

THE MATCHMAKER
By Richard Tornello © 2010

Artie, a regular at *Ciro's Restaurant*, is sitting at the bar. The bar area is dark, except being backlit by the huge TV screen facing the bar, and the low lights under the bar itself that illuminate the two sinks. The menu is all but unreadable. The screen is on and silent. The programmed actors, CNN or Fox, it's difficult to tell them apart except for the Logos, appear to be highly animated about what ever it is they are screaming about tonight, while underneath is the totally ignorable translation.

He wasn't sure if he wanted a table or was comfortable just to sit here resting against one of the six high back wooden bar stools. Artie did not really want to see the gore score or obits foisted upon him as news while he had a few drinks and something to eat. After a long frustrating day headhunting for the impossible, comfort food was what he was seeking and his prenatal environment involved some form of pasta and wine.

It was comfort of the nonsexual kind that he was seeking. *Yeah*, Artie thought, *a date and a roll would be a great idea, but first I need to decompress.* *Ciro*, the owner, guessed the situation and saddled up on the next seat and asked, "Would you like to try a glass of a new merlot from Sicily? It's very smooth. I think you'll like it."

Artie pivoted the bar stool so he was face on toward *Ciro* and responded, "A new one hey, sounds good. Sure why not. I'm not planning anything tonight. I'll grab a cab if I have to. What have you got to eat that I would like?"

Ciro strolled around the bar, faced the huge wall that held all the wine bottles, pulled a bottle mid level from the rack that started waste high and rose to the ceiling, with prices rising in relation to their height from the floor, and got two glasses. He uncorked the bottle, sniffed the bottle and cork and smiled. He poured a big one and passed it to Artie and poured a small amount for himself.

"Thanks," say Artie.

"Salute. I'll fix you something good. It will be a surprise," says *Ciro*. He knows his regulars and goes out of his way to make them feel at home. He and Artie sometimes cook for each other as a gift and for the critique.

"Thanks again I can use that, a nice surprise. *Ciro* nods and Artie takes sip and says "Ah yes... very nice... thank you. I like it." Artie is exhausted from some insane work he has had to undertake. Recently more and more companies are bidding government contracts just to win, the concept called 'Bid to Win' and don't take the time to investigate the actual salaries for the skills they are bidding. Then, when and if they win through a low bid that has no basis in any reality in any universe, hiring the people becomes impossible at best. So sitting at *Ciro's*, just relaxing, with a good glass of wine in hand, and within a few minutes the insanity of today dissolves away. Artie smiles a content smile, his body relaxes the tension in his face dissolves.

As Artie is getting the full flavor and affect of the wine, a new face to the restaurant comes in and sits at the bar, a few seats down, close to the window. The face

is a more of a silhouette; the details are obscured by the bright outside lights. Artie turns toward the new patron and notices that he is wearing a bowler that he does not remove. The best he can make out is that he has fair features and thinks with the wine's assistance, *wouldn't want to be him in prison*. He laughs to himself on that one, *what a pervert you are. Oh well. I think I'll stay here and observe. Dinner should arrive shortly.*

At that same time that thought went through Artie's head, the stranger in the hat turns to Artie, smiles a slight smile and says flatly, "I'm getting paid \$142,000 to find the right guy to marry this Ugly-Beautiful girl. I'm a professional matchmaker. Here's my card." And he reaches across the chairs and hands Artie his card.

Artie reaches for the card at the same time he says in a rather surprised manner, "YOU'RE A WHAT? What are you talking about? Why are you telling me?" Artie looks at the guy again, and then at the card. It's too dark to read it, and asks the first related question that springs from his mouth, "Have you seen her? This could be interesting. No stop. What am I saying? Who and what are you? You some kind of a nut case?"

No answer from Mr. Hat.

Then after a short interlude Artie smiles and says, "That was good. You got my attention. Now what's your real story?"

