

The Quicksilver Kid
by Richard Bowes

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For the nearly thirty years that Jess Quick has been a minor celebrity, every interviewer has asked about those legendary photos. An easy question that elicits an automatic response. But in all that time, no reporter has ever managed to find out what goes on behind that amused smile. The smile that launched a great man's career.

For Jess, what those photos evoke is old and personal. Usually the memories start with a vast and dusty second-hand and cut-out record store on a quiet Greenwich Village corner. The place didn't have a sales clerk. Anything you liked, you took across the street to the actual shop where you could also buy *Broadside Magazine* and the latest 45s by Sam Cooke, Bob Dylan, and the first wave of the British Invasion.

That's how long ago it was: Manhattan still had quiet corners and merchants operating on a slap-happy honor system. One morning, Jess, in a denim jacket a couple of sizes too large, flipped through the remainder bins. Stenciled on the back of the jacket was a winged sandal and the words FIVE ACES.

With a few minutes spare time between a delivery and a pick-up, this messenger had stepped inside the store looking for reminders of home. Or, more accurately, for some confirmation that home had ever actually existed.

One other customer poked around in the bins. Because a messenger is on the street a lot, Jess recognized the man. A week or so before, on a Saturday evening, both had stood on the outskirts of a Washington Square hootenanny. In the spring of 1964, Greenwich Village had its established eccentrics but even the junkies still wore suits and mind-boggling freaks were, as yet, few and far between.

This guy qualified. Plump-faced, ageless, he had no hair, not even eyebrows. The last made him seem quite expressionless. To compensate, he carried two little glass cubes, each with a black eyebrow inside. He would hold one or both of them up to express skepticism, wonder, or that certain something Groucho conveyed when he looked into the camera and wiggled his.

Eyebrow Man hummed under his breath, seemingly unaware anyone else was in the place. Jess, intent on being a quiet boy, took being able to blend into the nearest wall as a triumph. So it was startling and unwelcome when the man suddenly cocked a glass cube at an inquisitive angle and asked, "Isn't that Senator Macauley's kid?"

Instinctively, the messenger looked to where Eyebrow man looked and saw a tall young man with russet hair who had paused across the street. The elegant young woman with him smiled at something he had said. The friend they had obviously been waiting for popped out of the record store, face florid, and tossed his hands in the air dramatically. The young man and woman laughed.

Jess stared, wide-eyed. At that moment, by chance, or destiny, the man turned and met the messenger's gaze. And grinned. Jess recognized him from silver TV images of his father. And from a dream.

Young Macauley turned away but Jess watched as the party continued down the street. Kids can't really hide those moments when things click into place, synapses get connected. Normally they don't have to.

"You're too young to remember his father," said Eyebrow Man.

The kid from Five Aces responded, "Everyone remembers the funeral on..." Then Jess had the tingling

feeling that a third party was watching and remembered to shut up.

The walls of the store were decorated with album covers. One was of the soundtrack to *Fantasia*. It showed the conductor, Stokowski, with his long silver hair, high forehead and ancient wizard's eyes. For an instant, those eyes were alive and amused. Suddenly wary, the messenger was out of that store and headed away in an instant. Macauley and company were already gone. Sunlight danced as a breeze blew salt air in off the Atlantic. Good sailing weather, Jess knew.

Five Aces business, the hustle of the street, made it hard to concentrate on the incident. Over on Washington Square, a doorman handed Jess the package of sketches from the fashion designer in 14D. Thirty years working in the Village meant that he didn't look twice at a skinny boy who needed a haircut. Besides, he'd recently seen the Beatles sing on the Sullivan show.

Things were different uptown. In the Garment District, men over thirty still wore hats and tipped them in the presence of a lady. When Jess stepped onto a crowded elevator, salesmen and buyers touched their snap brims and fedoras. A few did double takes, shook their heads, baffled by the new androgyny.

The delivery made, Jess asked to use the men's room, checked out the mirror. In it was what would shortly become a common sight: a Mod Boy, thin, a little too pretty. Jess stepped into the stall and adjusted a rolled-up sweat sock in the front of the skintight pants. That trick had been learned from a seventeen-year-old hustler who lived in the same cheap hotel. In this city, some boys wanted a penis down to their knees. Others didn't want one at all.

Jess ate a Nedick's hotdog on Thirty-Fourth Street, drank an Orange Julius, took the crosstown bus. Five Aces operated out of a storefront in a nameless neighborhood in the East Twenties. Bike messengers were the elite. A pair of tough kids with sunglasses and jackets worn like matadors' capes flicked butts in the gutter and spat on the sidewalk before mounting up. One muttered, "Eat me, faggot!" as Jess passed him.

Inside, a few messengers sat waiting on splintery folding chairs, but the dispatcher in his wire cage looked up as Jess came in. He was older. Twenty-two, at least. He'd busted both his legs making a delivery one rainy night a couple of years before and still walked funny.

The dispatcher had done the hiring without asking questions when Jess, attracted by the logo, had walked in off the street six weeks before. He pulled out a slip and subway tokens. "Pick-up and delivery. Waverly Place near Broadway. Quicksilver Promotions. Probably take the rest of the day."

Jess knew something was up. But the favorable winds held steady east by northeast and the bright afternoon was full of promise. The address down on Waverly had an Armenian restaurant on the ground floor and a hat factory on the third. Quicksilver Promotion was on two. Jess bounded up the stairs, pressed a button, pushed open the door when the buzzer sounded.

