and Trent Conway is recalling his encounter with Paul. Trent, now this is very interesting, you pay attention to this, Trent is talking to or addressing Paul. This is the way you must speak, hear my accent, hear my voice, never say you are going horseback riding, you say you are going riding and do not say couch, say sofa and you say bottle, it is bottle, say bottle of beer.

Now, does it remind you of something? Paul says bottle of beer, Trent bottle of beer, some kind of echo, something else that you have done? Who did Shaw, did you? Who did Shaw for us? Yes, do you remember? Pygmalion, what happens in Pygmalion? My Fair Lady, but My Fair Lady is a movie based on Pygmalion, a play by Shaw and what happens in that? Who is the, who is the protagonist? He is a phonetician, he is a, he is a

linguist. Who is teaching a common flower girl, how to speak like a society lady, so that she can pass off almost like a duchess or as a princess in a society of aristocrats? Do you remember the play or the movie *My Fair Lady*? This is what he is doing. If you remember, what was, what were those famous sentences, that dialogue, how did he, that practice speech? Eliza Doolittle and Henry Higgins in *Pygmalion* or in *My Fair Lady*? The rain in Spain falls mainly in the plain, how does she pronounce? The rain in Spain falls mainly in the plains, remember the rain and then he says follow me, practice how I, the way I speak, follow my accent, follow my pattern of speech. What are we trying to do here? What is the basic idea of *Pygmalion*, which Gue is referencing? The social disconnect. There is, you know, there is something called speech.

There are certain ways, if you learn your way to work around those problems, those obstacles, perhaps there is some kind of opportunity waiting for you at the end of the tunnel. So, if you practice, if you practice your speech, if you speak well, if you dress well, if you have the right kind of knowledge, where you can, you know, which you can feel confident to discuss among the very elitist kind of people, then there are chances that you will be accepted as their own among those people. That is what Henry Higgins does in *Pygmalion* or *My Fair Lady*. That is what Trent Conway is doing here to Paul. So, speech, so do not you feel when he meets the Kittredges, he speaks beautifully, he has lots of information, he is full of knowledge and that is what charms them.

Baudelaire, bottle of beer, Paul sits on the sofa, he pulls out a thick address book from under him. What is this? My address book, all these names, addresses, tell me about these people. Now, he is having this kind of address book or you know yellow pages and he wants access to all these people. Trent sits beside him, I want you to come to bed with me. Tell me about these people, man.

I just want to look at you. Paul is hypnotized by the address book. Are these all rich people? No, hand to mouth on a higher plateau. Now, the rich are rich like geography. They do not even carry money with them.

He does not have two hundred dollars on his person to pay for the dinner, but he has two million dollars stashed away somewhere. Those are the real rich. The real rich do not carry about hundred, two hundred dollars. The middle class rich are like the Kittredges who depend on people like geography. Even among the very rich, there is kind of a hierarchy.

So, hand to mouth rich people, rich, but you know not the real rich. I think it must be very hard to be with rich people. You have to have money. You have to give them presents. That is what Paul thinks of the very rich people.

Not at all. Rich people do something nice for you. You give them a pot of jam. Now, pot of jam comes to, so you remember when he sends a bouquet of flowers and a pot of jam, you know thank you for a wonderful evening to Ouisa. That is what pots of jam are for orange, grapefruit. These are all varieties of jam, strawberry, but fancy.

They have entire stores filled with fancy pots of jam wrapped in cloth, English or French. So, not just ordinary jam which are available to all mediocre or middle class people, but exotic varieties of jam and that is what you should be sending them. I will tell you what I will do. I pick a name. You tell me about them, where they live, secrets and for each name, you get a piece of clothing.

Alright, Kittredge, Talbot and Woodrow. Those are actually the names of Tess and Woody, Talbot and Woodrow. Talbot called Tess was anorexic and was in a hospital for a while. This is Tess's background.

She was anorexic. Paul takes off her shoe and kicks it to Trent. The parents Ouisa and Flan for Flanders, Kittredge, Rhode Island, I believe, Newport, but not along the ocean. The street behind the ocean, he is an art dealer. They have a Kandinsky. So, you remember when he first barges in their house, he talks about a Kandinsky.

I know that you have your children talk about double sided Kandinsky. So, this is the, so it was not Tess and it was not Woody who actually spoke to Paul about their parents. Who was it? Trent Conway. A Kanwatsky Kandinsky, a double sided Kandinsky.

Paul kicks off his other shoe. Trent catches it joyously. I feel Trent. I feel like Sherzade. What is the reference to Sherzade here? Arabian Nights.

