

La La Land: Excerpts

Michael Angelo Tata

Beautiful Person #5: Lost Souls of Santa Monica Boulevard

“I know you!” “You do?”
“You’re from Australia!”
“You must have me confused
with an evil twin.” “You
sure you’re not Australian?”
“No—are you? “Nah—never
been there. What about you?”

Actually, though her country
of origin remains indeterminate,
her daily position never varies:
the sidewalk in front of Pet Luv.
Sitting with a partner in crime
even more bedraggled than she,
my new Aussie-lover begs for
change each sun-drenched day,
Crystal Waters’ “Gypsy Woman”
come to life in the form of a
white Rasta girl sired by wallabies.
To break up time’s anaesthetizing
monotony, which otherwise might
remain an undifferentiated field
of absolute insipidness, she lifts
her bony butt-cheeks from the
trottoir and stumbles over
to Starbucks, where a fresh
crop of ’roid-raging gym
bunnies and calculating carb-
counters and peppy out-of-towners
awaits her mendicant wiles.

Between 747s, Lady
180, in from Queens, sips
an iced Chai while relating
the latest shenanigans of the
Sunset Hills Vicodin set.
Liquid opium dumpster-

diving, ethics attorneys
conducting synchronized
swimming sessions in a pool
filled with Stoli Razberi—
all this, plus the latest and
greatest from the Mafia Princess
hotline: “Pop! Pop! I’m goin’
to the Top! Outa my way!”

Would that I were from Sydney;
that I rode to town on a Tasmanian
Devil; that Danii Minogue and
I raced marsupials for giggles
as we ridiculed Kylie for her
pluck; that an endogamous line
of sociopaths traceable back
to an unbalanced Anglo-Saxon
familial cluster constituted
my genetic legacy; that I rose
from the limpid waves of
Manly Beach resplendent
in a Ben Sherman Speedo
and wafted into the arms
of Russell Crowe: regardless
of these burning desires, no
twists or turns of the subjunctive
can link me up with the version
of me seized upon by the
dishwater-blonde, dollar-
grubbing, geographically
confounded hippie chick
interrupting our *tête-à-tête*
to inquire as to the veracity
of my national origin.

One George Washington,
one transmission of a Bic flame,
and one refusal later, and she’s
through, allowing us to return
to heavy Twin Star mode with
only occasional lunar outbursts
to distract us from enjoying our
supreme epistemological object,
gossip. Red-tagged mini-manses
that could go at a moment’s notice,
collapsed Virgin Megastores

wiped out by a simple afternoon
cloudburst, rhinoplasties and
Dudley Do-Right chin implants—
with less than ideal results—
our pace quickens to match
the increased flow of circulation
we experience, as scandal and
heat and black tea rile us up.

Would that I were a mafia princess
carrying a 700-lb. Vuitton, that I
rode my house down a heaving
mountain of mud like a surfer
vying for a magazine cover,
that I surfed the society page
on an involuted kangaroo
pouch, that my family tree
were studded with criminals.

While I muse, a new *petit*
four sprouts legs and
saunters on by. “OMFG!
That’s the one I met at
the grocery store when
I bought you all that
Godiva yesterday after
my date with Pigpen.”

“Yes, baby, it’s Isis.
Bam! You was snapping
up all the Chocolate Rasp-
berry Truffle like it was
going out of style.”

All I notice is a silver belt,
icy and frigid, fashion’s
answer to bands of frozen
water vapor and crushed
asteroid circling Neptune
in minty splendor, my eyes
disconnected from their
sockets and joining the
mass orbit of rogue particles
on a mindless mission
of autopiloted vertigo.

BP #11: Monica Lewinsky by the Warhols

MOCA: sad version of a Warhol retrospective makes it to downtown Los Angeles, where stepping over Heroin/Eats-Her-Own-Vomit Lady gains me access to Fauve soup cans and jazzy Jackies, all arranged by color scheme into Pop pockets. Aware that art is never what's on the walls, I am robbed of even the most minimal fantasy that any quantum of aesthetic splendor can be stored within the arid confines of a quadrilateral.

