



The Great Deception

By Geoff Brown

“I’m going to tell you something that only my family know. As a painter you must have a keen eye. You probably already recognise that I bear a striking resemblance to the famous writer and polemicist, George Bernard Shaw. A few years ago I acted as his double at several grand events he did not wish to attend. He regarded it as a delicious joke that people at these gatherings would fawn over the great GBS, not realising they were being duped.

We were members of the same London Club and had become firm friends. One evening something happened which caused us to hatch the plan for me to impersonate him. One of the members approached me with a face like thunder. Towering over me as I was savouring my post-prandial brandy and cigar he fulminated in a stentorian voice about the unpatriotic nature of my support for Hitler and Mussolini. I did not disabuse him of the idea that he was addressing not the controversial GBS but a self-effacing retired Permanent Secretary at the Department of Ag and Fish. Hidden behind his newspaper across the room GBS had been observing this tirade with great delight.

After my assailant had stormed out without giving me the opportunity to correct this case of mistaken identity, GBS joined me. He quoted himself, which he often did and dismissively referred to the fellow who had accosted me, who happened to be an MP. ‘He knows nothing and thinks he knows everything. That points clearly to a political career.’ We laughed heartily at this bizarre episode but then came up with the plan to replicate the charade at certain events of our choosing.

I am not a vain man but my double first at Oxford did equip me to hold my own in intellectual debate and mimic GBS’s often eccentric stance on issues. None of the distinguished people I hoodwinked suspected a thing. It was a delightful and uniquely uncharacteristic departure for me. To quote my *doppelganger* GBS, ‘We don’t stop playing games because we grow old. We grow old because we stop playing.’”

350 Words