

CANTARAVILLE

Cantaraville (ISSN 1933-6624), an exclusively PDF, 200-page international literary magazine, was published from 2008 to 2011 every April and October by Cantarabooks LLC. Submissions in English of short fiction, poetry, essays, interviews, stage/screen play excerpts, nonfiction book and novel excerpts, and book and film reviews were welcome all year round, simultaneous submissions and previous publication acceptable. We requested submissions (with no photos or illustrations) be sent through email with the subject line "Submission: Story/Poem/ Article by Your Name" with .doc, .rtf or .txt attachment of manuscript, word count and short bio anywhere in the attachment, to Senior Editor Michael Matheny at cantaraville@gmail.com. Response time one month. We asked for one-time, non-exclusive, electronic-only rights. Payment in copies only. We submitted eligible work for consideration for the O Henry Prize, the Pushcart Prize, and other editor-nominated literary prizes. Cantarabooks was a member of the New York-based Small Press Center, The Independent Book Publishers Association (PMA), and the Council of Literary Magazines and Presses (CLMP).

This is the best of Cantaraville.

THE ROAD TO CANTARAVILLE

It wasn't the first thing on our minds to start a literary magazine last summer.

Civilization—again—being assailed from within and without; the world—again!—on the precipice of chaos; the human race *this* close to utter annihilation like a sneeze in the universe—what could be more frivolous than to launch another round of feckless chatter into this fraught atmosphere? Besides, with the baby struggles of my small press, Cantarabooks, my husband, novelist Michael Matheny, and I had our hands full enough with authors ranging from cantankerous to charmingly temperamental.

The single paying gig I had going at this time was a senior editorship for a (larcenous, as it turned out) “publisher” which just managed to cover the rent, beer and occasional haircut. But in the middle of June 2006, in fact the day after what Michael (also a senior editor for selfsame “publisher”, though on a voluntary basis) and I thought was a brilliant appearance at the CLMP's annual Magathon and LitMag Fair, we were fired.

Not only fired, but summarily dismissed in the middle of the editorial selection process.

This left us with a problem. We'd already championed about a dozen short stories and were now no longer in a position to guarantee that these stories would find inclusion in the next issue. As the previous issue of this particular journal had run into editorial, organizational (manuscripts being unacknowledged, misplaced or simply lost), promotional and production problems that held up its publication by four months—the chief reasons we were brought on board in the first place—we weren't in a position to guarantee that its next issue would even come out at all.

The thought that these stories might be suspended in a kind of limbo was distressing. But, as I said, we were no longer in a position to offer any kind of assurances to anyone.

Unless...well, unless we started a literary magazine of our own.

If you've read my article, "Writing in the New Publishing Paradigm", you've gotten a pretty good idea of the tremendous stock I put in modern electronic and printing technology to further the Human Dialogue:

The world we're living in these days isn't big enough to encompass the current explosion in human activity. We need to enlarge the world, not narrow it. We need more ideas, not fewer.

In response to an intellectually refined, Russian-born acquaintance of mine who recently remarked with disdain, Now anybody can write a book, I say, Yes! Isn't that fantastic?

Because we need more books, not fewer. And we need them now.

I would add right here that this applies not just to books, but to stories, essays, poems—to whatever might encompass The Idea as written.

So in that spirit we started *Cantaraville*, the shape of which is a crisp, handsome, readable and printable PDF download. And beyond *Cantaraville's* ostensible pricing and availability for purchase online, the comp/review list for all issues benefits from our extensive number of contacts. Our primary goal for *Cantaraville* is to expand the readership of all the authors we publish.

As a New York-based publisher, we've had the opportunity to work and socialize with the writers and staff of excellent print and online publications like *Pindeldyboz*, *n+1*, *Open City*, *Bellevue Literary Review*, as well as many, many others; it's our good fortune to benefit from their models of editorship while refining ours. At *Cantaraville*, a writer can expect to encounter editors who edit, not simply accumulate or facilitate—editors who, taking great delight in the power of the English language, will do their best to ensure that a writer accomplishes his or her intent in any chosen piece, whether story, essay or poem.

And what can readers expect? Diversion, discovery, journey, destination, a heightening of thought and senses. In the words of

Vladimir Nabokov:

“This capacity to wonder at trifles—no matter the imminent peril—these asides of the spirit, these footnotes in the volume of life are the highest form of consciousness.”

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OUTTAKE FROM THE REBEL BOOKSELLER

Andy Laties

Despite our outward success Chris and I were increasingly isolated as individuals. Surrounded by customers and employees, we'd lost our privacy. We'd had small circles of longtime friends and now we had no time to see them. We spent our days keeping up a front. Our first newspaper interview was with Sarah Zesmer for the *Chicago Reader*. We were completely honest about how we'd stumbled into children's bookselling and when she printed what we'd said it looked awful. We shaped up fast, telling a story that went: “Take one cup Chris's bookstore background and one cup Andy's children's theatre life and voila! The Children's Bookstore!” Everyone loved this fairy tale. It matched the apparent existence of the store as an entity.

I never saw the store as an entity. When I looked around I confronted a million independent decisions, many erroneous, all arbitrary. But customers constantly asked, “Is this a chain? Where are the other stores?” If I answered, “My wife and I own this store,” they were perplexed, unable to grasp that they were admiring a new community institution created from scratch. “You own it? Did you buy it?” When I explained, “We opened it,” I'd get, “You opened it!? Is it a franchise?” Every few weeks someone would ask us how to open their own children's bookstore. Again, we had to learn how to answer this since it made so much less sense than questioners could possibly understand. Typically such a query came from someone

who'd never even worked in a bookstore. When we said, "First get a job in a bookstore to see if you like working there," they'd say, "Oh I don't want to work in a bookstore. I want to own a bookstore." If we asked why they were thinking about owning a children's bookstore, they'd say, "I just love children's books and I'd like to have my own store so I can read the books all day."

There was no time to read. The number of tasks was astonishing. People were slob. Make a swell display: it's a wreck in ten minutes. Alphabetize a section: in a day the titles are subtly rearranged. And the paperwork! I spent the first fall on the sales floor non-stop, while Chris and an assistant manager from our B Dalton days worked downstairs managing business operations. On New Year's Day we had \$50K in the bank. Exciting! Somehow we thought it was profit. In January I opened a drawer filled with invoices. Neatly filed. All unpaid. I added them up. \$39K. Then we discovered woops we hadn't filed any sales tax forms. We calculated: \$12K. We brought in a professional inventory team. They discovered, woops, a lot of books weren't there. When we did our own book-by-book inventory we realized there'd been theft. A lot of those wonderful customers had been helping themselves while I was recommending books to their friends. Cassettes, science toys, baby books, stuffed animals had walked out the door hidden in coats. We'd been worried about theft—but there's only so much you can do when you're overwhelmed with customers. You've got to sell, sell, sell, right? Who'd have thought so much would be stolen!? It was disgusting.

Our plan had been for Chris and me to launch the store, and then for me to gradually pull back out into children's theatre, or possibly pursue an interdisciplinary degree in history of jazz and history of religion. I'd work part-time. This wouldn't happen. No time to reflect. The phone ringing. Customers—demanding, demanding. "Look up the publication date of this book for my daughter's report. Goodbye." "How can I get an author to appear in my school? Thanks—goodbye." We'd become a fantastic resource but were losing money. How were we supposed to make it work? The American Booksellers Association financial materials had told about

stable bookstores during normal circumstances, but this was a runaway train. Zena Sutherland had been right: there were lots of people who wanted the full service we were offering. But no one wanted to pay. They took everything they could for free. Though we were selling books, the cost of operating left little room for error, and we were making errors. In '85 from September through December we did \$150K and when we finally got our bookkeeping done our wholesale cost of goods—including in-bound freight and theft—had somehow come to \$121K. That left \$29K for everything else. Employees, shopping bags, printed bookmarks, newsletters plus postage, rent, yellow pages, heat, and of course Chris and me living our lives. Terrible. We booked a big loss.

Startup expenses are standard, right? Everyone has them, right? Wrong—not us. We weren't business majors. We hadn't made this life decision to be wrapped up in cash flow management and budgetary fine-tuning. That's why people loved our store! Who we were was written all over it. Not business types: arts and culture people with a social agenda. And now we were becoming secret misanthropes. I got mad at Chris. Chris got mad at me. We traded places. Chris started supervising management, operations, staff, merchandising, and the sales floor. I moved downstairs and became business manager. I'd gone through calculus in high school. I hadn't taken a math course in eight years but I knew I'd have an easier time swimming in the numbers than Chris had. After all I'd studied the ABA materials and constructed our financial plans two years before.

The other plus for me of moving downstairs was I'd developed a loathing for our customers. They didn't know this of course. They thought I loved them. I was courteous, upbeat, knowledgeable, friendly, witty, on my toes. My customers were always right, I gave the lady what she wanted. But I couldn't stand it. Why? Consider, here I am, a guy who loved working with children, and I'm stuck working with their parents! These people were of absolutely no interest to me. Where were their kids? They came to The Children's Bookstore and left their kids at home! Then they'd ask, "What can you recommend for a three-year old?" There were thousands of

terrific books for three-year olds in that store. Why couldn't people make their own decisions?

I was shocked at how poorly read my customers were. And these were people who thought to enter a children's bookstore. Imagine all those grown-ups who wouldn't even consider stepping into such a place. I'd read the statistics of course: each year, only 27% of Americans bought at least one book. So, 73% of Americans did not buy even one book in a year. But what I didn't know was of the 27%, so many were clueless. And I was stuck helping them. They had no powers of judgment. They honestly didn't know whether a book was appropriate for their very own child, or even if they should read to their child before age three since baby might tear a precious book's pages! I found myself reassuring people they didn't need to buy *Goodnight Moon*, all they had to do was pick up the phone book and read out names and numbers in a rhythmic, musical way. Baby would love it. It took me some time to learn not to say things like this.

Because I believed them. I knew it was words and pictures that mattered, not books. Professionally published children's books were a luxury, so you could buy any good book. But why didn't parents tell homemade stories? Why didn't they illustrate their own books, with kids joining in? Why didn't they read aloud from the newspaper? Or the backs of cereal boxes? Babies loved to hear their parents declaim any old thing. What was the big deal with Mother Goose? That was just raggedy leftovers: fodder for cultural historians, sure, but to six-month-olds it was only as beautiful as any other bouncy text. Read The Bible! Read The Koran! Sing old TV commercials! Share your voice with the kid! Make yourself theirs! Give yourself away, lock, stock and barrel!

No. Customers at The Children's Bookstore were fixated on the correct children's book, with the most beautiful art, that had won the fanciest award, with the nicest gold sticker. They were buying from us because we were the highly publicized, newly touted, well-praised, endorsed-by-the-fashionable-neighbor The Children's Bookstore. We had classy bookcases, a pretty awning, full service.

Perhaps you think I was alone in this irritation with the people in a store. Not at all. Every retailer, every restaurateur, every salesperson hates the customer. That's why there are signs posted in backrooms saying: "Remember—without our customers, we're out of business, and you're out of a job." It's brutally tough to be nice to those goddamned customers. So stupid. So simpering. So ecstatic. So proud of themselves for having found this store. So whiny to have missed that special sale by just one day. So flaunting of their famous acquaintance. Now, mind you, after work, each night, closing at ten, exhausted after a roaring day of business, Chris and I would head down the street to the fabulous restaurant Fricano's, and eat, and drink wine, and have dessert, and I didn't care what the waiter or cook or hostess or busboy or guy who cleaned toilets or Mr. Fricano himself thought of me. All I wanted was great food, great atmosphere, great service. To paraphrase Pogo: "We have met the customer, and he is us." But what I hadn't known was how it would feel to have a private self of the kind that emerged inside, and how far divorced that version of me would be from the public self I'd be enacting for the customers. I was lucky in one respect though. I was a theatre person. I knew how to improvise. I knew the difference between the character you play for an audience and the actor underneath. Being the owner of The Children's Bookstore though was a matter of playing my character twelve hours a day.

People used to say, "You must love working in such a wonderful place." I wasn't working. I was doing it because it was real. It had happened. It was my path. All I had it in my power to do was make art out of whatever self sacrifice I was capable of enacting, and it happened that I had, collaboratively with Chris, created this particular pyre of art, which we were moment-by-moment keeping lit feeding flammable books to flaming children. The subject of this art act, and its object too, was direct action for social transformation and personal liberation. I'd discovered that this profession—bookseller—unsanctioned, uncertified, unavailable only to those who did not freely claim it—most lent itself to the collectivist ethos, since among all the mulching markets of goods, services, theories and

futures, bookstores alone thoroughly dispersed the turmoil of free, personal authorial arts escaping uncontrollably from bodies of books to minds and lives of readers who helplessly passed these untamed ideas forward to root and regenerate, enriching forever the social soil for other emergent selves.

But I also knew—significantly, powerfully, secretly—that children—those most uninhibited, uninhabitable members of society—were the true chokepoints for social transformation, generation to generation. I knew there was no position of greater influence than that of children’s culture worker. I’d discovered this as an undergraduate immersed in wildly imaginative freeform drama workshops inside decrepit New Haven housing projects. Once in the middle of a game with a group of children at Quinnapiac Valley Project, in ‘78, an eight-year-old had pulled a large knife from his pocket. Another boy had countered with his own: the two circled rapidly. I’d leapt between them and, continuing the game, nudged their characters toward a resolution they improvised—a plotline that credibly permitted them to put knives away and shake hands. Then I’d shifted the group smoothly to another game (I did insist they hand me their knives before continuing, which they both did voluntarily). As a self-proclaimed professional children’s bookseller, I knew every time I sold *Goodnight Moon*—written by Margaret Wise Brown whose mother was a Theosophical follower of mystical Hermeticism—I was handing that book’s one-year old reader a manual of magical spells empowering this baby Hermes Trismegistus to take command of the cosmos: going not gentle into that good night.

Crying out: *Goodnight Moon!!!* Asserting power over the world’s night light—the face of the sky—oh moon o’ mine. Goodnight Room!!! Relaxing back the walls of that earthy green room to reveal the profoundly roomy universe. Goodnight Comb and Goodnight Brush!!! Discarding concern for social nicety, ending presentation of self to world, attaining invisibility. Goodnight To The Old Lady Whispering Hush!!! Banishing the all-controlling mother, smashing her power by rendering her unconscious, deflecting the witch’s spell

of hushing to strengthen the outward rushing of hyperbolically expansive baby mind. Goodnight Stars!!! Eyes tight shut spark infinite stars in dark: “The brain is wider than the sky” (Emily Dickinson). Goodnight Air!!! Rhythmically inhaling/exhaling night, transmuting the texture of space-time to a substance engulfed and extruded by creator baby’s body. Goodnight Noises Everywhere!!! Extending ultimate authority over all event, all sensation, all action, all consequence. “The Brain is just the weight of God/For heft them, pound for pound/And they will differ, if they do/As syllable from sound.”

You see, I took pleasure and pride acting as the agent of that secret society of revolutionaries—the authors and illustrators of our era’s incendiary children’s literature—propagandizing subversion of pea-brained parental authority by deceptively shipping those unwitting so-called grown-ups back to their children’s nurseries nursing the very fuel I knew would burn bright to incite the macrocosmic minds of those recklessly romantic babies to rip-roaring rebellion. Which fuel was: *Alice Through The Looking Glass*, *Madeline*, *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*, *Yertle The Turtle*, *The Phantom Tollbooth*, *Curious George*, *Charlotte’s Web*, *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*, *Where The Wild Things Are*.

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THE BLACK CRAYON Excerpts

Jason Shamai

2.

Ding dong.
“Sweetie, it’s your friend,” Dennis yelled from the shower, as if he were more likely to have heard the bell. She jumped up out of her seat with excitement, tossed *The Portable Molière* onto the floor without marking her place, and ran to the door.

When the door opened, they both cried out and hugged their way from the threshold to the couch. Melissa hadn't seen Ari for almost two years, and he looked just as thin at twenty-nine as he had at twenty-seven.

She felt embarrassed as they hugged, two year's worth of extra weight pressing against his jutting ribs.

"Sit," she told him.

As he made himself comfortable, he noticed over Melissa's shoulder a bright light outlining a door in the hallway, steam oozing through the cracks. In the dimness of the apartment, it looked like the gateway to Hell, though he realized it must only be the gateway to a naked Dennis.

"How are you?" she asked, discovering that after the initial excitement had run its course there was really not much to say. "I'm great. Are you sure this was not too early to show up? It was the cheapest bus fare."

"No, no," she said. "I'm always up this early. I'm just sorry I couldn't pick you up. We're getting a vehicle at the end of the month. I wish we had one now so I could take you around to all the sights—" She smiled at him, again struggling to find something to say. He didn't seem to be helping much. "So, how's the teaching going?"

"Great. I quit."

Ari looked again at the door in the hallway, and it set him on edge. The water pipes growled like the belly of a demon behind the door. The steam danced playfully around the light like rows of ghost children.

"You quit?"

"Yes," he said. "I quit."

"Are you gonna stay in LA?" she asked, knowing the answer.

"Well, I don't really think so. I was thinking of moving up here," he said, staring directly into her eyes, not sure why he felt he needed her approval. He began to feel like a guest in some distant relative's home.

“That’s great! Wow, it’ll be like high school. Um,” she continued, stealing a quick glance at the unholy bathroom door, “you can stay here until you find a place to live.”

Ari was relieved. When he knocked on her door, he half expected Melissa to greet him with some obligatory conversation and a cup of coffee, a ceramic hourglass whose diminishing contents were to signal his departure.

“Really? Would that be okay?” he asked, now gleefully certain that it would be. “Even with...”

“What, Dennis?” she said. “It’ll be fine. He really likes you.”

Melissa, Ari, and Dennis each knew exactly how the two men felt about one another. Four years ago, at a party in Los Angeles, Dennis said to Ari, “You know what, Ari? I don’t like you.” And Ari had replied, “I know. And I don’t like you, Dennis,” to which Dennis replied, “I know.”

“Well, thanks. I really appreciate it. I couldn’t afford to stay in a motel that long.”

“Of course,” she said. “And tomorrow morning I can help you find a place. It’ll be fun. We can look up listings tonight. This is so exciting, I can’t believe you’re moving here.” She looked him in the eyes. “Why did you quit? Was it safe?”

“Oh, yeah. I taught a bunch of rich kids in West LA. It was fine. I just got tired of it, I guess.”

“But I thought you really liked teaching,” she said, vaguely recalling a remark he must have made five years ago.

“Yeah, teaching’s okay. It’s the literature...I don’t know. After years studying it in school and talking about books at parties, I’ve come to realize that I really just don’t care what the green light in *The Great Gatsby* symbolizes. A student of mine asked me what it symbolized and I just stared off into space and said, ‘Who cares?’ After that, there was a lot of whispering about me, so I just thought I should quit.” He sat back and stared off into space, as if dramatizing for Melissa how he felt when he decided to leave Los Angeles.

While Ari told his story, Melissa walked to the kitchen to pour some coffee. “You still drink coffee, don’t you?”

“Shut up already! I’m awake, for chrissake!”

“Sorry about that,” Melissa laughed, bringing two steaming cups over to the couch. “That’s the downstairs neighbor. He and his wife are nice people, but they yell a lot. So do the people upstairs. They’re nice too. But they fight really late at night sometimes, and they’re meaner to each other. I didn’t realize how mean until I learned a little Spanish. Dennis can’t stand either of the couples. He wants to move.”

Ari made a face that said, “Gee, I’m not surprised.”

“I don’t particularly care for it either, except when both apartments go at it at the same time. It’s like listening to a translation. They usually do have the same things to say to each other.”

“How the hell did Dennis ever want to move to this area?” Ari asked.

“Listen, Ari. I don’t care whether you like Dennis or not. I really don’t. But don’t think he’s not connected to his culture. Dennis’s parents grew up in Mexico, and he was raised in San Diego. He’s very involved in it.”

It was then that the grumbling water pipes quieted, and a few minutes later Dennis came out of the bathroom wearing a white bathrobe. He walked into the kitchen without acknowledging Ari and grabbed a mug from the cabinet. After pouring himself a cup, he joined the two in the living room and sat down near his wife.

“Good morning, sweetie,” he said, kissing Melissa on the temple. “Hi there, Ari. How was your trip?”

“Good. Very long.” They sat silently a moment. “How was your shower?”

“Good, Ari.” Dennis sipped his coffee. More silence.

Melissa rolled her eyes. “Okay, children, you’re gonna have to get used to being around one another for at least a week...”

Dennis sat up on the couch and turned to Melissa. “At least’ a week? Doesn’t he know when he’s going back home?” He turned to Ari. “Not that we’re not happy to have you.”

“Ari’s moving out here and he needs a little time to find a place.”

“He’s moving out here?” To Ari: “You got barred from teaching in LA?” Ari didn’t answer. “This is a bad economy. It won’t be easy to find a job out here. You won’t need very long to get a place, though.”

“He can stay as long as it takes.”

“I’m just saying it shouldn’t take very long,” Dennis said. “As long as you have a little money to work with. You do have a little money, don’t you?”

“Most of my assets are tucked away in your mother’s—”

“Hey! Ari, that’s enough. From both of you. Dennis, why don’t you go get dressed.”

Dennis stared at Ari, took a long, final sip of his coffee, and carried the cup into the bedroom with him. Melissa returned to the kitchen and made herself a bowl of sugary cereal. She offered a bowl to Ari, who had no intention of eating anything sweet for a very long time. He joined her at the breakfast table, watching her eat as Dennis could be heard fumbling through the process of dressing himself. Dennis came out wearing a green and yellow tie on a white shirt tucked into dark blue jeans. Buttoning his shirt as he walked to the breakfast table, he asked them, “So, what are your plans for today?”

“I thought I’d show Ari around the city,” Melissa answered. Ari’s only experience with San Francisco was getting lost while trying to pass through it on the 101. It sounded like an all right way to spend the day. Just so long as he could work his leg muscles after that long bus ride.

“Great,” said Dennis, taking Melissa’s spoon and scooping a pile of the cereal into his mouth. “Have fun.” He grabbed his bag and left. At least she hadn’t handed him a sack lunch on the way out the door, Ari thought.

“I hope you don’t mind,” Melissa started, now that it was just the two of them, “but I took the liberty of getting two seats on a tour bus around the city.”

Downtown they presented their tickets to a young redheaded man with an idiot grin on his face—a grin that looked as if it were

funded and maintained by the San Francisco Chamber of Commerce —and boarded the bus, the third Ari had been on that day. Ari was nauseous throughout the tour. Every bridge, tower, and museum seemed a monument to his desire to vomit. The two of them sat in their cushioned seats, silent, listening for three hours to regurgitated trivia and scripted jokes piped through speakers connected to the guide's microphone.

If Ari hadn't been so sick, he might have wondered why Melissa had hardly said a thing, but as it was he was thankful to be left to his misery.

Ari felt a camaraderie with the numerous children on the bus who'd been dragged along on the tour by their parents. Hanging over the seats or fiddling obsessively with their fingers, tortured expressions on their little faces, the children were the only ones who knew his sorrow. They would much rather have been playing in the dirt, and on some basic level, so would Ari.

But it wasn't until late in the tour that he began to hone his skills of perception, to effectively decipher the hierarchy of suffering souls. The guide was relating a story about the Golden Gate Bridge, how few had any faith in the construction of a suspension bridge so long. When he made a joke about "suspension of disbelief," something in his voice told Ari that the guide had spoken those words at least a thousand times, and once more could easily send him over that very same engineering marvel. That man was dying from his job; he wouldn't make it to peak season.

As the guide pointed out Coit Tower to their left, Ari glanced at Melissa to his right. She had a peaceful, lobotomized expression on her face, and Ari made an educated guess: she had been on this bus before.

She had taken countless nephews, grandparents, old coworkers from LA on this very same bus, this very same route. He looked again at the tour guide and realized he and Melissa had known each other for a long time.

They shared an unspoken relationship, founded in resignation. This was Dennis's fault. It was he who had turned such a beautiful

mind into gray Jell-O. Ari looked at her again, and she smiled pleasantly.

It was in fact true that she'd been on this tour many times; the points of interest no longer even registered in her mind. As structure after structure and district after district sailed by, her thoughts were with the beaches of Oaxaca, where a young Guatemalan folksinger lay naked with a Mexican girl from the local village. She would take him in her arms and, as he slowly entered her, waves would crash in the background.

Melissa replayed this moment over and over in her mind. While the others sat in a damp urban afternoon, she repeatedly received the tip of the Guatemalan penis, waves crashing in the background.

3.

Someone screamed in the apartment upstairs. Ari opened his eyes to the dark ceiling, a thin strip of orange light from a street lamp cut diagonally across it. A woman was shouting in Spanish, and a man's voice loudly interjected the occasional word. Ari looked over the counter at the clock in the kitchen and groaned, wondering, still half dreamy, whether these people were just waking up or just going to sleep. He couldn't imagine what could spur such emotion at 4:30 in the morning. A heated argument at two, perhaps when a drunken spouse might decide to return home, or at 6:30, when a reluctant worker might be furiously roused out of bed, both made sense. There didn't seem any justification for a quarrel at this hour. But he was not particularly upset about the disturbance, since he'd been drifting in and out of sleep the entire night, listening to the delivery drivers from the 24-hour pizza place next door.

The night already determined as unrestful, he lay in bed, content to listen to the bickering, trying to decipher the odd word here and there. Undertaking the task of translating mumbled sentences from a language he vaguely remembered from his studies, he caught only one phrase. They were the only words spoken with such clarity and venom.

“¡Putá gorda!”

Ari’s hands turned cold.

He made it to college, even though his grades were nowhere near good enough for the school he attended... He got in by bribing the admissions counselor, but then turned around academically once he got to the school and became a model student, studying biology only to graduate and find that he couldn’t get a job in his field... But he met a girl and lived off of her (and loans from his parents) for six months and devoted that time to losing weight so that he could get a job... He was positive that no one would hire him because of his weight... Completely isolated from his peers in college, biology had become his life, and so being unable to get a job in the field was a huge blow and just the motivation he needed to lose the pounds... When he had come down to a manageable 315 lbs, the girl he lived with left him for a man with a severe respiratory illness, because she needed someone in her life who was somehow greatly impaired...not because she had a low estimation of herself (on the contrary, she was beautiful and well aware of it), but because she got off on the idea of involving herself with people so far beneath her as to raise her even higher, like a showcased jewel in a cesspool...

When she left him, he stopped losing the weight, but did not gain any of it back either...so he lived the rest of his life with a different crippling stigma attached to him... He was no longer a circus freak, just a very fat man... There were an entirely different set of implications attached to this new role and, although it was not as hard a life to lead as before, the terrible irony of it left him a very angry and destructive man...which quietly manifested itself in devastating ways in his life-long job as a lowly lab technician.

Ari sat up in a sweat, his mouth dry, finding it difficult to swallow. He got up, stumbled over the coffee table, and hobbled into the kitchen. He poured himself a glass of orange juice and, after gulping down the glassful, poured himself another. He breathed deeply and leaned on the cold refrigerator door. By the orange strip of light on the ceiling Ari dressed and quietly left the apartment.

At five o’clock the city was still dark. In the pizza shop, two men

wearing white aprons talked in the kitchen, visible from the street. Ari thought about having a seat inside, but didn't want to order anything or speak with anyone. He walked up and down the street for half an hour, passing a few people on their way to work and a few sleeping on benches and storefronts, their heads shielded from the cold by coats or shirts pulled over. On a side street he noticed a custodian locking away a mop in the closet of a small laundromat. He kept the door open as he left. The place was the only business on the street, surrounded by apartment houses, and had a sign on the front that said "Wash 'n' Dry" in faded green letters that had flaked in places to reveal corroded metal. Mentally and physically fatigued but not yet wanting to return to Melissa's, Ari entered the laundry, freshly opened for business that day.

Though he saw the only person in the laundromat leave, Ari half expected to be interrupting something as he stepped inside. Residual heat from last night's dryers had given the room that hint of heavy, amniotic warmth. It was odd that it hadn't entirely dissipated during the cold night. Ari closed the door and the room became silent. He settled into a plastic chair and laid his forehead in his hands, rubbing his temples. That there was no going to sleep now he knew from four months' precedent.

He searched the room with his eyes, craving diversion, but saw only a waterlogged *Sports Illustrated* in the trashcan. Ari wondered why the custodian hadn't emptied the trash.

Anxiety rose and he began to perspire. He stood up and, one by one, opened every washer and every dryer, finding each one empty. He looked under the machines and the chairs but couldn't find anything. He stepped outside, looked to his right, and approached a little yellow rag (in fact, a ripped portion of a child's sweatshirt). He picked up the rag, almost brown with dirt and rain. Returning to the laundry, he placed the yellow rag into the dryer across from his chair and sent five quarters through the slot.

For over an hour Ari watched through drowsy eyes as the rag danced. The dryer had a round window through which the steaming rag could be seen falling from its ceiling, catching a ride back to the

top, and plummeting once again. For a moment he took his attention away from the rag and noticed an old woman standing in front of the door, looking at him. She had large watery eyes, and was wearing a brown dress under a gray overcoat and holding an umbrella. They stared at one another until the woman turned to look at the tumbling dryer. She then returned her glance to Ari's eyes. He could have sworn that she offered him a look of compassion, but assumed that, in reality, it must have been confusion.

Ari refocused on the round hot window and caught the woman's departure from the corner of his eye.

Just as dawn was breaking, a man came in with a load of laundry, followed soon after by a woman with laundry of her own. Not interested in explaining the rancid cloth baking in the dryer, Ari walked out to return to Melissa's apartment.

In the living room Melissa sat on the couch with an open book, the only light in the room burning from a small lamp on the side table. She sat there in its glow, Ari's bedding and nocturnal sweat beneath her. It was her routine to wake up at quarter to six and read all morning, breaking only to eat a quick breakfast with Dennis before he left for work.

When she married Dennis three years ago, they decided that he made enough money for the two of them, so she quit work and stayed home with nothing to do. They ordered out almost every night and cleaning the house didn't take that long, so Melissa took up full-time reading. The bookshelves sagged under the weight of great literature—someone had given them *The World's Masters* collection as a wedding gift. But she had read it all in the first two years of their marriage. When she finished the last page of the last of these works, she remembered returning it to the rectangular hole on the wall, sitting down on the couch, and looking back at the books, thinking, "So now what?"

