

## I'M JUST THE SAME WAY

Dave stands at the window, looking down onto Central Park, the curtain weighing against his left hand. Up here, on the Plaza's top floor, the city's chatter is muted by height and glass. The park is grey with snow and bare - a scarred shaven patch. He rests his forehead against the cold pane, and he feels the city's energy like a pressure, can feel behind him, although he cannot see them, the rows of black skyscrapers, plugged into Manhattan.

He feels out of joint with this place. The jetlag perhaps.

Behind him a door opens and he turns to see Jimmy emerging from the bathroom, a white towel round his waist, drying his long hair with another. When he sees Dave he stops and smiles:

"Dave! How the fuck did you get in here."

"Oh, the bellboy showed me up. The door wasn't locked."

"Well, Jesus! Come here!" Dave goes over to him and, stooping slightly, they embrace. Jimmy's body is tough, his skin warm and scented from his bath, brown from Miami. When they hold one another at arm's length Dave sees that Jimmy is scanning his face, a strange look in his eyes.

"What the fuck did they do to you Dave?"

Dave has to think for a split-second before he realises, then raises his hand to his brow and runs his fingertips over the coarse stubble there.

"Oh the eyebrows. It's for this picture I'm doing. Goblin kings don't have eyebrows apparently."

"Well shit," says Jimmy laughing, "It looks good. It makes you look, sort of, naked. Hey, you want something to eat? Drink?"

Dave shrugs. It would be three in the afternoon in London. Jimmy picks up the gilt phone from the Louis Quatorze table by the bathroom door. While it rings he puts his palm flat over the receiver and says:

"If they're going to keep me up here talking to these pricks all day the least I can...Sorry, Osterberg. The Astor Suite, yeah...could you send me up some oysters...what's good right now?...them...the Couvettes...and a couple more bottles of spring water and champagne?" This question is for Dave who shrugs again "...the '78. OK. OK. Thanks." He hangs up the phone. "The very least I can do is run up a megalithic bill." He begins to close the bathroom door but doesn't. Instead he opens it wider and beckons for Dave to look in. "You gotta check this shit out." Dave peers inside and sees, over Jimmy's shoulder, the bathroom. A

cherub hovers over the deep square bath whose single curving tap is swan's neck. The lights of the city glint dimly through the through three windows which surround it close on either side.

"Great place to beat off."

"It's certainly grand," says Dave. Jim likes this stuff.

They go back into the main room where TV is on with the sound off. It's about six foot across. On the coffee table are strewn several brightly coloured invitations and, next to them, an ashtray full of white filter tips, the flotsam of the day's interviews. There is also a black rectangular remote the size of a paperback, covered in grey rubber buttons. Jimmy picks it up and points it carefully at the TV.

"How do you turn this monster off?" The channel changes, there is a magician making little oily motions with his hands, the trailer for a movie, "Highlander", then the news, a long black truncheon whipping down, a skinny black elbow pointed out awkwardly to shield face that is all white eyes. The man is jerked back by his other elbow, his legs kicking out like a trapped frog's. Jimmy and Dave watch this in silence. Then Jimmy says:

"This makes me fucking sick. Sick to my heart."

"That's the world all over Jimmy dear."

The newscaster comes on and Jimmy lifts his arm to point the remote.

"Off. Off. Off." It cycles through more channels. "Fucking thing. What do you reckon I throw it out the window?" He goes over to it TV and braces his shoulder against it. "This shit weighs more than I do." Dave laughs. He loves Jimmy, clowning for him. Jimmy settles for the off button and throws himself into the corner of the sofa where he begins contemplating his toes.

"Earlier I had a pedicure." He wiggles the toes admiring their bright white cuticles. "You want a pedicure?"

"No thanks."

"No really. All I have to do is call down. We can get my guy, Jorge. Look what he did for me. You remember how my feet were." He points out a foot in Dave's direction.

"You know I don't like people touching my feet Jim."

"But Jorge is very good. All I gotta do. Seriously. Just pick up the phone I can have Jorge up here in two minutes."

"Jimmy, how did it go today?"

"All I gotta do."

"Jim?"

"What?"

"How did it go today?"

Jim rocks himself slightly in his seat, draws his knees up, nods and says:

"You know. OK. That bitch from *Spin* nearly had me angry."

"Oh?"

"Confection? It's like you have to be some English queer to make pop music?" He looks at Dave, "No offence."

"None taken." Raising his hand, "Look, it's a great record..."

"I know it's a great record. But do they? Like fuck."

"But thanks for doing this Jim. Really, I appreciate it."

Jim waves away his thanks. There is a knock at the door.

"Come!" Jim shouts, a flash of the power of his voice. The door is opened a crack:

"Room service."

"Just bring it right in," Calls Jim.

