

What if all those Paul-is-Dead Beatles rumors were true.....?

A Day in the Life

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A DAY IN THE LIFE

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Prologue

*“ Thrice the brinded cat hath mew’d.
Thrice and once the hedge-pig whined.
Harpier cries ‘Tis time, ‘tis time.’
Round about the cauldron go;
In the poison’d entrails throw.
Cool it with a baboon’s blood,
Then the charm is full and good. ”*
W. Shakespeare, *Macbeth*

Monday, November 3, 1980.

The call came at 1:20 a.m. Struggling awake, Daniel Ferro's predominant notion was that something had happened to his daughter. He shuffled into the hall and snatched up the telephone.

“Yeah?”

There was silence at the other end. Then, “Mr...Ferro?” It was a girl's voice and hesitant.

“Uh-huh?”

“Mr. Ferro. I need to...to talk to you...urgently. ” The voice wasn't just hesitant. It was shaking.

“Who’s this?”

“Listen. I...” She seemed to be trying to catch her breath as if she’d been running. “You're Daniel Ferro, the journalist, right?”

“Yes.”

“You work for *The Times* and *Rolling Stone* and stuff?”

“Yes—well, no, I'm a freelance. What do you want?” Ferro rubbed his eyes and attempted to concentrate.

“Listen, this is important, really important!” The girl's voice had lost its hesitancy. “John Lennon is going to be killed. They're out to get him! I need—”

“John Lennon? The Beatle?”

“Yes! John Lennon from the Beatles. I need—”
“Hold it, hold it, hold on,” Ferro interrupted impatiently. “What's your name? Who are you?” He had received calls like this before. Some bona fide, some misguided and some from real kooks.

She drew a deep breath. “Please, hear me out. Okay? I'm calling you because this has got to be stopped. I want you to write about it—expose them, tell the world! I just can't let this go on any longer.”

He tried again. “Who are you?”

“I'm sorry, I can't tell you that. I also can't stay on this call. For Christ's sake just listen! They're going to get Lennon. They're really going to do it. That's why I'm calling you. It could be anytime.”

“Who's going to kill him? Why?” Ferro shook his head. This was a joke. But why at this time in the morning? The girl certainly sounded scared.

“They're out to get him because he's refusing to keep his mouth shut.”

“About what?”

She sighed. “Okay. I know this is going to sound absolutely crazy. Really crazy. But it's true. Paul McCartney—the original one in the Beatles that is—he's dead. He died fourteen years ago—in 1966. They got someone to replace him, to keep it all going. Lennon's finally going public with the real story. You've got to—”

“Jesus Christ!” Ferro snorted and collapsed into a sitting position on the staircase. “Not that old hoax! Not the Paul-is-Dead nonsense again surely?” He slammed down the phone.

Ferro was halfway back to bed when it rang again. He lay in bed, enduring the trilling telephone for three full minutes before striding across the hall to grab the handset.

“Mr. Ferro,” said the girl. “I know this all sounds really crazy, but please just hear me out. Don't hang up. Let me finish...okay?” Her voice was harsh.

He shrugged. “Go ahead.”

“Okay. In September of 1966, Paul McCartney died in a car accident. He really did die and then—”

“Give me a break!” Ferro was exasperated. “That was all nonsense, just rumors. It was all disproved years ago. Everybody knows it was a hoax.”

“But it wasn't! Don't you see? Those rumors were *true*, absolutely true, at least the death part! He *did* die. And Lennon's now going to tell all. He's going to tell the world. And they're going to kill him!”

“Who's going to kill him?” asked Ferro despite himself. Then he shook his head. “Look, this is fucking stupid.”

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“Please, just *listen*.” The girl was insistent. “You’ve got to listen and you’ve *got* to believe me!”

Ferro sighed audibly.

“You don’t know this, nobody does, but a company took over the Beatles’ business empire back in 1966. They took over everything, just before the accident happened. They hushed it all up. No one knew. Some rumors got out but they squashed them. They’re really ruthless. They got the Beatles’ manager—you know, Brian Epstein—it wasn’t suicide. They also got Jacobs and now they’re going to get Lennon. They’ll get me too if they have any idea I’m talking to you. I’m absolutely and deadly serious.”

Ferro’s eyes narrowed. “You said they *got* Jacobs?”

“Yeah, David Jacobs. He was the Beatles’ lawyer back then.”

“Uh-huh.” Ferro grunted. He knew who Jacobs was. Or rather had been—the Beatles’ solicitor had committed suicide in 1968.

“Anyway, I need—”

“What’s the name of this so-called company?” Ferro interrupted.

The mystery caller was silent.

“Who’s the company?” he repeated

She hesitated. “I...they’re called the...the Charm Company.”

“The *Charm* Company?” Ferro put his head on one side. He’d heard about them before somewhere.

“Yeah. But look, I’ve got to stay out of this. If they knew...” She hesitated again.

A crackpot, Ferro decided. Poor kid. He felt sorry for her. “Look, what *is* your name?” He had difficulty conversing with anyone at any length without being able to use their name.

“I’ve told you, I can’t tell you!”

“Just a first name then.”

“No...no, I can’t”

“Okay. So why are you calling me about this?”

“Because this is the biggest story you’ll ever come across. I know you’ve written stuff about the Beatles before. You know all about them. So, get this story out about the Charm Company. Expose them to the world. If you write it, it’s bound to stop them. They won’t dare go after Lennon then.”

