

“You ever written a poem, Blue?” It was my chance to stand up before the damage was done.

“Not a proper poem. Only childish ones when I was younger.”

“Would you like to write a proper poem?”

I hadn’t meant the conversation to be about me. I’d wanted to find out more about him. “Could you teach me, Granga?” I was sure it was what he had in mind. Why else would he have taken a pen from his inside pocket and be picking up a piece of hotel writing paper from the coffee table?

“To be a true poet, you must have something to say. Do *you* have something to say, boy?” He was searching my face for a sign of something – but did I have it? I feared not.

“What sort of thing are you meaning?” I whispered, afraid of being overheard by the couple at the other side of the library.

“What *matters* to you, boy? What *moves* you? What shakes your soul?”

I longed to say, “You write it, Granga, you show me what to say.” But I didn’t want to let him down. So instead I thought and thought for what seemed like hours but was probably only minutes.

What was it that moved me? At first all I could think of was rugby and cricket and football, but Granga said that wasn’t the kind of thing he had in mind. Sometimes music had moved me, I told him, especially when I listened with my father to Max Bruch’s violin concerto – we both loved that one. But how could I write a poem about a piece of music? There must be something else. And Granga was still waiting.

“Take your time, Blue. There’s no hurry.” I feared that

Granga was getting bored until he went on: “It sometimes helps to begin with the title. Painters often do the same. Joan Miró, for instance, whom I told you a little about – remember him?”

I nodded. “Yes – he said that blue was the colour of his dreams.”

“Quite right. *Ceci est la couleur de mes rêves*, he wrote below his splash of blue on a canvas. Do you see how he created poetry with that title and the simplicity of his creation? He captured the mystery of blue, a spiritual quality that calls out to the imagination. You can’t live in Mallorca and be ignorant of one of the greatest artists who ever lived. The Spaniard made his home in Mallorca for many years, until his death on Christmas Day in 1983, a tragedy of a day . . . now why was I talking of him?”

“You were explaining about the importance of titles in poetry like in art.”

“Ah yes! Excellent student! Just testing. Miró described his work as *poetry in paint*, and once you see his work, you will understand why. And because he was such a poet, his titles were similarly poetic, like a line of poetry. I’ll give you another example: *The Flames of the Sun Make the Desert Flower Hysterical*. Now how about that for a title? Doesn’t it conjure up a *feeling*, a *sense* of something before you’ve even seen the painting – the pure emotions of the sun and the earth and the vibrant flower in the female shape that sets the earth alive? Do you see the clever use of metaphor in that title?”

“Yes,” I said excitedly, “I’ve learnt a bit about metaphors at school.”

“Well then, you’ll understand what the good poem title

requires also. Aristotle was another fine thinker to recognise the importance of the metaphor. He wrote that the greatest thing by far is to have a command of metaphor. He thought it was the mark of genius, for to make good metaphors implies an eye for resemblances. *For the purposes of poetry*, he wrote, *a convincing impossibility is preferable to an unconvincing possibility*. But for now, let's concentrate on the title. Miró put it well when he said that when he had found the title, he lived its atmosphere – the title for him was *une réalité exacte*.”

Granga looked at his watch and replaced his pen in his inside pocket. “But it’s getting late. Sleep on it, boy. Reflect on a title that matters to you. Perhaps in the form of a metaphor.”

“I think I shall,” I replied. I needed a night’s sleep before I could find the right title and start my poem.

My first evening in France was almost over. I wished my parents had been able to share it with me, all of us together like a real family should be. But Granga was my family now. So if I had an important question on my mind before I went to bed, then he was the person to take it to.

“Granga, there’s something I want to ask you.”

He looked hard into my eyes. I hesitated.

“Speak up, Blue! Or do you want me to guess? Is that it?”

He was growing impatient. I had to be brave like my father.

“I was wondering why you never visited us, why I never met you until . . . until now. I mean, I saw your reaction when you mentioned my mother in your room, and I heard the poem you wrote for her. So why didn’t you want to see her, even if you weren’t interested in meeting me?”

I tried to look hard into his eyes, just like he'd looked into mine. I had to observe him carefully before he spoke, I had to savour his expressions slowly, like reading good poetry – isn't that what he'd taught me? The trouble was, I couldn't read anything in them. It was like looking at a page written in a foreign language that no one had bothered to teach me.

"Dear Blue," he said finally. "Do you truly believe I had no desire to meet you, little man?"

Now I could read his expression – it wasn't difficult. "I didn't mean to upset you, Granga. You don't have to explain if you don't want to."

We were alone now in the library. The only sound I could hear was the ticking of a grandfather clock. Granga was reflecting. He looked older when he wasn't speaking. Suddenly an answer to my question didn't seem so important. But I got one anyway – or sort of a one, or maybe not one at all.

"We see others in many ways, Blue, not just with the eyes. Our senses can be unreliable sometimes."

"But haven't you been teaching me how important our senses are?"

He smiled at me warmly – that much was easy to understand.

"Bravo! You listen well for one of your few years. Our senses are extremely important, yes. They take us on a journey, a fascinating, colourful journey – but they are not a destination."

"Then what is more reliable, Granga? Do you mean the brain – thinking about someone? Is that more reliable?"

I frowned as I waited for him to explain.

"Recall in your imagination the Max Bruch violin concerto

you told me you loved to listen to with your Papa. Your ears took you on that wonderful journey. But was it your brain that told you how to love it? Is it an analysis of the notes that remains in your memory . . . or is it something more than this?”

He was urging me on with the expression in his small restless eyes. I thought and thought until my face grew red and hot. I wanted so much to find the right answer, *his* answer.

“Something more,” I agreed, afraid that I wouldn’t be able to explain exactly what it was.

Granga nodded encouragingly. I grew more confident.

“I loved the music in my heart. I didn’t understand it all, but that didn’t matter. It made me want to cry, like when you lose someone special – or when you find someone you thought you’d never find.”

Granga nodded knowingly. “You *felt* the music. It moved your *soul*.” He patted the centre of his chest where his heart was. “It’s still there, is it not, even without the actual music playing in your ears? It’s hard to forget.”

“Yes,” I replied quietly, remembering.

Granga got to his feet. I feared he was leaving without me, so I stood up too.

“I trust that answers your question, Blue.”