

## Class Traitor

By Fred Setterberg

Monday morning I marched into the office with every intention of editing *The Future of Arts Education: An Intensive Analysis of Determinants and Impacts*. All four hundred and thirty-three pages. But first thing through the door, I get caught up in conversation.

“Mor-ning,” chimed our receptionist, Cleopatra Ng.

I slipped into the wicker chair alongside Cleo’s desk. “Yes,” I agreed, wagging my head extravagantly, casting one eye over the warren of cubicles where I was destined soon to dwell. “Yes, it’s an extraordinary morning – it really is, Cleo. And I’ve got my work cut out for me.” I thwapped four gathered knuckles against the clear plastic cover of *The Future of Arts Education* – *The Future* as it was known around the office.

Cleo blinked, winced, and squeezed out a toothy smile. She had been pondering *Architectural Digest*, leafing through an article titled “The Splendor That Was Marx,” a tour of the former Hollywood homes of Groucho, Harpo, Chico, and Zeppo

“Of course, this is only the draft copy.” I seized the report in both hands. “That’s why I’m going to get started on it. Right now.”

*The Future* represented the end-product of three years devoted to conferring, conferencing, and collaborating with the cream of the education reform industry. The project had been paid for by PERIL, People Engaged in Reforming Inadequate Learning. My employer. A massively-endowed think tank committed to “transforming public schooling as we know it” – largely through vouchers, tuition subsidies, and the transfer of responsibilities once held by the commonweal to the realm of the individual.

PERIL had spent about \$850,000 on the project, or nearly two thousand dollars per page.

Enough, as I had calculated the previous week, to cover the starting salary of eighteen music teachers for one year.

“Well,” I told Cleopatra, “it really is time to get to work.” She seemed not to hear me. She switched the desktop portable television to CNBC, its focus on the collapsing real estate market.

Or \$850,000 might have covered one teacher’s salary for the next eighteen years, as long as you didn’t figure in cost of living allowances or merit pay increases, which seemed likely.

Over the past two years of employment at PERIL, I had conferred and collaborated with the full range of education reform professionals: the multi-tasking, capaciously-credentialed, redundantly-degreed planners, analysts, evaluators, and facilitators who washed through our

mahogany hallways to help organize convenings, colloquiums, and sometimes just plain meetings. Together we sponsored innovative efforts with wide-ranging implications, providing seed money for regional demonstration projects that could be replicated, disseminated, and scaled-up for national impact. We underwrote fellowships for theorists with Ph.D.s in Urban Education who had never spent a day teaching in a big city school and we funded consultants who specialized in the effective use of additional consultants who could offer further sage advice on funding. Which is to say that my job paid well, certainly better than teaching high school music – or playing “Knock on Wood” to a crowd of nightclub inebriates for the ten thousandth time. In my youth, before teaching I’d been a bar band musician wielding a Selmer Mark VI tenor sax. I worshipped at the foot of John Coltrane, Sonny Rollins, and the lamentably underrated Harold Land. I played, on my very best nights, closer to King Curtis screeching “Soul Serenade” on that great live album at the Filmore.

I was dawdling.

It was time to thrash through *The Future of Arts Education: An Intensive Analysis of Determinants and Impacts*. I needed to absorb its insights. Whittle them down to a presentable. It was my responsibility to show PERIL’s board how *The Future* could help us achieve the maximum utilization of public school potential in the arts.

That was the problem with PERIL. Nobody ever *used* anything around here. Instead, we "utilized" our telephones, calculators, and flip-charts as though we inhabited a world of hammers and saws, the most ordinary action suggesting masterful calculation and craft.

I was stalling. Start reading.

I re-read the sub-title.

*Analysis.*

Clearly, the author had not jotted down the first thing that popped into his head.

I was being snotty. I was being lazy. I was not paying attention.

The real problem was *Impact*.

As a noun, impact appeared innocent enough. Unfortunately, the experts in educational research had surrendered to the verb formation, impacting one another for several decades now. All it had led to was the horrendous, the execrable, the truly too, too terribly ear-clanging *impactful*. In the end – and I was willing to stake my present career on this proposition – people chose to impact rather than affect one another because it was too hard to remember whether the right word began with an a or e.

*Determinants* was easy. Determinants didn't mean anything. It was a spacer, a breather, a rhythmic bounce – like Joe Morello dropping bombs on his tom-tom in the extended-play version of “Take Five.”

