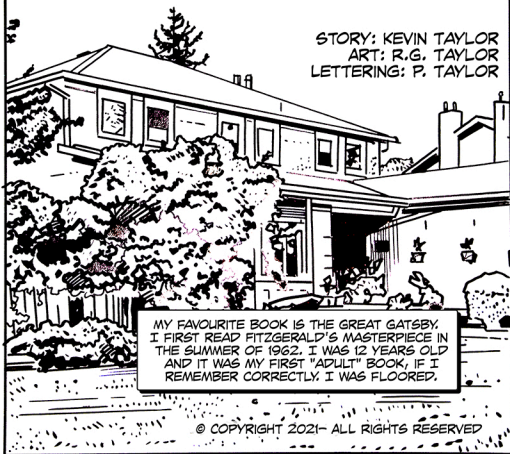


The Best Worst Months

"THE LONELIEST MOMENT OF SOMEONE'S LIFE IS WHEN THEY ARE WATCHING THEIR WHOLE WORLD FALL APART, AND ALL THEY CAN DO IS STARE BLANKLY."

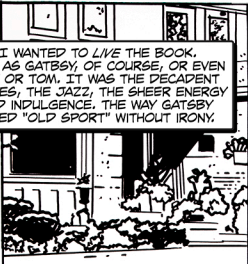
- F. SCOTT FITZGERALD

STORY: KEVIN TAYLOR
ART: R.G. TAYLOR
LETTERING: P. TAYLOR

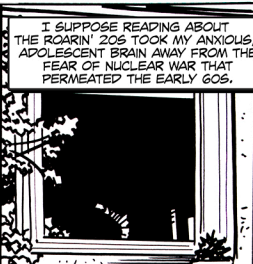


MY FAVOURITE BOOK IS THE GREAT GATSBY. I FIRST READ FITZGERALD'S MASTERPIECE IN THE SUMMER OF 1962. I WAS 12 YEARS OLD AND IT WAS MY FIRST "ADULT" BOOK, IF I REMEMBER CORRECTLY. I WAS FLOORED.

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I WANTED TO LIVE THE BOOK, NOT AS GATSBY, OF COURSE, OR EVEN NICK OR TOM. IT WAS THE DECADENT PARTIES, THE JAZZ, THE SHEER ENERGY AND INDULGENCE, THE WAY GATSBY USED "OLD SPORT" WITHOUT IRONY.

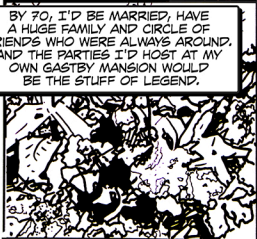


I SUPPOSE READING ABOUT THE ROARIN' 20S TOOK MY ANXIOUS, ADOLESCENT BRAIN AWAY FROM THE FEAR OF NUCLEAR WAR THAT PERMEATED THE EARLY 60S.



I BEGAN TO FANTASIZE ABOUT WHAT LIFE MIGHT BE LIKE IN MY OWN ROARIN' DECADE - THE 2020S. HOW OLD WOULD I BE? WHAT WOULD I BE DOING?

I DID THE MATH AND DISCOVERED I'D BE 70 AS THE DECADE BEGAN. NOT A YOUNG MAN, BUT I FIGURED THAT SURELY PEOPLE WOULD BE LIVING UNTIL 150 OR MORE BY THE NEXT MILLENNIUM, SO 70 WOULD PUT ME RIGHT IN MY PRIME.

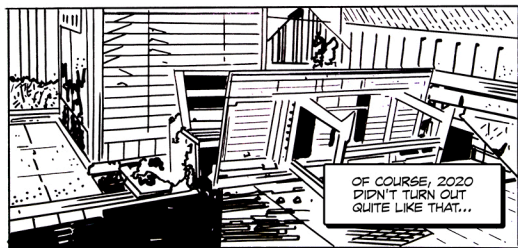
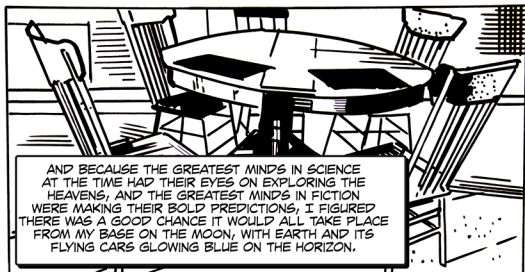


BY 70, I'D BE MARRIED, HAVE A HUGE FAMILY AND CIRCLE OF FRIENDS WHO WERE ALWAYS AROUND, AND THE PARTIES I'D HOST AT MY OWN GATSBY MANSION WOULD BE THE STUFF OF LEGEND.