It was not until that moment—even while reading the last page of the last book she remained happily oblivious—when the book was returned to the shelf and there was nothing left to read that she saw

almost two years of her life neatly encapsulated on one wall of her living room. The pages of those books may as well have held her story; her life was, after all, indistinguishable from what she had read in those twenty-two months. Since that day, every time she glanced at that wall of books, she saw that section of her life in full, like passing one's childhood home. During those months she had convinced herself that knowledge was her ultimate aim. It wasn't until she had sucked the last word out of those shelves that the realization came. From the beginning she had asked nothing more of those books than to fill the time.

That devastating revelation had inspired only one change: she would continue to read her life away, but would never again delude herself about it. No longer burdened by the pretense of an intellectual endeavor, she took to reading lurid mysteries and romances. But just weeks later the urge for something more stimulating began to nag. The stories were too easy, too immediately understandable, but she could not return to the classics; the associations were too grim. She solved the problem by going down to the corner market and picking up the same types of novels—mysteries and romances—in Spanish. She hadn't the faintest idea how to speak the language, but armed with a dictionary, a verb guide, and a staggering amount of free time, she taught herself to read them. It was not as difficult as she'd imagined. She discovered that reading virtual pornography in an unfamiliar tongue is, in itself, a highly effective instructional program. It was not uncommon for her to arrive at a sentence like, "He slowly brought her to the height of ecstasy with a something Guatemalan folk song and a something something to her thigh." Perhaps she could live without knowing what kind of Guatemalan folk song it was, but there was nothing on God's green earth that could keep her from looking up what had transpired on that thigh.

She kept secret her new life as a reader of Spanish pulps—she wasn't sure why, exactly. Most likely it was the fact that Dennis was Mexican, and she felt somehow ashamed of her attempt to learn the language of his culture, though he himself didn't speak it. To

disguise her books she ripped the cover off of *The Portable Molière* and taped it onto whatever she was reading at the time. She never changed the disguise because Dennis hadn't seemed to notice that she'd been reading the collection for over a year. Nor had he ever inquired about the fact that the same book often changed in size.

The door opened, and Melissa put Molière down on the coffee table. "Hey there," she greeted Ari as he stepped in.

Her presence startled him. He wasn't yet accustomed to how early she got up in the morning.

"I couldn't sleep, so I took a walk. I like your neighborhood." Ari sat down and stared straight ahead with the zombie-like commitment of one who has not slept in recent recollection. He was vaguely aware that the silence between him and Melissa was probably awkward, though he was not willing to decide with certainty—he was far more engaged by the thriving community of bumps and divots on the wall. On three hours of sleep Ari's aptitude for the observation of social nuances was greatly compromised—or rather, the perception was still there, but the concern was not. Melissa, on the other hand, had had a good night's sleep. They sat there together in the silent room until Dennis came out of the bedroom dressed for work in much the same way he had the previous morning. The only difference was his tie, a red and orange affair far louder than yesterday's. Ari knew the tie would upset him greatly once he fully regained his faculties. Dennis slid across the room to where Melissa sat and kissed her on the cheek before returning to the kitchen for some coffee.

"A little kiss for the wife and a cup of coffee before it's off to the grind," Ari said from the living room, his eyes still vacantly fixed upon the wall. "Don't worry, I'll make sure your little girl doesn't get into any mischief."

Dennis ignored him, and placed two English muffins into the toaster. Melissa, aggravated but unwilling to fight so early, changed the subject.

"Ari, you remember that girl in high school who told everyone she slept with Mr Halsted? Ruth, I think her name was."

“Who?” he said to the wall.

“You don’t remember that girl? She got kicked out of school within two weeks of our freshman year.”

Ari looked unimpressed. It took him a while to speak. “Oh yeah. That was the weirdest thing that’d happened before the day we killed that kid.”

None of them spoke. Dennis finished buttering his English muffins in silence, picked up his bag, and went to work.

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MEMORIES OF PHILIP K DICK

Tessa B Dick

I married Philip K Dick in 1973, which makes me his fifth and last ex-wife. I am also the silent protégé in the process of writing of his novel, *A Scanner Darkly*.

A Clay Pot

A large part of Phil’s monumental and unfinished Exegesis was inspired by a the little clay pot that he called Oho. It is mostly dry-fired, with just a splash of colored glaze.

Phil saw a vision of that little pot dancing and laughing, “Oh ho, ho, ho, ho, ho!”

The pot finished by saying “ho on”, which means “it is” in the Greek of the New Testament. This seems to be a parallel to the name that God gave when Moses asked which God was sending him to the people of Israel, “I am.”

A Scanner Darkly, The Movie

The filmmakers tried to make something symbolic out of the drug, Substance D, in *A Scanner Darkly*. They missed the point. The drug is what it is. It is the MacGuffin, as Alfred Hitchcock would say, the thing that everybody in the story wants.

It doesn't matter what the MacGuffin is; all that matters is that everybody wants it, so it motivates all the action in the story.

The real message of *A Scanner Darkly*, beyond the fact that drugs destroy people, is that the police state is watching everybody, including you.

This is even worse than George Orwell's *1984*. Remember, Phil began writing this novel in 1972, long before that fateful year.

Not only does the government have sophisticated video equipment to record your every move, but they also have your friends, relatives and neighbors watching you and reporting any behavior that seems unusual, in their opinion, to the authorities.

Ultimately the war on drugs—in fact, the war on crime in general—becomes a war on human rights. You no longer have any personal liberty. You have lost your Constitutional rights.

You have become the property of the government.

In a vision, Phil saw the Roman Empire overlaid like a transparency sheet over the streets and alleyways of Fullerton, California. He saw the United States, like the Roman Empire, spreading peace and prosperity throughout the world and dominating other nations through a combination of military force and economic aid. People welcomed the paved roads, stone cities and metal coins that the Roman Empire brought to them, and they enjoyed relative safety and security when the Roman legions guarded them against barbarian invasions, so they acquiesced to the domination and taxation that the Empire imposed.

Pinky

Phil saw a vision of our cat Pinky walking through a door from another dimension, then touching Phil's shoulder as if to heal an injury by laying on of paws.

Substance D

The drug in *Scanner* is based on the combined effects of methamphetamine (commonly known as meth or speed) and heroin. For example, when Charles Freck believes that aphids are crawling all over him and biting him, he is exhibiting a common side effect of meth in which the user suffers from intolerable itching and finds relief only by standing in the shower with water running all over their body. Some sufferers will actually stay in the shower for several hours, even after the hot water is gone and they are shivering from the cold. One of the other side effects of meth is hallucinations, and the itching often inspires the belief that insects are crawling on their skin, or even under their skin, and biting them. Paranoia, such as Freck exhibits when he is driving his car and spots a police car, is also a common side effect of meth.

Some of the brain damage and physical impairment caused by Substance D is more typical of heroin, which slows down metabolic processes, including brain function. The characters in *Scanner* sit around talking most of the time because the drug has robbed them of physical energy. In addition, their thinking processes are slowed down and fogged up, so they are not capable of thinking clearly. The physical effects can be life-threatening. For example, when Ernie Luckman chokes on his food, it is probably due to the partial paralysis of his muscles caused by heroin, which makes it difficult for him to swallow. Heroin, in large enough quantities, can stop the heart from beating and stop the person from breathing. The scene in which Bob Arctor is in withdrawal from Substance D depicts the classic symptoms of heroin withdrawal, which includes severe abdominal pain, vomiting and falling down.

The unique characteristic of Substance D is that it destroys the corpus callosum, a bundle of nerves which connects the left and right hemispheres of the brain and allows them to communicate with each other. As a result of this disconnection, the victim of Substance D becomes two personalities living in one body.

Ultimately, Substance D is death. Drug addicts, in the depths of their unconscious minds, crave death because they cannot bear to live in this world.

The villain in Bob Arctor's household is Jim Barris, not because of what he does, but because of what he fails to do. He does not directly harm people, but he does fail to help them. For example, when Luckman is choking and in danger of dying, Barris analyzes the situation intellectually but fails to act. He does eventually pick up the phone and call for emergency services, but his long speech about what is happening fails to communicate the information that the operator needs. Moreover, when Bob Arctor says that he is not going to do drugs any more, Barris hands him two red capsules of Substance D and convinces him to take them.

Phil's Philosophy

Most readers and critics understand that Philip K Dick was exploring the nature of reality in his work. In the Phildickworld, things rarely turn out to be what they appear. He constantly asked questions about the substructure that underlies what we call reality. However, the most important question, in his mind, was, "What makes us human?" A major corollary is, "Why are some people inhuman?" These two areas of exploration, reality and humanity, overlap in the many novels and stories that Phil wrote during his career.

Phil is best known as a science fiction writer, but he also wrote a number of mainstream novels and stories, as well as some children's stories. The most puzzling work, in the minds of fans and critics, is his thousand-page compilation of notes titled Exegesis. He attempted to explicate our reality in the same way that religious scholars explicate the scriptures. The basis for this work was a series of visions that Phil experienced, beginning on March 2, 1974. Those visions can be explained, in part, by the strong probability that he was having minor strokes caused by the high blood pressure from which he had suffered throughout his life. Although brain injury

might explain the fact that he had visions, it cannot explain their content.

A major source of his philosophy and religious views was Phil's friendship with Bishop James Pike, the Episcopal Bishop of California. He met Pike through his wife Nancy's stepmother, who was working as Pike's personal secretary. In addition, Phil had been a member of the Episcopal Church for some years. The Episcopal Church is that American offshoot of the Anglican Church (Church of England), and it is basically the Catholic Church without the Pope. Also, unlike Catholic priests, Episcopal priests are allowed to and often do marry. Phil's religious upbringing, which included a Quaker education early in life, led him to question tradition and dogma. He explored dualism in his Exegesis, in particular the Manichean philosophy, and early Christian heresy.

He believed that the Holy Spirit is female, and that she is the same entity as the Torah, the five Books of the Law, or Books of Moses, which Phil regarded as a living entity and a part of God.

He spoke about the Sybil, which is a title, not a name. In ancient Greece, the Oracle at Delphi was known as the Sybil. In the myth, she is described as a lover of the god Apollo who asked for the gift of eternal life, but forgot to ask for eternal youth. When they broke up, Apollo was too angry to grant her any more wishes, so she grew incredibly old and shrank until she was so small that she had to be kept in a bottle for her own safety. There she was, inside a leather bottle hung on the wall of a cave, giving out prophecy. Apollo was, among other things, the god of prophecy.

I shudder when I remember that Apollo gave Cassandra the gift of prophecy, but he also cursed her so that nobody would believe her when she warned them not to bring that wooden horse inside the gates of Troy.

THE E-READER IN THE WOODS

Last quarter, I read, was an especially profitable one for Amazon. Holiday sales of their dedicated ebook reader Kindle reached an all-time high, while its increasingly numerous competitors' scramble to overtake it has resulted what has been dubbed by the press as "The Ebook Wars". The Sony PRS, the Cybook Opus, the BeBook, Barnes & Noble's Nook (not to mention the much-vaunted, Blackberry-friendly .epub extension for electronic files) are all striving for prominence in the market. If you are a simple, ordinary avid reader, are you overwhelmed? Confused? Feeling a little guilty because you haven't been keeping up with the latest "reading" products?

Don't be. As someone who's been a PDF ebook publisher for nearly ten years, let me make a prediction (and Steve Jobs, technology blogger Travis Butler, and a score of other I-tech experts are with me on this):

Sooner than we think dedicated ebook readers will cease to be the primary delivery system for ebooks.

Remember the TV commercials for those Popeil gadgets that each only performed a single function, like slice a hard-boiled egg or dice a carrot? And how many of those gadgets ended up cluttering your drawer while you went back to using your old but trusty kitchen knife that does everything from open cans to crush garlic?

There will in the future always be a place for the dedicated ebook reader in the professions that require a heavy load of reading. But for the ordinary avid reader, the evolution of reading on an electronic device is not going to come from Kindle and its kind, but from a device much closer to hand: the laptop. To be specific, the new generation of cheap, light, small and portable personal computers called netbooks. Netbooks are what the young and hip people around the world are buying instead of Kindle and its competitors. Netbooks enable their users to purchase, download, store, share, print out, notate on, and read and read again PDF

ebooks such as the ones Cantarabooks publishes. This is in complete contrast to Amazon which, unlike less prominent ebook distributors, merely licenses their copies rather than selling them to you outright. For this, you pay a minimum of US\$9.95 per copy. (All titles at Cantarabooks are \$4.95.)

Four years ago I signed up for the Amazon ebook file converter before the Kindle was even perfected. Three years ago, believing that the palm-sized Treo was the wave of the future, I bought and installed the Mobipocket ebook creator. But no delivery system has ever worked as well for our literary micropress as well as a basic computer—be it desktop, laptop, or notebook—on which a user can purchase, download and read our ebooks, as well as perform all the other functions of a PC or Mac.

It turns out that during this time, while Cantarabooks appeared to be lagging behind, it was actually gearing up for the future.

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FORBIDDEN CITY: THE GOLDEN AGE OF CHINESE NIGHTCLUBS Excerpts

Trina Robbins

You know, we're going back a lot of years, kiddo! Where did the time go? But those were the good old days, like we say, they were very nice. –Frances Chun Kan, singer at the Forbidden City, 1937-1946

From the late 1930s to the early 1960s, Chinese nightclubs flourished in San Francisco's Chinatown. They were the first, and in those days the only, venues for talented Asians who sang or danced professionally. Like dancer Vicki Lee, who left a farm

in Oregon for San Francisco, Asian entertainers came from everywhere to perform at the Chinese nightclubs.

They were billed as “The Chinese Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers”, “The Chinese Frank Sinatra”, “The Chinese Sophie Tucker”. They entertained the GIs during the war, and Hollywood stars like Ronald Reagan and Jane Wyman came to their shows.

Many of the entertainers are gone. The owners of the Forbidden City, the Club Shanghai, and the Chinese Skyroom, are all gone. I have collected twenty taped interviews with veteran Chinese entertainers who sang and danced in the Chinese nightclubs as early as 1937, and with the sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, of those who have passed away.

The following are excerpts from some of my interviews.

JoAnne Yuen

We owned a nightclub, but we also owned a cocktail lounge and bar, Li Po, and it’s still there. It’s still called the Li Po, but we don’t own it anymore. Li Po opened—there was a grand opening February 10, 1937—and it was owned by Wilbert Wong, my uncle on my mother’s side, my mother’s younger brother, and Jack Chow, he was an attorney, and the address is 916 Grant Avenue. Subsequently my uncle opened Club Mandalay. I’m not sure when, but it was a few years down the road, so if Li Po opened in 1937, it was in the 1940s. I was a kid.

My husband filled in the description of the nightclub. He said there was a long mirror and you had three steps going up to the main room, and I said, “How did you know?” And he said, “When I was a kid, I used to deliver the Call-Bulletin newspaper and I was the newspaper boy who had the route that delivered the newspaper to your nightclub.”

I didn’t know that, and we’d been married for thirty-seven years at that time, and I had no inkling that he had any connection with our nightclub at all!

I started my piano lessons, and I didn't have a piano, and we were living in a small apartment at that time. So I would go down to practice in the afternoons on the grand piano that was on the stage of the club. It had little marks, you know, from the drinks, but it was a piano, and I could practice by myself. So I relished going down there and having a piano to practice on.

David Gee

I guess I was about, probably twelve, maybe thirteen, when I started going to the Chinese Skyroom, my aunt's place. That's my mother's sister. Their family owned the Skyroom.

If you walked up, came out of the elevator, as soon as you walked out, to the left there used to be the dancing club, dining room, sitting room, they had the orchestra pit, and to the right of you, the back kitchen, or back bar. And on the left of that was the big front part where uncle Charlie used to do all the work.

My uncle Hank was the one who taught me how to do the lighting. So he kind of taught me how to run the spotlights and stuff, and that's where I learned it. And also I knew how to do the back bar drinks, so at about thirteen I was doing all that, I was making all the drinks for the patrons of the club. I knew how to make all the drinks of the day that needed to be made at that time. And also I would help him with the spotlight. I used the spotlight for some of the opening acts, the beginning of the show and sometimes the ending of the show, but most of the spotlighting I did was for Barbara Yung. Yeah, she was a fan dancer. But I don't think she ever knew I spotlighted for her.

After night time we'd play high stakes poker in the back, at the back bar. They used to have this one real big table there, and that's where they used to play poker late at night. My mother loved to play poker herself, and she played poker with all the people in the Skyroom. So they played poker there late in the night, and I used to be there one, two, three, four o'clock in the morning.

Yeah, I was going to school at the same time. Most of the teachers couldn't figure out why I was sleeping in first period. I mean, your mother keeps you out [till] three or four o'clock in the morning and then you try to get up at seven to go to school, you're not going to make it.

Probably the most fun I had was during New Year's. It was so great because the clubs were always filled. And what I really liked about it was the fact that I used to clean up the place, because I used to be able to find money all over the place. And I used to help my uncle clean up, so he used to give me a check, "And any money you find is yours." So I loved that. I used to scrounge through all the couches. Oh, I'd find all kinds of money! And for a kid that age, I mean, that was a big deal. I can't believe how much money I found. It's amazing how much money people lose sitting down in those couches. 'cause they were very soft, and as they'd lean back all the money would drop, so when they went to get up, it's so dark you can't see anything. So that was great, that was fun.

There was one particular dance girl I won't forget. Her name was Penny. I think she was part Filipino, part Hawaiian, cute girl. But she had this thing about, I don't know, she always teased me at New Year's. Being at that age, that young, you know boys, they don't want to have anything to do with girls, right? So she always tried to kiss me, and she would tease me like crazy. I'd always turn my face and run, but she would always try.

Joyce Narlock

Joyce was the daughter of Charlie Low, owner of the Forbidden City, Chinatown's most famous nightclub.

I remember there were tons of servicemen during the war, of course that's why we became so popular is the servicemen. So that's how my dad made so much money during the war. Because of them being here in port before they took off.

We always got so excited when somebody famous was coming in. Like we knew that Gene Kelly was coming in and the place was just abuzz because we knew he was looking for entertainers for Flower Drum Song, and when Vera-Allen came in, when Bob Hope came in, oh gosh, Leo Carrillo, and I remember Abbot and Costello, Lou Costello. I remember him sitting there at the table, and he would give me a big hug all the time.

I was quite in awe as a young child about all of this and I hung around a lot, so I had to make myself useful. I would help in the hatcheck room and even sometimes serve drinks when I was underage myself, but to help out, and sometimes that place would be wall to wall people. Then there were some times when there was only a couple of tables and the girls still performed, everybody still performed their hearts out even though there were maybe ten people in the audience. I remember just feeling very proud of that and my dad would go around to all the tables and just say, "Hi, I'm Charlie!" and that's how he was.

He would work the room, and he really did know how to work the room, so that was exciting. I just marvel that here he was, this one little Chinese man among all these Caucasians, very well-to-do Caucasians. He just had that personality that drew people back in all the time and he had a terrific memory for names. So of course if somebody says, "Hi Frank, how you doin'?" Good to see you again," you'll come back.

Frances Chun Kan

My father plays the ukulele and all that, and you know how Hawaiian people are; they always had a group playing music. And so I grew up singing music with them. I always sang, and it was just a natural thing in our family.

See, Chinese-American people love to dance, and I guess you may know that. So Chinatown had three dance bands, and that was during the big band days, 1936, '37, '38. There was always a dance

going Friday and Saturday night, anywhere. You looking to dance, just come to Chinatown. Fifty cents.

So I started singing with a band called the Cathayans. Very good big band, about twelve pieces, fourteen pieces. And they're non-professional, they're all college boys. And they're always working. Didn't get paid much, you know, but they were always working. And they didn't just play for Chinatown dances, they played all over San Francisco, and we went up and down the coast during summertime. They had no trouble getting gigs. But like I say, not much pay, but it was fun. And from there I drifted on to cocktail lounges and vaudeville and nightclubs, and that's how I started. The first band I went with was all Chinese boys. After that for two years I worked as a vocalist with Ray Tellier's band from San Francisco. He traveled on the Matson steamship with the dance band and he let me go with him. But I didn't feel like being on a ship all the time. But I worked with him for three years and [his band] was an all-white band.

We didn't go through a lot of the prejudices like some of the other artists, like the black artists. You know, we never had—nothing ever happened. It was very funny, I talked to my black friends, and I never experienced the stuff they had, and so I don't say too much to make them feel bad. Somebody as famous as Ella Fitzgerald, they were not allowed to—this one singer I was thinking of, she was hired by Artie Shaw, they would not let her sit on the stage with the band. Can you imagine that? I never had to go through anything like that, you know? And little things like, when the band is traveling together and they stay in a town, she's not allowed to stay in the same hotel with them. You know, they had to stick her somewhere out of town. Isn't that terrible?

Larry Ching, he's a boy from Hawaii. They used to call him the Chinese Frank Sinatra. They used to call me, when I was singing in a band, they used to call me the Chinese Frances Langford. You don't even know who she is, she was a singer. Why do we have to be Chinese this and Chinese that? Larry didn't like it either, when they

used to call him the Chinese Sinatra. But he had a beautiful voice, I sure miss him as a friend.

Ellen Chinn

Candace Ponciano talks about her mother, Ellen Chinn.

This is the invitation to the grand opening (of the Forbidden City), and there's my mother's name, Ellen Chinn. She was known as the Betty Grable Legs of Chinatown, and my sister and I inherited her legs.

I think she ran away from home. She was probably underage. I know she ran away and was dancing on the stage, and I know grandfather—whom I've never met because I'm mixed and he didn't care for that—he went to the club, grabbed her off the stage, brought her home, and she ran away again.

This has nothing to do with anything, but it does. My father fell in love with my mother, saw her onstage, and they tried to get married, and he wrote letters to these states and these were the replies. Some of their letters are a little nasty, but the one that's decent is written by a woman. They finally married in Walla Walla, Washington.

Dorothy Toy (born Takahashi)

The war started in London first, but then it came to America, and then we were working at a nightclub right on Broadway. It was on the second floor, a very famous place. And then the newspaper says—I think it was Walter Winchell, they were saying, “Oh, there's two Asians, Orientals, dancing over at the—” Uh, what was the name of the place, the name of the nightclub? “One is Chinese and the other is Japanese, but they're not kicking the gong around.” In other words, they're not kicking each other around like in the war. And then we went, “Oh my gosh, they're going to come into the nightclub and throw tomatoes at us!” And we got worried. And I

said, “Gee, I’m sorry, Paul, you know, it’s because I’m Japanese.” So he said, “No, no, that’s okay. We’ll just ask the owners to release us, and we’ll go somewhere else.” And the owner goes, “No, no, no, we don’t want you to leave!” But we begged him. “It’s not only us, it’s for you. We don’t want people coming in and doing something to your club. So please release us, and then we’ll go elsewhere, out of town.” So anyway, he got a letter to say “Drafted.” So then the last performance, and then we’re walking out of the theater—and he’s got his bag and he’s going to go—he went to the Pennsylvania Station, and I went across the street to the hotel, and it was like, “Where am I going? And he’s going that way?” And we didn’t realize the split until that time. Because we were dancing. You were only dancing, and you have no other, nothing else on your mind. When, all of a sudden, you’re “Oh my god, he’s going, and I’m going to be all by myself.” So when I got up in the morning, I called my sister. She says, “You come and live with me.” My sister is older, and she was singing in the Village and everything. But poor Paul, he had to go down south, and he hated it. Because he wanted to be in Special Service to entertain. He loved to entertain. They wouldn’t let him.

You see, you can’t do that to a person. You could at least, every now and then, say, “Okay, you can be on stage.” But they wouldn’t, they didn’t do it. I don’t know if it’s because he’s Asian, I don’t know. He couldn’t do anything. He had to be in these tanks and everything. You’re a dancer, you’re in a tank, what can you do? And all of those boys, they’re not used to this. They had no training. And he’s lucky he came home alive. Yeah, he was in Normandy at the end there. But he saw too much, because he never came back to us, [was] never the same.

He wasn’t the same person. We still went dancing. He still went to the agents and got the jobs, but his heart was—he changed. There’s something that they took from him that he loved so much. He loved his dancing.

So it was very hard. But I had to overlook a lot of things because I understood him. What he went through changed him inside completely. A lot of boys do change. And no matter what you did,

they still had something in here that they couldn't get out. I feel so bad for them, because I know what Paul was going through. But life—you gotta be really strong.

Jadin Wong

Jadin was one of the star dancers in the Chinese nightclubs from the 1940s through the 1960s, and the only one to be featured on the cover of Life Magazine. Upon retiring from the stage, she started the first agency for Asian entertainers. In 2006, she suffered a series of strokes that left her partially paralyzed and unable to speak. In this interview, Wally Wong, Jadin's kid brother, an entertainer himself, reminisces with his sister and tells her story.

You ran away from home the first time, and you joined the Marx touring company, and of course the truant officers found out, they took you out of the show, brought you back to Stockton—you were seventeen years old—and you had to go back to school. Now what happened was, the second time, two months later, you ran away again. This time you was climbing out of the window of your bedroom and your mother was there waiting for you. And she didn't reprimand you, all she did was say to you, you have to go, don't you? You said yes, so she reached in her purse and she gave you forty dollars, which was a lot of money in those days, and we were very poor, remember?

Where do young people go? They go to Hollywood. With that forty dollars, when you ran out, you were sleeping on a park bench. You didn't have nothing to eat for two days and you were walking down Hollywood Boulevard and you looked in your bag, you took out your tap dance shoes and put them on, and you start tap dancing, maybe you'll get some money to get something to eat, and along comes a man by the name of Norman Foster, you remember him? He was an executive at 20th Century-Fox, and he was very intrigued, looking at you dancing, and he asked you, would you like to have

lunch? You went into a restaurant nearby and you ate like you were going to the chair, remember?

He says I'd like to bring you home to meet my wife, and his wife was Claudette Colbert, and within a few months you were in *Mr Moto Takes a Vacation*, for 20th Century-Fox. This was your first movie.

Now this is the moon goddess dance, and that's a big story of how Charlie Low discovered you. It was in the late 1930s, Charlie Low went to a dance studio and Charlie Low and his wife were looking for dancers for the nightclub and Jadin, you came out and you did the moon goddess dance and Charlie hired you. That's how you got hired in the Forbidden City.

Jadin, you were performing in Paris and what happened was General Westmoreland asked you to entertain the troops in Germany and you got a night off, so they brought you in military aircraft, picked you up in Paris and flew you to Germany. When you got to Germany, he couldn't land because it was fogged in, they kept going around and around and the military controller says we can't let you land. What happened was they asked you to jump.

And what happened is the plane crashed, and they were right because even if you didn't die you would have been scarred or crippled. So you was hangin' on a tree and some German farmer saw you hanging there and he had enough sense to contact the US military and they came out and cut you down. They took you to the infirmary and they looked at your handbag and they found out General Westmoreland gave you orders to entertain that night, so what happened was this: they patched you up, put you in a car and took you there and that night you performed without music, without wardrobe, and without makeup. It all went down with the plane. You stood out there and you danced and you performed.

Stanley Toy

Stanley danced in the Chinese nightclubs during the 1940s, but by the early 1950s, he left show business and managed a Chinese

restaurant in order to support his family. In 2000, Cynthia Yee, who had formed a non profit dance troupe, persuaded him to come out of retirement and perform with them for a community fundraiser. In 2003, ninety-seven year old Jadin Wong was to be honored at Lincoln Center for her lifetime work of helping young Asian entertainers. At her invitation, Ivy Tam and Stanley Toy danced at the ceremony. It was his last performance. A year after his comeback, he died, at the age of ninety.

Lana Toy speaks about her father, Stanley:

I did not meet my father until I was 8 years old, because he and my mother were married in China. He went to China to marry my mother—it was an arranged marriage, so he returned to the States cantaraville summer before I was born. And he went back to China after WW2 and that's the first time I met him. I believe he started (dancing) in the early 40s and on and off and then he left in I believe the early 50s. At that time he was still entertaining at the Forbidden City as well as the Club Shanghai.

What happened was in the year 2000, I think it was Cynthia Yee who approached him and asked if he would perform for a fundraiser for a Chinese hospital auxiliary and he was looking for a dance partner and he thought of Ivy Tam and that's how it got started. They performed at Lincoln Center in September of 2003. Jadin Wong asked them to do that and it was a tremendous honor for both of them. It really was a highlight for my father as well as for Ivy.

Ivy Tam talks about Stanley Toy:

He was my dancing partner at Lincoln Center. He was the first tap dancer in Forbidden City but I never met him. I not even know his name, I met him through Jadin Wong, now she's in New York, she's 97 years old, because she come to town, she wanted me to join her to go to Stanley's restaurant, to have dinner. That's how I met Stanley, more than 15 years ago. That's first time I met him.

So we perform at Chinese hospital one night, that's the first time, and then the big time coming is when they honor Jadin Wong in New York, in Lincoln Center. My son was her assistant at her agency for Asians in show business, like a manager. Because of that she and I had become very close and then she call me. She said, "Hey, they honor me at Lincoln Center and I want to make it like a Forbidden City show at Lincoln Center." I said, "Well, I'm okay, you have to ask Stanley if he's okay. He's much older than I, and we have to travel, right?" But he wants to do it, and we rehearse the number. So when we get there, you don't believe it, from rehearsal time until the day we performed they treated us like royalty, those young people. So actually we only do three numbers together, we do it two times for Chinese hospital and one time for Lincoln Center, and then after that we didn't do anything because he don't feel very well. He still want to do another number sometime but we never get together again.

Dorothy Toy, about Stanley Toy:

We were playing at the Paramount in Los Angeles, and at the stage door, here comes in Stanley Toy. But he was a young boy. And he had his tap shoes. I always remember he had his tap shoes on his arm. And he wanted to talk to Paul about tap- dancing. I just still can picture him coming in the stage door. A young boy with the tap shoes here. He loved his tap-dancing. Can you imagine? And he made his money through real estate and everything else, but not tap-dancing. But he loved his dancing.