Ferro shrugged. “If you believe someone’s threatening to kill John Lennon then why don’t you go to the police?”

“I can’t go near the fucking police, can I? If they knew I was even thinking of talking to the police they’d—”

“They? The Charm Company you mean?”

“Yeah! So I can’t go to the police and anyway I—“

“Why not just tip the police off anonymously?”

“I have. I’ve tried. I sent them stuff in the mail. They never followed it up. I suppose they didn’t believe me. They haven’t done anything anyway.”

“So why should I believe you? Don’t you think that I would also think you were—let’s say, misguided—about all this?”

“Look—I’m not misguided. I’m deadly serious. And I know all about it—from the inside. The person they got to take over for McCartney, that double, he couldn’t play bass guitar very well. Not at first anyway. Why do you think the Beatles stopped performing live in 1966 after that? Why do you think they stopped touring? And although he could sing something like Paul, his voice was different. You’re supposed to be a Beatles’ expert. You should’ve noticed that. Everything changed!”

“Hmm. And of course there were all those clues the Beatles put on their records after that, right?” Ferro commented sarcastically

“No, that was all bullshit. Just rumors, nothing else. The other Beatles didn’t do anything like that. They wouldn’t have. They had to keep it quiet. Don’t you see? The whole thing was an *incredibly* closely guarded secret. You’re a journalist. You can write about this. You can expose them. I was told you’ve got a good knowledge of the Beatles and that you could do it.”

Ferro picked up on the last remark. “Who told you to call me?”

“It doesn’t matter. It’s just—”

“Who suggested you contact me?”

She hesitated again. “Do you know a...a Geoff Sutton?”

“Yeah?” Ferro replied cautiously. “He’s a label manager at Magno Records.”

“Right. He told me you write stories like this. Said you had good knowledge of the Beatles, the music business and all that.”

“So Sutton believes your story then?”

“Oh, I didn’t tell him anything about this. Just that I needed a good journalist who knew about the Beatles and wouldn’t be afraid to tackle a serious story.”

The thought struck Ferro forcibly that the girl sounded rational and deadly serious. This was then surely a joker. He knew of several friends capable of contriving such a situation. But why at this time in the early hours? Perhaps it made it all the more funny. He was getting cold.

“Look,” he said gently. “If you really believe something is wrong try the police again. You can—”

“You won’t help me?”

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“I’m sorry. It’s crazy. I’m going back to bed where I was, comfortably asleep, before you—”

“No, wait! Wait! Lennon’s going to be—”

“Bye!” Ferro hung up the receiver and shook his head in disbelief. Paul-is-Dead for Christ’s sake! And after all these years!

The telephone didn’t ring again that night.

* * * * *

Ferro spent the next day in central London. He was researching, without much enthusiasm, a retrospective article on Elton John. It wasn’t that John’s 1970s career hadn’t been spectacular—it had. It was just that the subject had been covered in other recent articles and he wasn’t sure that one more in the same vein was going to sell.

Ferro had arranged several meetings with record producers and other contacts. He spent an active morning and the previous night’s conversation barely intruded on his thoughts. However, a canceled appointment in the afternoon provided him with an hour of free time. On a whim, he telephoned Geoffrey Sutton at Magno Records.

“Got an interesting phone call last night, Geoff. Know anything about it?”

“Should I?”

“It was a girl. Said she knew you or, rather, that you knew me. Said you recommended me.”

“Oh?... Who was it?”

“She didn’t—actually wouldn’t—give her name. Said she needed a music journalist. Had this crazy story and she sounded scared.”

“Really? And you didn’t get her name? Ah...” Sutton paused. “It wasn’t Carmen Venton by any chance?”

“As I said, she didn’t give her name. Who’s Carmen Venton?”

“Someone I went to school with. I went back home last weekend. Saw her in a pub there. Hadn’t seen her for—what?—ten years or more.”

“Where’s home Geoff?”

“Catford. We chatted for half an hour or so. Was it her?”

Ferro shrugged. “I don’t know, she wouldn’t tell me. London accent alright. Sounded scared. I was half asleep at the time. It was the middle of the fucking night.”

“Hmm. You could have said the Carmen I saw last Saturday night was scared, among other things. She was very thin, thinner than I ever remember. Looked quite ill actually. Probably using—doped up to the eyeballs. She was a blonde. Never used to be. She certainly wasn’t at ease. I don’t think she smiled once. She seemed pleased to see me though. Came up to me in the pub in the first place in fact.”

“Did she tell you anything?”

“Nothing particularly interesting. Should she have?”

“Possibly. If it was her I spoke to last night.”

“Anyway,” Sutton continued, “it was difficult to get her to talk about anything last week. She just wanted to reminisce about what we all got up to fifteen years ago. I asked her what she’s doing now. Never got a straight answer. So, what’s this crazy story she told you then?”

Ferro ignored the question. “Carmen? That’s an unusual name.”

“Yeah. Her mother was from South America I think, or somewhere.”

“And you said her surname was Venton or Fenton?”

“Venton—with a vee.”

“So why’d you give her my name Geoff?”

“Well after she found out I was in the biz, she asked me if I knew any good writers. I thought she meant songwriters at first. She said she wanted someone who was a good investigative journalist. Someone who could follow a lead about the Beatles and get a story published. I gave her a couple of names including yours.”