ENDLESS GOOD FOOD AND DRINK, SWINGING MUSIC, DRIPPING WITH STYLE AND SURROUNDED BY THE PEOPLE I LOVE.

GATSBY'S LONELY NIGHTMARE TURNED INTO MY DREAM LIFE.







I LOST MY WIFE OF 45 YEARS IN 2017.
IN THE LAST YEARS OF HER LIFE - THE FIRST YEARS
OF OUR RETIREMENT - WE BEGAN TAKING LONG,
DAILY WALKS AS A WAY TO STAY ACTIVE.
IT QUICKLY BECAME OUR FAVOURITE PART OF THE DAY.



WHEN SHE WAS GONE, I COULDN'T
DO IT ANYMORE. I FELT A DEEP,
PERVASIVE LONELINESS IN THOSE
WOODS, A LONELINESS THAT CREEPT
INTO EVERY CORNER OF MY LIFE.



SO, I SURROUNDED MYSELF
WITH OUR KIDS AND OUR
FRIENDS AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE.
AND I GOT A DOG.



WHEN THE PANDEMIC HIT, I LOST THAT HUMAN SUPPORT SYSTEM, AND SPENT THE FIRST FEW WEEKS NEVER LEAVING THE HOUSE. SLOWLY, I DISCOVERED THAT THE LONELINESS WAS NOW MOST ACUTE INSIDE. THE QUIET. THE EMPTINESS.



SO, I STARTED WALKING AGAIN WITH MY FURRY FRIEND.

WE DON'T DESERVE DOGS. WE REALLY DON'T.

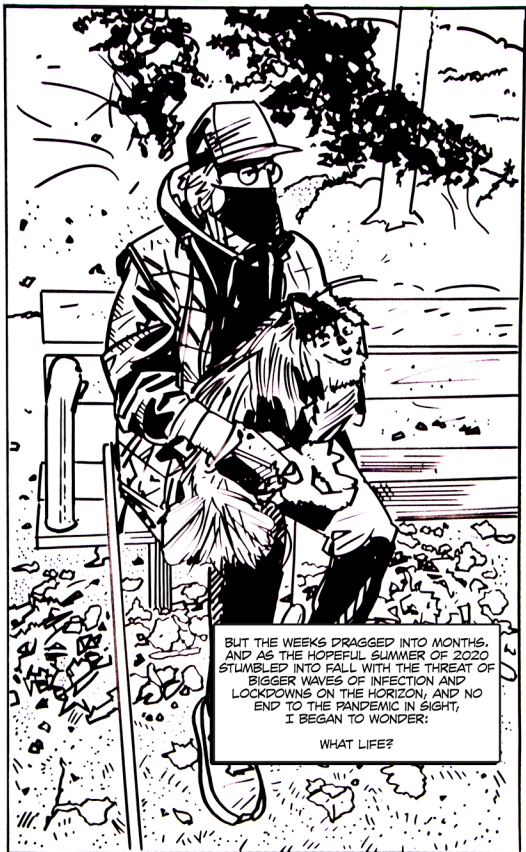


ONCE AGAIN, IT BECAME MY FAVOURITE PART OF THE DAY.



INSTEAD OF FEELING GRACE'S ABSENCE, I FELT HER IN EVERYTHING. THE SOUND OF WATER RUNNING OVER ROCKS OR WIND BLOWING THROUGH BRANCHES WAS LIKE HER VOICE URGING ME NOT TO GIVE UP ON HAPPINESS.

TO MOVE ON WITH MY LIFE.



BUT THE WEEKS DRAGGED INTO MONTHS,
AND AS THE HOPEFUL SUMMER OF 2020
STUMBLERD INTO FALL WITH THE THREAT OF
BIGGER WAVES OF INFECTION AND
LOCKDOWNS ON THE HORIZON, AND NO
END TO THE PANDEMIC IN SIGHT,
I BEGAN TO WONDER:

WHAT LIFE?



SO YOU'LL
COME BY FOR YOUR
BIRTHDAY ON SATURDAY, YA?
WE'LL DO IT IN THE BACKYARD,
MASKED UP. IT'LL BE GREAT!
IT'S A BIG YEAR!



WHY DON'T YOU BRING
THE KIDS HERE AND WE'LL
JUST HAVE A SMALL DINNER?
CASES SEEM STEADY RIGHT NOW,
AND IF EVERYONE IS
FEELING OK...



DAD, STOP. WITH YOUR
HEART ISSUES AND YOUR AGE?
WE'RE NOT TAKING THAT RISK.



WE'VE ALREADY LOST
ONE PARENT. WE'RE NOT GOING
TO BE THE REASON WE LOSE
ANOTHER. JUST HANG IN THERE.
WE'LL STILL SEE EACH
OTHER.





