

# **The boy who invented air and the big story**

***By Sohail Khan***

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## **The boy who invented air and the big story**

### **Characters**

**Gustavo:** *Ex worker for the company, retired due to injury, partner to Angela*

**Angela:** *Tabloid journalist and partner to Gus*

**Knowle:** *Friend of Angela's and ex work college of Gus's. Responsible in part for Gus's injury*

### **Staging is thus**

*Big sofa into which Gus is embedded Down Stage Centre. Small drinks Cabinet S.L with Bottles and cans some distance from sofa. A low coffee table directly in front of the sofa with mobile and numerous remotes and laptop. Wire frame chair S.R. of sofa, rather too close to sofa.*

**Lights up on Gustavo sitting on the sofa. He sits embedded centrally on the sofa and stays there throughout the play He wears a baggy jumper, combat trousers and slippers. He is staring out into the audience. He is intently watching television. The audience is the telly, He has a TV remote control in his hand, one of many on the low coffee table in front of him. He flicks the remotes and swaps between them. With each change of channel there is a marked change of attitude: the expression of his face changes in silent response to what greets him on each new channel. When something grabs him he makes a note in the lap top computer on his lap. Sometimes he gives a commentary to himself. The use of the remotes and typing input into the laptop punctuate his lines, which is like a kind of rap poem.**

**Gustavo: Hmm? (Flicks Channel) No, I wouldn't want to get you out of there, would I ? Could I? You will not do. (Flick ) Poor quality trash not so flash (Flicks) Oh! (Writes in Lap Top) No!.....Oh! Yes! That s true.! Your pain is mine, baby! (Writes Flicks) Or at least my gain maybe. (Flick/Type ) Well still peddling that same old line? (Writes) You should be ashamed a man of your age is all the rage (Writes In laptop/Flicks channel rapidly. Settles on something) Oops, bet you didn't mean to do that (Writes) Oh well more grist to the mill. More grist to the wrist and there is the twist (Flick/Write) and shout of it. (Flick/Flick/ Flick) The – put- it- all -about of it (writes/flick) The shot down in a New York street of it (Flick) The Taliban's or even the CIA' s. Isn't that meet of it so sweet of it to crash and burn and never learn and... and Done! And dusted and not quiet busted (Closes laptop but continues flicking using remote to punctuate his lines) No...More I'm such a bore such a whore for the truth as I was in my. ....(Mobile phone on the table rings) Bum! (Finds phone)**

**Gus:** *Yes Gustavo Mira, Yes this is he. Hi, yeah it's ready. (Flicks more rapidly) You're ready for it? That's good...I'm making sure nothing else comes up...(Flicks)...You have to be patient...If you get it now you won't like it...If you get it later you will.... and more importantly those above, below, and around you will like it and then they will like you too. If I give it to you now no one will like you because no one will understand it...as I said, context and timing...Don't you threaten me... Bye. (Hangs up.)*

**Pause.**

**Gustavo:** *Bum.*

**Starts to channel hop silently. Angie enters, classic 1920's beaded red party dress, high heels, fur coat. Bends down kisses Gus on his cheek, throws fur coat down next to Gus. Goes and sits to the other side of him on the sofa. Gus remains flicking his channel. He does not look at Angie.**

**Gus:** *You're back early. (Flicks)*

**Angela:** *I'm knackered! Oh! It was awful! Truly awful...I can't believe I still give them my time. Is it worth it? Is it? To make the same shit-eating grimaces. And who invited the military this time? Everyone worthwhile has left. Flown! It's like some rotten game of charades where nobody even bothers to pretend they're someone else.*

**Gus:** *I'm sorry to hear that.*

**Angela:** *And the heels! Why the heels!?*

**Gus:** *( Flicking) Hmm?*

**Angela:** *Why wear them if you're not going to walk the way you're supposed to walk with the heels! (She gets up and demonstrates up and down in Gus's field of view) You walk from the hips! You turn on the balls of the feet! You don't...you don't slump!... you don't plant you feet like blocks of concrete Clunk! Clunk! Clunk! Like some deranged honey monster and move your shoulders like a Wigan night club bouncer at the same time. What's the point? I mean in Spain, in Italy women wear their heels ninety percent of their waking lives. Why can't we- they! - put some effort into it? (Throws herself back down onto the sofa.)*

**Towards the end of Angie's tirade, Knowle has appeared from upstage entering more slowly than Angie. He arrives at the back of the sofa, and takes up a position directly behind Gus's head. Gus is still channel surfing, Knowle is working his way through a pizza from its box. The hand he is eating with is bandaged with a hanky. He wears a long black leather coat and fashionable trousers and shirt. Something about his clothes and general styling suggest someone who is trying too hard.**

**Angela:** *Knowle, did you pay the taxi man?*

**Knowle:** *I thought you did.*

**Angela:** *No, I did not. You said you would get it.*

**Knowle:** *Did I? Sorry I couldn't understand a word he was saying.*

**Gus:** *(To telly) Dickhead...So how was the party?*

**Angela:** *You've asked me already.....Gus! You have to listen, darling.*

**Gus:** *Sorry darling I always do that, don't I? I've got a lot on my mind right now.*

**Angela :** *So have we all. The party? Wonderful! It was lovely to see all our old friends all those old friends of ours chatting, laughing, loving each others company. Just like Hello and People Magazine. Lovely.*

