

The Past Is A Great Place To Be From

Warren Higgins walked briskly up Ninth Avenue, on his way to the studio of his friend, Hermes Trismegistus. This was not his friend's real name, having been born with the more ordinary monicker of Herman Weinblut, but Herm was in the psychic business, and needed more of an air of esotery to his name. The studio was just a block up, on Judah, right where the streetcar turned before lumbering off towards the ocean. Herm had been immersed in the occult arts for many years, and was an expert at many of them – Astrology, Palmistry, Phrenology, Numerology, the Tarot, the I Ching. He was knowledgeable on such diverse subjects as Rosicrucianism, Black Magic, White Magic, Egyptology, and had read extensively such authors as Madame Blavatsky, Gurdjieff, and Ouspensky. Warren did not believe in such nonsense himself, but was happy that his friend was finally doing so well in his business. The Law seemed to have recently modified its erstwhile strictures against the exploitation of the ignorant and naive, and it was now licit to openly advertise psychic garbage such as the reading of palms and minds for a price.

Warren was presently going through an onset-of-old-age crisis, having just celebrated with sadness the passing of his sixtieth birthday. He did not appear particularly ancient when gazing at himself in his bathroom mirror, but younger people were more and more often calling him “sir” and offering him their seats on the bus. Nor did he feel particularly decrepit as he strode with his usual robustness down the street, frequently overtaking pedestrians many years his junior. But the power of the multiples of ten was taking its toll. Fifty nine was barely bearable; sixty seemed like the beginning of the end. In no time at all he would be seventy, and then eighty, and he still had a lot of living to squeeze in before they came to put him in a box.

The friendly, glowing neon sign advertising psychic readings told him that his friend was in, and he was fortunate that there were no customers at that moment. He just wanted to chat with Herm, but Herm was so seldom at home, spending long days at his studio, always hoping for just one more customer before closing up shop. Herm seemed glad to see him as he ushered Warren into the large study in which he conducted his business. A large, ornately carved wooden desk dominated the room, whose walls were jammed with bookcases spilling over with treatises and tomes on every subject from Aenigma philosophorum to Zoroastrianism. Stacks of periodicals and occult trade journals occupied those parts of the floor not covered by a worn, but once-valuable oriental carpet. On one side of the cluttered desk stood a large crystal ball, and on one of the side tables sat an obsidian cat with jewelled eyes which Herm claimed had come from ancient Egypt.

“I really enjoyed myself the other night,” said Herm, referring to the birthday bash to which Warren had invited his small circle of friends the preceding Saturday evening.

“Yeah,” said Warren, “but it’s depressing.”

“What is? Getting older?”

“Getting sixty.”

“Sixty’s a nice number, quite popular with the ancients. It’s divisible by 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 10, 12, 15, 20, and 30. It was the base of the old Babylonian number system.”

“I don’t think it’s so nice. How would you like to be sixty?”

“Everybody in the world eventually gets to be sixty, at least posthumously. What age would you rather be?”

“Thirty would be kind of nice. That was probably the best time in my life. I was living in the Haight. I had a girl friend. Life was exciting.”

“You had a girl friend. That’s what I hear you saying. Are you afraid there’s no sex after sixty?”

“All the women my age are either fat and dumpy, or skinny and muscular. I still go for the younger ones. But they don’t go for me. There’s more to it than that, however. Back then I seemed to have some kind of purpose. Life was a lot more fun than it is now, things were happening, I was doing things. The Haight Ashbury was a great place to live in. The neighborhood I am now in is okay, but I just seem to go from one day to the next, living off the memories of the past.

“So you’d like to do a little time traveling, eh? I’ll bet if you found a way to do it, you’d find out it wasn’t really so great back then. People have a tendency to gloss over the bad times and just remember the good ones.”

“I’d be willing to take my chances. Couldn’t you dig out some forgotten magical incantation from one of those musty old books of yours?”

“Wish I could, but the ancients didn’t put much thought into time travel. They didn’t have a word for it, not even a concept. H. G. Wells seems to have introduced the idea into our culture.

As they were talking, the eyes of the black cat on the side table glowed momentarily with a peculiar yellow light, but neither of them noticed.

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The morning glare infiltrating his bedroom through every crack and crevice denied him further respite from the hideous hangover that threatened to dominate his day. Warren wished that Suzie had not talked him into staying so long at the party.

“Suzie?” asked one part of his mind. “Suzie?”

“Yeah, Suzie,” said another part.

Warren sat up abruptly, disregarding the hammering in his anterior lobe, besieged by this confusion going on in the left hemisphere of his cerebrum. The familiar, yet strangely unfamiliar green walls of his Page Street apartment tweaked at his memory. He hadn’t seen those walls for thirty years. What d’ya mean, he hadn’t seen them for thirty years? He had seen those goddam walls only yesterday. What was this shit? He looked around blearily at the rock posters on the walls, the green dresser, the bright blue chair he had just painted a few weeks ago. He remembered the old blue chair, worn and battered after thirty years, still sitting in the bedroom of his Hugo Street apartment. *Old* blue chair? *Thirty* years ago? *Hugo* Street? Where the fuck was Hugo Street? The Grateful Dead poster was long gone, the Jefferson Airplane poster worn and torn, rolled up in a box in his spare room. Yet here they *were*, gracing his walls. He struggled to get his mental bearings.

The last thing he could remember was sitting on Freeloader Freddie’s beat-up sofa holding in a big lungful of pot while chugalugging a jug of Red Mountain just passed to him by the fat leather biker sitting on his left trying to make time with his girlfriend Suzie sitting on his right.

The other last thing he could remember was sitting in Herm's study talking about time travel. Herm? Time travel?

Two memory streams, both equally valid. It was awesome.

