

Testimony Of A Golden Elevator

by Chris Okum



To Travel On In Old Accustomed Ways

Sometimes he found himself staring out the window. The morning light smiling at him. Every day he was called to watch the hassles down on the street. He tried to send a psychic signal across to the Palisades. Lately he'd been getting messages himself, staticky missives from outer space. What he was being told was blowing his mind. In time it wouldn't change anything, though. He wished he could do something to help the world from feeling like it did. "Come on," he would say to himself. "Maybe it's too late." It was such a shame. When something turned to nothing and no one was there to see. He was trying to make a difference. But he was talking to God

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only knows. "Ready," he said to himself. "This is the way I am. Yeah. And they're not going away." Sometimes he had no idea where he was. He was going up, up, up. There was a finger in the sky. The night became clear and then increased itself to reveal there was zero to fear.

Love And The Bed

After her experiences making major motion pictures in the 1960s, as well as the myriad one and two-night stands with some of Hollywood's most aggressive leading men, Sue Lyon decided that she would decompensate from the unfulfilling life of rough, casual sex by engaging in "Bundling," a courtship practice common in 17th and 18th-century colonial America, especially in New England and among Pennsylvania Dutch communities. In lieu of intercourse with the scores of men who continued to pursue her with extreme prejudice, Sue would weed out the serious from the unserious by sharing a bed fully clothed, separated by a board. The goal was to allow intimacy and conversation while preserving chastity. The first person Sue tried bundling with was her *Love, American Style* co-star, George Tobias. "This is an exhilarating experiment focused on many areas of our self image," said Tobias as he laid fully clothed on the other side of the board from Lyon. "With the help of this ritual I can learn about myself, and hopefully emerge as the healthy, attractive, dynamic person I truly am. It's going to be exciting." Tobias waited for Lyon to say something. For a moment he thought maybe she was asleep. He could sense that she wasn't, though. And he could smell her. Her scent was driving him crazy. She smelled like coconut and the breeze that comes off of the ocean in Bali. He felt high. He put his hand on the board. "This is going to be fun," said Tobias. "That's right," said Lyon. Tobias gave up on bedding Lyon after their third bundling appointment. Lyon would continue to try bundling on several occasions before giving it up herself and sleeping with Roland Harrison, husband number two, not only on the first date, but ten minutes into the first date. George Tobias died of

bladder cancer at age 78 at Cedars Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles. En route to the mortuary, the momentarily unattended station wagon transporting Tobias's body from the hospital was hijacked and driven three blocks before the thieves noticed the body, promptly abandoned the vehicle and, according to witnesses, ran screaming from the scene.

More Than This

From *I Need You To Need Me: How Celebrity Contaminates The World*, by Alexandra Veblen, Oxford University Press, 2009:

"Celebrity is to the collective human psyche what Capitalism is to the Earth: a concept which necessitates the involuntary expungement of every last drop of energy from the ground so that it can continue to function. Celebrity has left the majority of human civilization affectless husks. We are unable to give love or compassion to anyone but the celebrities who demand it all. Surely it's not a coincidence that the modern manifestation of celebrity was created co-terminus with fossil fuel production becoming the dominant form of Capitalist exploitation. Celebrities are micro versions of Shell or Exxon; they give a little, but they take more than a lot. Celebrity is, at its core, a monstrous form of existence. Because there is never enough adulation, never enough love, never enough money. The narcissist demands an endless supply of what it craves. Nothing is never enough. Until, finally, there is nothing at all."

