

SOMEWHERE IN KANSAS, A GIRL WALKS...

SATURDAY AUGUST 25, 1984 – 8:05AM

The road, not so much dusty as worn...

Pavement, yes, but no shoulder to speak of and somehow the grass - which waved back and forth in the endless and unforgiving Kansas landscape, a kind of hissing sound it made, almost haunting its own territory - was ever so slowly creeping inward, as if to say to the asphalt, I was here first and I shall remain.

No sidewalk in sight, of course...

The mere fact that the asphalt buttressed the grass was good enough to anyone daft enough to walk this barren landscape when a perfectly good car could be on loan from a rental company.

Somehow though, today begged for a walk, the sun, dazzlingly bright, the sky, a piercing blue, void of the fluffy stuff, the heat, no, not today, just a warm breeze kissing at my clothes, my cheeks. Most likely I would have a wind-burn come sundown.

I'd been walking for what seemed like forever, no real landmarks to guide me, only my nose, my innate sense of direction. Maybe knowing where I was going really wasn't completely necessary, for I knew where I had already been. Maybe just moving forward was good enough today.

So much time, so very much time had gone by. It seemed as if I had missed the good parts in between but don't we all say that about everything and everyone that comes before or after us?

I was okay with that as I had always felt the original story was never quite told in full. I always had the feeling there was more or could have been more, if just one more blank page was on offer to Truman, just one more minute of detailed admission was available to the reader. Einstein said that time is not linear. Maybe, in more ways than one, he was right.

One car, with miles of distance in between, would follow another as they sped by me. The drivers, out of deference to my solo promenade, would swerve well and slowly to the left for my safety and maybe to lessen the load of dust which would surely follow in their wake. The further I walked, the dustier I got and the less I sensed any productiveness to my trek. I strode with what felt like cast iron weights affixed to my ankles, each step felt harder on the soles of my feet, heavier in the effort, the landscape never really changing, the destination, it seemed, never really getting any closer. Time was ruling distance here and I allowed that. The hissing of the tall grasses kept my mind from going quietly insane with the barrage of infinite geographical space. I had time to wander back into my own thoughts, maybe to a place and its events to which I had always wanted to be more apart, or at least have seen, heard, felt longer than Fate allowed.

There was all the time in the world to “get there”. I knew the way, of course, how could I not. My speed of advancement had to match his; yet, he had no idea there would even be a meeting, our separate paths were so far apart in every respect. But then again, it's always the last scenario you envision that will end up being the correct one. I would walk and wait in my walking and

eventually he would appear. The inevitable is always so inevitable. The journey has finally begun.

SOMEWHERE IN BEL-AIR, TRUMAN SLEEPS...

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The bougainvillea, the hydrangea and hibiscus outside Truman's guest bedroom were lush and in full bloom, a beautiful sight to behold in a beautiful part of Los Angeles where Beautiful People lived and breathed. It had become Truman's de facto residence of late, a place of refuge, serenity and inner peace where he was not judged nor lauded for his Past nor his Present, a friend in Joanne whom he cherished, a friend to replace Babe Paley, one of Truman's Manhattan New York “swans”, right up until he aired her dirty laundry – a Truman “swan” she was no more.

He needed cherishing himself now, too many bad memories associated with New York, too many people knowing just too much about the dark side, the partying, the pills, the rampant embarrassments on national TV talk shows. Los Angeles seemed like a world away or at least far enough, to kiss a different ocean, to make Truman forget what needed to be forgotten.

The years of bodily abuse coming home to roost, his time to shine in the klieg lights he darn well knew was over. *You can only be the “It Girl” so long*, Truman thought to himself, smiling, the need for effeminate flamboyance was him down to the core. He would make fun of himself, first, before anyone else could. Yes, only for so long could you be on top, no matter what so-called masterpiece you had penned. Nell had known this decades ago and Truman just sloughed it off, scoffing at her inability to craft another perfect wheel. Turns out she was right. There are only so

many turns at the literary lathe before the wheel stops turning altogether. Nell came out of that realization rather unscathed. Truman, no, unscathed would not be the word to describe his fall from grace.

Truman was so thrilled to be back “Home”, his new place of temporary residence with Joanne and just so relieved to be at her Bel-Air house for the summer. Summers were so hard to bear now, now that A-List invites to the East Hamptons were a thing of the past and no Jack Dunphy to keep Truman sane and levelled and happy amid the gaiety of that social season. Drink, drugs and carousing ruined that relationship, Truman knew it. Too much water had flowed under that bridge, too many hurts and disappointments, he would have to settle for a distanced civility now with Jack and being on another coast altogether made that possible without further extraneous tearing of the soul. No, Joanne's hospitality and her friendship were precisely what he needed, where and when he needed them.

As the ex-wife of Talk-Show Guru, Johnny Carson, Joanne lacked for nothing in her sedate but well-appointed Bel-Air home. Basically adopting Truman as her charge, Joanne had re-decorated two of her guest bedrooms to specifically suit her literary celeb. She had bought antiques of dark burlled walnut and mahogany, purchased a very ornate bedstead, one she knew Truman would luxuriate in and on, writing as he lounged more often in the initial stages of a work than he ever did toiling at a desk. The linens, a lovely layering abound with throw pillows, all in ornate gold chintz, from the duvet to the satin sheets. A dressing room and private bath were made as

appendages to one of the bedrooms, whose windows faced a pleasant southerly direction and a corner of the dressing room held for Truman a sparse but beautifully carved walnut desk with a sturdy upright Jacobean chair, narrow French doors opening from there to a small second floor sun deck, furnished with white wrought iron and glass-topped side tables and a wild rose patterned, well-padded chaise-longue, essential when Truman needed to ponder his muse, refuse mental entry to his ghosts and rest in privacy while catching some California searing midday sun. He wanted for nothing with Joanne, she had become the Mother he had always wanted, the obvious age difference meaning nothing to either of them.

Tiredness overtook him that morning as it often did now, even after a good night's sleep. Tiredness, a lack of breath, the body demanding far more from Truman than the mind these days, literary masterpieces, or even the idea of them, taking a firm backseat in his life now. Somehow the focus as well as the hunger had ebbed away from Truman. Deep down he knew this but just wouldn't accept it even as a possibility. Too much wealth, too much public adulation and bodily abuse will do that to a person.

Regardless, on this day, Truman was determined to write his birthday gift for Joanne, a nice fictional piece on his once dear friend, Willa Cather, but for now, rest was calling, even his morning swim had to be delayed. *Some light writing, a nice light luncheon with Joanne, a late-day swim and I would be right as rain in no time*, Truman thought to himself. He had tried to get

dressed, he truly had tried, but his dangerous lack of balance, muscle weakness and lack of breath firmly called him back to bed.

Sleep beckoned after a quick swallowing of more pills - prescriptions for sleep, for pain, for breathing, for his phlebitis, for just about anything you could conjure up as an ailment - all representing the hope that for even a time, Truman could escape being Truman. He lay his head down on Joanne's satin throw pillows, so smooth, so soft, so cooling to the face, so utterly tranquil, the feeling, as a slight whisper of a fragrant breeze from outside his bedroom window kissed Truman's nose.

Dreams came easily to Truman now. Maybe it was the pills, the exhaustion and, of course, his always colourful imaginings, the source was difficult to tell. Events Truman had wanted to happen all mixed with what actually did, a jumble they were, making up a brand new reverie existence but no matter, it always seemed to put a smile on his face as he entered that world. *What would be the dream today*, a fleeting thought this little man had as the weight of his head made a goodly dent upon those pillows, consciousness now taking a back seat and the imagining curtain rising once again.

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