Had somebody slipped him some acid at the party? Otherwise why was he having these weird thoughts? He rubbed his face with his hands, trying to massage his mind into a semblance of sanity.

"What the fuck is happening to me?" he asked himself nervously. Acid had never affected him like this before. Maybe it *was* possible that acid could give you permanent brain damage, and this was it. He had always thought that was an old wives' tale made up by the cops to keep people from dropping acid. He sat and went over in his mind the two differing past weeks which presented themselves.

On the one hand he had just celebrated his sixtieth birthday the previous Saturday, and he had invited all his old buddies to talk about the good old days and how awful it was to be old. On the other hand he had spent the same weekend down at Big Sur on an acid trip with Phil the pill freak and Wes the super head, wondering what the fuck they were going to do with their dismal-looking futures. Two unbroken series of events going back as far as his mind's eye could see, and they seemed to join up thirty years ago, which seemed to be right now, this present minute, 1969. Wait a minute. 1969? It was 1999, for god's sake!

He got up and staggered to the mirror on top of the dresser, peering at himself disconsolately. A young, thirty-year-old with disheveled hair and a bleak look on his face stared back at him. He turned and staggered back to his bed, sitting on the edge of it, marveling at this strange predicament he was in, having this newly-acquired history of the last thirty years. Or was it the *next* thirty years? Where the fuck had *that* come from? Had he gone schizoid? Was he a new Bridey Murphy case? Just a minute, just a minute, he thought. Bridey Murphy had acquired a memory about the *past*. *He* had acquired a memory about the *future*. Wow.

In one part of his brain, he was struggling to contain the joy at suddenly being in possession of a new young body, as well as an additional thirty years to his lifespan. At the same time, he was aghast at the conviction that he was sixty years old, with one foot in the grave, living in some apartment on Hugo Street.

"What'll I do with this? Turn myself over to medical science? Call a press conference and become famous? Wait, wait, wait, wait, wait. Nobody'd believe me. Would I believe anyone else who told me a lallapaluza like this? No way. They'd laugh at me or put me away in a laughing academy. How could I prove it? On the other hand, I could predict the future. Go on stage and make a million. For starters, I could put all my money on the Forty Niner-Rams game tomorrow. Can I remember the result? Can I? God, I don't know. I'd better take it slow and easy. Why rush things. He lay back in bed, his hungover mind in a whirl. He drifted into an unhappy doze.

When he awoke the second time he felt somewhat better, but this other part of him still seemed to be there. And what did *other* mean? The sixty-year-old part, or the thirty-year-old part? Which one *was* he, for god's sake?

There *do* seem to be two parts of us, the sixty-year-old seemed to be saying to the thirty-year-old. We might as well get used to it, at least for now.

Okay, said the thirty-year-old. At least let's face realities. *I'm* the one who's living right now. It's 1969, right? And this apartment is on Page Street, right? Not on Hugo Street.

True, said the older part. You're the main guy. I just seem to be along for the ride. But look at the bright side of it. *I* know what's going to happen in the next thirty years. That ought to be worth something. And I've got all that wisdom I've acquired. You're young and you don't believe in yourself very much. We could do each other some good. All we have to do is cooperate. Right?

Right, said his thirty-year-old self. I'm glad we got that settled. *I'm* the one in charge. If I want your help, I can ask for it, okay? Now, how about that Forty Niner-Ram game tomorrow? What was the score on that one? Or rather, what *is* the score gonna be? Can you remember?

* * *

"Sorry, Warren. I don't know any bookies." Big Bill Boozer wiped down the bar, getting ready for his late morning customers. His real name was Buvier, but everybody called him Boozer. He was the owner of the Golden Carousel Rock-and-Roll Palace, but nothing looked golden about it this morning.

"What about all those bets you made last year?"

"That was in Vegas."

"You seen Ray lately? He's always talking it up big, how much he makes on football games."

"Yeah, well, I don't always believe everything Ray says. Besides, I haven't seen him since last month. I think he's visiting his sister in Chico."

"Shit, where'm I gonna find somebody to place a bet with?"

"How come you're in such a rush to give all your money away?"

"It's a sure thing. Rams over the Forty Niners, 27 to 3."

"You in on a big fix or something? How can you be so sure of the results?"

"I just don't have time to explain it, Boozer. I gotta find a bookie. How about Mac the hack? He gets around. He might know someone."

"I know he was driving last night, so he's probably sleeping in this morning. I don't know his number, but maybe Dizzy would know. If I know Dizzy, he probably tying one on over at the Castle Rock."

* * *

On Saturday night, Warren was in a funk. Miracle of all miracles, he had gotten the thirty five bucks back that Freeloader Freddie owed him, which, when added to the four hundred sixty five dollars he had removed from his now almost-denuded savings account, gave him a cool five hundred to bet on the game. If that damned bookie would only return his calls. He had also found out from Freddie what had happened to his girl friend Suzie.

"After you passed out at the party, she went off with that biker guy, what was his name?"

“Who gives a shit what that fat fuck’s name was, where did they go?”

“He was going to take her up to watch the sun rise at Mendocino City.”

“Mendocino City! They’d have to drive half the night to get there on time.”

“He had that big red Harley with the passenger seat. You know what a thing she’s always had for motorcycles.”

“Jesus! What the hell did she see in him?”

“Frankly, I never understood what she saw in you.”

“Thanks a lot, buddy.”

“Well, you were always downgrading her, telling her women were inferior, telling her how dumb she was. At least he was nice to her.”

“Yeah, buttering her up, lying through his teeth so he could get in her pants.”

“Considering how much you didn’t respect her mind, what the hell were you after?”

“Thanks a lot, Freddie. It’s nice to know who your friends are.”

