

Two Guys Meet Up At A Bar ©

JK Savoy

Based on an excerpt from my dystopian novel, And Then There's Lily

The last blush of sunlight vanished behind the horizon. A full moon cast a glow so nightcrawlers, much like myself, might know our way. Leaving the taxi after laying a fifty on the least truth seeking of Manhattan cab drivers, I shouted, “Feed your head is what the dormouse said!” As the cab vanished around the corner, I mumbled, “But it didn’t get fed in there!” Gazing to the heavens, I became lost in Friday evening’s brief sonata of silence: A time when the key to Manhattan is passed from last commuter to first reveler. In that fleeting flash of stillness, if one listens closely, one might hear the flutter of the night bird’s wings as it flies across the moon. Standing on the edge of time, space and West Broadway, I imagined my erstwhile philosopher-cab driver, Bindaihr Duhndat’s walking on a tropical beach sharing mangoes with our primate cousins as the Big Apple’s gutter water streamed past my feet. I stared at the darkening sky and stopped dead in my tracks to see a helicopter’s flashing strobe lights pierce the void. As the lights faded from view, motionless, I asked myself, “Why am I here? I have the means to go anywhere I want at the drop of a hat, yet here I am.” During my stalled epiphanic moment, an air conditioner fell from an upper window landing three feet before me. Taking that as a sign of the relevance of my momentary spontaneous pause, I exhaled.

While I turned to peruse the rubble in my path, a voice from above shouted, “Sorry!”

I shouted back, “But I sure as hell won’t be!” and continued along my way.

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Synchronicitously, as if commanded by a maestro's baton, Friday night's partygoing chaos erupted in faultless rhythm with a thunderstorm's timpani-like rumbling. As browbeaten faces fled their cubicles for their happy-hour amnesty, lightning exploded throughout SoHo: Its rolling thunder shaking the ground beneath all. From the blackening sky, a glimmer of light peeked defiantly from the moon's fading face as a cloudburst showered upon mine. Undaunted by the deluge, I laughed imagining Bindaihr winking from on high as the moon's final glimmer became diminished by a lightning flash. Awestruck and energized, my mind emptied itself of thought: My sense of being invigorated by the wonderous rain enveloping me. Free of the mundane, my head became filled with an amazing, singular question: 'Why not? At the drop of a purple turban, Bindaihr did it! So what's holding me back?' Upon realizing that the power to change everything lies in where I plant my next step, a cloudburst of release flowed along my body seeping into every pore, purging me of my customary lethargy as I moved on.

Catharsis complete, I asked myself, 'Why not abscond from this hypocritical ball of absurdity and perverted traditional values?' Imagining myself picking fruit from trees and freely mingling with uninhibited primates and other enlightened humans, I said, "Why not give myself the chance to live totally free in Nature? Why the hell not?" Waiting for the right time for an opening between traffic so I might dart from one edge of West Broadway to the other, I said, "Speaking of faraway idyllic places, I hope Bindaihr is finding the answers he'd been seeking by living among the mountain apes and mangoes as I'm hoping in vain to find mine in The Apple."

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Popping my umbrella and running for the Roost's door, I thought, 'Don't wish anything on him, Simon. Unlike yours, his head's not looking into the abyss of a wishing well. In fact, if he stood at that well, he would tell you, *"If you lean too far, you may fall in with hope as your passenger. Look inward: Answers one seeks lie within the question from which they sprang. Do not turn to the chaos of hope to hear what may dwell in the stillness of an open mind."*

I said to myself, 'Good boy, Simon. Bindaihr might just very well say all of that. Now all I need is a realistic life plan. But hey, Simon Blake's life is all about planning, now isn't it? Shit! What I need right now is a friggin' strategy to close this umbrella and slither between two of four revolving doors without getting soaked or the umbrella getting crushed. Reality really sucks!'