And stopped dead. Refinished lofts were still a novelty. So the height of the white tin ceiling, the sunlight through full-length windows, the big silkscreen on the wall opposite the door seemed like magic. The picture was of the phone company symbol, the bare-assed guy in winged sandals and helmet.

Behind a huge desk was a familiar face. Jess stood in the doorway prepared to leave fast.

Eyebrow Man wiggled one glass cube roguishly. "Oh come on, you knew you'd see me again! Some part of you did anyway." He nodded yes until, finally, Jess gave a slight nod.

"Now that you've found the young Macauley, we need to talk." He indicated a chair next to the desk.

Jess took a step backward.

"Don't do that, kid." Eyebrow Man put his hand on a phone. "Leave without talking to me, and I'll drop a dime on you. Not to those slap-happy klutzes on the local version of the NYPD. The Time Rangers make a specialty of rounding up world-jumpers. You've heard about them?"

Jess hadn't. But a short time spent close to the street had taught the messenger that there was always someone interested in returning stray kids to the hellholes they had escaped. "I'm not going back. I'm not going to wear a dress and be some kind of good little bride for some returning warrior the government selects for me."

"I don't blame you, sweetheart," said Eyebrow Man. "Nobody should wear a dress with which they are not absolutely comfortable. On the other hand," and he fluttered his left brow as he said this, "if you close the door and sit down, I'll make you a proposal. If you don't like it, you can walk out of here free and clear. Agreed?"

Jess said nothing, but shut the door and sat down, tense and wary.

"Harvey is my name. Like the invisible rabbit," said Eyebrow Man, "President and Chief Operating Officer of Quicksilver Promotions. My boss told me that Jess Waters, from a world where being a girl is maybe not very attractive, might show up here. Little details, like finding you and finding a way of making sure you were the real deal, he left to me. You do an excellent boy, by the way. If I hadn't known, I wouldn't have guessed. I will not pass that secret on to anyone."

Jess's hands trembled, but she held them steady on the arms of the chair. "What do you and your boss want?"

"The Rangers think of Time as a river that flows from the past into the future. With their kind permission and a few navigational tricks, you can travel from Chairman Mao's Beijing to Julius Caesar's Rome.

"Others think of Time as a wine-dark sea dotted with infinite worlds. A favoring wind and the right star can take them from Caesar's Beijing to Mao's Rome. Don't like the place to which the Fates have assigned you?" Harvey said. "Sail away! I'm one of those who felt that. So are you.

"Parts of your story I know firsthand. You come from a place that's happening right about now. Things there are bad. For you, certainly; probably for everybody. Nowhere in that rat hole world is there a ray of hope, a place to run. Then you had, what? A glimmer? A vision? A dream?"

Jess nodded at the last choice. "Tell me!" And this strange man settled back like a small child awaiting a bedtime story.

Jess forgot the door behind her and the street below. She stretched her legs out. Rested her feet on the corner of the desk. When she spoke it was with a hoarse catch in her voice. A boy trying to appear older and tougher than he was. Harvey smiled when she did that.

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I live ... lived out in Washington. A little place you wouldn't know. Way up Puget Sound. North of Seattle. I remember when I was ten or so, Macauley's funeral on TV, my parents crying. My father said it was the end of the country and my mother told him to be quiet because she was afraid of who'd hear.

After that, war was all anyone talked about. The president was some guy in uniform. No fighting but everyone on TV said that was coming. The boys in school were cadets. Uniforms. Dummy rifles. Girls were in their own auxiliary.

They kept taking kids. First the troublemakers, the tough boys and bad girls. Then they took boys after graduation. That's what happened to my brother Dan. Finally, at the start of senior year they took the oldest cadets. That's when they got Terry. He and I were steadies. We'd planned on doing everything together. College, marriage. All of a sudden, he was on a bus and we were both crying.

Good girls were the only ones left. We wore dresses. Always. No pants for the good girls. We were going to do office work. Be nurses. For the war. We wore aprons in Home Ec. Lucky ones would be wives for the officers.

My parents were afraid to talk to me. I miss them. Sometimes it's like a knife inside. But after my brother went, it was like watching them die.

That fall, I had a dream where I woke up early on what I knew was a Saturday. Everyone was still asleep. I went to the mirror, clipped my hair real short and put on the tightest shirt I could get into.

Everyone always said I was built like a boy. Even Terry. I went to Dan's room. My parents kept all his stuff. His freshman baseball jacket. I'm still wearing these moccasins he outgrew. They remind me of him. He had a duffel bag and I stuffed it with any clothes that looked like they'd fit. I went out the door without looking back.

It was just dawn. Grey light. Nobody else was awake. Even the birds didn't sing. I started walking toward the water. The Piersall brothers had a dock where they rented out sailboats. The office was closed. Nobody was around.

At the end of the dock, I saw a figure like the one on the wall behind you. In nothing but a winged helmet and sandals, carrying a kind of baton. All silver. When I looked again his hair and clothes were just like mine and he was a boy, maybe a little late starting to shave. Because it was a dream, I knew he was a god.

We read *The Odyssey* in junior year. Miss Garner taught. She was bad. Everyone called her Crabs. She had this high pitched whining voice, "Class. Pay attention. Which god appeared to Odysseus as a handsome youth in the first bloom of manhood?"

On the water at the end of the dock was a skiff all ready to sail. Rigged and with a picnic basket full of stuff. You heard whispers about people escaping to Canada, where it was supposed to be better. It looked like someone was trying that. There was even a wallet with I.D. papers and a bag of silver coins.