"I'm a Matchmaker. I told you and you seem to be interested in me. You are staring. So I figured I'd ask. No harm in asking is there?"

Artie's is hesitant to answer at first. This guy is kooky and I just want to gear down after today. But Artie, being who he is, can't resist the bait and answers, "Well first you're new here, and second, you're wearing a Bowler. Not too many people wear those these days. So obviously you're a bit interesting. And to answer your other question, no, there is no harm in asking but your question and statements are a bit off the wall. Furthermore the contradiction in your statement makes me wonder how can you even state that: Ugly or beautiful, what is she a female Janus? I mean really now. Even if that's the case, how can you even do your job?"

The matchmaker responds flatly, "I've been told. And no she is not. That's enough for me."

Artie asks "No she's not what? Told what; by whom? Do you believe everything your told?" Artie is pointing to the screen over the bar to illustrate his question. "Did you see her with your own two eyes?" Artie doesn't hear part of the answer. He turns and none too quietly says to Ciro, "This guy has got to be pulling my leg. This has to be some kind of joke. Are you getting me back for a few that I did to you?"

Ciro just smiles and in his thick Italian accent he says shaking his head, "No my friend. I never saw him before. Let me get him a glass of wine. Then the two of you can be on the same wave length. Maybe he'll loosen up and drop the joking around. Ciro laughs as he goes back behind the bar and pours a glass from the same bottle and offers it to the matchmaker. "On the house, Ciro states.

The matchmaker nods to Ciro and says, "In that case, yes thank you. It's never polite to refuse, especially from the owner. That would be an insult." Turning to Artie, taking a sip, smiling and says "Salute'. Well, she's 5'7 and 130 lbs...

Artie watching all this responds, "Five foot seven, Yeah and?"

The matchmaker responds just as quickly, "That's all."

Artie looks at this guy like he's really is nuts. Why am I doing this to myself? I have to be nuts to play along. Instead Artie asks, "That's all? What do you mean that's all? Do you expect some one just to pick up and go with you to where? Are you some kind of pimp? Is this a new school of?" He can't think of anything smart assed to say and is at a loss for words. "I wouldn't even know what to call it. When? And..." he sputters Based upon that scanty information you just gave me, do you really expect me or anyone with an ounce of common sense to believe you? What is your name? We can't go on like this with out some introduction?"

The matchmaker is nonplused and responds just as flatly as before, "Yes I do," the stranger says straight faced. "This is my task. And my name is Rickie, Rickie Titillo."

Ciro laughs and turns away. Artie looks in Ciro's direction and says. This is a joke right. This is you and your daughter Laura's idea." Ciro shrugs his shoulders and says, "Not at all."

"Are you for real?" Artie turns back and asks Rickie Titillio, and turning to Ciro again, he says, "May I have another glass of wine and one for my friend here too. I think he needs it." To Rickie Titillo he asks, "What will it be?"

Rickie answers "Yes I am for real. I don't really want another one, but since I'm not driving, and just to be polite, yes that will be just fine. And what is your name, now that I've introduced myself."

Artie decides to change the subject a bit. This is too weird. This nut case come in says he's a matchmaker, asks me if I'm interested and, "Artie is my name. And that's all you get right now. Now, what about the groom?" This has got to be good, he thinks. What crock of bullshit will he come up with now?

Rickie asks in return, "What about him?"

"Yeah exactly," says Artie.

"He's got to be nice." Rickie answers, slurring a bit. His hat is a bit off center. But it's dark in that section of the bar so there is nothing anyone notices, not that there is anything to notice except there two going at it in conversation. Ciro is watching intently and laughing to himself. Since it's not too busy tonight, the staff can handle the clients. Ciro can use the entertainment. He almost lives at his job.

Artie is a bit buzzed from the wine too and asks Rickie, "Nice, now what is a nondescript word like that supposed to mean?" And he repeats, "Nice. There have got to be more constraints on what you are searching for. Nice just doesn't do it. You're on a mission to find this babe a husband, or some sucker to mug right?"

