

Unknown Brothers

by Jeff Geiger

His name is Rick Reynolds. Rick lives the “American Dream” in the suburbs outside of Manhattan. His gorgeous wife Mary and two children, Bobby and Lisa, live with him in their standard two story house with a white picket fence. They live peacefully and happily, never a worry any day. Rick is in the advertising business on Madison Avenue while Mary stays at home and watches the kids. The family believes their lives are perfect.

Every weekday Rick awakens around seven and walks into his bathroom to shave and clean up. He combs his dark matte black hair perfectly into place, nudging every strand gently to order. Rick then proceeds to don his suite and tie and check his image in the closet mirror. Nodding in approval of himself, Rick grabs his black leather briefcase off the bed and goes down the stairs, following the scent of eggs and bacon. Upon reaching the kitchen he greets his family. He kisses, hugs, and high-fives. He loves them. Rick starts to read the *New York Times* and begins to break fast when he glances at his watch. Noticing his tardiness, Rick quickly scarfs his remaining meal and apologizes to his family. He grabs his belongings, puts on his fedora and runs out to the garage.

Rick starts the '62 Ford Galaxie and speeds out of the neighborhood. He yells and curses at the traffic surrounding him. An accident. A cop. A red light. *The best laid schemes of mice and men...* Rick thinks to himself. The New York lights blaze past him. A doughnut shop. A florist. A butcher. A gallery. Finally, his office. Rick quickly parks and rushes into the lobby. He yells at the elevator attendant. The doors close behind him.

The elevator doors open and the clacking of the typewriters fills the air and Rick's eardrums. Rick briskly walks past the rows of secretaries and bustling copywriters. He greets his secretary Marla and grabs a stack of papers off of her desk. After entering his corner office and sitting at his desk, he exams the various memos and one

page ads in his hand. The office dulls the outside clacking. Rick massages his temples, tosses the papers aside, and gazes out the window to the city. His intercom buzzes.

Marla tells Rick that the clients are in the meeting and that Matt and Jim are waiting for him. Rick enters the boardroom and shakes hands with the snobby moneybags that are filling his pockets. Matt fills him in and their current situation with the account. The clients want something new, everything offered has not been what they wanted, even though it's precisely what they asked for. Jim shows the clients new colored sketches that would fill magazines, newspapers, and billboards. Rick uses his silver tongue and spins slogans and catchphrases at the clients. He thoroughly and eloquently explains the meaning and drive behind each ad. The trio have done everything they could. They wait for a response. The young suits look to their leader in the center. The elder client lifts his cane, scratches his collar, and nods at the young gentlemen. A sigh of relief. Celebration drinks make their rounds. Hand shakes and pats on the back are exchanged. Rick exits the room and heads back to his office. He pours himself another drink.

The remainder of the day plays out in similar fashion. Meeting and drinks. Meeting and drinks. Meeting and drinks. Most of the time everything goes smoothly with the account. Sometimes they fail and lose the account. With the day done, Rick leaves the office and drives past a clothing store and arrives at my establishment.

His name is Steve Redford. Steve lives in a Village apartment far north of Rick's place. He shares the apartment with various other free-spirited bachelors and bachelorettes who come and go as the please. He lives the activist's lifestyle, constantly protesting against "The Man." Steve owns an art gallery that houses countless underground works which is considered to be the epicenter of the young and urban activist's movement.

Every weekday Steve slowly awakens around eight. The night before is almost always a blurry haze of drunken and stoned stupor. He eyes the half-naked men and women lying around his bedroom

floor. He cleans up, brushes his sandy blonde hair, and puts on his signature black turtle neck. Once dressed, Steve leaves the disheveled apartment and walks to a cafe to meet friends for breakfast. He discusses the news and current events with his politically active and intellectual brothers-in-arms while munching on some French toast. Unlike Rick, Steve is never in a rush. The gallery opens whenever he feels like it should be open. However, he also has enough help that he doesn't need to be in the shop all of the time. Steve glances at his watch and realizes that he should get going and, apologizing to his party, he heads into town.

Steve gets into his '54 VW bug and drives out of the Village and into "the real world." He glides along the streets with Bob Dylan playing on the radio. He makes rude gestures at the cops and honks at some military men, but for the most part his drive is uneventful. Steve rolls along into the heart of the city watching the shops go by. A Ford dealership. A bar with great music and poetry. A department clothing store. A tall silver office. Eventually, Steve pulls into his modern art gallery. He parks the bug, greets his assistant Jane at the door and enters.

The new shipment of paintings and sculptures sit in the middle of the white, pristine gallery. Jane gives him the backstory on all of the new pieces: the artist, the materials, the message. Steve observes the pieces and orders his helpers to start installing the artwork. He directs them to place a massive brass bust in the lobby, place the other sculptures in between paintings. The major artists get their own rooms for their artwork while the newcomers are placed in various locations based on size and imagery. *All is quiet on the Western Front...* thinks Steve.

With the gallery set up and open, Steve heads to his back office to take a break. He opens the top drawer of his desk, grabs a joint and lights up. It calms his nerves and opens his mind. He feels his needs to be open and relaxed to fully absorb the art around him. Jane pops in to join him, they exchange the joint and a few kisses. Jane came in to tell him that the gallery is full and that he should go to the lobby

and do his job. Eyes bloodshot, Steve wearily makes his way to the front. He observes the sheep lazily walking around the various paintings and sculptures. They look for only a brief moment, say, "That's nice," and move on. A few times throughout the day a Village friend stops by to say hello. Yet, like everyone else, they don't purchase anything. The people who have the money don't want the art. Those who want the art don't have the money. Steve only has a successful day on openings, galas, or other special venues. Normally, he's lucky for a purchase every few hours. This creates a backlog of unwanted masterpieces. More and more people want to speak their mind, yet no one wants to buy opinions.

Disgruntled, Steve decides to pack up and leave early. He has his employees to close up shop for him. He drives up the road to my place.

Around six, within ten minutes of each other, I see Rick and Steve enter my basement bar. It's a simple and small establishment that's hugely popular with the locals. A jazz quartet just finished and the audience claps. I watch, through the hazy smoke, the two sit at opposite sides of the bar. The pair enjoy listening to a poet rhyming about the current national problems. They both order an Old Fashioned and I give them their drinks.

Their eyes meet.

