

Walking To Gibraltar, Chapter 14: In Which 500 Fucking Words Appear

by Frank Indiana

He started writing again as he'd left off the last time. Awkwardly. Clumsily. Timidly.

But this time, he didn't stop.

This was before the cancer, years before. He did this every day: up at five, before Astrid and Max. Four cups of coffee in the machine. A bowl of granola. Five hundred words. Five hundred words no matter goddamn what. Five hundred words on Sunday and Christmas. Five hundred words with his nose full of snot and his head on fire. Five hundred words when Astrid hated him.

Five hundred words *about* Astrid hated him. His journal became his confidante. He wrote to it like a teenage girl, Dear Diary style. He wrote letters to Astrid he would never send. In his experience, any heartfelt attempt at understanding and reconciliation ended up in the kitchen trash. In pieces. A handful scattered on the floor. So that even if he didn't open the trash, he got the message.

He wrote poems. He wrote stories. He created worlds he could control—sad slipstream worlds where time ran sideways. He wrote a world where everyone lived forever and the only way to become immortal was to die forever. He wrote a world where Yoko got the bullet instead of John. A world where music with lyrics was illegal. A world where people disappeared into thin air, pants and all.

And damn if he didn't sell them.

He didn't tell Astrid.

For one thing, she didn't give a fuck. Excepting weightlifting magazines, she'd stopped reading altogether. And as long as she was reasonably certain he wasn't publishing, he couldn't betray her.

(As if he had the balls. As if he could admit his failure to himself, even in his five hundred fucking words a day.)

For another thing, they were *his* worlds. (As if they mattered. As if you could cash a contributor's copy of a ratty-ass SF mag.)

He wrote a murder. He wrote another one. He wrote music reviews. He wrote a gorilla who played first base for the 2045 Chicago Cubs. He wrote Astrid. He pleaded with Astrid, please, dear god, Astrid, tell me why you don't trust me.

"Are you spying on me again?" she asked. "Making notes about the horrible things I do to poor Frank?"

"Of course not," he said.

"Good. Because if you ever write anything about me, I'll sue you."

Christ on a crutch. The horrible truth was, she wasn't that interesting.

He kept his journals hidden, anyway.