Rickie Titillo says, "Excuse me for a bit. I'll be right back. I'll know nice when I see it, and she's not a babe, she's a woman," and heads off in the direction of the bathrooms.

Artie turns to Ciro, "If you didn't put one of your friends from Italy up to this, then this is the strangest conversation I have had in as long as I can remember. No more wine for me or I won't remember. And I might just fall for this guy's come-on line. You don't think he's gay do you?"

Ciro says, "In all honesty goomba, I never met this guy before. But between me and you, something is strange about him. I can't put my finger on it. But this is fun. Hey you got nothing to loose tonight. Have some fun. Play along. I'm enjoying this too. What the fuck."

Rickie Titillio returns. Artie can see his face with more clarity, well given two large glasses of wine, the clarity aspect is in some doubt. Artie notices the very fair features and thinks the same thing as he first did when Rickie sat down.

“Okay nice.” Artie says, figuring he’s not going to get too much clarity from him on this question. “What else?”

“A job, he has to have a job. That is so important. No bums for this girl. That is a strict requirement.” Rickie Titillio pulls out a note book and writes something down and presses a button. The notebook beeps. Rickie is intently looking at something in the note book. He nods to himself and responds back to the book, and doesn’t hear Arties question.

Artie asks again, louder, “I’ll bite, does it matter what type of job?”

Rickie finally responds. He thinks he’s got one, but he’s got to let him run before he reels this one in, and a grin breaks out. “Yes and no.” Apropos of the location he continues, “I, we don’t want a hit man.”

Artie is incredulous. “Let me get this right. Your job is to find a guy, any guy to be this groom, this idiot if I may say, for a 5 foot 7 inch, 130 pound, Ugly-Beautiful girl you’ve never seen, and getting paid \$142,000...”

“Plus expenses. And no he cannot be an idiot,” Rickie interjects

“Okay, okay plus expenses and no idiots. I must be an idiot to continue this conversation. This is like something out of the Holy Grail. And let me get this straight, you can’t define or describe anything else?” Artie is shaking his head.

Ciro, while I’m waiting for your dinner surprise, may I have a side of meatballs, spicy marinara please?”

“Coming right up.”

“You’re crackers, you know that, Rickie?”

“No I’m not. Rickie seems insulted by the question. He even pouts, waits a bit, pondering something, then asks, “Are you married?”

“No I AM NOT. And YES I DO HAVE A JOB. Now give me a break and let me eat. My blood sugar is down, I’m buzzed, I have this crazy matchmaker asking me questions that were I in my right mind, I would ignore.”

Rickie says, “But you can’t ignore me can you? And Mr. Low blood sugar man, you don’t have to get so huffy. You’re acting like a little girl.”

“What the f...”

Rickie looks right into Arties eyes, “No profanity, absolutely NO profanity. She does not allow profanity. It’s barbaric and impolite too. Now answer the questions. What type of job?”

Artie thinks, don’t you want documentation. In my business we require proof. This must be Rickie’s first assignment. “I’m not a hit man. I own a business. I’m from New York and New Jersey. We swear”

“Want to get married? If so, you’ll stop swearing. It’s not allowed in her universe. Now answer my question. Do you want to get married?”

Artie answers slowly and honestly, “Well, yes, some day. But not to you that’s for sure.” And then he responds remembering the other statement laughing, “Her Universe? Oh now she’s a space cadet or an alien.”

“Have I got a girl for you. And what if she is? She’s of your genetic pool.”

“Genetic pool, adult swim, I bet. Christ, you can’t even describe her or show me a picture.”

“I didn’t say THAT, exactly and Watch your mouth.”

Artie states, “You said you’ve never seen her.”

Rickie answers “I haven’t seen her, my face to her face, in real life.”

Artie asks “Oh? So my Curiosity’s supposed to be piqued by your non answers?”