“Well that sounds like our bird all right.”

“Yeah, it does,” agreed Sutton. “So what’d she say?”

“Okay Geoff, get ready! She woke me up in the early hours to tell me that Paul McCartney is dead and his place was taken by a double in 1966!”

“Ha!” exploded Sutton. “You’re kidding?”

“No, really. Fucking great, eh? And there’s more.”

“More?” Sutton chuckled.

“Right! She also said that John Lennon’s life is now in danger. Apparently, he’s threatening to go public with the story after fourteen years of silence and they’re out to get him.”

“Who are?”

“The so-called conspirators. Called the Charm Company or something like that. Ever heard of them?”

“No, can’t say I have. Have you?”

“Vaguely, somewhere.” Ferro shrugged. “But funny, eh?”

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“Right!” Sutton agreed. “Perhaps she’s just heard. About all the old Paul-is-Dead stuff, I mean. Read about it probably. Or been listening to the record clues like all the rest of ‘em. Keeps turning up, doesn’t it? The rumors go back to the late 60’s. That’s when I first heard about it.”

Ferro smiled. “Me too. It was a good hoax then for a couple of weeks. I remember it well. It was the autumn of 1969 when the story broke. Anyway, it seems she really believes it by the sound of things. I wonder where she got her story from after so long? It seems to have completely turned her head.”

“Yeah, sounds like it has! Not sure about the new bit about Lennon though. Never heard that one before.”

“Me neither.”

“Poor old Carmen.” Sutton sounded concerned. “I wonder what she’s on?”

“Yeah. She was deadly earnest about it all last night. And she was scared they’d get her too. Totally neurotic.”

“Funny thing is, although she looked nervous in the pub, she never said nothing to me about it.” Sutton pronounced it ‘nuffin’.

They chatted casually for a few more minutes. Sutton had two new signings he thought that Ferro might be interested in reviewing. They weren’t high on Ferro’s list of priorities although he agreed to receive complementary tickets for an upcoming concert.

So it wasn’t a joker, just an eccentric after all, reflected Ferro as he replaced the receiver. The Lennon story was new twist though.

The incident was gone from his mind by the next day.

* * * * *

One week later, the front page of *The Guardian* contained little of interest to Ferro. Ronald Reagan, the US president-elect had announced his cabinet. A quarter of the front page was devoted to a picture of Michael Foot, the new leader of the Labour Party, next to his predecessor James Callaghan. Ferro’s last *Guardian* article had been three months ago. Too long.

With his second cup of coffee he was on the sports pages, mostly post-mortems of Saturday’s soccer games. By his third cup, he was browsing the inside pages.

It was on page five, three-column-inches in length, just below an obituary of Steve McQueen. Ferro was glancing over the articles when two words

formed a jarring resonance. It is an interesting characteristic that when one sees something potentially dangerous out of the corner of the eye, the head does not turn to squarely face the danger. Instead, the eyes continue to scan it fleeting from the side while searching in other directions, as if for an escape route. Ferro's second glance at the article was in a manner akin to this flight reflex. His gaze flitted around its periphery at unrelated stories. He read it for the third time, this time carefully all the way through. Then he read it a fourth time. He sat back and stared at the wall. Just how many 'Carmen Ventons, age 30,' could there be in southern England?

Ferro remained fixated on his kitchen wall for two minutes. Then, very slowly, he dialed the number of Sussex County Constabulary at Horsham.

"Yes," he said when the police answered. "I've just read the article on Carmen Venton in the newspaper. That body they've just identified. They had your name and number in there. I need—"

"Just a moment sir, I'll put you through to the hotline. Please hold."

The phone was picked up immediately. "Hotline! Detective-Constable Tyrell."

"Yes. I need some details on the murder. Can you tell me whether—"

"I'm sorry sir," the policeman interrupted. "We're not giving out any information at this time. We're here to take calls from members of the public that may know something about the matter."

"It is a murder inquiry then?"

"Yes sir. Now is there anything you can tell us?"

"Well, yes, possibly there is. I'm—"

"Good. Good. Can I have your full name please...Sir?...Hello?..."

But Ferro had taken the phone away from his ear and was staring at the cord.

"Sir, can you still hear me?...Sir?" The voice crackled in the earpiece.

Ferro considered the situation for a few seconds more, the phone suspended in midair. He then gently replaced the receiver and stared through the kitchen window at the fog in the back yard beyond.

In a typical fog, the suspended water droplets are small. When they exceed a diameter of about two-tenths of a millimeter, they tend to fall earthwards as drizzle. Outside the window, the fog was now turning to drizzle.

Daniel Ferro, however, was deep in thought and appreciated none of this.

* * * * *

— Chapter 1 —

Abbey Road

Thursday, November 24, 1966

The London of November 1966 was a cold, rather dirty city. The air was now free of the pea-souper smogs of the 1950s because of the introduction of stringent smokeless-coal legislation in the intervening years. But there was, if possible, even more litter in the streets discarded by an increasingly nihilistic population. In 1966 ‘environment’ was spelled with only a lower case ‘e’ and the Concise Oxford English Dictionary of the period defined it merely as ‘...*surrounding objects, region, or circumstances...*’ The global environmental conscience was still some years away.