And then I lost track of him for a long time, because I went to New York and traveled all over. But then I heard of him later, when he was the manager of one of those Chinese restaurants. But he still loved his dancing. So when I heard he danced again at Lincoln center, I thought, "Oh, what a blessing for him," because that's what he loved. Something that you love, you don't care, you know, about anything else.

Well that was the best for him, because he didn't stay alive after that very long. But that was a great present for him. A gift, because I think that's what he was waiting for.

Penny Wong

Penny was Miss Chinatown of 1948.

I tell you, we had lots of fun in those days. Every night we went nightclubbing, every night. There were so many nightclubs! We all miss those days, I think everybody does.

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MYTH OF THE SMELL

Adnan Mahmutovic

Sometimes I think the only real home for a refugee is an endless road. In the second place, it'd have to be a bus. I've spent more time on different buses than in all the camps.

Refugee camps. Of course. These shelters end up in third place. I have nothing to put under number four. I don't seem to even have a Top Five list.

But this, you already know. I will not offer you dull, simple stereotypes of the idea of a refugee. You need to hear something that elucidates the being of a refugee in a different way. It's not a parable or a metaphor, even though it might look like one. It's a true event. It shows what it's like to be well accommodated in a foreign country and yet long for a home to nestle in. And this goes even for a girl like myself, for even though I view "home" with suspicious eyes, I too long for it in my own peculiar way.

I want to tell you about the myth of the smell, about the iridescent incenses rising from the simmering myth of Bosnia, as it

streams through our refugee bodies. I was at first reluctant to describe the homeland, its fragrances, tints and texture. Honestly, no refugee really has a clear memory of these things, but rather a vague feeling about something that might be causing our quirks, scribbling them down on our genes with an iron quill.

The moment you cross the border of your country, as if carried away by a ferocious wind, you find yourself chanting like little Dorothy, “There’s no place like home.” Sometimes, nauseating homesickness carries even me away. It makes me think I belong to a people, not the Bosnians, rather the folk of refugees.

At the beginning of our sojourn here, in this silent village at a lakeshore clearing, dug like a hole in the evergreen forests of southern Sweden, we started off the new life by facing a new language. The tongues of the adults twisted and bent in desperate attempts to pronounce even three-word-sentences. “Oh, come on, for God’s sake,” I used to tease them. “Thank goodness we’re not in China or Eskimo land. You wouldn’t learn how to say, ‘May I have some bread?’ by the time you’d hit your deathbeds. Be grateful they have supermarkets here so you can see and just take what you need, instead of asking for each item sitting behind the counter.”

I exaggerated, of course. But you should have seen us, walking those clean, broad streets, afraid to look at the scarce passers-by in case they should ask us something. We could not possibly have been mistaken for the locals. I guess the locals hadn’t had too many Gastarbeiters from the Balkans in this place, so they told us we were surprisingly white and not too dark-haired. Some of us were blond and blue-eyed. Still, you could recognize us from a mile’s distance: the ambling, the lowered eyes, and the mismatched second-hand clothes, hair styled by brain-numbing winds. But we progressed. Time came when translators were no longer needed. And we learned that the locals didn’t walk about so much; when they needed to buy something, they just jumped in their cars.

The new hometown descends down a hill-slope to the mirror surface of a little lake that freezes over in winter. The ice can be so thick that people drive cars across it to the other side where there is a

hotel and an art school. The area is still developing. There are few buildings higher than three stories, so there's no worry you will kill yourself if you—gazing beyond the horizon—happen to fall over a balcony.

The refugee camp is made of long, two-story houses, with four to six apartments in each. Unlike so many other times, there were now not more than two families sharing a bathroom. Picture frustrated husbands, constantly smoking, whining about the good ol' days, and starving for news broadcasts: Deutsche Welle, Free Europe, Voice of America; their dishwashing, food-cooking wives telling them to move their asses for once; kids taking every opportunity to watch MTV.

“Can you think of a worse place for a refugee than this?” I once asked a Swede who was part of the camp personnel. He was curious, even liked walking among us. Maybe it made him feel the stability of his own being, realize the perks of his own condition. The factory job he'd had was a pest, his marriage was diving into an abyss, and all that jazz, so, in need of making a difference in his life, in the world, he was trying his luck here.

“Of course I can,” he said, looking at me with ice-blue eyes. He looked almost like an albino. And straight from a forties film, the hair bright and sleek, a Robin Hood moustache. He always breathed as if rushing somewhere. It made me keep a distance.

I was afraid he would see the question as ungratefulness, a sign of some Slavic pride. I asked him what he meant.

“You know why,” he said, looking incredulous. “Because there is no place like home.”

I just looked at him, my mouth agape. He took me by surprise.

“I know what you're thinking,” he went on. “Such a cliché, ha? But I've been observing you Bosnians for a while now, and I just don't get it. I mean I do, but it seems to me that you love this—if you will excuse the expression—Bosnia, över allt annat, more than anything. You see, these last six months, now that the war's ended and all, I've seen people go back to their homeland for a month or two. In fact, they go as far as buying expired foods, dig for clothes in

those yellow UFF containers, walk out on early Saturday mornings, gathering deposit cans and anything else to save for a bus ticket back. They tell me people there expect them to come back with money.”

Since they did not defend the country they might just as well pay back something, it struck me.

“When they return, they have a different zeal in their eyes and a disappointment at being here. I don’t understand: why don’t they just go back there for good?”

Because there really is no place such as home, I thought, but granted him a smile instead of an answer. I used to tease my fellow countrymen for their homesickness, telling them if they longed for their hearths and doorsteps—oftentimes the only remnants of their burnt-down houses—why didn’t they just pack their bags and leave this place where they can’t find fertile soil to nourish their roots? I would say, “Bosnia is a rather free country now, so why not set your feet in motion and get the hell out of this paradise with apple trees and leaves big enough to cover your groin?”

Because we are cowards? Is this the correct answer?

Or maybe because we, in our most intimate nooks, in our *à deux* conversations, really do not believe there is a-place-like-home. We suspect that the moment we passed that booth with the sulky face of a border-guard, our homeland was erased and turned into someone else’s *tabula rasa*, left for others to carve the marks of their lives into it. I would tease them, but it would hurt me to see them purse their lips and mutter, “You’re such a wet blanket. A killjoy.” And, with any indication of even the faintest thought that there maybe was nothing left to live for in Bosnia, sneering looks and suspicion—even from those who had begun to think in the same groove—would fall upon the turncoat. It was not an easy confession.

The Swede continued, “They always talk about Bosnian smells, how wonderful it feels to breathe there, while here they are choking. I find it so condescending. I love the way my country is. What is so better about Bosnia?”

“She can tell you,” I said, pointing at Nijazeta, waddling towards us with a tray, three glasses chinking, lemonade running over their brims. Nijazeta is an old maid, as people have a nasty habit of saying, as old in face as the dress she’s been wearing since she was a young woman. Childless, homeless, almost friendless, always shaky as if freezing, her lids only slightly open, the bags underneath dark and swollen. She’s been taking care of me for two years. Hers were the first pair of arms around me after my parents and my seven brothers had died. I don’t even know how. I hadn’t been there to see it, but lying under a sweaty, panting slob, miles away. Damn, it sounds so senseless and matter-of-fact as I say it. I’d rather someone else tell it. But it’s important. It’s my background, what drives me as a character, as the manuals of narrative say.

“Nijazeta,” I said, as she shyly put the tray in front of us, avoiding the guy’s eyes and uttering a whispered “Hej.” “This man asks what Bosnia smells like. Could you tell him, and I’ll translate?”

She sat down beside me, looked at the little plastic table before us, then began, first softly and diffidently, then more passionately, fiercely and indignantly. “Our houses smell of cold and fresh lime on early summer mornings after the regular spring whitewashing. This pungent, tickling smell fades away a little for every day that goes by as the year turns around. The summers pullulate with a myriad of outdoor smells, budding trees of lilac, bramble, quince, plums, pears and apples. Meadow flowers bloom in their iridescent colors all the way into wintertimes. The winds never blow like here, incessantly, making you drowsy. They come and go, carried by the smells of seasons. Eddies withdrawing through space like Ramadan moves through time, sometimes moody like old people, sometimes just tired. Or strong, confining you indoors until you start sweating nervously. Or they disappear completely, to later breeze by when the worst heat comes over us.

“In winter, the lime evaporates stingily, fusing with the softly bitter smell of dry tree sap that seeps through the crevices of the stove where it smolders in burning logs like big incense. These then flow up and down in confluence with other plumes from the stove:

veal and mutton, tomatoes, strong red paprika, beans, clove bits scattered over the hot plates, plum and pear compote, simmering milk turning into a fat crust at the surface that we eat with apple syrup and dark bread. These smells embrace cold afternoons and evenings, rubbing themselves against the cool air, as one would rub one's hands to warm up.

“These Swedish apartments smell only of dirty wallpaper, linoleum floors that don't creak when you walk over them, and other building odors. These windows face only the walls of other buildings, or a tree crown, or other windows with shades rolled down to blot them out from foreign eyes.”

The Swede could hardly wait till I finished translating. He seemed to have understood what she was getting at from her face twitching, the oscillations in her breathing and vehement arm movements. “But for Christ's sake, you're in a refugee camp. Our homes and yards have all the nice smells as well.”

“No, no.” Nijazeta flailed with her arms. “It's a quality difference. You just don't get it. It's, as people say, indescribable. Bosnian smells are special. They have a certain texture as they move in the air, like fine cashmere. They are sweeter, sourer, bitterer and mellower in their ripeness, like the greeting arms of a father.”

“I think he's got it now, Mom.” I caressed her corrugated cheeks. The Swede was upset and tried to counter Nijazeta's patriotism. He said, “I've read that Bosnia is so war-torn now that streets are like fetid rubbish containers. Nothing works there. The locals dump garbage in rivers and abandoned backyards. I've heard that people there don't think the world of the country. They are hungry, jobless and frustrated. They long to get out and look for a better life elsewhere.” Then he heaved a breath as if he had plunged out of water, and went on rumbling about everything that that just stank: corruption, drug flow, something about his friends serving in the blue helmets—better known as Smurfs—who were constantly offered sex by young girls who reputedly wanted to get pregnant and so cheat their way out of the country. Even I could not listen to this, let alone translate it to Nijazeta. I sipped at my tasteless beverage,

avoiding his eyes, turning him the deaf ear till he gave up and said good-bye.

And that is all there is to it. It always cuts both ways. There are no winners or losers. Or maybe there always are losers, and only that. However, I think my Swedish friend was right in two ways. Such mythologizing, romanticizing, and embellishing of the little piece of land that you are born on—and do not learn to appreciate until you get driven from it—is just silly. But he noticed one more important thing—it is an incurable condition. I asked him if there was a worse place for us than this, and he correctly answered, yes. A city would not be better than this forest town. It would bring back memories of the throngs of emaciated people in school gymnasiums and the high ceilings of religious buildings where they'd lived the first weeks of their lives as refugees (as if it were the beginning of a career). All the city stores and boutiques would speak of the things they could, but didn't dare, buy, for they had to focus on traveling light. Smells from street-kitchens would conjure food to be devoured before somebody else pushed them out of the queue. No, a city would be an even worse refuge.

Still, wherever we are, there remains the MYTH, all defined, capitalized and italicized, built up from scratch into one of the most magnificent air castles between Heaven and Hell—inscribed at the nub of the two conjoined H's.

I wish my Swedish friend had been there when Rabija came back after a two-months' visit to her village somewhere in northern Bosnia. Then he would have seen how ridiculously homesick we could be.

Rabija's house was no longer occupied, and the government wanted her to register a wish for her property to be returned to her. She needed to register as a returning refugee. So she hurried back to her place of birth to make sure the administration was working on her case. The authorities had assured her that her house would be emptied of the people then living in it and returned to her within a year or so, all according to the Dayton convention and the current mood in the neighborhood. Awaiting the date of the transfer, she

kissed her rusty doorknob goodbye and returned to Sweden, even though she had no family over here. She was hoping to get the pecuniary aid that the Swedish government promised to the potential returnees.

As she stepped down from the train in the Swedish forest, the camp folks gathered around her like bees around their queen, and asked what ought to be asked, “What was it like?”

What could it be like, other than what the Swede described? But every time someone visited the homeland, everyone else spent the time lag between waving farewells and opening greeting arms, in biting their nails, anticipating news, gasping for impressions of the post-war home. The impressions of others that were to become their own. But almost never would you hear about disappointments. Whatever was said was slanted over with the common closing sentence, “What can I tell you, even the soil is fragrant back there.”

Then everybody would relax as if set free, exhaling a month or two of piled expectations. They laughed and chattered, for a moment intoxicated by this happy message that the land itself had sent them, “Tell them I’m fragrant. Tell them I’m sweet. Tell them I’m beautiful. Tell them I love them.” And a transparent amendment hanging under erasure, “Just don’t send them back for a while, will you! I’m so damn tired.”

Rabija took her time. Reticent. Expressionless. Breathing ceased. Then she reached into the pocket of her washed-out cardigan and exclaimed, “I brought you a piece of the land.”

My urge took hold of me. I lunged forward and buried my nose in that piece of pale dirt and grass and heaved a deep breath. A second later I was pushed outside of the circle. Everyone wanted to smell the piece of Bosnian earth that had traveled about three thousand kilometers and rekindle his or her nostrils.

But it had no smell whatsoever. Then again, before smelling it, we knew it wouldn’t. Still, everyone happily exhaled, bursting out, “It smells wonderful,” and chattered for a moment about the peculiar qualities of Bosnian smells, and about how Bosnian food, its breads and meats, were sweeter than the dozens of kinds found in Swedish

bakeries and shops. It was all as Nijazeta tried to convey to the Swede.

What about the truth? I wondered and looked up along the broad road that led to the refugee camp, scoured the surroundings with my squinting, fallow eyes and waved my hands.

What about it? It doesn't smell good.

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STONEWALL ANNIVERSARY

JE Freeman

I remember a fine June breeze swishing its way up Christopher Street from the river and the sweet aroma from the joint in my hand as I sat on a stoop up the block with some friends, the night New York's finest raided the Stonewall Inn. The Stonewall had been there for years. A pub, it is said, built before the American Revolution of the granite blocks from which it took its name. In my time it had been the best speakeasy dance bar in the West Village. By that June night in 1969, its faddish heyday had passed and it had become the party bar for drag and its fans. It was run, as were all the queer bars in New York City at that time, by the mob and its minions.

Remember, in those days, it was almost illegal to be queer, to congregate, to drink together, much less dance. We paid the mob in our private clubs and they paid the cops so we would be left alone. And that's why that night, as I sat with my friends blowing a joint up the block, the cops raided the Stonewall. They raided it over a "bump in the pad," an increase in their bribe. The Stonewall wouldn't pay, so it got raided. (One of New York's dirty little secrets.)

Police Unprepared

I'm sure the "boys in blue" from the precinct on West 10th Street were not prepared for what happened that night. I know I

wasn't. I wasn't prepared for the guys in drag breaking the lock on the back of the paddy wagon parked out front to let their "sisters" go. I wasn't prepared for the crowd that grew outside the bar as word spread down Christopher Street, person to person, street to street, club to club, bar to bar in a time before cell phones, texts and email. I was not prepared for the hippies and street people, the young and the old, the butch and the nellies, the men in leather, the college guys in chinos and polo shirts, the men in suits and ties, the scattering of lesbians or the guys from the trucks.

I was not prepared for it, but that's what happened.

From a couple of cop cars, one paddy wagon, about a dozen drag queens, the staff of the bar, a few drunks, some onlookers and the ubiquitous Sheridan Square pigeons grew one of the most important incidents in what has become the continuing movement for gay rights.

I remember it was a night tinged with mourning. Judy Garland had just died, and it's been said, only half in jest, that's why we got so mad. Our "idol" was dead and they wouldn't let us mourn in peace. And I remember how during the night, at odd moments from some radio on the fringes or some stereo in a window, would come the sound of Garland singing "Somewhere Over the Rainbow".

I remember fragments.

I remember the guys who slowly, inexorably, rocked a parking meter from its concrete foundation in the sidewalk until it came free. I remember how this small band of longhairs, some in dresses, some in pants and fringe, hefted that phallic projectile on their shoulders, ran across the street and heaved it meter first through the huge black plate-glass window of the Stonewall Bar. I remember the astonished look on the faces of the cops, who were now exposed to a screaming, angry, cheering outside world. I remember that what we saw was bedlam. They hadn't just come to raid the bar, but to trash it. To send a "message." Everything everywhere was broken. There were cops with their nightsticks clearing all the shelves of all the liquor. The cash registers were open, broken and empty. And there was the

echo of their laughing faces as the cops went happily about their work.

I remember the three cops who came to the front door with the emergency hose from the back. I remember the nozzle pointing at us from across the street. I remember that first insistent spearhead of water shooting from that nozzle, dousing us and pushing us back. And I remember the moment froze. And the water lost its power. And shrank away to an impotent drip.

I remember that hose. That old frayed emergency hose every bar had to have. That hose that had been folded in its rack on the back wall of the bar for years and years. I remember how that hose just split the first time it was ever used, leaving the bar and the cops ankle-deep in booze, water, beer and broken glass.

I remember the three cops in the doorway with the now flaccid hose in their hands. And I remember thinking, "Here we are, a bunch of fags, and we will not be washed away". To this day I wonder how different that night would have been had that old hose not split open, and the cops had been able to drive us back and wash us away, as down south Bull Connor had tried to wash the blacks away with his hoses and his dogs.

I remember how, as the night went on and the crowd grew, we were surrounded; as cops on horses, cops in riot gear, cops in cars and paddy wagons began to roll in behind and around Sheridan Square, with the firefighters and their trucks, and their hoses hooked up to hydrants and the hoses that would work. And Garland's voice and that haunting song. I can remember thinking how glad I was that John Lindsay was the mayor, because without Lindsay holding the cops at bay and refusing to give them permission to move, there would have been a bloodbath. I mean there we were, a crowd of homosexuals, pansies, fairies, fags, and we were not letting New York's finest trash a gay bar with impunity.

In the world before that night, we could not have done what we did. But that night we did. We finally stood up and said we have rights. To congregate. To dance. To mourn. To be left alone. Left

alone to live, to love, to work, or just dance and listen to Garland sing.

40 Years Later

It's been 40 years since that night. I was 24 and two years out of the US Marine Corps; two years since I had “turned myself in” to my CO because I was queer and I didn't want to go and kill or be killed in Vietnam for a government that did not want to recognize my right to exist.

I just wanted to be what I am. A gay man trying to be happy in a straight world. Sad to say, I'm still fighting the same war. Different battle. To remember Stonewall one must remember its context, its moment in time. It was a time of politics; a time of demonstrations, awareness and idealism. It was a time to march for peace and equal rights--on Selma and Montgomery, on the Pentagon, on the convention in Chicago. Anytime and anywhere injustice was perceived. There were movements everywhere. The civil rights movement, the peace movement, the women's movement. There were hippies and flower power, Cesar Chavez and the farmworkers, Black Panthers, Gray Panthers, the Weathermen and SDS. Woodstock was two months in the future, we were about to land on the moon and the whole world was watching the queers in Greenwich Village. The ground was shifting right under the establishment's feet.

That night the world changed for me and for every other gay, lesbian, bi, cross-dressing and transgender person on the planet. That night we were all reborn in the baptism of that hose's “holy” water.

Today I am 64 years old. I am a poet and retired actor. My face has, many times, graced the silver screen. I am 25 years HIV positive. I have marched and demonstrated all my life. I marched in San Francisco the night Harvey Milk and George Moscone were shot, and months later I rioted. I've marched on conventions and city halls.

I've marched in New York and DC, San Francisco and LA. I've marched in daylight and with a candle in my hand. I've marched for the living and the dead.

I've grown tired and old and sick marching. I've grown powerful and brave, wise and proud marching.

So even after 40 years, every time I hear Garland's voice sing that haunting song, I think of bluebirds and lemon drops, a fire hose and freedom. And for that freedom and our rights, I am—and many, many others are—prepared to march under our rainbow flags forever.

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A QUIET PLACE TO WRITE

About a week ago I had the opportunity to view again, after twenty years, an arty but satisfying film by director-documentarian Jill Godmilow, called *Waiting for the Moon*. Plotless and rather devil-may-care when it came to realistic chronology, it depicted the lives of Gertrude Stein and her companion, Alice B Toklas, as they spent them in the artistically rich atmosphere of pre-war Paris and their peaceful country house in the French province of Ain, near the Swiss border. Their days spent in Ain hold a particular glamour for writers. For who among us has not longed for that quiet place, where nothing is heard but the rustling of the leaves, the whistling of the teakettle and the steady scratch of pen on paper? And who among us has not longed for that ever-present companion who understands and fulfills not only our bodily needs—in kitchen and bedroom—but our fundamental need to get the words down right, and in order, the way we see them in our head?

And, of course, how many of us actually manage to satisfy that longing, we who have livings to make, families to feed, imperfect companions, dreams that must be deferred time and time again.

There's no substitute for the country house in France, or the book-lined study in Park Slope, or the shade of an oak tree high on a hill, I'm afraid. But it is still possible, even in these days of laptops and iPhones and TV screens buzzing even on buses, to find that Quiet Place wherever you are. Since the QP is different for everyone, I can only point out a few markers to help you find it for yourselves: The street is Purpose. The door is Focus. Find that street first. Once you walk down it you'll recognize the door.

If you can't make your time long, make your time deep. Fifteen minutes in the QP is infinitely superior to the prolonged dance we all like to do before we open the door—you know, with “research”, “correspondence”, or all those little chores that make us feel like we're “important writers”.

We're not important writers. Writers are not considered important in this culture so get used to it. Get comfortable being out of place in the world. What you hope for is grace. Gertrude and Alice were two American Jews living in tranquility in Nazi-occupied France, well aware of being in the strange pocket of grace that kept them from harm.

Be grateful to God for that grace when it comes to you. And if you don't believe in God, why are you writing?

Stop resenting those writers of whatever caliber who do possess the country house or book-lined study. They don't have what you have. Own what you have.

Use low technology to overcome high technology: Don't be shy about using earplugs. Four dollars at Walgreens will get you a half-dozen little blue sound dampers that can save your mind. If you live in New York City, get plugs with a noise reduction rating of 30 or over. Me, I like 33 when I can get them.

My friend Stephen Gyllenhaal, whose usual state of mind is cacophonous at best, found at the age of fifty-seven his Quiet Place just only a few months ago. Through meetings and shoots (he's a television director), through private doubts, public embarrassments, financial frettings and an ultimately disastrous family holiday, he was able to find the Street, find the Door and mentally sequester

himself in his own Quiet Place to write his first novel. In fact, when the family holiday culminated in the internationally headline-making fire at Manka's Lodge, it found Steve running out of the burning woodland retreat at three-thirty in the morning, without his shoes, without his underwear, and carrying out the only thing that mattered at the moment—his laptop, which contained the only version of his manuscript.

The lodge was burned to the ground and everyone's clothing and belongings were lost, but no one was hurt. That was grace.

More often than not, that kind of grace is all you can hope for and all you deserve. You can't buy it, but it sometimes comes as a gift, when you find that quiet place to write—where the sound of the story in your head is the loudest sound of all.

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THE MACOOMBA ROOM

AT THE CLUB MOCOMBO Excerpt

Buzz Belmondo

Preface

“My life has come full cycle, or maybe it's just gone in circles?”
Herbert W. Watson (1815-1867)

Historians will tell you that Herb Watson claimed to have invented the unicycle. Surprised by how many people held it against him, he became a recluse. Withdrawn from the world, Herb lived and died a hermit, leaving nothing behind but his half-a-bicycle.

I first learned of Herb Watson during my time as a circus lawyer. One day after a show in Roosevelt Park, Michigan, a couple of clowns took me to a cemetery. They wanted to have their picture

taken at the gravesite of the guy who invented the unicycle. Because all members of the clown sect have an intrinsic bad sense of direction, it took us a good part of a day to find Herb Watson's resting place. When we finally stumbled across it, what I saw was enough to give me the vapors. Etched into his headstone was the quote, "My life has come full cycle, or maybe it's just gone in circles?"

They were the fourteen words that I had spent years searching for. The cycle of circles Herb Watson described was the perfect opening line for my life story, a story burning my lips to be told. If it weren't for my agent nagging about me being sued, I would have claimed Herb's words as my own a long time ago. So, instead of stealing them, I decided to point to them as the heart of the story you are about to read.

Allow me to introduce myself. I'm Buzz Belmondo. Thank you very much, you're too kind. In my lifetime I've been described as boastful, egocentric, shady, and Filipino, always in a complimentary way of course. When people hear that description of me their first question is always, "You're Filipino?"

It's easy to see from the photographs on the cover of this book that I'm not your average Filipino. In fact I've been told that I'm not even your average human. You tend to hear that a lot when you're in show business.

"You're in Show Business?"

That's the second most asked question. Stage, screen, and television, I've done them all. My credits are too many to mention. But as long as we're on the subject, allow me to mention two of the too many. I was Buzz, the wacky neighbor on the television sitcom, *Out Of This World*. And, of course, there was my performance as the lovable Guido, Head of Beach Maintenance on the worldwide sensation, *Baywatch*.

Those of you familiar with my stage and screen work may be asking, "What happened to Buzz's accent?" My free flowing Filipino dialect has always been one of my many trademarks. Unfortunately, hearing an accent, and reading one, are two very different things. Consider this: "Gib de woomon air, chicken nut bread!" Compare

that to, “Give the woman air, she cannot breathe!” Believe me, there would be a lot of “chicken nut bread” to sort through if I were to write this book in the way I spoke. You can rest assured that my fragmented phrasing will remain intact, but for the sake of the public’s reading enjoyment, my story will be told using “American-English speaking” writing.

Out of fairness I’ve asked some of my friends to provide their own accounts of the events chronicled in this book. It goes without saying that I’ve disregarded their recollections and edited them into a version that conforms more to the way I remember things. The pseudo-Beatnik philosopher, Terrence Hamburg, once overheard someone say, “After all is said and done, more is said than done.” That being said, we’re done. I welcome you one and all, and I hope you will enjoy your stay at the fabulous Macomba Room at the Club Mocombo.

Italically yours,
Buzz Belmondo

1. The Stranger Arrives

Hans Rhinehardt was a stranger in town, but no stranger than most. Three days earlier this lamb among sheep had been living with his parents in the small town of Boeblingen, Germany. The furthest thing on the mind of the young man from Deutschland was to sell everything he owned and buy a digital video camera. Nonetheless, here he was in America with a canvas of life experiences as blank as the film in his bag, ready to embark on the adventure of his life. I should know; I talked him into it.

Hans’ first big city cab ride proved to be a memorable one. I made sure of that by hiring legendary cab driver Max “Get The Hell Out Of My Way” Kowalski to pick him up at the airport. Max got a bonus of ten bucks for every fare he steered to the Club Mocombo. Because this was a special job, I threw in an extra fiver.

Tossed from side to side in the backseat of the mustard colored cab, Hans tried to take his mind off of Max's suicidal approach to driving by glancing out at the passing skyline. He watched the smudges of lights as they swirled around the blurred buildings and realized that Max really needed to clean the cab's windows. Hans sighed and dropped back into his seat. It had finally sunk in. He was no longer in Boeblingen, known to many as the Kansas of Germany.

Unable to enjoy the scenery, Hans decided to play back the video he had shot of his family and friends who had come to the airport to see him off. Filled with Christmas morning excitement, he fumbled with his camera's playback button. Sadly, the images on the viewing screen attached to the side of his camera were just the first of many artistic disappointments to come.

"Überprüfen sie, dab Kamera is fokussiertes vorher filming!"

"You speaking to me, buddy?" the taxi's burly, big-eared driver asked.

"I was making a technical note to myself to make sure the camera is in focus before I start filming," Hans apologized.

With little regard for the traffic in front of him, Max kept his eyes glued on Hans in his rearview mirror.

"What are you filming? Something for the folks back home?"

"Actually, Herr Driver, I'm here to make a documentary film. I'm Hans Rhinehardt, filmmaker."

Max looked away from the rearview mirror long enough to nonchalantly avoid hitting a double-parked car.

"You're in films, huh? You know, when you first stepped into the cab I thought you had that artsy-fartsy look about you." Max glanced at Hans' black turtleneck sweater, trim black pants, and black Beatle boots. "Either that or you're a burglar."

"Do you get many burglars for fares?"

"No, but I do get a lot a film directors. What with all these digital cameras and stuff they make nowadays."

Hans leaned forward in his seat. For the first time since he had entered the cab his smile wasn't forced.

“I know exactly what this is you are talking about! I am here in America because of a magazine article I read entitled, ‘The Age of Digital Filmmaking. Now Any Idiot Can Make His Own Movie!’ I felt it was an omen.”

“You made *The Omen*? That was one scary movie, my friend.”

“No, no! What I meant was—”

Ignoring the honking horns and screeching tires, Max abruptly cut across the oncoming traffic and did a one-eighty into a parking space.

“Here you are, Spielberg, Cocktail Lane. That’ll be fifteen-fifty, excluding tip.”

Hans had prepared himself to expect the unexpected, but this he didn’t expect. The once-glamorous Cocktail Lane was now dancing on the dark side of poverty. The bright and upbeat opening he had envisioned for his documentary had just become a montage of decayed buildings and raunchy little shops.

“Hey, I don’t— This wasn’t— There was no— What is this?”

It became clear to Max that Hans could neither contain nor verbalize the disappointment he felt.

“Too bad you weren’t around in the old days. Back then Cocktail Lane was known as the ‘Nightclub Capital of the World’. Now that would have made a great movie.”

Hans picked up his camera and pointed it at the talkative cabby. It seemed like a good idea, until the young filmmaker noticed that the more Max came into focus, the more he looked like a corpse. A startled Hans stared at his viewing screen and wondered if this was a reflection of his directing style.

I would have to say yes, and no. No, because Hans didn’t have a style. And yes, because any veteran cinematographer will tell you that if left to its own accord, a camera’s lens doesn’t choose what it sees, but it does have a habit of showing you what you weren’t looking for. In Hans’ case, his lens had zeroed in on the combination of bad lighting, a pasty face, and a much too dark toupee. It was that wicked blend that gave Max the “cadaver look” most men shied away

from. Fortunately for Hans, looking dead didn't stop Max from sounding alive.

