

SOME LIKE IT COLD

John Kessel

Her heroes were Abraham Lincoln and Albert Einstein. Lincoln was out of the question, but with a little work I could look Einsteinesque. I grew a dark mustache, adopted wild graying hair. From wardrobe I requisitioned a pair of wool slacks, a white cotton shirt, a gabardine jacket with narrow lapel. The shoes were my own, my prized possession—genuine leather, Australian copies of mid twentieth-century brogues, comfortable, well broken in. The

prep-room mirror reflected back a handsomer, taller, younger relative of old Albert, a cross between Einstein and her psychiatrist Dr. Greenson. The moment-universes surrounding the evening of Saturday, August 4 were so thoroughly burned—tourists, biographers, conspiracy hunters, masturbators—that there was no sense arriving then. Besides, I wanted to get a taste of the old LA, before the quake. So I selected the Friday evening 18:00 PDT moment-universe. I materialized in a stall in the men's room at the Santa Monica Municipal Airport. Some aim for deserted places; I like airports, train stations, bus terminals. Lots of strangers if you've missed some detail of costume. Public transport easily available. Crowds to lose oneself in. The portable unit, disguised as an overnight bag, never looks out of place. I stopped in a shop and bought a couple of packs of Luckies. At the Hertz counter I rented a navy blue Plymouth with push-button transmission, threw my canvas camera bag and overnight case into the back and, checking the map, puzzled out the motel address on Wilshire Boulevard that Research had found for me.

The hotel was ersatz Spanish, pink stucco and a red tile roof, a colonnade around a courtyard pool where a teenage boy in white T-shirt and DA haircut leaned on a cleaning net and flirted with a couple of fifteen-year-old girls. I sat in the shadowed doorway of my room, smoked a Lucky and watched until a fat woman in a caftan came out and yelled at the boy to get back to work. The girls giggled.

The early evening I spent driving around. In Santa Monica I saw the pre-tsunami pier, the one she would tell Greenson she was going to visit Saturday night before she changed her mind and stayed home. I ate at the Dancers: a slab of prime rib, a baked potato the size of a football, a bottle of zinfandel. Afterward I drove my Plymouth along the Miracle Mile. I rolled down the windows and let the warm air wash over me, inspecting the strip joints, theaters, bars, and hookers. A number of the women, looking like her in cotton-candy hair and tight dresses, gave me the eye as I cruised by. I pulled into the lot beside a club called the Blue Note. Over the door a blue neon martini glass swamped a green neon olive in gold neon gin. Inside I ordered a scotch and listened to a trio play jazz. A thin white guy with a goatee strangled his saxophone: somewhere in there might be a melody. These cutting-edge late-moderns thought they had the* future augured. The future would be cool and atonal, they thought. No squares allowed. They didn't understand that the future, like the present, would be dominated by saps, and the big rush of 2043 would be barbershop quartets.

I sipped scotch. A brutal high, alcohol, like putting your head in a vise. I liked it. I smoked a couple more Luckies, layering a nicotine buzz over the

alcohol. I watched couples in the dim corners of booths talk about their pasts and their futures, all those words prelude to going to bed. Back in Brentwood she was spending another sleepless night harassed by calls telling her to leave Bobby Kennedy alone.

A woman with dark Jackie hair, black gloves, and a very low-cut dress sat on the stool next to me. The song expired and there was a smattering of applause. "I hate this modern crap, don't you?" the woman said. "It's emblematic of the times," I said.

She gave me a look, decided to laugh. "You can have the times."

"I've seen worse," I said.

"You're not American, are you? The accent."

"I was born in Germany."

"Ah. So you've seen bad times?"

I sipped my scotch. "You could say so." Her eyelids were heavy with shadow, eyelashes a centimeter long. Pale pink lipstick made her thin lips look cool; I wondered if they really were. "Let me buy you a drink."

"Thanks." She watched me fumble with the queer, nineteenth-century style currency. Pyramids with eyes on them, redeemable in silver on demand. I bought her a gin and tonic. "My name's Carol," she told me.

"I am Detlev. "

"Detleff? Funny name."

"Not so common, even in Germany."

"So Detleff, what brings you to LA? You come over the Berlin Wall?" "I'm here to see a movie star."

She snorted. "Won't find any in here."

"I think you could be a movie star, Carol."

"You're not going to believe this, Detleff, but I've heard that line before."

"You'll have to offer me another then."