The bellboy is a small man, thirty, thirty-five. He's wearing a charcoal uniform jacket with a mandarin collar which gives him a faintly militaristic look. This in sad contrast to his slumped shoulders, his protruding gut. A life of service. He rolls in the oysters and the champagne, in a misted silver bucket, on a squeaking trolley. He glances at them both nervously and says:

"You...you want me to open it for you now?" The question is directed at a point on the floor just in front of the low coffee table.

"Yeah, go right ahead. Just for Dave though. Mine's the water," Says Jimmy rising to go, "I left my wallet in the other room."

As the bellboy fusses with the wire on the champagne he keeps looking up at Dave who smiles at him. The bellboy gains confidence and smiles back, takes a long look at Dave's face. And in this moment's space Dave feels himself compared with a thousand images that add up to just one image in this other man's mind. It doesn't bother him so much any more, this process of sizing up, or scaling down, people refocusing on a tangible him. He has never liked to disappoint. Fame. This disfigurement he has. The bellboy has something to say, it becomes clear, and Dave nods, smiles coaxing, and the man says:

"I'm sorry...I know that this is a little...well a little unprofessional of me... it's just my wife and I we really...we really love your music."

"Thanks so much." Says Dave. The man nods enthusiastically. The champagne cork sighs and he turns to trickle the spume into a long fine flute.

"I was just wondering would you mind..."

"Sure, hey, what should I sign?" Still holding the bottle the bellboy pats the breast of his jacket and produces his order book.

"Thank you. Thank you so..." He gives a nervous little start forward and hands it to Dave. He's staring quite brazenly into his face now.

"What's your wife's name?"

"Jenna."

"Pretty name."

A little laugh, "Yeah I think so."

"And your name?"

"Christopher." The man nods briskly. Dave takes out his fountain pen from the inside pocket of his jacket.

"Chris?"

"Well usually Christopher actually..." He adds, "But you just write whatever."

On a thin leaf of the order book he writes:

To Jenna and Christopher. All the best. David Bowie

He puts the lid back on his pen and places it back in his pocket. He proffers the book.

"Thanks, thanks so much Mr. Bowie."

"Dave, please."

"Thanks. Dave." The man laughs, giggles even. "Sorry your drink." He turns back to the trolley and picks up the flute. "I'll just..." He places a paper napkin on the table. He puts the flute on the napkin, with a kind of extravagant precision, wanting to show that he too, although a bellboy at thirty, is good at what he does. Only then, when it comes to pouring the champagne, Dave sees that his hand is shaking, the glass is filled and begins to overflow.

"Oh," says Dave. It's running down the glass's stem, forming a small pool. The bellboy gives his head a shake and glances at what he's doing. A look of mortification clouds his face:

"Oh my God! Mr. Bowie I am so sorry!" He begins to mop up the champagne with the waiter's cloth he had folded so neatly over his arm. "I can't believe I. I'm so sorry. I just...I got distracted" He gets down his knees to fuss.

"Really it's OK."

"I can't believe... I could be so clumsy..."

"Don't worry about it." His face a bright crimson, he stands up and says very quickly:

"Should I serve the oysters now?"

"No," says Dave, too quickly, "I mean. I'm not really hungry. In fact, I think he just ordered them so that the company would have to pay."

Jimmy comes back into the room dressed. He flicks through the notes in his wallet.

"A fitty do ya?" He offers the man the note, grinning broadly.

"Oh thank you sir." The bellboy can't help bowing his head. That's gratitude.

"It's nothing brother." It is nothing Dave knows. And he goes out of the room virtually backwards, still blushing, still smiling, thank you Mr. Bowie, thank you, looking back at his face before the door, Dave waves.

Jimmy sprawls on the sofa opposite him. Dave takes out a cigarette lights it with a matchbook and tosses the pack and the matches to Jimmy who does the same. Jimmy blows a neat series of smoke rings and then says:

"The thing that they all say is that this is a pop album. They tell me: "You've done pop album". Like my dick has dropped off or something."

"You look surprised."

"No you look surprised"

Jimmy is quick and Dave laughs. He had forgotten the eyebrows. This disfigurement, fame.

"Well I'm not surprised that they think that. That's what it is. What surprised me was they were telling me "It's a pop album". Like I hadn't noticed? Like we didn't know."

Dave thinks for a moment, "Well maybe they don't understand it now. "

"But this. This just what I'm saying. Why do they think it's me? Or you? It's fucking them."

"Oh, I see. The rage of Caliban you mean."

"Wha?"

"The rage of Caliban at seeing his own face in the mirror. Wilde."

"The rage of Caliban. I like that. The rage of Caliban." Jimmy tests the phrase admiringly. "That's just right. I mean look at all this crap. You wanna go to a party Dave? You wanna?"

He begins to pick up the invitations from the coffee table.

