



RETURN OF THE MESSENGER THE IMPRESARIO ACT 3

THE IMPRESARIO

Thrusting through the smoke between us like a fleshy bolt of lightning, jolting me out of our walk down bizarre memory lane, the thick, hairy arm of the fuming elderly woman, shouting apparently all the while, snatched the burning cigarette. Flinging it to the floor, she ground the still-smoking butt to a pulp with unbecoming, twisty hip movements. Looking us over, arms akimbo, and giving a mighty dismissive huff, she strode off into the kitchen.

“This is very, very weird,” I heard myself say, still recovering from the entirely unexpected unearthing of this memory.

“Yeah and what isn't...?” he said, his pointy face leaning in way too close to mine.

“Forgive me, but what exactly the hell are you talking about?” I said, wiping my eyes and looking up, hoping he had dissipated with the

smoke. "And just who the hell are you, and how do you know about Paros or my book or my number or how to even find me.?"

"Huh-huh... it's not your alcohol, hashish-soaked brain that cannot recall. You've been glamourised, my boy," he said, as if this was a simple matter of fact.

"I don't smoke hashish, don't even know where to get any. Hang on, glamourised... like a vampire?" I asked, my anger rising, now propelled by fear.

"Ha!" his head went almost all the way back like a Pez dispenser. "Heavens no. No, nothing like that. Besides, vampires are drunken hacks," he said with obviously informed contempt.

"Then what the fuck do you mean by glamourised?" I said, feeling more creeping terror than anger now.

Waving his hand dismissively, "Please, we have bigger heads to fry."

"You mean fish," I said.

"Do I...?" he said, letting the unsettling image marinate for a moment.

"Your book," he said, making air quotes, "is a truly noble pursuit and worth writing, but you're focusing on the dusty distant past," he said, shaking his head. He went on, "You lot have been so diluted, you're so far from home. No more toner in the machine, but copies keep pouring out, huh-huh."

My eyes were blurring now, the surrealism kicking in. "The Olympians are just as you said, a great disbanded rock band, now keen to reassemble like Kiss or Journey and reap the pageantry, the adulation, speaking in tongues like the ladies of Delphi, you know; more drama, more good old-fashioned fun," he said, spreading his hands open like Fosse jazz hands. "You know what I mean?"

I was somehow enjoying this outlandish encounter, a form of pleasant dizziness settling in, but following the angular stranger's even

stranger narrative was getting hard to take. Shouting to the old lady, I ordered a beer with an ouzo back. Still visibly annoyed, she brought the drinks and used the same tray to take the cigarettes on the table. Grabbing her hand with the Luckies and shaking one loose from the pack, he lit the cigarette all in one serpentine motion. Shouting some kind of expletive in Greek, she walked away resignedly.

"Cheers," I said reflexively, hoisting up the shot of ouzo and taking comfort from the solid feel of the heavy little glass. "Stin ygeia sas," tapping the end of his cigarette on my glass and nodding. "How do I fit into what you're talking about, and how do you know about my book?" I said, calmed by the ouzo and taking a long pull.

"You told me," he said simply, shrugging.

"I told you?" I repeated dumbly, having no memory of sharing. Rolling his eyes in disregard, he went on, "Impresario," spreading his hands again, like a marquee lighting up, redirecting my attention. "Excuse me – like Kafka and The Hunger Artist?"

"Who, what, no: Im-pre-sar-io," speaking in syllables. "You shall be our Impresario, introducer, fixer!" holding up a bony finger, emphasizing his delight in finding the word. "Fixer of what exactly? And who is... we?" I said, the dizziness now transmuted into free-falling.

Throwing his head back and squinting at the ceiling, squeezing his brain like a sponge, wringing out the right words, he said, "A Meeting, yes, a meeting of," still squeezing, "very, very important," laughing out loud at these words; scrubbing the inside of his head for the perfect word, he finally, with some visible effort, produced; "Individuals."

"Is this a kind of drug deal...?" I said, indicating my contempt for his patchwork pitch.

"Ha, huh-huh, no drug deal, but it is a deal, as you say, of sorts," he said, between heavy drags on the Lucky.

Allowing myself to be drawn into his mysterious, curiously thin on details, scenario, I played along. "A few questions..." I said, playing along but not really understanding the game.

"Of course," he said in an overly gratuitous way, settling back into the booth and extending his arms over the back of both sides in a casual wide-open pose, indicating he had nothing to hide, although I knew, and he knew I knew, he was hiding something. "So... who is We exactly, and where does the meeting take place, and what is the subject?"

Leaning forward, he said, "We," tapping his lighter on the table emphasizing, "are the, shall we say, interested parties, the location is TBD, and the subject... well the subject is THE subject. Nothing could be of more interest or importance. Engage your very well-developed imagination."

Sipping beer, processing this, and scanning his other what must be worldly features, I said. "Is this a meeting with Aliens?"

"Well, huh-huh," cocking his head, "Yes, it is, I mean, not exactly ET, but alien is a word that applies, although not in the way you apply it."

"OK... let me make sure I understand; I am arranging a meeting with aliens of sorts, at an unknown place regarding THE subject, which is either the enslavement or the enlightenment of humanity, or something like that," my sarcasm came without effort.

"Exactly!" slamming his bony hand on the table. "That is basically, exactly right! Very astute. I knew you were the perfect... candidate, or rather Impresario." more air quotes. "Well when do we get started?" I said, going along with his excitement, baiting him for more details.

"You leave for Athens tomorrow, is that soon enough?"

"Athens, you mean the one in Greece! And how am I going to Athens tomorrow when I don't have a ticket or know where I am going... or why...?"

"Here is the address to my hotel, in Athens," he said, sliding a box of matches across the table.

"I own the hotel, in case you were wondering. You can tell... the matches have my name on them." Hotel Hermes" was embossed in bright gold on the cover, with winged feet, like his lighter, and my dream on Paros from 25 years ago, the bodiless feet running through the sand. "Check your electric post—you'll find your ticket there," tapping the long ash of his Lucky on the floor.

Checking my email on my phone, the ticket was there. First Class; Olympic Airlines. "First Class," I said out loud, reading the ticket. "But of course! Only the best for our Impresario," he said, gesturing towards me with both hands as if he were introducing me to the stage. "Any more questions?" raising his eyebrows challengingly.

"Just one, seriously, who the hell are you?" "I told you, I'm Herman." Filtering all the possible candidates, as our conversation progressed, I'd arrived at a guess: "C'mon, are you St Germain?" "Ha! If I were, I would not admit it! An amateur alchemist asshole across the ages, that one." He said summarily.

"That is not an answer," I said dryly. "Answers are overrated—see you in Athens." He stood up quickly, pulling out a wad of bills from a gold money clip fashioned from two wings and threw them on the table. Turning to exit, then as if remembering one last thing, he spun around and bent fully at the waist and arched one hand to the sky. He was gone, it seemed, somehow with out leaving.