

CHAPTER 1

Barry was always a linear person, logical to the extreme, despite the fact that he hated accountants, bankers and by the book cops more than broccoli. But...there was something he did wake up into one interestingly late autumn windy day after the trees in his yard had liberated the remaining leaves from their branches. “What if in a parallel universe the wheel, sailing ship and airplane were discovered in Pre-Columbian America before they were invented in Europe, introduced by maybe a time travelling Viking after he ate way too many talking berries hanging on singing trees?” he pondered when deciding whether to open his eyes to the world he lived in rather than the ones he imagined. “What if George Washington took the higher paying offer to become an officer in the British Army in 1770 rather than the pro-bono call to lead the Revolutionary Colonial Militias in 1774? And what if Hitler was admitted to art school in 1906, and fell in love with a Jewish lesbian who encouraged him to become a gay Rabbi?”

“Sure, that would only mean the world would have other problems,” Barry told himself as he dragged his feet to the bathroom after banging the fifth alarm clock that month into becoming junk that would be spending the next 1000 years in the dump waiting for the elements to break it down into molecules the earth worms could eat and not get sick with. “And what would happen if I was born as...someone else?” he slurred out of his mouth, wiping the last strands of hair off the crown of his head, making him look more ‘distinguished’ to Curb Your Enthusiasm fans, and older than his real age to most everyone else. “Or what if I was Larry David instead of Barry Davies?” he thought, contemplating the parallel universe theories once again. And thinking about what the fuck he did wrong in his last lifetime that made this one all about 100 units of struggle put out and 5% of results and maybe 1% of acknowledgement. “I’m not stupid,” he told himself in that voice inside his head which gave him a headache every time it escalated in volume or quiet intensity. “But I must be really dumb, because the smarter I seem to be, and the more intelligent I get, the less people understand me and...the less I seem to relate to them,” he noted from the part of his brain that was still sane. “But, I am a masochist, who refuses to join the world, even when I’m invited into it,” he was forced to acknowledge as he gazed down on his left wrist, which he had pounded into a collage of black, blue and red bumpy flesh courtesy of his right fist pounding into it during his most recent set of ‘exploratory dreams’ (aka, nightmares).

The mirror then captured his glance. The reflection on the other side had a mind of its own, affording him a view of the teeth marks on his left wrist and the red tinged gums inside his half opened yapper. “At least the blood between my teeth is my own, this time anyway,” he said, this time with a voice that could be heard by real ears in the land of the living in the present rather than the ethereal beings from his past. That past in the realm of the ‘beyond’ which he wore like a heavy coat protecting him from heat and cold of the ‘real world’ which he battled daily, and hourly, even when it wanted to be kind to him.

Barry peered behind his eyes into his past, and present, planning the future of this, yet another day, when waking up in an even stranger worm hole than previous mornings.

“Or maybe I’m a weak, stupid coward,” the discourse between mind and soul continued. “Assholes and manipulators get things done in a world that’s too cowardly and stupid to make changes it needs, and secretly wants, to,” he said to the reflection in the mirror which, this time, did mouth the same words back to him. “Assholes have to have the balls to follow through with your opinion, making it a crusade and manifesto,” Mirror Barry shot back. “And manipulators have to have brains to constantly recall what they sent out before so they can follow up on it later, so as to not be found out as a liar by people with bigger guns, more money or more popularity than they do,” ‘real’ Barry voiced after which one of the feline roommates in his small but functional mobile home leaped across his path, demanding and perhaps needing to be petted.

“But,” sort of ‘reality based’ Barry said to the purring white as virgin snow feline, whose coral blue eyes seemed to be wiser and stronger than his. “It’s easier and less energy draining to be honorable, honest and hard working,” he found himself saying to the cat with human words that his soul tried to translate into feline-eze with his fingers, which instinctively rested upon and stoked the soft skin between his four legged ‘mastress’s’ shoulder blades. “But is being honorable and hard working the lazy and ‘safe’ mench’s choice of life options, Tripod?” he asked the feline, who managed to run on her three legs faster than Barry could sprint on two good ones. Even in his youth when he was being chased by ex-girlfriends who, from a distance, looked fat as well as pregnant, were determined to throw the blame on him for both conditions. “And maybe because I’m lazy, safe and too cowardly to be an arrogant smart ass, that’s why I accept more punches than I give out in a world that really is about punching and not petting?”

