

Mazie's Diary, March 9, 1939

Fannie brought one of her fancy friends down to the theater last night. First she handed me a beer then she had me shake his hand. Bribery. He gave me a cigarette, the first one I've had in weeks. It tasted as good as I remembered. All of these things I'm not supposed to be having and there I was, having them. Rosie would kill me. We smoked for a minute, shooting the breeze. Then the fella told me he was there on a mission and he wouldn't take no for an answer. He wanted me to write a book about my life.

I said: Who cares about my life? I just sit in this ticket booth all day.

And he said: Plenty of people care, you run these streets. Fannie stood back, quiet, unlike usual. She was watching the both of us, or maybe it was only him. She likes these young boys around, and I guess I can't blame her. I'll hand this one a few points for his looks. He was real slick, tan, a Mediterranean fella in a bespoke suit. He's twenty-five if a day, but it didn't matter, he carried himself like he'd known everything about life since birth. It must be so easy to have all the answers already. It must be so easy to think you know the truth.

I said: I'm not so interesting. It's the bums that have the real story.

And he said: No, the bums are interesting because of you. If he can't see why they're worth talking about, then what kind of story would he want me to tell? Ten years of my life I've been helping those bums, I couldn't ignore them. And this guy, with his suit and his hair and his eyes, he wants me to forget their names.

I started closing up shop. Counting the change I'd already counted, just so he'd get the hint.

Fannie said: I'm sorry I brought him here.

I said: Everyone's welcome at the Venice Theater, even the snobs.

He said: You have a story to tell. I'm never wrong about these things. You're the queen, so tell the story of your kingdom. That cigarette was perched on his lips like it was part of his flesh. I wanted a hundred more of them but the doc says no. He slid his hand through the slot of the cage before he left. We shook, but then we still kept holding hands, and it made me feel young again under my skin, like I was a piece of ice melting in the sun. Just a pool of me left behind. We stood there like that. He held my hand, I held his. I'm a sucker. An old lady. A fool.

He said: Think about it.

Then this morning I dug you out of the closet and dusted you off. So all right, I'm thinking about it.