We flirted through three drinks. She told me she was lonely, I told her I was a stranger. We fell toward a typical liaison of the Penicillin Era: we learned enough about each other (who knew how much of it true?) not to let what we didn't know come between us and what we wanted. Her image of me was compounded by her own fantasies. I didn't have so many illusions. Or maybe mine were larger still, since I knew next-to-nothing about these people other than what I'd gleaned from images projected on various screens. An image had brought me here; images were my job. They had something to do with reality, but more to do with desire.

I studied the cleavage displayed by Carol's dress, she leaned against my shoulder, and from this we generated a lust we imagined would turn to sweet compassion, make up for our losses, and leave us blissfully complete in the same place. We would clutch each other's bodies until we were spent, lie holding each other close, our souls commingled, the first moment of a perfect

marriage that would extend forward from this night in an endless string of equally fulfilling nights. Then we'd part in the morning and never see each other again. That was the dream. I followed her back to her apartment and we did our best to produce it. Afterward I lay awake thinking of Gabrielle, just after we'd married, sunbathing on the screened beach at Nice. I'd watched her, as had the men who passed by. How much of her wanted us to look at her? Was there any difference, in her mind, between my regard and theirs?

I left Carol asleep with the dawn coming up through the window, made my way back to the pink hotel, and got some sleep of my own.

Saturday I spent touring pre-quake LA. I indulged vices I could not indulge in Munich in 2043. I smoked many cigarettes. I walked outside in direct sunlight. I bought a copy of the Wilhelm edition of the I Ching, printed on real paper. At mid-afternoon I stepped into a diner and ordered a bacon cheeseburger, rare, with lettuce and tomato and a side of fries. My mouth watered as the waitress set it in front of me, but after two bites I felt overcome by a wave of nausea. Hands sticky with blood and mayonnaise, I watched the grease congeal in the corner of the plate.

So far, so good. I was a fan of the dirty pleasures of the twentieth century. Things were so much more complicated then. People walked the streets under the shadow of the bomb. They all knew, at some almost biological level, that they might be vaporized at any second. Their blood vibrated with angst. Even the blonde ones. I imagined my ancestors half a world away in a country they expected momentarily to turn into a radioactive battleground, carrying their burden of guilt through the Englischer Garten. Sober Adenauer, struggling to stitch together half a nation. None of them fat, bored, or decadent.

And Marilyn, the world over, was their goddess. That improbable female body, that infantile voice, that oblivious demeanor.

Architecturally, LA 1962 was a disappointment. There was the appropriate amount of kitsch, hot-dog stands shaped like hot dogs and chiropractors' offices like flying saucers, but the really big skyscrapers that would come down in the quake hadn't been built yet. Maybe some of them wouldn't be built in this time-line anymore, thanks to me. By now my presence, through the butterfly effect, had already set this history off down another path from the one of my home. Anything I did toppled dominoes. Perhaps Carol's life would be ruined by the memory of our night of perfect love. Perhaps the cigarettes I bought saved crucial lives. Perhaps the breeze of my Plymouth's passing brought rain to Belgrade, drought to India. For better or worse, who could say?

I killed time into the early evening. By now she was going through the

two-hour session with Greenson trying to shore up her personality against that night's depression.

At 9:00 I took my camera bag and the portable unit and got into the rental car. It was still too early, but I was so keyed up I couldn't sit still. I drove up the Pacific Coast Highway, walked along the beach at Malibu, then turned around and headed back. Sunset Boulevard twisted through the hills. The lights of the houses flickered between trees. In Brentwood I had some trouble finding Carmelina, drove past, then doubled back. Marilyn's house was on Fifth Helena, a short street off Carmelina ending in a cul-de-sac. I parked at the end, slung my bags over my shoulder, and walked back.

A brick and stucco wall shielded the house from the street. I circled round through the neighbor's yard, pushed through the bougainvillea and approached from the back. It was a modest hacienda-style ranch, a couple of bedrooms, tile roof. The patio lights were off and the water in the pool lay smooth as dark glass. Lights shone from the end bedroom to the far left.

First problem would be to get rid of Eunice Murray, her companion and housekeeper. If what had happened in our history was true in this one, she'd gone to sleep at mid-evening. I stepped quietly through the back door, found her in her bedroom and slapped a sedative patch onto her forearm, holding my hand across her mouth against her struggling until she was out.

A long phone cord snaked down the hall from the living room and under the other bedroom door. The door was locked. Outside, I pushed through the shrubs, mucking up my shoes in the soft soil, reached in through the

bars over the opened window, and pushed aside the blackout curtains. Marilyn sprawled face down across the bed, right arm dangling off the

side, receiver clutched in her hand. I found the unbarred casement window on the adjacent side of the house, broke it open, then climbed inside. Her breathing was deep and irregular. Her skin was clammy. Only the faintest pulse at her neck.