Two hours and forty-six minutes until lunch.

I managed to scan the table of contents, treating it like an orchestra score somewhat beyond my immediate comprehension.

At least, there were no chapter headings invoking the virtues of “the community.” Only last month, our senior program staff had seriously discussed the merits of a grant proposal submitted by leaders of the pederast community.

But back to work.

I crooked myself over the desk and read.

(It was like listening to Handel’s “Water Music” at too early an age.)

I observed the second hand on my wristwatch to see how long it took to complete its orb.

Sixty seconds. Enough time to lay down the opening statement to a really complicated melody – say, Clifford Brown’s “Joy Spring.”

I sat back and listened to the music in my head.

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“Only a fool,” my father used to tell me, “would fail to get an education so that he can live off the sweat and blood of the people who do the real work in this country.”

Fool or parasite: We were all free to choose.

I had chosen and prospered. My education (B.A. in Music, Cal-State University at Hayward; plus a teaching credential) helped pay for my rotting-pumpkin-colored Volvo station wagon with the twin bumper stickers that once proclaimed *Question Authority* and then *Baby On Board* – both now bleached crisp and blank by the sun. Education had underwritten our unwisely remodeled kitchen, our backyard redwood deck, our house itself.

Most of all, I knew that my education had netted Miranda, my wife – who had come equipped with excellent manners and a moldering Master’s degree in French literature from Berkeley.

Miranda and I had first been tumbled together at one of those nostalgic affairs where strangers collapse into the corners of a rented two-story brown-shingle in the hills, congratulating themselves on the vague halos of light, the trailers emanating from their fingertips, and the liquid aspect of all solid objects melting into air.... Our first night together, I put Coltrane’s *Ballads* on the tape deck. We married quickly, rashly, happily. The Revolution was over. Miranda bore down upon Barthes

and Baudrillard, grew Italian parsley and three kinds of basil along our sun-drenched side yard, and mastered the art of the omelet. Then Caitlin arrived – our daughter for whose sake we strived and strained to cover the tuition at a private bi-lingual school in the City. Oakland’s public schools, which I had attended and then taught in, were out of the question.

Yet I knew that I had come up in the world thanks to my own education – no doubt about it. The old man had been right. Learning something changes everything. Even learning to play the saxophone. Of course, that was the problem these days. They had eviscerated public school music programs. No instruments to take home and practice until the dog howls. Just the stingiest smattering of orchestra, jazz band, and choir. No quick, smart, beautiful way to make yourself into somebody new.

What would my father have said about it all? He had been dead for six months now, though I’d confessed to Miranda that I’d had recently spotted his facsimile in the city. Some old codger in a reprehensible canvas hunting jacket patched together with gray duct tape, both thumbs hooked under his tan leather belt, rocking back and forth on both heels at the corner of Market and Third.

Caitlin had barely known the man. In his last years, he ignored every invitation, acting as though we had decamped to Kennebunkport to drive the final nail into the coffin of blue collar New Deal democracy. I could brag about past exertions on behalf of the teachers' union and Miranda might pledge her fealty to Barbara Ehrenreich and Noam Chomsky, but it still cut no ice with the old man. He played Harry James on his hi-fi, boasted that it was the greatest music in the world, and never left the house until the ambulance carted him away.

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From the East Bay to the West Bay, the drive was brutal.

I throttled the steering wheel with both hands as the city’s forty-story spires pricked through the fog. Cal-Trans had tossed up another blockade at the Bay Bridge’s Fifth Street exit. So I trumpeted my horn, emitting a civilized Swedish pip-pip, swerved into the far right lane, squeezed down the Civic Center off-ramp, and scurried onto the street with an audible pant and a mute, reflexive plea of thanksgiving.

Bless me, Odin, Brunhilde, and Thor. Safe, at last.

My Volvo station wagon lumbered through the yellow light and straight into an unanticipated lane of on-coming traffic.

"Daddy, you did that yesterday!"

Caitlin's squeal startled me. We screeched and skidded. I'd momentarily forgotten about my daughter and her A-period Orff *Schulwerk*, the reason I drove to the city once a week instead of sanely BARTing. It was Wednesday, eight A.M., and the world was awakening once again to the ordinary nightmare of the morning commute. If we survived, I still had to digest another 302 pages of *The Future of Arts Education* before the following week's board meeting.