But the London of November 1966 was also a dazzling city at the pinnacle of the renaissance of popular culture. Swinging London was the epicenter of the swinging sixties. The shift to the West Coast of America was half a year in the future, an eternity given the breakneck pace of artistic creation. London was the fashion capital of the world. England were the soccer champions of the world. The West End of London was the tourist mecca of the world. Not for the traditional tourist but for the newly emergent and affluent youth culture, infatuated with the recent British Invasion and everything that accompanied it. They swarmed from Oxford Street to Carnaby Street, to Piccadilly Circus, to the King's Road—a riotous melange of youth and color and mini-skirts and long hair and illegal aromas and, above all, of popular music.

In the gloom of the November evening, George Harrison nursed the Mini Cooper to the curbside and killed the engine. It was a borrowed car, less conspicuous than his white Aston Martin DB5 and less prone to lipstick messages from besotted fans. He'd just turned from the Bayswater Road into Queensway and, forgetting that there was no first-gear synchromesh on this unfamiliar vehicle, had been scolded with a wrenching protest from the bowels of the car.

Harrison grimaced. This was no longer the earnest, smiling member of the world's favorite pop group. In the past year, the Beatles had evolved a new musical art form in the recording studio that was impossible to reproduce live.

Nevertheless, they had been committed to touring the world earlier that summer as conventional pop musicians before multitudes screaming too loudly to notice, or care, how badly rehearsed they were. The continuous glare of public scrutiny, the continuous facile questions from a fawning press and, in particular, the recent appalling event, were killing Harrison's enthusiasm for his chosen career.

He sat in the car and glanced at the tobacconist's shop. He needed cigarettes. Why not just go in and get some? His trepidation of encountering the public had increased markedly over the past few months. Everywhere he went it was the same thing—the applause as he was spotlighted in the shadows of a nightclub, the free drinks, the hordes of eager people wanting to shake his hand and feel him up and down, as if he was made of some novel tactile material. It was the same inane questions and the same looks of awe at seeing him in the flesh. Was it really only four years ago that he had been riding his bicycle through the back streets of Liverpool, blithely ignorant of the world and it of him? It seemed a lifetime ago.

No, he wouldn't stop here. He'd have Mal or Neil get the cigarettes when he got to Abbey Road. Then again, he wasn't sure he was going to Abbey Road today—or ever again. He sat irresolute for a full minute, then hauled himself out of the Mini and entered the shop.

The man behind the counter looked at him carefully. He raised his eyebrows in question but said nothing.

"Twenty Gold Leaf please," said Harrison. He always gave the impression of frowning because his eyebrows thickened as they reached his nose. This time he was really was frowning.

"Four shillings and tuppence," the proprietor grunted.

"Thanks." Harrison placed the exact change on the counter, picked up the cigarettes and made to leave. Here was an easy escape at least, he thought. But it wasn't.

"My daughter really likes you lot," said the man. "She's plastered your pictures all over her bedroom walls. Spends all her pocket money on your records."

Harrison nodded briefly in acknowledgment. And now here comes the inevitable autograph request he thought. But it didn't.

"I don't understand it meself. It's just noise. I can't hear what you're all singing about. Not that I'd call it singing of course!"

As Harrison slouched out of the shop, he tried to recall what it had been like when he could go anywhere he pleased. It had been fantastic in 1963 when stardom had arrived. At the beginning of that year, the Beatles were

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well known in Liverpool but, with only a rather minor single release to their credit, he could walk the streets of London unrecognized. By the end of 1963 the phenomenon had exploded in the U.K. In 1964 they had become celebrities in the States. By 1965 they had achieved global exposure; and it was still fun—more or less. But now in late 1966, this King Midas syndrome was becoming too painful, especially given the present crisis. How great it would be, Harrison thought, if just for one hour, he could stroll through bustling central London without being recognized. Just another face in the crowd, free to do as he pleased, shop as he pleased, act as he pleased, without the press and populace snapping at his heels.

The autopilot in Harrison's head shepherded the Mini north on the Edgware Road and into Maida Vale, vying for position in the traffic streaming from central London. His conscious brain was in turmoil. He was still ambivalent as to whether he'd stop in at Abbey Road or simply just drive on and out of this charade forever. In October, when this new recording session had been suggested, he had refused. Of the three remaining Beatles, he had been the one most vehemently against continuing. A month had passed and he had barely softened his opposition. Yesterday, he'd decided not to do it. But this morning he had been strangely drawn by the desire to at least see the familiar faces of the inner circle. Then there was his wife—he was sure that Pattie suspected something. And perhaps of most concern there were the financial implications. He and his two fellow Beatles were broke.

* * * * *

EMI's Abbey Road studios are situated in a white-painted mansion in the leafy London suburb of St John's Wood, NW8, in the street of the same name. The original building was erected as a detached residence in 1830 with nine bedrooms and five reception rooms. It was purchased by the Gramophone Company in 1929 and converted to recording studios just prior to the merger with Columbia Records to form EMI. In November of 1966, an English Heritage plaque on the front of the house informed the world that Sir Edward Elgar had recorded here decades before. The Wedgwood-blue plaque is still there today. It has yet to be accompanied by a similar plaque commemorating the Beatles. Perhaps two more deaths must occur for that to happen.