"You had the Club Elegant right over on that corner there. Shorty Malone's was just across the street. The Loman Supper Club next to that. Down the block you had the Crystal Plunge. I'm telling you, the best of the best was right here," Max remembered with a smile that soon became a frown. "Now all you've got are these crappy little storefronts specializing in crap. And let's not forget your neverending parade of belligerent panhandlers. I'm telling you, buddy-boy, it's quite a come down from the old days."

Hans stroked his chin and tried not to be too critical of his own work. But there was no denying that the opening of his film had turned out to be a lot more depressing than it read on paper.

"What about the Macoomba Room at the Club Mocombo?" he asked hopefully.

Max flashed his dead man's grin and gestured to a bright neon oasis tucked away from their dilapidated surroundings.

"Oh, she's still standing. The last of her kind."

Hans dusted off his trampled enthusiasm and leaned into the camera's built-in microphone. He spoke in what he referred to as his Director's Narrative Voice, which, if you ask me, was just his regular voice, only slower.

"And so the adventure begins, as I have reached my destination...as well as my destiny."

"That'll be fifteen-fifty for the destination, your destiny can be reflected in my tip," Max chimed in, as he saw another fare signal from across the street.

Hans grabbed his belongings and handed Max a twenty-dollar bill. Once outside of the cab he began to thank Max for his kindness, but the taxi pulled away in mid-sentence. I don't blame Max for wanting to get moving. When it got dark in this part of Cocktail Lane some people prayed, while others did their own kind of preying.

And so it was that Hans Reinhardt found himself alone on a trash-strewn sidewalk, the sound of his heart pounding in his ears.

“Stories of the rampant crime in the streets and alleyways of America are greatly exaggerated,” he assured himself as he hitched up his equipment-filled backpack and hoped he wouldn’t be robbed.

Believing that what you didn’t see couldn’t hurt you, Hans kept his eyes down as he passed the denizens of Cocktail Lane. When he finally reached the neon glow at the end of the block, he took out his camera and stared in awe at the grand old building that filled his viewing screen.

“Der Macoomba Raum an der Verein Mocombo. Ein dokumentarischer film vorbei Hans Rhinehardt.”

Dollars to doughnuts that when all the big clubs on Cocktail Lane were in their heyday, nobody thought the Mocombo would be the last one standing. Oh sure, dirt and time had taken something out of the old girl, and it didn’t hurt if you squinted a little when you gave her a look, but that can be said about any of us.

If you wanted to see a living snapshot of the glamor and glitz that once made up Cocktail Lane, all you had to do was look up at the colorful neon palm trees and conga drums that adorned the Mocombo’s tropical entryway. It was an entryway that led down a short path to bamboo doors, tall and strong and guarded by the massive Bobo Upolu.

Bobo was a retired bear wrestler I had first met in American Samoa during a triumphant tour of my one-man show, *The Return of Buzz Belmondo, for Those of You Who Never Knew He Left*.

I always wondered how the barrel-chested Bobo was able to keep from exploding out of the tight flowery Polynesian shirts he wore. Body mass aside, Bobo was without a doubt the most sociable doorman/bouncer I had ever hired. With a fondness in his voice, he greeted all of our customers by calling them “cousins”.

“Welcome, cousins! Always good to have you come by. Tonight the boss has put together a big show for you. Lots of fun for everyone!” he would say with a belly laugh, then rattle the bamboo doors. There were many reasons the smiling Samoan was so popular with our clientele at the Club Mocombo. But none was more important than the fact that he stood between them and any

unwanted spillage from Cocktail Lane. According to our customers, Bobo's skill at crushing intruders only added to his adorability.

"Welcome to the Club Mocombo, young cousin," Bobo greeted Hans.

"You are definitely going to be on the movie poster, Herr Doorman," Hans said to the miniature image of the large Samoan in his viewing screen.

"I appreciate that, young cousin. But the boss has rules about cameras in the club."

"No problem, meine cousine. I have permission from Herr Belmondo himself."

Bobo smiled and held open the bamboo doors.

"We'll see what Suzi has to say."

"Who is Suzi?" Hans asked as the bamboo doors closed behind him. Suddenly aware that he was inside the Macoomba Room, Hans blinked his eyes a few times to make sure the images in his viewing screen were indeed real.

Actually, that wasn't an uncommon reaction. I still remember the first time I stepped into the Club Mocombo's Polynesian-style showroom, The Macoomba Room. The eye-popping spectacle of the lush green foliage and exotic flowers, mixed in with the elaborately carved teakwood tables and the handcrafted cobra-backed rattan chairs took my breath away. Did I mention the giant hand-chiseled tiki gods spread around the showroom, smiling their approval?

For the first-time visitor The Macoomba Room is a world of sights and sounds that demands attention from all the senses. Years ago, an acclaimed nightclub critic wrote that the Macoomba Room looked like a set from one of those classic Technicolor MGM musicals. Little did he know that a couple of those MGM sets were based on our showroom. Or so the story goes.

"Now this is more of what I envisioned for my film!" Hans shrieked, right before his viewing screen went dark. Left with little choice, Hans looked up from the screen and into the eyes of the woman whose hand covered his camera's lens.

“No cameras allowed in the showroom!” Suzi Wells said in a voice that invited no further discussion. I’m proud to say that I was the one who had taught Suzi that voice, and how to use it on the club’s staff. She got so good at it that it became her normal way of speaking.

When Suzi first showed up at our bamboo doors she was a seventeen-year-old wiseass looking for a job. Normally I don’t consider someone with pink hair, tattoos, and noserings management material. Nevertheless, I took the colorful ragamuffin under my wing and taught her the Nightclub Business. Suzi was a fast learner and I was a speedy teacher, and before I knew it she had gotten out from under my thumb and became my right hand. I couldn’t imagine running the Mocombo without her.

In many ways the now twenty-something Suzi was the anti-Hans. The young filmmaker from Germany would readily tell you that one task at a time was more than enough for him. For Suzi it was the complete opposite. She was obsessed with multiple tasks, the more the better. It was all related to a condition she had called Excessive Activities Syndrome. One-man bands and short-order cooks have a form of it.

Some people at the Mocombo whined that Suzi was too demanding in her ways. I say, “tough maracas”. If she stepped on a few toes, then so be it. Things got done because I allowed Suzi’s tentacles to stretch to every corner of the club. If you got in her way she’d run you down, as Hans was about to find out.

The young German tried not to look into Suzi’s cold steel eyes as he took a folded letter from his pocket and presented it to the pink-haired hostess.

“I apologize for the misunderstanding, fraulein, but I have written ahead for clearance. I am Hans Rhinehardt, Filmmaker.”

Suzi arched an eyebrow to show her annoyance and yanked Hans out of the path of a waiter toting a full tray of food.

“All that letter says is that you have permission to film backstage and in the boss’s dressing room.”

Hans shifted his weight and took a more accommodating stance.

“I assure you that the last thing I want to be is any kind of a distraction. I am only here to make art.”

“Art has its place, and it’s not in the showroom. That’s club policy,” Suzi pointed out. “Bobo, get our guest a seat and something to drink. I’ll tell the boss he’s here.”

A startled Hans almost dropped his camera at the unexpected sight of the huge doorman standing next to him.

“Where did you come from?”

“Samoa.”

More than a little intimidated by Bobo, Hans turned his attention back to Suzi.

“Fraulein, your assistance has been most...”

He was too late. Suzi was already on the other side of the Showroom seating customers.

“I’m learning, Herr Bobo, that in America it isn’t always easy to finish a thank you.”

“Try shorter ones,” Bobo suggested, as he slapped Hans on the back to get him moving across the show room floor.

It came as no surprise that the eclectic clientele we prided ourselves on would catch Hans’s eye. Young or old, hip or square, it made no difference. They all fell under the spell of the Club Mocombo. Hans was no exception.

“This atmosphere is unbelievable! What brings so many people here tonight?”

“Cabs mostly, but some of them drove,” Bobo shrugged and eased Hans into a cobra-back rattan chair. His butt had barely hit the seat when a comely waitress in a grass skirt and coconut bra placed a large fruit filled drink in front of him.

“That’s the house specialty. Enjoy yourself, cousin,” Bobo grinned and faded into the background.

“Danke, Herr Bo...” Hans began, but Bobo was already gone. Before Hans had a chance to fret about another wasted expression of gratitude, the house lights dimmed and the crowd grew quiet. A

drum roll led into the deep, rich voice of Antonio Marquez, the Mocombo's offstage announcer.

“Welcome to the world-renowned Macoomba Room at the fabulous Club Mocombo. We are proud to present for your entertainment enjoyment—The Buzz Belmondo Dancer!”

The house band picked up its cue as a bright spotlight hit center stage. Eve Sawtell, easily one of the top five most beautiful women I've ever worked with, stepped into the light. Eve was a spectacularly long-legged redhead with alabaster skin who sizzled in her sequined mini-dress and stiletto heels. At one time Eve and her ex-husband, Ronnie, were billed as The Buzz Belmondo Dancers. As part of their messy divorce settlement, Eve ended up with the act. To this day, every time she dances wildly around the stage, no one can remember what the hell Ronnie used to do.

As Eve began to move rhythmically to the music, Hans, and everyone else in the showroom, instinctively knew that at least for the next few hours the troubles of the world were safely on the other side of the Mocombo's bamboo doors.

2. My Dream Comes True—Sort Of

While the customers are in the Macoomba Room enjoying themselves, let me tell you about another part of this magnificent building. It is situated in an area that is off-limits to all but the Club Mocombo's most inner circle. I like to think of it as a virtual treasure-trove of glass-encased memorabilia and meticulously placed mementos. Although some people say it resembles the Liberace Museum, it reminds me of that place they keep the Crown Jewels in the Tower of London. In reality it is neither a museum nor a tower, but the dressing room of the Mocombo's Chief Honcho, yours truly, Buzz Belmondo.

Some would argue that this “shrine” to myself is a tad overdone. That's only because they don't have their own shrine. I'm simply a man who likes his belongings in order and his memories within

reach. Regrettably, nothing is perfect and that includes my little haven. In my case the problem was Mimes.

On the night of Hans Rhinehardt's visit I had stepped out of my dressing room for a moment to pay a courtesy call on my costumer. While I was gone the leader of a nest of white-faced Mimes who infested the building violated the sanctity of my personal sanctuary. This petty malcontent was known professionally as "Martel—The Smirking Mime". He took diabolical pleasure in coming up with ways to irritate me. The blinking red light on my telephone answering machine was just the kind of thing Martel was looking for. With his trademark smirk etched across his white painted face, Martel pressed the play button on the answering machine.

"Buzz, it's your landlord! Pick up! Where in the hell are you?"

It was the booming voice of Claude Lejaro, the building's owner. Claude shared a small office on the second floor with his longtime assistant and fiancée, Adella Frunt. Adella was a prune of a woman... No, what I meant was a prude of a woman... No, now that I think about it, prune is a better description. Adella always looked down at those on the floor below her. She was constantly in Claude's ear about running us out of the building.

Fortunately for us, Claude Lejaro wasn't a bad ol' guy. He may have been a little too boisterous for my taste, but as long as the rent was on time and he could cop a free meal from the kitchen, he didn't bother us much. And it didn't hurt that he had an eye for showgirls.

Back in the dressing room Martel recognized Claude's voice and began miming a chattering pompous ass.

"Buzz, I'm calling you because it's much easier than having to do this face to face," Claude griped. "Here's the deal. I'm selling the building. Out of the blue, this guy comes up to me and says he wants to buy the place. He's going to turn it into a strip club. The good news is that I got a great price. The bad news is that I've got to let everyone go."

Martel stopped his miming around and listened with a heightened sense of self-interest.

“More to the point, Buzz, you’re the one who’s got to let everyone go. Tell your people we shut down next week.”

And with that, Claude Lejaro hung up. Martel, bastard that he is, seized upon the opportunity to complicate my life by erasing the landlord’s message.

“It’s about time the ‘talkies’ got their comeuppance,” he mimed to himself in front of one of my full-length mirrors.

Martel’s moment of triumph was short-lived as I snuck up behind him and whacked him on the head.

Wait a minute, that sounds way too mean. Let me soften it a little by adding that when I whacked him it was obvious that I was a graceful man who looked too young to be in his fifties. My signature pencil-thin mustache, conservative pompadour, and decorative smoking jacket only added to the Show Biz aura I wore like cologne. Yeah, that’s more like it.

As was frequently the case with Mimes, an invisible “wall” impeded Martel’s exit from the room.

“Everyone knows there’s no wall there, you jackass! Now take a hike before I get the boo-boo stick!”

Like all Mimes, Martel was deadly afraid of the boo-boo stick and scurried away into one of the closets and disappeared. At that very moment, my general manager, Suzi, breezed into the dressing room and plopped down in a chair. She immediately began sniffing the air.

“Is that Martel I smell?” Suzi asked.

“Damn Mimes, you spray and they still keep coming back,” I muttered.

“This will make you happy. Here’s your headcount. We’re sixteen short of a full house. Not bad for a weeknight,” Suzi reported, and rewarded herself with a foot rub. She looked so relaxed that I decided to give myself one.

“Is the ventriloquist still whining about his dressing room being too damp?” I asked as I cracked my toes.

Suzi answered with a crack of her own. “Let him whine. What’s his alternative? Dressing in the hallway?”

Never one for long breaks, Suzi eased back into her shoes and took a final stretch.

“By the way, I heard the landlord’s been looking for you. It sounded like it might be something important.”

It only took a quick glance at my answering machine to see how unimportant it was.

“If the landlord really wanted to talk to me he would have left a message.”

Suzi gestured for me to be quiet as she listened to her own message coming in over her headset.

“I’ve got to go. Pauley needs help behind the bar.”

Suzi headed for the door but something made her stop.

“Oh yeah, I almost forgot. There’s some rube outside, says he’s here to take your picture. I’ll have Bobo bring him around.”

There was no way I was going to let Suzi’s afterthought go unchallenged.

“One moment, young lady,” I slowly enunciated. I do that “slowly enunciating” thing when I don’t want my accent to blur my point.

“As you are aware, I’m about to be the subject of a documentary film of intercontinental importance. And yet from you, I’m feeling no vibes of celebration.”

Suzi was a woman of a thousand facial expressions, all of them meant to convey to you what an idiot you were. She shot me a couple of her best.

“Why should I be excited about this? I don’t even think this guy is legit.”

“It’s obvious one of us is delusional and I don’t see it being me!” I said as I threw back my head and laughed. The sharp pain that ran down my neck reminded me not to do that again.

“Don’t get your accent in a dander,” Suzi smirked. “My guess is he wants to sign you up for one of those long distance phone services or something. Ask yourself this question, Buzz. If this guy is really legit, then why you?”

“What do you mean, why me? Have you ever stopped to think that maybe my life story could inspire and lift people up?”

“No, I’ve never stop to think about that at all. Why don’t you do something useful and find out what the landlord wants?”

I had had enough of my ego being slapped around and waved Suzi away.

“Don’t you have a club to run? I’ll look into this Landlord Thing when I’m done with my interview.”

“Seriously, Buzz, it might be something important.”

“And my life story isn’t?”

“At least we can agree on that,” Suzi smiled and closed the dressing room door behind her.

Rather than stew in my own anger, I decided I needed to do some yoga deep breathing or, better yet, change my smoking jacket. I am proud to say that I have a collection of eye-catching smoking jackets that run the gamut from the spectacular to the daring—a breathtaking rainbow of colors and fabrics that many consider to be the gold standard of gaudy leisure wear. And when I say gaudy, I’m referring to the Icelandic definition of the word, which means “Godly”.

I began to feel like my self-centered self again as I slipped out of the radish-red velvet smoking jacket I was wearing and into an ice-blue number with a bit more sparkle to it. Filled with confidence and full of myself, I felt a bit bloated.

What I needed was to lighten my load by clearing my mind. Having studied with Maharishi Mahatma Joe, I took a seat at my Oklahoma Oak table and began meditating. As usual, meditation led to dozing off. Which was why I wasn’t sure if I had heard a knock at the door or not. It might have been one of those soft non-knocks favored by Mimes. I got up to investigate.

“Who’s out there? Martel, if that’s you or any of your cockroach buddies, I’m not in the mood for this.”

“Herr Belmondo?”

“Yes, I’m here. Who wants to know?”

I threw open the dressing room door and found a cowering young man dressed in black. He held up a camera as if it were a form of identification.

“It is I, Hans Rhinehardt, Filmmaker.”

My imagination provided the royal trumpets as my grand moment had finally arrived. I’ve always been blessed with hearing horns in my head. The bearer of my grand moment wasn’t quite as sophisticated as I had envisioned, nor did he command much of a presence, but he had a camera and that was good enough for me.

“Please, come in, won’t you? So, you’re Hans Rhinehardt! I knew it was you right away. You have that look of an artist.”

“Danke, Herr Belmondo,” Hans said as he gazed around the dressing room in a kind of dreamy-eyed trance. “Your home is much more magical than I ever dreamt.”

“In a way I guess you could say that my dressing room is my ‘home’, as long as you realize that I don’t actually live here. You do realize that, right?”

“I shall make a note of it. With your permission, Herr Belmondo, I would like to shoot some footage. I will of course make sure the camera is in focus.”

Maybe Suzi was right about this guy?

“Beginning in drei, zwei, ein...I am here in the dressing room of Herr Buzz Belmondo, known to many as Guido, Head of Beach Maintenance on the hit show *Baywatch!* His room is a remarkable mixture of glitter and stay-at-home comfort. I could easily spend my life in such a place.”

As I watched Hans narrate over the images in his viewing screen, every strand of my artistic instinct told me that this guy was going to put the audience to sleep. What we needed here was a little dash of me. That’s when I decided to ever so gracefully ease my way into Hans’s camera shot.

“I’d like to point out that this particular dressing room has a lot of history to it. Dean Martin once had the dressing room right next door.”

“Fantastic!” Hans shouted without warning and scared the Bee Gees out of me. Rather than explain my startled jump, I used it as part of a gesture for Hans to have a seat at my Oklahoma Oak table. Because I had worked in front of the camera before, I was keenly aware of continuity, so I recreated the startled jump before I took my own seat.

“Care for some fruit?” I asked my young guest and offered him a basket of grapes and apples. I’ve always considered myself a gracious host. It was something I learned from my parents and continued to do in their honor. To my surprise Hans leaped to his feet and bowed. This guy must really like fruit.

“Herr Belmondo! I am honored that you have invited me here tonight. Because of your appearances on Baywatch, meeting you has caused me to have, how do you say it, butterflies in my stomach.”

“Think nothing of it. I’ve turned many a stomach in my time.”

Even a hardened veteran like myself couldn’t help but be charmed by Hans’ naive honesty. It was obvious that what I needed to do here was loosen this guy up a bit, get him to relax. I’ve waited all my life to tell my life story. I thought I could wait a few more minutes.

“Maybe we should take some time to get to know each other a little better?” I said as I again offered Hans the basket of fruit. “What can you tell me about yourself?”

Hans cleared his throat and spoke with a purpose and resolve that I didn’t think he had in him.

“First of all, Herr Belmondo, I consider myself to be an enemy of the Big Studios. I proudly call myself an Independent Filmmaker. You can rest assured that it will be a cold day in hell before you see one of my films at your local multiplex!”

I sat back in my chair and gave that some thought. Was it just me, or did Hans’ filmmaking goals seem somewhat limited? I had hoped that the film of my life story would get a major release or at least go straight to DVD. But it was beginning to sound like I’d be lucky if it played in my living room.

“How exactly do you see this film, Hans?”

“I believe that at its core a film should be about something. And I’ve always considered you something, Herr Belmondo.”

“Thank you, Hans. I’ll try to live up to your high praise,” I replied, unsure if I had been complimented or not.

“After I read the quotes on your website it became clear to me that the world was begging for a story filled with inspiration, glamor, and enlightenment. In other words, Herr Belmondo, your story!”

Maybe I had been too quick to doubt this young man? It was obvious he had the ability to grasp important subject matter.

“You think people would want to hear my story?” I asked with just the right amount of measured humility. Being a Showman, I wasted little time making the transition from humble to hammy.

“Let me say what a pleasure it is to have you with us here tonight, Hans. In anticipation of your visit, I’ve taken the liberty of putting together my own format that I think best highlights the golden moments of my life. I hope you don’t mind?”

Hans grabbed his camera and clutched it to his chest.

“Herr Belmondo, I can not begin to tell you how relieved I am to hear those words! The release from the burden of structure frees me to just film!” he cheered and raised his camera over his head in triumph. “Shall we start with your stories of Baywatch?”

“We’ll build to Baywatch by starting out with a lot of background material about me.”

“Sprechen sie deutsch?”

“What about the Dutch?” I asked as I cupped my hand to my ear.

“Nothing, Herr Belmondo. I had hoped to capture that charming accent of yours speaking German.”

“I know a word or two. But it’s probably better if I just stick to my native tongue.”

“Which is?” Hans asked.

“English. And don’t look so surprised. Just because someone speaks with an accent doesn’t mean they speak another language.”

A glow of enlightenment came over Hans.

“Herr Belmondo, that is precisely the kind of insight I was hoping for in my film! You don’t learn something like that in a textbook.”

I was moved by the spiritual mentorship that was building between the young director and myself. The Maharishi Mahesh Yogi had that one guy from the Beach Boys as his pupil, and now I had Hans. I began to imagine what it might have been like to have cocktails with the Marharishi, and possibly Gandhi, to discuss the way of the teacher.

“Herr Belmondo? You look so deep in thought I almost hate to bother you, but are you ready to start filming?”

I tweaked my mustache and smiled at such a foolish question. “Frame it and count it down, my friend.”

Bursting with excitement, Hans stared into the viewing screen of his camera and began his count, “In drei, zwei, ein...”

The numbers had barely rolled off Hans’ lips when a heavenly chorus of “Hallelujah” swept through the room.

“What you’re listening to is the Admore 2000 Deluxe synthesizer. Because, how good can a person’s life story be if it doesn’t have background music?”

I leaned over to the Admore’s keyboard and pushed a button that brought the cool sensibility of slow jazz into the room. With an eye on the camera’s lens I asked the question, “When one relives their life story, just how much of it is really worth remembering?”

“Ten minutes, Buzz,” Suzi called out as she charged into the dressing room. I was amused by her naiveté and gave the camera a knowing wink.

“I think you’ll find that it’s a lot longer than ten minutes, Suzi.”

Suzi checked her watch. “And I think you’ll find that we start the main show at the same time every night. Which would be nine and a half minutes from now.”

In one of those movie magic moments, Suzi had inadvertently provided me with the opportunity to take a shot at being profound.

“I can see now that Suzi is talking about the show, while I was talking about my life. And yet...the show is my life! What do you say to that, Suzi?”

“It’s a little early to be hitting the sauce, isn’t it?” she snickered.

For the sake of the film I masked my annoyance with a good-natured chuckle and kept the scene moving.

“Where are my manners? Let me introduce our general manager, and my personal protégée, Suzi Wells.”

Instead of graciously accepting her close-up, Suzi abruptly turned and left the room. Her unexpected exit confused the inexperienced Hans, who stared at his empty viewing screen and panicked.

“Should I yell ‘cut’? Do you yell ‘cut’? Do we yell it together?”

It was up to me to make the save.

“Keep the film rolling. We’ll fix it in editing.”

“Jawohl, Herr Belmondo! The film is rolling.”

I looked the camera in the lens and wiped away a fake tear.

“What a wonderful young woman! Suzi ran out of here to tell her friends that my life story would soon be on film. Thank you, Suzi! This way, Hans, I need to touch up my makeup.”

Being able to keep me in frame during most of my walk to the makeup area gave the young director’s confidence a needed boost. It was during our stroll that my rack of smoking jackets caught the attention of his viewing screen. Hans glanced up from the screen to get a look at what his camera was shooting and was stunned by the beauty he saw.

“Wunderbar! I bet these fancy clothes were purchased in Las Vegas. Am I correct?”

I had to throw a wad of cotton balls at Hans to get his attention and the camera’s lens back on me.

“Actually I designed many of those jackets myself. They say that clothes make the man, and I make my own clothes. I guess you could say that I’m a self-made man.”

I had used that line hundreds of time before, but I could think of no better way to show the camera that behind my made-up face was made-up philosophy.

It was time to hit the stage so I slipped into my custom-made, rhinestone-trimmed Emcee's Tuxedo Coat.

"Hans, why don't you come out front and watch me work? I'm sorry, but no cameras allowed in the showroom."

Hans was relieved to turn his camera off and set it down. "Time for another of your delicious fruity drinks."

"A word of caution. Those drinks not only taste like punch but they pack one too. You've been warned."

Except for Suzi's rude exit, our first filming session had gone so well that I was sorry to see it come to an end. But my first obligation was to the paying customers in the showroom. Once again my life had taken a back seat to my art. I shrugged and sighed as I turned off the lights and closed the door behind us.

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AN LSD CHRISTMAS

Stephen Tobolowsky

It was Christmas Eve in Topanga. It was a party of about twelve friends. We had a turkey dinner with all the trimmings: apple pie, bottles of wine, homemade jalapeno jam. We were sitting around by the fire drinking buckets of cowboy coffee listening to "Blood on the Tracks" when one of my pals came out from the kitchen with a huge smile on his face.

"Attention everyone. I have an announcement to make."

We paused in our merriment. He continued, "My Christmas gift to you all has come a little early. To brighten up your holiday I've put LSD in all of your coffees."

I stared into my now empty mug. Different phrases popped into my mind like, "Kill him, kill him, kill him now"—"With friends like

that you don't need enemies"—and “Why are the lights on the Christmas tree moving around the room?”

You have to understand that I have never been a drug person, even in college, even in the late sixties. I never understood it. People who did drugs in those days didn't bathe regularly, they missed a lot classes, they wore odd clothing combinations like T-shirts with top hats, and they listened to lots of FM radio. It all scared me.

I later learned that the main reason people took up drugs in grad school was to watch something called “Monty Python's Flying Circus”. I had no idea. So I broke down, succumbed to peer pressure and smoked something called “hash” and watched the program. The show was quite humorous in its own right and mercifully the “hash” had absolutely no effect on me at all.

That time.

No effect the next week either.

The third week it had an effect. Watching the show, smoking the hash, apparently I passed out. That was my friend's version. My version was that I was swallowed by a large, toothless mouth covered in cat hair, I slid down an upholstered esophagus lined with chips and beer, and landed in the very stomach of hell. My version.

My first high. Since that dark, dark era many years ago I had been reticent to take drugs. It disappointed many of my friends. I never knew which part of the drug experience they wanted me to revisit: the nausea, the cat hair, or just the loss of consciousness.

It was then that I became aware of the first law of drug use: there is no experience bad enough, no decision bone headed enough that it cannot be revisited...often. I counted myself one of the lucky ones. The only long-term repercussions of those Saturday evenings and the hash pipe for me were that I did in fact start listening to more FM radio.

But I digress. So 'twas the night before Christmas, I had drunk a mug of LSD and the lights on the Christmas tree were walking around the room. They were changing colors. My heart was pounding in my ears louder and louder. I was furious that I was

ambushed like this over the holidays and I wasn't even visiting my parents.

My pal who put the acid in our coffee told me I should calm down and go with the flow. Otherwise my negative emotions could make the next few hours pretty unpleasant. Unfortunately this pep talk seemed to spawn a whole new truckful of negative emotions: way too much of a flow to go with. It was then that I realized that my brain was too big for my skull and my eyes might pop out of the front of my face.

I quietly mentioned this to our hostess who was staring at jelly jars in her kitchen. She stopped and turned to me and said, "Cool. You're starting to rush."

"Rush?"

"Yeah. The blood really starts flowing. It can get pretty intense."

"Intense?"

"Yeah."

"Is that intense good like sex or intense bad like stepping on a tack?"

She pondered her answer, weighing many unseen variables.

"It's, just, well... It's just...intense."

Rule Number Two of taking drugs: there is no utterance pointless enough or meaningless enough which cannot be construed as folk wisdom.

I was "rushing". It was intense. And in this case it is what I considered "bad intense". I thought I was going to have a stroke. My skin was on fire. My hostess advised that I needed to get in a cool, dark place for a while—like I was a jar of jam or a crock of pickles. Maybe like a salamander.

That sounded good to me. I told her I always like salamanders. They came in a variety of colors and had cool toes. I could do that. At this point in time I was on my hands and knees.

My hostess left her jars long enough to lead me down the hallway to the guest bathroom at the back of the house. This bathroom had ceramic tiles and would be very cool and dark. She

told me I should lie down in the coolest and darkest place in the room—which was around the base of the toilet.

She soaked a blue towel in cold water and wrapped it around my head like a turban. I curled around the base of the toilet looking like Sabu the Indian boy. She turned out the lights and told me to rest for a few minutes. She closed the door.

Utter and complete blackness.

If Einstein ever wanted a real world scenario to prove his theory of relativity, I would offer this premise: take a man, wrap his head in a blue, wet towel and have him hug the base of a stranger's toilet in the dark and I promise you: time—will—stop. The only way I knew I was still alive was that I was so vigorously kicking myself for coming to this party.

I don't know how long I was in the bathroom, but eventually I crawled out. The rushes were gone and I needed some fresh air. So, turban still in place, I crawled back down the hallway. I hung a right at the kitchen, bypassing the laughter coming from the living room, and headed for the back porch.

I opened the screen door and crawled outside and sat next to the dog of the house. His name was Manny More. It was one of those Shepherd mix dogs that wore a red bandana and rode in the back of pickup trucks. In his younger days he probably chased Frisbees on the beech, but now he was content to do what most country dogs end up doing—panting and scratching.

I didn't know him very well. I felt like there was no time like the present so I began talking to him. I said, "Manny, you are so wise. So noble. We haven't spent a lot of time together in the past. I just wanted to take this opportunity to change that here on this beautiful night. I envy your peace of mind. Your tranquility."

At this Manny turned toward me and said, "Stephen—I have no peace of mind. You have no idea what you're talking about. We both look out into the night but from different perspectives. I have keener senses than you do. My scent, my hearing. I know, for example, that there is a coyote right behind that clump of trees...just waiting for me to go too far from the house. The trees are filled with predatory

birds. Hawks, owls. There's danger everywhere out here in the dark that I can sense and you have no idea is even there. That's why you romanticize the night. I don't. I know the night for what it is. But all of your poetry, your art, your music arise from your weakness: your desire to romanticize the night."