I followed the kid aboard. I'd been out on the water enough with my dad that I knew how to lend a hand. He smiled and said, "Haul the canvas to the wind, steer and hold that wind. It will take you to your destiny."

Being in a dream, we skipped details. Except I remember the journey wasn't over open water. We went across ponds and down old stagnant canals, hopped from one swimming pool to another in suburbs, crossed a huge lake, went up a river against the current. Sometimes we were regular size. Sometimes we were tiny, hurtling along a rain ditch. The young guy kept one hand on the tiller, the eye on the sun or stars. Once he looked at me, smiled, and said, "We do not choose which god we serve."

Time blurred. It was night then it was day. Then we were on blue and white ocean water. Under a golden sun. A couple of hundred yards away was a green shore with trees and a lawn and meat roasting on open grills. On that lawn were golden-tanned people. In blue shirts and white pants. Blue and white deck shoes. Bare legs and arms. Throwing back their heads, moving in groups with drinks in their hands, walking down to the rocks that ringed the shore. Like a herd of magic horses.

We tossed on the water right in front of them and no one saw us. But the boy pointed with this stick and I saw a young man even more golden than the others. Smiling but impatient. Like he was bored.

He looked up, saw us, did a double take and winked like he could keep a secret. And the boy god said, "The Young Macauley." He gave me the little baton. It had silver snakes curled around it. "This will guide you," he said. And I saw that the snakes were twisting and alive.

Then I was awake in my room and it was cold because the army needed all the fuel. And it was Saturday before dawn. That's when most dreams fade. But that morning, something was on the pillow next to my head.

3

Jess pulled out of her pocket what looked like a silver swizzle stick in the form of the caduceus, the serpent wand. "The serpents were twisting and alive when I found it and I knew I'd had a true dream. I got up and did what I'd been shown."

"Straight from the Gate of Horn," Harvey breathed. "Pretty dreams, illusions come from the Ivory Gate. True dreams like yours come through the Horn."

"So, I have to decide whether I want to work for you."

"Not for me, honey. I speak as a servant of one who is a patron of communication and commerce, tricks and travel. In other words, public relations work."

The silkscreen stirred on the wall behind him. From where Jess sat, the god's winged hat seemed to rest on Harvey's head and for an instant the man seemed big, breathtaking. Then he spoiled that illusion by arching a plastic encased brow over one eye, pointing a finger at her and saying, "Hermes, Lord Mercury, wants you! And I, his servant, need you and would like to have you work with me. Will you accept? Please?"

They both knew she going to stay. Jess gave a shrug. "I guess that's why I'm here." Then, she realized how badly she needed to talk. "The actual voyage wasn't like what I was shown," she said. "It was scary and took a long time with a lot of wrong directions and wrong worlds and the god wasn't there to help me. The wand protected me, pretty much, until I got to this New York when it went dead like it is now. So I figured this must be where I was supposed to be. But, until this morning, I couldn't figure out why."

"I had to go away without waking my parents or saying anything. I tried to find them when I got here, long distance. But the phone company had never heard of them. And when I left home it was fall and here it's spring and everybody asks if I'm a British singer. My birthday was in February. I turned seventeen someplace on the way, and ..."

Jess put her head down. The god on the wall had gone back to being a slightly campy silkscreen. Harvey dropped the glass cubes and came around the desk with a box of Kleenex. She let him hold her. "Kid, cry all you need to. But when you're finished, I know a place that makes the most incredible chocolate cake. We'll have your birthday. And we'll buy you a present. Anything you want?"

It took a couple of minutes of deep breaths and sobs. Then she said. "There are these ankle boots I saw on Eighth Street that I could wear. They're meant for boys, but I want to keep dressing this way. It makes me feel ... more confident."

"Considering how the boss dresses," said Harvey, "I don't see how he could object. Do you mind if we call you Jess Quick? It will make things easier. Wipe your eyes. No. Firmer strokes. As a guy, you're

mad that they're watering. Want to use the bathroom? While you're in there, remember that boys sometimes 'dress,' as we say, to the right or more usually to the left. Not straight down. Why don't you adjust the handkerchief . . ."

"Sweatsock."

"Pardon me, the sweatsock, in your pants."

Later, opera records played in an old Italian restaurant, and the wife of the owner insisted that they order the veal. Jess had wine. Just a glass or two. But it was the first she'd ever drunk. "The stuff I said about Senator Macauley was a giveaway, wasn't it," she asked.

"On this world, Kennedy's funeral last fall is the one you'd remember and be traumatized by. Macauley is almost forgotten except among aficionados of politics. On your world he was some kind of Shining White Hope. Here he was a war hero and a bright young senator who, against all advice, died flying his own plane in bad weather. The son is a good-looking dilettante with a tendency to self-destruction. But our employer has high hopes for him. If he can be kept alive."

A couple of hours later, they walked down lower Fifth Avenue, laughing. It was a lovely night. Couples strolled. Jess was trying out the boots. Harvey carried bags full of paisley shirts and tight chinos.

"The boots give you another inch or two. You're a good height. But a boy is conscious of those things. Walk on the balls of the feet."

He glanced up, and said, "My god, this is destiny!" Jess looked and saw Tim Macauley with a different young woman than the one he'd been with that morning. The other man, flushed, grandiloquent, was still with him. Now he, too, had a woman on his arm.

Harvey stepped up to the group. "Hello, Mr. Macauley. We met last month at the NAACP rally...."

All this came naturally to Macauley. "Nice to see you again." A microsecond's pause. "Harvey Quick, wasn't it? Public relations. I have your card somewhere."