"We're going to be late again, Daddy."

"We won't."

This morning, like all mornings, we advanced and retreated, pulsed and rerouted, oscillated and vegetated along the grid of the maze that constituted the City of San Francisco. The path from our home across the bay in Oakland to L'Academie Canard, located in the heart of the unparkable Haight, constituted a Hobbesian nightmare of primordial fear and competition: solitary, nasty, brutish, and inexcusably long.

"*Badaboum!*" bawled Caitlin.

A taxicab nearly clipped us on the right. The driver poked his head out the window and delivered a few flaying words about my grasp of the road.

"*Quelle barbe*," commented Caitlin dryly, arching her eyebrows like Edith Piaf.

I hated it when my daughter spoke French. Why did anybody in California need to learn French? Where were the French people yearning to communicate with us?

I turned on National Public Radio to inform and distract.

Spanish, I liked to tell myself, was my language – a practical acquisition. In Spanish, I could fail to communicate with gusto and self-confidence, relying on my near-mastery of a half-dozen active verbs and the brand names of common household cleaning products utilized by the procession of matronly housekeepers who had fled the civil wars in El Salvador and Guatemala to end up sweeping our floors in Oakland.

My Volvo skipped out of the pathway of a rampaging Muni bus. We climbed momentarily onto the sidewalk and scattered the pedestrians like pigeons.

"Daddy, you almost hit those people."

"I know I did, sweetheart." I switched to the classical station and turned down the volume to a barely intelligible burble. I hungered for just a hint of Haydn.

In truth, I told myself, the pedestrians had bounded skillfully out of range, their agility honed by numerous opportunities for practice. San Franciscans mowed down dozens of their own every day.

"So what's your class studying right now, Caitlin?"

"Did you mean to hit them?"

"Not everything is always in our control, honey." I drove swiftly, but safely down Hayes Street.

"*D'accord.*" She inspected the road for further dangers. "You asked me what we were studying yesterday."

I slammed on the brakes for a bicycle messenger clad in a racer's Speedo and, for some reason, swim fins.

"*Cabron!*" I bellowed in an excellent accent.

"Did you hear me, Daddy? I said, 'You asked me that yesterday.'"

A blinking neon road sign with numerous bulbs burned out unhelpfully proposed the word puzzle, DE- -UR.

"You ask me the same thing everyday," complained Caitlin with a distinct whiff of a Gallic whine.

"Sure," I replied, remembering that it was still possible to bamboozle a ten-year-old, "but you see, I'm wondering if *you* remember."

"You're such a liar, Daddy. We're studying the French Revolution, remember?"

I risked taking my eyes from the road to glance briefly at my daughter. She was a bright, imperfectly adjusted kid who deserved the best. (And who, I allowed myself to wonder for a moment, were the kids deserving the worst?)

"The French Revolution," I repeated, chewing over the words in earnest recollection as though this were an area of my own intense scholarly interest. "*C'est bon!*" The prospect of Caitlin celebrating the exploits of Marat and Danton would have suited my dear departed father. Impulsively, I glanced into the mirror to survey the back seat and found the old man missing.

"Our side lost," she said.

"*Our* side?"

"Not ours, really. I know that we're not French. But the King and Queen, the mob cut their heads off."

"You mean," I corrected, "the People. The Revolutionaries."

"The rabble."

Our Volvo pierced the boggle of traffic obstructing all entryways into the Haight. The city was like a fun house configured by Frank Gehry to serve as a municipal abattoir in a nightmare confabulated by Salvador Dali. Caitlin switched the radio from the classics to traffic and we learned about the pile-ups then occurring on the Dumbarton, San Mateo, and San Rafael bridges. I

tried to remember something good to say about Robespierre. Traffic sped up and then slowed down. Sped up, slowed down, sped up, slowed down, sped up, slowed down. I suppressed an execration.

"Do you like your friends at school?" I finally asked my daughter, touching upon a tender subject.

According to her teachers, Caitlin had failed to make friends. According to classmates recruited through the elaborate arrangements of reciprocal weekly play dates, she bit. Childhood had changed drastically. During my upbringing, the kids of our neighborhood had been blissfully set free to work out our childish differences – or not. Now Caitlin and her crew required constant parental vigilance, lest they be abducted, brutalized, traumatized, marginalized, and somehow fail to maximize their potential. It's a more dangerous world, Miranda and I told each other, as though we believed that the Jihadists or the Russian mafia or the closer peril of the cities posed a threat at our neighborhood jungle gym. As a result, nobody knew how to get along anymore.