“If they’re really friends, they’re the only ones who’ll tell you the truth.”

“Yeah, okay. Well, thanks anyway for paying me back that thirty five bucks.”

“What’s up, man?”

“I’ll tell you later, after it’s over. Soon I’ll be sitting on easy street, with more women than I know what to do with. Dumb broads like Suzie are a dime a dozen.”

So anyway, here he was, waiting for a call from the bookie. He hadn’t been able to speak to him in person, but he had left a half dozen messages with the woman with the gravelly voice who had answered the phone. Probably the guy’s girlfriend.

“Yeah, yeah,” she had said. “Like I told you before, he’ll be in later. I’ll give him your message, I promise. Please don’t call anymore.”

“But you did write it down, just in case you’re asleep when he comes in?”

“Yeah, yeah, I wrote it down. Honest. Now please quit calling. I gotta wash my hair.”

While waiting for the call, his alter ego was having the time of his life poring over the front pages of the Saturday Chronicle, sucking up all the national and foreign news, items which normally bored the shit out of Warren. News on the Viet Nam war was prominently displayed, but it was other subjects that attracted his new psychic partner’s attention.

“Look at this! The Israelis and Jordanians are fighting over the holy mosque in Hebron.”

“What’s that?”

“It’s the place where Abraham is buried.”

“So?”

“So thirty years from now, the Israelis and Palestinians will be fighting over the same thing.”

Or, “I see where they’re talking about building a freeway through a corner of Golden Gate Park.”

“And?”

“Well, it’ll never happen, and, thirty years from now, they also won’t have an Embarcadero freeway, and they’ll be tearing down the Central Freeway because of earthquake damage.”

Warren Jr. didn't mind glancing at the miniskirt fashion photos with his lustful senior.

"Do you realize that women will still be wearing them thirty years from now?"

"Sounds like the world's not gonna change much."

"They'll still be playing rock and roll, but they'll just call it rock, and there won't be a Soviet Union or a divided Germany. And television will be in color."

For a moment, Warren junior was mildly interested. But only for a moment.

"When's that fucking bookie gonna return my call?"

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On Sunday morning, Warren was back at his job at the Veggie Hut, serving veggie burgers and ladeling out lentil soup to gaily-clad hippies. He had been planning to phone in sick, so he could listen to the game, but the goddamned bookie had never called back, and now the bookie's godammned phone was off the hook, so there wasn't going to be a big bet after all.

Warren Sr. had very much enjoyed the walk to work. Haight Street was jam-packed by a street fair, and pretty hippy girls were everywhere, asking for spare change. The Berkeley Barb was being sold on the street corners, and rock posters for the Avalon Ballroom and the Fillmore Auditorium graced the shopwindows. There was even something going on at the Straight Theater.

"Don't worry about it," Warren Sr. admonished Warren Jr. "There'll be lots of other events we can bet on in the future."

"You sure you'll be able to remember them?"

"Maybe we could go to a hypnotist. God knows I went to enough football games. Maybe I could even dredge up the winner of the Preakness or the Kentucky Derby."

That idea cheered Junior up a bit. He was eager to locate a hypnotist as soon as possible.

"I had forgotten how antsy I used to be," Senior reflected. "Why don't we try to seduce one of these gorgeous flower children? They look so damned available."

"They don't call them flower children any longer, old man, but for once we're in agreement. Maybe you could help me in the confidence department. I haven't had much luck lately."

Sunday morning passed quickly, and it was nearly one in the afternoon. Game time. Warren could almost hear the loudspeakers at Kezar stadium, and, bet or no bet, he was anxious to know how the game would turn out. There was a beat-up old radio in the back room of the Veggie Hut, which he could listen to on his breaks, but old man Prentiss, his boss, kept an eagle eye on the clock. The first chance he had was during his lunch period, from one till one thirty. Warren stayed glued to the radio, listening to the old familiar voice of Lon Simmons doing the play-by-play, with Gordy Soltau as the color man. It was near the end of the half, with the score fourteen to three in favor of Los Angeles, but John Brodie had just completed a pass to Dave Parks at the Rams' thirty three yard line, and Ken Willard had run it down to the twenty. This didn't sound like the game he remembered, with the Forty Niners never making it beyond the fifty yard line except for that one field goal, but, unfortunately, one-thirty arrived, along with Mr. Prentiss, so he reluctantly turned off the radio and donned his apron once more. It wasn't

until his fifteen-minute break at four, with the game almost over, that he could check in again. He was aghast to learn that the score was seventeen to ten with five minutes to go. He turned off the radio angrily, directing an inner glance of near hatred at his alter ego.

"Twenty one to three, huh? You old fart! Lucky I never made that bet."

"Just what I was going to say. Aren't we lucky?"

"Aren't we now."

"We' is you too, buddy. Maybe the hypnotist idea isn't such a bad one."

This reflection mollified Warren Jr. Somewhat, and the inner discussion was ended anyway, with the reappearance of his boss.

"You talking to yourself, Higgins?"

"No, sir."

"Sure sounded like it to me. Better get your ass out there. We're knee-deep in customers."

* * *

Big Bill gave him a funny glance when he entered the Golden Carousel. The place was packed, and it took a good five minutes to order a drink.

"I'm not giving you any credit," Big Bill warned him.

"Who needs it?"

"Didn't you bet everything you had on the game?"

"Nah, the goddamned bookie never returned my call."

"Lucky you. You shouldn't be cussing him out. He did you a giant favor."

"Yeah, I guess. Lemme have a double gin and tonic. I really need it."

It wasn't until the bartender returned with his drink that he directed an additional comment to Warren.

"You know that twenty one to three score you were talking about?"

"Yeah?"