"I'm amazed that you remember. I'd like you to meet Jess, my . . . nephew. A great admirer of yours."

"See, I knew there had to be one!" Macauley told his friends. He grinned, looked right in the kid's eyes. The women smiled politely. The other man shot Jess a hard look.

"I felt really stupid," Jess told Harvey as they walked away.

"You were fine," he said. "Just remember that men expect to shake hands. Yours should go out as the introduction is made. I'll show you later."

"Who were the other people?"

"The young woman with Macauley is an aspiring model, one of several young ladies whom he's currently seeing. The other man is Graham Lane, the actor. He and Tim were roommates at Choate."

"He looked angry."

"Or something."

Next day Jess moved into a room of her own in the living space behind the Quicksilver office. She liked

to sit out on the wide windowsill and watch the street which bothered Harvey.

That summer she was enrolled full-time at New York University, right around the corner. High school diplomas, SAT tests, tuition money appeared as they were needed. Her age when the birth certificate came was eighteen, not seventeen.

"Makes it legal for you to drink," Harvey said, "And do whatever else you like."

He sent her to a doctor, an older European woman, who examined Jess, commented that she was "comme un garçon," and elicited her brief sexual history. She gave an understanding nod and didn't ask more when Jess told her that the boy in question had been taken by the army. Then she explained the Pill and prescribed it.

Harvey was around most of the time if Jess needed to lean on a shoulder just a bit, or ask questions like, "What does Lord Mercury want?"

"Survival. Who pays attention to gods like him anymore except kids trying to pass school exams? And it gets worse. A few hundred years Upstream, so I'm told, there's no one whom we would call human. No people equals no gods. Mercury and the others have started doing something about that. A little late. But if you knew there was going to be a bad wreck several millennia up the line, you might decide to have five or six thousand years of fun."

"A god can do anything."

"These are old low-horsepower entities. Sending you that dream was probably what Hermes, Lord Mercury, was doing at that moment. You had to find your way here by yourself because he was busy elsewhere."

He also taught her the business of Quicksilver Promotions. Quicksilver promoted the arts. Exhibitions, avant-garde happenings, spontaneous eruptions. There was no money in it—as yet. But lots of fun.

One night Jess brought some of the kids in her English class to an old warehouse down on Houston Street. They crawled through a plastic tunnel that twisted like the belly of a snake and popped out for a moment into a tent where a woman danced on a floor covered with inflated balloons. Back into the tunnel they went and came out again in a place that was totally dark except for holy candles being extinguished one by one. Next time, the tunnel let them out where they could look down a hall and see, under an overhead light, two men in blindfolds played chess with salt and pepper shakers and pieces of cheese.

At the end of the tunnel was movie screen showing a film of a park. To a background of piano music, pigeons walked, girls with long hair stared off into space.

In the audience, Harvey sat next to a striking man with a broken nose. The man gave Jess the once over. "Frank," said Harvey. "This is my nephew, who's staying with me. Jess, this is Frank O'Hara, a very important person in this little world. He's at MOMA, The Museum of Modern Art."

"Your nephew? Get off it, Harvey. Come to MOMA, little boy, and I will show you *everything*." He winked and Jess smiled. Her classmates were scandalized. And jealous.

Life was an adventure. "How come nobody knows about Lord Mercury?" Jess asked Harvey. "What if we told people about him?"

"I can see the *Enquirer* headlines: 'GREEK GOD ABDUCTED ME' SAYS TOMBOY FROM ANOTHER DIMENSION."

Tim Macauley was the best adventure of all. He ran for city council. Because of his youth and his wealthy mother, a columnist called him "Childe Candidate." Macauley found that funny.

That summer, Harvey organized a benefit for the free clinic at the Judson Church. A woman played a Bach partita for cello with her breasts bare. Tim Macauley and Graham Lane were present and looking highly amused. As Jess stepped toward Macauley, Lane shot her a hard look and moved between them.

"Why does Graham Lane hate me," she asked Harvey later.

"Memories and fear?" he suggested. "Lane would know better than most how the young Macauley likes to trifle with the Fates."

Just before he won the election, Macauley addressed a rally protesting the banning of musical instruments in Washington Square Park. A sign asked ARE YOU GETTING YOUR DAILY RATION OF PASSION? A young woman with a guitar and a doleful expression sang "Maid of Constant Sorrow." A man in a beard proclaimed, "A ban on music is a ban on the heart of the people."

The old radicals were there, men in work shirts, women in dresses they'd made themselves. The horde of young people were in transition. A girl might still be in pumps and a conservative dress but have long, straight hair that looked like it had been ironed. A crew-cut boy in horn-rims might sport a flowery silk shirt. All heads turned as Jess walked by, the very embodiment of that moment when the world was trembling and changing.

Then Tim Macauley spoke and Jess was riveted. He smiled when she approached him afterwards. Bracken, his campaign manager, was the only one with the candidate. A humorless young man in glasses and a dark suit, he never even noticed Jess.

When Macauley put his arm around Jess, she twisted away, grinning. "Is Harvey a jealous uncle?" he asked.

Jess sat on her windowsill on the last warm day of autumn. "I feel stupid around Tim," she said when Harvey stuck his head out and asked her to come in. "I've got nothing to say."

"Conversation is beside the point."

So it was. The next week, Quicksilver Productions gave a party in the loft. The booze was ample. The grass was grand. Macauley was there. Lane was not. Harvey disappeared halfway through the evening. Jess sat back to the wall, knees drawn up. Her brain was opening and closing. Her eyes were out of focus.

"The rug is walking around," someone said.