**Knowle:** *Lovely. (Finishes, his pizza and throws it down by side behind the sofa.) Hello Gus, how are you?*

**Gus:** *(Flicking, eyes on screen.) That's nice darling. So was it worthwhile?*

**Angela:** *In terms of research, it was, of course. It's always nice to meet new people. But some of them, what do they think they are? Put them in a bin bag made by some forced labour kid in a penal factory. (Aside) Poor little bugger. Stick a label on it and charge them half a K and they think they're gods gift. How was your day dear?*

**Gus:** *(Still Flicking) Oh, you know. Took the dog for a walk. Made myself some sushi. Worked out on the cross trainer for a while.*

**Angela:** *Really dear?*

**Gus:** *(Flicking) I've been working just like you, Angela.*

**Angela:** *Really! How's the story? Is it ready?*

**Gus:** *Not yet. I've already had a phone conversation about that. They threatened me again.*

**Angela:** *Well, they are paying dear. Guess who I found at the party! Gus! Knowle! Say hello to Knowle, Gus.*

**Gus puts down the remote. He looks straight up at Knowle.**

**Gus:** *Hello there, geezer!*

**Knowle:** *Ha! Ha! Ha! Great to see you. Gus how are you mate!*

**Knowle goes and sits on the chair to S.R of Gus. As Knowle sits, Angela rises and goes to drinks cabinet. She makes herself a drink.**

**Gus:** *Ha! Ha! Ha! Getting on, ducking and diving.*

**Knowle:** *Bobbing and Weaving.*

**Gus:** *Whatever.*

**Knowle:** *Ha Ha. Same old same old.*

**Gus:** *What?*

**Knowle:** *You know! Ha! Ha! Ha! You kidder, you!*

**Gus:** *Ha! Ha! Ha! No I don't know.*

**Angie:** *Do you want a drink Knowle?*

**Knowle:** *Whatever you're having, Angela. It was a shit party, Gus you missed nothing. (Pause) I hear you're writing a new story. Like the screens. Nice new kit, Gus!*

**Gus:** *Severance pay Knowle, I'll have a drink too, Babes.*

**Angie:** *Do you want ice with that Knowle?*

**Gus:** *I said I'll have a drink too, Angie. (Pause) Shall I come and get it myself? (Pause) Angela?*

**Angela:** *What do you want Gus?*

**Gus:** *I will have a Stella. You know me Angie. I'm a Stella man.*

**Knowle:** *Stella's piss. Well, that's not precisely true. Stella with the embossed can you have too watch out for, you see. On the surface the gold embossed can implies extra value, but in fact if you look at the small print you will see that it's made in the U.K. Tastes like piss, all metallic a third of the way down the can no matter how cold you chill it. What is that one? Ang?*

**Angela:** *It's un-embossed Knowle.*

**Angela crosses to Gus who has gone back to surfing. She gives him the tin. She sits on his lap facing Knowle's direction.**

**Knowle:** *Ah you see! Where as the old un-embossed tins, they're still made in Bremen, Germany.*

**Angela:** *Really ?*

**Knowle:** *It's the purity laws you see, for the beer, the old beer purity laws.*

**Gus:** *You should know this by now, Knowle. Nothing but the best in this house. Cheers!*

**Angela and Knowle:** *Cheers!*



**Knowle:** *(Sniffs) What's that stink?*

**Angie:** *(Sniffs) For God's sake, the sewers have backed up again! What are the taxes for?*

**Knowle:** *Only to be expected this part of town.*

**Angie:** *Shut up, Knowle. (Pause.) Well I suppose I will have to go and clean it up then ? (Pause looks to Gus then Knowle) I will go and clean it up then?*

**Gus:** *Okay Doke's, Babe.*

**Angela takes her coat and exits. Knowle watches her go**

**Knowle:** *So how is it? Keeping busy, I hear? Busy writing?*

**Gus:** *You know. One must work. Keeping my hand in.*

**Knowle:** *So I hear. Ha Ha. I still run into the old boys sometimes. You know. They ask after you still: "If you see old Gus give him our regards. A diamond geezer," they say.*

**Gus:** *Too kind.*

**Knowle:** *They say ; "The best ideas man in the 'Biz." "One of the good old boys," "Have him back like a shot we would..." "Water under the bridge and all that."*

**Gus:** *Isn't that up to me to decide, partly at least.*

**Knowle:** *What do you mean old man Ha! Ha!*

**Gus:** *Whether or not it is all water under the bridge.*

**Knowle:** *All I'm saying is that they say there is a place for you. That's all. If you should want it you've still got the edge you know. We all know it. We all say it.*

**Gus:** *I'm retired, from all that. I'm retired.*

**Knowle:** *Ha! Ha! That's what I said to them retired: I said, he's taking a rest.*

**Gus:** *I'm retired. I write my own story now.*

**Knowle:** *You're still in the industry. It's where all the stories are, Gus you're never out of it. It don't matter where you're sitting, either side of the fence you're still in with us.*