It had been five months since the Beatles had last recorded at the studios—Tuesday, June 21, 1966 to be exact, a date that held more

significance for rock and roll than any music historian would realize. What had ostensibly been devoted to recording the song 'She Said She Said' for the forthcoming *Revolver* album, had in fact been the final recording session of the four original Beatles. It had been so long, that the usual gaggle of fans outside the gates was absent.

And now, for the first time in their career, and for two very different reasons, there was no pressure on the Beatles to deliver a recorded product to meet a planned deadline. Their unique position in the world of popular music was beyond question. Even hidebound and inflexible EMI had offered them open-ended evening studio time and no recording budget limit.

The stucco walls of the grounds fronting the street were still painted off-white even though they had been adorned for two years now with a lacework of graffiti from Beatle fans. A bored-looking security guard glanced into the Mini Cooper stopped outside, recognized its famous occupant with an inclination of his head and swung open the gates. At the entrance to the building a uniformed doorman nodded, apparently deferentially, and stood back to let Harrison enter. Doorman and world celebrity glanced at each other as they passed. Harrison was conscious of the contrast between them: the doorman resplendent in a sham uniform and probably earning all of fourteen pounds a week; himself, casually dressed and a former multi-millionaire. But the doorman would have been astonished to learn that Harrison, like his remaining colleagues, was insolvent.

"Studio Two today I believe, sir," said the doorman. There was a slight hesitation before the 'sir'.

Harrison strode through the hallway vaguely aware of the smell of polish on the parquet floor. It always triggered in him the olfactory memory of Dovedale Primary School. Cautiously opening the door to the control room of Studio Two, he nodded without expression to engineers Gerry Easterby and Peter MacDougal, and descended the twenty steps down to the floor of Studio Two itself.

"Hello George!" said the five people on the floor. However, only producer George Martin had smiled.

The recording complex of Abbey Road comprises four studios. The largest is Studio One and is routinely used for large orchestral recording and operas. The Beatles rarely used Studio One, whereas approximately half of their *Revolver* album had been recorded in Studio Three earlier in the year. Their favorite studio had always been Studio Two; it was referred to patronizingly as the 'pop' studio by EMI management.

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On that Thursday in November of 1966, five guitars were laid out against the wall of Studio Two: a Martin acoustic, two semi-acoustics—an orange Gretsch and a sunburst Epiphone, and a 1959 Fender Stratocaster. But Harrison's eyes were drawn to the solitary instrument set apart from the rest—a Höfner violin-style bass guitar. It was a left-handed model. A lump formed in his throat as Harrison blinked rapidly to stem the upwelling tears.

George Martin was seated on his characteristic high stool in the center of the studio with John Lennon standing before him, an acoustic guitar slung around his neck. Ringo Starr and the Beatles' assistant, Neil Aspinall, were seated at a small table, a chessboard between them.

Mal Evans, the other Beatles' factotum, returned to a Vox amplifier he was inspecting, a returned relic from the Beatles' Shea Stadium concert last year. He peered inside the back, his large six-foot-three-inch frame bent almost double.

"Trouble?" said Harrison.

"Thermistor's overheating again," replied Evans. "Smell the smoke? These Vox AC100s never have been reliable."

"They're not much use here in the studio anyroad" Harrison drawled. "Too big. They sound tinny at low volume."

Harrison sat down and watched Lennon and Martin through the pall of cigarette smoke hanging in the air. He thought Lennon looked considerably thinner in the face since he had last seen him. The other's hair was cropped short, a slap in the face to the tenor of the times, and he was wearing a pair of cheap, wire-framed National Health glasses. Harrison thought they looked rather silly.

"I understand that Paul's not around," said George Martin to the room in general.

"No," said Lennon shortly, staring at the ground.

"Is he coming later in the week?"

"No."

"Why?"

"He's not, that's all." Lennon didn't look up.

"Hmm." Their producer paused, raised his voice towards the studio intercom. "O.K Gerry. Mark this session started at six p.m. and let's go. Single track, two microphone mix, channels one and two, Rehearsal only." He turned back to Lennon eyebrows raised.

"This is a new one George. It's called 'Strawberry Fields Forever'. It's...it's about a place I knew once." Lennon taped some handwritten lyrics

to the microphone stand. He adjusted the tuning of his top string and began, just himself and an acoustic guitar.

“No one, I think, is in my tree...” he sang.

This song was to start very differently from the final version. Martin sat on his stool in front of Lennon, his head on one side listening closely. Starr and Aspinall had ceased their chess game. Their eyes were focused on the two figures in the center of the floor. Easterby had left the control board and was standing in the open doorway, looking down on the scene in the studio below. Harrison and Evans were both listening entranced by Lennon’s halting, childlike, but ultimately beautiful lyrics. This was magic in the making.

Following a few rehearsals of the song, a piece of musical history was about to be set into motion.

“ ‘Strawberry Fields Forever’, take one,” said Martin into the intercom microphone.

“Living is easy with eyes closed, misunderstanding all you see...” began Lennon in what was to be an intermediate attempt at the opening lines of the song. Harrison played rhythm accompaniment, glancing at a transcribed chord chart on his music stand. Starr, behind a sound screen, offered a drum pattern with dominant use of tom-toms.

“Okay John,” said Martin at the song’s conclusion. “If you’re going to add further ideas tonight, we’ll need a temporary bass track for reference. Who wants to play the bass part just for today?”