Sheltered from the rain in a wedge of space between whirling doors, I saw my friend Tom waiting for me at the bar and thought, 'See? Progress has been made. Now I'm about to amble around on only one spiritual crutch.' The doors flapped behind me as I thought, 'Just as Bindaihr spins me along the ethereal and lands me upon a passing cloud of hope, Doctor Tom points to my feet and lets me know whether or not they're stuck in the mud: And if so, how far in over my head I may be. Footloose and head still in the clouds, I plopped down one stool away from Tom saying the first thing that came to my mouth: "If I told you that people don't think things through anymore, you'd be the first one to tell me that I make a damn good living by providing all of the digital data they need for their instant gratification."

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“I would? Not that you’d be putting words into my mouth or anything, right Simon?”

“When you think about it Tom, people today blindly process passed along information. There’s no thinking or coming to terms with how they truly feel about anything at all! They’re too damn busy embalming their brains with social media or the psycho-formaldehyde of anything preceded by, *‘Breaking News!’* followed by, *‘We’ll be back with more on that, right after these very important messages...’*” to which, Tom smirked and downed his Grey Goose.

A vision of green uniformed, assault rifle armed guardians of conventional wisdom at the gateway of my perception flashed before me as I blurted, “When you and I stopped our idiot friends from shooting one another during last week’s camping trip gone wild, we didn’t process and then cross reference data regarding the situation, check for precedents and act after we covered our asses. We saw it for what it was, went with our guts and pulled off a rescue. Right?”

“I guess so. But I was rather drunk at the time. Simon, where are you going with this?”

“Not one of those stoned out assholes even said, thanks!”

“No expectations no disappointments, Simon. Like I asked, where is this going?”

“I guess I’m going to everything going on in this asinine society that’s created this mess that we call life in the big city. I mean, it’s getting more and more like that experiment where they kept adding more and more rats to a confined space and...”

“... And yeah Simon, the more they did the more the, until then, passive rats became increasingly aggressive and territorial

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until they were killing and cannibalizing one another for more space. Hey bro, Behavioral Science could have spared those innocent rats and simply observed a crowded, stalled F train in a tunnel with no air conditioning. So, what's up?"

"Sorry for my rambling, but lately my usual observing of societal insignificance is taking a back seat to doing something like ... well, chucking all the city's bullshit and joining Bindaihr in 'who knows where' and living among the orangutans in the forest! At least everyone gathering for communal coconut cracking and delousing makes more sense than this bullshit we live in!"

"Simon my philosophical friend, have you ever considered that your sudden high mindedness just may be rooted in pretentiousness that's hiding a bruised male ego? Bottom line bro, you're not the first dude who got dumped and you're not going to be the last. Get yourself a hottie of a rental or better yet, avoid a case of the clap and take your love life situation in hand."

"Why are you turning all of this around on me?" Seeing him gaping from the TV to the silent calling of a vodka bottle I asked, "Okay Tom, what the hell happened?"

"Everything's still processing ... And, why do you think that something has happened?" As Tom caught Freddy the bartender's skillfully slid Grey Goose into his waiting hand, I said, "Dude, I've known you since we were crazy young 'vagrants by choice' living in Central Park like rats. I think I've earned my stripes on the subject of my hypocritical best friend."

"That's great! Then you should know that it's time to change the subject, bro!"

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"Freddy, please make me my usual Grey Goose with a shot of Apple Pucker."

"Bro, when are you gonna say it like it is? It's a fucking Appletini! So get real!"

"And when are you gonna drop that fucking subject, Tom? Anyway, new topic! Dig this: If I could have my tech people install a recovery program into the database of the insane asylum America's become, perhaps normalcy might return. That's it! They could load an anti-absurdity virus, and have it attack all of the stupidity files."

"Then there wouldn't be a fucking thing left of this brave New America, Simon."

"Exactly! But something like that is not going to happen, now is it Tom?"

