

FULL

Full Doppelmann did not walk. He floated, seemingly propelled along with his feet on pillows of air—despite the awkwardly heavy-looking construction boots or occasional combat boots he usually wore as part of his uniform while working, along with the Levi's 501s which were absolutely de rigueur. Effortless as a bottle set upright in the Atlantic he was carried along by a resiliency bounding from one wave's crest to the next. Of course the world in which he moved could also be as tumultuous and stormy as any ocean—and as dangerous. At any rate he flowed with it as if he were a cork always at the top. Nothing seemed to weigh down the sparkling ballet that was choreographed by him for his day after day existence. Full (short for Fullerton Geiss Doppelmann III) did not let this somewhat ponderous name weigh him down as well, either. He was known simply, by his friends who were many, as “Full”, and lightly floated among them like a honeybee among blossoms. He had properly cropped hair the colour of a bright penny, and sometimes or not sported a mustache of a shade of a tarnished cent. To the world at large that he

inhabited, Full's life was laden only with a willingness to smile, oftentimes knowingly, and charm. He appeared effortlessly to float.

He had appeared in New York, after schooling, at some previous but unknown date because it seemed the inevitable thing to be done—New York being a cornucopia of excitement and delights. It was always thus, of course, for every generation of excitable and anxious arrivals, arriving by train from university or farm, but in those heady days of the early nineteen-seventies it was an especially open-armed era of fresh excitement, intensity and freedom. We flocked to mecca. to the wonderful land of Oz, glittering emerald city. Full—he had bobbed like “a duck to water”. Through acquaintances, drifting into the precincts of a luminous world of show business he began to work in the production aspects of theatre, New York being in the east the epicenter of that particular industry encompassing glamour and drama. Full relished his work running all over the various shopping districts of the kaleidoscope of city, his errands diminishing a daily list of chores, fulfilling the demands of designers and technicians, traveling by subway and taxi and sidewalk, meeting all sorts of people. Full worked along with an old school chum; he shared a spacious-enough by New York dimensions apartment with a revolving cast of semi-permanent or numerous roommates, other arrivees from various parts of the

country or his old school. Though, or certainly as a result of being, originally from Philadelphia, of course Full knew, and could execute admirably if prompted, a real “Texas curtsy” for presentation. It proved his limber agility, and such unmentioned charms as he surely showed to his most intimates. Publicly this gesture proclaimed a quiet, refined, but bravura self-assurance as he floated about his life. He was, as were we all, a devotee of musical theatre—the romance and jaunty spectacle of it, the rhythmns of its' stage life. For we all coming to live in New York was not just a passage; it was entering into life itself—however dreamy the milieu. Full, and our contemporaries, knew, as always had, that the teeming scope of the city was a magnet for a consciously or not certain type of individual, a type attracted to the artistic—an attracted young person with a certain sense to beauty, or the pageant of history, or a certain sensitiveness of heart.

New York was then such an amusement park—a playland of thrills. Manhattan island shined with electricity like a magic carpet spread beneath our eager feet, ready to whisk us into the air. We came there, with varying measures of brazenness; we worked; we played; we mingled; we safaried; and we danced. And we danced more. Full took part in it all, his outlook toward the joy of life was never shown to tire. We all, in our own cups, were spinning,

twirling, in the tilt-a-whirl ride of the city. Day, and night, each day, each night; it seemed it would never stop—the giddiness of adventure. And, too, love was in the air. We had only to reach out and find it—touching its' smiling face, looking it in the eyes.

The young are a restless brood. We searched abroad the magic city, Manhattan, and its' melody of vitality. Each previous era that we could hear of, that echoed toward us, seemed to latch onto its' music: piano, organ-grinders, brass Sousa, ragtime, vaudeville and charleston and 'tin-pan alley', war years' big bands, the romance of golden Broadway, doo-wop, smokey jazz, acoustic folk, tinkling cabaret boites, and our time was now strobe-beat disco. Insistently pulsing and driven, it propelled the pace of days and of nights. It was the nighttime counterpoint, or perhaps athrobbing bass-line, of the days' dewy love songs of Broadway.