"Wasn't that the score of the first Rams game last year? I was thinking about it after you left."

"No shit. Yeah, maybe you're right."

"I'm almost positive. I probably have the old game program at home. Want me to check it?"

"I'd appreciate it. Say, look – you didn't say anything to anyone about my bet, did you?"

"Your bet? No way, Warren. You trying to insult me or something?"

"Sorry, Big Bill. There's been a lot on my mind lately."

"There's been a lot on your mind for a long time, buddy. Why don't you loosen up a little."

* * *

On Tuesday morning, Warren went to a meeting with the hypnotherapist he had discovered in the yellow pages the day before. He had taken a couple hours off from his job at the Veggie Hut, much to the continuing displeasure of Mr. Prentiss, but fortunately

Millie had been willing to cover for him. It had been sheer luck that Dr. Rampant had been able to see him right away. Normally, appointments had to be made at least a couple weeks in advance, but another of his patients had just cancelled her Tuesday visit.

Hugo Rampant had his office in a little house in back in a residential block of the Noe Valley. Although it had been foggy in the Haight Ashbury, it was a clear, bright day on the other side of Twin Peaks. Dr. Rampant ushered Warren to a seat on the other side of his empty desk and delivered a brief spiel on hypnotherapy.

"I, like the father of modern psychology, Dr. Sigmund Freud," began the good doctor, pausing for a mental genuflection at the brief mention of the creator of psychotherapy, "and unlike most of my contemporaries, make considerable use of hypnosis in my practice. It seems to have fallen into disrepute in recent years, which is a real pity, as it is such a valuable tool, and often saves much time in getting to the roots of neurosis. At the same time, it's important that a situation of trust be established between patient and therapist, since hypnosis has been given such an ill repute by stage performers that many patients feel it to be a violation of their privacy."

Dr. Rampant stopped for a moment, tenting his hands pontifically, looking directly at Warren for the first time. Warren noticed that one of Dr. Rampant's eyes seemed to be cocked in a slightly different direction from the other, giving him a somewhat unworldly appearance. He also noticed that a few of Dr. Rampant's hairs were sticking up on the back of his head.

"I'm only going through all of this with you, Warren, because I want you to understand that hypnosis is only one of several techniques we might employ, should you decide to become one of my patients. I mention this because you seemed to show such a strong interest in it." He smiled a somewhat wispy smile, a small social down payment on the full-fledged treatment should Warren decide to throw in his cards with Dr. Rampant.

"Well, uh, that's just what I'd like to talk to you about," Warren began, wishing the words would come as easily as they had when he had practiced them in his bedroom earlier.

"Becoming one of my patients?"

"No, not really. More like *not* becoming one of your patients. You see, I'm not nuts or anything, and I don't think I have any of those neuroses you were talking about. I'm just a sane, ordinary guy who would like to hire you to do some hypnotic work."

"In a sick society, a sane man is truly a rarity," said Dr. Rampant with a lopsided smile which seemed to prove his point. "You would be a rare man indeed if you didn't have a neurosis or two."

"Yeah, well, maybe that's so, but basically the problem is that there's some stuff in my past, like the scores of football games and horse races which I know I knew back when they happened, but which I can't remember now, and it would be worth a couple sessions to me if you could dig them out."

"Football games? Horseraces?" said Dr. Rampant, his eyes bulging slightly. "I don't understand. Couldn't you just look them up in newspaper archives?"

"Well, they haven't happened yet is the problem. Of course they *have* happened, but like in the future, you see, so I've been to all those games, but my memory isn't so great and I'd like you to just hypnotize me and then ask me what those scores were and write them down for me."

"I see," said Dr. Rampant, not seeing at all. "And why is it so important for you to know those scores?"

"Well, I hope you can keep this a secret, but . . ." Warren paused, beginning to realize how strange he must be sounding, and starting to hate the conversation, but determined to press things to their conclusion, now that he had gotten this far. "I'd, uh, like to win some money betting on them," he finished somewhat lamely.

The five minutes of silence which followed this denouement were terrible for Warren to bear. Dr. Rampant was looking at him as if he were a prize specimen at a zoo.

"I see, I see. Have you, uh, been a time traveler for very long now, Warren? Dr. Rampant's voice had taken on a soothing, persuasive tone, the sort one used with backward children and people with a loose screw.

"No, just since a few days ago," Warren stammered. "Saturday morning as a matter of fact."

"Well, Warren, I think we would need to do a great deal of work before we got around to what you would, uh, like me to do. In cases like yours it is very important for me to learn a lot about your situation. It's not generally a good idea to rush things. Let me see . . ." He pulled out a drawer and withdrew a notebook. "What would be the best day for you to come see me? I have a Wednesday slot still open at 10:30 in the morning. How would that be?"

"But I don't want to be a patient," said Warren futilely. "I just want to hire you to perform some straightforward hypnosis, like I was saying. In fact, I couldn't really afford more than a couple sessions."

"Well, don't worry yourself unduly about payments right now, Warren. I use a sliding scale geared to the income of my patients. Perhaps you have a hospitalization plan where you work?"

"No, no!" said Warren, becoming more and more upset. "I'm not crazy and I don't want to be a patient! I'm sure you're a very good doctor, but there's really nothing wrong with me, even though what I've told you must sound sort of nuts. Look, I could maybe prove it to you by telling you a little bit about the future. I really have been there, you know."

"Yes, yes, of course, Warren. I understand. I really do. But you have to understand that this is just a free, first-time, get-together session. You would have to become a regular patient of mine for you to go into greater detail. In addition to that, I don't perform hypnosis for an hourly rate. Hypnosis is an integral part of therapy."