"Tonight we have the 54 Winter Ball," He tosses it onto the carpet where it glints, picks up another which opens out into a chain of paper figures like a child's origami toy "Ralph Lauren's opening on 5th!" The next is a formal invitation on creamy card "Mapplethorpe's dinner at Woo's?" Jimmy gathers the rest in his hand and throws them on to the carpet where they land together in gaily-coloured heap.

"You know. You pays your money, you takes your choice."

"The glamour! The glamour!" Says Dave laughing.

"Fuck it Dave. It's disgusting, it makes me want to puke. I don't even live here and the insects have a mail bag full of them waiting for me when I turn up this morning."

"It's the time we live in Jim."

"They all want a piece of me and, frankly, I'm getting too fucking small to go round."

Dave takes a sip of the champagne. The bubbles sing and burn in his mouth.

"I bet Warhol will be at every single one of them," Jim says rising, beginning to pace the carpet "Not a single party, a single dinner he isn't at. Sometimes I even wonder whether there's not a team of Warhol's working the city. Why isn't he bored? I mean, I'm bored. I'm real fucking bored."

"Warhol is one of the eternal. After they drop the bomb it will just be Andy and the cockroaches drinking champagne. "You must let me photograph that beautiful carapace," Dave lisps.

"He's their thing. He's become their thing..."

"Jim..."

"...like I'm their fucking thing. Like it was inevitable. I was inevitable. They needed me, yes, but not me even. If it hadn't of been me it would have just been someone else. Why did I get isolated?"

"It's the life we chose my dear."

"Oh fuck that Dave! You think you had any choice? Or I did? That's a fucking lie and it's not worthy of you."

Dave takes another sip of champagne. He looks at his watch. The car will be downstairs. He knows better than to try and engage he's like this.

"We should go," he says.

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From where Dave is standing in the wings the crowd is formless, a black and boiling sea. Jimmy is centre stage. He's taken of his jacket and ripped off his t-shirt. Blood trickles from a cut on his shoulder, the lights make it look black, his body metallic.

The crowd is angry. They don't like the new material. The keyboard player, growing tired of ducking bottles, has already left the stage. Broken glass glitters on the floor around the bassist and the guitarist who have retreated back against the tall amps. They are exchanging glances and will leave, Dave knows, if it gets any worse. This is not what they signed up for.

He fears for Jimmy, who stands, nerveless, not moving, staring out into the spotlight, into that white eye swathed in drifts of steam and cigarette smoke where the crowd gathers itself into a single roaring thing.

At the unquiet margin where the stage ends and the crowd begins he can just make out security men hauling out a girl's body. Her head is limp and her black hair is plastered over the side of her face. This is bad, Dave thinks. This is New York and this is not far from a riot, you can smell it. It is a fear unique to the famous, the fear of being shot on stage.

A bottle smashes against one of the amps. Something large and heavy-looking sails by Jimmy's head and crashes against the drum kit. He doesn't even look round as the guitarist and the bassist exchange a nod and are gone.

There are screams, the security men are trying to drag back a man who boots backward, emerges, struggling, arms flailing onto the stage. He is suddenly up there with them. A huge bearded Hell's Angel, he has on an oily looking black leather jacket and in his tattooed hand he's holding something that glints. A knife? No a bottle, the jagged broken stem of a beer bottle. He stands, his shoulders heaving after his struggle to get out, to differentiate himself. The crowd roars with one hot breath.

Dave wants to do something, but he realises that they blame him. Also that they will know him. So instead he watches as Jimmy turns slowly to this man and blinks and spreads out his arms wide, inviting. With the flat of his hand slaps his stomach and thrusts it out, offering that tender point above the hard muscle his abdomen. But the man hesitates. He's out in the open. He turns and looks out over that dark mass, wondering, seeing for the first time just how it must be. He shrinks.

Jimmy cocks his head flirtatiously, like a teenage hustler with a disappointing tom, and for just a second, Dave sees, he wanted it.

Then there are two security men. And one of them has the biker's legs and has tipped him up so his head thuds, audible even above the roar, onto the stage. The other has his knee on the man's chest and breaks his nose spitefully with his fist. They drag him off, his heels trailing, past Dave and out to the back.

Jimmy comes back to life. He is beckoning frantically, at first Dave thinks, to him. He starts to shake his head but then he sees that Jimmy's looking past him at roadie who has come to crouch unnoticed in the wings. The roadie is holding a guitar. Jimmy beckons again, shouts something inaudible, and the man scuttles on, bent over like a civilian under fire. He hands the Jimmy the guitar and runs at full tilt off the other side of the stage.

Jimmy throws the strap over himself so that the guitar swings clumsily. Then he leans forward and grabs the microphone.

He smiles and he says:

"I would rather be... I would rather be..."

He adjusts the pegs absent-mindedly with his left hand then jerks out a chord.

"...a real dog..."

And then snarling, the veins standing out on his neck:

"...than a fucking...scumbag..."

He roars:

"...ROCKSTAR!"

The crowd roar back. They are ecstatic