

# Someplace Else



Eli  
Geller



**SOMEPLACE**  
*ELSE*

Eli Geller



Strategic book Group

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## CHAPTER ONE

MAYBE IF I'D STAYED HOME that night, nothing would have happened. Who knows?

Anyway, Friday was my night out and I had to get away for those few hours or I'd go nuts.

So I went and by morning my world was upside down.

Like they say, life is full of surprises. Not all of them are happy ones.

As always, on the eve of each weekend, I prepared for the night out to look my very best. I showered and shaved, put on fresh underwear and a navy blue suit. A solid red tie on a white shirt went nicely with the suit. I wet a comb and ran it through my hair before the mirror. I turned off the bathroom light and I was on my way.

I paused by the front room where Ma sat watching television, watching it endlessly. This was what her life had come to; television and occasional visits from her friend, Daisy. A stroke and subsequent broken leg had rendered her housebound for several years now.

How did people in her situation survive before television? I often wondered.

She had a cell phone hanging by a loop to her wrist in case she needed help when I wasn't around. There was a walker next to where she sat, her ticket to move around the apartment. In a corner was her wheelchair for when Carlos, the friendly building super, took her in his car to the doctor, the bank, shopping, wherever.

"Ma, I'm going out."

Her head turned. She looked terrible, worse than the last time I saw her and that was when? A couple hours ago, when I got home from work.

Just the sight left a sick feeling in my stomach. Her face was the color of ash. More wrinkles than Methuselah and with the weight and torment of the world in her eyes. She was decaying right in front of me.

Her gray hair sat wasted and disheveled on her head and she wore a robe that was old and an absurd chartreuse. She paid something like five dollars for it in a second hand store back when she was able to get around by herself. She was always looking for bargains.

"Where?"

Always "where?"

"A movie maybe. Maybe a social club. I dunno. I haven't decided."

Untrue. I knew exactly where I was going, where I always went Friday evenings. It was a singles' bar but I'd tell her a bar and she'd worry I was becoming a drunk.

And I'd hear about it. I'd hear without end.

"When are you going to meet a nice girl and get married, like your brother and sister?"

"One of these days."

"You always say that, but nothing ever happens. I won't be around forever. I want to see all my children settled down with families before I'm gone."

"Don't talk about when you're gone. When I'm your age, you'll still be here."

A lie. From the way she looked, she couldn't last much longer.

Well, what should I do, tell her that?

Still, one never knew. We lived in an exciting era. Maybe the medics would come up with a magic pill that would cure all her ailments. That would be nice.

"What's that you're watching?" I asked, nodding at the TV.

"I don't know."

"You don't know? Why are you watching if you don't know?"

"What am I going to do? It's watch television or watch the four walls."

I was sorry I asked. Shirley had tried to talk her into socializing with the neighbors. Nobody wanted to socialize, she claimed. Get involved in a seniors' center. She went once and didn't go back.

She had Daisy and she didn't need anyone else. Daisy was her friend.

*Some friend!*

"I'll be back in a little while," I said. "And please, don't wait up. I'll make it home okay."

"Don't be out too late. You know how I worry."

"Don't worry."

*Damn it, don't worry.*

*Christ.*

I hurried down the stairs and when I came out the front door, I ran into Carlos. He was sweeping the sidewalk in the gathering dusk. He was in a pique as he greeted me.

"Look, Harold, look here." He jabbed the broom at a used condom in the gutter.

"Some louse left it on my car."

"Don't look at me," I kidded.

"I wish I'd caught the no-good-son-of-a-bitch. I'd have shoved it down his throat."

He exploded in a sound of rage and frustration. There sat his green Honda Civic, shiny under the streetlights, which he'd bought recently in a trade-in for his ancient gray pickup. The Honda was not quite new but it looked new and had not-high mileage and it was, he said, the "sweetest little car" he'd ever owned. He doted on it like on a child.

And some "no-good-son-of-a-bitch" had gone and left a used condom on it. Who wouldn't be steamed?

"Glass syringes. Drug dealers come around the corner from the Avenue and hang out here. I find hookers bringing their business into the lobby."

"Park Avenue this ain't," I said.

"So that's no reason people have to act like pigs."

"No argument there," I said.

He threw up his arms

"What are you going to do? The cops don't do nothing. Nobody cares."

Me, I didn't like the neighborhood even before all this stuff began happening. I wanted to get the hell out of here almost as far back as I could remember. But Ma wouldn't move.

"My friends are here," she'd say.

"What friends? They all disappeared when you got sick."

"I still got Daisy."

Yuh, sure, Daisy. Maybe Daisy was the reason nobody else ever showed up.

Carlos brightened as he noticed I was spruced up for a night out.