"I like my friends," Caitlin assured me, "but I don't like my enemies."

"Still," I advised, "you shouldn't bite them. Remember that."

A maroon Mercedes SUV slid in front of us with the cunning spring of a lithe jungle cat. Suddenly we were bumper-to-bumper, not quite kissing metal. I ground the ball of my fist into the steering wheel's padded horn. The Mercedes SUV slithered into the open space at our left and jiggled around another car-length to advance its lead.

"Did you see that idiot?" I demanded. I felt my face flush with outrage at the injustice of this world. Beneath my pink perma-press dress shirt and tie, I was sweating like a ditch digger.

"Get him, Daddy! *Botter les fesses!*"

Our Volvo thudded forward. I drove for the Mercedes' tail.

"Are you going to pound him when you catch him?" wondered Caitlin.

I eased up on the gas pedal. The Volvo lunged and sputtered.

"Adults don't do that," I said, deceiving no one. We slipped into the slower right lane and missed the turn-off to Caitlin's school. "I just want you to be on time."

"You're nice, Daddy."

I inspected her big smile for any trace of the irony that spoils so many children these days. Safe for now, I decided. I began preaching to my daughter the truth about our nemesis, the SUV. What personally steamed me most about those gas-guzzling, smaller-car-colliding road hogs was not their menace, expense, or carbon footprint, but their blatant imposture. *We're all just working people driving around here in our trucks* – that's what every phony-baloney behind the wheel

seemed to be saying. *Hey, listen to my Blaupunkt six-disc CD stereo sound system – I'm playing Merle Haggard!* Caitlin wasn't listening.

We circled the block three times until a parking space was miraculously revealed across the street from L'Academie Canard. I hunched over the wheel and gathered my wits for the sprint down the block. The open space would prove a tight fit, but I estimated that we could back-in with a slow crunch to the left, if only I could manage to... and then, it was gone: the space instantly occupied by the maroon Mercedes SUV which had whipped across two lanes of oncoming traffic to shimmer into the slot with the ease of an invertebrate.

The driver wiggled four long, tapered fingers from the open window, gesturing to me with aristocratic regret, and he popped jauntily out of the front seat.

Mr. Big stood upon the sidewalk, resplendent in a lavender shirt and costly blue suit. He had a face like a honey-baked ham with sausage lips that glistened as they smacked in amiable conversation with his invisible passenger. His bullet head was a sheen of gray locks greased straight back like all downtown's leading men of finance and industry. Worst of all, he wore a simpy red bow tie. That bow tie really pissed me off.

Mr. Big straightened his right arm as though it were equipped with a tennis racquet and adroitly snapped his fingers. A tiny red-haired girl slithered out of the front seat and dashed to his side. They strolled towards the front entrance of L'Academie Canard. You could almost hear the "Ode to Joy" booming in the background.

"Is that little girl in your class?" I demanded.

"Yes. Her name is Simone."

"Is she a friend?"

"Not really. Should I bite her, Daddy?"

"Some decisions you have to make for yourself, Caitlin."

She slipped up my shoulder and pecked my cheek. The kiss seemed to magically bequeath upon me a truly wonderful idea.

"I'll walk you to class."

"No, you don't have to do that, Daddy."

"But I want to."

"That's okay. Thanks, anyway."

Caitlin struggled to free herself from the front seat's safety lash. I edged our Volvo adjacent to the Mercedes. We skittered forward, inch-by-inch, eventually obstructing its path. The SUV could

not budge without stripping its glossy finish against the ragged edge of my chrome trim. I tripped the Volvo's emergency blinkers. Mr. Big was not going anywhere without my cooperation.

Caitlin and I spilled onto the sidewalk, locked hands, and sauntered towards the school entrance.

"I don't think that car can get out," she whispered, glancing furtively around the schoolyard, poised to defect if either friends or enemies should appear.

"He's got all the time in the world."