Heaven Is Cold Without Any Soul

There is a man who lives in a van directly across the street from their apartment building. Everyone in the building has decided to refer to him as Van Man. He shits in the street and hurls anti-Semitic slurs at everyone in the neighborhood even though there is no way for him to know who is and who isn't Jewish. A woman caught him wiping his ass in plain view the other day and when she

was parking her car down the street from the van her tires rolled through a huge pile of poop which then splattered onto the driver's side door. Last week he tried to physically assault an old woman and her granddaughter. The woman who lives on the ground level closest to the street, Teri, says she saw Van Man down at the Pier, where he was hawking what looked like a book he had made at Kinko's. Teri said the book was about 'Alternative 3,' a consipracy based on a mockumentary that was shown on Britain's ITV in 1977, said conspiracy having something to do with America and Russia sending physicists, engineers, astronomers to Mars and the Moon as early as 1962. Teri also said she skimmed the book, got the gist of it, which is that human beings settled Mars and the Moon over 60 years ago, that there are multiple colonies on the dark side of both, that Earth's elites are just waiting until the ecological crisis reaches a tipping point, at which time they will all get on spaceships and go to Mars and the Moon, where they will be able to continue their lifestyles immediately and without a hitch, and that Elon Musk talks about going to Mars as a way of diverting the population away from the fact that we already have. Additionally, Teri said Van Man asked her if she was going to buy they book and when she said no he said something to the affect of, yeah, of course not, all you Jews are cheap, to which Teri said she replied by pulling the cross out from under her t-shirt and waved it in Van Man's face. Multiple people who live in the neighborhood and not just the building have called the police to complain about Van Man, all to no avail. The newest tenant called the police to complain after he was walking into a Starbucks with his daughter and Van Man was walking out and looked at them and said, "Goddamn fucking Jews everywhere." The tenant wrote down Van Man's license plate number and called the police. They told the tenant there was nothing they could do about Van Man, not unless there was video or pictures of him committing a crime, specifically a video edited according to Walter Murch's "Rule of Six" (the criteria for making effective cuts: emotion, story, rhythm, eye trace, two-dimensional space, and three-dimensional space) and scored to music which served as a counterpoint to the action (for

example, Van Man defecating onto the pavement while Emerson, Lake & Palmer's "Fanfare for the Common Man" plays over the image), as well as pictures which had the same oneiric qualities as those taken by Diane Arbus and Weegee. The tenant told the police he would try, but that he wasn't sure he knew how to do that. He said, "I feel like I would have to do a stakeout and then jump out of the bushes and capture him like an angry paparazzo, or maybe hang out with him long enough so that at some point he would feel comfortable enough around me to expose his true self." The police left a message for the tenant a few days after he had called to complain. They said they ran Van Man's license plate number and that he had an extensive record of crimes and misdemeanors. He was arrested for arson. He was arrested for animal cruelty. He was arrested for domestic abuse. He was arrested for stalking. He was arrested for public intoxication. He was arrested for operating a vehicle while impaired. They also said his legal name was Adam Sandler. When the tenant laughed the police asked him what was so funny. "Well," said the tenant, "it's just that, despite all this Adam Sandler has done, I still think I like him better than the other Adam Sandler." The police did not laugh. They told the tenant the other Adam Sandler was a huge supporter of Blue Lives Matter. They told the tenant to call them back when he was serious about doing something nice for the community, which the tenant did, weeks later, after being informed that Van Man had sexually assaulted an elderly woman sitting in her heavy duty rollator walker. When the police asked the tenant why the elderly woman didn't report the crime herself, the tenant said, "She has dementia. She thinks the assault happened to someone else. And we can't convince her otherwise." The police clicked their tongues and then sang "So In Love," by Orchestral Maneuvers in the Dark (which got as high as 26 on the Billboard Hot 100 in 1985): *Heaven is cold/Without any soul/It's hard to believe/I was so in love with you*. When the police were done with their accapella version of the song the tenant asked them why they had just sung a song to him that he had hoped he would never hear again. "Just a reflex," said the police. "We always sing that song

to victims of sexual assault. We find it calms them down. We don't know why though. Some think it's the lyrics, others think it's the timbre of our voices when we harmonize. We assume it's the former, but sincerely hope it's the latter."