"Must be the hash," someone replied, and they laughed uproariously.

Tim Macauley sat down beside Jess. After a while, he put his hand on Jess's knee. He massaged it gently. She lowered her leg. He turned towards Jess and looked right in her eyes. Jess was back in the dream and Lord Mercury guided her. She nodded. They rose and went to her room. "Look at them," someone whispered.

They were on the bed. Jess was barefoot. Tim's shirt was open. They kissed.

He unbuttoned Jess' shirt, touched her breasts for the first time, stopped for a moment. She looked into his eyes and saw what? Surprise? Disappointment? Later, he insisted he had known all along. But Jess had seen something more complex.

He had a scar along his left thigh. Jess traced it with her finger. "My war wound," he said. When Jess looked questioningly, he laughed and explained, "Naval Flight Training. Dumb stunt."

Then Jess was in touch with Tim from her head to her toes. Life ran through her. It felt like she had been frozen at the moment of Lord Mercury's dream. But now she was awake.

Tim's hair hung at a goofy angle. Jess reached out and pushed it back in place. "I sailed through a whole lot of worlds to find you," she told him.

"Must be the hash," he said and they both giggled.

Jess copied Tim's haircut. She asked Harvey about the scar.

"That hubris-ridden young man managed to have an accident almost exactly like the one that killed his father." He looked her over. "We could darken the upper lip just a shade, babyface." But she shook her head hard, went into her room and slammed the door. Harvey used both hands to raise his brows inquiringly to the silk screen on the wall.

Macauley had an apartment on Hudson Street in his Council district. On a frosty morning, shortly after he had won an easy election to the City Council, Tim and Jess came out the front door. They kissed and turned to go their separate ways. Both looked back and returned for another embrace. Then Tim rushed down to City Hall and Jess hurried to class.

It happened so fast as to be invisible and we'll never know who took the picture without their noticing. Whoever it was, it turned out, took a whole series of snapshots. One was published in the *Village Voice* as part of a collage of street photos. At the time, no one noticed.

A week or two later, Jess waiting outside a union hall where Tim was speaking, overheard one old politician remark to another, "Macauley's little friend."

"Guess he never heard," said the other, "That an office holder can survive anything but being caught in bed with a dead girl or a live boy."

On the otherwise deserted beach at his mother's house in the Hamptons, Jess turned and saw Tim looking out to sea. He had the same restless, bored expression as in her dream. Later, as they smoked in bed in the empty house, she said, "I saw you in a dream before I ever met you. Standing on that beach just like you did today."

"Must be the hash," he said and passed her the joint. Neither of them laughed.

Next morning was foggy and chill, reminding Jess of home and family. As they got into the car, she said shyly, "I could start dressing like a girl again."

"Don't," he said. "I knew as soon as I saw you. But Graham thinks you're a boy and it drives him crazy. He and I were roommates and he's afraid for his reputation as a ladies' man." He laughed for the first time that weekend.

5

Jess sat on the windowsill for one whole day. In the building across the street, women bent over sweatshop sewing machines and men hauled boxes out of elevators. Harvey stuck his head out the window. "It's January. You'll freeze."

"Tim Macauley is a self-centered prick," she said. "This thing with me is a joke on Graham Lane." Harvey

said nothing. "I want to be a girl again."

Harvey raised an appraising brow. "You'll be beautiful, honey."

The return to womanhood, as happens with journeys back, wasn't as exciting as the voyage out. Only after Jess had arrived at her destination, did Harvey show her two sets of photos. They had been brought Downstream from a few years in the future.

Jess stared at them. "So, this is the whole point of what happened to me?"

"Lord Mercury intends that this world not end up the same way yours did. Keeping young Macauley viable is part of that plan. It hasn't been easy."

Not long afterwards, Harvey was gone. His work in that Time and Place done, he was sent elsewhere in the service of his master. He and Jess cried a lot on parting. But she had gotten good at saying goodbye.

Besides, the business had been left to her, and it was flourishing. Events in the arts not represented by Quicksilver Production were as trees falling without witness in a forest. A geek to whom Harvey had been kind was now Warhol, the Silver Prince.

Jess avoided Macauley. He had moved into that spotlight politicians on the rise occupy where every public moment is a performance. He married a young woman with a good pedigree.

Graham Lane went to Hollywood, as we all know. Tim Macauley became a congressman. After a few years, a senate seat came up for election. The occupant, old and well-respected, was always called "The First Gentleman of New York Politics." But it had been noticed that he wasn't as nimble as before. His tap dance away from the Vietnam War had been slow, his pirouette around Watergate, clumsy.

Once Macauley announced his candidacy, all kinds of stories about his escapades began to circulate. Though the Senator would never stoop to gossip, not all his supporters, regrettably, were so noble.

Finally, as happens, the rumors of debauchery and infidelity coalesced around a single item. A photo from ten years before had surfaced. In it, two people, one of them unmistakably the young Macauley, the other quite obviously a boy, kissed on a city street. The rest of the roll of film came to light and showed the boy as not even particularly feminine. Not for an audience which had experienced Jagger and Bowie in full flower.

Jess waited until the pictures made it into the tabloids, when television news was straining for an excuse to show them, when The First Gentleman had said that he himself chose only to believe good about an opponent but perhaps the young man had best explain himself.

Then she sprang the trap. Complex matters often get summed up in an image. The running girl, burned by napalm, stands for the mindless carnage of war. The sailor and the nurse kissing in Times Square signify victory. The photo of Jess in her Chanel suit and silver caduceus brooch, armed with her birth certificate and medical records will always warn us not to rush to judgment.