“Well yes it is. Why wouldn’t it be? I even have a picture.”

Now Artie thinks this is more like it, something solid to see, “Of her? Recent? May I see it please?”

“I think so,” Rickie says, “but I can’t show you. It’s in my contract.”

“You think so? You can’t show me. Is this a joke? I should just go home. This is more insane then trying to head hunt people at low balled salary levels.” Artie is shaking his head and turning toward the screen. He despises the way the news has become an entertainment show as opposed to fact gathering and analysis. He’s got a wacko on his left and the screaming monkeys in front of him. Home sounds like a very good idea right now. He’s too wired to go to sleep any time soon. When this exercise in futility get old, he thinks, I’ll cut it short and go home.

Rickie breaks Artie’s train of thought, “No, really it’s my contract. Here it is.” And again, Rickie whips out a thick pile of legal looking papers and just as quickly stuffs it back in his jacket pocket with a bit hanging out from underneath the right lapel. “My contract that is. You interested?”

Artie thinks, “What else have I got to do. It’s going to be a very long evening. This could be fun.” Artie looks at Ciro and nods toward the guy in the hat, with an “as if” look. Ciro shakes his head laughing and heads back into the kitchen to straighten out some mess that just occurred. My dinner he thinks, damn, and hears yelling, and his name in Italian and Spanish. My home away from home, it’s so nice.

“Dinner is going to be a while longer. Sorry.”

“Not a problem. It’s worth the wait. Just give me two meatballs in a spicy sauce.”

Artie makes a decision and turns to Rickie, “Okay tell me more.” And the banter begins between the two of them. All the TV noise is lost in the conversation. Artie doesn’t even think about where he is. He is into this. He is fully engaged.

Rickie starts, “Well, she’s 5 foot seven and 130 pounds.”

Artie retorts, “So you’ve said. She’s about average or better. And not a slob.”

Rickie shoots back just as quickly, “Better, and no, she’s not a slob. Most definitely.”

Artie wants more answers. This is a pain trying to get the answers. This is like working with some of his clients. “Okay what else?”

Rickie change gears and throws the conversation off a bit by saying, “I’m getting paid.”

“I know that. Tell me more damn it.”

Shaking his finger, thinking how many times do I have to tell this maroon, Rickie says as if to a child, “Not nice talk, no, no, no. What do you want to know?”

Artie asks, “You know, how’d you know I’d be curious? Why me and why don’t you just give me a core dump for Ch..., for crying out loud!”

“I wasn’t, I didn’t. Since you engaged me I followed through. And I was supposed to make sure.”

“And nice catch. You’re getting there,” Rickie smiles.

And Artie thinks to himself again, I wouldn’t want to be you in prison. You look almost feminine. “Sure of what? And may I make it clear, YOU engaged me in conversation first. I just looked at you and your hat. You started it.”

Rickie shifts the thrust to a different spot, “Curiosity, important quality they said.”

Artie bites the bait again, “Who said what? You know you make me crazy with this all over the place.” Artie’s brain hurts. It’s been a long day, and now this game he’s playing, playing with this weirdo matchmaker if he is a matchmaker, has got him hooked.

Rickie waits for a while and lets the silence drive Artie a bit more bonkers waiting for the answer, whatever it might be. “The parents,” Rickie says.

“What parents? You never mentioned them.”

“You never asked.”

“Okay tell me about them.”

“Sorry, not allowed, except to say they pay,” and Rickie takes a sip of the wine in front of him. “This is very nice wine. I like it.” he sits back with his back leaning against the back of the bar stool just watching Artie struggle with all that he has been given and denied.. There is something cat like in his demeanor.

Artie finally says, “Okay let me sum this up: I have a mystery girl, five foot seven, one hundred and thirty pounds, ugly and or beautiful, obviously not skinny and not fat with parents who pay. Have I got that right?”

“Yes.”