The cat meowed, somehow telling Barry to continue. “But, for today, I have to be an asshole, and manipulator,” he explained to the cat, and tried to rationalize a new strategy to himself. “Because if this experiment that I’m about to take on works, you and me will be born into a better world than we have to endure, or transform now.” He reached down into his pocket to see the latest e mail and promo pitch from a woman he met at the library yesterday who was three times younger than he was, five times smarter, and certainly ten fold more attractive to look at. But the paper with her promise, pitch and Passionate mission was not in his pocket.

“Are you looking for this?” Barry heard in an angry and arrogant voice from a two legged roommate who the law, the IRS and the wedding pictures posted around the house said was his wife. “You dropped this on the floor last night, along with wrappers from three candy bars you didn’t clean up after you fell asleep on the couch, fucking again!” Olivia Bernstein-Davies, clad in a nightgown which hid her sagging breasts, sporting a mop of thinning brown hair over her crows’ feet laden eyes with all too visible white roots yapped through series of snarly yawns. She presented Barry with a fistful of chocolate-coated wrappers within which was a photo of a young women who Olivia resembled in past years, and previous eras. “Time machine Doctor Tanya?” she said regarding the photo of the millennial with a thick long auburn mane, whose optimistic smile was genuinely kind, and whose eyes said ‘intensely committed’ to something. Intensely dedicated to achieving the dream of transforming the world through the ‘love is all you really need’ mandate that Barry and, for a good ten years after their marriage,

Olivia believed in as well. “Who is this idiot bimbo two digit IQ and perfectly shaped C cup breasted idealist?”

“The hope for the future, maybe,” Barry replied. “Someone with three Ph.D.s she earned by doing two real theses from accredited schools that were NOT done on line, and two doctorates in subjects of her own in her own self-funded university. Her specialty being--”

“---‘The physics, pathology and possibilities of time, and the ability to travel back but not backwards in it’?” Olivia read on the headline of the newspaper article for the free library talk she had given the night before. With a tongue that sliced and diced every string of wisdom, kindness and technical expertise that the under-aged, super-hot looking, super-geek with degrees in Psychology, Poetry, Physiology, Physics and Metaphysics which (to Barry’s perception anyway) Tanya had integrated into her life and intense Purpose to live it. “A like, ya know, totally cool trip you and her will go on under the sheets,” Olivia continued in a mocking tone. “To, like, ya know, fucking emerge in another dimension in your demented head, that---”

“---Is better than this one!” Barry blasted out from a part of himself that had been slumbering and self-smothered for a long time. “And...perception can become reality!”

Olivia folded her arms, arched her back, and let Barry have it with both barrels, aiming at the most valued and, perhaps because or despite of such, vulnerable part of his soul. “Like that yahoo Injun theory about the Huyou Enita that what you change in the dream world affects the one we ALL have to deal with here in the real world!!!?”

“It’s the Yaqui Indians and the Huya Anya,” Barry barked back after taking in a deep ‘soothing’ breath regarding the reference in Revolutionary Blues. It was his favorite Western and book, which he had to buy four times as each version he bought and brought home was ‘mysteriously’ pissed on by the cat after Olivia discovered it. “And though it might be true, Professor Doctor Tanya, as she likes and deserves to be called, is trying an experiment.”

“In the physics of time, or the psychology of dreamers who will both wind up in the Nuthouse if you follow through with this too much? OR is about sexual fantasy rather than metaphysical fucking inquiry?” Olivia rebutted with an upturned chin, rolling eyebrows and a vicious tone made more intense by its low volume.

Barry absorbed the insult, holding back his clenched fist. Unable to attack with his tongue as Olivia (who was a nurturing beauty who became an ugly bitch too late for Barry to divorce her)... was maybe right.

“Look,” Olivia continued, with an understanding tone, laying her open, soft palm upon Barry’s rock hard yet shaking like mud-slide shoulder. “Your father lived more less happily in the past when they got Altimer’s disease, but my mother’s journey back to her childhood when she hit the big seven O was hell on her and, as you recall, us.”