Wet Platinum

Vince was about to close the book on his career as an aging high-end male escort to rich, older actresses when he met Mark, an aspiring male escort, and took him under his wing as his protege. The only problem with Mark was that he was still under the control of not only his father, who owned a car wash in Studio City, but also his high school girlfriend, a bossy little girl with white blonde hair who managed the car wash. Mark's first gig was an assignation with Marg Helgenberger, and like most first-time male escorts who slept with aging actresses, Mark fell in love with the job, head-over-heels, madly, truly, deeply. But then events out of Mark's control conspired against him and cut his career as a high-end male escort short. His father's car wash was set on fire. His girlfriend was kidnapped by a group of ICE agents and sexually assaulted. In the wake of these crimes Mark found himself helping his father to rebuild the car wash as well as helping his girlfriend recover from the trauma of the attack by the ICE agents. Mark had to hang up his lube. No more Marg Helgenberger. No more Jennifer Tilly. No more Elizabeth Berkley. Vince felt bad for Mark, of course, but what could he do, some men got to live their lives drenched, others got to live their lives making sure that the back seat crevices were vacuumed properly. Vince spent his early retirement at the gym, pumping iron, even when he was tired from a night out with Tea Leoni, a former client he had agreed to continue servicing, pro bono. Vince was obsessed with building up his lats, and in between sets he ruminated about Mark, remembered what he had heard from the lady clients, how Mark's specialty was to cover the entirety of his hairless body with a thin layer of baby oil, a trick Vince had taught Mark. Vince looked around the gym at all the other men trying their hardest to

mold their bodies into something acceptable to the opposite sex and he couldn't find an ounce of talent. His lips curled into a sneer. "Mark could've been something," thought Vince as he grabbed the handles of the pulldown machine. "Wet he was a star."

Thieves Like Us

Two tenured professors - one a professor in the Department of Education, the other a professor in the Department of Philosophy - pass each other in the hallway of an august East Coast institution of higher learning boasting a \$32.9 billion endowment and a reputation as a factory for Supreme Court Justices. The Professor of Education says to the Professor of Philosophy, "All those students sign up for your classes only because you're in the news for killing your wife, acting as your own counsel, and then convincing the jury that you're not guilty even though all of the evidence and witness testimony points to your unequivocal guilt. They just want to hear how you did it." The Professor of Philosophy says, "And what an excellent reason to take a philosophy class."

Red Means Run

The Old Man was begging someone to write a novel about him. Every morning he put on his MIT sweatshirt and walked briskly in the middle of the street, a busy street, a street which acted as a connecting tributary between a dense residential neighborhood and the downtown area in which these residents worked. Drivers were forced to slow down and go around the Old Man, who, for the record, did not graduate from MIT, and who, in fact, did not go to college at all, instead opting to work at his father's beverage technology warehouse directly out a high school, working his way up to Operations Manager, and then, when his father passed, inheriting the whole shebang, affording him the ability to live in a place where the price of an average house was beyond the means of anyone who had not inherited wealth from an older, more enterprising relative.

All novels, the Old Man thought to himself as he gave the finger to drivers yelling at him to get out of the middle of the street, begin with an Old Man walking in the middle of the street. One of these people, he thought, eventually had to use him as a springboard for a series of anecdotes that, over the course of a few hundred pages, would comprise what is commonly referred to as a novel. There was no way his behavior was not the trigger for an incredible creative outpouring for those so inclined. Not that the Old Man would ever know whether someone did or didn't find him a worthy literary subject. And not that the Old Man would ever know that after all these years walking in the middle of the street, no one had. Of the thousands of people who had driven around the Old Man not one had been spurred to imagine why the Old Man was walking in the middle of the street. No one had ever postulated through fictional means that maybe the reason the Old Man was walking in the middle of the street was because he was proving a point about how this life worked, i.e., the more one provokes other people into killing them the more likely it is that other people will not. No one was interested in the Old Man other than in the moment when they were forced to slow down and drive around him. Some people did think about the Old Man for a few blocks after encountering him, but every single one of these people eventually forgot about the Old Man once they arrived at their destination, even if it wasn't their first time dealing with him. Nothing about the Old Man's actions stimulated the general population to do anything but loathe him. The Old Man hoped one day he would walk into a bookstore and come across a book about an Old Man who walked in the middle of the street. He knew that if he did he would know it was himself. He hoped the novel was long and encyclopedic and was thematically similar to all these systems novels he had read back when he was pretending like he graduated from MIT, a time in his life he was becoming more and more nostalgic for despite it also being the same period in his life when he had to sit in a hospital room for months on end watching his six year old son die of a medulloblastoma. He wanted the novel of his life to have a shaggy

