

## Star Lover and Star

An excerpt from

### A Relatively Harmless Dialogue

"Well then. How we all came to be acquainted, I don't remember, being in different departments. It is probable that we shared the same affection for folk music. One was a researcher in medicine; another was a medical doctor. And there was an astrophysicist who introduced me to the astronomer, a classic Marian the librarian with glasses, her hair usually tied in a bun, for practical reasons, of course. Being very smart, she attracted educated men with her misleading feminine innocence, seemingly reserved. She loved the night, spent a great deal of time alone looking into a telescope, giving her the enticing quality of a muse, remote and austere, like the moon. And she was also, I must admit, artistically well endowed."

The historian waited like a straight man for the expected response.

"You mean when she let her hair down and took her glasses off?"

The writing teacher had just walked up to the professors at their new location. One by one, the others, while on their way out the door, were detoured by the gathering in the alcove. They all decided to stay and listen to the story.

He answered. "When she was away from the telescope and the planetarium and on an outing with a small group of like-minded aficionados of culture, yes."

"What were these extracurricular activities outside of the classroom?"

"I would say her hobbies were in the realm of music and dance, especially when it rotated around the pagan fringe religions. If I was not chastened by her remarkable disregard of sentiment, both in her obsession with the night sky and a contrasting, almost mindless dive into a sea of activity, except that I did not have the required talent of a worthy poet, I would have written sonnets to her. I found her to be very seductive in the colors of her character, but I'll let your own imaginations fill in the spaces with all the graphic details of a fantasy between my words."

"Some things are best left to the imagination, artistically speaking."

"Yes, a good writer knows when less is more, depending on the reader." The intern added, thinking also of how a talented actor performs.

"I, myself, do prefer to avoid the explicit visuals of some works of art. Nevertheless, I was more radical in my youth. Hopefully, I have not swung as a pendulum and become a reactionary prude in my old age."

"I, for one, am not going to let you pull the shade down quite yet."

"Yes, what did happen between you and the stargazer?"

"You may keep your story in context of a general audience rating."

"I will keep it short and as metaphorical as possible. Let's just say our psyches got about as close to each other as Haley's Comet does to Earth--once in a lifetime and a passing that is brief."

"An intensity of language in a poem will not be made better by adding more words to the poem."

"Although, there is much to be said for the critical essay about the poem, or we would all be out of a job."

"So, I assume there was a dramatic moment, at least at the end of the movie, when you parted company." The writing teacher, with a friendly spur of insistence in his voice, maintained a momentum after the mild laughter subsided.

"We just went our separate ways. Although, there was a moment when I realized we were on very different trajectories."

"When it became evident that you were drifting away."

"Very quickly. It happened when I... She was a... To give you the context in which this little drama takes place, I should reveal a little more about her personality. When she let her hair down and took her glasses off, she became very charismatic. I was the classic young man, or more like the stereotypical Midwestern country bumkin, falling head over heels for a slightly older and a far more experienced woman. Naturally, I was very anxious to please. On the occasion of her birthday, I searched for a present. She was colorful, like I said, very artistically centered and being Jewish, it occurred to me that a print of a painting by Chagall would be appropriate."

"Now, Chagall, in his style, is very mystical and dark with dynamic splashes of color. Vibrant, dramatic. Weird, like her. Well, I found a print, one in which a flying angel sort of man is offering a bouquet of flowers to a woman. Beautiful. I had the clerk put it in a frame and hold it in storage for me. When the opportunity arose, I told her I had a gift for her, a surprise; I brought her to the art shop, had the clerk bring out the framed print, and when he set it on the counter for her to look at, she responded in apparent indifference of silence, at first, then said, with disdain, 'Chagall...? I hate...! Chagall...!' Needless to say, I realized I had a lot to learn about women."

"Did it occur to you that she hated Chagall because she was so much like Chagall, considering what you said?"

"The paintings, definitely, as well the character of the artist, yes. But I think there's another reason."

"That she was a Dionysian possessed female, perhaps?" The intern said.

"That did occur to me, later, when the shock wore off, and I could look at the incident with some amusement. I was thinking, however, in a more down to earth and psychological context."

He resumed the role of Professor, a detached observer of humanity.

"It's not unusual for people who hate themselves, mentally ill or not, to hate reflections of themselves. But I think it's more complicated than that. I think she hated Chagall, not only because she was so much like Chagall in character, but because Chagall was a Jew."

"But she, herself, was a Jew." Said the student, surprised, innocent.

"Yes, she was, very much a Jew. And I was as shocked as you are when I learned how much Jews can hate themselves for being Jews. Why that is, I'm not willing to go into here. Long story short. After a while, I concluded that she was way too dangerous for me."

"Sounds to me like you may have an interesting novel to be written."

"When I consider the other anecdotes that come to mind, you may have inspired me to dabble in the egotistical art."

"Wouldn't that be the evil art? No, that would be poetry, wouldn't it!"

The professor was, at this moment, recalling her bi-sexuality and her tendency to disconcertingly switch her gender on him.

"At any rate, to borrow a phrase from what Lawrence Olivier said when he returned from his honeymoon with Vivian Leigh, thank God... I did not get married to a woman from outer space."

Some mild laughter from the more experienced and older men.

"What about those other members of the elite who impressed you?"

"Well, one of my other acquaintances was an astrophysicist who traveled to India to meditate at an ashram. Another was a highly skilled medical doctor who entertained with a quick wit and a wide knowledge of the arts and literature. Now, you might suppose, as I did, that these friends of mine, as a result of their education and interests, had acquired, at least accidentally, some spiritual depth. Not so."

"Oh, I'm sure they were very deep." Said Night Hawk, with a cryptic tinge to a smile.

"Into the very thing we're trying to stay out of." Said a student.

"And that would be... what?" Dared his friend and classmate.

"Deep into a study of the material." Rescued Night Hawk. "Alchemy."

"Appropriate term in reference to researchers, I must say."

The Historian appreciated that he had time to step back from his little prologue before embarking onto the main thesis he would be compelled to give. Hoping for an opportunity to gain an alliance and a confirmation of his theory, he intended to let the others reveal their positions. But the comfort of the chair pulled on his desire, threatened his impulse to go into battle, and he suspected that if he did not speak up soon, he would miss the tide for a dominance and risk the sinking that is the dispond of memory; or at the very least, retreat into a mere passive observation. The fire of a newly felt experiential knowledge was in his eyes as he gazed about at the other men.

### And Behold the Angels Ascending and Descending

He sat for a while in the sorcery of his mind, riled by a radiancy of determination, provoked by the increased discomfort of the inner struggle. He decided he would not let go of this Devine inspiration when the time came for her to plead release. The playing hard to get response to his desire made him smile at the sudden image of himself as a teen-age girl's Byronic fantasy in "Northanger Abbey." It would be an interesting journey into metaphor, at any rate, so he bravely spurred his metaphorical horse onto the metaphorical road.

For a pilgrimage? A crusade, perhaps? Whether his destination be Canterbury, Constantinople, or the windmills of Spain, he was reasonably certain he could count on support from Night Hawk, the alumnus and the Presbyterian. He did fear his closest friends might find themselves on the other side of the sword. The intern, unsurprisingly, was in it for himself, of course. A young opportunist at present, he did show signs of moral conviction. All the others were either his enemy or just too nice to take a side.

After he stood and lightly tapped the burnt ashes from his pipe into a nearby potted plant, he addressed Night Hawk directly.

"There was a serious—I would say tragic and very human—flaw in the characters of my former colleagues who advocated socialist economics."

"Of course, they would be materialists, in opposition to the spirit."