"Wow. Manny. You're right."

It was here that I recalled Rule Number Three of using drugs: If the dog talks to you—always listen to the dog.

My moment with Manny More was interrupted by a wave of laughter from inside the house. I stood up for the first time in seemingly hours and walked back to see what all the hilarity was that I was missing. And I had missed a lot. Someone had accidentally set the house on fire.

There was a line of all my friends laughing uproariously as they shook their beers and tried to "squirt" the fire out. Finally the host and hostess threw pans of water on the wall, leaving it a smoldering, wet, black mess. Here is where Rule Number Four of using drugs came into play. It is perhaps the most important rule of all: no one is to blame. For anything. Ever. It is a world without consequences.

This, I believe, is the key to all addiction. Physical dependence can eventually be overcome through abstinence. But drugs create a more enticing arena where we can become addicted to the drama of our own bad choices.

I wandered away from the group and into the deserted living room. I sat on the floor and watched my friends, the Christmas tree, the smoke. I looked at the ornaments, some of which were handmade. I thought about Christmas and what a special time of year it is. I thought about how far we had come since that first Christmas so long ago in Bethlehem. But then I thought, maybe not. After all, Jesus was born in a stable—not unlike Topanga—sort of. Animals figured prominently in that story too. And in all of the Renaissance paintings Joseph is usually alone, wearing a blue turban, with a confused look on his face that seemed to say, "What the hell is going on here?" For all we know, the Nativity could have been a chronicle of one of the first bad trips.

The first rays of the sun came up over the Santa Monica Mountains. Night was officially over.

It reminded me of the Fifth Rule of doing drugs: the sun will eventually rise. The party will eventually end. Return to the world of consequences and regret is inevitable. And that was the bottom line after all—inevitability.

For the person who doesn't believe in God, for the person who has no faith, the handiest substitute for the Eternal is the inevitable. And for that, the sun will do as well as any Deity.

I staggered out to my car. My thighs ached. It was explained to me that the strychnine used in the making of LSD would make my legs sore for the next two or three days—a small price to pay for an evening that set a new benchmark for terror and personal shame.

I took a deep breath. It was Christmas morning. The road would be empty. The highway belonged to me. In the quiet of the car I recalled the final rule of using drugs: conserve your strength. You'll need all of your energy to try to forget what you just did.

I backed out of the dirt driveway and as I headed for the main road, through my rearview mirror I saw a patch of red moving through the tall brush. It was a bandana. I stopped and turned to look. Through the rising dust I saw Manny More. He was wandering off into the foothills. Off to explore by light of day the dangers that we could only romanticize at night.

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MEMORIES OF THE FAB MAB

The Mad Mick & Rick the Relic

So I was back in San Francisco, in North Beach, walking down Columbus with my old friend, Rick the Relic, the self-proclaimed “World's Oldest Hippie” (though he's several years younger than I am). Rick's been calling himself that since the early eighties, the era

when the country was first afflicted with Reagan, AIDS, and “Greed is Good”, I guess as a reaction to the materialistic majority.

Anyway, we had just come out of City Lights Bookstore, where we had been reacquainting ourselves with the latest in literary fashions, and had turned down Broadway for no particular reason, passing Big Al’s and the former Condor Club (of Carol Doda and topless fame), when Rick stopped me with a “Wow!”

“Wow!’ what?” I inquired.

By way of answer he pointed a finger at a rather old looking building, the front doors of which were chain locked and its balconied windows shuttered. A faded and tattered blue awning extended over the sidewalk, its white lettering all but illegible. Its only outward identification was a building number, 443. “You know what that used to be, man?” he inquired cryptically .

I was used to playing these guessing games with Rick. “No,” I replied patiently, “a famous restaurant?”

“No, guess again.”

“A bar? Whorehouse? Opium den?” I was playing with him now.

He gave me that stupid-looking grin of his. “Close, man, but no reefer.”

“So enlighten me, already.”

“That, my man, was once the most famous punk night club in town, probably on the West Coast, possibly even the best west of CBGB’s. Bet you don’t know what it was called.”

I gave him a look of intense concentration, furrowing my furry eyebrows and stroking my furry beard. I knew the answer damn well, of course. I mean, who doesn’t? But I played along anyway, because Rick likes nothing better than to be the fount of knowledge, even when that knowledge, more often than not, turns out to be common knowledge. “Hmm, punk club, punk club, lemme see...late seventies, early eighties, right?”

“Uh-huh.”

I pretended to think harder than ever and wondered how long I could drag this out, how long it would be before sheer impatience

made the answer burst from his lips. “Yeah, I think it’s starting to come back now...some foreign-sounding name, uh...”

Rick was already beginning to fidget.

“Hmm,” I continued, “something like ‘The Mambo Club’, ‘The Flamingo Club’, uh...” I held up a hand. “Don’t tell me, don’t tell me, it’s right on the tip of my tongue...”

“C’mon, man!” He was now beginning to dance around. “Either you know it or you don’t. Give it up, man!”

I decided to let him off the hook. “Okay, okay, I give up. So tell me, already!”

“It used to be called The Mabuhay Gardens, man. They called it that ‘cause before it was a punk club it used to be a straight Philippine restaurant-night club and they never changed the name. ‘Mabuhay’ means ‘welcome’ in Tagalog, the most common language in the Philippines.” All this came out of him in a rush.

“You don’t say,” I replied, pretending what he had told me was indeed privileged information. “You ever go there much? In the seventies, I mean?”

“Hell, yes. I got some stories about that place, man, that you wouldn’t believe.”

“Well, I tell you what, Rick.” I looked at my watch. “It’s nearly four. What the hell are we doing standing out here on the sidewalk, when we could be sitting at a table discussing this over a coupla cold beers like civilized people?”

“I dunno,” Rick admitted. “You got any money, Mick?”

I checked the pockets of my greasy jeans, but all I could come up with was a handful of small change. I shook my head. “You?” He answered by turning out the linings of his pants pockets, giving me the universal symbol for “flat broke”. “I won’t get my check till next week.”

“You still drawing that ‘unemployment’ check? What’s it been now, fifteen years, twenty?” I enjoyed needling Rick about his check, which in reality was money his family paid him to stay out here rather than return to his home town in Nebraska and embarrass the

hell out of them. Astonishingly, his father and mother were still alive. They must be over eighty by now, I thought.

Rick had the good grace to blush and give a little giggle. “Yeah, still gettin’ that check,” he mumbled.

Then I snapped my fingers. “Wait a minute!” I cried out. I pulled my wallet out of my back pocket and meticulously sorted through the contents, mostly old pawn tickets and business cards of various bail bondsmen. Finally I found what I was looking for. “Ha!” I cried out triumphantly, holding up what looked like a postage stamp.

“How’s that gonna help us?” he inquired reasonably enough. Carefully I unfolded the piece of paper, which to my relief turned out to be a ten-dollar bill. I waved it in Rick’s face. “This’ll get us at least a coupla cold ones,” I told him.

“Well, what are we waitin’ for, man? Let’s hit Vesuvio’s. Should be quiet upstairs this time of day in the middle of the week.”

I agreed and soon we were sitting at a table upstairs at Vesuvio’s, frosty pint glasses of Full Sail Amber in front of us.

“So, Rick,” I prompted him after we had swallowed a few mouthfuls and slaked our thirst somewhat. “You were gonna tell me about your experiences at the, what did you call it again, Mambohie Gardens.”

“No, man, Mabuhay, Mabuhay. But you can just call it the Mab. Or the Fab Mab. That’s what we called it back then, I guess ‘cause we were all too stoned to say Mabuhay. Some of the best Punk bands appeared there, not only the local ones like The Nuns, The Avengers and Black Flag, but from all over the country. The Sex Pistols played there once, I think, and so did the Ramones, from New York.”

“You know, Rick, I never did really get the Punk music thing,” I told him, just to get him going. “It all seemed like just a bunch of tone-deaf guys banging on their instruments as loud and as fast as they could. And their hair—spikey, dyed or shaved into weird patterns. And safety pins through their noses, for God’s sake!”

“Yeah,” Rick agreed. “It was a little extreme. But you gotta remember, at that time, rock and roll had gotten way too self-important, at least in some peoples’ opinions. Groups like The

Moody Blues, Pink Floyd, Yes, Genesis, were all doing these huge, complex electronic, symphonic arrangements. A lotta people felt Rock should just get back to basics, get simplified again, so that anybody with a guitar, bass, or drum, and a little talent could play it. The Punks were basically trying to give the music back to the people, guys that didn't have the bread for synthesizers, complicated mixers, and orchestral effects."

"So you were a big fan of the Punks, then?" I needled him. "I always thought you were more of a quiet peace-and-love kind of guy."

"Yeah, that's true," he admitted. "But truth be told, though I was always a great Dead fan, back in the late seventies I was getting kind of bored with both the music and the attitude. I mean, look at the times. Us peaceniks had finally gotten the U.S. out of 'Nam and got that bastard Nixon to resign. A lot of us, too many of us, I guess, thought we'd finally won. So we turned inward, some of us obsessed with casual sex and drugs, others, such as myself, with personal enlightenment, spiritual stuff. But all that sense of community we had during the war, man, of, like, we're all in this together, all that was fading away."

"So what's that got to do with the Punks?" I inquired, just to be contrary.

"Well, underneath all that youthful rebellion and anti-social shit, the Punks were trying to remind us that we really hadn't accomplished anything. The same bastards were still running the country, even if they weren't currently bombing innocent foreigners. The rich were getting richer and the poor were getting taxed for it. You know, stuff like that. Songs like "California Uber Alles" and "Holiday in Cambodia" by The Dead Kennedys were filled with rage, sure, but they had a social consciousness that most of us mainstream rockers seemed to have forgotten about."

"But what about your personal experiences?" This I wanted to know, for real. Once you get Rick wound up, it usually takes awhile to wind him down, make him get to the point. I looked down at our beer glasses which were now practically empty. "Damn it, Rick," I

told him, “you were just gettin’ to the good part. I could sure use another one, and I bet you could too, but I only got about three bucks left.”

“Hmm,” Rick considered this. Then he brightened. “Hey, Mick! It’s July, right?”

I didn’t know what he was getting at, but I reassured him. “Yeah, late July. Why?”

“Well, this is North Beach. It’s late July, and the weather’s pretty good.”

“Yeah,” I agreed again. “Sunny, a little fog on the fringes, not too chilly.”

“So...if it’s summer in North Beach, there must be tourists, right? And this is Vesuvio’s, famous Beatnik bar in the fifties and sixties, right across Jack Kerouac Alley from City Lights. So go downstairs,” he pointed dramatically toward the upstairs railing, “and find me some tourists.”

I got up from the table and peered down towards the ground floor. “Don’t even have to move,” I told him, motioning him to get up and join me. Together we scoped out the joint. Then I pointed to a small table by the front window, just to the left of the door and the bar. “Lookee there! Meat on the table!”

I was referring to a middle-aged man and woman, presumably a married couple, who had wedged their bulk in behind the table and were now precariously perched on the small wooden chairs, butt cheeks hanging over both sides. He was stuffed into a yellow-green Banlon-type short sleeved shirt, knit, but with a flimsy collar and a couple of unfastened buttons at the throat. Below that were loudly-colored plaid Bermuda shorts, white socks and leather sandals. She was similarly attired, except in place of the shirt, she was wearing a thin pink blouse that was working overtime trying to restrain her overly large mammaries. An expensive-looking camera lay on the table between two large glasses containing frothy pink tropical-looking drinks complete with fruit salad and tiny paper umbrellas. They were huddled together, scrupulously studying what appeared to be the standard Muni map of the City.

Rick rubbed his hands together with glee. "Perfect!" he exclaimed. He turned and started downstairs, beckoning me to come with him. "Just follow my lead," was all he said by way of explanation.

When we reached the couple's table, Rick's voice and entire manner changed instantly. "Howdy, folks," he called out in a sharp Midwestern twang. "I betcha ya could use a little help findin' yer way around here. It sure can be confusin' at first, doncha know." The man looked up at Rick with the light of recognition in his eyes. "That sure is nice of ya, Buddy," he replied in an accent, I swear to God, almost identical to Rick's. Needless to say, I kept my mouth shut. "Me and Edna here, that's the little woman," he pointed to her unnecessarily, "were just tryin' ta figure out how ta get ta the Fisherman's Wharf from here. The map don't seem ta be of much help, doncha know." Then he seemed to remember his manners. "My name's Ralph, by the way, Ralph Knutsen. Why doncha pull up a coupla chairs for you fellers?"

Rick shook the man's proffered hand while at the same time motioning me to find chairs which I did. "I'm Richard, Richard, uh, Halvorsen, and this is my friend, Michael."

I nodded and put down the chairs.

"Real glad ta meetcha," Rick concluded, sitting down.

Ralph again pointed to the map. "I sure would be obliged to ya if you could help me figure this thing out."

"Sure, you betcha," Rick told him. "You wanta go ta the Wharf, yah?"

Ralph nodded.

"Well, see, what ya gotta do is, ya go up Columbus, that's the street we're on here," he pointed out the window, "and go up the street maybe ten blocks er so till ya see a big park that's got a real big church with two big steeples. Ya cross the park till ya see a street called Powell. Ya turn right an' then it ain't too far till ya get ta the Wharf."

"I sure do appreciate the help, Richard," replied Ralph, glancing at his wife and looking relieved.

“I’m afraid Ralph ain’t the best at followin’ directions,” apologized Edna, her first words since the conversation had begun. There was some more amiable social chitchat. When Rick found out that the couple was from Duluth, he mysteriously turned out to be from St Cloud. I knew what was couming next, so I went into my act, putting my hand to my head and mumbling loudly but incoherently.

“Don’t pay no attention to him,” said Rick with a dismissive wave of his hand. “Poor ol’ feller’s still a little addled. From the war, ya know. He’s a cousin o’ mine, I came out here to Calyfornya ta take care o’ him.”

“Oh, now ain’t that a shame,” Edna replied, her voice dripping with sympathy.

I looked around as if coming out of a daze. “Gooks... grenades... real thirsty.”

Rick made a shushing noise in my direction. “I surely do apologize for my friend here,” he told them. “Bout the only thing that seems to calm him down anymore’s a nice cold beer, but I’m kinda low on funds right now.”

Edna poked Ralph in the ribs. “Give the poor man some money, dear.”

“Yah, sure, I guess I can spare a few bucks for a fella that’s from our neck o’ the woods.” He reached into his pocket and pulled out a ten.

“I better take it,” I told him. “Poor guy ain’t too good with money these days. I’ll go get him a beer an’ take him upstairs, calm him down so he won’t bother you nice folks. I’m sure glad ta have met ya, Ralph, Edna.”

He shook their hands, then took me by the shoulder and led me to the bar. We were both trying to suppress our giggles. We got our beers, and Rick turned and waved at Ralph and Edna, who waved back as he led me up the stairs.

When we were seated again (fortunately, there was still a table open) and had drunk several swallows of the Full Sail Amber, Rick gave a sigh and a belch of contentment. “Tourists,” he mused. “You

gotta love ‘em.” He raised his glass in a toast. I followed suit and we clinked glasses. “Good job, Mick,” he told me.

“Thanks,” I replied. “I think I got craziness down pretty good by this time. That was a nice accent, by the way.”

Rick grinned. “Yeah, Al taught me that one.” “But how’d you know that was the one to use?” He stuck his head over the railing. Ralph and Edna were just struggling to their feet, preparing to leave. Rick motioned me over. “Just look at them. At least forty pounds overweight, pasty white complexions. They look fifty but they’re prob’ly only thirty-five, maybe forty. Where else could they be from?”

“Yeah, I guess you got a point. But you took a big chance, talking first like that.”

“That’s the key to what Al taught me. If they talk first, and then you figure out their accent, then talk back to them in the same way, they figure you’re making fun of the way they talk and you won’t get anywhere.”

“Ahh,” I exclaimed. “But if you speak first...”

“Yeah, then they’ll genuinely think you’re the same kind of people as they are, and they’re a hell of a lot more likely to help you out.”

I pondered this piece of information for a moment. Could help with the panhandling, I thought. Then I pulled my mind back to what had brought us here in the first place. “So, Rick,” I began. “You were gonna tell me more about the Mab. Like maybe a personal experience?”

“Oh, yeah, uh, that’s what we came in here for, right? I guess I got so involved with the hustle I forgot.”

“Uh-huh.” Rick’s mind has been known to wander a bit on occasion.

“Well,” he began. “There was this one time, must have been about ‘78 or ‘79, I guess. I was kinda, uh, between lovers at the moment, so I was lookin’ for something to do to keep from feeling sorry for myself, you know? So I checked all the papers for a really happening rock concert, club performance, etc. I remember it was

like a week night, Tuesday or Wednesday I guess, 'cause I couldn't find anything going on at all, not even a decent movie. So I was just hanging out in the little apartment I was sharing with this other dude (not a lover, you understand), and I guess I was bitchin' about bein' bored. It was the end of the month, too, and I didn't even have enough bread to score some decent weed. So anyway, my roommate got tired of my bitchin' and whinin', I guess, so he looked at me and said, 'Hey, man, you ever been to the Mab?'

"I told him no, I never had, and anyway, I was too broke. But this dude, he just grinned at me and said, 'No problem, man. Here.' And he reached into his pocket and handed me a twenty, just like that. When I started to protest, he just shook his head and said, 'Anything to get you out of the house tonight, man. I got a heavy date comin' over and I don't want you in the way. Go out and have a good time. Black Flag's playin' at the Mab. Or go someplace else. Just don't come back till after midnight, you dig?'

"Well, what could I do? I suddenly had twenty bucks (which was a big deal in those days, you remember), so I decided right there, what the hell, even a punk band would be okay, at least they'd be high-energy dudes. So I told him okay, I'd take his advice and go to the Mab. So he told me where to go (at the time I didn't even know where it was), you remember, that building I showed you about a block and a half up Broadway from Columbus. 'Oh, and one more thing,' he told me (this dude was full of surprises), 'drop these when you get there.' He handed me a couple of whites and patted me on the back. 'I know your scene's mainly weed,' he told me, 'but that's way too mellow for a punk concert. You gotta really be up for it, if you know what I mean.'

"I hadn't known the guy for very long, about a month, got his name through a roommate service. So I was really amazed that he was doing this for me, and I told him so. 'No problem,' he said again.

'When your check comes it's your turn.'

"So I thanked him and left. I got to the Mab about nine and after finding a place about six blocks away to park my van (parking was a bitch, even back then), I strolled casually up to the front door.

The minute I opened it, a blast of music hit me so hard it almost knocked me down. And, man, like you couldn't hear anything from outside. I paid the three-dollar cover to this funny-lookin' guy at the door (I later found out he was Dirk Dirksen, the club owner. People called him the Bill Graham of punk) and then went inside. I was expecting just a crummy little club, you know, like one of those beatnik places where they read poetry on a postage-stamp stage, but man, this place was just huge. There was a full bar on one side of the place, as big as any I'd seen in a regular tavern, and the whole bar area only took up about a quarter of the place I guess. The stage and dance floor were almost as big as at Winterland, and on the other side of the room there was a real theatrical-looking booth, with a professional sound mixing board and a light board with at least a dozen dimmers, maybe more.

So, after checking the place out, I walked over to the bar and got a bottle of Bud and a shot of Jack Daniels. I sat there drinking for a while and listening to the music. At first I thought it was pretty horrible: way too loud and fast and you couldn't even understand the vocals. But I remembered what the dude had told me and dropped the whites. After a few minutes, for some reason, I started to really get into the music (now I know it was the pills). I finished my Jack and Bud and got up to dance.

“Now this wasn't Grateful Dead graceful acid- type dancing, where when you even touched somebody else by accident, you said excuse me, and moved away from them so as not to bum their trip. No, this was more like a war than a dance. I started jumping up and down in time to the music (pogo- ing, they called it) and bouncing off bodies, male and female. The weird thing was that everybody was doing it to everybody else and nobody took offense.

“After dancing like this for some time, I started feeling weirder and weirder. It was like the top of my head was coming off or something. I had this stupid idea that the faster I danced, the better I'd feel. I must have been howling like a maniac, when I suddenly had the impulse that I had to get up on stage, had to be a part of this really righteous music. So I did (there was no security; all the groups

had to fend for themselves, and besides, no self-respecting punk group would want their fans to think they were pussy enough to need protection from them). I started yelling and screaming at the top of my lungs and dancing up a storm. Well, after a couple of minutes of this, the lead singer'd had enough. He dropped his microphone onto the stage (causing a wild screeching feedback) and grabbed me by the shoulders. Man, was he a strong mother! I couldn't move, I felt paralyzed. He took one hand off me and picked up the mic. Before I could try to move, he yelled out to the crowd, 'You want this bastard?' The crowd closest to the stage roared their approval. So this dude picks me up and, I swear to God, throws me off the stage and into the audience. Then he goes on with the number they were playing, just as if nothing unusual at all had happened. The audience caught me and held me at shoulder level, like I was lying down, but on a human mattress. Then they started tossing me back and forth like a beach ball. So," here Rick took the last few swallows of his beer, "what do think of that story, Mick? That okay for a 'personal experience'?"

"Wow," I agreed. "Yeah, that was quite a story, all right. And that kinda stuff went on there every night?"

"As far as I know. I went back there several times after that, till it finally closed in the mid-eighties some time and, yeah, it was always like that. I learned my lesson, though, and didn't do any more weird drugs there. The scene was just too intense, man."

I drained the last of my beer as well. "Guess it's time to go, then," I said with regret. "Unless you wanta hustle enough for another round."

Rick laughed at that. "No way," he replied. "Never get too greedy, that's my policy. It's only good karma if you do it when you really need to."

"Yeah, I guess you're right."

So we stood up and headed for the door.

"Shit!" exclaimed Rick.

"What's the matter?" I inquired with some alarm.

“I just remembered. I didn’t even tell you the best story about the Mab. Oh, well, I guess it’ll just have to wait till next time...”

And so it will.

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TWO PRESSES

Somewhere on the internet I’ve mentioned that Cantarabooks-Cantaraville was inspired by Hogarth Press, founded in 1917 by the writers Leonard and Virginia Woolf. Like authors before them—and certainly authors after—they began their small press as a way to ensure that their own works, and the works of their friends, would always find publication. As far as Hogarth Press’s scale of operation, the Woolfs’ ambitions were modest: a tabletop handpress, tools, lead type and a how-to pamphlet on typesetting were their only capital assets. Truly, Hogarth Press was a do-it-yourself strategy that would not have been out of place in the zine scene of the 1980s.

Their first publication, the first product of their printing labors, was a chapbook of their own fiction entitled *Two Stories*.

Typesetting it was a slow, meticulous, painstaking affair: each line needed to be set, letter by letter and word by word; the type would then have be lined up to fill the width of the composing stick; and once an entire page was typeset, the block of lead pieces would have to be compressed so tightly in the frame that none of the words would fall out when the page was carried over to the handpress, which lay on the dining room table; finally, the press would have to be inked evenly enough so that, from page to page, the printing was neither too thick nor too thin.

It was an agonizing learning process, and Hogarth Press’s first product (now a collector’s item) displays a lot of initial mistakes—blotches, for example, and a few misspellings. But I want you to imagine if you can one of the greatest authors, one of the greatest

intellects, of the twentieth century intensely involved in this labor—for it was Virginia Woolf herself who set the type, framed the lead and inked the pages—and excuse their baby steps.

Within six years, Virginia was adept enough at the craft to elegantly typeset, print and publish 450 copies of TS Eliot’s monumental poem “The Wasteland”, and two years after that several hundred copies of her own full-length novel, *Mrs Dalloway*. A few years and dozens of titles later, the running of Hogarth Press would be given over to other hands and expand into a more traditional publishing company. But while Hogarth Press remained a tangible presence on the dining room table of the Woolfs’ ramshackle house in a London suburb, it was Virginia’s means to fulfillment, the kind of fulfillment that comes from exercising a hands-on practical skill.

Creating the actual unit copies of her press’s titles wasn’t fulfilling for Virginia only on a visceral level—it also affected in the profoundest terms how she came to consider writing and editing of course, but also the circulation of literature in general. It’s here, I think, where Hogarth Press and our press find their common ground. The new publishing technology has made it infinitely easier to create an aesthetically pleasing, readable publication—such as the one you’re reading now—and also to circulate it in forms never before conceived. As PDFs, Cantaraville as well as our ebooks can be read online, or downloaded and read offline at a reader’s leisure—even, at a reader’s leisure, printed out partially or entirely. The beauty of the page remains, whether on the screen or on paper.

With such ease of manufacture available, the selection and editing of works submitted to us can now take its rightful place at the top of our priorities. And as editors of Cantaraville-Cantarabooks, we find ourselves in the most luxurious position of all: having the means and leisure to be able to communicate, to enter the Great Literary Dialogue, with writers all over the world.

I REMEMBER AMNESIA Excerpt

Clifford Irving

1.

Six years ago, I killed a man. I was twelve years old when it happened. He was the father of my best friend, Amy Bedford. Did I murder him? That was for the judge to decide after the fact-finding inquiry, which is what they called a juvenile trial in the State of New York. It took place in the Family Court in the town of Riverhead, which is in Suffolk County on Eastern Long Island.

At the arraignment in Riverhead, I pled not guilty to the charges. The Honorable John T Walsh was chief judge of the juvenile division. He peered down at me from the bench. He was a huge man with a face like an old brown leather bag. I wasn't frightened, but I did feel dwarfed.

He growled, "You're William R Braverman?"

"Yes, sir."

"Usually called Billy?"

"Yes, sir."

"Says in these papers I'm holding here that you're twelve years old. That a fact, or is someone playing games with me?"

"It's a fact, your honor."

Judge Walsh shook his head in disbelief, even though he knew I was telling the truth, and he cocked his head like some kind of dark, super large, stressed-out bird.

"You're not quite the youngest human being ever came before me in this courtroom," he said, "but you may be the smallest."

He turned to his court reporter and quickly added: "Strike that."

I was careful not to smile. My lawyer, Ginger Casey, had told me: "Billy, you nearly killed a man. Look penitent, even if you don't feel that way."

My family was there in the courtroom to offer me all the support they could muster. My mother, founder of a family of mutual funds, sat behind me in the first row. At her side was my father, senior partner in a New York law firm. Ginger Casey wasn't a member of my dad's firm—Ginger had a small law office next to a pickle factory on Delancey Street on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. She was twenty-nine years old, curvy and provocative even in a highnecked black summer dress, and she smelled of vanilla and jasmine. She couldn't help that any more than I could help being small.

My case had received national coverage, but Judge Walsh had barred the public and the media from the Family Court. Today the judge had to decide whether to send me to a detention center or let me go free until I was tried and he could figure out a proper long-term fate for me.

The worst he could do, down the line, was sentence me to six years, which isn't forever but it certainly seemed like a long time to me. Time enough, I figured, to ruin my life, if it wasn't ruined already by what I'd done.

Judge Walsh had a loud voice, so that he always sounded as if he were talking to a packed courtroom.

"Mr Braverman," he boomed, "I've seen you on television commercials with your monkey, so I know you're an achiever. This state prosecutor wants to send you to Spofford. That's a juvenile reformatory, by the way, not a country club for children. No tennis courts like you've got out there in Amagansett, where you live. The prosecutor wants you to spend the full six years locked up for the purpose of rehabilitation. Mr Braverman, do you agree with what your attorney, Ms Casey, has done? She's pled you not guilty to all charges."

"Your honor," I said, "I agree to the plea."

The judge digested that pithy reply, and he accepted it.

"Within thirty days," he roared on, "we're going to have the fact-finding hearing. But first we have to deal with this question: What do we do with you? A while ago you and young Amy Bedford

ran away from home. Three days ago, when I sent you home with your parents, I didn't know that fact. The record now informs me that earlier this summer, in Jamaica, in the borough of Queens, en route to Manhattan, you and Amy Bedford evaded the pursuit of two police officers on a railroad platform. Caused considerable commotion there in Jamaica. You have any comment?"

"No, sir," I said.

He looked surprised at the fact that I didn't want to discuss the matter, and he rustled the papers scattered on his desk.

"Here's another report," he said. "This one's from Child Protective Services in New York County, author is a Mr Siegel, stating that you escaped from his custody and that of two other police officers in some big midtown Manhattan hotel. Pretty aggressive behavior for a twelve-year old. And, as we know, just a few days ago you nearly engineered an extraction of the Bedford girl from the locked premises of number One Jail Road here in Suffolk County. Do you dispute any of these facts?"

I raised my head a few inches higher. I said, "Your honor, in the Mayflower Hotel I wasn't in anybody's custody. I fooled Mr Siegel, that's true. But I didn't promise him anything except that I was going to wake Amy in the next room."

"You're splitting hairs, young man. I don't like that. Furthermore, Billy Braverman, you're an escape artist. Is that, or is it not, a fact?"

"Yes, sir, I'm good at escapes."

Ginger and I had rehearsed what I was supposed to say, but now I couldn't help myself. I veered off the track.

"I've watched a lot of escape movies," I explained. "*Cool Hand Luke—Escape from Alcatraz—The Shawshank Redemption*. I figured out how they do it, and..."

Ginger coughed sharply. She meant: Back off, gunfighter.

So I didn't finish my sentence.

Judge Walsh said, "If I let you stay free in the custody of your parents, what's going to stop you from taking off again for parts unknown?"

I returned to the script. “Your honor, I’ve already given my parents enough grief. I want to clear up this whole thing as soon as possible. I want closure. I give you my word of honor that I’ll stay home except to go to the beach and run my lemonade business.”

The judge turned toward Ginger Casey. “A charming child. Charm will not get him through the judicial process. Nevertheless, I don’t like to put a twelve-year old boy into detention when he hasn’t yet been convicted of anything and he’s pled not guilty.” He sniffed a few times in Ginger’s direction, and I figured that some of her dangerous tropical aroma must have reached him. “What do you think, Ms Casey?”

Ginger seized the moment. She straightened her back and said, “Your Honor, Billy Braverman’s word of honor is his bond. Ask anyone who knows him.”

“What say the People?” Judge Walsh inquired.

