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## The Throes of Yesteryear

Will was a bit apprehensive as his friends piled into his car on Calhoun Street on that bitter January, 1970, night. Dinner with two high-school friends, now UC classmates, had started off what had seemed a typical evening. They traded critiques of professors. The art-history prof got high marks, even though her class was big, being required in the College of Design, Art, and Architecture. It was hard to complain about spending a class-hour looking at images of great art, even if shown as less-than-crisp overhead projections. And the youngish prof's passion for the subject came through, although it led her to use phrases like "sweeping monumentality" too often. The three of them had taken to lying in wait for it during class, and to intoning "sweeping" sounds when it arrived.

Dinner at "Pedro's" Mexican restaurant had been accompanied by the appearance of Pedro himself. As always, Pedro was decked out like Marlon Brando had been in "Viva Zapata," complete with a fake revolver in a silver-inlaid holster. The rumor was that Pedro was as Mexican as Brando. But his student clientele appreciated the theater, and gave him good business.

Things took their first unusual turn when Will's friend Steve proposed that they visit a guy he worked with at his part-time job at the Main library. That guy lived in a building by Eden Park known as "Peyote Palace." "What the hell," said Steve. "It's Friday night, we've got no classes tomorrow. I had to pull all-nighters last week to get my damn design project done. Let's see what turns up at the Palace."

Will had experience with alcohol and nicotine. And fresher experience with grass, which he had inhaled. Peyote Palace sounded like moving up a league. But Steve said he trusted this coworker not to offer them bad stuff. Worst case, they'd have to crash there for the night. So ... on to the Palace.

There the friends found their host welcoming, although it wasn't clear that he knew who they were. It also wasn't clear he knew who *he* was that evening. After letting them in, he tumbled back onto the pillows strewn on the floor. Will looked around the place. The ceilings were ridiculously high, and the walls covered with dark paisley-print paper. The place ate light.

The most coherent thing their host had said was that there was some great "tea" in the kitchen. They found an odd-smelling liquid in a pan on the stove. The only other consumables around were some longneck Hudepohls in the fridge. For Will, there was something about that local brew. Barely a whiff of it gave him a splitting headache. His friends knew that. When they saw the Hudys, they hit him with the Crosley Field beer-vendors' chant: "Hey Will – you want to rock and roll with Whoodie Pole?"

He told them to kiss off, and went back to the front room. He liked its view of the ponds by the Conservatory. He wasn't disturbing their host, who was continuing his own journey. Will found the stereo, and flipped through albums. The Doors' "Strange Days" turned up. He put it on the turntable, and cued up "When the Music's Over," figuring the rest of the evening would have at least ten good minutes. Jim Morrison had chanted the title twice when Steve came out of the kitchen with a cup of the host's "tea." "Here Will, if you're not going to have a Hudy, try some of this."

Will wondered if that was a good idea. But when you're listening to "When the Music's Over," it's hard to say "No" to possibilities. He took a sip. Astringent, but not bad. Made you want to drink more.

As Morrison sang "We want the world and we want it .... Now," the ponds across Victory Parkway started shimmering. Will felt his face flush. He then found himself in a brightly lit diner. As his eyes focused a bit better, he saw he sat at a table across from an older man who had the long, melancholy face of his paternal grandmother. When he spoke, though, the man's voice lacked the grandmother's hard-to-understand Polish accent.

“Welcome to 2020, Will.”

“Funny, it looks like Hathaway’s Diner to me.”

The older man chuckled. “You’re right, it is. ‘2020’ refers to the year. Your future, my present. Maybe I should say ‘our present’, since I’m you. Maybe ‘you-to-be,’ is more apt. You’re thinking ‘Why Hathaway’s?’ If you think a little more, you’ll realize it is a time machine. You might even recognize some of the purple-haired waitresses.”

“So, how did I get here?”

“Beats me. You’re the one who drank the Kool-Aid at Peyote Palace.”

“I’m pretty sure that wasn’t Kool-Aid.”

“Whoops. Sorry Will. Not Kool-Aid. The event that birthed that idiom is eight years in your future. I’ll be more careful about anachronisms – given that you’re a living one.”

“Okay, then, what are you doing here with me?”

“It was like I was summoned. That was some tea. Kind of gave us a triumph of the Wills.”

“Damn,” said young Will. “Could it be my sense of humor hasn’t improved in fifty years?”

“Sadly, the reverse, Will. Plaque on the gray matter, and all that; and as you age, you’ll understand more and more how fascinating and entertaining you are to others. Right now, that has to be the case for me, since I can let you look fifty years into your future. One ground rule: no stock tips. Those could make you so rich that you wouldn’t turn out to be me. Self-preservation. Or, *self-prevention*. It’s complicated.”