"Going to make the girls happy, eh?"

"I'll try," I smiled back. "I hope nothing happens with--you know--her upstairs."

"Nothing's going to happen. She'll be okay."

"Have you seen her lately? She looks awful."

"Well, she's not a youngster anymore."

"She's not that old, Carlos."

"She's not that young either," he said. "And her health hasn't been too good, y'know."

"That's the point," I said. "Every time I go out, I have to worry what I might find when I come back."

"Don't worry. You go and have a good time. I'll look in on her in a little while. She'll be okay. I'll make sure of it."

"Thanks," I said gratefully.

He patted my arm. "Go and make the girls happy."

I walked the two long cross-town blocks to 8th Avenue and took the subway train downtown to the Village. A short walk along dark winding streets brought me to SHELLY'S PLACE. Early June and it was already turning into the sweaty time of summer. The walk was warm and sticky, even with the sun gone till morning.

A welcome breeze of air conditioning greeted me as I stepped through the door into the dimly lit tavern. A few patrons were straggled around the horseshoe bar. The evening was still young. In another hour or so, the place would be jumping and a live combo would replace the jukebox now belting out a tune.

"Same?" the bartender greeted me with a smile.

I nodded. He remembered me by what I drank but didn't know my name. Fine by me. I didn't care. He didn't have to know my name.

And it didn't really matter what I drank. I didn't care for liquor but I couldn't just sit around and not spend money. So, early on, in my entering of the bar scene, I repeated what I heard somebody else order. It worked for me so I stuck with it.

If tonight was anything like most nights, I'd go home "empty-handed." But I did have some good nights in my past. Not great nights and not many, but it happened.

Maybe tonight I'd have a better than *good* night. It's what kept me coming back week after week. I was a persistent optimist. I couldn't afford not to be. Anyway, this bar drew a lot of foxy chicks so that's why it drew me.

I caught the eye of a girl who looked enticing from where I sat. I offered a smile. She turned away.

I was no quitter. I didn't get dressed for a night out and buy a round trip to the Village and then shell out for a drink to get slapped down by a mere turning away. She could be playing coy.

I got off my stool and took my drink to stand at her shoulder. "Hi, can I buy you a drink?"

"Get lost."

She didn't just say it. She snarled it.

"Sorry," was all I said and slunk back to my stool. I sat there and glared at her for a bit but she didn't look back.

Bitch!

What was she looking for? A jock? A millionaire? Well, I wouldn't pass for a jock. But how did she know I wasn't a millionaire in my sharp suit and tie? Or billionaire, for that matter? She might at least have the curiosity, if not the courtesy, to want to find out.

Too many prima donnas in these places.

That was the way it went most times. They made their decision about me quickly. And usually it wasn't a favorable decision.

*Usually? Invariably.*

Okay, I entertained no illusions about myself. I wasn't a big guy or a macho man. I didn't get a fat income and my job wasn't one to flaunt. These were the things women looked for in a guy, the kind of women I looked for did.

But not all such women--I didn't think. There had to be at least one in a thousand who dug guys who weren't tall and had ordinary jobs and paychecks. That one in a thousand just might walk through the barroom door one of these Friday nights, look at me and think: *there is my dream guy.*

Maybe tonight?

Nine-thirty. The place was filling up. I, still at the bar, was on my second (or was it my third?) drink. I was already feeling a slight buzz. I'd smiled at several women. I'd tried to initiate a chat with someone on the adjacent stool. She chose to ignore me and smiled at the next guy who stopped and spoke to her.

Well, c'est la vie. My *dream girl* wouldn't be making an appearance tonight or she'd have been here by now. I'd kill another ten minutes or so, finish my drink and get the hell out. The air conditioning was losing the battle with the growing crowd. I was feeling sticky again. I knew Ma would be waiting up. So I'd call it a night and head for home and ease her mind.

"Hey, is that you, Harold?"

Wow, my eardrum!

I turned to the voice that blasted in my ear above the din and the music.

"Lance?" I was pleasantly surprised. This guy had been a neighbor on 53rd Street, growing up. His family had gotten out of there long, long ago-- 15 years as I recollected. I'd run into him a few times in all those years.

"That's who I am. What are you doing in a place like this?"

"I wish I knew," I said with a grim laugh. "How about you?"

"Same as you, I guess. No luck, eh?"

"Not tonight."

"Come here often?" he asked.

"Just on Fridays. Don't have to work tomorrow."

"Gee," he said. "I'd been thinking of you lately. It's been a while. When was the last time we saw each other?"

"I met you in Macy's a while back. Must have been four-five years."

"That's right," he grinned.

"You were with a girl, your bride-to-be, you said."

