

When Ayn Rand Walked In L.A.

by

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“Economic redlining sponsored by financial institutions makes the situation in South L.A. worse,” said Harris-Dawson, who remembered former Federal Reserve bank head Alan Greenspan walking the vacant and burned out lots in South L.A. and promising re-investment.

DESCRIPTION

A trio of LA economic desperates holds Alan Greenspan captive in hopes the capitalist system will reconfigure.

CHARACTERS

- ALAN GREENSPAN
- AFREEN (female)
- SALIM (male)
- NAHIM (male)

MISCELLANEOUS

- The year is 1998

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ALAN GREENSPAN sits in a chair in some large echoing space—a warehouse, perhaps. Under fluorescent light.

Also seated is NAHIM. AFREEN and SALIM stand. They all observe GREENSPAN.

NAHIM

I don't know if this is good luck or the worst luck ever.

AFREEN

Couldn't help myself.

SALIM

Snatching up the Chairman of the Federal Reserve?

AFREEN

Yeah.

SALIM

Worst, not good. Like, what kind of trade-in power does he bring to the table?

GREENSPAN

They will find me.

SALIM

Of course—of course they're gonna find him because we're gonna let Mr. Alan Greenspan go.

AFREEN

No.

NAHIM

I agree.

AFREEN

Thanks.

SALIM

You two are bat shit—bat shit and a half.

AFREEN

I mean, when's the next time a motherfucker like him—

NAHIM

Right.

AFREEN

—is gonna walk through this territory?

NAHIM

Right. Not in 1998 again. Not ever again.

AFREEN

Snatch what you can, get what you can for it.

SALIM

And what do you think we can get for him? The grab wasn't the bad idea—the bad idea was him—like, why would you bring something dead and rotten into your home?

NAHIM

I think you just hurt his feelings.

SALIM

If we'd taken Waters instead—

AFREEN

Maxine is a friend.

SALIM

A friend? You on the Congresswoman's Palm Pilot? You on her Christmas card list? Didn't think so.

SOUND: Helicopter overflight—up loud, then fades away.

They all look up and track the sound.

NAHIM

See the look on this face? Too bad.

AFREEN

Too bad.

GREENSPAN

They'll come back.

SALIM

They will come back.

NAHIM

Mr. Greenspan, I'm surprised—aren't you two surprised? He didn't use 1400 syllables to say something simple—that's how he tells his lies—must be nervous.

SALIM

He may be a piece of shit, but he's their piece of shit, and they won't leave him behind—

NAHIM walks over to SALIM and gives him a big hug.

NAHIM

Friend, what do you we have to lose? Hmm? What do we have to lose that he hasn't already lost for us?

AFREEN

Come on.

SALIM gives in to the moment. NAHIM turns back to GREENSPAN.

NAHIM

The power of the state will come back—the power of your state, not ours. Why did you ever come walking around south-central L.A. and lead us into a temptation that we had no choice but to give in to?

GREENSPAN

I came—

NAHIM

Come on.

GREENSPAN

I came to see what good can be done.

NAHIM

Really.

NAHIM looks at SALIM and AFREEN with mock admiration. AFREEN laughs. Even SALIM finds himself laughing.

SALIM

I am surprised his lips don't turn into, like, scorpions, or dry up from embarrassment.

AFREEN

I'm surprised words like those ever make it to the light of day from a tar pit like him.

NAHIM

I didn't—we didn't—wake up this morning planning on your kidnap, but, well, there you were, walking around photo-op-ing the former riot scene and, well—I only wish I could have Rodney-King'd you in front of the cameras, though that is not in my nature, but given the bullshit you've put us through, this country through, you deserve to have the shit beaten out of you three or four times on video before you can begin to call yourself anything close to the kind of human being that could do anything called "good."

NAHIM gets ahold of himself—this isn't pleasant for him.

GREENSPAN

Who are you? Who are all of you?

NAHIM

We're your editors.

GREENSPAN

I don't need any editing.

SALIM

You're a dangerous man because you believe in a utopia, so, yes, you need some editing.

GREENSPAN

Let me go. I've seen your faces.

AFREEN

You're not tied down, not shackled.