“Great. You’ll let me see the future, so long as you don’t make me rich. Aren’t you the genie in the bottle?”

“And when did you become a money-grubber, you long-haired freak?”

“Fair point. Let’s talk of ‘Hair.’ What’s happening in the Age of Aquarius?”

“Well, Will, speaking of ‘Hair,’ you see that your future follicles are a lot less eloquent than they were. As for the musical’s prediction of

Harmony and understanding

Sympathy and trust abounding

Temper your expectations knowing that the lyrics to the tune have been called “astrological gibberish,”<sup>1</sup> since ‘Jupiter aligns with Mars several times a year and the moon is in the 7th House for two hours every day.’<sup>2</sup> And, my young self, astrological gibberish must be gibberish squared.”

“OK. What about the important stuff – sex, drugs, and rock and roll?”

“Surprises in each, young man. I’ll speak in generalities. I don’t want to spoil any firsts for you. Let’s take them in order: first, sex. In 2020 it’s not what you imagined when you watched Jagger and Anita Pallenberg in “Performance.” There’s good and bad news. The good news is that every taboo is gone, short of

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<sup>1</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Age\\_of\\_Aquarius#Astrological\\_meaning](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Age_of_Aquarius#Astrological_meaning)

<sup>2</sup> Id.

incest and bestiality. That epithet you guys threw around in high school no longer carries the threat of police action. The Supreme Court took care of that in 2003. The bad news, from the prism of the summer of love, is that millennials are having less sex than that summer foretold.”

“Wait a minute. What are millennials?”

“Whoops. Sorry. Another anachronism. Not an easy answer. It’s the generation born between (pick your favorite numbers here) either the late ‘70’s or early ‘80’s to the mid ‘90’s.<sup>3</sup> Yes, we ascribe personality traits according to birth eras. That’s one of our many, many types of sorting. If we matrix our sortings a bit more, we might even get to individuals. But I doubt it. Let’s get back to sex. These millennial folk have fewer teen pregnancies, marry later, and have less sex. At least less sex with others.<sup>4</sup> The reasons aren’t clear. Their behavior confounds *our* natural right to characterize a later generation as degenerate. Damned inconsiderate of them.”

“Uhh, ... yeah. I hope things are going better on the drug front.”

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<sup>3</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Millennials>

<sup>4</sup> See “The Sex Recession,” *The Atlantic*, Dec. 2018 at 79.

“A mixed bag again, Will. Grass for fun is legal in 10 states. A scion of the Taft family worked to get that done in Ohio, but failed. I’m not making this up. On the other hand, there aren’t any more cigarette machines in high schools. Soon, you’ll likely be able to vote, or join the Army, earlier than you could legally buy a pack of cigarettes here. Our deadliest drug problem traces to drug sellers’ pitching prescription painkillers as less addictive than they were.<sup>5</sup> Steppenwolf can now sing “God Damn the Pusher” to an Rx drug company.

“Weird. How about rock-and-roll? That could never die.”

“It’s not dead. It’s on a permanent nostalgia tour. And it’s as current to teenagers now as Tony Bennett was to you. Bennett, by the way, is hot again. In contrast, Jim Morrison lived hard, left a beautiful corpse, and is buried in the same cemetery in northeastern Paris as are Chopin, Oscar Wilde, and Héloïse and Abelard.<sup>6</sup> Bob Dylan is still singing. He’s also into direct sales of whiskey and apparel.<sup>7</sup> And won a Nobel Prize.”

“Oh man,” groaned young Will. “What was *in* that tea?”

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.drugabuse.gov/drugs-abuse/opioids/opioid-overdose-crisis>

<sup>6</sup> Some dispute that that pair’s remains are in Père Lachaise cemetery. See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peter\\_Abelard#Disputed\\_resting\\_place/lovers'\\_pilgrimage](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peter_Abelard#Disputed_resting_place/lovers'_pilgrimage) . Whether Abelard’s lying near the Lizard King is more poignant than ironic is an interesting accounting.

<sup>7</sup> [http://bobdylan.rockandrolltshirts.com/category.php?category\\_url=bob-dylan](http://bobdylan.rockandrolltshirts.com/category.php?category_url=bob-dylan)

“No lies, Will. The 2016 Nobel in Literature. Pearls were clutched on campuses worldwide. That’s as much as I think you can handle now. One final request.”

“What’s that?”

Check out Cat Stevens’ next album. You might find these lyrics apt:

You're still young, that's your fault

There's so much you have to go through

...

Look at me, I am old, but I'm happy.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> From Cat Stevens’ 1970 “Fathers and Sons.” Some lines omitted.