

Blue Moon

By David Kinder

A terrace of a large seaside hotel at night. Music spills out from the faded grandeur of the ballroom.

*Downstage, a small group are in conversation. The woman in the group, **Anushka Laghari**, is in her mid-forties and seems important, judging by the little group of younger acolytes around her. She says something that they find overly hilarious.*

***Simon Altringham**, also mid-forties, comes up some steps from the garden, sees the group and realises who is in it.*

SIMON: [*Under his breath*] Shit!

[He's obviously not meant to be here. He turns away from the group, considers retracing his steps. Realises that it is too late and stands still, pretending to be fascinated by the view.]

ANUSHKA: Simon! Simon Altringham?

SIMON: [*Pretending to be surprised*] Anushka!

ANUSHKA: What are you doing here?

SIMON: I'm admiring the ocean, stretched out, under this delightful harvest moon.

ANUSHKA: You're staring at a bush.

SIMON: I'm using my inner eye.

ANUSHKA: You're gate-crashing a party by sneaking in through the garden.

SIMON: That's an outrageous accusation.

ANUSHKA: How the fuck did you get past security?

SIMON: I... I... Well... (*He dangles a Press pass*)

ANUSHKA: That pass is for the conference centre only.

SIMON: [*Feigning innocence*] Is it?

ADVISOR 1 (*approaching*): Sorry, Ms Laghari, is there a problem?

ANUSHKA: This is Simon Altringham, from the (*with disgust*) *Guardian*

SIMON: I'm freelance, actually.

ADVISOR 2: How can we help you?

SIMON: You can get me drink if you like. Something strong.

ADVISOR 1: Mr Altringham, the Home Secretary is not available for an interview this evening.

SIMON: That's a relief.

ADVISOR 2: Shall I call security Ma'am?

ANUSHKA: I'm not sure. What are you doing here, really, Simon?

SIMON: Erm... curiosity?

ANUSHKA: You want to catch some pissed Tories with their trousers down? Inspect some party *members*?

SIMON: That's actually quite good.

ANUSHKA: You're about thirty years too late. It's as sterile in there as one of your editorials.

SIMON: I notice you didn't say political sketches.

ANUSHKA: I didn't want to upset you.

SIMON: Since when did that bother you?

ANUSHKA: Come on. Truth.

SIMON: Ooo. There's the famous steel. The Godfather in taffeta.

ANUSHKA: It's georgette.

SIMON: It was a bet. I was in the bar with 3 other hacks and I told them it was still possible to get in here by climbing over the wall. Didn't expect to successfully present a case of *illegal entry* to the woman in charge of the hostile environment.

ANUSHKA: You climbed over the wall of this hotel?

SIMON: Actually I more or less walked in. Turns out the Conservative Party post-conference gala has porous borders. Who'd have thought it? [*the SPADs are advancing*]. You can tell your goons to back off. I'll leave now. This will do for Monday's copy.

ANUSHKA: Piss off then.

SIMON: I will. [*Doesn't move*]

ANUSHKA: I'm waiting.

SIMON: Right.

[*He turns to go down the steps*]

SIMON: [*As he goes*] Good luck with Blue Stone, by the way!

ANUSHKA: What? Simon! *Wait!*

[*Simon stops*]

SIMON: [*Enjoying the moment*] 'I'm waiting.'

ANUSHKA: What did you just say?

SIMON: Blue Stone Asset Management. Just wishing you luck. It's a big day for them tomorrow, isn't it?

ANUSHKA: [*To the SPADS -*] Erm... I think can manage Simon from here. Can you get me a top up? [*Hands one of them her glass*]

SIMON: Is there any punch?

ANUSHKA: And a punch, please. [*The SPADs nod and leave*] Look, Simon, I'm not commenting on this. And we're not talking about it. But if we were, I'd want to know, how the fuck did you find out about it?

SIMON: I'm a journalist. It's what I do.

ANUSHKA: You're a sketch writer. You take the piss out of hard working politicians...

SIMON: Oh please...

ANUSHKA: And you moan about your problems.

SIMON: It's called adding colour. [*Beat.*] So you do know about it?

ANUSHKA: It's my husband's fund.

SIMON: So that's a yes.

ANUSHKA: Off the record?

SIMON: [*Groaning*] All right.

ANUSHKA: Yes, I know that Blue Stone is floating in the morning.

SIMON: Which will make you extraordinarily rich.

ANUSHKA: Don't ask me.

SIMON: Why not? That's the joy of flotations, isn't it? Weren't you the Business Secretary?

ANUSHKA: As I say, it's my husband's fund, Simon. I don't get involved in it. And I am not saying anything more about what I know or don't know about Blue Stone.

SIMON: We're off the record.

ANUSHKA: That is no comfort to me. I want to know what you are planning to do with this.

SIMON: (Archly) Why? Isn't it 'your husband's fund'?

ANUSHKA: Do you like having access to Parliamentary business, Simon.

SIMON: Are you threatening me?

ANUSHKA: No. But if you start digging around in the private business dealings of members of this government you will be lucky to be invited to hearings of the Accommodation and Works Committee. You'll spend the rest of your career writing about choices of wall paper.

SIMON: You are threatening me.

ANUSHKA: Do I have to spell it out? Why would I talk to a 'journalist' working for a paper that is read by 130,000 myopics, who would choke over their no-fat muesli to read about a financial scandal relating to a Secretary of State?

SIMON: Is there one to print?

ANUSHKA: No, of course not.

SIMON: Hmm... By the way, we have about 4 million readers.

ANUSHKA: Bollocks.