My expectation of a light, humorous response from my friend was diminished when he slurred at my reflection in the mirror behind the bar and said, "Fuck it and forget about it! It's all gone too far, Simon!" Pointing at the TV's talking head he added, "We're not living in a goddamn country anymore! We're living within a security system that has taken on a life of its own. Ironically, it's a monster that was created from our fears of being consumed by a monster! It's like the puppies in Orwell's Animal Farm, all cute and cuddly until they mature into attack dogs and maul the electorate. Ol' Benny Franklin was so fucking right when he said, *'Those who surrender liberty for security deserve neither'*."

After kicking back the contents of his glass, he blasted, "You just said: Install an anti-absurdity virus? Yeah, right! Bro, harikari is so much quicker. The way it is; even if you were to

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put poison into the belly of the beast, it would grow two feet taller from it and then gouge your fucking eyes out! Simon my friend, load anything down the throat of Database USA and it will know you, track you and ultimately wrap you within its tentacles and squeeze you to death with your own information. It's become ominous, I tell you. Hell yeah! It's insidious and pervasive!"

Before I could answer, we heard, "*Breaking News!*" sounding from the TV above the bar. Lifting our heads, we saw the camera panning away from computer equipment being carried by US marshals then zeroing in on the face of a handcuffed man of about seventy. Upon seeing the camera, the otherwise distinguished looking prisoner tucked his head down, turned away the best he could while the voice-over announced, "*This morning, acting on direct orders of Secretary Arch-Bishop Harland Gates, special agents from the Department of Faith Based Initiatives arrested Senator Roy Stone. Regarding the arrest, Secretary Arch-Bishop Gates' newly appointed undersecretary, Reverend Bryan Auslander, had this to say...*"

"I shouted, "I know that holy roller asshole! Now I've fucking heard everything!"

Covering my mouth, Tom said, "No you haven't. So shut the hell up and listen to him!"

Reverend Auslander's face filled the bar's ninety inch monitor as he said, "*A blessed day to all. Today, we regret to see the career of such a prominent member of our sacred New American government come to this. But sadly, although Senator Stone had been a constructive voice for the opposition, and worked with our Regime in many areas whole-heartedly, he fell*

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victim to his darker side. President Greene's thoughts and prayers are with him.

"After a lengthy investigation, Senator Stone's hard drive was found to contain the most egregious of sinful activity: frequent visits to child pornography sites. Whether they terrorize our skies or our young, seditionists such as this will not escape the ever-vigilant eyes and ears of those who are there to protect us. May the good Lord bless our New America and its servants!"

Seizing the remote from Freddy's hand, Tom lowered the volume saying, "They fucking set him up! Like you said about loading a virus, who's to stop them from planting incriminating files into anyone's computer? Ask The Regime for a look-see of their black bag capabilities? We know the answer to that one, *'No comment in the interest of national security.'* New America, you just heard the quid pro quo for surrendered liberty," raising his glass, Tom said, "And here's to you, Benny Franklin. Ya sure as hell saw this shit coming!"

"Did you know Senator Stone, Tom?"

"I knew of him. He's no saint, but he doesn't hide behind the cross like they do. Think about it, he's been a senior senator for two of his five terms. He's served honorably on every committee you could fucking name," pointing to the TV that showed federal agents pushing Senator Stone's head down and then shove him into a black Suburban, Tom slurred, "Throw the pedophile name at anyone and the world will beat his door down so they can lynch him! That entire fucking regime should be wearing hard hats with those little lights stuck on the front."

"Why?"

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Following one well aimed click of the TV remote's OFF button, Tom looked me in the eye and said, "Because they're nothing but miners! Not the kind of miners that ride a coal car a mile underground, earn a day's pay and a lung full of the thing that'll finally do them in. That would be too goddamn honest. Data-mining is what these bastards do best."

"What's that, Tom?" asked the IT-illiterate owner of several data companies.