You know, so 1001 Arabian Nights. Do you know any the background of that? Why is he comparing himself to Princess Sherzade? What was the condition? You keep telling me a story and I will allow you to live for another day. So, your one day of life in exchange for one story. So, Sherzade Scheherazade has no other choice but to keep her husband happy by telling him a new story every night. So, that is the genesis of 1001 Arabian Nights stories.

I feel like Sherzade. For everything, I get rewarded. For every story, I get rewarded. He embraces Paul with fierce tenderness. I do not want you to leave me Paul. I will go through my address book and tell you about family after family.

You will never not fit in again. We will give you a new identity. So, this the whole

construct of identity is extremely important in six degrees of separation because see very soon we will find out that even the identities of these very rich kids, they are also quite problematic but because Paul is poor, it is more problematic for him. I will make you the most eagerly sought after young man in the east. Usually this is what Henry Higgins promised Eliza Doolittle if you remember that you will be the most eagerly sought after young lady industry in London society. So, that is what and then I will come into one of these homes one day and you will be there and I will be presented to you and I will pretend to meet you for the first time and our friendship will be witnessed by my friends, our parents friends.

It is almost like you know an arranged marriage, an arranged courtship kind of thing that one day you will be so highly placed that there would not be people would not think that there is anything wrong in our relationship having a relationship like us. If it all happens under their noses, they cannot judge me. They cannot disparage you. I will make you a guest in their houses.

Ask me another name. I would like to try for that shirt. Paul that is enough for today. Paul takes his shoes and the address book and goes, Trent turns to Tess. Paul stayed with me for three months. We went through the address book letter by letter.

Paul vanished by the elves. Paul vanished by the elves means Larkins. Remember the Larkins are his latest victims. Doctor Fine, Kittredge's Larkins. After that he was gone.

He took the address book with him. Well, he is already been in all your houses. Maybe I will meet him again. I sure would like to. So, he is still carrying a torch for Paul. His past, his real name, I do not know anything about him.

It was a rainy night in Boston. He was in a doorway. That is all. He took stuff from you. Besides the address book, he took my stereo and sport jacket and my word processor and my laser printer and my skis and my TV.

Will you press charges? No, it is a felony. Why do they want to find him? They say to help him. If there is a crime, the cops will get involved. Look, we must keep in touch. We were friends for a brief bit in school.

I mean we were really good friends. Would you press charges? Please. Now, what does it tell you? He does not want to. He has lost so many things to Paul, but he still does not want to press charges.

Why do you think? He loves Paul. He loves Paul. He has fallen for Paul's charisma in

a big way. So, there is no way that he is going to press charges. That is the appeal of Paul. That is the kind of influence he has on everybody including the people in whose houses he barges in.

So, they go. Ouisa appears. Tess played me the tapes. Tess is voice taped. Would not you press charges? Trent's voice taped. Please, Ouisa to us. These are the most famous lines from Six Degrees of Separation.

Can you believe it? Paul learned all that in three months. Three months. Who would have thought it? Trent Conway, the Henry Higgins of our time. The Trent Conway is as efficient, as proficient a linguist as Henry Higgins.

He can change identities. He can change personalities. He can train a black kid from the streets in such a way just in three months that he can pass off as the son of Sidney Poitier. The story he tells about himself, remember what is it to, I mean racism in America. I do not feel American. You see, I was brought up in Europe in Switzerland and he is able to convince his host that he is indeed to the manner born and that is the power of what? Grooming.

So, grooming matters a lot in our society. That is what Guare is trying to tell us. Paul looked at those names and said, I am Columbus. I am Magellan. I will sail into this new world. So, by assuming a new identity, he set out to explore the unknown and who are the unknown for him? The very rich, the very famous.

Otherwise, he would not have access to these people. It was only by assuming an entirely new identity, a shiny new bright personality that he is able to have access into these homes. Do you get the reference to Columbus and Magellan? Coming into the houses of Kittredge and Larkin is as challenging an act for someone like Paul as the discovery of the new land for people like Columbus and Magellan because the distance is that much. Physically, the distance might not be, but socially the distance is that deep. The chasm is that deep and he has to assume an entirely new identity and a new persona to reach them. I read somewhere that everybody on this planet is separated by only six other people, six degrees of separation.

Here comes a title of the play. Between us and everybody else on this planet, the president of the United States, a gondolier in Venice, fill in the names, I find that a tremendously comforting that we are so close and b like Chinese water torture that we are close. So, there is a conflict between this kind of theory. It is very comfortable that we can always connect to someone only through a chain of six people, but it is also extremely discomfiting, disconcerting that through a medium of six people, our identity

can be or our privacy can be invaded just through a medium of six people. Because you have to find the right six people to make the connection.

