

Hugh Fox

“How?”

“HOW am I supposed to know what to do? I’ve got this concentration problem, can’t learn math, four times four is....? And everything is so high-tech these days....”

First film, TV, couldn’t finish that at the local community college (Mulch City College in Mulch, Michigan), got a certificate, went around for a year waving that “At least it’s something.” Then into Summer Thaw State College in the Upper Peninsula, “I’m going into cybernetics, computers, I’m Mr. Gigabyte, you know dat!,” one month and then out. Came back the next day with another MCC possibility, “Management, I look like a duckin’ MANAGER, don’t I?”

“You’re a handsome guy,” his Thaiandese stepmother said. Dr. Thai Thinktank, his father’s third wife, who had been his student when he was teaching English as a Second Language at Michigan State University. “Look at you, tall, those black eyes and hair.... you look almost Thai or Japanese or Laotian, a little tan and eye-uplift on the sides....”

“Your English, baby,” said Chris, “is fantastic. ‘Eye-uplift.’ Moses! You’re IN....”

“Not into too much, all day behind a microscope, sometimes I feel I ought to move into some cave somewhere and just enjoy the cool permanent night! Sixty-three....”

“And you look thirty-six.”

“What do you mean you’ve got math problems. You know how to reverse numbers.”

“This whole country’s reversed. I should have been Lord Christopher. Eighteenth.... make it seventeenth century England. Manor House in the country, you as my Spanish bride. Before the Tudors. You know.... all I would’ve had to do is kiss the King’s and Queen’s Asses, eat my porridge and Campbell’s soup, drink my homemade wine.... some imported from Spain....”

“Or Thailand! Don’t make me into an Española!”

“Espa-who?”

“Spanish anything. I’m 100% Red Fish Curry, Lemoned Prawns, Plum Wine, Nasi Goreng....”

“I’m talking about my possible wife, not stepmother.”

“You’re going to marry Sarah, don’t fight me on that! You know you love her.”

“She’s too Americanized!”

“So take her back to Thailand. We can all go with you, get the duck out of Confusion Paradise!”

“Come on, come on...,” Chris getting all super-patriotic when most of the time all he thought about, dreamed about, was starting over again in the Orient. “We’re doing OK here.”

“Your father’s pension. Who knows. Cut, cut, cut, cut, cut....”

“I don’t have the perserverance, concentration, mono-mania power, stick-to-it-ness to finish college and become a hearse or nurse or worse, a lawyer, flyer, computer jerk.... every time I enroll in another course I feel like I’m on a different wrong horse. Don’t you get it? I’m a can’t-concentrate, ADD loser, always was, am, will be....”

Dad walks into the room, ancient, fat, confused by years of insomnia, sleep-pills, -drugs that don’t put him to sleep but more and more idiotize him.

“I heard the word loser. I don’t wanna hear it again. Just go for what your inner voices are telling you.... film, TV. Old films, new films, wrestling, films about wrestling, horror-whore-films, you’ve been a film-buff since you were born, TV, big-screen, computer-screen maniac.... just go for it.... Like your mom.... she wanted to bar it up, you know, those legs and mams.... So that’s what she did, it didn’t make no difference to her that I was an ex-Catholic, ex-Lutheran, ex-Unitarian, ex-Jew who believed in Nothing-Everything full-time....”

“That’s what I always liked about your father,” oozes Mrabri Third Wife, putting her arms around his immense waist and then massaging his back, mmming almost like a jungle-cat.

“That he was an EX?” said Chris.

“EX everything-else-but-ME. His first two wives were like a rehearsal for me: first act, second act, then the climactic act....”

Dad a little bothered by so much sexual demonstration in front of his son. Pulling away a little, kissing Mrabri on her super-combed-down black (dyed twice a week) hair.

“Maybe I should just become a drug addict, alcoholic, whore-monger. Or a hair-cutter, asparagus-farmer. Grow pot in my basement when I have a basement. Become a dog-trimmer, -caretaker.... they make big money.... everyone likes dogs, even if they hate their kids....”

Dad suddenly footballishly young again, his adrenaline taking off.... “Wait a minute. Hate my kids? I’ve given, given, given.... I love ya, you’re my baby....”

“I’m almost thirty, ready to retire. Believe me, if I could, I would! Win a lottery and end up with fifty- or sixty- or a hundred-and-fifty-million.... I’d give you guys a couple.” Starting to think, Chris sits on the floor, smoking an imaginary joint, a mind-helper, smoke in, blow out, smoke in, blow out.... “Maybe I’d go back to Thailand with Sarah, re-Thaiandize her, build a castle somewhere, or just get a giant apartment in Bangkok or on Plhuket Island. Three, four bedroom, huge, Chalong Bay, what would fifty-five-thousand Thai Bahts be to me then....? Stick it in Sarah full time, kids, kids, kids.... she could forget her biochemistry degrees, all that genetic research, forget it, the Tudor world without Henry the Eighth....”