“What am I missing?” Artie asks knowing full well that there has to be more.

“A ring.”

“A ring!??” What the ...

“No, no, no, not nice words. A ring. You’re missing a ring. I have that too. It’s a nice one.” Rickie pulls a small felt box out of a pocket opens it, just to make sure, smiles and says, “See? Look.”

“Well yes it is a ring. What type of stone is it?”

“Alexandrite, 5 carats, and worth a fortune.”

“I’ll bet.” Then he says, “Honestly, I have no clue. How would I even know?”

“Trust me,” laughs Rickie. “Trust me.”

“For the bride? It’s nice but rather big. What do her hands look like?”

“No the groom, the bride gets a matching one see.” And Rickie pulls out another box, goes through the same operation he did with the first ring and says, “See? It’s smaller.”

“Nice ring yeah. Ugly-Beautiful? Hmmm. I’ll bite. When and where does this wedding take place?”

“At her family estate when ever I locate Mr. Right.”

“Estate? Right.” Artie aware that every question has to be specific. “Define estate and where is this said estate?”

“Not allowed.”

“Not allowed? Why the hell not? You throw out bit of information, you hold back, you deny answers, and you expect some idiot to just believe you and go along with your story? You could be a psychopath. I should get my gun.”

“Trust me Artie, you’ll see.” Rickie let’s the foul language pass. It’s not too bad.

“You know that’s the first time you called me by my name tonight. What do you mean, I’ll see?” Artie is enjoying this give and take game but not sure if he’s the mouse or cat or if he’s even in the game. Shit, he’s not even sure he wants to play any more. He looks up at the screen, then at the clock. Boring talking heads, bla bla bla, killing, murder, lies. Yuck. “Let’s say I go along with this, and with you. And say, at the first sight, I realize that the prospective bride is ugly is beyond description, and I can’t deal with it.”

“Too late, you’re committed.”

“You should be committed for taking this job on.”

“\$142,000 up front cash plus expenses. I couldn’t turn it down. You coming?”

“Am I coming? Where am I going? Are you nuts?”

“You’re not married? You don’t have a current lady friend do you?”

Artie turns the tables laughing out loud, “I never said I did or didn’t. And you never asked.”

“You wouldn’t go this far if you did, right? I don’t see a ring.”

“Yeah, you got me there.”

“So are you or are you not coming?” Rickie looks down at his pad and types something in. It beeps and he whispers something.

As Rickie is talking into his pad, the restaurant suffers a power surge and goes black. The whole strip mall that the restaurant is in is hit. People look up at the sky to see if a squirrel immolated itself on a transformer or a thunder storm approaching. It is summer and the evening has brought sever storms these last few years. But no, the sky is clear. Rickie looks around, grins, and continues her typing and whispering. The restaurant power comes on and the systems reboot with beeps from computers doing their reboot dance and the accompanying noises of the equipment turning back on. Things finally settle down.

Artie watches all this and then turns to the matchmaker, “Hey Rickie what are you doing now. Face booking your friends telling them what a sucker you have to play along with your charade?”

“You think this is a charade?” He’s really angry. Artie hit a button.

Hold up, you can’t take a bit of ribbing? You certainly dish it out. You come on like gangbusters with this matchmaker stuff and what; I’m supposed to believe it?

Why, yes you are. I do not lie! So I’ll ask again, are you coming or?”

“What the hell. I must be nuts. Where’s your vehicle?” And just as he finishes speaking a huge Bentley pulls up and stops in front of the restaurant. The windows are blacked out. There is a driver and a passenger in the shotgun seat. They both open their doors at exactly the same time, and like clockwork get out and stand by the passenger doors, one on either side. This is not new for this locale. There are many very wealthy and powerful people in the Washington DC area. Artie looks and then says so where’s your vehicle?

Rickie looks at Artie and says, “That’s it.”