SIMON: We have 4 million views every day.

ANUSHKA: Clicks and readers are not the same thing. That's the reason your paper is broke. You give it all away, free!

SIMON: I know that's hard to understand. Free things make you lot nervous. Like wild flowers. Or moonlight. Or *lurve*.

Why not think of it like railway franchises, which you give away to your chums like figurines in cereal packets? Or something more trivial... like the right to run a state primary school!

What the hell happened to you, Nushki?

ANUSHKA: Don't call me that.

SIMON: You had principles.

ANUSHKA: I had illusions. Delusions - and I had them a long time ago.

SIMON: Back in the 90s. When they made music that is even more crap than this stuff.

ANUSHKA: Thankfully all forgotten now.

SIMON: Oh come on. You must remember dancing on the beach, to that rubbish little tape player. The year Labour came to Brighton. That beach down there, Nush.

ANUSHKA: I was never much of a dancer and that wasn't much of a dance.

SIMON: Alright, maybe it was more of a stumble. We'd had a few. We were celebrating John Smith's speech, as I recall. Christ he was the one that got away. What an orator. Must have been 93. The year before you began the most screeching ideological U-turn in history. [Beat] Really though, I've still no idea why you left. You only had to wait another few years and you would could have boarded the New Labour gravy train and eaten your fill.

ANUSHKA: I needed to catch a faster service.

SIMON: Why?

ANUSHKA: I realised that the world doesn't work like they said it did. Like you said it did. The idea that we can all look out for each other. It's not true.

SIMON: I don't get it.

ANUSHKA: Of course you don't. Ideological socialists never get it. They are so far up themselves they can't see out.

SIMON: Are we really talking about politics here?

ANUSHKA: There's some things I can remember. Sitting about late into the night trying to work out how we were going to take down the system. Private schools, gone. Privatisation, gone. The new dawn of a society based on mutual care. None of it, none of it is real!

SIMON: What about the NHS?

ANUSHKA: Enlightened self-interest. Pure and simple. Not for the politicians of 1945, of course. They believed in it. But they got lucky. There were enough people who were on their knees from the war and they knew a better offer when they saw it. Likewise for education. But it's a one off. Society will never go that way again. That's why you lot lose. Again and again. People have simple wants and needs and they will pursue them no matter what. And if you want evidence, all you need to do is to look into the personal actions of your average socialist, all the way back to Karl Marx. They treat their partners like shit!

SIMON: So we're not talking about politics.

ANUSHKA: I am talking about the whole thing, Simon. Because all these dreams of a New Jerusalem start with the people who peddle them - who continue to whinge on about them on the pages of national newspapers, written on a nicely oiled oak table somewhere in North London. People like you, with all your ideals of love and friendship. You made it made it very clear to me, that year, that in the end none of it extended beyond personal ambition.

SIMON: Anushka -

ANUSHKA: I thought we had started something, Simon. It felt like we could be the centre of it all. You and me and - Of course you never said it, directly. All your choice, you said. Your body. But it was bloody clear to me what you meant.

SIMON: We were too young to start a family, Nush.

ANUSHKA: So you said! Youthful idealism is all very well, apparently, but not when it comes to having believing in a youthful family unit. So I took care of it. And after I had picked myself up I said 'sod it'. 'Sod you.' All of you. I decided to get real, and learnt to see things like they really are. I decided to get some power and exercise it for the good of a society that is honest with itself.

SIMON: So shafting the poor is actually more of a personal vendetta?

ANUSHKA: You arrogant prick. No wonder you need to inflict your problems on the nation if you are that self-obsessed. It was a catalyst, Simon. A lightning bolt of clarity. Clarity and honesty, in the end, guides everything I do.

SIMON: Nice soundbite. So does this clarity extend to the flotation of Blue Rock Asset Management? A 3 billion pound private hedge fund steps out into the open of a public offering, for the good of us all? And the former Business Secretary and now holder of one of the great offices of state makes an absolute fucking fortune.

ANUSHKA: That's what you were after, wasn't it Simon. That's why you're here. It's The Return of the Jedi? With your plucky little light sabre you have come to slay the dark lords of capitalism. Well sorry - there is nothing to fight here. Nothing to see. It is my husband's concern and his concerns are, increasingly, if we are being honest - and this is off the record, remember - not really my concerns, except when we are standing on a podium together. And that, Mr Bernstein-Woodward, is the best you will get out of me.

[One of the SPADs has returned with their drinks]

Thank you, Giles. *[To Simon]* Want it?

SIMON: Is it poisoned?

ANUSHKA: Probably. *[She gives it to him]* Up yours.

SIMON: And yours. You know it's not why I crashed this party. Trespassed. At least, it's not the only reason.

ANUSHKA: Really?

SIMON: It was like I said at the start. I'm curious. I do remember that dance. Like it was this evening. It was a moonlit night.

ANUSHKA: Bollocks.

SIMON: Alright. Fuck knows what the weather was like. But I remember the feeling. And I've never felt a feeling like it. And I'm sorry I fucked it all up. You're right, I am arrogant and probably self-obsessed.

ANUSHKA: Not probably

SIMON: Definitely, self-obsessed. But I believe in it. I do believe we're a decent species, in the end, and that we can be decent to each other. So I thought, I wonder if- if last time it was a stumble. We could.. try again.

ANUSHKA: Another dance?

SIMON: In the moonlight. Why not?

ANUSHKA: A conservative Secretary of State, at the party conference gala, with a *Guardian* columnist?

SIMON: Now there's a story...

[They put down their drinks, and move out across the terrace, under the harvest moon...]