Inside the L'Academie Canard, we were sucked into a swarm of busy children as the school bell commenced to clang. Caitlin steadied herself and reached up to emboss either cheek, attempting to make me disappear. I latched on to Caitlin's shoulder and forced her to point out the principal who was posted in the hallway, chattering away with several teachers in their snippy, incomprehensible tongue. I introduced myself, and for several minutes, I engaged them all in a spirited conversation regarding the Social Contract, the presumptive excesses of Saint-Just, and the legitimate aspirations of the French peasantry to overthrow their bourgeois oppressors.

In the distance, I could distinguish the basso beluga whale car horn of the maroon Mercedes SUV stamping out its noisy protest over the press of time and a lack of space. The clang of the school bell rose to an insane pitch. A young gentleman of nine or ten years strolled by with his baseball cap worn *the right side round*, and I thought to myself that the world was properly repairing itself before my very eyes.

"See you tonight, sweetheart."

"I hope so, Daddy," Caitlin screeched above the din.

I floated back towards my car.

On the sidewalk, not far from where the Volvo should have been parked, I watched Mr. Big and his red bow tie swish past, his long tapered fingers drumming merrily upon the steering column of his maroon Mercedes SUV. He tooted his horn and darted away.

In the center of the street, I spotted my Volvo station wagon blocking the path of a police cruiser.

I realized that I had neglected to lock the driver's side door. All Mr. Big had to do was yank the parking brake and apply a deft shove.

The emergency blinkers were still blinking.

The police officer was writing me a ticket of unforgettable proportions.

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So when did my heart drop out of teaching?

Probably around the same time that I began to lose track of my students' names. Brendan Wong, Quetzalcoatl Jackson, Tamiesha Nyguen – it was a strange and hopeful thing, this mixing of blood lines from around the globe, the children carrying forth into the crumbling public schools of Oakland the expectations, hopes, and blatantly musical monikers of the newly amalgamated nation at last hammered together from everyplace.

And yet as I stared out at the sea of dark shining faces, the public schools now entirely deserted by the white middle class, my memory – once prodigious, a necessity for any bar band musician – stumbled and stalled. It is the first duty of every teacher to remember exactly whom he is addressing. And anyway, how can you teach music without memory?

The confusion over names did not reside exclusively within the squabbling United Nations of the Oakland public schools. As Caitlin began her studies at L'Academie Canard, the majority of boys in her class were called Jason. Eleven Jasons destined to lead their generation of young Argonauts to the glittering shores of the New Economy, plus one mid-year transfer student from Hillsborough called, if I am not mistaken, Beowulf. The air was clotted with the fashionable promise of all those Amandas, Shannons, Josuahs, and Zacharys – and yes, Caitlins, too – spewing from the loins of friends and neighbors named Jane and Steve.

Whatever happened to little Bobby, Buzz, Buddy, Chip?

I spent my final year of teaching at Charlie Parker Middle School, a campus rechristened during the brief ascendancy of Afro-centrism in a desperate district-wide effort to improve reading scores. Theolonious Monk Elementary, Dizzy Gillespie Technical High, Sun Ra Continuation School: icons of a discordant mid-century American culture who bore as much interest to a hip-hop generation, a third of whom had recently arrived from El Salvador, Laos, and Hong Kong, as Dvorak, Bartok, and Schonberg. Scores fluttered and sank.

Of course, when ex-teachers gather, this is precisely the kind of folly that they cite as having driven them out of the classroom. That – along with the textbooks never ordered, lost, or purloined at the source. Campus cell block architecture with perilous grim classrooms that would provoke the ire of inspectors from the International Red Cross. Naturally, I shared these frustrations and complained like everybody else about the tyranny of the bell schedule, our time clock at the factory gate. I groomed my personal sense of professional grievance about the extra twenty minutes required each morning to locate the chairs and music stands that disappeared overnight; the interval spent rattling the thermostat into operation on those occasions when the furnace actually fired up. I resented the ninety minutes after school devoted to shuffling through the cubbyhole mail slot

stuffed with faint photocopies on the rejected poster paper sheets of maize, aubergine, and teal: forms for excusing absence, lateness, and court appearances; permission slips for field trips to the Jobs Corps Center or STD testing at the county public health; probation officer reports, restraining orders, details covering the adjusted premium for classroom assault insurance; memos on departmental meetings, faculty disputes, union elections, and the vice principal's shifting schedule of obligatory in-service trainings outlining the latest state-mandated reforms that would usher forth the dawn of the six-period day, five-period days, schools within schools, charter schools, seven-period days, the newest New Math, whole language learning as a substitute for phonics (or vice-versa), and the numerous methods for repairing all the damage spawned by previous waves of reform.