Lennon and Harrison glanced quickly at each other and then at the floor.

“Well?” said Martin. “Who wants to do the bass part?” No one moved.

Finally Lennon got up from the Mellotron stool and moved slowly over to the Höfner Beatle bass. Holding it away from his body, he stared at the instrument, his eyes wide and unblinking. Ringo Starr, who had risen from his drum stool, froze in the act of extracting a packet of Peter Stuyvesant from the carton on top of the piano.

Harrison stared at Lennon with deep concern. He knew that his colleague’s inner demons must be squirming and that this was the last thing that Lennon wanted to do. George Martin was looking up at the control room and seemed not to have noticed the petrified proceedings.

”Jesus fuckin’ Christ,” exclaimed Lennon. “I can’t do this.”

“Something wrong John?” Martin asked.

“I just can’t do this today George, okay?” snapped Lennon. “Anyway it’s left handed—I can’t play left handed.”

“Okay John, okay. Let’s take a break shall we?” Martin turned back to his local microphone. “Gerry, we’ll take twenty. Phil, can you reel up that song

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for the new single? You know, Paul's solo session we were doing a couple of month ago. John could add some more harmony vocals later."

Lennon looked over at Harrison. "Want to go upstairs George?" he said, raising his eyes upwards. Harrison smiled for the first time that evening and nodded.

"Better bring your coat, it's cold up there," said Lennon.

Starr and Aspinall had returned to their chess game. Evans had given up on the amplifier, leaving vacuum tubes scattered over the tabletop. He had picked up a guitar and was idly strumming it, unamplified, his chair tilted back against the wall.

Lennon and Harrison were walking out of the door into the corridor when the control room was suddenly filled with voice of Paul McCartney. It was emanating from the reference monitors on each side of the control desk. The two men stopped dead and listened intently.

"What the fuck is that?" snapped Lennon.

"This is Paul's song for the new single," replied MacDougal the engineer. "The one he started in September when you were filming in Spain." McDonald looked at the EMI recording sheet. "This was...take four and..."

"Take it off," said Lennon very quietly. "Take it off. I don't want to hear that again."

"Er...George just said he wanted it played for you. Anyway, you remember this one, surely? You came in and added some harmonies by yourself later in September. George said you might want to add some more today and—"

"I said take it off. I said I don't want to hear that again. Not today. Not tomorrow. Not ever! Okay?"

"Okay, okay, I'll take it off." MacDougal looked at him resentfully. McCartney's voice cut off abruptly. MacDougal switched to fast rewind, braked the flapping reel with the palm of his hand, detached it from the Studer four-track machine and replaced it in the metal can. Lennon watched this operation closely. On its completion he snatched up the can and held it firmly to his chest. He seemed about to walk out with it but appeared to think better of it. Slamming it down on the table, he strode out of the room followed by Harrison.

The engineer watched them go with puzzlement. So, what's wrong with Lennon? He'd certainly been increasingly difficult to work with over the last year or so—more demanding in his requirements, more acerbic in his comments to the staff. But, then again, ever more creative in his musical output. MacDougal shrugged. That's what you put up with when you work

with geniuses. He wondered if Sir Edward Elgar had been this difficult. He shrugged again and looked back at McCartney's recording sheet for early September. Well it was a great song anyway, even if Lennon didn't want to hear it. How did it go again? 'Woke up, fell out of bed...'

* * * * *

Lennon led the way through empty corridors, his head down, his face grim. Harrison followed him up the stairs to the third floor. In 1966, Abbey Road Studios was still mainly a nine-to-five operation; they met no one as they made their way to the roof of Studio Two. Lennon leaned against the push-bar to let Harrison through. The air temperature was in the low thirties, the sky was clear and sparkles of frost were already forming on the neighboring roof tiles. Lennon looked about him sadly. It had been an entirely different world last time he was up here.

Harrison watched as his colleague took a small plastic bag from his pocket and offered it to him. Inside were five sugar cubes.

"Good stuff?" said Harrison, his breath condensing in the cold air.

"Very good," nodded Lennon. "I already popped one an hour ago. I need a double hit tonight. Go ahead George."

Harrison hesitated. "This'll be the end of any more useful work tonight you know."

"Oh, fuck it, George! We shouldn't be here tonight in the first place. Get on wi'rr'it."

Harrison shook his head. "No thanks John. I've got to be able to play the guitar later."

Lennon shrugged, popped a sugar cube into his mouth and crunched it. It tasted of nothing more than granulated sugar.

"So, how've you been George?"

"Fair to middling I suppose."

"How's Pattie?"

"Fine...and you? And Cyn, Julian?"

"They're okay I 'spose." Lennon chewed the inside of his cheek

They fell silent and both stared at the ground. Harrison stamped his feet and hugged himself against the cold, folding his arms into his body. Lennon lit a cigarette.

"It ain't going to work like this, is it Georgy boy?" said Lennon at length.

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“No,” agreed Harrison. He shook his head.

“So how have you *really* been, George?”

“Not good. Can’t do anything. Can’t get anything useful done. Know what I mean?”

Lennon grunted in assent. “Yeah, me too. Although, it’s actually been better the last couple of weeks. I met this chick...” He hesitated.

Harrison glanced up. Lennon was looking rather sheepish.

