

An Inconvenient
Amish Zombie
Left Behind
The Da Vinci
Diet
Code
Truth



Tom Smucker

“Beneath every parody lies a homage”
--Anonymous

FACT

Dean Martin was born and grew up in Steubenville, Ohio, and was a major influence on Elvis Presely.

The Mills Brother grew up in Piqua, Ohio and were a major influence on Dean Martin.

The Rock and Roll Hall of Fame is located in Cleveland, Ohio.

U.S. Presidents from Ohio: William Henry Harrison, Ulysses Grant, Rutherford B Hayes, James Garfeild, Benjamin Harrison, William McKinley, William Howard Taft, Warren Harding

Prologue

The Hard Rock Café, Paris 10:47 P.M.

Renowned public intellectual Bernard St. Germaine staggered out of his taxi on Boulevard Montmartre, pushed his way through the first floor crowd and stumbled up the staircase to his left. High in prestige but small in stature, he was forced to weave through a group of expatriate volleyball players as his eyes desperately scanned the walls of rock 'n' roll memorabilia. Rushing past the displays of celebrity clothes and gold records, he searched until he located a guitar mounted on the far end wall above the second floor bar across from a table occupied by a group of drunk Americans.

Knowing that his time was running out, he jumped up onto the bar, lunging towards the guitar, and with a final burst of strength pulled it off the wall and fell backwards onto the table, landing on top of the french fries, burgers, and beer. Holding the guitar in a tight embrace, lying flat on his back, Bernard turned his head to the startled American whose hamburger now lay under his cheek, and whose jacket and shirt were now covered in ketchup and mustard.

“Buff, the police,” he groaned, locking eyes with the American, and then fell asleep.

Before the physician conveniently eating dinner downstairs with the detective could be escorted upstairs to their table, and before the restaurant management and the merely curious could gravitate towards the commotion, the American noticed his attractive red-haired waitress hovering over him.

Forgetting that only a moment ago he had been flirting with her in French, he stared deep into her hazel eyes as he blurted out in his mother tongue, “Now what should I do?” And then, remembering that he was still in Paris, gestured towards his hamburger, the head of Bernard St. Germaine, and his own condiment stained clothing.

“What did he say to you?” the waitress whispered in his ear.

“So you speak English, and without an accent” the American replied, startled yet again.

“I’m Canadian. Bi-lingual.” she whispered. “Please, it’s important that we know. What did Bernard?” and she pointed at the face of the man sleeping on the table, “What did he say to you?”

“Buff, the police. In English. He spoke in English.”

“And you are Buff, are you not?”

“Yes. How did, I mean, how do you, that is . . . my old name. I haven’t used that name in decades.”

The waitress began to whisper in his ear again but then

looked across the room as the physician and the detective pushed through the agitated crowd towards their table. The American noticed her eyes grow wide as she frantically looked down at the guitar and stared at an inscription on the back, framed by the thumbs and index fingers of Bernard St. Germaine.

“The Sign of the Analogy,” she sighed under her breath, and then turned towards the American, causally altering the position of the hands of the sleeping St. Germaine so that they covered up the inscription. “Please, let me take you to the kitchen and clean you up. It could cost me my job if my superior gets here and sees you like this.”

The American couldn’t see the logic in this. Why would her boss blame her for the actions of the deranged Parisian? But then again, events had already moved past the point of any logic. Besides, something in the waitress’s eyes intrigued and terrified him, and felt connected to the questions now swirling through his brain. How did she know his former name? What had she seen on the guitar? The gentleman passed out on the table had wanted the police, but why had he said the word in English, and how did the Parisian know to call him Buff?

Standing up, bewildered enough to be susceptible to suggestion, he let her lead him through the restaurant and out the service exit, not knowing where they were going but feeling oddly reassured.

They were through the door and off the floor before

a hulking deeply tanned bald man with a distinctive mustache and a bandana wrapped around his forehead materialized at the entrance and made his way slowly up the stairs towards the sleeping pundit.

CHAPTER ONE

Original Sins

Cliff Anger's mind was on a car he'd never driven. Flying back from De Gaulle to Midway and his family in the western suburbs of Chicago, he was grateful for the chance to relax while his co-pilot handled the controls. In a minute he would take over for the descent and landing. But just for now, Cliff was imagining what lay ahead.

Yes, it was a good life, and Cliff enjoyed his frequent trips to Paris and everything that Paris made available, even if in Cliff's case, the woman he was involved with there was someone he had first met in the Schaumburg Mall a short drive from his home in Illinois, someone who also served on the airplane crew.