"Talk about pervasive? Data mining is casting a wide net by way of all communications means at their disposal, so they can see and hear what lands at their feet."

"How does that work?"

"This shit's really scary. That old saying; '*Looks like a duck, walks like a duck*' today goes to keyword searches. For instance, if you emailed or said the word 'gather', and that was the word they were seeking at that moment, you and your dossier are placed into a file with every saint, scoundrel or ten year old brat who may have said the same. It's automatic thanks to A-I geniuses much like your people. Those digital rats chew away at everything we're about."

"Sorry, Tom."

"Hey, Al Einstein never figured that ideologues and their crusaders might grab the key to devastating the universe from his scribbling five symbols on a blackboard. As for Simon Blake's invasive application of ones and zeros? If all you were trying to do was unemploy a few pencil pushers so you could share in the New American dream, you're bloody well forgiven."

"Thanks Tom."

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“I’m sorry for laying this shit on you, bro, but I’ve spent my life curing people who spend their lives trying to rip off or annihilate one another. Our fucking species’ self-loathing, self-destructive processing totally pisses me off! It’s like, overnight, we’ve gone from throwing rocks to pitching nukes at each other in the name of the same idea of God, but in different alphabets. It’s the mirror maddening its reflection!” Pointing to the bar’s intercom, rhetorically, Tom asked, “Is this thing on?” He looked around and then said, “Who knows who’s listening anymore? In the old days, the snoops used to sneak through your window and rifle through your sock drawer, but they thought twice because of a thing called the Fourth Amendment. Now, they use the specter of an eternal phantom in the shadows to override The Constitution and all of our rights. These Neo-Nazis leap into the phone system or Internet under the guise of national security or in Stone’s case, finding illicit activity. Give the bastards credit, they’ve eliminated all opposition.”

With the TV remote held hostage in his left hand, Tom’s right awaited tribute in the form of another Grey Goose. Noting his restiveness, I looked into the mirror and said to my friend’s reflection, “Let’s cut all of your distraction bullshit! What’s really going on with you, bro?”

“What makes you think that something’s going on with me, Simon?”

“Because every Friday night, when you sit at the bar, get drunk and rant about The Regime, it’s followed by a sober Monday morning phone call when you finally tell me what caused you to get hammered in the first place. By the way, it usually comes at ten AM.”

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“You think you know me, Simon?”

“Yeah, by now, pretty much.”

Yielding the remote to Freddy, bourbon in hand, Tom confessed, “Yeah, you sure do.”

“So, what’s up, Tom?”

“Bro, did you ever look at someone and know, unless you do everything short of running backwards, today will be the broken guardrail where your life took that wrong turn?”

For a long moment, we stared at one another via the bar’s mirror. Then I answered, “When you put it like that, I can’t say I ever did.” Watching him swirl the ice cubes in his drink with his index finger, I asked, “Did something happen, dude? Hey, are you okay?”

Removing his finger from the glass, he looked at it, laughed and said, “Doctor heal thyself?” shook his head, kicked back his vodka and declared, “But only if you can Doctor, only if you fucking can!” After signaling for another, he gazed into his empty glass murmuring, “I often wondered if the word ‘spirits’ came about when people might have believed that alcohol contained a mystical force capable of ridding a body of evil.”

Taking the glass from his hand, I nudged him answering, “Perhaps, ‘til they figured that the spirits might be that very evil,” addressing his spaced out silence, I said, “Tom, it looks like what we need here is a damned good landscaper.”

“What? Why the hell would we need that, Simon?”

“To get rid of the bush you’re beating around! Now, what the hell’s going on here?”

Turning away from the mirror, he looked me dead in the eye saying, “Bro, I still have no fucking idea! Up until two

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weeks ago, everything five miles north of that guardrail was what my life was all about. Doctor Tom was set on cruise-control rolling along an endless straightaway. All systems were GO; locked in a slipstream of one amazing day becoming the next. Who could ask for anything more?” Finger in his drink, he said, “And what a life it was! I’m at the top of my field, Aimee’s finishing grad school next month and Todd’s fellowship at Twin Cities Medical is a dream come true. Laurie’s become a VP at her company and we were making bunnies look like cloistered nuns!”