RIGHT... FINE.
SATURDAY AT YOUR PLACE.
BACKYARD, MASKS, DISTANCE.
HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO ME.

WE'RE ALL MAKING
SACRIFICES THIS YEAR. NEXT
YEAR WILL BE DIFFERENT,
I'M SURE.

HA, BETTER BE.
WHEN DID YOU BECOME
SUCH AN OPTIMIST?

OPTIMISM IS ALL THAT'S
STANDING BETWEEN ME AND A COMPLETE
MENTAL BREAKDOWN. AND BEING TRAPPED
IN A HOUSE WITH TWO KIDS MAKES IT AN
INCONVENIENT TIME FOR
ONE OF THOSE.

SO, LIKE ALMOST EVERYONE ELSE ON THE PLANET, WE GATHERED FOR MY FIRST "COVID BIRTHDAY PARTY".









SO, ON A CRISP FALL MORNING, I SET OUT WITH A SOUNDTRACK.



AS I SUSPECTED, IT DIDN'T LAST LONG.



THIS IS BAILEY.

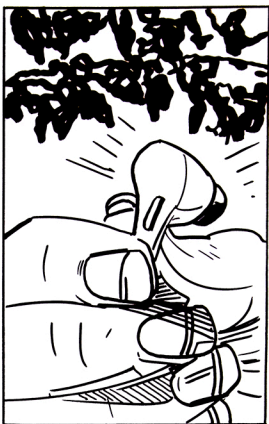
HI PUPPY!
WHAT'S YOUR NAME?

HA! AREN'T WE ALL?

HI BAILEY! I PROMISE I'M PERFECTLY HEALTHY. JUST STARVED FOR INTERACTION.

WHAT A HANDSOME BOY.







THANK YOU SO MUCH! I'D HAVE BEEN LOOKING FOR ABOUT 5 MINUTES AND GIVEN UP.

I'D HAVE DONE THE SAME. I JUST LOOKED DOWN AND THERE IT WAS. MUST BE OUR LUCKY DAY.

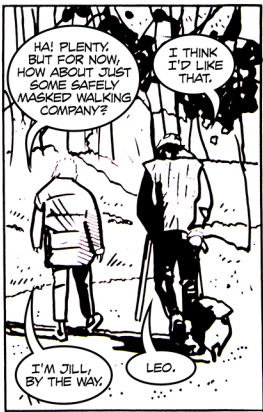


WELL, IF ANYTHING, IT'S JUST NICE TO KNOW THAT THERE ARE STILL GOOD PEOPLE IN THIS BACKWARDS WORLD OF OURS.



AND ARE YOU ONE OF THOSE GOOD PEOPLE, TOO?

I LIKE TO THINK SO! SOMETHING I CAN HELP YOU FIND, MISS?



HA! PLENTY, BUT FOR NOW, HOW ABOUT JUST SOME SAFELY MASKED WALKING COMPANY?

I THINK I'D LIKE THAT.

I'M JILL, BY THE WAY.

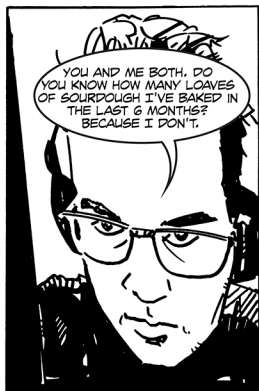
LEO.



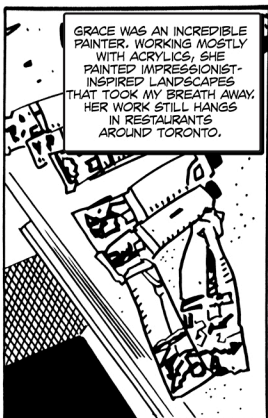
SO, THAT'S HOW I MET JILL.
IF THIS WAS A MOVIE, WE'D
CALL IT OUR "MEET CUTE".
TRUTH BE TOLD, I'VE COME
TO THINK OF IT AS FATE
STEPPING IN.

WE SOON BEGAN
WALKING TOGETHER
EVERY DAY, ENJOYING
EACH OTHER'S COMPANY,
SHARING LONG
CONVERSATIONS THAT
RARELY EVEN TOUCHED
ON THE PANDEMIC
WE WERE NAVIGATING.

OF COURSE, THE
SNOW SOON CAME
AND WALKING
BECAME LESS OF
A LEISURE ACTIVITY
AND MORE OF AN
ENDURANCE SPORT.







