

TWO THUMBS UP, WAY UP

by

Philip Heckman

© 2013 Philip Heckman
701 Panther Trl.
Monona, WI 53716-3058
philipheckmanwriter.com
pheckman02@gmail.com

8/24/2013

TWO THUMBS UP, WAY UP

Characters

VERNON, white male, 60s, the driver.

ZOOT, minority male, 20s, the passenger.

Time

Present.

Setting

A sedan on the Interstate through the Great Plains.

TWO THUMBS UP, WAY UP

VERNON is behind the wheel of a car traveling straight ahead at high speed. He is dressed for the road, in the comfortable slacks and short-sleeved shirt that white American males favor as they approach retirement. ZOOT sits beside him, wearing a muscle shirt, baggy shorts with cargo pockets, and possibly a do-rag. An oldies rock radio station plays softly under their conversation.

VERNON

Know who this is?

ZOOT

Yeah, that chick starved herself to death. Carpenter.

VERNON

Karen Carpenter. Very good.

ZOOT

My moms used to play her all the time I was a kid.

VERNON

Purest, most beautiful voice in all of God's Creation.

ZOOT

Fucked up, though, huh? Kill yourself like that. I could never do that, even, say, in a hunger strike for some great political purpose. I like to eat too much.

VERNON

Hard to imagine.

ZOOT

My moms, she used to get so mad when me and my brother got into it in the house. Tearing up the living room and shit. She used to chase us outside with a broom. We'd be laughing and shit how mad she'd get, calling us God-forsaken hellions. Then she'd lock the door and refuse to let us in for dinner. We were so young we didn't have any money, we'd go hungry. Weren't laughing then.

VERNON

Yeah? Didn't the neighbors feed you or anything?

ZOOT

(Chuckles.)

No way. They knew better. She'd rip them another one anyone messed with her child-rearing practices.

VERNON

But she loved you, right. She was just doing her best, trying to raise you right.

ZOOT

Yeah. Me and my brother, we got some bruises now and then from that old broom, but we turned out all right.

VERNON

My generation, we sure had a funny way of showing our love.

A few moments of quiet, as they muse.

VERNON (CONT'D)

You hungry now? Got bag of chips, some jerky in the back seat.

ZOOT

Naw, I'm fine. I ate at a truck stop hundred miles or so back.

VERNON

You let me know you need to pull off. I tend to keep going until I have to take a leak.

ZOOT

I'm good. Thanks.

VERNON

You're lucky I came along when I did. Not too much traffic this stretch. How long you waiting?

ZOOT

Couple of hours. I don't mind. I'll get there when I get there.

VERNON

How far you going?

ZOOT

California.

VERNON

Job? Woman?

ZOOT

(Smiles.)

Yeah, both.

VERNON

A two-fer, that's the way to do it. You never want to leave one for the other. Too traumatic.

ZOOT

I'm sure.

VERNON

No, long as you have coin and a condom--and the opportunity to use 'em--life is good.

ZOOT

Ain't that the truth.

VERNON

All you need.

ZOOT

Yeah.

The music has changed.

VERNON

This one, you know this one?

ZOOT

(Listening.)

I heard it before. Don't know the name though.

VERNON

Brits. Blues rock. They were heavy metal before there was heavy metal.

ZOOT

(Shrugs.)

Sorry, man, before heavy metal was way before me.

VERNON

Led Zeppelin. You don't know them?

ZOOT

Oh, yeah, sure.

VERNON

I was your age when they were still together, but they were monsters even then. Still are. They're always going to be on the radio somewhere until the end of time.

ZOOT

You sure had weird names for bands in those days.

VERNON

What's wrong with Led Zeppelin?

ZOOT

What's it mean? You think about that?

VERNON

You never heard the expression "go over like a lead balloon"? It's ironic and self-deprecating, you know, a joke.

ZOOT

(Laughs.)

Put it that way makes 'em sound like pussies.

VERNON

(Slightly offended, pouting.)

The Hindenburg, the hydrogen ship that blew up, that was a zeppelin. Not so funny.

ZOOT

(Trying to back off, he's a guest, after all.)

I'm sorry, man. I shouldn't laugh.

(Beat, unable to resist.)

But you got to admit, some crazy names for bands in those days. That Revival, Clearwater Revival--Creedence Clearwater Revival--what's with that?

(Beat, trying to break through.)

Come on, you got to admit some crazy shit with the names way back then.

VERNON

(Beat.)

Question Mark & The Mysterians.

ZOOT

Say what?

VERNON

Question Mark & The Mysterians. The Troggs. Tonto's Expanding Head Band.

ZOOT is laughing and VERNON is getting into it, laughing along.

VERNON (CONT'D)

Mott the Hoople. Moby Grape. Captain Beefheart.

ZOOT

See? I told you. Fucked up names, man. That's what you get doing all them psychedelic drugs.

VERNON

(Good-naturedly.)

Oh, and you young punks are different.

ZOOT

What?

VERNON

Who you listen to? Jay-Z. And Ice T. And Fuck Yer Dead Homeboy?