Mostly, I resented what was missing. Long ago, when I was in first grade, the teacher passed out *Songs of a Great Republic* and we learned to sing “Battle Hymn of the Republic” along with “The Erie Canal.” In second grade, we graduated to tonettes and rhythm blocks. By fourth grade, we could lay claim to a school-bought trumpet, flute, violin, or clarinet (whatever that was) and take it home to practice for months in the back bedroom until we finally mastered “Michael, Row the Boat Ashore.” From there, the sky was the limit.

Now we live like Turkic potentates – like Renaissance princesses. But music is something your parents pay for. I can’t tell you what’s happening with reading, writing, math, science, or history. But the kids know nothing about Stephen Foster or the simple pleasures of a round.

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Thursday morning I took the opportunity to refresh myself at Cafe Kafka, conveniently situated a block from our office. I ordered my tall double-shot espresso mocha (no foam), a drink I enjoyed every morning in the silent, surly company of my *companeros*. A portrait of the gloomy father of Prague letters gaped down at us, goggle-eyed on the plastic casement of morning buns and petite madeleines.

Our crowd swarmed around the zinc countertop, noses lifted like hounds about to bay, nostrils flared, torsos tilted at sixty degrees as we thrust and nuzzled in the direction of the sweet dark aroma of bitter liquid inspiration.

How much did I spend each year on coffee?

Our financial planner – his services had been an insult disguised as a Christmas gift from Miranda’s stockbroker brother – urged us to make the calculation, and it proved appalling. One tall double-shot espresso mocha (no foam) purchased five mornings every week, plus

intermittent refreshers to enliven drowsy afternoons devoted to sorting impacts from determinants – that's \$3.25 per drink, plus tip, totaling well over one thousand dollars a year.

I snorted at the chrome-plated espresso machine and harbored guilty thoughts about my father.

Dad had died an innocent, never supposing it possible to pay \$3.25 for a cup of joe.

I pressed a path to the register and snatched up my order. It was either expensive coffee for some of us, or an equitable society for all. You couldn't have both. (You could ask Robespierre.) I tipped. Sipped. Ploughed ahead.

*The Future* demanded my undivided attention.

I stepped onto Market Street and faced the ferry building's clock tower, shuddering at a slash of bay wind. I stared momentarily into the sun. That's when I saw him for the second time. Dad, on the corner, hailing a cab – an implausible sight whether the man was living or dead. It was Dad in a far younger guise, at his most cantankerous, still ruddy and brawny. He wore coffee-colored Ben Davis work pants and a blue work shirt rolled up to his biceps. His fringe of close-cropped hair gleamed steel grey, flecked with egret white. Mostly he was bald as an egg. When the man successfully halted a cab, he turned in my direction, and as he folded himself into the back seat, I could see that his beady eyes radiated the insistence of life, and I could see even better than he hardly resembled my father at all.

"Help the homeless today?"

A slender young black man blocked my path. He toted a plastic bucket brimming with soiled soap suds. His left hand gripped the essential tool of his trade, the window wiper's rubber squeegee hefted high in salutation like a trident.

"No. Thanks."

I pivoted and marched towards PERIL. Sap, I thought. I had been standing on the corner like a tourist, a mark. I had been making a spectacle out of my delusions.

"Hey, mister. Wait."

The window wiper skidded up to my side.

My duties at PERIL occasionally brought me into contact with the professional emissaries of the city's impoverished and oppressed – their ranks being thoroughly deputed, even franchised. But since I had left teaching, I seldom had the opportunity to converse with the poor themselves. I didn't know what to say.

"Not today," I said.

I picked up the pace. The window wiper skated behind, his rubber flip-flops clapping adamantly between bare soles and concrete. From the corner of my eye, I caught his figure swishing into view, his too-large T-shirt and loose trousers billowing alongside. He was scuffed, soiled, doubtlessly drunk or drug-addled, possibly insane – one of the miserable.

*Les Miserables*, I remembered, the corners of my mouth curling into an unconscionable uplift, a reflexive smile: Caitlin's school had taken a field trip to see the musical. Following the show, she committed to memory every unpronounceable syllable of the Parisian cast recording.

