

Walking On Air

by Daniel Harris

Nik Wallenda was going to walk a wire stretched from Sarasota Bay across US 41 to a condo on Gulf Stream Drive. It was a beautiful late January day, but then most days in Sarasota are beautiful. It might not be a good day for wire walking; there was a gusty northwest wind.

An hour before the event, I left my 1920 American Craftsman bungalow in Laurel Park and walked to the bay front. Already, there was a large crowd gathering with many people packing folding deck chairs, coolers and sun block. Shade was non-existent.

There were no places to sit. It looked like I would have to stand for over an hour. I noticed that the sport fishing pier gate was open. I entered and sat on the concrete pier with my feet dangling over the water. I was facing where Nik would begin his walk. I had perfect sight lines of his route.

About five minutes before Nik was lifted by a crane up to the rope ladder that led to the starting platform, a young girl, perhaps twenty, but certainly not more than twenty-two or three, appeared.

—Do you mind if I sit here?

—Help yourself, I said.

She was wearing a thin low-cut sundress, not much underwear, if any, and was barefoot. She had long, light brown hair that hadn't felt brush or comb for some time. She smelled of Patchouli oil. She acted as if she had been stoned hours earlier, but was now in a mellow stage. She was druggie thin, but with a nice all-American-girl face. Her winning smile revealed sparkling white teeth.

—Do you want to see Nik through my binoculars?

—Yeah, how nice of you.

—Please put the strap around your neck, I told her, we don't need them falling in the bay.

I am a sucker for stunts like this. I always think that because I'm watching, this will be the time he falls, as if I were the Jonah jinx that threatens daredevils.

It seemed prudent, I thought, that Nik postpone the walk until the wind died down, but since this was a winter Northwester, there was not much chance of that. If anything, it would become stronger and gustier. Afterwards, he said that the wind on the wire was as bad as the wind on his Niagara Falls walk the previous June.

When Nik was about a quarter of the way across the girl handed me the binoculars.

—Wow, this is awesome. He looks like he's walking on air.

—It is amazing, I said.

—This is real art, she said. I never realized the purity of walking a wire. On TV it all seems so fake. Awesome. Really, really awesome.

She continued with her verbally challenged prattle for the entire walk. When Nik had reached the end of his walk, I gave the girl my hand to help her up from her sitting position. The back of her skirt was soaked. We stood and applauded like the rest of the crowd. She put two fingers in her mouth and unleashed an astoundingly loud wolf whistle.

—That was some stunt, I said, referring to Nik's walk, not her ear splitting whistle.

—I'm so hot, she said with a purposeful look in her eyes, I want to fuck that guy RIGHT NOW!

—Good luck, I said, knowing Nik to be a deeply religious family man.

