

The
Butterfly Breeze



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THE BUTTERFLY BREEZE

ONE

1980

It was a cold night in New York City. Gary Mullens made his way down Broadway, past Christmas shoppers and homeless people. He was headed for West 72nd Street.

It seemed to him that New York in this time period didn't look much different to what it was in the future - except of course for the World Trade Towers back in the business district he'd just left, completed six years previously. He walked past a cinema in Times Square, its marquee advertising the film *Ordinary People*, starring Donald Sutherland, Jane Fonda and Timothy Hutton. He'd seen it on dvd a long time ago and remembered it as a fairly dull film. But here it was a runaway success.

A bookstore near the cinema was still open. He had some time, so he decided to go in and look around. It had occurred to him that he hadn't brought anything to read on this trip. He perused the shelves and looked at the latest releases. There were some Stephen Kings, Jacqueline Sussans and some Norman Mailers. Nothing of interest to him, apart from the King novels, and he'd read them already. He walked over to the Science Fiction section and noted with a grin that it wasn't full of thick, serialized fantasy novels all trying to outdo *Lord of the Rings*. It contained actual science fiction books and classic science fiction authors. There was Asimov, Heinlein, Philip K Dick, even some Ursula Le Guin. He sighed.

A little further on, he noticed the Classic Literature section and was surprised to find they had included J.D. Salinger's *Catcher In The Rye* there. It was certainly a classic of American literature. He'd also read that long ago. But he thought of Classic Lit as being all those stuffy English and Russian novels and authors from the Nineteenth Century: Dickens and Austen and Dostoyevsky and the like.

He took the *Catcher* off the shelf and looked at it. As usual it had a featureless cover. Salinger apparently had a thing for plain covers of his works - nothing pictorial for him. Gary was suddenly struck by a thought and realized he held in his hand the perfect novel to read here at this time, on this mission. The synchronicity of it was so right that he just had to smile.

“That’s right, it was his favorite. Bloody hell!” he said to himself.

Turning into Columbus Avenue, getting closer to his destination now, he mused on the sequence of events that had brought him here to this moment. First the night, not so long ago, in the *Starbucks* in San Bernadino with his friends, discussing the possibilities of time travel. Then the plan to thwart the government and the sexy yet duplicitous agent Flores. And then the trip through the Gate to Brazil, coming out of that chamber on the lower eastern slopes of the Andes, and getting by on his broken Spanish in that Portuguese-speaking country to complete his mission there. Then back through the Gate, through time, to here in 1980.

That was two days ago. He’d brought some Twenty-first Century money with him. It was a risk using it in this time, but the taxi driver who had taken him from Montecito to New York City hadn’t noticed. He would dearly have loved to take advantage of his situation and go to an off track betting shop and lay his money down on some sure thing that he knew about from the future. But the sad fact was he had no idea about sports results or horse race results or anything gambling-wise, from this time. It wasn’t as though he could make use of an actual *Gray’s Sports Almanac*, as used by the character Griff in the film *Back To The Future 2*. Although something like that would definitely come in handy. No, the only sure thing he knew of about this time was that a certain music legend would soon be murdered.

He took a room in a small hotel in Greenwich Village, paying cash and no questions asked. On the second day he checked out the building where it would all go down, then wandered Central Park and Greenwich Village, checking out the record stores.

New York was a revelation to him. The buildings, the people, the steam coming out of the subway grates: it looked exactly like it did in the movies.

That night, the night before his mission here, he went to the Sheraton Hotel to seek out the man he was after - his *quarry* as he thought of him. He saw him once in the lobby, wearing his black coat and making his way up to his room for the night. He remembered the story about him, about his *quarry* partaking of an escort girl in that very place, on that very night. It gave him the creeps. He could have, in theory, gone to his room and confronted him there and then. But it was too soon. It would not have the impact of the way he was going to do it.

After turning right into 72nd Street, he was now at the intersection with Central Park West. Across the road he could see the building, the hotel rising up ten stories high. It was an old building: the architectural style was North German Renaissance. It had high gables, balustrades and archways. It looked like a good place to commit murder.

The Man was not up there in his seventh floor apartment, he was at a radio station giving an interview. Gary looked at the main entrance of the building and saw the doorman and no one else. *Where is he?* he thought. He walked across 72nd Street, looking about for his *quarry*, then spotted him walking away from a car on the other side of Central Park West. That must have been the photographer he'd just seen off. They'd already had the famous meeting with *the Man*, where he'd signed a copy of his album *Double Fantasy* and had his picture taken with the one who would soon kill him. The *quarry* was wearing a dark coat and a stupid winter hat with ear protectors.

Gary saw he was coming right towards him, so he walked on a block or two so as not to arouse his suspicions or scare him off. That was the last thing he wanted. It would blow his entire schedule and throw everything into chaos. He would not be able to predict his *quarry*'s movements after tonight if he did not go through with his plans.