I rolled her onto her back, got my bag, pried back her eyelid and shone a light into her eye. Her pupil barely contracted. I had come late on purpose, but this was not good.

I gave her a shot of apomorphine, lifted her off the bed and shouldered her toward the bathroom. She was surprisingly light-gaunt, even. I could feel her ribs. In the bathroom, full of plaster and junk from the remodelers,

I held her over the toilet until she vomited. No food, but some undigested capsules. That would have been a good sign, except she habitually pierced them with a pin so they'd work faster. There was no way of telling how much Nembutal she had in her bloodstream.

I dug my thumb into the crook of her elbow, forcing the tendon. Did she

inhale more strongly? "Wake up, Norma Jean," I said. "Time to wake up. No

reaction.

I took her back to the bed and got the blood filter out of my camera bag. The studio'd had me practicing on indigents hired from the state. I wiped a pharmacy's worth of pill bottles from the flimsy table next to the bed and set up the machine. The shunt slipped easily into the artery in her arm, and I fiddled with the flow until the readout went green. What with one thing and another I had a busy half hour before she was resting in bed, bundled up, feet elevated, asleep but breathing normally, God in his heaven, and her blood circulating merrily through the filter like money through my bank account. I went outside and smoked a cigarette. The stars were out and a breeze had kicked up. On the tile threshold outside the front door words were emblazoned: "Cursum Perficio. " I am finishing my journey. I looked in on Mrs. Murray. Still out. I went back and sat in the bedroom. The place was a mess. Forests of pill bottles covered every horizontal surface. A stack of Sinatra records sat on the record player. On top: "High Hopes. " Loose-leaf binders lay scattered all over the floor. I picked one up. It was a script for Something's Got to Give.

I read through the script. It wasn't very good. About 2:00 a.m. she moaned and started to move. I slapped a clarifier patch onto her arm. It wouldn't push the pentobarbital out of her system any faster, but when it began to take hold it would make her feel better.

About 3:00 the blood filter beeped. I removed the shunt, sat her up, made her drink a liter of electrolyte. It took her a while to get it all down. She looked at me through fogged eyes. She smelled sour and did not look like the most beautiful woman in the world. "What happened?" she mumbled.

"You took too many pills. You're going to be all right."

I helped her into a robe, then walked her down the hallway and around the living room until she began to take some of the weight herself. At one end of the room hung a couple of lurid Mexican Day of the Dead masks, at the other a framed portrait of Lincoln. When I got tired of facing down the leering ghouls and honest Abe, I took her outside and we marched around the pool in the darkness. The breeze wrote cat's paws on the surface of the water. After a while she began to come around. She tried to pull away but was weak as a baby.

"Let me go," she mumbled.

"You want to stop walking?"

"I want to sleep," she said.

"Keep walking.- We circled the pool for another quarter hour. In the distance I heard sparse traffic on Sunset; nearer the breeze rustled the fan palms. I was sweaty, she was cold.

"Please," she whined. "Let's stop."

I let her down onto a patio chair, went inside, found some coffee and set a pot brewing. I brought a blanket out, wrapped her in it, poked her

to keep her awake until the coffee was ready. Eventually she sat there sipping coffee, holding the cup in both hands to warm them, hair down in her eyes and eyelashes gummed together. She looked tired. "How are you?" I asked.

"Alive. Bad luck." She started to cry. "Cruel, all of them, all those bastards. Oh, Jesus . . . "

I let her go on for a while. I gave her a handkerchief and she dried her eyes, blew her nose. The most beautiful woman in the world. "Who are you?" she asked.

"My name is Detlev Gruber. Call me Det."

"What are you doing here? Where's Mrs. Murray?"

"You don't remember? You sent her home."

She took a sip of coffee, watching me over the rim of the cup.

"I'm here to help you, Marilyn. To rescue you."

"Rescue me?"

"I know how hard things are, how lonely you've been. I knew that you would try to kill yourself."

"I was just trying to get some sleep."

"Do you really think that's all there is to it?"

"Listen, mister, I don't know who you are but I don't need your help and if you don't get out of here pretty soon I'm going to call the police. " Her voice trailed off pitifully at the end. "I'm sorry," she said.

"Don't be sorry. I'm here to save you from all this."

Hands shaking, she put down the cup. I had never seen a face more vulnerable. She tried to hide it, but her expression was full of need. I felt an urge to protect her that, despite the fact she was a wreck, was pure sex. "I'm cold," she said. "Can we go inside?"