And yes, he also appreciated and enjoyed his time at home with his lively wife Patsy, and their two boys Tim and Jerry. Cliff sincerely felt it was an opportunity, and not an obligation, coaching Little League, helping with fundraising at their church, and serving on the community board of their gated suburban development. As he often told himself, even if someone else might have called it a cliché, he had the best of both worlds.

But lately things had changed. It wasn't that he didn't find Patsy attractive and interesting anymore, or that he disapproved of her interest in politics. He had always loved the fact that she kept herself occupied during his frequent absences, and had something new to report on each time he came back home. Cliff certainly did not think that Patsy should stay locked in the kitchen. And they both believed and had taught their boys that every citizen in a republic had a duty to make use of the political freedoms they were lucky enough to be able to take for granted.

Cliff had even gone with Patsy to hear a lecture about the environment at the high school one evening, and had joined a committee that carefully weighed their options before recommending the phasing out the use of pesticides on the lawns of their development. But lately Patsy had become involved with a smaller group that met twice a week, and Cliff felt, took things a little bit too far. He attended a meeting or two of her new friends when he was at home, and once drove them into the city to watch a documentary at a Northside theater, but found that all the prophecies about global warming and running out of oil made him nervous. Now when Patsy would ask Cliff to come along to another of her meetings he would joke about the mess on his desk or the woodshop in the basement and say "I have to clean up *this* environment first."

In truth he found himself dreading Patsy's talks about hybrid cars, and mass transit, and bicycles, and walking

home from her part time job at the veterinarian. How did she expect him to get home from O'Hare, in a canoe? Did she think people still wanted to cross the Atlantic Ocean in a clipper ship?

That's what he liked about Irene. A good meal out in Paris, some drinks, some laughs, a night together, and no gloom and doom lectures, no meetings, no talk about the rainforests. Then when they disembarked in Illinois, they went their separate ways, no questions asked. Cliff wasn't even sure where Irene lived.

Jerry was old enough to drive now, and owned a used Toyota that they bought him when he brought his grades up high enough to get into college. Cliff would have liked to splurge on an old muscle car from back when he was a Jerry's age, and put the money into rebuilding it with his son, but he didn't really have the time. Tim was still just a kid, and at first was jealous of his older brother's car. Then he had been dragged along to his mother's rallies and discussion groups, and Cliff felt, was unduly influenced by their propaganda. For his most recent birthday he had asked for on-line skates, and started saving money for an expensive custom built 10 speed bicycle.

When she had to drive, Patsy took the Taurus, and refused to trade it in on a newer car, claiming that would be wasteful. Cliff remembered when they brought their new Taurus home, so many years ago, when it seemed like everybody on the block was buying them, and remembered

the sense of shame he couldn't repress as one after another, the neighbors bought new cars. Now the Taurus made them stand out, and if you didn't know Patsy, made it seem like Cliff didn't earn enough or care enough to upgrade their cars. It was bad enough he had to joke about the old black Cadillac Seville he drove to and from the airport, but in truth, he liked the feel of a big car, and didn't want to think about the tiny import his wife would want to buy if he ever traded in the Caddy.

Yes, Cliff thought, if he was honest, he hadn't always told Patsy everything. But there was a lot she never asked about, so he could in truth say that he had never lied to her. About what happened in Paris, for example. Now for the first time, he realized, he was even rehearsing the lie he planned to tell her.

The Caddy would mysteriously get totaled at the parking lot while he was out of town, and then, because of the Windy City winters and recent summer flooding, and those flight attendants he often helped drive home, and the Little League, and the church, he would need to get a vehicle with four wheel drive that would seat at least six adults, or 10 kids with their bats and gloves. The money would come from the bonus he just received from the big shots he flew back and forth to Paris, and these days the dealers were desperate to sell those big cars with the poor gas mileage, so he was sure to get a hefty discount. What a great idea! The more he turned it over in his mind the better it sounded. Just remember, he

told himself, whatever you bring home cannot be called an SUV. The mere mention of that acronym would drive Patsy into one of her tirades, even if Cliff thought a Suburban Utility Vehicle pretty well summed up what he was looking for.

Already Cliff could imagine the test drives in the dealerships, and fantasize for just a bit about driving home in a Hummer, a Range Rover, or a Ram 5500. That would make short work of the Eisenhower and the Kennedy in the middle of a snow storm. If Patsy was going to turn into a fanatic, what was wrong with Cliff enjoying the pleasures of the new car that she had decided to deny herself?