**Gus:** *I like my current reality, Knowle. So what is it like out there for you? What's the story with your hand?*

**Knowle:** *It's murder out there. Everything means something and nothing now. Remember when we were coming up? We had it beat into us one way or another. No sense of history today, of where things come from, of how things got to be like they are, the reasons for things.*

**Gus:** *Oh Knowle what I asked you was. "What have you done to your hand?"*

**Knowle:** *You don't know how tricky it is now. The stress, how it gets to you? How difficult it is, it's all drying up. It's closing down around us. It's desperate, I don't mind telling you. I don't know how Angela manages to*

*keep smiling. We are all caught in the loop the options. Jesus I need another drink.*

**Gus:** *Help yourself. Don't talk about my wife.*

**Knowle:** *Jesus...Gus...I don't know how you can sit there?*

**Gus:** *That's about all I can do. Do not talk about my wife.*

**Knowle:** *I need your help! That's why I'm here Gus. You need to come back. The Managements changed they want the software They say it's theirs. I said I could get the story out of you. They think I'm all washed up if you give.....*

**Gus:** *I don't have to do anything for you. This software wrote itself. This story is for everyone else. I got tired of writing conspiracy theories.*

**Knowle:** *And me! I got tired of actioning them. You owe me! They used to call you "The boy who invented air and got jealous if any one else breathed." I had ideas too you know! You took them from me. I made the space so your ideas could blossom! I strangled my imagination so you had the air to breath.*

**Gus:** *Nothing new under the sun, Knowle. No genius unless all six billion of us are. You. That's been the problem all along with you and the company you can't box imagination and call it yours and sell it back. It's all out there. Imagination comes through you it's not of you.*

**Knowle:** *I've got a gun.*

**Gus resumes Channel surfing with the remote Angela returns in stained overalls over her dress, wiping her hands on a rag.**

**Angela:** *I hope you boys have not been fighting? Its was backed all the way up but I've cleared it. We will have to call someone in the morning.*

**Gus:** *Ok I'll do it first thing.*

**Angela:** *So how are we then?*

**Gus:** *Apparently Knowle has a gun. What for, I cannot imagine unless it's for his over weaning resentment.*

**Angela:** *Is that true Knowle? May I see?*

**Knowle:** *I...I was lying. I don't have a gun. Do you think that if I had a gun I would be here? If I were allowed a gun, do you?... I spill my guts and you sit there flicking away as calm as pie....*

**Angela:** *I don't see any spilled guts, what do you expect Gus to do for you? A can can? Or maybe him and I could do a little tango for you?*

**Gus:** *It's time.*

**Angela:** *Are you sure?*

**Gus:** *As sure as I will ever be. Do you want to press the button. It will come up on the screens. It's only text of course, but it's full of images.*

**Gus opens up the lap top. Angela presses a button in the lap top and what they see happens on the imaginary screens in the audience.**

**Silence for thirty seconds. The 'footage' plays. They watch in silence.**

**Knowle:** *Is that it! Is that it! What do you think you are doing? Why are you dicking about? I am dead.*

**Angela:** *I think it works. I think you have to give it time. You are so used to understanding everything now, wanting the solutions now.*

**Knowle:** *There's nothing there. Don't you see it? Nothing. No text. No words. No pictures. No sounds. Nothing. You can't sell that, it's a fucking blank!*

**Angela:** *What are you talking about? Didn't you see it Knowle? All the colours ? The old peasant woman stroking the enemy soldier's face. That light over a new planet? The Jew and the Arab playing hopscotch? I mean those things were only a small part of it, a tiny facet of it, little sparks.....*

**Knowle:** *Playing what !?...Are you insane? There is nothing...NOTHING! How can you...!.. exploit what isn't there?*

**Angela:** *It's hope Knowle...You're overtired. Take some rest and in a while Gus will show you again and you will see. Won't he, Gus?*

**Gus:** *Hmm?*

**Gus takes up one of the remotes and starts flicking again.**

**Angela:** *You were looking too hard to see. You need to relax.*

**Knowle:** *Don't fucking touch me! This is bullshit! You won't get away with this to think I put my trust in you to sort this.*

**Angela:** *It's out there now, for everyone to see. The loop's broken. Soon everyone will know who is who.*

**Knowle:** *It's nothing! There is nothing the screen is BLANK! You won't sell this Angie' No one will buy into this.*

**Angela:** *We will see.*

**Knowle:** *See what?*

**The lights do a ten second fade**

**Knowle:** *What's happening, You're beginning to..... I... can't make you out.*

**Angela:** *What do you mean, Knowle? We are right here.*

**Knowle:** *I can't...what is this some kind of trick...the drink ...I can't feel... I can't see....I...*

**Black out by now**

**Angela:** *You are over reacting. You drank the same as me. You know you go from one extreme to another. Here take my hand.*

**Knowle:** *I can't hear you... I...I...nothing there's nothing, Can't find anything to hold on to.*

**Angela:** *It's fine. We are here, over here Knowle. We are in the light.*

**The End**