

A BOTTLENECK IN TIME
by Frank Marcopulos

BANGBANGBANG!

“What was that?” I thought.

BANGBANGBANG!

“Oh, it’s the front door. Why is someone banging on my front door?”

BANGBANGBANG!

“Guess I better go down and see what the hell is going on.”

I opened the door. The world seemed out of joint somehow—a swirling, mad vortex awash in full-on Crazy. The sidewalk quivered, like it was made of grey and black Jell-O. A short, goatee’d, angry-looking man stood there. An even shorter woman stood behind him. “You the tenant?” the man said.

I said, “One of ‘em, yeah. Why?” The faded sky was all slush and cigarette ash blended into a gooey mix. A crisp, frigid breeze whirled bits of paper garbage around on the twisty sidewalk.

“Bob’s dead,” the man said. “Died on New Year’s Eve. We’re the new owners of this place. And it’s gonna be sold. You ask me, you got, like, maybe thirty, sixty days, tops, to collect your stuff, and be out. But it’ll be up to the new owners, o’ course. What they wanna do witcha.”

“Um,” I said. “Okay? Well, my name’s Frank, by the way.” I held out my handshake hand. We shook. “In the meantime, you might want to consider, maybe, renting out the store, keeping the two tenants, and having that monthly cashflow, which will accumulate pretty nicely over time.”

“Nah,” the woman behind the man said. “We just want the casheesh. We gonna have a blow-out in Vegas, baby!” She laughed, turned, and clacked her heels against the Jell-O cement toward the curb where a late-model Camry was parked. The car swayed and swerved as if whoever was observing it was doing so through the kaleidoscope lens of a sixties-style acid trip. She opened the wavy door and disappeared inside the car.

“Yeah, we’re set on sellin’,” the goatee’d man said. He handed me a slip of paper.

“Here’s my info. Mail me a check the first of the month til the place sells.”

I stood there, dumbfounded, until they drove away, back to whatever bastion they called home. The world slipped even more out of joint, and I quickly closed the door, before the entire thing collapsed into dank, smoky ruins.

I remember what I was doing before all the door-banging that Saturday quite well because I was excited by the fact that I had just finished architecting the narrative of my new novel. I was happy that with that structure in place, I could move on to the business of seriously constructing the actual scenes—y’know, the fun part of writing a novel, the actual *writing* of it. And then the banging came, and my mood suddenly swung 180 degrees, from joy to world-collapsing, black depression.

First of all, I actually liked my previous landlord. Now, all of a sudden, I had to digest the fact that he was no longer walking around on the planet. He was, instead, a pile of ashes in an urn somewhere. That’s more than a little depressing.

Second, I was told that I had to vacate an apartment that’s been my home for over 10 years now. As crappy as this apartment may be, it doesn’t change the fact that I’ve had 10 years’ worth of personal memories here. When I started thinking about the prospect of leaving this crappy apartment that trippy Saturday afternoon, the emotions struck me, hard. Even though it had been around 300 days since I had had a drink on that Saturday, I seriously considered breaking my long streak of sobriety. It was a lightning-strike, life-changing situation after all, and normally I drowned those kinds of events in alcohol—as an attempt to kill them. I mean, one minute, you’re finishing up the architecture of your new novel, the next minute doors are being banged on, and you’re told you’ve got to find a new home, in the least home-like place on Earth, Noir York City, where people would

rather stab you than smile at you. It's jarring, to say the least. But I ultimately decided NOT to have that drink. I decided to deal with all of this stone-cold sober.

The fact of the matter is, I've been living in this crappy apartment since February 19, 2001. I was here during 9/11, on vacation of all things. A vacation spent having my emotions ripped apart with chaos exploding everywhere. I woke up on that day intending to get some serious writing done, heard Howard Stern (still on terrestrial radio back then) talking about something weird going on, flipped on the news, and that was it for the writing plans and everything else as I watched with horror as that tragic day raged on and on and on.

