

Uri Rogoza

Hannah, a Witch

«Life- it ain't at all what people think»

Colonel Dan Mitchell, US Army, Retired Known to many Manhattanites As the homeless man with the nickname The American Hero.

Vince Sherman had always been an idiot. But tonight he out did himself.

“Un-fucking-believable!” he blurted out again for the umpteenth time, spilling his whisky on his expensive designer suit. “No, really, a witch, I swear! Looked like a scarecrow- skinny as a rail, dark eyes, dressed in tatters... And the main thing is I don't even know what made me do it! I was driving on I-95 when, like an asshole, I decided to take a short cut. But then, if I didn't I wouldn't have seen what I saw! And I'm telling you – Un-fucking-believable!

The party was just beginning, so it was no wonder that the crowd gathering around Vince, who arrived either already drunk or stoned, and mostly likely both, was quite large. They all had their smug faces, haughty smiles, and impeccable suits... I knew

some of the people standing around him, some I did not. As usual.

I was at the antique gallery of Richard Mills (who was the type who couldn't stand it when anybody called him Dick or Richie), a thin blond gay man with sad eyes who moved to New York from London four years ago, and having opened his gallery immediately decided to use it to organize a "Men's Club", as he called it. Once a month he gathered the glitterati from show-biz, artists, gallery owners, and wealthy playboys, who never knew what to do with themselves. Her Majesty's loyal subject dreamt of creating a comfortable homosexual haven for himself, but instead he had to endure crowds of boorish drunken men, who at the end of the evening, having had their fill of free booze and good times, would start calling their wives, girlfriends and mistresses to continue the fun.

"And you, Steve, what are you doing here?" I would have asked myself any other time. But tonight I knew exactly what I was doing at Richard Mills' soiree. Everything was perfect. Everything was happening exactly as it was supposed to. Life had taken a wonderful a turn. The world was magical. It was an unfamiliar feeling, one of joyous trepidation.

I'd barely warmed a glass of rich whisky in my palm, and was putting it back on the tray when I first heard the words of the drunken, laughing Vince Sherman. Because so many people were not listening to

his story, it was clear that it was really intended for only one person in the world. Me.

I had to hear it again, before Vince either became completely incoherent, or switched to his favorite subject- the joys of sex with hermaphroditic prostitutes.

Thankfully this hadn't happened yet, and Vince was basking in the ironic attention of the other guests, still regaling them with his adventure. Once again. For the fifth or sixth time. I had already gotten the gist, as had everyone else standing around with drinks in their hands. Basically, Vince was on his way back to Manhattan from parts unknown when he decided to take a shortcut, exited I-95, and while driving through some little backwater town (Don't forget the name! Don't forget the name! I repeated to myself like a mantra) he crashed his Mercedes full speed into a pile of metal from some old tractor blade or something.

"Son of bitch! It was right in the middle of the road!" Vince explained to his listeners, his eyes bright with enthusiasm "A nasty pile of rusted metal! No, seriously! Right. In. The. Middle. Of. The. Road! And I was going 60! Un-fucking-believable!"

Whistleroad Town, if you believed Vince, was one armpit of a town. He had fallen into complete despair that he was forced to wait until morning to get help, when, for a few bucks, some local wino introduced him to the town's only point of interest (I already knew I would never forget the name) – the local

freak who could supposedly make miracles.

“The shack she lived in – Uncle Tom’s cabin had nothing on this place! Jesus Christ, what a dump!” Vince took a long swallow of whisky and his eyes glistened, but not in a good way- he had definitely taken something else besides alcohol tonight. “I went in. She apparently wasn’t sleeping, although it was 4 o’clock in the morning. Hoooweee, was she ugly! Beaten something fierce with the ugly stick! And how old – maybe 20, maybe 40, who the hell knows? And her name, fantastic – Han-nah!! I shat a brick when I heard it! So we spent a couple of hours together.”

“ ‘So what tricks can you do, Miracle Lady?’ ” I asked her. She said nothing. Then it dawned on me. I said, ‘Can you turn ten bucks into a hundred? Here take this’... So I go to take a ten out of my wallet, and she doesn’t even touch it, and I look again – a C note! A real 100 dollar bill! What the hell are you all laughing at? I’m telling you, it was unbelievable... So then, I’m telling you, listen to this, my wallet is black, right? Can you make it turn green? I take it out again – and it is green...”

The crowd, already warmed-up from the free booze, laughed raucously and derisively. “I’m telling you!” protested Vince, dropping his glass which shattered into a spray of sharp fragments. He awkwardly pulled a big worn and disgustingly green wallet out of his back pocket. “Look! I swear to

Christ!”

But the other guests laughed even louder, for a moment drowning out the live music; in the depths of the studio a string trio invited by the aesthete Richard was performing something understated and beautiful.

“Fine, screw you, then! If you don’t believe me, then don’t!” an offended Vince grabbed another glass of whisky off a tray. “Morons! And do you know how it ended? Well, listen!... ‘Fine,’ so I say, ‘That’s enough. Thanks. But maybe you can conjure up a tow truck right now, ‘cause in this shitty Podunk town my cell doesn’t even work.’ So she just sits there for a second then says, ‘You don’t need a tow truck. I fixed your car.’ So I look outside- and I’ll be damned! There’s my baby- all in one piece, good as new. And what’s more- that fucking plow blade, the one I crashed into, is standing right there a couple of feet away, and it hadn’t even moved. So right there I started believing in her miracles... Big Time... I even got a little scared...”

“Time to lay off the drugs, Vince, my friend. No, no kidding. If you start having these bad trips, they’re not a good sign,” suggested someone I couldn’t see.

“You don’t believe me?” asked Sherman, but he already had calmed down, and took another swig of whisky. “Well, I guess that’s to be expected. I wouldn’t have believed it myself either.”