“Was? Okay Tom, you’re not going to simply come right out with it, are you?”

“You’ve known me too long, bro. Do I ever get right to the point? But I am getting there, Simon. Trust me.” Rubbing his lips with his booze soaked finger, he asked, “Did you ever see that little diner on old Route-9 about a mile north of Tarrytown?”

“No.”

“Neither did I, not until a couple of weeks ago.”

Sipping at my drink, I listened while Tom laid it all out: “There was a derailment on the Metroliner so I had to take the car into the city that day. You know how I hate to drive. When I got downstairs, the fucking coffee pot was empty! Aimee’s been back at home studying since the flood in her dorm room so she and Laurie must have blabbed through every drop. Hey, when I think about it, it’s better that Aimee drank my share rather than dropping uppers or loading up with those hot shot energy drinks from the 7-11 to stay awake, so she can study for her finals. But I fucking need my morning jolt!”

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Eyes bulging, he exhaled abruptly saying, “I must have come off like a total asshole, shoulders shrugged with an ‘*is there no me here?*’ look on my face. Aimee said she’d make another pot. She said it would take only a few minutes. I guess I was pissed off that my twenty year robo-routine was broken, so I had to play the martyr and prove a point,” downing half of his Grey Goose, he said, “Talk about famous last words.”

“What were they, Tom?”

Shaking his head as if in disbelief, he said, “I kissed them both good-bye and told them, ‘*Don’t worry, I’ll catch something down the road.*’”

“So, you did remember seeing that diner.”

“No! Like I said before, I never noticed it being there until that day. Actually, I was on my way to Starbucks at the strip mall.” Like the fish describing that shiny thing he saw just before the fight of his life began, Tom went on to say, “Simon, it was like something out of The Twilight Zone! I mean, maybe it was there all along and I never took notice or maybe it dropped from the sky beyond the bend just to fuck up everything in my life.”

“Tom, I’m confused. Getting back to ‘*Doctor cure thyself,*’ and ‘*Something down the road.*’ Dude, you get a dose of salmonella or something from that diner?”

As if the bush had re-grown between us, he went on to say, “Cure yourself? Sure, you think you know yourself? Bullshit! So yeah bro, I got a dose of something.” Staring into the rest of his drink, he said, “Anyway, I came around the turn on Old Route-9, and all I saw in front of me was this blinking antique neon sign that read, *The Castle Diner – Best Coffee Around.* I knew it

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couldn't be true but, without thinking, I turned into their lot." Gulping down his drink, he said, "Simon, it was like a foretelling. I had this crazy feeling in my gut, but I couldn't figure out if it was my better judgment yelling at me to bug out or I was just hungry. So I sat in front of the place and listened to the radio for a bit and tried to let things in my head settle down."

"Let's see, was there a heavy mist and a ship's horn sounding in the distance?"

"Cut the bullshit bro and hear me out! Okay, so you know how I've always been about Carly Simon. A real gentleman never leaves a lady halfway through it, so I sat in the car waiting for You're So Vain to finish on the radio. The moment it did, I saw her walk out of the diner."

"Carly Simon?"

Dismissing my cheekiness, he went on to say, "Bro, it wasn't that there was any magical cliché eye contact or anything. You know, it was something like that tired, shiny lure anecdote of yours. Yeah, it was more of a glance, and as far as I was concerned, pretty much only coming from me or, what came from her was; she probably just dug my Benz. I mean, it wasn't that she was that great looking, but there was just something about her, you know?"

"Was there a Beatles song playing when you thought that?"

"Fuck you! That's real funny Simon! I've put up with your personal shit for all these years, so knock off the cheekiness and hear your best friend out!"