We went inside. We sat in the living room, she on the sofa and I in an uncomfortable Spanish chair, and I told her things about her life that nobody should have known but her. The abortions. The suicide attempts. The Kennedy affairs. The way Sinatra treated her. More than that, the fear of loneliness, the fear of insanity, the fear of aging. I found myself warming to the role of rescuer. I really did want to hold her, for more than one reason. She was not able to keep up her hostility in the face of the knowledge that I was telling her the simple truth. Miller had written how grateful she was every time he'd saved her life, and it looked like that reaction was coming through for me now. She'd always liked being rescued, and the men who rescued her. The clarifier might have had something to do with it, too. Finally she protested, "How do you know all this?"

"This is going to be the hardest part, Marilyn. I know because I'm from

the future. If I had not shown up here, you would have died tonight. It's recorded history."

She laughed. "From the future?"

"Absolutely.

"Right. "

"I'm not lying to you, Marilyn. If I didn't care, would you be alive now?"

She pulled the blanket tighter around her. "What does the future want with me?"

"You're the most famous actress of your era. Your death would be a great tragedy, and we want to prevent that. "

"What good does this do me? I'm still stuck in the same shit.

"You don't have to be." She tried to look skeptical but hope was written in every tremble of her body. It was frightening. "I want you to come with me back to the future, Marilyn."

She stared at me. "You must be crazy. I wouldn't know anybody. No friends, no family. "

"You don't have any family. Your mother is in an institution. And where were your friends tonight?"

She put her hand to her head, rubbed her forehead, a gesture so full of troubled intelligence that I had a sudden sense of her as a real person, a grown woman in a lot of trouble. "You don't want to mess with me," she said.

"I'm not worth it. I'm nothing but trouble."

"I can cure your trouble. In the future we have ways. No one here really cares for you, Marilyn, no one truly understands you. That dark pit of despair that opens up inside you—we can fill it. We can heal the wounds you've had since you were a little girl, make up for all the neglect you've suffered, keep you young forever. We have these powers. It's my job to correct the mistakes of the past, for special people. You're one of them. I have a team of caregivers waiting for you, a home, emotional support, understanding. "

"Yeah. Another institution. I can't take it." I came over, sat beside her, lowered my voice, looked her in the eyes. Time for the closer. "You know that poem—that Yeats poem?"

"What poem?"

" 'Never Give All the Heart.' " Research had made me memorize it. It was one of her favorites.

"Never give all the heart, for love,
Will hardly seem worth thinking of
To passionate women if it seem

Certain, and they never dream
That it fades out from kiss to kiss
For everything that's lovely is
But a brief, dreamy, kind delight

She stopped me. "What about it?" Her voice was edgy.

"Just that life doesn't have to be like the poem, brief, and you don't have to suffer. You don't have to give all the heart, and lose."

She sat there, wound in the blanket. Clearly I had touched something in her.

"Think about it," I said. I went outside and smoked another Lucky. When I'd started working for DAA I'd considered this a glamour job. Exotic times, famous people. And I was good at it. A quick study, smart, adaptable. Sincere. I was so good that Gabrielle came to hate me, and left.

After a considerable while Marilyn came outside, the blanket over her head and shoulders like an Indian.

"Well, kemosabe?" I asked.

Despite herself, she smiled. Although the light was dim, the crow's feet at the comers of her eyes were visible. "If I don't like it, will you bring me back?"

"You'll like it. But if you don't I promise I'll bring you back."

"Okay. What do I have to do?"

"Just pack a few things to take with you-the most important ones."

I waited while she threw some clothes into a suitcase. She took the Lincoln portrait off the wall and put it in on top. I bagged the blood filter and set up the portable unit in the living room.

"Maf!" she said.

"What?"

"My dog!" She looked crushed, as if she were about to collapse. "Who'll take care of Maf?"

"Mrs. Murray will."

"She hates him! I can't trust her." She was disintegrating. "I can't go. This isn't a good idea."

"Where is Maf? We'll take him."

We went out to the guest house. The place stunk. The dog, sleeping on an old fur coat, launched himself at me, yapping, as soon as we opened the door. It was one of those inbred over-groomed toy poodles that you want to drop kick into the next universe. She picked him up, cooed over him, made me get a bag of dog food and his water dish. I gritted my teeth.

In the living room I moved the chair aside and made her stand in the center

of the room while I laid the wire circle around us to outline the field. She was nervous. I held her hand, she held the dog. "Here we go, Marilyn."

I touched the switch on the case. Marilyn's living room receded from us in all directions, we fell like pebbles into a dark well, and from infinitely far away the transit stage at DAA rushed forward to surround us. The dog growled. Marilyn swayed, put a hand to her head. I held her arm to steady her.