"Yeah, we were shopping for married-life things--kitchenware, appliances.

"So what are you doing here? This place is for singles."

"That's what I am."

"The marriage didn't last?"

"It never happened. I found out just in time she was a phony. She didn't have the kind of money she said she had. She had less money than I had. And I had nothing."

"You would marry for money?"

"If you have money, you can marry for other things. But if you don't have money, like they say about winning, it's not everything. It's the only thing."

I didn't see it that way. But that was me and Lance was Lance.

"Wedding bells haven't rung for you yet?" he asked.

"Still looking," I said.

"I'm surprised. Your brother and sister are both locked in bondage, er, I mean marital bliss. What happened to you?"

"Well, there are factors in my situation."

"By the way, I ran into your brother, Jerry, a while back," Lance said. "He's on disability."

"I know. He can't work, so he says."

"That's a shame. Let me buy you a drink," Lance said. "What are you having?"

"No, no, thanks anyway. I was just about to leave."

"Are you serious? It's not even ten yet."

"I know but my mother is home alone. She's not in the best of health. I worry that something will happen when I'm not there. And she worries I've been mugged and murdered if I'm not home by midnight."

"Well, that's one hell of a life you're leading," Lance said. "What good is your day off tomorrow if you have to be home early tonight?"

"I know."

"And what good is being single if--ditto?"

Son-of-a-bitch was rubbing it in. I didn't like being reminded, but he was telling me exactly how I felt.

Well, what the hell could I do? She was my mother and this was the situation. You have some responsibility to your parents as long as they're alive. Don't you?

Maybe not. Jerry didn't seem to think so.

"I don't like to stay out too late, anyway. The later the hour, the more dangerous the streets and subways are," I said.

Which was true. I supposed I could take a cab if I were out, say until two or three in the morning. But it would still be two or three in the morning. And I'd still find her up, even more frantic and wanting to know "where in the world were you this late?" And "I've been going out of my mind."

*I was out getting laid. Okay with you, Ma?*

Shit!

"You didn't drive here?" Lance asked.

"I don't have a car. And I wouldn't want to drive after drinking, anyway."

"Don't worry about it. My car's outside. I'll drive you home. And you got more than two hours till midnight, so just relax and have a drink with me."

"You drink and drive?"

"I said don't worry about it. I know my capacity. Come on, it's been a while. One drink. I'm buying. And I'm taking you to your front door. So what do you have to lose?"

"I already had three drinks, Lance."

"So another won't kill you."

"I don't want to get drunk."

"One more won't get you drunk."

I surrendered with a shrug. He'd give me a ride home, so what the hell?

"There you go," he said. "Four or five years since we last met? We got a lot of catching up to do. One more time, what are you drinking?"

I told him.

"Two Canadian Clubs and soda, please," he shouted at the bartender.

"So," he said, turning to me, his arm resting on the bar. "Aside from what has been said, how's life been treating you?"

I got a good look at him now. He was growing bald. I remembered when we were kids he had a thick mop of blond curls. Some kids called him Goldilocks. Not anymore. His hair had become dark brown, what was left of it. And the clothes he wore looked shitty, a brown suit jacket over gray pants, somewhat frayed along the edges.

"I'm older but not better," I said. "Still in a job with no future. Still without a wife and family."

I turned away as my eyes grew misty.

"Maybe your problem is you wait for things to happen instead of making them happen."

He had that right. I knew because I'd heard the same thing from Shirley a million times. But who was this guy to talk? Just from the looks, he didn't seem to be batting them out of the ballpark, either.

I'd seen street bums as well dressed.

"How about you?" I asked. "You racing up the ladder of success?"

"I'm racing up an escalator that's going down," he said and laughed.

I figured as much. And I felt a little better about myself.

"What do you do?"

"Actually, I'm in sales."

*Actually?* Like he didn't want to go into detail. Like he maybe sold hot dogs at Yankee Stadium or some such.

Well, who was I to criticize? I wasn't doing all that great myself.

"Making a living at it?" I asked, probing. Maybe I'd glean a little more about these *actual* sales without seeming too brazen about my curiosity.

"It's a living," he said, telling me nothing. He paid the bartender and handed me a fresh drink. He picked up his own.

"*So he says.* What does that mean?" he asked.

"Huh?"

"Jerry. He can't work, *so he says.* That's what you told me."

"Yeah, you got to wonder how disabled he is. He gets around okay. He spends more time at the racetrack than he does at home."

"That so?"

"Absolutely. So don't tell my sister there isn't something he can't do. He really pisses her off with that story. His wife has to work nights at a waitress job while he collects his disability check and blows it on the horses."