"Sorry, Tom. Please go on."

"Anyway, as I was saying, there was nothing I could put my finger on. There was this thing about her that kept my eyes

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looking and got the fires of adolescent Tommy Payne burning inside of me. Hey, bro! Get this, I ain't known a feeling like that since high school when Becky Freeman's skirt flew up when she jumped from the top of the cheerleader pyramid..."

"Shit! Rumor was, Becky never wore panties! How all the guys prayed for a windy day."

"Knock it off, Simon I'm talking here ...but you're right, Becky didn't wear panties ... I should know. Anyhow, after a few blue-ball flashbacks, the spirit of impulsive eighteen year old Tommy Payne tugged at my door handle. Then, the tempering effect of old Doctor Tom, having survived into his third decade of wedded bliss, succeeded in folding his arms and letting another song play. Though I kept looking, I actually waited for her to get to her car and drive off."

"So if nothing happened – what happened, Tom?"

"My roving eye had been in check so long, I guess what I did was simply part of that long buried unconscious process. Once the coast was clear, I went into the diner and ordered a coffee and a toasted corn muffin to go."

"So that's it? Tom, if no harm – then no foul."

"I wish! Blindsided must have been the order of the day. Bag in hand, I walked out of the diner, turned the corner outside of the vestibule and the next thing I know, I'm wearing her bag of hot coffees. Of course she apologized. She told me she had to bring them back because the waitress put milk in them. I was grateful they weren't black."

"Tom! Is there a point here?"

"Yeah, there is, Simon. Standing there, soaking wet, I got lost in her eyes. We went back inside. The waitress gave us

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some paper towels. I started to dry myself off, but Annie seemed to be taking pleasure in helping me and dammit, it felt fucking great!”

“Annie?”

“Yeah, Annie,” Tom paused and then said, “You were right.”

“I was right about what?”

“The whole thing was as surreal as that ship’s horn in a heavy mist thing you said. It was like I became fogged in and lost sight of everything else in my life. Yeah, her name is Annie. She’s an owner of The Lost Word. It’s an antiquarian book store in an eighteen-sixties house. Her store’s a stone’s throw from the diner. She lives upstairs from it. It was her day off and she was getting coffee for the girls who were covering for her.”

“Tom. You’re closing in on it. Now ya gotta tell me what happened next!”

“If you’re guessing that we wound up in her apartment and made love, you’re right. Simon, it’s still like a goddamn dream! It was like I was someone else! As I came, I felt like my integrity and everything meaningful became ripped from my soul.”

“Then what?”

“As soon as that feeling passed, my hands were all over her and we did it again. Damn!”

“Tom, during the past few Friday nights, we’ve been getting together like we always do. I’ve known you most of my life and I ...I mean, come on...I never suspected...”

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“Neither did Laurie and, in a way, neither did I. I guess I was still in that fog waiting for it to clear and drive off to the city. The whole damn thing is surreal!”

“How long did it go on?”

With Tom quietly staring into his reflection, I asked, “So what’s going to happen with you and Laurie?”

“Happen? Simon, the shit’s happened!”

“What?”

“It’s as if I’m not really a doctor, but I’ve played one at my office for twenty years. Simon, I aired out the one eyed snake and let it lead the way only for the first time. I guess the learned doctor was blinder than the fool in his pants. Medical books tell you that an erecting penis is becoming engorged with blood. This dumb-ass doctor will tell you it’s gathering every ounce of honesty and fidelity the mind and soul might contain.”

Snickering at me, he said, “Don’t rub it in, Simon! I know, I’m the one who always tells you about the ounce of whisky in your gut and the isopropyl ‘after the act’ to your pecker ratio. And yeah, I’m the one who always tells you to walk away from the bitch and get the fuck on home and jerk the hell off!”

“HIV?”

