

Everything Which Is Not Forbidden Is Allowed

by Chris Okum



An excerpt from *Henry Krinkle*, the 1980 novelization of the sequel to *Taxi Driver*

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There's a new hack who only works days and some of the other hacks are saying he's the smartest person they've ever met. That's what Geronimo Joe told me. Same with Perfect Patty. They said to me, Travis, you have to meet Nick, he's a philosophy professor who teaches night classes at City College and he's also a composer and at night he drives a taxi to make ends meet. I didn't ask them what kind of music Nick composes. I don't even know if that's the right

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word, "composes." It can't be. It sounds funny to me, "composes." Maybe that's the right word. Everything I say has been sounding funny to me lately. Every word that comes out of my mouth sounds wrong, or it sounds like something I wouldn't even say. "Composes." Nick "composes" music. I guess what they mean by that is that Nick is one of those people who likes classical music. I can't stand classical music. There are too many notes and no lyrics and when I'm listening to music I need to listen to someone else saying words that I would want to say but can't manage to get out of my head. Lately I've been listening to a lot of Cliff Richard, who sings about things I think about a lot. I really like the song 'We Don't Talk Any More.' "Well, it seems a long time ago, you were the lonely one," sings Cliff. "Now it comes to letting go, you are the only one. Do you know what you've done?" It's like Cliff Richard snuck into my mind during the middle of the night and stole my words. Geronimo Joe says I should stop listening to so much Cliff Richard and listen to Bruce Springsteen instead. So I went out and bought one of Springsteen's albums and I really couldn't understand what he was talking about and I didn't even believe what he was talking about when I could understand what he was talking about. I also didn't understand anything this new guy Nick said when I finally met him today. I decided to pick up an extra shift. I stood around and listened while Nick talked. Everyone was just standing there and it looked like they were really paying attention to what he was saying, so I pretended to do the same. But I had no idea what he was talking about. He was speaking English but in an English accent and the words made no sense because he was using them in ways I've never heard before. And it sounded like he was speaking in riddles. I think when you have someone who speaks like this and speaks in an accent it's easy for them to pull one over on people like myself. There was also something about him that made me think that maybe he's driving a taxi for all the wrong reasons. Like for research purposes or something. He seemed very confident in what he was saying and the way he was standing made me think it wasn't the first time a group of people had stood around and listened to every

single word he had to say. He spoke in very long sentences and then when he was done with one long sentence he would move onto the next, but not before looking around and smiling at everyone. When Nick would smile at everyone, everyone smiled back, so I smiled back too. Nick used a lot of big words, and he also used words that didn't sound to me like real words, like "circuit-crouch." He said the word "circuit-crouch" and when he said it everyone nodded their heads like they understood what he was talking about, so I nodded too. I don't want anyone to think I don't understand what certain words are. I think it would probably be best for me to stay away from this new guy Nick, because he seems like the type of person who will make me feel bad about myself. Nick doesn't seem like the type of person who would like the music of Cliff Richard. There is a song by Cliff Richard, 'Devil Woman,' and when I listen to it, I feel like Cliff must have some kind of device that is able to read my mind. "I drank the potion she offered me," sings Cliff. "I found myself on the floor, then I looked in those big green eyes and I wondered what I'd come there for." I swear to God that I have said those exact same words to myself, in the same exact order. Sometimes I feel like I'm the only person on planet Earth. Sometimes it feels to me like the world ended and I'm the only one who survived, and everyone else, they're just figments of my imagination. Sometimes I feel like if I died the whole world would die with me. Or maybe I'm already dead. There are certain possibilities you can't just wave away with a sweep of your hand. I am still not one hundred percent positive whether or not I am dreaming of the world or the world is dreaming of me.