Warren could not remember very clearly afterwards what happened then. He knew only that he left rather abruptly, stumbling over his words and mumbling his apologies to a stern-faced Dr. Rampant, who looked at him in much the same way Warren's father had when he had been sent home from his third-grade class for placing one of his turds on the desk of the little girl who sat in front of him. He had thought it a great joke at the time, but the little girl, his teacher, and his father had not shared that opinion. At any rate, Warren fled. To make matters worse, he found a ticket on the windshield of his beat-up '58 Volkswagen for partially blocking a driveway. He drove back to the Haight in a real funk, hating the fact that he had to return to his job when, with every fiber of his being, he wanted to escape to the Golden Carousel, to drink himself into a temporary oblivion.



After escaping the four green walls of the Veggie Hut, the first thing Warren did was to stop at Hamburger Harry's and wolf down a half-pound cheeseburger with fries and lots of ketchup. It was a treat to taste some real meat after serving veggie-burgers all day to a bunch of sissies who couldn't face the fact that Man was inherently a killer ape.

The second thing he did was drop by the Carousel to lighten up after a trying day. It gave his alter ego, Warren Sr., a chance to interact with his younger version, having been relegated to the role of observer for most of the roller coaster ride that Warren Jr. had carried him through.

"You really have a knack for making minced meat out of your life," he silently admonished his younger self. "I couldn't get a thought in edgewise all day. I've had a lot of experience in life, you know. You should really let me help you over some of the rough spots."

"Sure thing, Pops," retorted Warren the Younger. "You might help me make time with that scrumptious chick over there. I'm not much good at stupid conversation, and that's what they all seem to want."

"Leave it to me, son," replied Warren the Elder. "Just suspend the short circuit between your brain and your tongue, and let me do the talking."

The scrumptious chick's name was Wanda, as Warren Sr. quickly ascertained after strolling over to where she was sitting and claiming the stool next to hers. She had long black shiny hair, big soulful eyes, nice tits, and enough makeup to make her thirty five years look like twenty five. She was drinking a gin fizz and was quite amenable to Warren buying her another.

"What d'ya do, honey?" she asked in a little baby-doll voice.

"When I'm wrestling lions out at the San Francisco Zoo, or rescuing fair maidens from the boredom of boyless bars?" asked Warren Sr.

"Hey, you're something else," she giggled.

"You bet I am, baby. What'ya say we blow this place and go somewhere exciting, like my place?"

She giggled again. It was a nice giggle. "You don't really work at the zoo, do you?"

"Nah, not really. I'm actually the assistant vice mayor in charge of vice. Except when I'm talking to a beautiful, vivacious, charming young woman like you."

"Then what?"

"Then I become the reincarnation of Ronald Coleman. Suave, debonnair, worldly wise." Warren Sr. went into his Ronald Coleman routine. "Bettina, Bettina," he crooned.

"Hey, you know," she said, "I really *like* Ronald Coleman."

"Yeah? What's your favorite movie of his?"

"A Double Life. I've seen it three times. He's great. I wish more men were like him."

"Like him how?"

"Oh, you know. It's like he respects women. He doesn't just wanna jump in bed right away."

"Like he wants to get to know who they are."

"Yeah, that's right. You know, it's funny."

"What is?"

"I got an intuition about people. Especially men. Even though you're a young guy, there's something older about you. I like that."

"You like old guys?"

"Oh, you know what I mean. There's something fatherly about you."

"Thanks. I take that as a compliment."

("What a phony you are," Warren Jr. said silently to Warren Sr.

"Don't knock it if it works," Warren Sr. retorted just as silently.)

"Hey, you know what?" said Wanda.

"No, what?" said Warren.

"Let's go over to the Aub Zam Zam for a couple. You know where it is? Then maybe we could go where you said."

The Aub Zam Zam was a Persian bar whose oriental decor and genteel quiet made the select crowd feel themselves to be anywhere but on Haight Street. The gin fizzes were bigger, fizzier, and more expensive (much to Warren Jr.'s discomfort), and Wanda became more animated, laughing at all of Warren Sr.'s jokes. In no time at all they were walking arm in arm in the direction of Warren's Page Street apartment.

"Hey, did you notice how both our names start with 'W'?" Wanda said as Warren helped her off with her bra.

"Wanda and Warren. Warren and Wanda," Warren said as he kissed her nipples and gave her a hand slipping out of her dress.

"You make me feel all warm and cozy," she told him as they lay together in the darkness, while he nibbled at her neck and stroked her fanny.

("When are we gonna cut to the action, Pops?" said Warren Jr. exasperatedly.

"Cool it, sonny," responded Warren Sr. "Your job is to get it up, mine to get it in.")

The caressing continued for some time, gradually becoming more animated. Soon the bed covers were thrown back and the bed was rocking.

A long time later they were sharing a cigarette together, just being close and touching. Warren Jr. was having a conniption fit, wishing Wanda would split so he could return to the Golden Carousel and celebrate his conquest, but Warren Sr.'s wisdom prevailed. Wanda stayed till the early morning, and dressed quietly while the two Warrens slept, closing the door softly behind her. She left a note on the bedside table with the drawing of a little heart, with two W's inside it, pierced by an arrow, followed by her hastily-scribbled phone number.

* * *

The Ritz Hotel occupied a seedy-looking block of Folsom, one of a row of two-story buildings, the second floors devoted to apartments and rooms, the first floors housing marginal business enterprises. Warren managed with some difficulty to park his VW in a small alley blocking a driveway, a block away from the address he had been given. The Ritz had some difficulty in living up to its name, the worn paint on its exterior beginning to peel, and dark waterstains running down from the window sills. He had to press the doorbell several times before an elderly woman appeared, her hair in a bun, and wearing a faded flower print dress.