You’re kidding right? But he knows Rickie is not. Artie looks closer and notices the driver and the other person are female. “What’s with the female driver and the other one?”

“Bodyguards,” Rickie interrupts.

“Bodyguards? What for? Are you Mafia, Government or some such NGO?”

“Yes bodyguards. It’s part of the package, and I prefer the company of professional women. And since this is my operation, I get what I want. You coming?”

Rickie stands up knocks down the last of his drink, leaves a very large tip, walks to the door and holds it open for Artie. At that point both driver and bodyguard open the doors to the Bentley.

As Artie is leaving, Ciro give him a thumbs up sign, a smile and a rude gesture. Rickie sees that too and laughs thinking he has no idea. Neither of them do. "Here we go," Rickie says to Artie, "Come on I'll arrange for your things to be picked up. Give me your address and keys and your finger."

Artie give him the finger. "How about this one? My keys, are you nuts?"

Rickie hold up his wallet and keys, "I am good," he says.

"You SOB, you picked my pockets. I should just punch you out. I have a good mind to get out now!" But Artie is buzzed, and common sense is in the back seat of his mind, asleep.

"Stop being such a baby, and give me your finger, any will do," Ignoring the gesture. "And That will do too."

Artie yells: "OW" as Rickie pricks it. The needle glows green.

"GOOD, you're okay. Let's go." They both enter the vehicle. The doors shut with a thunk that is almost armor like in sound. The interior is silent. The passenger section, large and spacious is sealed off from the front occupants. He takes in a deep breath and smells the leather. He touches the seat. It's rich, thick and subtle. This is very, very, nice. This is a very expensive piece of machinery.

As the two bodyguards get into the front, Artie can see part of the dash board by the illumination. It's like nothing he's seen in any vehicle before. It reminds him of the cockpit of a race vehicle or a jet.

"Some vehicle, very different, very, very something else," say Artie. "Is this yours?"

"You're observant, another good sign. And it is different, trust me on that too. No, theirs. I get to use it as I see fit, no questions. It's part of the business package." Rickie hits a button on a panel and a screen comes on. As far as Artie can view, it's a picture of nothing he's seen before. It looks like a flight chart with , and what else he can't make out.

"Some GPS," he says laughing but beginning to worry. His mind is all over the place. These people are serious about something. Maybe they are government types. Maybe I fucked up on some of the headhunting. He did play in the black world.

"Not quite," Rickie says concentrating on something and not looking up. The driver's window opens to the passenger compartment. "Sir, we are preparing now." The vehicle hums and it almost sounds like the whole thing is buttoning up. It over pressures.

Artie wants to talk in order to relax, so he starts, "I still think you should be committed for taking this job."

"You said that already. And what does that say about you for coming along?"

"Yes I did. And I should have my head examined for going along with a stranger that shows me a ring claiming to be 5 carat Alexandrite, to meet a ugly beautiful girl, her parents and." He looks at him, "with a perfect stranger and those two, what do you call female goons?"

"And you've already committed. And they are not goons. They are professionals and they are here to assist me with my tasks. "

"Committed, have I? Says who?"

“You’re in the car and we’re on the way. Says me, end of story.”

“I’m being kidnapped!” There is no sense of movement. He can hear nothing. He feels a slight vibration through the vehicle. He attempts to look out the window but everything is a black gray mush. “I didn’t even realize we were moving. Who’s driving?”

“The pilot of course,” Rickie says his face in the screen.

“Pilot, this is a car not a jet, what do you mean pilot? Artie is shaking a bit. This is too weird.

“Sir, I have him. We’ll be there shortly” The window was open to their compartment and Artie overheard the passenger guard.

“Who is this sir she’s talking to?”

“Her father. You don’t seem to be scared or nervous. You’ll meet him soon. BE POLITE and proper.”

“Just be polite and proper. I don’t know who you are talking about. This is crazy.”