“I met this chick—well a woman really,” Lennon continued. “In Pete Asher’s Indica Gallery. You know, just off Jermyn Street. She’s...she’s sort of different. She’s not from here. She’s Japanese. She looks at things differently than I ever have before. I’m sort of thinking of—”

“You’ve not said anything to her about any of this?” Harrison looked alarmed.

“No, course not. But she’s been, er...comforting. In a very different way.”

“Does Cyn know? About this woman I mean.”

Lennon snorted. “What do *you* think?”

Harrison shrugged and then said, “Well John, at least you can still write. That was a new song tonight wasn’t it? The one about the old orphanage at Strawberry Fields?”

“Yeah. Writing’s what I can still do. Makes it all more special now, more meaningful, in a funny sort of way.”

They fell silent again. Finally Harrison said, “Funny thing. I wasn’t going to come here today. In the end, I started out and then almost drove by and away forever.”

Lennon shook his head. “It was dumb to think we could continue this. We should just drop it and slip away. Hide maybe. Go to the Caribbean for a year or two. At least it’ll bloody well be warm there! Not like this shitty frozen country.”

“Who’s going to pay for it? All our money’s with the Company remember!”

“Yeah, I know.” Lennon breathed heavily. “Fucking Epstein. Fucking Jacobs. Fucking stupid cunts. Fucking stupid idea!” He smacked his right fist into his left palm.

“We all agreed John. It wasn’t just them. We could’ve said no. We voted four to nothing, plus them.”

Lennon snorted. “But Jesus fucking Christ, George! How were we to know this would happen, eh?” He paused and then asked, “Have you talked to Ringo more about it?”

“Yeah. You know Ringo. Matter-of-fact about it all. You makes yer choices and takes yer chances, he says. Anyroad, it’s incredible the Press haven’t been sniffing around.”

“Ah! It’s not that incredible. Remember the Company. They can hush anything up. The Company is clever.” Lennon put a finger into the corner of each of his eyes and slanted them upwards. “Velly clever. Velly, velly clever. Too clever by half. Fuck ‘em all.” He bit his lip.

“Umm...John...” Harrison hesitated.

“Yeah?”

“What, er...what d’you think about this grand idea of Brian’s then?”

Lennon wheeled around to face him. His eyes blazed. “I think it’s totally fucking insane!” He swung back and stared hard at the ground.

Their desultory conversation continued until Lennon gradually fell silent. The lysergic acid diethylamide was beginning to bite and the tingles were starting. For a minute he gazed across the rooftops, preoccupied with his altering perception. It was a clear night with good visibility. He looked southward over Lord’s Cricket Ground and gradually rotated to encompass the now-pulsating lights over Maida Vale. He swiveled north to the Finchley Road where a yellow snake of sodium streetlights was threading Swiss Cottage. He finally turned his gaze eastwards to a large black region devoid of lights. This puzzled Lennon until he realized it must be Regent’s Park and London Zoo. London Zoo! Visions of tigers sprang into his mind—bright, flashing yellow-gold tigers with broad shiny black stripes and gaping, crimson mouths.

He swiveled westwards once more to stare at a nearby block of flats. The lit windows metamorphosed into array of gold nuggets set on a large velvet cloth. He could clearly see the rough speckled texture of the surface of each nugget. He blinked rapidly and the nuggets merged with the lights of a half-dozen surrounding tower blocks of St. John’s Wood. The tower blocks became large black monoliths studded with sapphires, rubies, emeralds and deep-blue flashing diamonds, overpowering in their intensity. Lennon laughed delightedly. He squinted through his eyelashes and shook his head slowly back and forth. The panoply of precious stones formed sweeping arcs of swirling rainbows.

“It’s good George,” he said grinning expansively. “It’s very good! Wow! Come and look at this!”

Harrison was sitting on a low retaining wall hunched up against the cold. He rose and walked over to where his partner was now fixated on the sparkling frost crystals coating the air conditioning ducts. Lennon would

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focus for a second on one spot when, out of the corner of his eye, another shimmer would draw his gaze. He steeled himself not to look at further flashes but their Morse Code insistently demanded his attention.

Lennon was experiencing a lull. His vision had cleared and his perception was more or less back to normal. But he knew he only had to wait a minute or two for the show to re-commence. Shaking his head to clear it, he turned his attention back to his friend.

“Are you going to the Bag O’Nails club tomorrow?” he said thickly.

Harrison blinked. “To see that new black guitarist?” he said at length. “Yeah, thinking of it.”

“He’s suppose to be really shit-hot you know.”

“Yeh, I know,” said Harrison dourly. “Eric said he let him sit in on a Cream gig they did at the Regent Street Poly. Said he tried to blow him off the stage. Eric said he was fuckin’ good. Too fuckin’ good!” He sighed.

Just one more slick, virtuoso guitarist named James Marshall Hendrix was all Harrison needed in his life at the moment. It had been increasingly difficult for him over the past two years to maintain his status in the top echelon of lead guitarists. An echelon with no formal ranking but, nevertheless, very evident within the music fraternity. The new note-bending, blues-influenced styles of Eric Clapton, Jimmy Page, Jeff Beck and now this Hendrix character, were rather alien to him. Harrison was a picker, a competent but conventional guitarist whose major influence had been the rockabilly guitarist Carl Perkins.

Suddenly, Lennon was shaking Harrison’s arm, doubled over in laughter.

