

Memoir of Travelling:

Letting your Jewish mother pack your suitcase is never a good idea. I can personally attest to that. Thank God they didn't weigh suitcases when you left America back in the 1960s, or I would have never been let on the plane! Coming home would be an entirely different story. 80lbs of luggage later, the majority of which would never see the light of day, and I was finally on my way. My big adventure. Europe, with my best friend Morris. I couldn't wait... London here we come!

We arrived at a club with a line two hundred and fifty people, and two hours, long. Women in exquisite gowns and men in expensive suits waited around the block just to get in. To say it was the most exclusive club in London, would not have been an understatement. I had never felt so under-dressed in my whole life. Nor have I felt so under-dressed since. If you visited The Revolution nightclub in the 1960s, it would not have been unusual for you to spy the likes of Elizabeth Taylor or the Kray brothers. Often bands of such calibre as The Beatles, The Rolling Stones and Elton John would play there. It has been said that playing a gig at The Revolution was the start of many high-profile music careers. It was the first of its kind. Before this, England had only pubs... which had no dancefloors, people would just stand around drinking, oftentimes on the sidewalk, or 'pavement', as they say across the pond.

I'm not going to lie; my heart sank when I saw the line. I was just about ready to turn around, when Morris strode off towards the great wooden door, directing a, "Don't worry," my way. He bypassed the street full of people waiting, not so patiently, to get inside. With all eyes on him, he pounded his coffee-coloured fist against the dark wood. A gentleman opened the peep hole and asked Morris, rather brashly, what he wanted.

Morris puffed out his already broad chest and said, "You tell Dennis, that Morris is here." Barely a minute later I heard a voice over the loudspeaker inviting Morris's 'party' to the front door. The door swung wide open and immediately we were surrounded by opulence. There is no other way to describe it. An expanse of red velvet and gold finishes. The sheer volume of people within the walls made it seem as though the club was living. Breathing. Containing a stage, a dancefloor, a restaurant and a casino, there was something for everybody. We were shown to a table on the front row, smack-bang at the centre of the stage. Waiting for us were two bottles of the finest champagne. At this point, I knew I was in out of my depth. I took in my surroundings and sank into a chair. Turning to Morris I asked, "How did you do this?"

He looked at me, his deep brown eyes sparking, the biggest grin on his face. He sipped his champagne and replied, "Gary, it's a long story. I'll tell you the shorter version".

Morris had this way of captivating people. He was able to monologue and leave people in awe of the story he was telling. It was the way he spoke. You'd feel like he was letting you in on his biggest secret.

"The story begins with my sister, Fiona." Morris began, gesturing in the general direction of her house with his muscular arm. "She came over here from Iran, over ten years ago, to open a boutique. She eats at the restaurant next door to here all the time. She knows the people there well. One day, she notices this handsome gentleman looking at her across the room. Their eyes keep meeting, until eventually Fiona decides to go over to him and start a conversation. Now, he introduces himself as Dennis. Tells Fiona he's come to London from Iraq to make his own way in life, after being disowned by his father for not wanting to go into the family business. His father, as it turned out, was an unbelievably rich man, owning the bottling rights to Coca Cola for the whole of Egypt, amongst many other things. Doing business in various countries, under various names, he really was a tycoon. There was 'rich' and then there was him. Dennis says to Fiona that his dream is to open nightclubs in London. He wanted an empire of nightclubs, for the rich and famous, and decided that London was the best place to start because there's only pubs here. Fiona leaves the table at this point and asks to borrow the staff phone. She goes outside and makes a call to our dad in Iran. When she returns to the table, some minutes later, she looks Dennis in the eyes and tells him that she wants to make him a deal. She will give him a hundred thousand dollars, for a fifty percent share of his business. She wanted to be equal partners. He shakes her hand, and that was that. They've been partners for over ten years and own twelve establishments, including the best-known casino in the whole of England,

The Grosvenor Casino. That's why they let me in when I told them who I was. That is why we get the special treatment here."

Almost as if on cue, Dennis sauntered up to the table with three exceptionally stunning, scantily clad women draped over him. A redhead, a blonde and a brunette. They gazed around the room, an air of indifference about them like a smokescreen. They were used to the atmosphere here. Used to the attention. Dennis greeted Morris as an old friend. Morris introduced me and filled Dennis in on our big plans to drive around Europe. At this point, I was completely dumb struck. Look at this from my perspective, if you will. One of the most accomplished entrepreneurs was stood at my table and Morris was chatting to him as though this was a completely normal occurrence. Of course, I didn't know at the time, that this was 'normal' for Morris. Dennis then offered to us, what felt to me, like the world. He told us that we could have any drinks we wished, any food we wished, any women we wished. He wanted us to have a good time there. More specifically, he wanted Morris to have a good time there. You see, Dennis knew that Morris could put on a show. Draw all the attention to himself. Make the men want to be him, and the women want to be with him. By doing this, Dennis knew that anybody who set eyes on Morris, would also have a good time. Morris was then given £500 to gamble with. "Go put on a show!" Dennis whispered. In addition to the £500 chip, Dennis threw some keys on the table, "Use my penthouse if you want. It has a bar, one hell of a view and a new round bed." He said, winking at us before swaggering away.

Within minutes Morris had a crowd of onlookers watching him play roulette, in awe. It was a rollercoaster ride. First, he was up by about five grand, then he was down, then he was up again. The crowd riding the wave with him. Raucous cheering erupted when he was winning, intense silence when he was losing. Nobody could play the room like Morris. Meanwhile, I watched from a distance, eating my steak, drinking my champagne and trying to let this insane night sink in.

Almost an hour later Morris asked me to follow him up to the top floor of the building. We arrived at a huge double door with an armed guard stationed at each side. I expected the guards to approach us. To ask us who we were at least, but they let us walk straight by, into a private room. Before us sat six men at a circular table playing poker, each of them was sweating excessively, their faces various shades of red. The room was stark. It had only the table and a small bar area in the far corner. We walked silently over to the bar and perched on the stools; half hidden in the shadows of the room. Morris lent over to me and whispered, gesturing with his head at the table of men hunched over their cards, that this game would be worth over one million dollars. That each hand could be worth anything from twenty-five thousand dollars to a hundred thousand dollars. My mouth hit the floor. Not only could I never imagine having that much money in the first place, but to try to imagine gambling it away? These men were straight up crazy-rich. Not only were they crazy rich, but they were helping to make Dennis and Fiona even richer, as two percent of each pot went straight to the club. They were the only guaranteed winners here, making anywhere between £500 and £5000 per hand.

Sipping another glass of champagne that Morris had placed into my hand, I couldn't take my eyes off these men. The tension in the room was like nothing else. Every move they made was deliberate. Every yawn, every sigh, every drink. I was watching something very few people would ever have the chance to. As it was a cash game, the mountain of money dominated the table. Have you ever seen that amount of money in pound notes? Believe me, it's an astonishing sight. I turned to Morris to express this sentiment, but he had vanished from beside me. In fact, he had vanished from the room altogether!