dog ending because knew his real life would not. His real life, the one he was living, would end exactly how he knew it would, not with an anti-climax, but with the exact opposite, a cosmic conclusion, with the bright light, the sound of trumpets, and the sight of his son taking his hand and leading him into the endless great white night. He didn't understand how it could be any different. He didn't understand how anyone's life could end with everything leading up to the end meaning nothing. Meaninglessness was invented by the novel, and it was in the novel he wanted to survive. It was his only hope. And so he walked in the middle of street. On and on and on and on and on and on and on and on and on and on and on and on.

Cardiac Kid

On June 23, 1984, Earth passed through the tail of a comet, and some feared that it was another mass extinction event, with most human beings disappearing in the blink of an eye, leaving the survivors to wonder just what in the hell had happened. And at the very same time the Earth was passing through this nameless cosmic snowball, the woman my dad hired to clean our apartment was sitting at our kitchen table, biting her fingernails, waiting for him to come home from work. When he finally did, and found the cleaning lady staring at him with baleful eyes, he asked her what was wrong. "Culture me," she said. "Please." The next day my dad paid the cleaning lady to drive me to Yosemite, which she pronounced "Yossa-might." During the six hour drive she told me her name (Agatha), where she was from (Venezuela), and the history of her family, starting, of course, with her grandparents. I learned many things about Agatha, including, but not limited to: 1) how her first husband got into a motorcycle accident and lost his ankle, but not his foot; 2) her time working in a bar that serviced executives from Coca-Cola, as well as the executives' bodyguards; 3) her grandfather's deathbed confession, in which he admitted to being a member of the hit squad that took out former Guatemalan President and agrarian reformist Jacobo Arbenz, who, contrary to official declarations, did not die of

cardiac arrest; and 4) how Agatha, when she was 25, was told that she would never be able to have kids because of structural issues with her fallopian tubes. Agatha bought me an vanilla soft serve ice cream cone at a convenience store in Yosemite. She took a picture of me in front of a waterfall. We saw a Sierra Nevada bighorn sheep. On the way home we stopped in Bakersfield and saw *Streets of Fire*. Agatha cried at the end of the movie, during the performance of "Tonight Is What It Means To be Young" by Ellen Aim and the Attackers. Agatha could not stop singing *Let the revels begin/Let the fire be started/We're dancing for the restless and the broken-hearted* while we drove through the Grapevine, and I didn't ask her to stop or act irritated because she had a beautiful voice. When we got back to the condo we found my dad dead from a heart attack. Agatha called the ambulance. She told me to call my mom. I told her I didn't have a mom. I told her I didn't have a brother or a sister. I told her my dad didn't have any family either. I told her it was just me and my dad. And now my dad was dead. "My dad is dead," I said. But Agatha was already gone. She had called the ambulance and then left me alone in the condo with my dead dad. And then the ambulance came and took my dead dad away. The next 6 years of my life were very complicated. I was 12 years old and a total orphan. They found a family for me, complete with a dog and a brutal older brother. But there's no need to get into it. No, really. Let's skip the details. It happened so long ago. Agatha kissed my father on the forehead before she called the ambulance and then put the ripped movie ticket in his cold, dead hand. I don't know why. That night I decided to sleep outside rather than in an empty apartment. I had a hard time closing my eyes, so instead, I looked at the stars. The stars, however, did not look back.