Jess Quick's amusement and ease at the reporters' questions, her warm endorsement of Timothy Macauley, blew the scandal off the face of the earth. The First Gentleman, it turned out, was an old fool who didn't know a girl when he saw one. The young candidate was inoculated against his own folly. Through the long and scandal-riddled career, both in the White House and later, Macauley always got the benefit of the doubt.

For Jess, of course, the famous press conference was like a rerun even as it occurred. What she kept in mind as she spoke were the memories of her parents, afraid to talk in their own home; of the line of buses

carrying kids away; and the hope that she was stopping those things from happening in her adopted world. Thus far, it seems she has succeeded.

And her smile remains as enigmatic as that of the trickster god whom she has served so well.

The End

3

Jess pulled out of her pocket what looked like a silver swizzle stick in the form of the caduceus, the serpent wand. "The serpents were twisting and alive when I found it and I knew I'd had a true dream. I got up and did what I'd been shown."

"Straight from the Gate of Horn," Harvey breathed. "Pretty dreams, illusions come from the Ivory Gate. True dreams like yours come through the Horn."

"So, I have to decide whether I want to work for you."

"Not for me, honey. I speak as a servant of one who is a patron of communication and commerce, tricks and travel. In other words, public relations work."

The silkscreen stirred on the wall behind him. From where Jess sat, the god's winged hat seemed to rest on Harvey's head and for an instant the man seemed big, breathtaking. Then he spoiled that illusion by arching a plastic encased brow over one eye, pointing a finger at her and saying, "Hermes, Lord Mercury, wants you! And I, his servant, need you and would like to have you work with me. Will you accept? Please?"

They both knew she was going to stay. Jess gave a shrug. "I guess that's why I'm here." Then, she realized how badly she needed to talk. "The actual voyage wasn't like what I was shown," she said. "It was scary and took a long time with a lot of wrong directions and wrong worlds and the god wasn't there to help me. The wand protected me, pretty much, until I got to this New York when it went dead like it is now. So I figured this must be where I was supposed to be. But, until this morning, I couldn't figure out why."

"I had to go away without waking my parents or saying anything. I tried to find them when I got here, long distance. But the phone company had never heard of them. And when I left home it was fall and here it's spring and everybody asks if I'm a British singer. My birthday was in February. I turned seventeen someplace on the way, and ..."

Jess put her head down. The god on the wall had gone back to being a slightly campy silkscreen. Harvey dropped the glass cubes and came around the desk with a box of Kleenex. She let him hold her. "Kid, cry all you need to. But when you're finished, I know a place that makes the most incredible chocolate cake. We'll have your birthday. And we'll buy you a present. Anything you want?"

It took a couple of minutes of deep breaths and sobs. Then she said. "There are these ankle boots I saw on Eighth Street that I could wear. They're meant for boys, but I want to keep dressing this way. It makes me feel ... more confident."

"Considering how the boss dresses," said Harvey, "I don't see how he could object. Do you mind if we call you Jess Quick? It will make things easier. Wipe your eyes. No. Firmer strokes. As a guy, you're mad that they're watering. Want to use the bathroom? While you're in there, remember that boys sometimes 'dress,' as we say, to the right or more usually to the left. Not straight down. Why don't you adjust the handkerchief ..."

"Sweatsock."

"Pardon me, the sweatsock, in your pants."

Later, opera records played in an old Italian restaurant, and the wife of the owner insisted that they order the veal. Jess had wine. Just a glass or two. But it was the first she'd ever drunk. "The stuff I said about Senator Macauley was a giveaway, wasn't it," she asked.

"On this world, Kennedy's funeral last fall is the one you'd remember and be traumatized by. Macauley is almost forgotten except among aficionados of politics. On your world he was some kind of Shining White Hope. Here he was a war hero and a bright young senator who, against all advice, died flying his own plane in bad weather. The son is a good-looking dilettante with a tendency to self-destruction. But our employer has high hopes for him. If he can be kept alive."

A couple of hours later, they walked down lower Fifth Avenue, laughing. It was a lovely night. Couples strolled. Jess was trying out the boots. Harvey carried bags full of paisley shirts and tight chinos.

"The boots give you another inch or two. You're a good height. But a boy is conscious of those things. Walk on the balls of the feet."

He glanced up, and said, "My god, this is destiny!" Jess looked and saw Tim Macauley with a different young woman than the one he'd been with that morning. The other man, flushed, grandiloquent, was still with him. Now he, too, had a woman on his arm.

Harvey stepped up to the group. "Hello, Mr. Macauley. We met last month at the NAACP rally...."

All this came naturally to Macauley. "Nice to see you again." A microsecond's pause. "Harvey Quick, wasn't it? Public relations. I have your card somewhere."

"I'm amazed that you remember. I'd like you to meet Jess, my ... nephew. A great admirer of yours."

"See, I knew there had to be one!" Macauley told his friends. He grinned, looked right in the kid's eyes. The women smiled politely. The other man shot Jess a hard look.

"I felt really stupid," Jess told Harvey as they walked away.

"You were fine," he said. "Just remember that men expect to shake hands. Yours should go out as the introduction is made. I'll show you later."

"Who were the other people?"

"The young woman with Macauley is an aspiring model, one of several young ladies whom he's currently seeing. The other man is Graham Lane, the actor. He and Tim were roommates at Choate."

"He looked angry."

"Or something."

4

Next day Jess moved into a room of her own in the living space behind the Quicksilver office. She liked to sit out on the wide windowsill and watch the street which bothered Harvey.