Being “of the theatre”, even just the fringes of its' aura, of dim backstage hallways to wardrobe rooms, was a further fantasy alongside the fantasy of simply being in New York's amusement park, airy fantasy built rising atop one another. This is where I first met Full; we both worked in the behind-the-scenes workrooms that kept theatre tapping in its' shuffle along. Some lightness in

Full drew people to him, and it was easily inevitable to be enticed into wanting to be in the presence of his circle. (This would prove eventually to be Full's demise; but at that time no one could imagine such consequences.) Though Full was of an indeterminate age, he had to be a few years slight older than I. Early after our first meeting in work, our first real shared adventure was to be sent with a new production to its' "out-of-town" try-out, which happened to be in Philadelphia. We had been booked into the Bellevue-Stratford, to share a double room. After a long day of work separately running our various errands, and sitting on call through an evening's dress rehearsal, we each, rather exhausted, having sat through company notes as well, retired to our room. Mostly silently getting ready for bed amid the Bellevue-Stratford's rather homey old-fashioned furniture, as a crystal moment in our rather brief acquaintance, it stunned to see him while he dropped his clothes so effortlessly, emerging like a Botticelli *danseur*, revealing the prime beauty of a freckled youth, aglow as a candle. No false modesty marred his openness, his direct genuineness, his innocent-seeming nonchalance. Myself, as a younger, reticently shy, (and, in a most unfortunate and crushing manner, somewhat recently wounded voyager), I rather coyly wrapped myself in a robe to slip into my bed. Attempting some conversation, lights out, I spoke shyly. At last he said, "Let's just sleep."

In addition to his inherent cheer Full could as well project a “knowing” quality, maintaining a certain sense of worldliness and cosmopolitan sophistication. (though, if allowed, he probably would have worn the 501s with his dress clothes—which had hung unused in his closet for quite some time). This aspect probably came as some result of a certain rebelliousness, of growing up in his not-discussed Philadelphia family. Over the next years we worked together many instances.

Once, later, relating a story of a disturbingly worrisome memory which I carried with others always in the dark corners of my head, we sat in the stillness of past-midnight hours near the windowlight on the fire escape of the Perry Street apartment, It was a very warm evening, slowly winding down after a night of traipsing the city, still now and whispering, darkness covering the dwindling night, a streetlight at the end of the block illuminating the thick humid air hanging above the street. We were languid but unable to sleep, spinning listlessly, yet aware of the city's weakened pulse, but languorous, contemplative, in a time of evening when confidences are brought to the surface. The memory involved a birthday party I had attended years before, a birthday celebration for a mutual British acquaintance who I had met through work, before I had even known Full. The party had been on a brisk autumn

evening, and I had felt compelled to go, though alone, though knowing I likely would see there other certain mutual friends who would tamp my spirits, but I could perhaps circuitiously avoid. The theatre world was made up of small intersecting circles, tight, shifting. High in one of the old war-era apartment buildings, the British design-assistant and her fiance were hosting the birthday celebration in her apartment. I had not been there before. It was a typically small New York apartment, and the crowd was large, with arrivals throughout the evening. We had been invited to sit on all the assembled chairs, and we were filling them to the limit. Some of the guests I knew, and some I did not. We all chatted, getting acquainted or re-acquainted, awaiting latecomers and the arrival of the cake. Sitting on a sofa with several people, I faced the door. We all talked. The evening was a sparkling script. A bit later, a couple arrived; the hostess led them in. And there it was, the moment I knew would be coming. Again face to face; no where to run. One was an old love of mine accompanied with their current long-time partner. A moment of sinking despair clutched me. All the seats were full, but the person next to me (I cannot even now remember who) moved a bit down the sofa making space and cheerily announced, "Here, you can sit here." The current spouse declined, to lean against the wall, and slyly indicated that my old love, my disturbing old love, the

one who had abandoned me as useless, the one who refused to speak to me, should sit jammed next me on the sofa, close as sardines in a tin. Sudden frightening attack of panic, but I was incapable to flee. Silent, he forced himself forward to take the seat, and was on top of me, shoulder to shoulder, thigh to thigh, but keeping our hands aside. My nerves jangled and pulsed, my body wedged into immobility. He was still the most beautiful boy that I had ever seen, for whatever the reason might be. That touch seared me. It laid already a scar atop my unhealing scar, all the way up and down our touched arms and all the way to my heart, searing.

Amiable conversation continued on around us, but I could say nothing. Our bodies were pinioned together, but the silence from our shoulders spoke no words. At a later point, in the way of circular gatherings, we all moved; it must have been for the singing or the cake.

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Full and I had languished into long pauses. We sighed. The story had become extended, and weary. It had been a long time ago—an ancient history, though living still. Now—the humid air, and darkness, hung heavier than ever. At that, I could see dimly and feel as Full fixed on me that rare “knowing” look—

the one that came from inside behind his lighter-than-air facade. Again he sighed, a half-weary comment. I lapsed into prolonging silence, adrift thinking about the past. The look did so much as to remind me of the intonation of the old serial drama, "There are eight million stories in the Naked City;..."

--J. F. Lowe