“Oh my God—Michael! It's Monica!” My West Coast Mother is floored, a reaction I don't often see. “Monica from *Loisaida*? I wonder if she's still running that dungeon. You know, she would charge this one Rabbi \$500 an hour to get dressed up like Boy George and be verbally abused. Once he tried to stiff her, and boy did she let him have it...” “What? Never mind—I'm talking about Monica Lewinsky! She just went into that room over there with someone who looked like her mother.” “No way! Was she carrying one of those handbags she's been designing?” “I don't know—but maybe you can ask her for one. Hurry—there she goes. Say something fast! You're good in this situations.”

Big Mac is brimming with excitement. Normally, she can't care less about celebrity. She'll say hello to Kate Winslet at a party with the same tones she'd use at the dry cleaners,

but for some reason, the sex star of the Clinton White House lights her fire, and how can I ever refuse her this pleasure? Urged onward by an enthusiasm and urgency I have never before heard in her voice, I am obligated to perform the very Warholian work of ignoring the labor of curators, conservationists and creative directors, instead using the museum as an occasion to try my luck at initiating an alien encounter. It's better than Angie Dickinson using the Met as sex club in *Dressed to Kill*, and for me, there's no danger of contracting syphilis. Off I go, hellbent at supplementing recent readings about the history of Madame du Barry with a more contemporary account of what it takes to seduce heads of state and other potentates.

I think of the influence Bill had on the porn industry, remembering one called *The Oval Orifice* and featuring one hell of a blowjob scene, at least according to the box, displayed prominently in the window of a sleazy sex shop on Christopher Street which, in the conservative aftermath of 9/11, became a wholesome, legitimate video rental boutique competing with Blockbuster by emphasizing "the human touch." No—I won't mention that. Sneaking into a room of giant day-glo flowers recalling the best 60s trip, I search and search for a hairdo sculpted into a helmet.

Bingo! Her massive coif is still massive in real life, although she is so much thinner than when she appears on the cover of *Star Magazine* above a headline screaming something about fat cells in revolt. Not starstruck in the least—Stephen Hawking might make me stutter, but not a horny intern—I adjust my shirt, on which enterprising heirs of Franco Moschino have stamped a giant stalk of celery, the words “7 Calories,” and an arrow indicating that the greens house the calories, to make it cling in all the right places. Waiting for the smallest pause to perforate the conversation flowering between Monica and a slightly older woman in a pink Chanel business suit, I sense a momentary break in vibration and pounce. Big Mac’s happiness depends upon the success of this encounter, so I have to think fast and turn on the charm to levels just below unctuous.

“Monica—Hi! So wonderful to see you here. Are you a big fan of Warhol? Oh—allow me to introduce myself.” It takes no time at all for the three of us to be talking with the amicability of old friends. The woman is her aunt; she heralds from Pasadena, and, yes, Warhol is one of Monica’s favorite artists.

Now I can allow things to get a bit racier. “You know, Monica, I don’t care what

all those horrible people in
the press say about what
happened between you
and Bill. I would have
given him head, too.
You did the right thing.”
Appreciating my candor, she
shakes her head in agreement
and thanks me for my honesty,
giving a schoolgirl giggle
of the sort the former president
has most certainly heard at
the most indelicate of times.
“You’re right. Thank you.
But, you know,” her voice
drops ever so slightly, “I
should never have kept that
awful dress. What was I thinking?”
Now Monica’s aunt is laughing,
too, using a curious turn at the
edge of her lip to indicate that
she, too, had advised Monica
to ditch the protein-coated
garment, and was never able
to understand why the afters
of a sexual affair would be
preserved. “Perhaps they’ll
use it on her mannequin at
Madame Tussaud’s one day.”

A faint corona of orange from
the petal of 60s fauna lights
up Monica’s hair from behind,
giving her a supernatural glow.
The conversation continues to
blossom, but, my work done,
it is time to share the fruits
of my labor with Mac Grande.
Politely excusing myself
through reference to an
imminent lunch engagement,
I bid my new friends *adieu*
just before there is time to
solidify our friendship, which
was never really my goal.
“Goodbye! So lovely to

meet you. See you at the
wax museum in a few!”