“It doesn’t matter. He’s your new father-in-law.” Rickie Titillo has change in demeanor becoming somewhat more pugnacious in his retorts to Artie’s hesitant comments. Rickie knows there is no going back and is attempting to relay that in a slightly subtle manner. The frustration is showing.

“Or might be.”

“Oh no, YOU ARE committed,” Get over it.

“I should be.”

“Oh no YOU ARE. Now please let’s change the subject.” Rickie thinks *I can use a drink about now*. Later, I’ll wait until later until bird brain here gets it and appreciates what I’m going through to get him a prize of his life time.

“What do you exactly mean by that?”

“I said, let’s change the subject. Take a look out the window.” Rickie knew this would get his attention.

“Oh shit! Where, what?”

“No profanity, please it’s upsetting.”

“WHERE ARE WE? Upsetting? Look, you sit there as calmly as can be. I have no clue...”

Rickie feels takes a deep breath. He is back in control, and like a cat, wants to play with the mouse, and answers, “Clue? No you don’t, do you? Somewhere, I’m not exactly sure.” And lets it go like that.

“How fast are we going?” Artie know he is moving faster than anything he’s ever been in or on. Yet there is absolutely no sensation of speed, mass moving or anything that would give the notion of motion away.

“Not sure of that either,” Rickie yawns. “We could be anywhere. The science behind this is...” Rickie puts his hand up as if to say stop, “you’ll get it soon enough.”

Artie still wants some answers, decent answers, anything he can grab on to in this very strange vehicle whatever it is. “Okay changing the subject. What’s her name? I do need to know that. I can’t just call her MS X or Mystery wife

“Please Artie, really, how many times must I tell you, I am not allowed to state that yet.” The voice is softer and different. Rickie looks at him with some pity. This will be just fine. I wouldn’t lead you astray, really I wouldn’t. I found the right match. My task will be complete.”

“This is very strange. I’m in a fog about so much. Why should I trust you? I get nothing but oblique answers to my questions on none at all. I’m in this whatever it is traveling at speeds I have never seen and as to where I am, I have no damned idea.”

Artie decides to ask another question, “Okay what about her Mother?”

“A fine and elegant lady.”

“Tell me about her.”

“I can’t say. It’s in my contract.” The both say in unison

“In my contract that’s what you always fall back on. Well, who signed it? What does the signature read?”

“BY THE POWER INVESTED IN ME and \$142,000 cash, is what it says.

“And that’s all you have?”

“I have this Bentley. I have them. And, I have you.”

“You have me all right. I’m trapped with a nutcase, two bodyguards that I would not want to mess with, in a... what looks a lot like a Bentley but it’s something else entirely that’s for sure.” Artie repeats himself a bit nervously, “this is the thickest fog I’ve ever been in. It’s like soup.”

“It will clear up soon. Trust me.”

“I guess I have to.”

Rickie’s soft hands touch Artie’s hands as if to calm him down.

“That’s the first time you stated something like that or touched me except to pick my pocket.” Artie takes the hand. This guy has never done a day of hard work in his life. “Do you know when we’ll be where ever it is we should be?”

“I’m not sure of our specific location or of our specific velocity.” Rickie snaps, pulling his hand back quickly.

“You admitted to that earlier. You’re sure you’re not sure?” Artie grins.

“Yes I am.” Rickie states emphatically

“You are what, which, what?” Artie smiles. Well at least I found a way to entertain myself. It’s been at my expense all evening, and he looks out the window, or whatever it is out there.

“Sure about not being sure.”

“Am I dreaming? Really is this a dream?”

For the first time Rickie answers the question. “No. But if you think about it, all reality is observed by the mind. So in a strange interpretation, yes and no.”

“Ah the fog is lifting. We’re almost there.” Rickie is glad. Soon this will all be over and done with, mission completed. Mr. Doubting Thomas here will finally understand. I’ve been through so many possible candidates and this one who seems the best is a real nudnik.

“Where is there?”