Mr Hull, the balding, red-faced young prosecutor, argued that I’d proved myself to be what they called a runner, and so the State of New York didn’t accept the risk of my being on them loose. It didn’t matter that I was twelve years old and small for my age, I should be placed behind bars in a secure detention center. Given half an inch of squirm room, Mr Hull said, I might fly off to Kalamazoo, Key West, or even Katmandu.

Judge Walsh thought it over. He groaned a little, in a baritone, to himself, as if he believed that no one else could hear. Finally he declared to everyone:

“This boy, the respondent, is accused of serious crimes—second-degree murder and statutory rape—but I don’t believe that currently he presents a risk of flight. Because if he flees, the consequences will be grave, and he appears to understand that concept. Nor does society need to be protected from him. His father, Mr Jacob Braverman, is a criminal defense attorney, a man of high professional stature. His mother, Dr Diana Adler, is a well-known name in finance.

“It’s been three days since the alleged murder and the boy’s stayed home so far and hasn’t budged. Provided that he doesn’t leave

the borders of Suffolk County, I'm going to rule that he can continue to remain under parental custody until the fact-finding inquiry."

We all felt better, at least for the moment. The judge set a date for the inquiry. He then explained that another condition of my release into parental custody was that I not communicate with Amy Bedford. Not even by telephone. And I couldn't approach her physically within a hundred yards.

Judge Walsh's eyes snapped like logs burning in a grate. "Listen carefully, Billy Braverman.

"You gave your word of honor, now I give you mine. You reach out to that girl, in any way whatsoever, you'll regret it for the rest of your life."

2.

We used to live in Manhattan. But then our apartment on Central Park West was burglarized, the one irreplaceable loss being a baseball autographed by Mickey Mantle, Duke Snider, and Willie Mays, which a doting uncle had presented to my dad on the occasion of my dad's bar mitzvah. A week after the burglary, my mom—a beautiful lady with big cheekbones and fuzzy black hair that looked like a mop fallen into a pot of India ink—left her brokerage office in the financial district and was mugged in the Goldman Sachs parking garage on Broad Street. They took her cash, credit cards, bracelets and wedding ring, and they scared her half out of her wits when one of the guys used a switchblade knife to cut the strand of pearls off her throat.

Not long after that mugging, my older brother Simon went rollerblading in Central Park, veered off the path into the bushes to take a leak, and got groped there by a pervert with a razor blade in one hand and his dick in the other. Simon was lucky, however; a border collie came loping by and jumped at the perp, who bolted. Simon ran screaming in the other direction and never knew how it turned out between the other two.

My mom was shaken by these events and took some time off from work. That weekend, over blueberries and Häagen-Daz vanilla, we sat down in the dining room for a family summit.

“Jack,” she said to my dad, “the universe is sending us a message.”

“And what is that message, Diana?”

“Leave the city.”

“To where, sweetheart?”

“Oak Lane.”

Oak Lane was what we called our country home in Amagansett, on Long Island, in Suffolk County, because it sat on a short, tree-lined street bearing that name. We’d owned it then for four years, and we went there every Memorial Day for most of the summer. All of us loved Oak Lane.

My dad said, “Year-round, Diana?”

“Jack, one door closes and the draft opens another one. Yes, year-round. I can do what I’ve always wanted to do”—and she raised her pinky and index finger, in the direction of Central Park, to ward off the evil eye.

She meant Modern Age Green, whose name and purpose she had already registered with the Securities & Exchange Commission.

My dad asked, “And what do you suggest I do about my law practice?”

“Jack, you’re out half the weeknights anyway for drinks and dinner with clients. If not, you’re in Dixie holding the hand of some poor schlemiel on Death Row. Get a pied-à-terre on the East Side near the firm. Walk to work. Come out to Oak Lane for weekends and holidays. We’ll have quality time together.”

At the end of the discussion she turned to me and Simon. “How do you guys vote?”

We voted the way she wanted us to.

They sold the apartment for \$2.5 million and we moved to Amagansett, whose name meant, in the old Algonquian language, “the place of good water”. Amagansett was located at the eastern end of Long Island, which on the map looks like an open-jawed alligator

flopped out into the Atlantic Ocean from New York City. The lower jaw of the alligator is often called the South Fork, and its lanes and roads are lined by oak, elm, maple, flowering dogwood, and huckleberry. Sweet corn and good Katahdin potatoes grow; in summer the lawns are as green as English meadows. In those days Amagansett kids past elementary school level either biked or were bused to schools five miles west in East Hampton. My parents and quite a few other people didn't lock their doors when they went out. On the South Fork, in that final decade of the last century, you could smell high taxes, salt air, and a sense of self-congratulation. "This is the right way to live, and we are blessed."

My mom bought a farmhouse outside the nearby village of Sag Harbor, converted it into an office complex, and started a mutual fund that refused to buy shares in companies that polluted the environment or the lungs. When Modern Age Green doubled in value its first year, Barrons called it "the tiny new superstar of ecologically-responsible no-load mutual funds." My mom Became a New Age hero: she lectured at women's clubs, was given an honorary PhD by her alma mater, Brown University, and was invited by Hillary to the White House. The President joined them at tea.

Later, Oprah interviewed my mom, and asked, "Dr Adler, what was your reaction to President Clinton?"

"Kinda cute," my mom said, which brought the house down.

My dad, Jacob Braverman, Esq, a trim, fresh-faced, handsome man with feet so small you'd think his parents had bound them when he was a boy, was almost always called Jack. If he was at a party he seemed to vanish among the bigger people, but when he held forth in his mellow voice on subjects such as white-collar crime, opera at the Met, the current crisis in the Middle East, or the Yankees' chances in the playoffs, people always clammed up and listened.

His major passion, however, was defending convicted murderers on various death rows in the Deep South. He did it for free, flying to Florida or some other state once or twice a month, and he had a contract with a New York publisher to write a book about all

the men and women in this country who had been convicted of murder, then executed, and later shown to have been innocent.

So we lived the good life, the honorable life, the purposeful life, the life that just about everybody in this country would want to live and profit by. And then I messed up big time.

Early one Sunday morning in August I watched while my mom dove into the twenty-meter pool in the garden at Oak Lane. In swimming goggles and a black bikini, she always swam at least thirty laps, and when she finished she was never out of breath. She shook out a yoga mat, did half an hour of poses under an elm tree, chanted her oms, and then settled in the shade of the cabana to work her way through Barron's and the Monday Special edition of Investors Business Daily.

My dad was out biking, and my brother Simon was out eating pizza and yakking with his buddies about all the disgusting things they'd like to do to girls. I was still eleven years old at the time; I hated the thought of being a teen-ager and was trying to figure out a way to skip it.

I curled up in a deck chair next to my mom, and began reading another Horatio Hornblower sea story. I loved adventure books, except that the love parts bored me.

"Am I bothering you, Mom?"

"Oh, no, darling just the opposite. I adore it that you're here. Come give me a hug."

After the hug, she folded up her well-marked copy of IBD and said, "Billy darling, can I ask you a personal question?"

"Sure, Mom."

"Are you ever lonely?"

"Why should I be lonely?"

"Because your dad's in the city so much of the time, and down in Florida trying to keep people from being executed, and I work late in Sag Harbor, and I travel a lot, too—I have to, you understand, because I feel personally responsible to everyone who buys a single share in any of my funds. But you're alone so much. I know that you and your brother fight. So...I was just wondering if you were lonely."

“No, Mom, I’m fine,” I said. “I read. I go online. I have email pals in Buenos Aires and Paris. I’m going to find one in Rome, too, as soon as my Italian gets good enough. And I climb.

I’d be climbing today, except the gym’s closed on Sundays.”

I was crazy about climbing. If you climb to the top of anything, even if it’s no more than the climbing wall at the high school gym, you feel as if you’re on top of the world. My mom often reminded me that even before I could crawl I climbed out of my crib, fell to the carpet, turned red, and later purple and blue, but didn’t cry. I’d climbed all the big elms and oaks on our property and I’d climbed all the rafters of the garage. I’d been punished for it often, but that never stopped me. Punishment, I figured, was part of a kid’s life.

This was my plan. Before I was eighteen I was going to climb Mount Everest, so that I’d be the youngest Western climber ever to do it. Our housekeeper Inez was teaching me Spanish,

French, and Italian, and cuisine à la françaises. I intended to become a gourmet chef, cook a five-course amazing meal at base camp, carry it up to the summit of Everest, heat it and eat it, and broadcast the menu to the world in several languages. Then, after I graduated Harvard, I would start a chain of gourmet restaurants called Everest. This plan couldn’t miss, I thought.

When I first told it to my mom, she said, “Do you know how many people have died trying to climb Mt. Everest?”

“One hundred and sixty seven far in this century. But that won’t happen to me.”

“Billy, do you think you’re immortal? And that you can’t be hurt? Or crippled?”

“Sort of,” I admitted.

Another time, when she was talking to my dad outside the pool cabana, I was up a nearby tree and heard her say, “Jack, when he goes to the beach, the lifeguard has to whistle him back from the deep water. He plays with snakes in the garden. This passion for climbing frightens me.

He’s got a reckless streak. And he’s still so small.”

“But he’s tough,” my dad said, “like me.”

I loved him for saying that.

“No, Mom,” I said, that day at the pool, “I’m not lonely at all. I’m one of the luckiest kids I know.”

A household chore of mine was to take out the garbage first thing on Tuesday mornings.

Later I’d see the guys in their overalls dumping the plastic sacks and I’d get a whiff of what was in the guts of the garbage truck. I figured that had to be the worst job a man could have.

On the Tuesday before Labor Day Weekend, I rolled the big green cans from the garage to the driveway. An hour later I started out with my ten-speed to the A & P to stock up on lemons for my beach business, Yummy-in-the-Tummy Lemonade Company, of which I was founder, boss, and sole employee. I stopped on the gravel to adjust my backpack, and the gray garbage truck pulled into our crescent-shaped loop, its back gate clanking.

One of the garbage men hopped down out of the truck and walked up to me. He was a lean guy in his late thirties with pale reddish hair and the biceps of a bodybuilder. He wore denim shorts, a sleeveless white T-shirt that said BONACKER PRIDE, and a blue silk scarf tied around his neck, like he was Cary Grant playing the role of a jaunty hard-muscled garbage man. His teeth were as white as bathroom tiles. He had shifty silver eyes, but now they bore right into me.

He said in a friendly voice, “How you doing, sonny?”

“I’m doing fine.”

“I’ve seen you before. What’s your name?”

“Billy.”

“Mine’s Carter.”

“Well, that fits,” I said.

Those watery eyes grew twenty degrees colder. “What the fuck’s that supposed to mean?”

I was a wiseass. I tried not to be, but I didn’t always succeed.

“I meant that your name is Carter, and you’re in the carting business.”

He kept glowering. His intensity scared me, but I didn't back down. "Carting is another word for taking things away," I said. "A lot of last names in English come from professions. Baker. Hunter. Smith. Carpenter. Carter. See?"

The garbage man squared his shoulders. "Except my last name ain't Carter. Carter is my Christian name. My last name is Bedford."

While his two brown-skinned associates dumped our cans into the truck, Carter Bedford snorted and honked a load of phlegm up his nose. Then he made a funny sound at the back of his throat. He didn't spit. He swallowed it. That was gross.

He angled his head toward the big white house at the end of the driveway. Oak Lane had been remodeled quite a few times through the centuries, and it was still a stop on the summer house tours conducted by the Ladies Village Improvement Society. "Nice little shack," Carter Bedford said. The breeze shifted, and I caught the smell of his breath, which was like the smell of the stuff in the truck.

I spun my pedals. "I have to go now."

"You headed for the beach?"

"No, sir, the supermarket."

Carter Bedford took a step that blocked my path. "I knew about Bedford being the name of a place in the old country. I'm a Bonacker, but my people come over here a couple hundred years ago. In England we probably lived in one of those castles with a moat. All I know, I might be related to William Shakespeare."

The Latino guy behind the wheel of the garbage truck tapped on the horn, but Carter Bedford ignored him. He pulled a bent pack of Camels from his overalls and shook one out, so that it dribbled tobacco flakes on the gravel.

"What school you go to, Billy?"

"Middle School, East Hampton."

"Which grade?"

"I start sixth next week."

"No kidding." Those gray watery eyes sparkled. "My daughter's going into sixth. She's got hair same color as mine. Real pretty. Name's Amy."

“I know who she is,” I said. “But I haven’t ever talked to her.”

“That’s because she don’t talk to strangers. She’s shy.” He had lit up, and he pushed his pack of cigarettes in my face. “Want one?”

“No.”

“You should get to know my daughter,” Carter Bedford said.

“Maybe next term.”

“Don’t get fresh with her, though. That’ll piss her off.”

What an asshole, I thought. Still, I went for the bait. I said, “Why would I get fresh with her?”

“Cause your little pecker might twitch and you couldn’t help yourself, that’s why.” He brayed a laugh.

“I have to go, Mr Bedford. Nice to have met you.”

He studied me with those polished silver eyes. “Yeah, you definitely oughta get to know Amy.”

I pedaled onto the grass, veering around Carter Bedford. I could feel his stare on the back of my neck. I left him dragging on his limp cigarette, flexing his ropy muscles, and snorting snot.

He’d called himself a Bonacker. A long time ago that was a beach person who came from Accabonac Harbor, a few miles to the north of Amagansett, and dug for clams and scallops. In hard times Bonackers trapped seagulls and roasted them in sand pits. Now the hardware stores from Water Mill all the way out as far as Montauk sold bumper stickers and T-shirts, like the one Carter Bedford wore, proclaiming BONACKER PRIDE. Bonackers sold tennis balls to the summer residents, repaired their plumbing, tended bar at their lawn parties, filled their speedboats with gas, and hauled away their garbage. I don’t think they liked us much but they needed us so that they didn’t have to go back to trapping seagulls.

Carter Bedford and his wife—I learned this quite a while later—still lived near Accabonac Harbor in a part of the township called Springs, which was considerably less expensive and more rural than East Hampton Village. There was a self-storage facility out there in Springs, A-1 Self-Storage, in a dusty field on a back road. Attached to it was a small yellow brick building, a former local jail that Springs residents had once called the Yellow Brick Jail. It had a strange

shape: although it was a narrow cube, it had three stories. The top story was set to one side of the roof.

After its term as a jail it was empty for a decade, and then for a time it had been used as a warehouse by an auto parts shop on Pantigo Road. In the 1980's, with a minimum of rehab, the warehouse was turned into a residence for the caretakers of a newly-built self-storage facility.

The latest caretakers were the Bedfords. The job paid nothing but the family lived rent-free in the yellow brick house, which still had bars on some windows from the era when it had been a jail.

The Bedfords kept an old Winnebago RV out in back, and Carter and his wife slept in it. A-1's office occupied the downstairs of the house, with the two Bedford boys sharing a queen bed in the one-bedroom apartment upstairs, and Amy, the oldest child, sleeping on a convertible sofa in the apartment's tiny living room. The top floor was just a small cube of a room connected to the second-floor apartment by a narrow staircase with a barred gate—another relic of jail days.

There was one bathroom for everybody, because the pipes in the Winnebago had frozen, cracked, and never been repaired. A fat bulldog and a large hairy young mongrel bunked in Carter's pickup truck. They were supposed to be guard dogs. In some parts of the United States, a family like that would have been called poor white trash. But they hardly ever used words like that on the south fork of Long Island.

Carter Bedford was the man the State of New York accused me of trying to murder. My lawyer, Ginger Casey, said, "I won't lie to you, Billy—the state has a good case. We have a lot of work to do. Are you ready for that?"

"Let's rock and roll," I said.

"Tell me everything that happened," Ginger said.

3.

“Girls and boys, welcome Amy Bedford. She’s a transfer from middle school out in Montauk. How about a nice round of applause as our way of saying ‘Good to have you with us, Amy?’”

Those words were spoken to us by Mrs. Metzger, the fifth-grade teacher in East Hampton Middle School, at the beginning of the spring term a few months before my first meeting with Carter Bedford.

I clapped louder than anybody, and a few kids stared at me as if my enthusiasm confirmed my status as the class nerd. Most people thought I looked like a miniature but pudgy version of Kramer, that geeky guy on *Seinfeld* whose hair stands straight up on his head. I felt sorry for that guy. I didn’t feel sorry for myself. I might grow out of it. The new girl paid no attention to my clapping. She was seated at a desk in the last row, and she was talking to herself. You could see her lips moving, although you couldn’t make out what words she was saying. It was a murmur, or she could have been singing under her breath. She was somewhere else.

Not cool, I thought. Something wrong with this girl.

She was tall and thin, freckled, with long legs, small fingers, and skin the color of the ivory elephants on our coffee table at home. Her hair was darker and shinier than a carrot, and she wore it in a frayed black ribbon.

During math hour the first week, she must have felt me staring at her. She looked up, and checked me out like I was a frog on the dissecting table in Science class. Her eyes were a soft brown, like good Belgian milk chocolate, and they slanted upward a bit. She blinked a few times, then looked down, and started talking to herself again.

In a way that was hard to define, I thought she was the prettiest girl in the class. I watched her move through the fluorescent-lit halls of the middle school. She didn’t bounce like the other girls. She glided like a graceful ghost. And she didn’t chew gum.

I watched her often, but after that five-second look during math hour, she ignored me.

One evening after we'd eaten paella in the kitchen and Inez had written out the recipe for me to enter into my computer, my brother Simon and I cruised into the den. I grabbed the remote so that Simon couldn't turn on the TV. Simon, who was fourteen, played the drums, read sports car and professional wrestling magazines, and hung out with a bunch of guys I considered dorks; but now and then, since he had good genes, he was capable of intelligent observations. Hoping that this would be one of those occasions, I told him what I knew about Amy Bedford.

"I know a few chicks in your class," he said. "Which does she hang with?"

"None. They think she's weird."

"So do you."

"But I'm interested in her."

"You think you can get into her panties?"

"Simon, I'm eleven. I just want to get to know her. Maybe she's a medium and she's getting messages from the astral sphere. Maybe she's talking a foreign language. It's called 'speaking in tongues'."

"Bullshit. You want to get to second base, bro. Play with her titties."

"She doesn't have any."

I should never have said that. For Simon, that put her in the category of what he and his friends called a "Tug"—Totally Uninteresting Girl. He grabbed the remote, shoved and kicked me off the sofa, and began watching TV.

When the other girls sneaked off to the baseball field during lunch hour to smoke cigarettes, Amy Bedford sat alone on the stone steps in front of the school. In class, when she wasn't talking to herself, she drew in her notebook, covering the page with a pale arm so no one could see what she was doing. Her clothes were wrinkled. She never wore any makeup.

Then, in late August, her father, the garbage man, introduced himself to me in our driveway.

A few days after school started up again, I stood outside on the steps at three o'clock of a sunny afternoon, waiting.

The girls of our class came out of the building in clumps of three and four, stopping to put their lipstick on because they weren't allowed to wear it during school hours—plus, no mascara, no rouge, no high heels or clothes that let their belly buttons show. They were always talking about movie stars like Nicole Kidman and Leonardo DiCaprio. For me, these girls were from another planet. The boys, barging out behind the girls, wore studded leather jackets and baggy pants that hung way below their knees. They fiddled with their peckers in class when they thought no one was looking. They were into heavy metal, the Mets, the Giants, and the Knicks, but they didn't know dick about climbing.

Toting her book bag, wearing old blue jeans and scuffed sneakers, Amy slipped out of the school alone, trailing behind everyone else. I stood in her path, just like Carter Bedford had done to me, and then I planted myself at her side and began walking down the steps with her. My heartbeats were so strong, so deep, and so loud, that I was a little frightened by them.

“Beautiful day, isn't it?”

Dumb, but it got her attention. She swiveled her head toward me.

“I wanted to ask you,” I said, “what you thought of us saying the pledge of allegiance every morning. ‘I pledge allegiance to the flag’... blah blah blah.’ Do you ever think about what the words mean? I mean, I didn't until a few days ago. We're like robots. A lot of things we do in life are robotic. That's my point. You seem like an intelligent and interesting girl, so I'd like your opinion.”

Amy kept moving at a fair pace down the steps, then turned up the street toward where the school buses stopped. She was taller than me, and she had long legs, so I had a hard time keeping up with her and talking to her at the same time.

I thought of showing her my Swiss army knife. I'd bought it for myself as a tenth-birthday present. It had thirteen blades. I played

mumblety-peg with it on our front lawn. But deep down I knew she wouldn't be interested.

"I met your dad one morning in front of our house," I said. "He believes his ancestors are English, maybe from Stratford-on-Avon. Did you ever discuss that with him?"

She shot a quick sharp frown at me.

"He suggested I get to know you," I said. "He made a big point of it."

We reached the bus stop. She didn't give me any more looks to make me feel I'd just crawled out from under a slimy rock, but that's because she was peering down Newtown Lane for her bus.

I kept trying. "What book are you going to read for your report? Mrs Ostrow gave us a good choice, don't you think? I thought I'd do *The Diary of Anne Frank*, because I'm Jewish, and I got all choked up when I first read it. I have a feeling you'd like *The Hobbit*. It's cool."

The yellow bus, the one that took the kids north to Springs, pulled up, brakes hissing. I'd always seen my dad help my mom in and out of cars by taking her arm, or her hand, and I thought it was a classy thing to do. Amy was about to get on the bus, so I reached out and took hold of her elbow to help her up the step.

She wrenched her arm loose from me, turned, drew her hand back, and hit me in the face. I don't mean she socked me with a closed fist, but neither do I mean that she slapped me. I never had time to figure out what kind of a blow it was. I staggered back a step. Pain ran up the nerves to my brain and then back to my cheekbone.

Some of the kids saw it. They must have figured I'd done something gross.

It was just her elbow, for chrissake...

I could feel my cheeks turning bright red. Amy Bedford didn't even wait to see if I'd been knocked out or fallen down into the gutter in a faint. She jumped on the bus, and all I could see of her was her back, moving away into the shadowy interior of the bus, then vanishing from view.

Tears of pain filled my eyes. Or maybe they were tears of shock. Maybe even tears of embarrassment.

I ran to the bike rack, where I unchained my ten-speed. I heard kids giggling. I jumped aboard the bike and pedaled down Newtown Lane, then swerved left into traffic on Main Street, so that a car honked at me; then I took a hard right down the Montauk Highway, and then I flew along Skimhampton Road until I got to Amagansett fifteen minutes later.

What a bitch. What a dummy. What a creepy, stupid, unfriendly, aggressive, arrogant, nasty human being. What did she think I was trying to do? I got a headache from thinking about it.

I couldn't tell my brother. But I had to talk to someone, and that someone was Inez.

Three years ago, when we'd moved from the West Side of Manhattan to the South Fork of Long Island, my mom decided we needed a full-time housekeeper, nanny, and cook, all in one persona. She wanted somebody foreign, on the theory that they were harder workers, better educated, and more traditional as regards how children should be cared for, so she contacted a top domestic help agency in London. Four applicants made the final cut. Two were German, one Scottish, another Spanish. The first three had great references, were under thirty years of age, and appeared attractive in the photographs attached to their applications. They wrote in their resumés that they loved children and wanted to work in the USA because it was the land of opportunity and it had always been their dream to see America.

The last applicant was Inez Tur, a dark-eyed Catalan woman of forty-two. She gave her height as five-feet-one but that was probably the only direct lie Inez ever told anyone in the Braverman family. She wrote that she had worked as a waitress to put herself through cooking school in Barcelona, then been an assistant to a sous chef at a restaurant in Perpignan, France. "I like most children," she wrote. "I can't have any of my own, which make me sad but that's destiny and I don't argue. I'm living now outside of London, with a rich English family, but my feet are always cold and I'm underpaid for

what I do. I have a beloved brother Alfonso is hairdresser in Great Neck, NY, Long Island, so a job near to him sounds good to me as long as it's not damp the whole year round and the pay is fair."

My mom was used to analyzing data. "Those first three young women are expecting to have a good time. The Spanish woman, Inez Tur, is a mature spinster. She's realistic. She's straightforward. And she's family-oriented. She looks unattractive—well, let's just say, plain. I'll pay top dollar. She can have her own thermostat."

That evening, after Amy Bedford smacked my head at the bus stop, Inez asked, "Whassamatter with you, Billy? Qué pasó? Why's your face so red? Some bad boy socked you, cariño?"

"A girl," I said.

"Oooh. You was fresh?"

"No, Inez. Honestly."

I told her the story about what happened on Newtown Lane outside the middle school. I told her all about Amy.

"She likes you," Inez concluded.

That startled me. "I like her, too," I said.

Inez looked into my eyes. I think she saw something there that had never been there before and that no one else could see. "Be careful, mi amor," she said.

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ASHLEY SAVES THE WORLD

Tom Baum

ASHLEY, 20s, enters, on a cell phone.

ASHLEY (on phone) Kayla, I swear to God, I will never go through another night like that again. I've had it, no more bars, no more clubs, and above all no more lawyers. God strike me dead if I ever date a man who dyes his pubic hair again....

THE DEVIL enters. He must be invisible, because ASHLEY doesn't see him.

ASHLEYNo, I didn't see his pubic hair, talk about too much information, he told me about it...He's with the Cato Institute...Yes, well, I didn't know that going in. We got into this huge argument in the restaurant, he doesn't believe in organized charity, can you believe that? And then he goes, "What's wrong with women today? Why are they all alike?" Yeah, we've both heard that one before. I'm like, you're the Devil, aren't you? He just laughed in my face. I left him sitting there, I didn't order dessert, I just walked out, and I never did that before in my entire life. Kayla, what have we done to deserve these horrible guys? God must be punishing us for something, I wish I knew what.

ASHLEY now sees THE DEVIL. Tries to let out a scream. No sound comes out.

THE DEVIL Shh. Everything's going to be all right.

ASHLEY Kayla, call 911. There's a guy in my room. You know my address, right? Kayla? Hello?

ASHLEY ends the call, dials 911. Doesn't get a signal. Tries to scream again. No sound.

THE DEVIL Sit down, Ashley, and try to remain calm.

ASHLEY What do you want? How do you know my name?

THE DEVIL I know a good deal more than your name.

ASHLEY What. What do you know.

THE DEVIL OK, let's see. You were raised on a farm in Omaha, Nebraska, but your parents moved to Princeton, New Jersey, when you were four years old. You attended Episcopal convent school, but were expelled after the third bottle of liquor was found in your dorm room. After graduating from Cornell you took a position with

Ploughshares, a pacifist organization, where you now work as a project coordinator.

ASHLEY: OK. So you've been on my Facebook page.

THE DEVIL You had a very bad date tonight. In general, you've had very poor luck with men. It's not really your fault. The whole system's designed to keep people in circulation. Meet, mate, multiply, and move on. Wasn't my idea, believe me.

ASHLEY Whose idea was it?

THE DEVIL (gestures heavenward) His.

ASHLEY You mean God?

THE DEVIL You don't believe in God?

ASHLEY No I mean yes I've always believed in something bigger than myself.

THE DEVIL You mean, like the state of North Dakota? Or the Parthenon? Or a water buffalo?

ASHLEY Who are you? Why are you here?

THE DEVIL Me? I'm the guy whose name you took in vain before. That Cato jerk? He's only a very minor demon.

ASHLEY No way. This is a dream, a lucid dream, and there's something I'm supposed to do to wake myself up. I don't need this, this isn't happening. Wake up, Ashley. Wake up now.

Nothing happens.

THE DEVIL It's not a dream, Ashley. It's an opportunity.

ASHLEY What do you mean, an opportunity.

THE DEVIL Tell me, Ashley, if you could wish for any three things to come true, what would you wish for?

ASHLEY I'd like a cell phone that works, so I can call 911.

THE DEVIL produces one from his pocket.

THE DEVIL There you go. State of the art. It's got all your data, don't worry. But I wouldn't bother trying to dial out. You're in a

temporary dead zone. I won't count that as a wish, by the way. Do you need any further proof? Before we get down to business
ASHLEY Omigod. I wish I were back in Nebraska.

Sound of cows mooing outside the window.

ASHLEY This is so weird. What's happening.

THE DEVIL Just a cheap effect. You're still in your apartment.

ASHLEY What do you want from me?

THE DEVIL Didn't I just say? I want you to make three wishes.

ASHLEY And then you'll go away?

THE DEVIL If that's what you think you'll want.

ASHLEY Can that be one of my wishes?

THE DEVIL Ashley, you're just being difficult. Come on, if you're so eager to get rid of me... First wish.

ASHLEY I don't know...to live forever?

THE DEVIL You don't sound too sure.

ASHLEY I'm not. I just said that to say something.

THE DEVIL Good, because I can't give you eternal life. Not my department. I'm not a miracle worker. Strictly cause and effect. For example, if you want money, you can say, I want to win the lottery. Of course you could end up winning fifty bucks. Just a word of warning. Try again.

Silence.

THE DEVIL Ashley.

ASHLEY Yes. Stop hectoring me. OK. I wish my mother didn't have severe arthritis.

THE DEVIL That's a very selfless wish. You're not trying to kiss up, are you, Ashley?

ASHLEY No. It's just something I pray for sometimes.

THE DEVIL He hasn't answered you, has He.

ASHLEY No, He hasn't.

THE DEVIL Well, then. It's high time you put your trust in me.

ASHLEY You mean she's cured? Just like that?

THE DEVIL Let's get your ducks in a row first. Second wish, please.

ASHLEY I don't know. I can't think. World peace.

THE DEVIL Ashley. Don't go all beauty-pageant on me. You can wish for a mideast peace conference to be successful, or Pakistan to give up its nukes, anything along those lines. But be specific.

ASHLEY What about a man?

THE DEVIL What about him?

ASHLEY Can you make a love match?

THE DEVIL Sure. That's totally within the scope of natural law. Pheromones, oxytocin, hypnotism. No trick to that. Any particular man in mind? Your supervisor at Ploughshares?

ASHLEY No. He's married.

THE DEVIL You're a woman of principle. I like that. What's your type?

ASHLEY I don't have a type.

THE DEVIL Ashley, everybody has a type.

ASHLEY All right. Sensitive, caring, funny, nice-looking... with Progressive convictions.

THE DEVIL (pointedly) I can manage that.

ASHLEY I wasn't describing you.

THE DEVIL Obviously not. Next wish.