GREENSPAN holds up his hands and suddenly realizes that he is indeed free to go, has been free to go all along.

SALIM

Didn't expect that, did you?

GREENSPAN

Why?

NAHIM

Because you can't debate with someone when they're enslaved.

GREENSPAN

You have an argument with me.

AFREEN laughs.

AFREEN

I don't know—is it possible to argue with someone who is not in his right mind? Like teaching a pig to sing—a waste of time, and it irritates the pig.

GREENSPAN gives them all the once-over, then turns to leave.

SALIM

There goes the coward.

NAHIM

There goes the mad man, the destroyer of worlds.

SALIM

Don't make him bigger than he isn't. "Coward" fits best.

AFREEN

Agreed. Coward. A coward pussy.

GREENSPAN stops, then exits.

SOUND: Helicopter overflight—up loud, then fades away.

The three wait. NAHIM shouts.

NAHIM

Did'ya leave or did'ya stay?

They listen.

SOUND: Two police cars, sirens going, doppler by.

GREENSPAN reënters. The four stare at each other.

NAHIM

Those could've given you a ride—

GREENSPAN

Why do you say that? Why do say I'm not in my right mind?

NAHIM

You want to come sit back down? Like you do in front of all those Congressional committees that you baffle and punk out?

GREENSPAN

I'll stand.

NAHIM

Where do we begin with you, Mr. Greenspan? Let's begin with your capitalist utopia—"the efficiency of markets to enlarge standards of living."

GREENSPAN

That's not utopia, markets are not a utopia, they're rational machines to allocate—

AFREEN

Every capitalist wants to believe we live in the best of all possible worlds.

SALIM

That people get what they deserve.

AFREEN

And they deserve whatever it is they get.

GREENSPAN

And the market makes sure that happens—but a market that's not tied down, regulated. Free flow of everything, everyone gets to play.

NAHIM

Such a clean theology.

AFREEN

The capitalist rapture.

SALIM

You get any “irrational exuberance”—see, we read the papers—get any of that on your little walk through the bombed-out parts—the still bombed-out parts, six years post-Rodney, post-rebellion? Get much of a sense of everyone getting’ to “play”? Honest now. Honest—

GREENSPAN

No.

NAHIM

Because your markets don’t hunt here. We’re not necessary for your markets except that what little money we have in our pockets is like coal, something to be dug out of us and never put back. C’mon, Mr. G.—you mean it never occurred to you that what you and Ayn Rand and her crowd and all your buds on “The Street”—

SALIM

Etcetera, etcetera.

NAHIM

—are engaged in are occult practices?

AFREEN

Witchcraft. Reading animal guts. Throwing bones.

SALIM

You and your little governors at your meetings sifting through magical numbers looking for The Word—talk about a cult!

NAHIM

Come on, G., give us your best shot. Give us your core belief, the thing about “markets” and “efficiency” that gets you up the morning, the—the—

SALIM

The thing that if we ripped it out of you, you would find life even more stupid and useless than it already is because of what you’ve done.

AFREEN

Can you really say—really say—given what you saw out there, little as it was, that the free market is the thing that makes you whole and gives meaning to your universe?

SOUND: A concurrence of two police cars, sirens going, and the helicopter, all of it really really loud.

Something happens to GREENSPAN during the soundburst—it is the rapture he feels, it is epilepsy, it is true belief, it is a nervous breakdown, it is a visitation, it is sexual release. GREENSPAN falls, writhes, dances to this tune.

GREENSPAN

Ayn! Ayn! Ayn! Ayn! John Galt—yes, John Gaaaalt!! Goollddd
ssttaannddard—ahhhh!!!—Fountainhead!—ohhhh!!—Atlas—
Exuberance! Exuberance!

GREENSPAN speaks the next words as if it were one long sentence and as fast as he can.

GREENSPAN

“For monetary policy to foster maximum sustainable economic growth, it is useful to preempt forces of imbalance before they threaten economic stability. But this may not always be possible--the future at times can be too opaque to penetrate. When we can be preemptive we should be, because modest preemptive actions can obviate the need of more drastic actions at a later date that could destabilize the economy.”