“Yes,” she asked rather severely, appearing to have been unwillingly torn from a TV soap or a telephone chat. “If you’re selling something, you’re wasting your time.”

“No, ma’am,” he said. “I have an appointment to see Mr. Grandini.”

Her severity relented somewhat. “Yes, I believe he is in. An appointment, you say?”

“A business appointment,” Warren hastened to add.

“You may as well come in, then. A business appointment, eh? Perhaps his greatness will be able to pay up some of his back rent. This way, please.”

She led Warren up a rickety staircase whose worn carpet showed patches of bare wood here and there. At the top of the second landing, she pointed to a dark-stained door at the end of the hallway.

“You’ll find him in there. God knows what he does all day. He might be sleeping, so you’d better knock first.” She turned abruptly and returned the way they had come.

“Come in, come in,” boomed a large, deep voice in response to Warren’s knock. The door stuck somewhat, and Warren had to force it open.

He found himself facing a large man seated in a wooden chair in the midst of a room bereft of furniture, save for a single bed, a couple of chairs, two large trunks plastered with shipping labels, and a large, faded poster on one of the walls prominently displaying the name ‘the Great Grandini’. The man himself had a florid face under a shock of bristling white hair, with bushy, salt-and-pepper eyebrows above frowning eyes. He was wearing a rumpled suit which looked as if it had missed a few cleanings. His soiled shirt was open at the collar, and he looked as if he had forgotten to shave for several days.

“Sit down, sit down. No use standing on ceremony,” said the man. “What do you want? I hope you’re not from that infernal society.”

“No sir,” stammered Warren. “I called you yesterday, don’t you remember? You said two o’clock, and that’s just what it is. Two on the nose.”

“Yes, yes. Sit down then. Please forgive the shabbiness of my surroundings. There was a time when the Great Santini occupied a position of importance in the world, as big as Houdini or Howard Thurston. Once I toured the world with a large traveling company, appearing before the royal courts of Europe. But conjuring is a forgotten art. That dreadful invention, television, brought about its demise. The large theaters have all been boarded up and torn down, and one cannot perform legerdemain in front of a television camera, because everyone would simply assume it was a trick of photography. Regard.”

He held out a large hand with long tapering fingers. He wiggled his fingers and a silver dollar appeared. The large coin then cavorted about his fingertips, turning over and over as it passed from his thumb and forefinger to the adjacent fingers until it suddenly vanished. He turned his hand over to show the backside, then turned it back to show an empty palm. He returned his hands to his lap.

“Could one show such a feat in front of a camera? No sir. The public would assume it was a camera trick.”

Warren nodded, quite impressed.

“But enough of this. You came on business, you say?” The aged magician looked sharply at Warren, as if suspecting him of some sort of chicanery.

Warren explained what he had come for. He mentioned his older self coming from the future, and his interest in football scores and horserace winners.

"I don't expect you to believe me, Mr. Grandini, but since I'm willing to pay you, it shouldn't matter too much."

"Hm, yes. Hypnosis, you say. Yes. How much would you be able to pay?"

"I was thinking maybe fifty dollars might be acceptable."

The Great Grandini looked at Warren appraisingly. He knew a sucker when he saw one.

"Perhaps a hundred might be more acceptable."

"Uh, yeah. I guess I could manage a hundred."

"Then let us first see the color of your coin, Mr. . . .?"

"Higgins."

"Yes, Mr. Higgins. Let us first deal with the sordid monetary aspect. You have the money with you?" The perpetual scowl on his face lightened momentarily.

Warren counted out four twenties and two tens. It was more than he had wanted to pay, but he had come this far and it was too late to turn back. He also handed the man a sheet of paper with a list of football games and horse races, each followed by a date.

"I just need to know the scores and the winners," he explained. "Do you have a pen, or would you like to borrow mine?"

Warren had little memory of going under. Mr. Grandini's bed was comfortable enough, and his head was propped up on a couple of large pillows. Grandini faced him, seated on the side of the bed. With his eyes, Warren followed the gold watch which the magician swung slowly back and forth. He counted backwards from twenty, and before he reached ten his mind was already fuzzy and drifting.

When he came to, he was still lying on Mr. Grandini's bed, looking up at the faded ceiling paper which hung in folds above him. He felt extremely rested. Mr. Grandini was sitting on a chair next to the bed.

"Ah, there you are coming around, Mr. Higgins. No, don't get up right away. It is better to come to your senses slowly."

"How long have I been under hypnosis?" Warren lifted his wristwatch to his face. "My God! It's nearly six o'clock."

"Yes, this process is not one which can be hurried. Please relax for a few minutes."

"Let me see the results, please." Warren was eager to see the list of scores and winners.

"I am afraid there are no results, Mr. Higgins."

"No results?" Warren disregarded his instructions and sat bolt upright. "Why not? Didn't you believe me, that I came from the future and all?"

"Oh, I believe you fully now, Mr. Higgins. You are indeed remarkable. Yes, I obtained more than sufficient proof of your claims. I have never encountered such a thing in my entire career. You really should make yourself known to the medical community. There is perhaps a real future there for you. But results, unfortunately not."

"No results?" Warren felt sick.

"Because you do not remember them, Mr. Higgins. I was able to verify that you attended most of these events, but you do not recall the information you requested. You must not think that everyone retains, even in their unconscious, the trivial facts and figures which seem so important at the time of their occurrence. Someone else might, but

you do not. You have the sort of mind which glosses over such things. Your attention is on other matters – the shape of a woman's leg, the color of a sunset, the dollar amount on a paycheck. But not football scores. Nor horse race winners. I am truly sorry, but I have done my best."

"What a bummer! Nothing at all?"

"Nothing. Not one score. Not one name of a winner."

"That's really hard to believe. I could imagine not remembering them all. But not one?"