Pud Hornets seethed as he sat near the window of the airplane's second row. The whole trip to Paris had been a mistake, just as he suspected. The expatriate media advisor had disappeared and the meeting with the supposedly pro-American Parisian intellectual Bernard St. Germaine had been a disaster. Hornets had sipped a Diet Coke as St. Germaine flipped back and forth between comatose and hyper, espresso and brandy, popping pills while raving on about Elvis Presley and Dean Martin, of all people, and dismissing every bit of American foreign policy since the Marshall Plan. And then the debacle at that dreadful Rock 'n' Roll Café!

The man was clearly an idiot, and should only be

taken seriously because he posed a danger. In his own idiotic land, Horents knew, St. Germaine was considered a potential Voltaire, so he had to be kept under observation. But there was more than a political disagreement between the two men. It was also a question of fashion. Ever since he was a boy in the Bronx, Hornets disliked men who intentionally left their shirts unbuttoned half way down their chest. He knew enough about the world to know that St. Germaine was wearing a very expensive, custom tailored shirt, so why not show it off? It was a style of false informality available only to those with inherited wealth, and that irritated Hornets, but it also reminded him of the unbuttoned shirts of the Mafia wannabes that beat him up as a kid on Arthur Avenue.

It was bad enough having the last name of Hornets, a gift, like so many American names, of immigration officials who could not understand, or didn't care to understand, his grandparents when they got off the boat from Europe. And what did they care? They'd made it out, call them whatever you wished. It was better than the Czar.

And so what if the strange last name insured that your grandson would have to fight his way to and from school each day. That only made him study so hard he won a scholarship to escape the Bronx after the seventh grade and attend a boarding school for rich young men in Maine. Where the beatings started up again, but quickly switched from physical to emotional abuse, when his tormentors realized that was the arena where they held the advantage. So

Hornets learned a new style of combat.

Everyone else up there had a hyphenated last name, a first initial, a middle name, and a peculiar boarding school nickname like Muffy, Spats, Biff, or Blinky. Hornets would be assigned one as well, an experience he would never forget, in fact, an experience he would never let himself forget.

One night, after studying while his classmates snuck out to drink some smuggled beer, Hornets lay in bed, his mind buzzing with all the information, including the casual references and jokes he needed to absorb, all the knowledge and the social cues that the Muffys and the Biffs could always take for granted. Was he calming himself down, in the manner young men sometimes choose, as some would claim? Or was he just lying there, straightening his sheet, as others told the story?

Whatever may have been his condition, he could always count on hearing his drunk roommates as they stumbled up the stairs and so feign sleep. But this time they were completely quiet, inspired no doubt by sadism, not courtesy.

A flashlight, the light switch, and general merriment as the biggest, richest, and laziest of them all, and hence their leader, called out, "Look who we caught pulling on his pud." And so the nickname.

If they thought that they could shame him they were wrong. He would never use his real first name again. From

now on he was Pud and would shove it in their faces. Pud on the rowing team. Pud the poet, chosen to squire doddering old Robert Frost around the school on his annual visit. Pud the valedictorian. Pud full scholarship to Princeton. Pud the brilliant young critic who knocked Ernest Hemingway off his pedestal and famously debated Leslie Fiedler at the Mark Twain symposium in Hartford. Pud the author of *Straight and Twain* while still in his twenties. No, he would not rest until his old tormentors would be forced to brag, “Pud Hornets, of course I know Pud. We were classmates at Penesbicanute Academy.”

But that was all in the past, as was Paris, and Bernard St. Germaine. Now Pud looked forward to his trip to Chicago, and the chance to help select the next members of the Supreme Court and the Federal Reserve Bank.

Buff Blessinger followed the red-haired waitress through the kitchen, up a rear stairway, quickly down a long hallway and into a small, wood-paneled private room complete with sink and toilet, only slightly bigger than a closet. She closed and locked the door behind them and pulled a leather

valise from under a compact desk built into one wall. Inside the valise were underwear, socks, pants, shirt, a belt, a pair of expensive leather shoes, a box of individually packaged moist towelettes and a black plastic garbage bag. On the wall hung a brown leather jacket.

“Please, you must change all of your clothes and place them in the bag, including your shoes. Wipe yourself down with the toweletes and then put on these new clothes, including the leather jacket, but hurry.”

“I don’t think that’s necessary, just to get rid of this.” Buff offered, pointing to the ketchup and the mustard covering his clothes. “I promise I won’t sue the restaurant. I’ll tell that to your boss.” But something told him they were no longer in the restaurant.