It is not just big names. It is anyone, a native in rain forest, a tear at the few gun, an Eskimo. I am bound to everyone on this planet by a trail of six people. It is a profound thought. How Paul found us? How to find the man whose son he pretends to be or perhaps is his son? Although I doubt it, how every person is a new door opening up into other worlds? The degrees of separation between me and everyone else on this planet, but to find the right six people.

Flan appears, flan to us. We did not hear for a while. We went about our lives. The doorman appears, who is that to us? And then, you know, see there is a passage of time for a very long time. Nobody heard anything about Paul because perhaps he has not been invading the houses of the rich and famous. In their society, they would not know about anyone else.

So, they did not hear of Paul at all. And then, one day our doorman whom we tip very well at Christmas and anytime he does something nice for us. Our doorman spit at my husband, J.

Flanders Kittredge. I mean spit at him. So, this doorman spit at Mr. Flan. The doorman spits at Flan. Your son, I know all about your son. Now, which son? Who is this son? No prizes for guessing. What about my son? Not the little shithole is there.

The other son, the secret son, the negro son you deny. So, now who is Paul's father? Flan Kittredge. The doorman spits at Flan again. The negro son, the black son you make live in Central Park.

So, you have disowned your son. You have sort of sent him away. You do not recognize your own son. He is forced to live in Central Park. He is homeless. He is shelter less and here you are so rich.

Who is that to us? The next chapter. Rick and Elizabeth and Paul sit on the grass in Central Park. So, who are these Rick and Elizabeth? We do not know, but we will soon see. Rick, Elizabeth and Paul. Now, picture this scenario.

How picture perfect and you know absolutely like you know pastoral imagery. That is like a landscape. This is what John Guare creates. A very idyllic kind of a scene. Rick, Elizabeth, a young couple and Paul run on laughing in Central Park.

Rick, a nice young guy. So, from the beginning, we are told he is a nice young guy. So, there is nothing wrong with him. Rick in his mid-twenties plays the guitar energetically. He and Paul and Elizabeth, a beautiful girl in her mid-twenties are having a great time singing a cheery song. Say James Taylor shower the people until Rick hits the wrong chord.

They try to break down the harmony. Rick cannot for the life of him find the right chord. The three of them laugh. Paul is wearing the pink shirt. Now, which pink shirt is this? The same shirt that belong once to Woody and he is so possessive about this shirt and he had a fight with his father because of this shirt.

Now, Paul is wearing the same shirt because that must be his best shirt. And now, he is talking to these young people. Tell me about yourselves. We are from Utah.

Do they have any black people in Utah? May be two. Yes, the Mormons brought into. Who are the Mormons? M-o-r-m-o-n-s. Right, the church of Utah, religious kind of church. May be you know, so we do not have black people in Utah.

May be the church brought in. We came to be actors. She won the all state competition for comedy and drama that was in Utah. My gosh, the quality of mercy is not strained. It droppeth like the gentle rain from heaven.

This is merchant of Venice Shakespeare's. Portia's speech to Shylock. You will soon find that how these lines are said in a very ironic context and we study and we wait tables because you have to have technique like the painters. Cezanne looked for the rules behind the spontaneity of his impressionism.

Says, that is a painter. We do not know anything about painting. My dad loves painting. He has a Kandinsky, but he loves Cezanne the most. He lives up there. What? Paul, he lives up there.

Count six windows over John Flanders Kittredge. His chums call him Flan. I was the child of Flan's hippie days. His radical days. He went down south as a freedom marcher to register black voters. His friends were killed, met my mother, registered her and married her in a fit of sentimental righteousness and knocked her up with me and came back here and abandoned her.

Went to Howard. He is now a fancy art dealer. Lives up there. Count six windows over there. Won't see me the new wife, the white wife, the Louisa Kittredge call me Louisa wife, the mother of the new children wife. Now, this see, she is, there is a step mother

over there. I am the child when my father was in a in a radical state of mind and that is the time when my white father married my black mother and I am a product of that union, but after that once the movement, once the radical ideas and ideology they got over, he came back here and he disowned my mother. He refuses to recognize me and now he has a white wife and white children. So, another round of identity creation for Paul, but because by perhaps by now he is done with swindling the rich people and now he wants to make new connection with these, with this very young couple, but they do not have much money. So, what happens next? We will continue with this tomorrow. Thank you. Thank you. . .