“Thank God, no. A week later, after my balls swelled and I was pissing fire, I treated myself and Annie. Gonorrhea goes down easy but not guilt, shame and all of those other attributes of an eroding spirit that gets the best of a total asshole.”

“Let me guess; this is where the story goes to your wife?”

“When I got home to Laurie after my first encounter with Annie, it’s strange.... Although I was gushing remorse, I walked into our bedroom and the next thing I knew we were going at it

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again and again! Like I said before, we'd been like bunnies. That didn't stop."

"So you took a little gift home from the book store and gave it to Laurie."

"Only my true friend can find a humor in my personal Hell. Thanks, bro! But yeah, the gift that keeps on giving kept on giving. After I knew that I had the clap, I told Laurie that I wanted her to begin antibiotics because we may have ingested some tainted food."

"What happened?"

"She played me like I was that trout with the shiny thing."

"Bottom line, Tom?"

"A day before I figured it out, she had an appointment with her gynecologist. I guess Doctor Emory thought she was giving Laurie the heads up. She told her she had a dose and put her on antibiotics. How considerate!"

"Where does this leave you?"

"Sleeping on my office couch!"

"And Annie?"

"I'm hoping to close the book on that."

Noting our silence, Freddy clicked CN-Plus back into our reality. Trying to fill the banter void left by Tom's disclosure while watching the commentator, Napoleon Suzuki, sift through empty pages on his desk then search for the teleprompter, I said, "I think Suzuki's upper lip took a full shot of hairspray. Thank God for subtitles or the hearing impaired would be going nuts."

"Thanks, Simon."

"For what?"

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“For trying to change the subject, really. Now shut the fuck up!”

Unable to follow doctor’s orders, I said, “It really is a fucked up world.”

“Okay, I’ll bite. How?”

“Everywhere you go, there’s a goddamn TV monitor showing and telling everyone what matters. Even now, as tight as our conversation was we’re totally distracted.”

“Maybe you are.”

“Really, Tom. It’s like all human connection is something that might exist somewhere between ‘*We’ll be back with more on that...*’ and ‘*...now, we take you live to...!*’ of course, that would mean that the connection won’t be broken by a commercial offering something better, or by that total attention grabber, ‘*Breaking News!*’ ”

“Simon, sometimes you’re too cynical even for the likes of me. Please shut up!”

While CN-Plus hammered at New America’s free will insulting the intelligence of anyone who lowered his drink to watch, I said, “I’ve been thinking about Tina lately.”

“That comes with age. You had your shot at her and you made your choices.”

Gazing at his emptied glass, I thought back to our living in Central Park days and recalled being distracted by a half filled gin bottle beneath a park bench and blurted, “One shitty thing goes down the hatch, I get wasted and conk out while everything good walks out of my life.”

“Bro, considering my latest fuck up, I’m no one to play preacher man so...”

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“Good! Too many of them around. It’s all like a dream,
Tom: Like a fucking dream!”

“Yeah, I can dig it. Your Tina was totally iconic: the poet-codewriter who walked away from it all. She was a very complex person, sometimes a total contradiction.”

“What do you mean by contradiction, Tom?”

“When she wasn’t fucked up on whatever pharmaceutical drug I could cop for her, she would hang out with us and make perfect sense about how America was heading in a dangerous direction. She kind of nailed it. I mean, look at what it’s become. Stoned, Tina was the total grunge. Straight, she sounded like she could have been Jefferson’s speechwriter.”

“So the love of my life was a pill popping patriot, huh?”

“One day, out of the blue, she goes cold sober and takes a stand against meaningless materialism: And men have the balls? So what brings Tina up now?”

“I’ve been wondering lately.... No! I’ve been asking myself if I have the cojones to do it: Walk away from power and money like Tina did and have a purpose to serve! Could I dive off the ledge of all I’ve learned as being of value and let life drift my sorry ass to something real?”