“He’s really deep isn’t he?” his Thai stepmother impressed to the nth degree.

“He has problems with math. But why they make people take math courses when they’re going into film/ the arts, is beyond me.... Math-jacks on the Board of Trustees....”

“I was misdiagnosed when I was a kid. I needed glasses, couldn’t focus on pages. Then,” turning to his dad like a starving man reading a menu, “remember, one day you asked me to read something, you’d forgotten your glasses at home.... and I couldn’t see it.... you took me to another eye-doctor and....,” pointing to his glasses like he was pointing at a Nobel Prize.

Girlfriend Sarah in the doorway, starting to cry. “I just wanna marry the guy, forget dog-grooming or TV announcer or abdominal-abominable surgeon. I’ve got my degree in biochemistry, Ph.D., passed all my post-doc exams. We can have ten kids and he can be Mom, I can be Dad.... reverse roles.... It might just as well be Century Sixty-One as Century Twenty-One....,” her voice suddenly burrowing into a whisper, “if we ever get to even Twenty-ballistic-TWO....”

“See what I mean, she’s Ms. End of the World. Why don’t we all just go out and buy ten gallons of insect killer and drink it.... arsenic content.... you know what I mean.... Ms. Fly and Mr. Beetle....”

“I’m just being realistic,” Sarah’s crying finito, her mood moving into Mussolini-ish duce-ness, “When it was Knights Templar and swords and hatchets, that was one thing. Then came guns, bigger guns, nuclear, super-nuclear.... mega, mega, mega everything....”

“Except my ego,” Chris teary-eyed now, “If I’d just been treated like a Bull Terrier when I was a kid instead of a crippled owl....”

“His mother was over-protective.... she worked with mice in a chemotherapy research lab, always treated him like a mouse. Pet-pet here, pet-pet there....,” explained Dad. “We broke up when she said she didn’t want any more sex ever, that all she wanted was mice to pet.... you know the whole story.”

“Only too well,” Mrabri frowns, tears in her eyes, “I’m getting a little post-everything myself. Still want my chocolates and guavas and mangos, but The Big Lance-Thrust Massage....”

“My God, your language.... miraculous!”

“We watch a lot of English films every night, right now a bunch of films about the Tudors, you know, Henry the Eighth and Mary Boleyn and her sister Anne, all the beheadings.... and then Henry dies anyhow.... big life, all the money in the world, and still it all comes down to Rest in Peace. That’s why I say LET CHRISTOPHER BE. SO HE’S TWENTY-NINE, THIRTY-NINE, DEAD FOR A HUNDRED-AND-NINE.... CENTURIES.... Satori.... be in the Now.... plow the plow, how the how, screw complications....”

Sarah laughing and crying now, and Chris too, even Dad guiltily serious.

“Maybe you’re right! At seventy-seven I’m counting the breaths....”

“In and out slowly, meditation-breaths,” half-whispers Mrabri as if she doesn’t want the gods/demons to hear. She gives a sample of a slow breath in and out.

Dad reaching into the twenty-dollar vault in his left pants-pocket, taking out three twenty-dollar bills. “Here, pal, you’re still my baby boy, the last one around, I don’t know what I’d do if it was life without you....”

Chris hesitating for a blinking, uncertain moment, then the real him reincarnating, “OK, pal, I feel the same way about you....”

Giving him a hug.

Giving his stepmother a hug.

Sarah giving everyone hugs too.

“See you guys later,” Chris squirming toward the door, his head bubbling full of possible films (“The Proposal,” that’s the one!) to see, places to go eat, down to Thai High or California Roll Heaven, the Irish Pub, and then maybe a drive over to Ann Arbor, “Our Town” tonight at the U. Players, outside summer show, stopping for a moment. “If I believed in afterlives, afterwives, after-anythings.... but all I can manage is a still-jostling NOW which, even for me and Sarah, is getting too Middle Everything, if you know what I mean.... Passent les jours et passent les semaines, Ni temps passé.... the days and the weeks pass, but time, no....”

“But how do you...?” his father dumbfounded, confused.

“Attention Deficit turning into Who Gives a.... passé.”

Out the door. Dad grabbing onto his third wife and hugging her like she was chemotherapy, radiation therapy, and her hugging him back as if he were Surya Sun God who would never, ever horizon it down.

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