"Not one, Mr. Higgins. Here is your list. It isn't worth much, but I, of course, have no need of it." Mr. Grandini rose and drew the blinds, letting in the stark light of day.

"I guess you'll be giving me my money back, then."

"Certainly not, Mr. Higgins. A bargain is a bargain. And it *is* a bargain. I normally charge much more than that for my services."

It was a stunned Warren who allowed himself to be ushered out of the room. Mr. Grandini kindly walked him to the front door.

"If you should require my services again, Mr. Higgins, you know where to find me."

"Yeah, I guess so," muttered a disgruntled and disappointed Warren. He heard the door close behind him as he stumbled down the street, nearly colliding with a couple children running in the opposite direction.

* * *

The next few weeks fairly flew by, Warren spending his working days at the Veggie Hut and his nights at the Golden Carousel, except when he was dating Wanda, which was fairly frequently. When he didn't call her, she came looking for him at the bar, which delighted Warren Sr. and irritated Warren Jr.

"The bitch is checking up on me again," he would complain to his older self.

"She likes us and wants to be with us," his older self would respond.

"She likes you; she probably wouldn't like me if she knew me. I really can't imagine how I'll turn into you in thirty years. Where did you get all those corny jokes? They're the refuge of a man with a small mind."

"Whereas you dwell on matters of more cosmic importance."

"I'm really getting tired of sharing the inside of my skull with a snide old man like you, Pops. When I turn into you I'm gonna commit suicide."

And so it continued, Warren Sr. being gradually forced to give up more and more quality time to his younger self. Wanda was becoming increasingly restive, disenchanted of Warren Jr.'s brashness, selfishness, and lack of humor.

"You really oughta lighten up a little, honey," she would say.

Early November arrived, along with the racing season, and, in an effort to lighten up, Warren started going out to the track. He spent his off days getting away from the serving up of ersatz hamburgers to the placing of bets on questionable fillies. Warren Sr. was helpful to him in this category, showing an absolute genius for picking winners. Warren Jr. began once more to appreciate his older self, and, as a favor to him, took Wanda along for the ride. They would arrive early at the track, eleven forty five at Golden Gate Fields and twelve fifteen at Bay Meadows.

“How come you’re so good at picking winners?” Warren asked his older self after hitting his third exacta in a week. His question was temporarily interrupted when he spotted an elegantly-dressed older gentleman with a mane of white hair stepping out of the clubhouse with a succulent young thing on his arm.

“Grandini!” he exclaimed silently to himself, leaving Wanda at the gate as he chased after the aged conjuror, who unfortunately pulled a vanishing act by the time Warren arrived out of breath at the spot where he had seen him.

“You looked like you saw a ghost, honey,” Wanda said to him on his return.

“Yeah, a guy who said I didn’t have a ghost of a chance at picking out winners,” he explained enigmatically.

The following Tuesday he got Millie to sub for him at the Veggie Hut while he paid another visit to the Great Grandini. The same dour matron met him at the door.

“I’m afraid Mr. Grandini no longer resides here,” she informed Warren drily.

“Did he come into a lot of money suddenly?” asked Warren.

“Why yes,” said the startled landlady. “How did you know?”

“I’ve got psychic abilities,” Warren explained. “Did he leave a forwarding address?”

“I’m afraid not. He paid up all his back rent and left. He told me he was quitting Magic, said he had found a more lucrative line of work.”

“I’ll bet,” said Warren, knowing full well what that line of work was. Football games and horse races. The old fucker, he said to himself.

He kept an eye out for Grandini, every time he was at the track, but he never saw him again. He continued his winning streak, however, and it augmented his salary from the Veggie Hut considerably. Big Bill Boozer was impressed by his success, and treated him with a little more respect at the bar. Wanda was equally impressed.

But his run of good luck at the track began to wane after the first few successful weeks.

“Maybe your memory’s starting to fail,” Warren the Younger accused his senior.

“Maybe we’re starting to affect the future,” Warren the Elder suggested to his junior.

“How’s that?”

“All those times I went to the track, back when I was you, I went alone.”

“So?”

“So we’re changing the sequence of events, little by little. Maybe, with time, that list of football scores and horse race winners that Grandini stole from us will begin to go bad.”

“This cheered Warren Jr. up slightly. It didn’t compensate for his losses, but it appealed to his cosmic sense of justice. It also didn’t compensate him for his bar bill, which began increasing once more, and his continuing lack of success at the track put his self confidence into a nose dive. As his cash flow dwindled, the amicability of his relationship with his older self began to hit new lows, and he began, more and more, to shut his alter ego out. Wanda noticed the change in his treatment of her immediately, and began to complain, but Warren Jr. didn’t care. He had never liked her very much anyway, and when she finally admitted to him that she had begun seeing someone else, someone older and more mature, he was just as glad, and told her to get fucked. Which meant that he wasn’t, and he began spending much more time at the Golden Carousel

getting swacked, staring morbidly at all the pulchritudinous ladies who wandered in, making them nervous, and causing Big Bill to discourage him from coming around by curtailing his bar tab, which, by this time, had reached epidemic proportions.

So Warren took his business elsewhere, and began haunting the Castle Rock, a sleazy establishment where he was allowed to wallow in his growing self pity. He still managed to hold down his job at the Veggie Hut, but his life had definitely taken a downward spiral. His internal conversations with his older self were starting to fade, and Warren Jr. began to feel more and more alone. Finally, one fatal Friday night, he really tied one on.

* * *

The first thing Warren noticed on awakening was that he was in a strange room. The second thing, when he tried in vain to raise his head from the pillow, was that he had a splitting headache.

“Boy,” he gasped to himself. “I must’ve really done myself in at the bar last night.”