“Drift? Yeah, kind of like our conversation’s been tonight. Okay, Simon, I showed you mine now you show me yours.”

“What do you mean?”

“Fire the fucking landscaper and get rid of that bush you’re beating around, bro! What’s going on here, Simon?”

“I guess it goes to the connection between us and all there may be out there. Like Tina once asked, *‘Where do we end and where does what may be of significance begin?’*”

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Tom seemed to lighten up a bit when he said, “That’s right, Tina was the one who said, *‘You can own the tallest building in New York, but fall from its ledge and you’re just another scream in the wind.’* Then Tom whispered sadly, “Yeah, I’m a real scream...”

“Tell me something Tom, if one’s free-fall is a matter of choice, might that scream be a satori-moment?”

“A what?”

“Total enlightenment! Satori! It’s a Zen thing – the total awakening! The satori-moment is the flash of time when all is realized though nothing may be known...”

“You really miss that purple turbaned cabbie, Bindaihr, don’t you?” Tom scrunched his mouth, looked up a bit and added, “Oh yeah! I know what you mean. It’s like Thelma and Louise when they knew all was lost and let the T-Bird fly off to who knows where or what!”

“Yeah, Tom. It’s like flying through a window to Nirvana! Somewhere between the leap and the crash, their spirits soar beyond the wreckage and into an eternal freeze-frame.”

Tom looked toward the ceiling, then stared at me through the mirror and asked, “You’re actually considering leaving it all behind, aren’t you Simon?”

“It’s in the feeling, borderline thinking stage, Tom.”

“But there’s so damn much for you to walk away from. So where do you start?”

“Tom, the only thing we can’t walk away from is a broken leg. I’m no idiot. Tina and her friend, John? Each of them had to have taken something of value with them. As for me, I need time to separate the things in my life that are holding me back from

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what's screaming for me to break away. On the other hand, no one gets out of this life alive, right?"

Casting his vision someplace within the bottles above the bar, Tom said, "Unless Thelma or Louise latched on to a cloud somewhere between the guardrail and the rocks, not even them."

"At this point, there's no distinction between me nor any other sad sack in this fucked up city. It seems like our wagon train is in a circle and we're being picked off little by little by that holier than thou regime. Tom, deep down I know there's no walking away from any of that bullshit. But I feel torn... There's gotta be a safe haven for a rich, single dude like me and my midlife crisis to make a fresh start. It's goddamn time for me to break free from these Holy Gestapo motherfuckers and have me a real life!"

With a faraway stare, Tom asked, "You talkin' about Heaven? Bro, rumor has it, getting there's a killer of a ride."

"Cut it out, Tom. I'm talking about a place where there's no word for hate, war nor wanting. A place where people and our primate predecessors can share in the abundance and everyone lives freely without coveting what others have. I hear that it's called ... Ah, who knows what? Anyway, a place like that is probably somewhere in the South Pacific ... that'd my guess."

"Tell me bro, are its creamy mountain peaks capped with chocolaty sprinkles?"

Just as I replied, "I'm serious." the TV blasted, "*Breaking News!*"

Like linked antennae, our heads swung upward targeting the TV above the bar. Instantly, a commentator's face flooded

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the screen as he said solemnly: *“We take you, live, to Washington for a special announcement from the newly appointed Undersecretary for Faith Based Initiatives, Bishop Bryan Auslander with an announcement of utmost importance.”*

“Simon, didn’t we meet that Auslander dude at your pilot friend’s soiree last June?”

“Yeah Tom, Guy gave him a flying lesson a while back and told him to go buy a boat!”

“What did Auslander say to that?”

“That holy-roller told Guy how people like himself could build The Lord’s arc, just to leave people like Guy behind with the dinosaurs. Bottom line, they slapped high fives and headed for the bar.”

“Another round, Bro?”

“Or, smoke a joint?”

“Cool!”

“Hey, remember back in our park days how the cops always had the best weed...?”