JILL AND I STAYED CONNECTED THROUGH THE POWER OF MODERN TECHNOLOGY; TALKING DAILY, SOMETIMES LONG INTO THE NIGHT. SHE WAS ALSO ON HER OWN, HAVING LOST HER HUSBAND MORE THAN TEN YEARS AGO. THEY DIDN'T HAVE ANY CHILDREN.





SOON, WE WERE EVEN WATCHING TV
AND MOVIES TOGETHER, TRADING PICKS
EACH NIGHT.

NEEDLESS TO SAY, WE DIDN'T ALWAYS
SEE EYE TO EYE, BUT WE WERE ABLE
TO INTRODUCE EACH OTHER TO SOME
NEW THINGS, BOTH CLASSIC AND ... NOT.

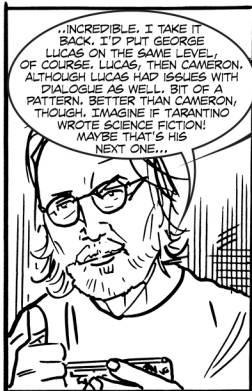
I WAS STUNNED TO LEARN THAT JILL - A
SELF-PROCLAIMED MOVIE FANATIC LIKE
MYSELF - HAD NEVER SEEN ONE OF THE
HIGHEST GROSSING MOVIES OF ALL TIME!



HOW CAN YOU CLAIM TO BE A FILM BUFF AND HAVE NEVER SEEN AVATAR??

I'VE NEVER FELT THE NEED TO!

HE MAY NOT BE THE MASTER OF DIALOGUE, BUT WHEN IT COMES TO THE ART OF WORLD-BUILDING, JIM CAMERON IS IN A LEAGUE OF HIS OWN. I CAN'T WAIT TO SEE WHAT HE DOES WITH THE NEXT ONES, AND THE TECHNOLOGY HE DEVELOPED JUST FOR THESE FILMS...



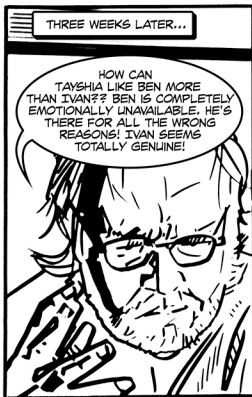
...INCREDIBLE. I TAKE IT BACK. I'D PUT GEORGE LUCAS ON THE SAME LEVEL, OF COURSE. LUCAS, THEN CAMERON. ALTHOUGH LUCAS HAD ISSUES WITH DIALOGUE AS WELL. BIT OF A PATTERN. BETTER THAN CAMERON, THOUGH. IMAGINE IF TARANTINO WROTE SCIENCE FICTION! MAYBE THAT'S HIS NEXT ONE...



OK, SO IT'S AN IMPRESSIVE TECHNICAL ACHIEVEMENT, BUT IS IT A GREAT FILM?

THE TWO AREN'T MUTUALLY EXCLUSIVE!

SURE, BUT YOU NEED STORY AND CHARACTER. I'D WATCH THAT TARANTINO SCI FI... I'M A SUCKER FOR SNAPPY DIALOGUE.





MEANWHILE, I KEPT PAINTING THROUGH THE WINTER, HAVING FINALLY FOUND MY MUSE.

AS I BECAME MORE CONFIDENT IN MY BUDDING HOBBY, WINTER GAVE WAY TO SPRING, AND WITH IT CAME THE VACCINES WE HAD BEEN WAITING FOR. JILL AND I SET A DATE, AND I RESOLVED TO COME PREPARED.



SO, WHAT DO WE THINK?

WHINE

YA, WELL... AT LEAST I DON'T LICK MY OWN ASSHOLE.

EVERYONE'S A CRITIC.

FINALLY, THE DAY WE HAD
BEEN WAITING FOR WAS HERE.

I HAVE A PRESENT
FOR YOU, FIRST.

A PRESENT?

LET'S CALL
IT A SECOND DOSE
GIFT. SOMETHING TO
MARK A NEW
BEGINNING
THE START OF
NEW POSSIBILITIES.

OH MY GOD, LEO.
IT'S BEAUTIFUL!
YOU DID THIS?

INSPIRED BY OUR
WALKS TOGETHER,
JILL- THIS LAST WHILE
HAS BEEN...

IT'S BEEN
GREAT!



TRULY THE
BEST WORST
MONTHS.



NOW *THAT*
IS GREAT
DIALOGUE.





THIS THING ISN'T
OVER, YOU KNOW. THERE
COULD BE MORE WAVES,
MORE LOCKDOWNS.



YA, WELL, WE'LL DEAL WITH
THEM TOGETHER. WE'LL WRITE
OUR OWN STORY FROM
HERE ON OUT.



OH YEAH? WHAT
HAPPENS NEXT IN
OUR STORY, OLD
SPORT?