Then he began noticing more details in his surroundings – the drapes surrounding the bed, the needle taped to his arm, the I.V. bottle suspended from the stand above him. He lay back and tried to reconstruct the previous evening.

“Hello,” said a voice. He moved his eyes in the direction of the voice to see a black woman with a white cap peering in through the curtains.

“Welcome back to the world,” she said, pushing the drapes aside to reveal a shapely body in a nurse’s uniform. She came to the bed and put her palm on Warren’s forehead.

“How do you feel, honey?”

“Terrible headache,” said Warren. “I guess I had one too many last night.”

“One too many *what*, dear,” asked the nurse with a smile. “I.V. bottles, maybe. You’ve been in a coma, honey. for the last three months. We’ve all been mighty worried about you. Your friend, Herm, has been sitting here night after night. I’ve got instructions to call him the minute you showed any signs of life. You just take it easy and I’ll tell the charge nurse to contact your doctor. Then we’ll check out your vital signs and make sure everything’s okay. You just rest easy now.”

Three months in a coma! Warren couldn’t believe it. He was really confused. He could hardly wait to look at himself in a mirror and find out for sure which Warren he was. The older or the younger version. He looked at his hands, but they didn’t tell him a lot, although they did look kind of wrinkled. Then he remembered the nurse mentioning his friend, Herm. That clinched it. He almost felt a sense of relief. It might be nice to be young, but to have to put up any longer with his younger self didn’t appeal much to him. He had had it with Warren Jr. He searched around inside his skull with his mental eye for another personality lurking there. Nobody. Just him. He was alone once more.

“Nice to see you back among the living,” the young doctor said, striding in briskly. He stuck a thermometer in Warren’s mouth to silence anything Warren might have said, picked up Warren’s wrist and held it, looking simultaneously at his watch. After a minute he released Warren’s hand.

“Pulse is slow but strong. Let’s see how the old ticker is doing.” He placed the ends of a stethoscope in his ears and held the cup over Warren’s chest. He moved the cup several times, nodding each time with a look of approval. The nurse removed the thermometer from Warren’s mouth.

“98 point 6, Doctor.”

“Looks like he’s in good shape,” said the doctor, unplugging the stethoscope from his ears and jamming it back in the pocket of his gown. “Check his blood pressure and do an E.K.G. Might as well do a blood and urine series.” He scribbled a few notes on his pad, then turned his gaze back to Warren.

“How are you doing, sir? We’ve been pretty concerned about you. Any pains or discomfort? Dizziness?”

“Just this horrible hangover,” said Warren, then noticed the doctor’s look of surprise. “I mean headache.”

The doctor smiled. “That’s probably natural. Long-term I.V. feeding will do it to you. You might have a funny taste in your mouth for a while, as well. We’ll get you back on some solid food soon, but we’d better stick to a soft diet for the first few days. We’ll have the nurse give you a couple aspirins. That’ll probably take care of the headache, but let us know if it persists.” The doctor reached down and examined Warren’s eyes, stretching the lids open wide as he carefully peered in. He lifted up Warren’s palms, one at a time, squeezing them and examining them closely.

“Everything looks pretty good, Mr. Higgins. Nurse here will take care of you. Let us know if you need anything.”

“How long will I have to stay here?” asked Warren.

“Oh, a couple of days at most. You’ve been here for three months, so what the heck are a few days, right? Bye for now.” The doctor strode off, just as briskly as he had strode in, while the nurse pumped up the blood pressure cuff wrapped around his left arm.

“Nurse,” he said to the woman. “When you’re done, could I have a mirror, please?”

* * *

Herm dropped in to see him in the late afternoon. He smiled broadly at Warren.

“How you doing, buddy? You really had me scared.” He grabbed the visitor’s chair and sat down next to the bed.

“What happened?” said Warren.

“One minute we were sitting, talking in my office, the next minute you were passed out like a light. I thought you had had an attack or something. I made sure you were breathing, then I called emergency. They came and took you here. It’s been exactly three months to the day now.”

“You got a few minutes?” asked Warren, anxious to relate to his friend all the miraculous adventures he had been having.

“All the time in the world,” said his friend. “At least until visiting hours are over. That’s about four hours from now.”

So Warren told him everything that had happened. Living back in the Haight, sharing existence with his younger self, visiting all the old haunts again, the Great Grandini, winning at the track, Wanda. Herm sat and listened, a half-incredulous smile plastered on his face. He interjected a question now and then, but mostly let Warren ramble on. About an hour later, Warren came up for air.

“Pretty amazing, Warren. Do you think it really happened?”

“It wasn’t any dream, Herm. And it wasn’t hazy or anything, the way that dreams are, or the way I would guess a coma would be. It was as real as anything I’ve ever experienced.” He shook his head in wonder.

“Do you think you learned anything from it?”

Warren lay back and thought about it.

“Yeah, Herm. I learned a lot.”

“Like what?”

“Like what an asshole I was back then. Arrogant. Selfish. Egotistical.”

Herm smiled. “Is that all?”

“I also realized that somehow I grew up in the last thirty years. I hadn’t realized that. I really approve of the person I’ve become. It helps to compare myself with who I was back then.”

“Sounds like you really *did* learn a lot.”

“Oh, and that’s not all. I found out that maybe there are some younger women out there who like older men. Wanda helped me to realize that.” He paused for a moment, smiling ruefully. “You know, it’s funny, Herm.”

“What is?”

“That maybe the best relationship I had in my life was with that woman.”

“Wanda? The woman of your dreams?” Herm smiled to let Warren know he was joking.

“Yeah, even if it were a dream, which I don’t for one second believe. I’ll bet there are a lot of Wandas out there. I just have to go out and find one.”