All too much for him, and GREENSPAN swoons. The other three are in amused shock. GREENSPAN suddenly pops up and blurts out—again, all words in a rush.

GREENSPAN

Capitalism is a lot like an airplane in which the pilot announces to his passengers that he has two pieces of news to tell them. The good news is that they are traveling at the pre-established speed of 600 miles an hour and all the systems on the plane are functioning perfectly. The bad news is that they are lost.

GREENSPAN looks stunned by the revelation, then swoons again—out cold.

They wait to see if GREENSPAN will offer an encore. He doesn't. They cannot help bursting into laughter. AFREEN kneels by him.

NAHIM

Oh man—I wonder if it's going to be like Saul on the road to Damascus.

SALIM
Or Jack Nicholson in Cuckoo's Nest.

AFREEN strokes his hair.

SALIM
What are you doing? And be sure to disinfect your hand after doing that.

AFREEN
It's like finding something in the middle of the road that's been hit and ain't dead yet—maybe even not that hard hit, maybe even with a chance for repair.

NAHIM
Do you kill it or do you move it?

AFREEN
Not even that—not only that—just feel sorry for something so unfortunate. He got infected too early on.

SALIM
Yeah, well, his infection's just about ruined everything, so I've got no sympathy—rabies you put down, not share with one another. Kill it, don't move it.

NAHIM
You want to do that?

This gives SALIM pause. AFREEN looks at him.

AFREEN
Shit.

NAHIM
Nothing stopping you from doing that.

SOUND: A low rumble—still far away, but the low rumble of something like a tank moving slowly forward. It builds throughout.

NAHIM
Get rid of the scourge. Once. And for all of us.

SALIM looks at them both. He goes to GREENSPAN, kneels by him, looks at him, then AFREEN.

SALIM

What about you?

AFREEN

Killing one cockroach don't change the DNA of the species.

SALIM

But it does get rid of the one roach.

AFREEN

No argument there.

SALIM

Which devils are you two playing on which of my shoulders here?

SOUND: The rumbling, though still low, is evident—maybe even felt.

AFREEN looks up.

AFREEN

Grim Reaper's on its way, it seems.

NAHIM

Narrows the mind. Maybe he converts into Paul, maybe he stays as Saul—

AFREEN

Crap shoot either way.

SALIM

Yeah, but I let him live, I have a better chance of living—and you're right about changing the DNA of the species—killing him just makes a mess, the rest of his brother cockroaches out there still, and the fucking-over marches on with or without him.

SOUND: Rumbling is significant now.

GREENSPAN snaps awake, sits up, looks around, stands up. NAHIM gestures for GREENSPAN to leave.

NAHIM

Your driver's coming for you.

GREENSPAN

Exuberance. Exuberance.

GREENSPAN leaves.

SOUND: Rumbling is up full, stays at full pitch. Now mixed with shouting voices.

The three of them wait.

SOUND: Rumbling fades away, voices fade away.

No police come in to the building.

AFREEN

Well—guess he did us a favor. Guess we were worth his time and trouble.

NAHIM

Doesn't mean that we should hang out here any longer than necessary.

SALIM hugs AFREEN.

SALIM

I think you did a great thing.

AFREEN

Which part?

SALIM

All your parts.

NAHIM

Let's go before the utopia comes back and gives us some exuberance up our ass.

They move to leave.

AFREEN

Which part?

SALIM

Getting me not to kill him.

NAHIM

Hard not to want to blow the whole fucking thing up, whatever piece of it you can get your hands on.

AFREEN

Especially when you got your own utopia.

SALIM

It is not a utopia, what I have!

AFREEN

“Power of the people”—you mean the people we know, all the chuckleheads and burn-outs and low-lives we know? Imagine—the universe in their hands!

SALIM

You gotta start somewhere—if it don’t work with them, it ain’t gonna work with anybody—

AFREEN

Talk about pushing a rock up a mountain of shit—

SALIM

You’ve got no faith—

AFREEN

I got as much faith in faith as when the dentist says, “This ain’t gonna hurt.”

NAHIM

Let’s do this over some food and drink, eh?

They continue the argument as they exit.

SOUND: Three expert gunshots.

Lights to black.