“Where we are going, of course.”

Artie looks at his watch. “It stopped moving. This is an expensive piece of time keeping.”

Smiling a knowing smile Rickie starts to explain, “Oh It’s moving alright but not as you think.”

“But what?”

“Sorry I’m not allowed to say. I slipped. You’ll understand soon enough.”

The Bentley now approaches a huge well laid out estate. On closer inspection, the estate, green and lush and extensive in its reach, but it is surrounded by nothing. The outlying land is empty, a void, as if it were a barren planet dry and forbidding.

“SOOO WOW!” Artie is taken in by the size of the structure as well as the surrounding gardens. He ignores the outlying regions.

“No, this is not it.” states Rickie without any inflection.

“No? Then where is it? You’re kidding me again?” Then Artie takes a close look and notices the outlying environment. “Out there, it looks like pictures of the moon. What and where is this place?”

“You’ll see.”

“It’s the only building I can see. What else is around here?” How do you live, where are the neighbors?”

“It’s part of our M-based estate. It’s a portal, an entry point, one could claim.”

“An M-based what? Portal? Aliens?” Artie is really worried. He may not be an axe murderer but this is getting stranger and strange as time moves forward.

“You’ll understand soon enough,” say Rickien again in that soft voice Artie heard just before. It’s a bit more musical in tone and higher.

The Driver stops in front of the long steps. A butler suddenly appears popping out of nowhere and with a hissing of escaping air opens the door. “Sir This way if you please. I will show you to your rooms. Your goods will arrive shortly. However, happily, you won’t be requiring most of them. We have all new garments, made by the best in the universe, just for you.” He giggles.

Another butler suddenly appears and opens the Matchmakers door only after Artie steps out. He whispers something. The other one disappears as quickly. Artie looks at Rickie in the light for the first time. There’s something about this guy that’s...I can’t put my finger on it. Oh well here I am.

“So everything else has been taken care of.” The Matchmaker inquires or states as a question.

“What is Everything? Artie interrupts and asks the matchmaker.

“Most everything,” the Butler says looking at both of them.

Artie continues and getting concerned, “And the girl, when do I get to meet Ms Ugly-Beautiful?”

“You have,” say the Matchmaker laughing.

“I have? When? Where? What the f...?”

“*NO profanity I Told you,*” and in a softer calmer voice, “please.” The matchmaker continues, “*You have, and I pick you.*” The matchmaker states that in a matter of fact tone.

“What! You’re a guy! I’m not into guys. What have I got myself...?” Artie is losing it and ranting. He’s been hoodwinked and is going to be some guy’s play toy.

“Silly boy, take another look!”

Artie is almost crying in despair, “I’m not into guys. What have I got myself...?”

The Bowler comes off. The suit jacket comes off. Artie is thunder struck. “Oh my god, you’re beautiful.” Her long jet black hair falls past her shoulders. Green eyes that he never noticed are sparkling like supernovas. What else comes off, and when, he wonders. She stands in front of him to give him a good look. She turns around completely

and when she faces him again, she hugs him. There is electricity in her touch. She kisses him on the cheek.

“Yes I am all of that. Come, meet Daddy and Mother. I’ll introduce you right away. Daddy’s name is Zeno and Mother is Aditi. Have you got that? Aditi and Zeno. Be polite!”

“Where are we? Who are you? What are you?” Artie is totally smitten. He really doesn’t care. He thinks he died and is in heaven. Or even if this is hell, he’ll take it too. “I don’t even know your real name.”

“I’ll tell you later and does it Really Matter? Rickie work just fine.” Laughing, she pulls Artie through the portal and giggles at her own eternal pun. The fuzzy outlined multi-moons circle over head. It is a beautiful day.

THE END

This story is one of complete fiction. Any resemblances to deities, beings, humans or characters, locations, realities, businesses real or imagined in any form or fashion, written or otherwise, are purely coincidental.