"You're thinking, 'I'm walking away from my car right now so what's this fool askin' about a wash job for?' Ain't that right?"

"I really don't want my windows washed."

We walked faster now. It wasn't just that I didn't know any of the miserable personally. I was no longer acquainted even with scimpers and scrapers – people who punched a time clock and worked with their hands for very little indeed. If Miranda and I attended a dinner party, we might find Diego Rivera prints in praise of manual labor adorning the hosts' dining room walls and Ben Shahn hand-me-downs expensively framed for the second bathroom; but nobody ever belonged to a trade union.

But wasn't that the point of middle-class striving: the ability to acquaint your kid with Victor Hugo's masterpiece and protect yourself from unwanted window-wiping?

I sculled to the bottom of my pockets for change, producing a rattle of coins. I extended my cupped hand like a soup ladle and shared the wealth.

The unwanted window wiper examined his palm, squinched up his brow. "*That* all you got?"

I pivoted, making my break, aiming to streak down the street to the haven of employment.

"Hey, I know you!"

He was back at my side. Persistent. Diligent in his own way.

"No, you don't."

He maneuvered ahead of me now, about to block my way.

"I *know* you. Yeah, sure, I do."

"Go away."

"You were my band teacher. Man, that was *years* ago!"

I stopped.

"That's right! You remember me, I bet you do." He tapped the center of his chest. "Woodrow Lee," he announced modestly.

I did remember him. A nice enough kid who lived with an aunt and older sister in a motel off MacArthur Boulevard. He played bass clarinet in orchestra and baritone sax in jazz band. A pleasant earthy tone – like Harry Carney from the Ellington Orchestra.

Most of my students had been children of the miserable – miserable themselves.

I struggled to puzzle him out from the mask of time.

"Hey, you still teaching? You weren't that bad a teacher, cuz."

I shook my head. "No," I started to explain, "not any longer –"

"That's good, 'cause I hear they don't pay teachers for shit. You got to be somekinda fool to keep doing that year after year, am I right? You look like you're doin' better for yourself, yes you do!"

"I don't have all that much money," I told him, studying the sidewalk. "I'll give you what I can."

"Hey, that's okay, my brother. You gimme what you got."

I remembered Woodrow Lee. We'd featured him on "Jeru," one of the numbers written by Gerry Mulligan for Miles' *Birth of the Cool*. I hadn't seen him in at least fifteen years.

"You give me some folding money," he explained. "Some 'your dollars."

I plunged a hand into my pocket and unconscionably demanded to know: "Woodrow, what happened?"

"What happened to *me*?" He chuckled mirthlessly, peering down at the pavement. "Oh, man, a lot a shit happened. Some bad shit *happened*." His head flopped to either side. "I won't go into all that, thank you."

I opened my wallet. "I've only got a twenty." I sighed. "Sorry."

I was his former teacher standing on the corner, wishing I had managed to teach him what he had needed to know.

He held out his hand.

I had no idea what that might be.

"You give me your twenty and I'll give you the ninety-five cents I already made this morning."

I surrendered the twenty dollar bill and we stood together in silence for what seemed liked lifetimes.

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"And are we still meeting this morning?" I asked Cleopatra Ng. "Cody and me?"

It was 9:00 AM, Friday, final day of weekly servitude. I had plans for Saturday and Sunday. Mosaic had just reissued a box set of Art Pepper's recordings from late 1956 and early 1957. Three CDs with forty-five tunes, including a seven-minute and seventeen second version of "Summertime" featuring the incomparable, but seldom-heard Russ Freeman on piano.

Cleo shrugged, opening both hands to reveal an absence of information.

I located my cubicle and began to work for a living.

For better than an hour, I immersed myself in endless paragraphs regarding the utilization of analytical tools for intensive public investment, the mechanisms of linkage between public and private entities, the prospective targets of maximum accountability with negative constraints on benchmarking, best practices, and systems design. I ran through the inputs, throughputs, and outputs for an array of educational reform initiatives, appraising in each the interface with change agents, capacity-builders, and highly impactful learning communities.

Then my attention sagged, my brain fogged over, and my mouth seemed to fill with soot. *The Future* contained scarcely a word about music, and how it accelerated the demanding and rapturous process of distinguishing us from the furniture.

"Ah, hard at work!"