ASHLEY I'd like global warming to stop. Right, OK, I want all the nations of the world to ratify the next treaty on climate change and stick to all its provisions. Is that specific enough?

THE DEVIL It's perfect. OK, so let's review. Medical science finds a cure for arthritis. The nations of the world cooperate to stem the tide of global warming. And you marry the man of your dreams. Is that roughly it?

ASHLEY I didn't say man of my dreams.

THE DEVIL Nevertheless. Are those your final wishes?

ASHLEY Yes. So what happens now? They all come true?

THE DEVIL Not yet. Now comes the interesting part. If your mother is cured of arthritis, money will be diverted from other

medical research, and an undetermined number of women will die unnecessarily from ovarian cancer.

ASHLEY Omigod.

THE DEVIL Could be one, could be thousands. Now if the nations of the world cooperate on global warming, the population of wolves in the frozen north will go out of control, resulting in the death of a number of native Canadians.

ASHLEY That's horrible.

THE DEVIL And if I make you a love match, all the spiders in the world will be obliterated.

ASHLEY Spiders eat other insects.

THE DEVIL That's right.

ASHLEY It could throw off the whole balance of nature.

THE DEVIL It certainly could.

ASHLEY Eliminating all the spiders could lead to insect infestations and crop failure and trees disappearing and the ozone layer opening up and drought and famine and war and the whole planet could go under, couldn't it?

THE DEVIL Eminently possible.

ASHLEY You know it's possible. That's why you made it a condition. How long have you been doing this?

THE DEVIL Oh, about 6,000 years, give or take.

ASHLEY And all that time you've been granting people's wishes.

THE DEVIL Not people. Just women.

ASHLEY No way. Why just women?

THE DEVIL I gave up on men long ago. Their selfishness is incurable. Women are my only hope.

ASHLEY But if they got what they wished for, terrible things happened.

THE DEVIL Oh yes. The Crash of '29, for example. Ayn Rand wished for a Hollywood contract. Ironic, isn't it? World War II, that was Mother Teresa. She wanted to be on the cover of *Time* magazine. And she was. Posthumously. My little joke.

ASHLEY You're saying a woman was responsible for Hitler?

THE DEVIL Well yes, Hitler's mother, for starters—she told him he could do no wrong. But Gertrude Stein, she was the real catalyst. *Four Saints in Three Acts*? Would never have gotten produced. So what's it going to be, Ashley?

ASHLEY No.

THE DEVIL I'll make you a deal. You can choose one, two, or three of these wishes.

ASHLEY None of them.

THE DEVIL Your mother healed, the planet healed, marital happiness....

ASHLEY I don't want any of my wishes.

THE DEVIL Well. That's fantastic! Finally!

ASHLEY Why. Oh come on. I'm sure it's happened before.

THE DEVIL Never. Not once.

ASHLEY No way.

THE DEVIL Unbelievable, isn't it? Frailty, thy name is woman.

ASHLEY Your sample must be skewed.

THE DEVIL Nope. Totally random.

ASHLEY You just go from one woman to the next.

THE DEVIL Not necessarily.

ASHLEY What do you mean?

THE DEVIL Can't you guess?

ASHLEY No. I don't know what you're talking about. Why don't you just leave? So I'm the exception, big deal, so leave me alone.

THE DEVIL You are the exception. You're absolutely unique. And that's why you're getting one of your wishes. No strings attached.

ASHLEY Which one?

THE DEVIL Can't you guess?

ASHLEY No. You're ridiculous.

THE DEVIL I've been called worse. Marry me, Ashley, and I hang up my pitchfork.

ASHLEY You're joking.

THE DEVIL I've never been more serious in my life. Marry me, and the game's over. No more wishes, no more Evil in the world. Marry me, Ashley.

ASHLEY No. How. I can't marry you.

THE DEVIL Why not?

ASHLEY Because it's absurd! How would we live? Where would we live?

THE DEVIL You know the song "My Blue Heaven"?

ASHLEY No.

THE DEVIL Anyway, that's where.

ASHLEY You mean not on Earth.

THE DEVIL You'll love it, I guarantee.

THE DEVIL gets down on bended knee.

THE DEVIL Ashley, please, marry me.

ASHLEY No. Get up.

THE DEVIL You'll get the Nobel Peace Prize.

ASHLEY No. Impossible. The answer's no.

THE DEVIL I see. So all these social concerns, all these Progressive ideals, they're hollow, they're empty, they're sheer hypocrisy?

ASHLEY God's telling me not to.

THE DEVIL Oh, big surprise. God needs me to make Him look good, that's why He's trying to discourage you. That's why He created me in the first place...then threw me out of Heaven. You know who the real Devil is? He is. I mean, look at the devil's bargain He made me. I find an angel like you, marry her, I get back into Heaven, no more Hell on Earth. But I need your answer, Ashley, because I'm already late for my next appointment, so what's it going to be?

No answer.

THE DEVIL All right. I tried. Goodbye, Ashley.

ASHLEY Stop. Don't go No more Evil? Really? You can make that happen?

THE DEVIL So long as God keeps His end of the deal.

ASHLEY Will He?

THE DEVIL Only one way to find out.

ASHLEY When would the wedding take place?

THE DEVIL The instant we consummate.

ASHLEY: Oh. I see.

THE DEVIL Well, you didn't expect chastity, did you? From me? Your answer, please, Ashley. The future of humanity hangs in the balance.

ASHLEY's cell rings. ASHLEY checks the number.

ASHLEY Mind if I take this?

DEVIL Yes, but make it fast.

ASHLEY starts to undress. THE DEVIL helps.

ASHLEY Hi, Kayla....Yeah, sorry, my phone went on the fritz for a while...Listen, amazing news.... I'm getting married....No, I don't think you've met him....(THE DEVIL shakes his head no)...Yes, I know it's sudden....Very interesting guy. Kayla, he called me an angel! He thinks I'm unique!... I know, right?...Well, I can't be more specific, but Kayla? I promise you this. You'll never have a bad date again.

ASHLEY hangs up. THE DEVIL takes her in his arms.

THE DEVIL Ashley...you're glorious.

ASHLEY Well, so are you. In a way.

They kiss. Blackout. Music rises: the opening strains of Mendelssohn's Wedding March, which dissolves into a plummy radio voice.

RADIO VOICE This is BBC World News. Osama Bin Laden has surrendered to Seth Nasatir, an Aetna Casualty insurance investigator following up claims arising from the 9/11 tragedy....

Hurricane Heather, off the North Carolina coast, has been downgraded to a Category One storm.... The upcoming bar mitzvah of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad will be held at Temple B’Nai Jeshurun, Pepper Pike, Ohio, Rabbi Ezra Goldstein presiding....

Lights up as music rises: My Blue Heaven, sung by Fats Domino. ASHLEY and THE DEVIL dance. END OF PLAY.

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DECODING THE BARD

Nicole M Coonradt

*Dissident Theory: “To be, or not to be: that is [still] the question”
(Hamlet 3.1.64)*

Not long ago, a colleague casually asked, somewhat tongue-in-cheekily, “So what’s new in Shakespeare studies?” little guessing that my reply might be, “Plenty!” But perhaps to say, “What’s old is new again,” might just prove more accurate. Let me explain...

In 2006 I traveled to Oxford University in England, to participate in a summer school course on Shakespeare at St Benet’s Hall called “Shakespeare’s Secret: The Catholic Imagination in Elizabethan England”. The course, organized by Second Spring and sponsored by ResSource Ltd, an educational group based in Oxford, focused on the bloody history of Reformation England and what some scholars argue is the response to these events by Shakespeare and other “dissident” artists of his time. On the penultimate day, Dr. Joseph Milne of the University of Kent and a Temenos Academy Fellow spoke on “Shakespeare’s Cosmos”. What struck me most about his insightful remarks with their pre-Enlightenment emphasis came at the beginning of his address when, surprisingly, he commended us for having convened at such a “dangerous” and

“daring” conference. Some of us laughed it off—where was the peril in the idyllic week we’d just enjoyed? It was the perfect vacation, in some ways, although, officially a week of study. Without the distractions of everyday routines, all we had to do was consume gallons of tea and attend the many lectures and discussion sessions, some of which we conducted after hours over pints at the Eagle and Child, the Oxford pub famous as the Inklings’ haunt of JRR Tolkien and CS Lewis. Given the delightful nature of my fellow attendees, “dangerous” would be the last adjective I’d use to describe our week.

So what could Dr Milne have meant by his opening remarks? To explain this I’ll note that he joined us from the “outside”, beyond the realm of the nurturing cocoon we’d spun for ourselves at St Benet’s that week, thus giving his comments peculiar resonance. The conference was risky academically, and perhaps even socially, because we had chosen to follow a forbidden path of inquiry generally ignored or discounted in higher education.

Our diverse group had gathered, from all over the globe—some traveling from such distant locales as Japan and Australia—for an in-depth exploration of “dissidence” in Shakespeare and his fellow artists under the tutelage of Clare Asquith (*Shadowplay: The Hidden Beliefs and Coded Politics of William Shakespeare*, Public Affairs 2005) and Father Peter Milward, SJ (*Shakespeare the Papist*, Sapientia 2005). Though not the first to examine coded meanings in Shakespeare, Asquith especially has come under attack for her bold arguments and historical analyses. *Shadowplay* posits that Shakespeare’s work secretly appeals to his contemporary audience—especially the monarchs—in a plea for toleration in hopes that the best ideals of both the old faith, Catholicism, and the new, Protestantism, might coexist harmoniously. We need only read the morning’s headlines about the world’s religious and political turmoil to find current relevance regarding the importance of “toleration”.

While the conference discussed the Shakespeare canon in general, the plays examined in greater depth were *As You Like It*, *Macbeth*, *King Lear*, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, and *The Tempest*. Besides Asquith and Milward (who remained on-site all

week), and the previously mentioned Joseph Milne, guest speakers included, variously: Stratford and Leonie Caldecott of Second Spring on “Faith and Culture in Oxford”; Ken Noster of Living Water College of the Arts in Canada on this fledgling school; David Skinner, then of the Faculty of Music at Oxford now at Cambridge on “William Byrd and Catholic Music”; and Russell Sparkes, editor of *Sound of Heaven—A Treasury of Catholic Verse* (St Paul’s 2001), on “Shakespeare the Poet”. There was also a marvelous impromptu performance by Martin Dodwell, a seminary student at St. John’s Womersley, of an excerpt from a play he wrote about this idea of dissident drama (inspired by Asquith’s book), appropriately titled “The Mirror of Life,” which was performed at St. John’s that spring. In this brilliant first play, Dodwell (who wrote and produced a second play this year, “The Making of Jack Falstaff”) demonstrates dissidence in action along with his behind-the-drama/back-stage imagining of Shakespeare and fellow playwright Ben Jonson.

We also enjoyed a walking tour of Oxford (led by the redoubtable Fr. Peter—then 80!) and an excursion to Stratford to tour the Bard’s birth and burial sites, visit the garden at New Place (all that is now left of the Bard’s final residence), and attend a Royal Shakespeare Company production (directed by Rupert Goold) of *The Tempest*, which starred Patrick Stewart as Prospero. All of this gave the conference attendees a better appreciation of the history behind the plays, further demonstrating what they see as the need to examine them as the work of a dissident writer.

For some reason, though, most in Shakespeare studies continue to resist what we conference attendees coined “Dissident Theory”, or the idea that people in repressive regimes communicate their dissent through code in their art, where art becomes the site for veiled political utterances. By way of example, William Byrd, we learned, did this through his compositions, even corresponding with a fellow Catholic composer at Spanish court via musical cipher! Asquith first landed on the idea of a hidden code in Shakespeare’s work while sitting in a Moscow playhouse during the Cold War watching a dissident production of Chekhov’s short stories with KGB minders in

the wings. The catastrophic history of Shakespeare's England reveals that he faced censorship and danger every bit equal to those intrepid Muscovites. His brilliant holographic poetry generated out of such turbulent times actually heightens its universal value. Leo Strauss's *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (Greenwood 1952) makes a firm case for the strategy of "reading between the lines" as a necessity for texts produced during times of political unrest and severe repression. Strauss writes:

Modern historical research, which emerged at a time when persecution was a matter of feeble recollection rather than of forceful experience, has counteracted or even destroyed an earlier tendency to read between the lines of the great writer, or to attach more weight to their fundamental design than to those views which they have repeated most often ... If it is true that there is a necessary correlation between persecution and writing between the lines, then there is necessary negative criterion: that the [text] in question must have been composed in an era of persecution, that is, at a time when some political or other orthodoxy was enforced by law or custom [Reformation in England?]. One positive criterion is this: if an able writer who has a clear mind and a perfect knowledge of the orthodox view and all its ramifications, contradicts surreptitiously and as it were in passing one of its necessary presuppositions or consequences which he explicitly recognizes and maintains everywhere else [anomalies?], we can reasonably suspect that he was opposed to the orthodox system as such and we must study his whole [work] all over again, with much greater care and much less naïveté than before. In some cases, we possess even explicit evidence proving that the author has indicated his views on the most important subjects only between the lines. (31-2)

Fittingly, Shakespeare's Sonnet 23 appears after the dedication of Asquith's book. With its pun on the name of Christian humanist Saint Thomas More—he who shunned apostasy and died for refusing to take the Henrician Oath of Supremacy—and a like appeal to "read between the lines," it poignantly offers:

*As an unperfect actor on the stage,
Who with his fear is put besides his part,
Or some fierce thing replete with too much rage,
Whose strength's abundance weakens his own heart;
So I for fear of trust forget to say
The perfect ceremony of love's right [rite],
And in mine own love's strength seem to decay,
O'ercharged with burden of mine own love's might:
O let my books be then the eloquence,
And dumb presagers of my speaking breast,
Who plead for love, and look for recompense,
More than that love which [M]ore hath more expressed.
O learn to read what silent love hath writ,
To hear with eyes belongs to love's fine wit.*

To demonstrate a bit how reading for code in Shakespeare works, to “learn to read what silent love hath writ,” we can look at a very famous passage in *The Merchant of Venice*: Shylock’s “I am a Jew” speech. He says that Jews and Christians are “fed with the same food” (3.1.51). Yet as we know, Jews and Christians do not eat the same things all the time. Here, the concern is the consumption of pork, which earlier in the play, Shylock had mentioned specifically as not part of the Jewish diet. In an early aside, Shylock makes great show of the fact that he will do many things with Christians, but he will not dine with them, especially on devilish pork. “Yes, to smell pork, to eat of the habitation which your prophet the Nazarite conjured the devil into! I will buy with you, sell with you, talk with you, walk with you, and so following, but I will not eat with you...” (1.3.31-5). So what are we to make of this? First he says he will not eat with Christians, but then he claims that Christians and Jews are “fed with the same food.” Was this just an editorial slip, an oversight? Given the source, we can only conclude that this anomaly, this inconsistency, occurred purposely and that the author is trying to communicate something to us. If we take the trouble to read between the lines, one conclusion is that the play is not so much

about the “Jewish Problem” as the “Christian” one as found in the catastrophic Catholic-Protestant Reformation rift. The play is not really about Jews after all, but Shakespeare uses the conventional safety of the trope of the “Jew as Scapegoat” in order to convey his dissident message. In *The Merchant of Venice* he highlights the hypocrisy found in Christian-on-Christian violence exacted in the name of justice and mercy. If we only privilege the universal, however, we might easily miss this deeper level of meaning.

It is hard for most of us now to imagine what the Reformation would have been like, especially as the history handed down to us by the Reformers via what some call “The Tudor Myth” tells so little of the details, instead insisting that reform was embraced peaceably. Not acknowledged until recently, however, is the extent of active and passive resistance and the social trauma following the Crown’s outlawing and violent suppression of Catholicism (which Asquith and others fairly acknowledge was due for some reform). From the illegal possession of a crucifix to the gruesome martyrdom of Jesuit Priests (estimated at no less than 124 under Elizabeth I alone) and laity alike, the world as they knew it was turned upside down. Dissident theorists agreed that it is inconceivable that a genius like Shakespeare lived through such upheaval and had absolutely nothing to say about it. They find the history difficult to dismiss.

But Shakespeare has generally been taught in a sort of historical vacuum. We marvel at the universality of his plays and applaud the enigmatic genius who speaks to us through the ages, but perhaps, as Asquith and others assert, there’s more to the message and we’ve just not been listening properly all these years, partly because the tools to do so were tarnished or lost, and partly because of our now significant remove from events. Wary critics have said, “So all along these ‘hidden’ messages have been there and Asquith’s the first one in over four hundred years to notice?” Actually, however, a number of scholars have made similar claims along the way, including Milward, whose life’s work has been in this vein. His logical thesis explores how taken alone, one instance that points to dissidence might be something to overlook, but the breadth of the

evidence, supported with innumerable instances taken all together within the canon necessarily, “adds up to something of great consequence.” Yet as with Asquith and Milward, most scholars arguing for the Bard’s dissidence have caused either comparable concern or, what proponents of Dissident Theory find worse, elicit no notice at all. For example, in the 19th Century, John Lingard’s *History of England* and William Cobbett’s *History of the Protestant Reformation*, based on Lingard’s work, provided the facts and yet these have been passed over by most, save a few like Eamon Duffy (*The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, 1400-1580*, Yale 1992) and Edwin Jones (*The English Nation: The Great Myth*, Sutton 2003). Noted Shakespeare scholar Dennis Taylor has remarked that Lingard, as the reputed father or pioneer of source criticism in the history of historiography, “has been astonishingly overlooked.” When we consider that his *History* was the only acknowledged “complete” history listed at Oxford University even as recently as the early twentieth century, such lack of interest in and serious consideration of Lingard’s work seems baffling at best, academically foolhardy at worst.

But strangely, even when acknowledging the true history, accepted scholarship from most major figures in Shakespeare studies now takes the facts only so far. According to Dissident Theorists, these scholars usually refuse to allow that a rational genius like Shakespeare cared about religion, instead arguing that he would have been entirely disillusioned by the whole sordid business. Ironically, however, what are we to make of all the Biblical allusions in his work? Typically, these are viewed as standard and hollow rhetorical devices, mere “echoes” of the times. But when we increasingly study artists within their historical contexts as we move beyond New Historicism, these become more than just echoes and at least warrant further contemplation.

Another frequent comment from scholars wary of hidden agendas has been, “You’re only seeing this because you’re Catholic.” In an interview with Debra Murphy of *GodSpy* magazine shortly after *Shadowplay* was released, Asquith noted the importance of

understanding code as a key to setting the history straight—in spite of her own Catholicity. She posited that if somehow most of the world had been fooled into thinking the Jewish Holocaust had never happened, and Jewish dissident artists wishing to communicate covertly with their fellow persecuted Jews effected this through their craft, logically, who better to discover this (at least initially), than Jews? Again, ironically however, plenty of non-Catholic scholars, myself included, note many of the same things in Shakespeare’s work that Asquith has discovered. Incidentally, Cobbett, though not considered a “historian” by most because of his impassioned prose, was a Protestant who was jailed for voicing his ideas and later fled England for America. For my own experience, during graduate study, I came to similar conclusions independent of Asquith and others employing “Dissident Theory”, as yet unnamed. When we get obvious, repeated references to exile, banishment, torture, and execution in the Bard’s work, often in incongruous and contextually perplexing moments, the literal topicality seems hard to miss. This also begs the question: What is distinctly “Catholic” about a plea for toleration?

Some readers may be thinking the proverbial, So what? “Yeah, Catholics were persecuted, but that’s history now, and nearly 500 years later, can’t we move on?” In reaction, I’d offer this as food for thought. Imagine for a moment that Americans in the US tried to ignore slavery—which I’d argue, more than any other social ill in history, damages our heritage—or claimed that it never happened—or admitted that it happened, but claimed that blacks liked being slaves and embraced their lot. What if “history” told us that African slaves and their descendants were not tortured and damaged—both psychologically and physically—nor were they murdered on a mind-boggling scale? How different our own country might be now, especially as far as immigration goes, if slavery had never happened. Africans would have had the opportunity to enter the country initially as regular immigrants, of their own free will, as so many of the rest of our population have. Pretending slavery never happened, however, would be a far different thing. In the end, how could a lie

ever hide or erase such inherent evil? History matters, but only if we get the story right. The same holds true for the Protestant Reformation in England.

Presentations at the conference noted that while the establishment generally accepts a wide range of other methodologies, including Feminist, Alternate-Gender, Freudian, Marxist, Post-Colonial and just about every other theory imaginable, to read Shakespeare in his own historical context tends to puzzle many scholars. One goal is to get readers—both scholarly and lay varieties—to at least consider the possible meanings and insight reading for dissidence offers whether one, in the end, agrees with the outcomes or not. Certainly “theory” does not necessarily imply something that is indisputable, whether we are talking about Queer theory or Psychoanalytic theory. Why, with solid scholarship based on what are now-accepted facts, should Dissident Theory be any different? We don’t dismiss the history that influences other artists, so why, ask Dissident Theorists, should we do so with Shakespeare? The time to either rethink or notice Dissident Theory has arrived they say, mostly because it has always already been there, whether other members of the Shakespeare establishment are ready to embrace it or not. Until such time as others come round, however, it seems fitting that the current proponents of Dissident Theory are themselves “dissidents.” This is but the smallest taste of what others have known.

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DEAR COMRADE-IN-LETTERS

If you subscribe to our occasional update-by-email, Cantaranews, you’ll probably recognize the title above as my normal salutation. I started to use the phrase late in 2000 while running a Topica.com forum for Michael’s and my real-life

writers support group—begun in Paris and continued in San Francisco—called PariSalon4665, after its old Geocities website. When the forum and the group went defunct, I used it again in answering emails to our magazine. Now I use it exclusively to address readers of our newsletter.

To my way of thinking, it doesn't hurt at the beginning of a writing stint (if it hasn't already been laid out for you by the dictates of the genre, or of locale) to try to get a sense of who your readers might be. When I named my readers "Comrades-in-Letters", what quickly formed in my imagination was an idealized portrait of a cohesive group of people—perhaps not entirely of like mind—but, at least, I hoped, with the same general attitude of goodwill toward our new literary venture.

At first the term "comrade" ran into some objections. Not for the political connotation, as I thought at first, but for the shared activity, the shared experience it implied. Some subscribers wondered what could possibly be the shared experience.

Well, of course, the shared experience is Letters—Literature.

Which brings me to the questions I would like to pose to other writers: How close a link do you want with your readers? What kind of commitment do you require from your audience? When you write, do you feel that you're embarking on an enterprise that will eventually be shared by others? What do you think that shared experience might be?

There aren't any right or wrong answers, of course, but simply asking yourself these questions early on can help you bring your objective for writing into focus, clarify your style, and strengthen your voice.

Whatever other anxieties the actual creative process may bring you, remember that readers are there neither to be coddled or placed above you. But they do demand your respect. Remember that you're in this enterprise together.

Write, therefore, as if your readers were comrades.

ENGLISH FAIRNESS SNOW

Maryanne Khan

Mahji kept the English Fairness Snow cream in the china cabinet with the aspirin and the fine china decorated with roses that her younger daughter had brought back from England in her luggage. Each piece was carefully wrapped in items of her clothing. So precious it was that no one but the American doctors were allowed to drink from the delicate teacups. The tea set sat behind the glass in solitary, unused splendour, slowly accumulating a thin film of dust.

Arezu's grandmother often asked her to take it out, "carefully, mind you", to wipe each cup and saucer with an old silk shawl to restore the shine to the gilded handles and the rim of each saucer. Mahji sat on the bed each time, keeping vigil until her granddaughter had completed the task and the last cup sat inverted on its saucer in the rose-bower that had sprung to life in the china cabinet. Because she was the one charged with dusting the precious set, Arezu secretly hoped that Mahji would give it to her when she was married. But she was not to be married for a year yet and in the meantime there would be many occasions on which a potential slip of the hand might spell disaster.

Arezu dusted and polished with the attitude of a man burying a chest of gold in a secret place in the garden—as the Hindus had done. They had entombed a fortune in gold in the nearby hills at the time of the Partition. Unfortunately for them, they had been forced to leave the village before they had the opportunity to dig it up again. Everyone knew of the existence of this treasure, but thus far no one had found it. Arezu imagined that somewhere in the environs of the village, trees would spring up bearing golden leaves and jewelled fruit.

The tin with the picture of a fair-complexioned woman on the label sat next to the tea set and when Mahji asked for it, Arezu would fetch it for her. Stooping over the mirror propped on the small shelf

in a corner of her room, Mahji would massage the cream into her face, turning her head this way and that, sure that the potion was having the desired effect. The photograph of her dead husband sat on the same shelf, staring not at the face of his widow, but at a crack in the wall opposite, which made Arezu wonder if it was working or not. More likely not, she thought, as Grandfather would have noticed if it were.

Also, Arezu rather suspected that the old woman's sight was fading as fast, if not faster than the time necessary for the effects of the Snow cream to manifest.

If Mahji was worried about her complexion, there were many other more important things for Arezu to worry about that particular Ramadan.

Firstly, someone was stealing chappatis from the kitchen during the daytime. This was a terrible thing, for one of her own relatives was surely going to hell. The Prophet had prohibited the faithful from eating during the hours of daylight and someone was disobeying His solemn command.

She rather suspected it was the elder of her two younger brothers, for Naseer was at a difficult age. Baba had said he would grow out of it, but Arezu worried all the same. Had not another boy in the village been recently killed by a falling tree? She knew that the boy would never have had time to repent of his sins before his life was crushed like a walnut and what if that happened to Naseer? It could not be Baby—he was far too small to reach the shelf on which the bread wrapped in a white cotton cloth waited for the dark. By elimination it could be none other than Naseer. She always mentioned Naseer in her prayers, reminding God that he was still young and would recognise his true duty in time. She also prayed that Naseer would stay away from unsound trees.

Another thing to worry about was the fact that she had been allowed to look at her fiancé when Safta and his relatives had come to be presented to hers. Peeking through the tiny window between her room and the veranda, she had seen that Safta was a rather lanky young man with a distinct lack of a chin. In profile she thought he

rather resembled a turtle, which was unfortunate and, she hoped, not cruel on her part.

But, she thought, he did look like a turtle and there you have it. Facts are facts.

On the other hand, he had a nice smile and was saving money to buy a bus. She imagined herself married to the owner of a fine bus. Such decorations he was planning! She watched him explain his plans to her parents, who listened in silence as he moved his hands in excitement describing the length and breadth of the bus, and how he was firmly intent on hiring no fewer than ten different artists to do the paintings on its sides. He had already ordered long black tassels made from real horsehair from the truck shop in Abbotabad.

Which brought matters around to herself. She stared at her face in Mahji's mirror and worried. What if the Snow cream actually worked and she was depriving herself of the opportunity to present herself at her level best on her wedding day? Was not the maximum ideal of English fairness preferable to the dusky complexion she saw in the mirror? She was certainly not as dark as Mahji and her uncle Nazeir was decidedly black, there was no denying it. But what exactly was the most desirable shade? She wiped the hem of her shawl over the mirror to make sure that there was no dust clouding her judgment.

She decided to try the Snow cream, just once. Perhaps a single application would do the trick—she was ever so much younger than Grandmother.

She waited until Mahji was occupied with visitors in the garden and stole into her grandmother's room. The white cat coiled on the bed opened one eye and stretched to its full length, yellow eye fixing her unblinking. It yawned, showing a mouthful of little pointed teeth as if threatening to sound the alarm.

Thinking, how silly of me, cats are not dogs, they can't bark, she reached into the cabinet and removed the tin. When she prised the lid with her thumb, it made a frightful popping sound she had never noticed before, a sound that everyone in the house was certain to have heard—even Mahji in the garden. She replaced the lid,

concealed the tin under her shawl and rushed to the room she shared with her brothers and sister.

Mumtaz was not there, Naseer was out and Baby was asleep rolled up in a blanket. What a sweet little thing he is she reflected, and so quiet. Even at age five he says very little, although he was quite naughty last night, throwing the basket of bread on the floor when he was not offered it first. And how curious it is that he follows Baba everywhere! Still he lay asleep, dreaming of who knows what, his eyelids fluttering almost imperceptibly, his hair sticking to his forehead in damp black ringlets and suddenly it was as though she was up against a stone wall. Soon she would have a baby of her own, what a thought!

She stood on tiptoe on a chair, straining up to conceal the tin in a crevice between the two loose mud bricks that always streamed water each time it rained hard enough, when a voice said, “What have you got?”

She started and almost fell off the chair. It was Naseer who had appeared from nowhere and who was now leaning against the doorpost.

“Nothing,” she said, withdrawing her hand after giving the tin a little tap to make sure it was resting deep within its niche. She jumped down from the chair.

Naseer’s eyes flitted from her to the place in the wall where the tin was and had it burst into flames in that instant, she would not have been surprised.

Naseer’s eyes said, you put something up there, but his mouth remained closed.

“We’re going to the bazaar tonight for Iftari,” she said quickly. “Baba said we’re going to the food stalls and we can have anything we want. Imagine!”

It was going to be wonderful, her face said but she lowered her eyes, because they said, I hid something up there and you mustn’t go looking for it or I’ll be in trouble. She sat on the chair on the pretext of loosening the buckle of her sandal and still her brother hung

about, saying nothing. If it had to be, she would sit there on the chair for the rest of the day so that Naseer could not go exploring.

Which was annoying in the extreme, as she had wanted to iron her very best outfit for the breaking of the fast that night. Perhaps no one would notice that it was a little wrinkled and that there was a ridge running across the middle of the qamiz from its having been hung on the line to dry. But on second thoughts, oh surely they would notice, how could they not?

Naseer was stolidly going nowhere. He sat stubborn as a stone on the floor next to her, having decided that he needed to tighten the strap of his slingshot, a laborious operation that required him to unknot the strip of rubber, find Baba's pocket-knife in the drawer of the dresser, cut a tiny piece from the end of the strap and then re-knot it. He worked away in silence as she imagined herself going to the bazaar in crinkled clothes and what would people say?

Naseer snapped the strap, testing its tensile properties and she said, "Why don't you try it outside?"

He snapped it again.

"You can't really tell if it's right unless you have a stone," she said. "And there's no stones in here."

Without a word, Naseer felt in his pocket and produced a stone. He held it against the rubber strap and sighted around the room for a target.