From the control booth Scoville and a nurse came up to us. The nurse took Marilyn's other side. "Marilyn, this is a nurse who's going to help you get some rest. And this is Derek Scoville, who's running this operation."

We got her into the suite and the doctors shot her full of metabolic cleansers. I promised her I'd take care of Maf, then pawned the dog off on the staff. I held her hand, smiled reassuringly, sat with her until she went to sleep. Lying there she looked calm, confident. She liked being cared for; she was used to it. Now she had a whole new world waiting to take care of her. She thought.

It was all up to me.

I went to the prep room, showered, and switched to street clothes: an onyx Singapore silk shirt, cotton baggies, spex. The weather report said it was a bad UV day: I selected a broad-brimmed hat. I was inspecting my shoes, which looked ruined from the muck from Marilyn's garden, when a summons from Scoville showed in the corner of my spex: meet them in the conference room. Levine and Sally House were there, and the doctor, and Jason Cryer from publicity. "So, what do you think?" Levine asked me.

"She's in pretty rough shape. Physically she can probably take it, but emotionally she's a wreck. "

"Tomorrow we'll inject her with nanorepair devices," the doctor said. "She's probably had some degree of renal damage, if not worse."

"Christ, have you seen her scars?" Levine said. "How many operations has she had? Did they just take a cleaver to them back then?"

"They took a cleaver first, then an airbrush," Sally said.

"We'll fix the scars," said Cryer. Legend had it the most dangerous place in Hollywood was between Cryer and a news camera. "And Detlev here will be her protector, right Det? After all, you saved her life. You're her friend. Her dad. Her lover, if it comes to that."

"Right," I said. I thought about Marilyn, asleep at last. What expectations did she have?

Scoville spoke for the first time. "I want us into production within three weeks. We've got eighty million already invested in this. Sally, you can crank publicity up to full gain. We're going to succeed where all the others have failed. We're going to put the first viable Marilyn on the wire. She

may be a wreck, but she wants to be here. Not like Paramount's version. "

"That's where we're smart," Cryer said. "We take into account the psychological factors."

I couldn't stand much more. After the meeting I rode down to the lobby and checked out of the building. As I approached the front doors I could see a crowd of people had gathered outside in the bright sunlight. Faces slick with factor 400 sunscreen, they shouted and carried picket signs. "End Time Exploitation." "Information, not People Hands off the Past."

Not one gram of evidence existed that a change in a past moment-universe had ever affected our own time. They were as separate as two sides of a coin. Of course it was true that once you burned a particular universe you could never go back. But with an eternity of moment-universes to exploit, who cared?

The chronological protection fanatics would be better off taking care of the historicals who were coming to litter up the present, the ones who couldn't adjust, or outlasted their momentary celebrity, or turned out not to be as interesting to the present as their sponsors had imagined. A lot of money had been squandered on bad risks. Who really wanted to listen to new compositions by Gershwin? How was Shakespeare even going to understand the twenty-first century, let alone write VR scripts that anybody would want to experience? I sneaked out the side door and caught the metro down at the corner. Rode the train through Hollywood and up to my arcology.

In the newsstand I uploaded the latest trades into my spex, then stopped into the men's room to get my shoes polished. While the valet worked I smoked the last of my Luckies and checked the news. Jesus, still hotter than a pistol, was the lead on Variety. He smiled, new teeth, clean shaven, homely little Jew, but even through the holo he projected a lethal charisma. That one was making Universal rich. Who would have thought that a religious mystic with an Aramaic accent would become such a talk-show shark, his virtual image the number one teleromantics dream date? "Jesus' Laying On of Hands is the most spiritual experience I've ever had over fiberoptic VR,- gushed worldwide recording megastar Daphne Overdone.

On Hollywood Grapevine, gossip maven Hedley O'Connor reported Elisenbrunnen GMBH, which owned DAA, was unhappy with third-quarter earnings. If Scoville went down, the new boss would pull the plug on all his projects. My contractual responsibilities would then, as they say, be at an end.

"What a mess you made of these shoes, Herr Gruber," the valet muttered in German. I switched off my spex and watched him finish. The arco hired a lot of indigents. It was cheap, and good PR, but the valet was my personal

reclamation project. His unruly head of hair danced as he buffed my shoes to a high luster. He looked up at me. "How is that?"

I "Looks fine." I fished out a twenty-dollar piece. He watched me with his watery, sad, intelligent eyes. His brown hair was going gray.

"I see you got a mustache, like mine," he said.

"Only for work. For a while I need to look like you, Albert."

I gave him the twenty and went up to my room.