“And what’s she doing living in that shithole, anyway, this Hannah of yours? Huh? If she can do

anything?” asked a flushed pig-faced man standing next to me, “Something here doesn’t add up?”

“You won’t believe it, but I asked her that myself! She lowered her eyes and spoke so softly, “I can’t ask for anything for myself. It is not allowed. I can only ask for others... Or else the gift will disappear... So at the end of the night I gave her a fiver. I thought she might make a fuss, say that it was too little, but she just lowered her eyes and said ‘Thank you’. I woke her up in the middle of the night, made her do some magic tricks, got a new car – and for only five bucks! And all she said was a pathetic ‘Thank you.’”

The crowd of listeners began to break up. Some were laughing; the majority already discussing something else, already having forgotten about the nonsense of Vince Sherman.

Except for me. I believed every word. I came here expecting a miracle, about which I had been forewarned. And it happened – I heard it, as soon as I entered the cozy, dimly-lit gallery. I had not even had time to take a sip of whisky. And now, I am going to keep it all to myself- it had been too long since I’d had any miracles in my life. Especially the good kind.

All that was left was to leave and not attract any attention. I moved closer to the door, and stopped by the window. Autumn in the Village was in all its splendor, and it was absolutely beautiful. It looked like a greeting card for a mysterious holiday which only a

few people know about.

All of a sudden I felt the brush of a light, almost feminine hand. I turned around. The founder of the “Men’s Club” Richard Mills looked as he always did – in a silk shirt of an undeterminable color, narrow shoulders, with a shock of silky blond hair, thin fingers with an ideal manicure, puppy-dog eyes...

But Richard was much more pleasant than all of his guests – who were pushy and arrogant, drinking his whisky and breaking his glasses, swearing and shouting. I thought suddenly, “Why do you need all this? Manhattan is full of gay clubs where a refined man like Richard would find himself welcomed with open arms.

“Hi Richard,” I shook his long thin fingers, “Everything is wonderful. As always. And the music is just sublime...”

“But what’s the point of it all if you are already leaving?” he sadly sighed, “You haven’t even had a drink... Lee isn’t coming, of course?”

“He’s working.” Or having a threesome with a beautiful blond and a gorgeous brunette I wanted to add, but thought better of it. The sad Brit might have thought that I was being vulgar, which I certainly did not want. There was enough uncivilized behavior at his party already without my adding to it.

“Yes, Lee is now a national treasure!” Mills smiled widely, “An American Michelangelo! Soon, no

one will believe us that we used to know him, will they? By the way,” he almost hesitated, “A lot of people still think that you two are lovers...”

“Really? Who cares?” I found this very amusing, “Don’t even bother to convince them otherwise, Richard. In fact, it’s actually quite funny! In any case, the word ‘lover’ is from the word ‘love’, and I do love Lee like a brother. So in a sense you could say that they are right...”

“Oh, I like the way you put that- ‘from the word love’,” Richard’s charcoal eyes lowered even more, making him look even more like a sad puppy.

I could not wait to leave- a feeling of sorcery was pulsing through my veins like warm electricity – but Mills was still standing there next me, more as if he were just another guest, like me, than the host. Besides, I had the strange feeling that he wanted to say something more to me, but that he could not decide whether to do so or not. At least so it seemed.

“Stephen, my dear...” sighed Richard as he lowered those puppy-dog eyes, “You wouldn’t be offended if I tell you that I know something about your... your problems?”

“Problems?” I asked.

“I mean about work,” it was clear that the Englishman was uncomfortable, “You see, I have a good friend who also works in television... He is no longer young, but is very rich and powerful...”

“Great,” I thought to myself, “Typical...”

“And I mentioned you to him, just a word, without your permission, I know, my apologies...” Richard rambled on faster, as if afraid that I would not hear him out, or would punch him instead. “It’s just that he is a big fan of everything that you have done. He told me himself, and would never lie to me!... He would like to meet with you for a serious discussion. He is a very influential man in the TV world, really. I am very serious. And what’s more, he said that sorting out your issue with Paul is not a problem...”

My issue with Paul...

Paul Foxman, or “Paul the Couch” as he is also known – the son of a bitch! – was my boss, my curse and my slavemaster. He eclipsed my sunshine, poured poison in my morning coffee, he ruined my sex life!...

Then, snap!, just like that “your issue with Paul is not a problem...” It’s just that simple.

“So? You’ll meet with him?” Mills looked at me as if he was asking me for something rather than trying to do me an amazing favor.

To say that life is strange is to say nothing at all. Two hours ago, what the lovely English Richard Mills was offering would have made me the happiest I have been in the last four years. It would have been my salvation, a miracle of miracles, unbelievable and incredible. But at that moment the only thing pulsing

through me, powerfully and incessant was “Hannah of Whistleroad Town, Hannah of Whistleroad Town...”

Compared to my absolute, blind faith in my miracle, Richard’s words seemed as empty as banal office gossip. “I don’t need to give you an answer right now, do I, Richard?” I put my palm on his thin adolescent shoulder, “Let’s discuss this another time, OK? But in any case, thank you. You are an amazing and wonderful man.”

“Even for a Brit,” Lee would have definitely added.

But of course I did not bother to add anything. I just smiled my good-bye and stepped toward the door – a luxurious oak door, which turned the lights of the “City That Never Sleeps” into a dazzling multi-colored kaleidoscope.

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There are at least ten thousand reasons to live in New York. One of which is autumn. The particularly New York kind of autumn, when summer ends and takes its heat with it, but leaves a warmth behind, and the great city luxuriates in it, while at the same time still bustling along under the slowly falling leaves of hundred year old trees. The people, the buildings and the cars all know that this bliss is only a temporary one