"You're not allowed to shoot inside the house!" she cried. "You'll wake the baby!"

Like a deaf man, Naseer ignored her. He aimed at exactly the spot where she had hidden the Snow cream and let the stone fly.

Despite herself, she had to admit that he was a very good shot, because the stone hit the crack in the wall precisely. When he was old enough, Baba would certainly take him hunting.

She sat on in silence until the thought of going to the bazaar inappropriately clad was too much to bear and she got to her feet saying, "I can't sit here all day. I have important things to do." She did not step away from the chair, however, but hovered, reluctant, as though she were somehow tethered to it.

Naseer shrugged. "I'm not stopping you."

But he was stopping her and with mounting irritation, she snapped at him, "Go outside and play."

"So you can get what you put up there?"

She was about to shout, "No!" but it would have been a lie. Instead she said in a small voice, "If I tell you what it is, will you tell anyone?"

"Who would I tell?"

"It's Mahji's magic cream," she said, feeling her face burn with shame.

"Let me see."

"It's for girls. It makes them superior," she said.

"Show me."

"If I show you, you won't tell anyone?"

"Show me."

She dragged the chair closer to the wall and fetched down the tin.

"See? It has a picture of a girl on it. It's not for boys."

Naseer snatched the can from her and removed the lid, sniffing the contents. "How does it work?"

"You put it on your face and it makes you one hundred percent beautiful," she said. "Look."

With the tip of her finger, she scooped out a dollop of cream and dabbed it onto her face. She smoothed it over her forehead and cheeks, observing her reflection in the glass of the picture of Murree that her father had hung on the wall telling his children that it was the most beautiful place in the world. The cream burned a little, but that was proof that it was working.

"By tomorrow I'll be more beautiful," she said. "But now I have to put it back."

Carefully, she smoothed the cream in the tin to erase the groove her finger had left in its surface.

Naseer followed her into Mahji's room and watched her tuck the tin back in place amongst the china, which she did feeling as though she were under the scrutiny of a squadron of police.

“There! “ she said. “Now I have to get ready for tonight.”

She walked back along the veranda pausing to straighten one of the cans containing dusty geraniums that was not in line with the others, her measured pace and casual air saying, see? Nothing’s wrong. No harm done, I put it back.

She returned to their room and took the flatiron from the shelf to take to the kitchen and heat on the fire. Naseer, having no interest in ironing and with no further mysteries to solve, disappeared.

Arezu shook out her favourite yellow qamiz and spread it carefully on the blanket on the floor, telling herself that she was definitely going to be the prettiest girl at the bazaar and she would make sure not to eat too much at the food stalls so she would have room for her favourite sweet. The carrot halva at Shaji’s stall was more delightful than anything imaginable—as honey-sweet and rosewater-perfumed as heaven itself.

She returned to the kitchen, squatting and holding her hand close to the iron, waiting for it to heat, thinking that fasting all day was certainly worth it when Baba decided to take them all to the bazaar even one glorious evening. The sparkling coloured lights, the music! Plus she could tell the cream was working because of the tingling sensation in her face.

I will be the one with English fairness, she thought, almost wanting to hug herself in anticipation, and now it no longer mattered that Safta was a very plain boy, as he would have a bus and she would be the fairest bride in the world. She stared into the fire as the iron warmed and when it was hot she wrapped a cloth around the handle and took it back to her room.

The ironing finished, she got to her feet, straightening her clothes and smiled up at her mother who had returned from having visited a sick cousin.

Arezu went to say, “How was Auntie?” but Mother’s face was stricken and she screamed.

“Ayi! Ayi! What happened to you, beti?”

Arezu swiped her sleeve across her eyes, aware that they were watering slightly and said, “What do you mean?”

Her mother caught her by the sleeve and pulled her into Mahji's room where she snatched the mirror from the shelf and held it up.

Arezu stared at the vile creature in the glass. Her eyes were swollen so that the crease defining her eyelids had disappeared; her lips were thick like two raw kebabs; the hollows in her cheeks plumped up so that her face was as round as the full moon.

The family decided it must have been a bee sting, but were rather at a loss to explain how it was that Naseer had also fallen victim to unnatural swelling in his private parts, so that he and his sister lay in an agony of itching on their cots that night whilst the others went to the bazaar.

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IN JOSEPHINE'S FOOTSTEPS

Manda Djinn

Velvet curtains part, lights from the sparkling crystal chandeliers dim and the opening number with dancers, clothed and half-clothed begins the show, an acrobat climbs a rope lowered from the ceiling and winds herself around and around, finally hanging gracefully by one foot, a couple puts several poodles through their paces, the dancers are back cavorting and singing, and the one thing missing is me!

I haven't really danced for years but as the show continues, I gain more confidence until the finale when I can actually imagine myself on the big stage at the Folies Bergere.

This afternoon Mister Thierry, manager of the Folies Bergere, calls, asking if I'd like to be their next star. We, being me and my husband, Raphael, are invited tonight to see the show; then I can decide on my own if I'm interested in the job.

After the show they invite me for an audition tomorrow. I have a gown, bought for a "gig" in Morocco when I was told that

special people who could help my career would be attending. That's an old story but I fell for it. As it turned out, the "gig" was just a "gig" and afterwards we said goodbye and it was over. So here I am with a custom made lamé gown, toga-style with a silver front and a gold back attached only at the shoulders, very elegant and fine. I am quite aware that my form is not the usual one of a Folies star, but the singer I'm replacing, Bertise Redding, is a heavyweight and I mean that literally—she played the rotund Bloody Mary in *South Pacific*. She has health problems, though, and one evening, as the story goes, they found her passed out on the toilet floor. That must have been a sight because the toilet is so tiny she's lying half-in, half-out on the tile floor.

They built the show around her with special numbers and costumes and a packet of publicity. All this I find out later; for now, I have an audition to make. We climb a narrow wooden stairway one flight up. The star's dressing room consists of two rooms. The first is full of cabinets on two walls and a dressing table and mirror on the remaining wall. The dresser sits here when she's not taking care of the star. The star's dressing room is spacious enough to throw a party but not luxuriously furnished. The mirror and dressing table are regulation sized. The only difference from the dancer's dressing rooms is the privacy and the special dresser, l'habilleuse, sitting on the other side of the wall surrounded by closets of costumes.

My music is playing (each room has a speaker to keep the occupant aware of the show while dressing), so I descend and enter onstage. The stage is very wide and deep with the highest stairway on any Paris stage. I will be obliged to forget my fear of falling and gracefully descend these stairs, while singing, mind you.

I breathe in deeply and attack. Mr Gyamarthy, Artistic Director, Mister Thierry, Manager, and the owner, Madame Martini, are conferring in the audience. I try to read their faces but I'm too far away. Then Mister Gyamarthy asks the wardrobe mistress to take me to the costume department on the top floor. We climb again. I'm wishing for an elevator or someone to carry me on his back, but we finally arrive in a wonderland of fabric. Bolts and boxes of luscious

fabrics are stacked and strewn around the room. The costumer flips through racks and at last produces a transparent lace jumpsuit. Although it looks suspiciously like the costume worn by Josephine Baker during her last show at the Bobino theatre, this creation could have been worn by Lisette Malidor: a strikingly tall, lean, black dancer with a head as bald as an eight ball. She was the last Folies star shown on the poster, bare-assed and greased up behind a fluffy fan. One star or the other, makes no difference, someone's crotch was a lot longer than mine. The Folies' costumers were capable, though, of altering used costumes in their vast repertoire as I soon find out.

I feel ridiculous in this suit. It clings in the wrong places but, following orders, I wear it downstairs and return to the stage. Mister Gyamarthy, takes one look at me and waves me away, out of his sight.

They tell me I've got the job and am now starring in the Folies Bergere's revue.

Madame Martini, the Folies' owner, invites me to her restaurant, Raspoutine, for the contract signing. Russian singers and violin players cavort while we order our meal. The food arrives, meat on a sword, but since I've been off red meat for awhile, the smell makes me ill and this casts a pall over the festivities. Never mind, Madame is gracious. We finally eat and then I sign. French law makes a contract of more than two years change from definite to indefinite. Indefinite meaning you can never be fired! Oh boy, needless to say, I sign a definite contract for six months. If I stay, I'll sign again and again, six months at a time until I've completed two years.

Now the work begins: intense rehearsing, learning songs written not only for the show but also specifically for Bertise. I get to descend from the ceiling in a parachute and although the stairs panic me, I will have to walk gracefully down the highest staircase on any Paris stage. When I saw them for the first time I told the choreographer that I suffered from vertigo. She said, "Honey, that's a big part of the job." The steps are narrow. My size forty shoes are

longer than the steps are wide. After I scramble up a rung ladder to reach the narrow platform at the top, the trick they teach me is to place my heel against the back of each step as I descend.

My memory is being put to the test, especially memorizing French lyrics. We search for songs and settle on “My Man” but in French. This song was first made famous by Edith Piaf in French as “Mon Homme”. I’d always thought of it as Billie Holiday’s song. Live and learn. We also chose “You Make Me Feel So Young” and, of all things, “O Happy Day” for my solo spot. “New York, New York”, which I’ve been singing in my act for years already, I sing and dance with the chorus. And of course, “J’ai Deux Amors”, the song written for and made famous by Josephine Baker.

Mister Gyamarthy wants “La Vie en Rose” but the orchestra is happy when I decide not to use it because they’ve been obliged to play it in every show for decades. A battle of wills is raging between me and Gyamarthy. He looks at the halo on my head made by the extensions that take over twenty hours to “braid in” and tells me to cut it off. It has to make way for the close-fitting hats I’ll wear in the show, like the rhinestone-studded thirties style white cap that accompanies the pure white, floor-length gown I’ll wear to sing “My Man”.

All this is quite a change from the Brazilian cabaret show where I starred in Santo Domingo. The Folies is more sober. There I wore flowered ruffles and sang Brazilian songs. Dancers in fruit costumes came onstage in wooden carts pushed by delicious young men in sombreros and pedal pushers. I sang about a bird, “Pajarito Lindo” and felt like flying. The finale was a wild samba number. I could’ve danced the samba forever.

Lastly, the management complains that Bonnard on the marquee will suggest a Frenchman appearing as vedette or star. Raphael suggests I use my real first names, Manda and Jean, changing the spelling of Jean to Djinn. So now I try on Manda Djinn for size and everyone likes it, including me. What’s more, it looks great in neon. I forget that Americans long ago used to call me Mandy—which I hated because it always brought to mind the image

of Aunt Jemima. I liked it better when they said I was another Lena Horne.

Opening night is in two days and dress rehearsal has my nerves on edge anyway until I learn that the entire cast is on strike. The Folies is a union house and the union has long-standing disagreements, mostly about money, with the management. I watch from the wings while the dancers take seats in the audience and then sit silently. They don't know it but they're doing me a favor because how could I give way to my nerves with the whole cast sitting there watching me? Claudette Walker, the choreographer, and I go through all of my routines without one mistake. I'm ready to open. Bouquets of exotic flowers: tiger lilies, a rainbow of roses, tulips, jonquils, interspersed with fern and cacti, incredibly beautiful and inventive arrangements fill my dressing room, also an enormous bouquet from the Folies' management wishing me luck.

In the corridor, another special smell permeates the air, the smell of pancake makeup and perfume and wintergreen liniment slathered on aching knees throughout the years. I picture Josephine "La Baker" sitting in this very dressing room regarding her oval face in the same mirror much the same as I. The show is playing through a speaker in back of me on the right wall beside the door. Couldn't miss a cue if I wanted to, right, what with the wall speaker and my dresser sitting right in the outer room, two steps away. But it's music to my ears.

The show goes without a hitch. I dance and sing and feel good about my performance. After the show Michel Gyamarthy arrives praising my voice and my performance. At the end of the superlatives, he asks, "Madam Manda, are you aware that each time you turn, the two halves of your gown open and your fesses (a lovely word for behind, buttocks, ass) are exposed to the audience?" Is he crazy? Of course I'm not aware of it. Perhaps I should have worn underwear under my pantyhose. Perhaps the enthusiastic applause I received was a result of my "flashing". Surely, my face turns from golden brown to rosy. He promises to solve the problem for tomorrow.

Here comes one of the costumers with a bikini that does not quite fit one of my thighs. Mister Gyamarthy is sick of me. More than ever he's longing for a Skinny Minny to star in the show. I feel he's giving up because the next solution given me is a pair of harem-style pants. Pantaloons. I'm wearing three copies of my lame gown, so that makes three outfits with tunic and harem pants. I turn out to be the mostcovered Folies star in the history of the Folies Bergere!

It's so thrilling being in this special place that I invite every person showing the least bit of interest to the show and even offer free seats to friendly salespeople in stores who take the time to converse with me. Life at the Folies is not what I imagined. Over the years, the name of the Folies Bergere and the association with Josephine Baker gave me the impression of glamorous dancers and stage-door Johnnies waiting with flowers to whisk them off to expensive dining places and after-hour discotheques. The reality is it's another job, longer than some, but a job after all.

Most of the publicity was done in advance of the show and focused on Bertise. The budget is spent. But we do have a poster of a magazine shoot with me at the foot of the stairway flanked by male dancers in white tails and high hats, the stairway behind filled with feather-tailed and sequin-studded females. Everyone is smiling broadly and the photographer is focused on me looking like a black Scarlet O'Hara in a white ball-gown with a tall feather headdress. Among my harem-like costumes—a turquoise military uniform and the gown—the gown is by far and away my favorite. It takes three dressers to get me ready for my entrance every night. Most of the changes are made in the wings.

The word is that as Mister Gyamarthy gets older, the show gets faster. Back to my ball-gown. One holds it open, another helps me jump into it and zips me up, and yet another places the hat on my head and pulls on my gloves.

One night as I'm dressing, I realize that the stage is absolutely quiet. Normally, I can hear the music, which I now know by heart, playing and in this case, the dancers' taps. I lift the skirt of my gown

and tiptoe over to the wings. Peeking out, I see the dancers' lips moving and their feet too, but still no sound.

Later my dresser tells me that I'm the only artist singing live, everyone else is taped. Even the taps are taped! My singing is taped too, but I would never dream of lipsynching every night, just on general principles.

The backstage is never pretty except maybe in films and The Folies is no exception. No air conditioning or circulation. My first summer and it is hot. All the windows are open wide and dancers are hanging out of each one except mine. In the middle of this unbearable heat, my dresser arrives with a floor-length white fur cape and matching togue-style hat.

Seems that Mister Gyamarthy has the bright idea that I should sing "My Man" in this outfit as of tonight. Without a moment of thought I tell the dresser to tell Mister Gyamarthy, "No way," and that's that.

I don't hear of this outfit ever again. Then Madame Martini asks me my shoe size. We both wear 39 1/2. She seems happy to hear that and the next night I get a call to go down to her office before the show. When I arrive she hands me a large shopping bag filled with designer shoes, all almost new and in my size. Trouble is, they're all spike-heeled. Maybe some years ago I flattered my legs with heels that high, but that was long ago and far away, as the song says. Madame tells me her couturier, Per Spook, forbids her to wear these heels now. Well, I say, thank you very much, but my designer tells me the same thing.

"Manda", she says, "I'm only trying to make you look more beautiful." I can't argue with that, but I also can't inflict those shoes on my tired ex-dancer's feet.

Mostly the show goes smoothly like it's on roller skates. Everything is planned and choreographed down to the last minute. Sometimes people get bored and try to break out a bit—like the night when the male dancers, who usually stood in the wings and clapped their hands during my numbers, danced onto the stage during "Oh Happy Day". We had a great time singing and clapping our hands

and dancing. After the show, Mister Gyamarthy stopped me, saying that never in the history of the Folies Bergere had such a thing happened. He told me in plain terms that no spontaneity is allowed on the premises. What a laugh! Imagine saying that to a jazz singer whose existence in music is based on improvisation.

Because of my position as replacement for Bertise, I think it would be interesting to drum up some publicity just for me as the new star. I've been collecting dolls for several years and just naturally think wouldn't it be great to have a Manda Djinn doll dressed in the costumes I wear in the show. So I propose my project to the management. Mister Thierry goes over the idea with me and then I wait for the answer. Finally the management turns me down, saying they don't want to have that as the Folies' image. This attitude flabbergasts me because what exactly does this mean? Is it a question of a black doll? Why do they have a black star if they want a different image?

I'm let down but undaunted. After all, I have a contract at the Folies Bergere and *la vie est belle*. I'll just have to get my publicity on my own.

Meanwhile, I continue at the Aux Trois Mailletz, a nightclub in Saint Michel in the Latin Quarter. There I can be as spontaneous as I like.

December 10, 1987, is my first birthday at the Folies. I come into work feeling a bit depressed. Didn't I say my birthday was today? So how come no one wishes me "Happy Birthday"? In fact, people hardly speak with me at all. And to make matters worse, Raphael, who usually accompanies me to work, decides not to come tonight. I go through the show putting on a good face.

During the finale, with everyone on stage, just as I'm opening my mouth to sing, the sound cuts off. "Oh sh—," I say to myself. "What's up now with this spontaneous happening"? Then the announcer's voice booms over the system, "Ladies and gentlemen", he says, "tonight is our star's birthday. Join with us in wishing Manda Djinn a happy birthday".

The audience stands up en masse and starts singing. I turn and see the whole cast behind me smiling and wishing me well. I feel all that love coming at me and my eyes fill up and my heart too, and I know I'm the happiest person alive tonight. I forget how Mr Gyamarchy is after me to lose weight and the dresser says he'll like me better if I do, and I think how lucky I am to be alive in Paris, starring at the Folies Bergere, following in the footsteps of Josephine.

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THE BULLET

Eisart Dunne

It's driven by gravity and the weight of air,
The smooth, hydraulic, romantic motion
Through cloud and fire, flesh and bone
Making time stand still for the world.
It dances erotically on the skin
For a moment that seems to last an age
Like a tiny black angel on invisible wings—
Angel of Death coming for me.
Deep and dark and dark and deep—
The wound that runs without an end.
All in a second, the bullet's gone
But the scent of blood remains forever.

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WRITING IN THE NEW PUBLISHING PARADIGM

My first publishing venture was at the age of ten. Equipped with typing sheets, my mother's office stapler and manual Smith-Corona and, most wondrous of all, a box of carbon paper, I created twenty copies of a work entitled *Faculty Frolics*, a collection of stories about the totally imaginary romantic doings of the staff of Waite Park Elementary School, Minneapolis. It was about as silly and scandalous as a fifth-grader could write. I charged ten cents per copy and sold twelve. Even my teacher bought one.

Twenty-five years later I dived into publishing again, this time with an even longer stapler, an electric typewriter, and a Kinko's copier instead of carbon paper. It was the early 90s during the height of the Do-It-Yourself movement and I was a housewife, living with my husband Michael and our son at the epicenter of DIY, San Francisco. For the benefit of you youngsters out there who barely remember what life was like before personal computers and the internet, let me tell you how it was with us rinky-dink publishers back then. You typed your zines—or, if you were feeling particularly artistic, you handwrote them. And unless you had a basket of cash to fling at some professional binder, you put together your books and magazines manually. Whether you had a large run or small, that was no picnic. I remember collating parties at the notorious leftist labor zine, *Processed World*, where we'd all get mightily stoned before commencing the daunting task of assembling 3000 copies of the newest issue in a single night. For my own publications, the slipstream fiction zine *Absinthe* and the Filipino humor zine *Bakya*, I was compelled to enlist my then-preteen son to help me carry boxes of freshly-run sheets home from the copy store. During the final days of *Bakya* and *Absinthe*, in order to minimize the construction process I devised a clever way to fold a single sheet of paper to turn it into a 5-page book, and stuck with that technique until I stopped publishing altogether. If you ever come across one of

these quirky little issues (which I'm told are still floating around in the zinosphere), please let me know.

Let me clarify a point here. DIY publishing has never been entirely synonymous with small press publishing—à la Coffee House or Grove—which has its own concerns, and in many ways follows the business model of its larger kin: You listen to an agent, read her client's work, accept it, pay him an advance for it, publish it, garner acceptance of it by way of good publicity and good reviews, sell copies of it, and pay him royalties. It's only in scale where major and minor houses differ.

DIY publishing—which really started to take off once high-quality photocopying became easily available to consumers—had much more in common with DIY music. The poet who made up little chapbooks to sell at her readings was a kissing cousin of the band that taped its own cassettes to sell at gigs. Both thrived on being able to offer their audience something palpable, something outlasting the ephemeralness of their public appearances. And though it might be argued that the Do-It-Yourself zine craze spread during the 80s and 90s because of grassroots outrage at the corporate takeover of creative culture, it really just had to do with the very basic impulse possessed by almost all writers: to get their ideas out to an audience as quickly, broadly, and tangibly as possible.

Technological advances, like shareable computer files, dedicated ebook readers and print-on-demand machines, are the new vehicles of these ideas in what has been dubbed the New Publishing Paradigm. Despite what you might have culled from news items these past five years in *Publishers Weekly* or *MediaBistro.com*, the new paradigm wasn't launched by a bunch of Old Paradigm, fist-shaking New York editors who got dumped when big conglomerates like Bertlesmann and Holtzbrinck took over their various publishing houses. This is evident because the New Publishing Paradigm isn't business as usual, it's not the author-to-agent-to-publisher-to-bookstore-to-reader route, simply at another address.

It is, rather, DIY with better machines, and it's being run by people like you and me. And on its own terms, it's succeeding and

going places that no author, publisher or reader could have dreamed of a generation ago.

Let me give you the example of my own experience. In late 2001 I wanted to publish my husband's recently written novels and didn't want to go the route of the so-called self-publishing POD portals like Xlibris, iUniverse, or 1st Books (now AuthorHouse) which exuded then, and still exude—although a little less strongly nowadays—the bad odor of vanity publishing. So, I started an imprint called CityFables, a name I thought would reflect the whimsical fantastic nature of Michael's books. We had a dismally low amount of capital, but fortunately I found a hungry new little POD company that printed trade-sized paperbacks as high in quality as the ones in Barnes & Noble, that didn't charge for setup, required only a small minimum run, and delivered in one week.

Now, this was a mere four years ago, but still far enough back in time when any printing on demand was viewed with a great deal of suspicion, and the very idea of self-publishing itself was held in absolutely no literary regard whatsoever, Virginia Woolf, Walt Whitman and James Joyce be damned. So, lacking a business model, I made up my own:

For each of the books, print a hundred copies; sell fifty at full price to break even (easily accomplished, as Michael and I were running a writers group at the time and could sell copies to our members); keep the other fifty for reviewers, public readings, book fairs, and just to have around for stock. (The POD printer could always supply more, within days, as needed.)

But—give away online the PDF version, the shareable computer file, as quickly and widely and for as long as possible.

If this goes against the grain, this concept of giving away for free the work you've sweated over, possibly to be debased, defiled, or worse, ripped off, please consider the words of Web 2.0's Tim O'Reilly, as quoted by author and award-winning science fiction novelist, Cory Doctorow, who famously gives away his work:

The enemy of authors isn't piracy—it's obscurity.

And if the prospect of non-obscurity, that is, of getting your name and your work known by thousands of people all over the world, isn't sufficient to overcome your righteous desire to be financially compensated, ponder this: Once you launch your work into cyberspace, it immediately becomes part of the permanent body of human knowledge. Your work is indexable, google-able, findable, sendable, shareable, judgeable.

More important, it gets the opportunity to become Cool. As even Patrick Nielsen Hayden, Managing Editor of Tor Books and therefore top honcho of the biggest moneymaking science fiction house in the world, has acknowledged, the most underrated reason why people copy things off the internet is the simple desire to Share Cool Stuff with friends. What author could object to being introduced to his public in this way, by fans to other potential fans?

I must disclose at this point that my decision to give away Michael's books wasn't entirely altruistic, or unsystematic, because at the very beginning of launching CityFables I equipped each of his titles with several information-gathering tools. I used, for example, a download counter and a hit tracker, and made sure to include in the file an email address for responses (he got a surprising amount from retirees as well as students, who wanted to know more about his subjects—the Sixties and San Francisco—including a young Turkish student who eventually wrote a thesis on Michael's entire body of work). All these services, by the way, can be gotten for free online. My tracking was on a smaller scale like Bookscan, the rating service of the traditional publishing trade, only I wasn't interested in counting retail sales as much as finding out who downloaded Michael's books and where they were.

In short, I was searching for his audience.

When I toted up the download statistics for Michael's three novels after a nearly a year, several interesting things stood out. One, that if people were inclined at all to download any one of his novels, they'd usually end up downloading all three; two, that people who

downloaded his novels tended either to be college students in Canada and Australia, who downloaded in the afternoons, or a variety of people in the countries of Eastern Europe, who downloaded in the evenings; and three, that even without having his books listed at other, larger, better publicized online free download centers—that is, just from adding keywords to search engines that pointed only to the CityFables website, where the books could be downloaded—each of his three titles attracted an average of two downloads per day, bringing the yearly total to nearly two thousand for all of them. A swift mental calculation tells me that, even allowing for errors of miscount, his entire output has been downloaded—so far—about 8000 times, and that’s not even counting whatever digital copies or printouts were made for the purposes of sharing.

In the Old Paradigm, if this were a sales or readership figure it would be laughed off the board—until you stop to consider that the most promising nominee for last year’s National Book Award sold a total of 1300 copies of her novel. We have now gotten to the point where vetting by agents, publicists, marketers and Michiko Kakutani is no longer sufficient to rouse even the nerdiest bookaholic to buy a book costing two to three hours of the average wage.

And here’s the kicker. People aren’t reading less, they’re reading more. It’s just the way they’re reading that’s changed. They’re reading off computer screens, ebook readers, Palm Pilots. They’re downloading PDFs and printing out the pages as they need them. At present a friend of mine in Austria, the publisher Jörg Hotter, is attempting to negotiate a deal with the phone company there to include monthly billing for his service, which plans to send regular installments of new novels to subscribers to read off their cell phone screens.

People are still looking for stuff to read, and they’re willing and eager to go to neat new places to find it.

So—if you’re willing to trade the chancy prospect of being published by a traditional house more than two years after they’ve bought your book; of getting an advance you may have to give back;

of royalties that cut your percentage when your book is wholesaled; of getting a cover illustration you can't stand to look at; of being allotted a publicity budget that wouldn't buy a Big Mac; of having six weeks of glory on the back shelf at Barnes & Noble, only to eventually discover that every copy of your book that wasn't sold was turned into mulch (yes, they do that)—

If you don't mind trading all that for the Olympian power and tranquility of just being able to write, write, write and get your words out the moment you're ready to a responsive audience, then please, consider writing in the New Publishing Paradigm.

Write a memoir, a diatribe, a bit of porn. Make it good. Don't lengthen it, shorten it, dumb it down, or geek it up because you're trying to second guess an audience whose reading habits you don't understand. Don't compromise. It will get read. I'm a housewife with a useless BA from a crappy university and if I can follow de Toqueville on my RocketBook reader, you can too.

The world we're living in these days isn't big enough to encompass the current explosion in human activity. We need to enlarge the world, not narrow it. We need more ideas, not fewer.

In response to an intellectually refined, Russian-born acquaintance of mine who recently remarked with disdain, Now anybody can write a book, I say, Yes! Isn't that fantastic?

Because we need more books, not fewer. And we need them now.

But let me take a breath and leap off my Olympian Mount to address at last a subject dearest to the heart of every writer, and that is money.

Is there money to be made in the New Publishing Paradigm? Well, if you disregard the newsmaking six-figure deals which are, one, as likely for an author to win as the lottery and, two, in the last analysis big expensive ads for the publishing houses themselves anyway, let's just say there's about enough money in the NPP as there is in the OPP. Online genre fiction magazines, when they pay, continue in the great tradition of doling out bupkes to writers—a

penny a word is still the norm. Most literary online journals, like their prestigious printed siblings, don't pay at all.

At this particular moment in literary history, the single bright light is for authors of ebooks in the area of genre fiction, but it's not where you'd immediately think—not in high-tech science fiction, say, or lurid thrillers. It is, of all places, in the line of erotic romance. Women have money to spend for ebooks, the internet does not daunt them, and their hunger for good unformulaic stories remains unabated. Of all the types of e-fiction out there, this is the one that has provided the most reliable income for the most writers. It is actually possible to make a living writing strictly for this subgenre. True to the girl who wrote *Faculty Frolics*, I have dabbled here myself, with some success. (Don't look for me. I'm writing under a pseudonym.) It's the one area of writing where I believe I have any hope of finding recognition and steady remuneration.

Offline in the world of PODs, the situation is, perhaps, slightly better, because self-published print-on-demand books are now being considered sort of the triple-A team of major league publishing. A writer who can afford the thousands of dollars it takes to have her work privately edited, proofread, polished, packaged and market-analyzed stands a good chance of eventually being noticed by one or another of the big houses, who would be enchanted by the thought that there's very little else they'd have to do (read: pay for) to bring her little moneymaker to the marketplace. An influential litblogger (an online diarist focusing on literary matters) named GirlOnDemand specializes in reviewing self-published novels from POD portals like iUniverse and Xlibris. Although most, she reports, are absolute crap, occasionally she finds one or two gems in her reading pile that are major-house quality, and she's as pleased as anyone in the business when these titles do get acquired. On her blog is a list of POD novels that eventually made it to Kensington, St. Martin's, Crown, and other traditional publishers, and it's an eye-opener. (Just remember the next time that Reese Witherspoon movie comes around to cable—it started as a POD book.)

And while you're setting aside copies of your own POD novel for stock, be sure to wrap up a few to keep pristine. Mint editions of *A Time to Kill*, John Grisham's first novel which he paid to have published, are selling on eBay for upwards of three thousand dollars.

Meanwhile, Michael's readership continues to grow around the world at a slow but steady pace, while I dream of becoming the new Daphne du Maurier, only sexier. And who knows? My own present forays into the marketplace of remunerative publishing may eventually reap some big rewards. But as an author I can't count on the marketplace to supply the creative juice I need—that all us writers need—to keep on writing.

In the New Publishing Paradigm, it's there: The immediate response from engaged readers. The satisfaction of knowing that your work is going out to a wider audience than any author could have dreamed of in the past. The awe and wonder—and conferment of responsibility—when you realize that your words might, just might, be around for another generation or two to come.

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