He looked at his watch. It was nearly nine thirty p.m. Not long now, he needed to make his move soon. But there were people

still walking around - too many, in fact. He needed to wait a while longer for the sidewalks to empty out a bit more.

He was nervous, far more than he thought he'd be. He reached into his pocket and put his hand on the device he had there. He hoped it would do the trick. It wasn't really an adequate defense against a gun, but he hoped the surprise would be enough. He reminded himself why he didn't just call the cops and tip them off about the guy. They might not believe him, or even if they did, they might not get there in time. No, this was the best way.

He looked at his watch again: ten o'clock. It was time.

But he hesitated. Now that he was finally here and the time was upon him, he didn't know if he could go through with it. The magnitude of the thing he was about to do was starting to get to him. He felt frozen to the spot.

He knew he needed to psyche himself up – but how? The only other thing he could think of at the moment was the argument he'd had with his best friend Ron Everson before the trip. "You're gambling with your family" Ron had said to him. That had hurt: mainly because he knew it was true. And now Ron had gone off with Charlie on some lark into the Wild West. That also had hurt. Gary couldn't help but feel as though he'd been thrown over for someone else.

But he had gone ahead with it anyway. Why? Just to prove to Ron that he could do it? No, it was more than that. There was definitely a need in him to do this, to make things right. He was not one for psycho-analyzing his own motives, but he thought that maybe a part of him was still the resentful, insecure boy he knew he had been in his youth, trying to strike out, to make his mark on the world, to show *them* he wasn't some weak little victim. That he mattered.

The thought disturbed him, but it did the trick. He was psyched up now.

He steeled himself and walked back towards the building. The sidewalk was empty now, only a few cars going by. Coming to the side entrance he saw the *quarry* leaning against the arched wall there in the shadows, his black-rimmed glasses catching intermittent points of light. Gary moved off the sidewalk and

went straight for the side entrance as though he had business inside, just as he'd rehearsed it in his mind. He pretended not to notice the man leaning there until he was upon him, at which point he gave a casual "Hi". Then he stopped, turned around and said to the man: "Hey, you wouldn't have the time on you, would you?"

The man looked agitated, surprised to be spoken to, but he obligingly took his hands out of his coat pockets and looked at his watch. That was when Gary pounced with his device: it was a 15 million volt stun gun. He pushed it into the man's chest as hard as he could, and it emitted a loud crack.

The man yelped and shook with the voltage going through him and slumped to the ground.

Gary then grabbed him and dragged him away from the entrance, further into the shadows, giving him another blast with the gun as he did so. Then he felt in the man's pockets for the gun he knew was there. He took it out and looked at it. It was a snub nose Charter Arms thirty-eight. He put it in his own pocket, and placed a note into the man's pocket where the gun had been. He leaned forward, looking into his *quarry's* face. He looked unconscious, but it didn't matter.

Gary said to him, repeating the words of the note he'd written: "All right Mark Chapman, if you ever try to kill John Lennon or anyone else again, I'll come for you. I know what you are, you mad motherfucker!"

He then drove the stun gun back into Chapman one last time, and as he did so a brief moment of recognition flickered over him. It was only a flash of thought and then it was gone. But it shook him up. It was an image of Ron Everson, staring back at him in shock and surprise.

Gary had only a moment to process the image before he had to walk quickly away from the scene of the crime. After a couple of blocks and no sign of alarm or pursuit, he realized he'd made good his escape. He felt the gun in his pocket. It was the gun Mark Chapman had used to kill John Lennon. But in this alternate timeline, that would not happen. Now Chapman had no gun, and the letter in his pocket would, Gary hoped, keep

him away. But would it be enough? Would it stop Chapman from trying again?

He ducked into a bar and sat down and ordered a drink. He needed it to quieten his nerves. The place was almost empty, just the staff and one other guy down the other end. There was no one else to witness his triumph. Gary's feelings were indescribable. John Winston Lennon, alive to write another day! Man, that was worth celebrating!

He looked at his watch again. It was ten past eleven. John would be safely inside his apartment with Yoko now, oblivious to the danger he'd narrowly avoided. Gary wondered, would this world know, would it ever appreciate what he had done?

At that very moment the bar's music system began playing John's latest song, (Just Like) Starting Over. Gary remembered a quote from John in response to being asked about he and Yoko's future. John had said something about hoping they were a nice old couple living on the coast of Ireland, looking at their 'scrapbook of madness'. He hoped they would get the chance to add more pages to it now. Just like starting over, indeed.

"Here's to ya, Johnny Rhythm!" He looked at himself in the mirror opposite and took another drink. For a moment, Ron's face flashed again before his eyes, requiring Gary to concentrate hard to suppress the thought. He didn't want to deal with all that it implied just now. He wanted to celebrate. But when he looked again in the mirror he saw another face that was not his. It belonged to Mark Chapman.