That summer she was enrolled full-time at New York University, right around the corner. High school diplomas, SAT tests, tuition money appeared as they were needed. Her age when the birth certificate came was eighteen, not seventeen.

"Makes it legal for you to drink," Harvey said, "And do whatever else you like."

He sent her to a doctor, an older European woman, who examined Jess, commented that she was "comme un garçon," and elicited her brief sexual history. She gave an understanding nod and didn't ask more when Jess told her that the boy in question had been taken by the army. Then she explained the Pill and prescribed it.

Harvey was around most of the time if Jess needed to lean on a shoulder just a bit, or ask questions like, "What does Lord Mercury want?"

"Survival. Who pays attention to gods like him anymore except kids trying to pass school exams? And it gets worse. A few hundred years Upstream, so I'm told, there's no one whom we would call human. No people equals no gods. Mercury and the others have started doing something about that. A little late. But if you knew there was going to be a bad wreck several millennia up the line, you might decide to have five or six thousand years of fun."

"A god can do anything."

"These are old low-horsepower entities. Sending you that dream was probably what Hermes, Lord Mercury, was doing at that moment. You had to find your way here by yourself because he was busy elsewhere."

He also taught her the business of Quicksilver Promotions. Quicksilver promoted the arts. Exhibitions, avant-garde happenings, spontaneous eruptions. There was no money in it—as yet. But lots of fun.

One night Jess brought some of the kids in her English class to an old warehouse down on Houston Street. They crawled through a plastic tunnel that twisted like the belly of a snake and popped out for a moment into a tent where a woman danced on a floor covered with inflated balloons. Back into the tunnel they went and came out again in a place that was totally dark except for holy candles being extinguished one by one. Next time, the tunnel let them out where they could look down a hall and see, under an overhead light, two men in blindfolds played chess with salt and pepper shakers and pieces of cheese.

At the end of the tunnel was movie screen showing a film of a park. To a background of piano music, pigeons walked, girls with long hair stared off into space.

In the audience, Harvey sat next to a striking man with a broken nose. The man gave Jess the once over. "Frank," said Harvey. "This is my nephew, who's staying with me. Jess, this is Frank O'Hara, a very important person in this little world. He's at MOMA, The Museum of Modern Art."

"Your nephew? Get off it, Harvey. Come to MOMA, little boy, and I will show you *everything*." He winked and Jess smiled. Her classmates were scandalized. And jealous.

Life was an adventure. "How come nobody knows about Lord Mercury?" Jess asked Harvey. "What if we told people about him?"

"I can see the *Enquirer* headlines: 'GREEK GOD ABDUCTED ME' SAYS TOMBOY FROM ANOTHER DIMENSION."

Tim Macauley was the best adventure of all. He ran for city council. Because of his youth and his wealthy mother, a columnist called him "Childe Candidate." Macauley found that funny.

That summer, Harvey organized a benefit for the free clinic at the Judson Church. A woman played a Bach partita for cello with her breasts bare. Tim Macauley and Graham Lane were present and looking highly amused. As Jess stepped toward Macauley, Lane shot her a hard look and moved between them.

"Why does Graham Lane hate me," she asked Harvey later.

"Memories and fear?" he suggested. "Lane would know better than most how the young Macauley likes to trifle with the Fates."

Just before he won the election, Macauley addressed a rally protesting the banning of musical instruments in Washington Square Park. A sign asked ARE YOU GETTING YOUR DAILY RATION OF PASSION? A young woman with a guitar and a doleful expression sang "Maid of Constant Sorrow." A man in a beard proclaimed, "A ban on music is a ban on the heart of the people."

The old radicals were there, men in work shirts, women in dresses they'd made themselves. The horde of young people were in transition. A girl might still be in pumps and a conservative dress but have long, straight hair that looked like it had been ironed. A crew-cut boy in horn-rims might sport a flowery silk shirt. All heads turned as Jess walked by, the very embodiment of that moment when the world was trembling and changing.

Then Tim Macauley spoke and Jess was riveted. He smiled when she approached him afterwards. Bracken, his campaign manager, was the only one with the candidate. A humorless young man in glasses and a dark suit, he never even noticed Jess.

When Macauley put his arm around Jess, she twisted away, grinning. "Is Harvey a jealous uncle?" he asked.

Jess sat on her windowsill on the last warm day of autumn. "I feel stupid around Tim," she said when Harvey stuck his head out and asked her to come in. "I've got nothing to say."

"Conversation is beside the point."

So it was. The next week, Quicksilver Productions gave a party in the loft. The booze was ample. The grass was grand. Macauley was there. Lane was not. Harvey disappeared halfway through the evening. Jess sat back to the wall, knees drawn up. Her brain was opening and closing. Her eyes were out of focus.

"The rug is walking around," someone said.

"Must be the hash," someone replied, and they laughed uproariously.

Tim Macauley sat down beside Jess. After a while, he put his hand on Jess's knee. He massaged it gently. She lowered her leg. He turned towards Jess and looked right in her eyes. Jess was back in the dream and Lord Mercury guided her. She nodded. They rose and went to her room. "Look at them," someone whispered.

They were on the bed. Jess was barefoot. Tim's shirt was open. They kissed.

He unbuttoned Jess' shirt, touched her breasts for the first time, stopped for a moment. She looked into his eyes and saw what? Surprise? Disappointment? Later, he insisted he had known all along. But Jess had seen something more complex.

He had a scar along his left thigh. Jess traced it with her finger. "My war wound," he said. When Jess looked questioningly, he laughed and explained, "Naval Flight Training. Dumb stunt."