ZOOT is hysterical.

VERNON (CONT'D)

Am I right? And Snoop Doggy Dogg-Dog.

ZOOT

(Trying to get a handle.)

It's Snoop Lion now.

VERNON

Oh, yeah? Like that's an improvement.

ZOOT

(Wiping his eyes.)

You win, man.

VERNON

'Course I win. I'm a Baby Boomer. We're the greatest generation that ever lived. Most creative. Most inventive. Most politically active and relevant.

ZOOT

(Laughing again.)

Whatever you say.

VERNON

I'm serious. Show some respect.

ZOOT

(Trying.)

No, you're right.

(Beat, chuckling.)

Captain Beefchunks.

VERNON

(Smiles.)

Fuck. You should remember whose car this is and who's driving. Have some decorum. Zoot. That's your name, right? You ought to talk.

ZOOT

OK. My moms named me, but she was more your generation. Proves my point.

VERNON

That it does. Let's change the subject.

ZOOT

Where you headed?

VERNON

(Beat.)

"Second star to the right and straight on 'til morning."

ZOOT

Oh, yeah? Where'd you get that?

VERNON

From an old book. I just remembered it.

ZOOT

Funny how that goes.

VERNON

Yeah. Funny. Peter Pan.

ZOOT

Hey, I saw that movie I was a kid.

VERNON

Your generation doesn't read much, do they?

ZOOT

What do you mean? I get texts on my cell all the time.

VERNON

No, I mean, reading for real. Not that LOL shit.

(Beat.)

I always thought my life would make a good book. I suppose everybody thinks that. But I'd read a book about my life. Just to make sure it really happened the way I remember it.

(Beat.)

You ever fish?

ZOOT

You mean eat fish?

VERNON

Well, eat them, yeah, but did you ever catch them first. You know, with a fishing pole and a worm, like that?

ZOOT

Naw. No fishing where I grew up.

VERNON

Well, there was for me. My granddad took me with a cane pole. We dug worms. Caught fish and ate them ourselves. More than once.

ZOOT

Nice.

VERNON

Tried fishing with my son. Took him to a lake near where we lived couple of times. Never caught any fish, though. After that, he lost interest. Never went back. Years later I mentioned it to him, pretended like we actually did catch fish together, and later, he remembered it that way, the way I told him. So for him, it was just the same as if it really happened.

ZOOT

Then, if there was a video of you and your granddad, you'd want to watch it see if your memory was correct.

VERNON

Or, like I said, read about it in my authentic biography.

ZOOT

I don't know, man. Seems risky. What if your granddad did to you what you did to your son? Made it all up.

VERNON

I think I'd want to know. It would explain a lot to me about my relationship with the truth.

ZOOT

I guess...

VERNON

(Beat.)

Let me ask you something, Zoot. You think you get the life you deserve?

ZOOT

(Off balance.)

Huh? Like just desserts?

VERNON

No, I'm not talking retribution. It's like, you know, all is said and done, do you think your life is representative of your character?

ZOOT

I don't know. Never thought about it.

VERNON

'Course not. Why would you? Still practically a kid.

ZOOT

What do you think?

VERNON

(Beat.)

I think...I think by the time you're in a position to ask the question, you're in no shape to do anything about the answer. It's the fucked-up human condition.

A few moment of silent reflection, then VERNON slowly turns the wheel slightly to his right.

VERNON (CONT'D)

Rest area. Time to stop.

ZOOT

Sure.

VERNON maneuvers the car into a parking spot. He shuts off the engine.

VERNON

This car--Pontiac. 1966 Grand Prix--rebuilt it myself. First car I ever got laid in.

ZOOT

In here? You must be kidding.

VERNON

She was a contortionist, let me tell you. The things you put up with for sex.

VERNON tosses the keys to ZOOT and reaches into the back for a small bag.

ZOOT

What? You want me to drive?

VERNON

I want you to have it.

ZOOT

What?

VERNON

Keep it. It's yours. Title transfer's in the glove box. Signed, you just fill in the rest.

ZOOT

What? No...

VERNON gets out, leans in through the window.

VERNON

You're a good man, Zoot. I can tell. Not many guys would hitchhike all the way across the country for a woman. You deserve the car. I want you to have it.

ZOOT

What for?

VERNON

Whatever you want. Drive it. Sell it. Blow it up. It's yours.

VERNON turns away.

ZOOT

Hey, where you going?

VERNON

Rest of the way on foot.

ZOOT

Well...But there's nothing here. It's Nebraska. Come on, let me drive you somewhere at least.

VERNON

You can't. My destination, no vehicles allowed.

ZOOT

I don't understand.

VERNON

It's very simple. I got the life I deserved and now I got something to do and I don't want to mess up that car for the next guy owns it. Which is you.

VERNON salutes ZOOT with the bag, shakes it...

VERNON (CONT'D)

So long, Zoot. You made me laugh. I won't forget that long as I live.

VERNON exits. ZOOT looks at the keys in his hand.

ZOOT

The fuck...

Fade to black.

THE END