The waitress looked frantic. “Your life is in grave danger. We have, at the most two or three minutes. You must change your clothes, there’s no time to explain now, and no time for privacy. I’ll tell you everything when I can, but now I must beg you. As we are talking someone entered the restaurant with orders to assassinate you, and must kill me if they find us together. Now you must remove the small stainless steel disc that was placed in your shirt pocket, flush it down the toilet, undress, clean off your entire body with

these towelettes, and put on these new clothes.”

“O.K.,” answered Buff, surprised that he believed her.

“But just tell me one thing.”

“What is that?”

“What is your name?”

“Chloe Nouveau, but you knew me as . . .”

“I’m afraid I don’t recall . . .”

“There’s no time now. I’ll explain it all later. Please.”

“O.K. Chloe, help me with my pants.”

“I’m sorry, but I can’t touch you,” she apologized, as she carefully wiped her hands with a moistened towelette that she then threw into the plastic garbage bag.

Bishop Jake Teedy was a big man who ran a big church. In fact his church had grown so large it met in three different megachurches around Columbus, Ohio. Teedy liked to joke that he ministered to “Interstate 70, Interstate 71, and Interstate 670,” but it was also true. He had to do a lot of driving to keep in personal touch with his three staffs and three congregations.

There was nothing wrong with using the telephone; in fact Teedy loved the telephone. And there was nothing

wrong with having a television show, a radio show, an internet site, CDs, DVDs, books, and a newspaper column. But there was nothing like the personal touch.

So Teedy drove a big car, and not just because it was comfortable and made the traffic jams at rush hour more bearable. He also drove big cars as an example to his staff and congregation. “Think Big, and you will Be Big,” he titled one of his most popular sermons.

“What if?” he’d asked last Sunday, looking around the full to capacity, 6000 seat sanctuary, “What if I’d arrived on an old bicycle and tied it to a bicycle rack when I started this new church? How would all of you make it here this Sunday? You wouldn’t. You wouldn’t show up. You would stay at home. But God told me to make a bi-i-i-i-g parking lot, big enough for everyone, so everyone would feel invited. Think Big. Invite Success Into Your Life. Build a Bigger Parking Lot, in your hearts and in the world. And this will happen to you!”

Yes, times were good. So good, in fact, that he was on his way to meet with some consultants about opening new sanctuaries in Cincinnati and Toledo. Making it important to place dynamic yet stable leadership in the founding churches in the middle of Ohio. Which is why he had asked Rev. Nana

Tasker to follow him to the parking lot. He told her that he wanted her to see his new Lincoln Navigator, which was true. But he also wanted to talk to her alone about taking over here if he expanded. It was time to move some women to the top of his leadership. It was the right thing to do, and he chuckled to himself, it would drive some of his more rigid fellow clergy up the wall. Think Big.

Nana was impressed, by the dark blue Navigator and the chance to step into her mentor's pulpit. He had saved her life, introduced her to her husband, and now was offering a chance to receive some of the national attention that was showered on him. What a wonderful, generous man.

It was a long way from the rural poverty of her childhood, the miserable alcoholism of her adolescence and the parade of abusive males through both, but the journey had been worth it, and she loved to share her story with others. Of course, she would need to prepare for the jealousy from those on the staff who saw themselves as ready for and deserving this promotion. Most everyone on Teedy's Team, as he liked to call it, who worked at the Worldwide Inspirational Life Changing Organization were selfless, good-hearted Christians. But human beings were still human beings.

Worldwide. It used to sound a little too ambitious. Maybe it was really destined to come true.

Nana Tasker and Bishop Teedy talked for over an hour in the parking lot, out by his car, away from the rest of the staff, about small details and large scenarios, about fundraising and staffing, about coordination and independence, about things that might and might not happen.

Now, as Bishop Teedy stepped into his car and closed the door, Nana looked off into the setting sun and felt the future opening up before her as the past protected and embraced her, just like the big Midwestern sky. As Teedy drove away she waved, still able to see his smiling face in the left side rear view mirror, illuminated by the parking lot lights that had just switched on. And then Bishop Teedy and the Lincoln Navigator disappeared.

Nana blinked and stared into the twilight but there was nothing there. She walked, and then ran forward in the large, nearly empty parking lot to the area where the car was moving when she had waved. She was all alone. And then it hit her. "I'm getting ready to move on," he'd told her, "and I want to leave you in charge back here."

Teedy had been raptured, and she'd been left behind. It was sundown in late summer in Ohio.

To Exit Full Screen Mode Press the "Esc" Key

Entire
COMING SOON:

Book

Now On
CHAPTER TWO

Sale!
END TIMES
Kindle! Nook! Ipad!
Ink on Paper!