Then Jess was in touch with Tim from her head to her toes. Life ran through her. It felt like she had been frozen at the moment of Lord Mercury's dream. But now she was awake.

Tim's hair hung at a goofy angle. Jess reached out and pushed it back in place. "I sailed through a whole lot of worlds to find you," she told him.

"Must be the hash," he said and they both giggled.

Jess copied Tim's haircut. She asked Harvey about the scar.

"That hubris-ridden young man managed to have an accident almost exactly like the one that killed his father." He looked her over. "We could darken the upper lip just a shade, babyface." But she shook her head hard, went into her room and slammed the door. Harvey used both hands to raise his brows inquiringly to the silk screen on the wall.

Macauley had an apartment on Hudson Street in his Council district. On a frosty morning, shortly after he had won an easy election to the City Council, Tim and Jess came out the front door. They kissed and turned to go their separate ways. Both looked back and returned for another embrace. Then Tim rushed down to City Hall and Jess hurried to class.

It happened so fast as to be invisible and we'll never know who took the picture without their noticing. Whoever it was, it turned out, took a whole series of snapshots. One was published in the *Village Voice* as part of a collage of street photos. At the time, no one noticed.

A week or two later, Jess waiting outside a union hall where Tim was speaking, overheard one old politician remark to another, "Macauley's little friend."

"Guess he never heard," said the other, "That an office holder can survive anything but being caught in bed with a dead girl or a live boy."

On the otherwise deserted beach at his mother's house in the Hamptons, Jess turned and saw Tim looking out to sea. He had the same restless, bored expression as in her dream. Later, as they smoked in bed in the empty house, she said, "I saw you in a dream before I ever met you. Standing on that beach just like you did today."

"Must be the hash," he said and passed her the joint. Neither of them laughed.

Next morning was foggy and chill, reminding Jess of home and family. As they got into the car, she said shyly, "I could start dressing like a girl again."

"Don't," he said. "I knew as soon as I saw you. But Graham thinks you're a boy and it drives him crazy. He and I were roommates and he's afraid for his reputation as a ladies' man." He laughed for the first time that weekend.

5

Jess sat on the windowsill for one whole day. In the building across the street, women bent over sweatshop sewing machines and men hauled boxes out of elevators. Harvey stuck his head out the window. "It's January. You'll freeze."

"Tim Macauley is a self-centered prick," she said. "This thing with me is a joke on Graham Lane." Harvey said nothing. "I want to be a girl again."

Harvey raised an appraising brow. "You'll be beautiful, honey."

The return to womanhood, as happens with journeys back, wasn't as exciting as the voyage out. Only after Jess had arrived at her destination, did Harvey show her two sets of photos. They had been brought

Downstream from a few years in the future.

Jess stared at them. "So, this is the whole point of what happened to me?"

"Lord Mercury intends that this world not end up the same way yours did. Keeping young Macauley viable is part of that plan. It hasn't been easy."

Not long afterwards, Harvey was gone. His work in that Time and Place done, he was sent elsewhere in the service of his master. He and Jess cried a lot on parting. But she had gotten good at saying goodbye.

Besides, the business had been left to her, and it was flourishing. Events in the arts not represented by Quicksilver Production were as trees falling without witness in a forest. A geek to whom Harvey had been kind was now Warhol, the Silver Prince.

Jess avoided Macauley. He had moved into that spotlight politicians on the rise occupy where every public moment is a performance. He married a young woman with a good pedigree.

Graham Lane went to Hollywood, as we all know. Tim Macauley became a congressman. After a few years, a senate seat came up for election. The occupant, old and well-respected, was always called "The First Gentleman of New York Politics." But it had been noticed that he wasn't as nimble as before. His tap dance away from the Vietnam War had been slow, his pirouette around Watergate, clumsy.

Once Macauley announced his candidacy, all kinds of stories about his escapades began to circulate. Though the Senator would never stoop to gossip, not all his supporters, regrettably, were so noble.

Finally, as happens, the rumors of debauchery and infidelity coalesced around a single item. A photo from ten years before had surfaced. In it, two people, one of them unmistakably the young Macauley, the other quite obviously a boy, kissed on a city street. The rest of the roll of film came to light and showed the boy as not even particularly feminine. Not for an audience which had experienced Jagger and Bowie in full flower.

Jess waited until the pictures made it into the tabloids, when television news was straining for an excuse to show them, when The First Gentleman had said that he himself chose only to believe good about an opponent but perhaps the young man had best explain himself.

Then she sprang the trap. Complex matters often get summed up in an image. The running girl, burned by napalm, stands for the mindless carnage of war. The sailor and the nurse kissing in Times Square signify victory. The photo of Jess in her Chanel suit and silver caduceus brooch, armed with her birth certificate and medical records will always warn us not to rush to judgment.

Jess Quick's amusement and ease at the reporters' questions, her warm endorsement of Timothy Macauley, blew the scandal off the face of the earth. The First Gentleman, it turned out, was an old fool who didn't know a girl when he saw one. The young candidate was inoculated against his own folly. Through the long and scandal-riddled career, both in the White House and later, Macauley always got the benefit of the doubt.

For Jess, of course, the famous press conference was like a rerun even as it occurred. What she kept in mind as she spoke were the memories of her parents, afraid to talk in their own home; of the line of buses carrying kids away; and the hope that she was stopping those things from happening in her adopted world. Thus far, it seems she has succeeded.

And her smile remains as enigmatic as that of the trickster god whom she has served so well.

The End