BP #13: Prince Mustafa Is Recalled to Riyadh

Delilah is frantic. “Mustafa is gone. His family ordered him to return to Saudi Arabia. Nobody knows what happened. I think they figured it all out and weren’t exactly overjoyed to discover they had been duped for such a long time. I feel just awful. He’s gone, gone for good.”

How strange and terrible— Prince Mustafa has vanished, spirited away without a word. Subsequent phone calls reveal new dimensions: had a last-minute estate sale, left his gleaming white Audi in someone’s driveway in The Hills, had been hospitalized recently after a mysterious collapse not to be confused with Epstein-Barr or asthma. Thinking back even further to a recent jaunt to South Beach, I realize what his parents have only now discovered, and know for sure that Delilah’s right, I will never see him again.

Sitting at the Starbucks on Ocean Drive, Miami, just after an November evening post-Thanksgiving shopping spree, we sipped steaming Peppermint Mochas by foaming waves taken directly from a Donna Summer anthem as we discussed what we hadn’t bought and hadn’t eaten.

“A/X? Paco never lets me shop there. Everything I buy, he throws away. He says it’s worse than Wal-Mart.” “Isn’t that where they sell walls?” “OK, Paris!”

Mustafa blew a smoke ring in the eye of an orotund moon suspended by puppet wire above palm trees shaking their leaves to an imperceivable rhythm. “Listen. I think I am in trouble. I don’t know what to do. I am undone.”

Hearing serious tones issue forth from standing waves in his vocal cords struck me as out of character, and then and there I knew that something had gone horribly awry in his personal life, a zone I normally avoided. As he spoke, I entered and exited consciousness intermittently, anchored to reality only by the joint benevolence of mint and caffeine and dark chocolate. His words seemed so critical, so unlike anything else he had ever communicated. Inhaling just enough of his cigarette fumes to be convinced that I was the one smoking, I absorbed the gravity of Mustafa’s tale as it took shape.

Apparently, the past four years of his life, a constant production of parties, photo ops and decadence, had been funded by devoted parents who believed the money they sent each month was being used to earn an advanced degree in some branch of the Humanities at UCLA. Now that the duration of his degree had come to an end, they had been proactive and contacted the school themselves to inquire as to when graduation ceremonies would be held. For once, Mustafa was faced with telling them the truth: he had squandered a fortune everywhere but school, and there was no way of preventing them from

coming to Los Angeles. Loving parents that they were, they had even made airplane and hotel reservations in advance, anxious to watch their precious son march down an aisle in a Medieval cleric's gown to the hopeful notes of "Pomp and Circumstance," curious as to who would deliver the commencement speech, who would receive an honorary degree that year, which of these fellow comrades had been his friend during his stay in a desert on the other side of the world.

Instantly, Prince Mustafa's life in all its intricacy unraveled. We sat, savored, exhaled, looking at each other with the full comprehension that two separate parallelograms of force would pull us away from one another, incorporating us into narratives which would no longer touch, tales set loose on conveyor belts of pulsing parallel lines.

Later that night, somewhere in that glorious and spooky time when morning and evening blur into a temporal mish-mosh, a knock came on my hotel door, alerting me to an impending urgency. A sexy Caribbean man in only his underwear stood there sheepishly. "Sorry to bother you. Mustafa ran out of lube. Do you have any extra?" "Sure—they gave me some in my goodie bag. One sec." And with the departure of Mustafa's new friend came the last trace of the Prince that I would ever collect. Within two weeks we would return to our separate

corners of the City of Angels, he would relay the shocking details of his expenditures to his family, and the present would close around his presence, sending him sling-shotting away toward a luxury condominium on the Persian Gulf. Weekends of sensual extravagance would fast become oases of family time, and, sadly, there would no longer be a need for post-midnight packets of lubricant placed in the hot and sweaty palm of a beautiful stranger. In Riyadh, Mustafa would return to the princely splendor he had tried to exchange for the tawdry mists of an unabashed hedonist.

“You know, I could always forget about their money and work at Blockbuster.” “Mustafa, you can’t afford to live in Westwood working at Blockbuster.” “Don’t worry—I can live on \$60,000. Nothing is more important than my sexual and personal freedom.” “Ummm, try living on six dollars an hour. That’s what they pay.” “Oh, Liza. Who the hell are they gonna make me marry?”