“And especially you,” Barry replied with a tender heart, as Olivia’s stare dropped to the floor, and tears fell down the side of her face. “It was a blessing that she ran into that car, and had that accident that killed her.”

“And a source of shame that I, or you, didn’t hire a driver to do it sooner than that,” Olivia said as her body went limp and she let her ass fall down onto the closed toilet lid.

Such confirmed Barry’s suspicions, and secret regrets. But as for what to do now? In the present. And to prevent the same kind of dementia enriched future that was, according to the tests done by the most reliable labs, awaiting both Barry and Olivia as they both were approaching 70 within the next year.

Gathering all the courage in his curmudgeon soul, Barry edged his way towards Olivia, opened his arms, and invited her to become embraced in a hug. She turned her back on him, and averted her eyes, denying him, or the mirror, the opportunity to look into them. “Just go, do what you want and have to do. At least it will make for an interesting book. That you can sell, in REAL numbers this time. As long as you write it honestly and effectively enough, as the asshole and manipulator that you really are. And I suppose have to be.”

With that, Olivia pulled her overweight under-muscled body up from the toilet seat, marched into the master bedroom and shut the door behind her, locking it just as Barry tried to gain entry. Nothing new with regard to being excluded from the room Barry regretted going into most night, but something new made its presence known. A ghost in the room, and a heavy sensation in his gut which said that the key to any kind of future for himself, Olivia and the world involved doing a Sherman and Mister Peabody going back in time. With an alluring, exciting and somehow ancient young woman who, in this lifetime anyway, had never heard of nor seen the cartoon about the wise Professor canine and his pet boy Sherman. On a day that felt like past, present and future, all at the same time. But this time with the participants on stage calling the shots instead of obeying the elusive and perhaps sadistic (or maybe, in His or Her own way, benevolent) writer who scripted the show.

There were many things wrong with the world that wacked Barry into his eyes and found their way into his head now that there was no hair on top of it to keep it out. They came yet again to consciousness in big and little ways as he shuffled into the bathroom to take his second shit of the morning. Once there, he noted that his detritus did stink. And every time he tried to flush it down, it resurfaced three times, bringing up even more ass-wipe that chose to stay at home rather than go to ‘the great beyond’ seen by no man and noted by only the house inspector when it comes time for resale. And, today anyway, Tripod the feline was living down to her handicap, caused by a veterinary surgeon who thought he was an innovative healer when he had used defective ‘made somewhere he didn’t identify’ pins, plates and plastic prostheses to heal a lump on a leg that that turned out to be cancerous, or perhaps just an infection that got in too deep. She nearly fall into the porcelain abyss when Barry banged the plunger on the sink countertop in a ‘victory’

rant. Such caused the radio that never worked to crash onto her ass and somehow turn on.

Barry washed the brown gunk off Tripod's face, doing his best to not get bit, or worse, to wake Olivia up so she would take a bite out of his ass. He listened to the news of the day. Another war in Africa, this time between countries he did know and maybe could find on a map.. Floods in the East, drought in the West, cold snaps in the South freezing roads, water pipes and the electrical grids. And a rash of race riots in the seemingly tolerant intelligent, college 'educated' Northern states. And...not to be neglected on a slow news day... another maybe COVID variant that the 'empathetically concerned' broadcaster with the mid Atlantic trained and conditioned at Vassar, Yale and McGill accent, and no doubt her boss, the government and the sponsors, wanted everyone to believe was new Black Plague before any scientist could see it under a microscope. And...more tragically, and dangerously, Keeping Up With the Kardashians was renewed for yet another season, as well as green lighted for two feature length movies. "And we call ourselves the superior species," Barry related to Tripod as a profound apology for his brethren and 'sistren'.

"So fucking do something about it!" the cat blasted back with a snarl, biting his hand, then grabbing hold of a photo-business card from Tanya with her phone number and address on it, that fell out of Barry's pocket before Olivia found it. Tripod laid it at Barry's feet with a 'help your species and mine, while you're still on top' determined look in her ever open, caring and, if you looked at them long enough, intelligent eyes.

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