My boss, Cody Knotts, scanned *The Future's* bulleted assertions and evasions over the peaks of my shoulders, casting a shadow below.

Tall, tan, and electively bald, Cody was a daunting specimen who pressed iron three times weekly at the financial district's Bay Club and swam laps every morning like a frisky tuna.

"A heads-up," he explained. "FYI."

"OK".

To countermand the gaudiness of his smooth, shaved head, Cody had recently adopted the prickly, full-face beard favored by macho neo-con supply-siders that rendered them indistinguishable from academic leftists steeped in Foucault. I had been hired at PERIL because in the midst of our first interview, during a lull in the conversation about perceptible Back Bay influences in the music of John Adams, Joshua Redman, and Yo-Yo Ma, Cody got the idea that I had graduated like them, and himself, from Harvard. I failed to correct him. I had actually attended Hayward – a commuter campus of the California State College system, a launching pad for assistant city managers and high school teachers drawn from the blue collar surrounds.

"Conference chamber," ordered Cody. "Ten minutes. We're meeting with Gerald Treble to run through *The Future* before the board meeting."

Gerald Treble was President of PERIL's board. I had never met the man. Should I call him Sir, Mr. Treble, Gerald, Gerry, Ger, or might he possess some sobriquet bequeathed upon the enormously endowed that I hadn't yet read about in *Fast Company*?

I poked my right thumb into the air as though I were spiritedly inserting it into the eye of an adversary. Cody smiled and clip-clopped down the hall.

My thoughts drifted back to my dear dead Dad.

I now pictured him in PERIL's conference chamber, installed in a corner high-back recliner, scowling; or leaning against the flow charts with the unfussy elegance of a shovel. What would he have made of what was about to take place?

It was just a job. We all have our jobs.

Cody's office was located at the far end of the floor, down the polished steel trim corridor; past the gallery of Frida Kahlo and Keith Haring prints; beyond the fair trade coffee pot and the Jolt! dispenser; around the corner from Cleopatra Ng, who registered no reaction as I hurried off to the most important meeting of my brief career as an education reform professional.

Rounding the corner, I spotted two men crushed into the doorway of Cody's office. Cody's smooth scalp shone like a pearl under the bath of energy-efficient rail lighting. He rolled his weight-trained shoulders, conveying a sense of edifice and capacity. I had no trouble recognizing the man speaking with my boss.

The honey-glazed snout, the gray locks flapped across the bullet skull, the green eyes in brine: Gerald Treble also wore a simpy red bow tie. Our President was Mr. Big with the red bow tie and the maroon Mercedes SUV that stole other people's parking spaces and eased ordinary Volvos into the path of police cruisers.

I marched into my boss' office. Cody made the introductions. Gerald Treble extended his hand and crushed my *flexor ossis metacarpi* with the requisite shake of corporate hyper-masculinity. Then he stared straight through me, his eye fixed for a flicker upon the sippy sweat stains that had risen in half-moons at my armpits. I was absolutely nobody, a bureaucrat, a former teacher, an ex-saxophone player, just another working stiff. People such as Gerald Treble didn't recognize, remember, or sustain the slightest interest in people such as me. Sometimes that worked out fine.

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Out in the street, after work, 6:00 PM on the dot. San Francisco expelled its office dwellers with a grind and a gasp as commuters mounted the bridges and crossed the bay on our quaint ferries.

Rain pelted the sidewalk and the wind sang through corridors of glass. I took refuge beneath the canopy of a small Syrian grocery store slivered into a faction of Mission Street. I turned my face to the warmth inside and then I heard the whine of a rickety tape deck bolted to the counter. What was it? – an oud, a bouzouki? The melody swelled, dense and hysterical. Maybe Sunday, after the Art Pepper sessions, I'd dip into something more soothing – say, Louis and Ella dancing “Cheek to Cheek.” Maybe Annie Ross singing “Let There Be Love” with Chet Baker noodling away in the background, still young, beautiful, desperately high and forlorn. You always had music on your side, I told myself. Monteverdi to Ives, Mozart and Gershwin, Robert Johnson, Gene Autry, Archie Shepp.

It was an oud. I'd bet my life it was an oud.

I stepped outside to survey Mission Street, looking up and down the block, spotting no one. I raised both hands to cool the hot flush of my face, blood rushing into my ears, and for a moment I didn't hear a thing.