I've gone through a number of different jobs while in this crappy apartment. Several girlfriends have come and gone through here. I've had countless gallons of alcohol here, hung out with cool and not-so-cool people here. I've read some of the world's great books here. Right here, in this crappy apartment. I've suffered through robberies, graffiti vandalism, roof-leak rainstorms, insurance-fraud fires, next-door cold-blooded murders, and countless other heart-stopping events in this crappy apartment.

Besides all the bad stuff, some good things have happened here, too. I've celebrated exciting sporting events and personal achievements here, cooked thousands of untasty meals here, felt the entire range of human emotions in this crappy little apartment. This crappy little apartment is not just wood floors and broken-hinged doors, knobs coming

off cabinets and dead pet fish and video games and broken windowpanes. It is, but it's not.

I have written a zillion less-than-glorious words here. I have narrated some of the greatest stories ever written here, by writers named Poe and Twain and Dostoyevsky and Bierce and Henry and Wilde and Salinger and Hemingway and Faulkner. I have discovered Robert Greene and Paul Dobransky and Eva Cassidy and Robert Bly and Eminem and THE WIRE and Alex Jones and Joe Rogan and Luke Rudkowski and Dwight Swain here.

Some day, I know this crappy little apartment will be the source of a lot of funny stories.

For example, I'm going to tell stories about when the roof leaked directly above the toilet, so every time I had to relieve myself, I'd be subjected to a very strange version of Chinese Water Torture during severe rainstorms. I'll be telling stories about how many things I fixed with duct tape. I'll be telling stories about how the methamphetamine head from 3 doors over used to sneak into my apartment through the windows and steal from me while I was at work until I barred the windows to the point where it's now a fire hazard. I'll be telling stories about how I went around the apartment sniffing for 20 minutes one night, trying to find the source of the smell of fire I was getting—and then suddenly realized the building (from 2 apartments over) was on fire, and I needed to get out immediately. I'll tell stories about the mice and the bugs and the spiders and the broken pipes and the standing water in the shower and the noisy neighbors and so much more.

Most importantly, though, I wrote the final, published version of [ALMOST HOME](#) here. I architected the narrative of that novel here, surprising myself with what I'd come up with as the plot slowly unfolded over time. I found it fascinating to write myself into a corner at night and think, with frustration pouring out of me, "There's no way I can solve this plot problem. It's over. This novel is dead. I'm a total and complete fraud. It's over. I can never write this fucking novel. What was I thinking? It's all over." But then I'd wake up in the morning, get back to work, an idea would come, and the unsolvable problem from the night before was suddenly solved. It felt... miraculous, really, to go from "I can't possibly solve this problem" to "Problem solved. Let's move on." So to ME, miracles have happened here, in this crappy little apartment. Sounds grandiose, maybe, but if you're a writer, I think you'll be able to relate to those "early morning miracles."

And I think what I'll remember most about this crappy little apartment is THAT rollercoaster experience—the excruciating pain and the inexplicable joy—of finishing a novel that I'm proud of. A novel I want to share with YOU, even though we've never met, and probably never will meet.

[ALMOST HOME](#) is the first novel that I tacked up, scene by scene, with colored index cards onto my corkboarded walls. And I did that here. I had it rejected by dozens of literary agents and small presses here. I tacked those rejections up on the corkboarded walls here. I pitched it to hundreds of book-review bloggers here, did giveaways and discounts for it here, promoted it ad nauseum on Twitter here. I came up with the way-too-popular title, [ALMOST HOME](#), here. Right here, in this crappy little apartment.

But, despite all of that, or maybe because of it, I know that new memories await me, and they'll be made in a healthier, less dangerous place. New literary adventures are awaiting my arrival as well. I don't know what they'll be, exactly, but I suspect they'll be just as poignant, just as miraculous, just as enlightening as the ones I've had here, in this crappy little apartment.

I can hardly wait.

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