“I was just thinking,” gasped Lennon. “It’s so funny...so funny. You just said, ‘tried to blow him off the stage.’ I was just thinking...like this.” Lennon pursed his lips and attempted to blow. His continuing laughter defeated the effort.

Harrison stood there frowning, appearing not to see the humor. But Lennon did. He collapsed in a heap on the ground, helpless with laughter, tears streaming from his eyes. It was the kind of laughter that wouldn’t let go. It continued to pump his diaphragm and prevented him from taking a breath. It was the kind of laughter that made him scared it would never stop. But it stopped as abruptly as it had started.

* * * * *

“Okay John,” said George Martin. “Ready to go on ‘Strawberry Fields’ again?”

John Lennon was not ready to go. The jitters had commenced in earnest. Moreover, he was mesmerized by the pulsing reflections from the pearl inlays on his acoustic guitar. He angled the instrument to catch the studio lights high overhead and he scanned back and forth from the kaleidoscopic colors on the body to the iridescent markers on the fretboard.

“John?” said Martin again.

Lennon wrenched his attention back to his producer. But, out of the corner of his eye, the wall to his left, formerly only a yard or so away, appeared to have vanished and had been replaced by a huge yawning void. His head instinctively snapped to the left and the green studio wall appeared reassuringly solid. He shook his head to clear it. “I want to try something alone for a minute, George” he said to Martin. “I’m going to do something different to start it.” He haltingly picked out an introduction similar to the Mellotron figure he’d added an hour ago.

“Let me take you down, ‘cos I’m going to...” he sang unsteadily.

Just after the start of Lennon’s solo effort, the door from the control room opened and Brian Epstein quietly descended the stairs. The Beatles’ manager was, as always, immaculately dressed, with a camel-hair officer’s drill coat, brown leather gloves and a yellow silk scarf. His hair was starting to thin and he had recently been sporting a lowered side parting with the front arranged in rather prissy waves. He stopped two steps from the bottom, leant on the handrail and listened closely to the remainder of the song.

“Very nice John. Very nice indeed,” Epstein said with a smile at its conclusion. He was, however, sweating and looked nervous.

Lennon was having trouble focusing on moving objects, however slightly they were moving including Epstein. His manager’s face, already flushed, looked to him like a giant red beach ball hovering in the air. Epstein’s features were grossly distorted and extended into a huge nose and grinning cavernous mouth.

“Hello Brian,” Lennon slurred. He smiled hugely at nothing in particular.

“George, excuse me for interrupting the session,” Epstein said turning to Martin. “I just popped in to see the boys. Would you mind if I drag them away for a minute or two?” He turned to the three Beatles. “Boys, shall we go upstairs for a minute? I’ve brought someone I’d like you to meet. I knew you’d all be here today so I thought we should strike while the iron was hot.” He rubbed his hands together enthusiastically but avoided looking them in the eye. Lennon was still having trouble with the red beach ball.

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The three Beatles followed their manager up the stairs and through the control room.

“That was a new song I just heard wasn’t it John?” said Epstein smiling over his shoulder. Epstein’s teeth were irregular and slightly splayed, unusual in one so fastidious in dress. When he smiled, his top teeth appeared to bite into his lower lip.

“Uh-huh,” grunted Lennon.

“I’m so glad you’re doing a new song today. A new beginning and a new LP, eh?”

“There’s not going to be any new LP, Brian.”

“Now John! We’ve already discussed all this and it’s been agreed. Anyway, the song sounded very nice. Yes, very nice.” He paused. “You know though, the middle bit sounded...er...not quite right. Perhaps you should think about—”

“You just stick to yer percentages Brian,” retorted Lennon acidly. “We’ll look after the music.”

But no more music was destined to be made that night.

The main corridor outside Studio Two was now in semi-darkness. The minimal night lighting was throwing yellow wedges on the floor in patterns alternating with dark pools of shadow. The doorman had long departed leaving only the night watchman, at this moment asleep in his booth just inside the main entrance. In one of the patches of shadow a solitary figure stood, watching the approaching group of four closely, a cigarette burning in his hand.

“Umm, boys,” said Epstein apprehensively. “I’d like you to meet Bill.” He turned to the figure in the shadows.

The stranger was dressed in a cream, gabardine raincoat, a striped college scarf wrapped tightly around his neck. His face was distinguished by a mustache and a pair of black, heavy frame glasses. He wore a beret on his head. The newcomer was about five feet ten tall, the same height as Harrison. He glanced quickly from one Beatle to the next, a nervous smile licking at the corners of his mouth.

Lennon strode forward until he was toe-to-toe with the stranger, his head jutted forward staring intently into the other’s eyes. He continued to stare for a period longer than is considered polite in Western society. The man straightened upward and backward, his eyes averted. Lennon suddenly sprang, tearing off the stranger’s beret and glasses. The man’s head snapped back. Lennon eyes were riveted on the other’s face. Harrison simultaneously took a sharp intake of breath. Ringo Starr just stared.

L. John Perkins

“You must be fookin’ crazy Epstein!” screamed Lennon. “Absolutely, fookin’ crazy. We’re all fookin’ crazy!”

Lennon pushed violently past Epstein and his guest, strode through the front entrance and into the night. The night watchman awoke startled as the door slammed behind him.

* * * * *

What if all those Paul-is-Dead Beatles rumors were true.....?

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