"He had a bad fall off a flight of stairs while making a delivery when the railing collapsed. That's what he told me."

"He tells everybody. Did he tell you he got a settlement from the building's owner?"

"He did? A lot?"

"Who knows? He never said how much, just, 'not much.' Well, he wasn't hurt that much either. He had his back taped and he was in bed for a week, maybe two. And then, suddenly he's a gentleman of leisure, getting a regular check for a phony disability."

Lance chuckled. "Don't knock him. Congratulate the guy. I wish I could get a regular check for doing nothing. And have a wife willing to support me."

"Not me," I said. "It's not a life to brag about."

"You're right," he agreed. "I was kidding, of course. So your mother isn't doing too well? That's a shame."

I nodded.

"It must be pretty tough on you."

"Well, it could be worse," I said with a laugh. "At least she doesn't have Alzheimer's. Not yet anyway."

"Count your blessings, Harold. I had an aunt with Alzheimer's. When she finally died, it was like the family hit the lottery. Hey, how about another drink?"

"You said one, Lance."

"Okay, another won't kill you."

"Trying to get me drunk?"

"I won't get you drunk."

"You said one drink. This is the last of my *one* drink. I'm finishing and then you're giving me a ride home like you promised."

"I'll give you a ride home. There are still things to talk about. Who knows when we'll meet again?"

"I dunno."

"Come on, buddy of mine. For old times' sake. Remember all the things we did together as kids? And that time we found ten dollars and took a ride up to the Bronx Zoo without telling anybody? And they had the cops looking for us?"

"Yeah and I still feel guilty about it," I said, smiling with the recollection. "I had my mother going crazy."

"We all do things we're sorry about later. Bartender, two more of the same when you get a chance."

We did have a lot to talk about. He told me about his aunt that had Alzheimer's. And I was ventilating to an old friend and it was good to let it all hang out. Very good. So much so, that I stopped looking at my watch and when he ordered still another round, a short while later, I didn't protest.

"I'm beginning to hate New York," I said. "If not for my mother, I'd have gotten the hell out of here a long time ago."

"And gone where?"

"Just someplace else."

"You are someplace else."

"Huh?"

"You're not in Chicago. You're not in Detroit. So you must be someplace else. Correct?"

"Hey, come on, Lance, huh?"

"The old Abbott and Costello skit. Don't you remember?"

"Come on, huh? I'm talking misery and he turns it into an Abbott and Costello skit."

"No good? Well, try this. Go to court and say you want to be someplace else. And *voilà!*" he snapped his fingers. "You're Mr. Someplace Else."

He laughed. I didn't.

In the midst of our heart-to-heart, some time later, we got distracted by a pair of beauties passing by. He managed to snare one with an arm around her waist and she didn't protest. The other came along willingly and put a friendly hand on my knee.

"I'm Lance and this is my friend from bygone days, Harold. And you are?"

One was Lisa and the other one, with the friendly hand on my knee, was Theodora.

"You can call me Theo."

My old friend from bygone days, it seemed had a way with women. Lance ordered more drinks, three of them.

"Hey, there's four of us," I reminded him.

"I know," he said. "But since I'm driving, I better stop here. No reason to spoil anybody else's fun, though. Right, girls?"

"Oh, absolutely," they chimed and giggled.

We had a session where we did little talking and got a lot of rubbing up close and smooching from the girls. At one point, Theo leaned halfway off my lap to whisper in Lisa's ear. Lisa whispered in Lance's ear. He smiled and whispered back to Theo.

What the hell was that about?

I got over my paranoia as soon as her butt was once again fully ensconced on my lap for more rubbing and smooching. Her hand moved from stroking me down below to stroking my neck. Then her hot wet tongue was mopping around inside my ear.

Wonderful. And no charge whatsoever for the service, unlike my usual "love" sessions.

"We ought to do this more often," I said to Theo.

"We should indeed," she said and giggled.

Lisa said, "Theo, we better go. It's getting toward midnight."

"That late?" Theo looked at her watch. "You're right. My, how time flies when you're having fun."

"Gonna turn into a pumpkin?" Lance asked.

"I have to be up early for another workday, sad to say."

"What kind of work gets you up early on Saturday?" Lance asked.

"I'm an OR nurse," Lisa said with a smile.

"Gee, that's nice. St. Vincent's?"

"Right you are."

Theo was off my lap again, bending toward Lance and Lisa.

Whisper, whisper. . .

I leaned toward them. Theo noticed and went quiet. Lance said, "Do you mind? This is a private conversation," and waved me back.

"About me, huh?"

"Be nice," Theo said, pushing me away.

Then the girls were gone and Lance had some explaining to do.

"Theo likes you. That's what the whispering was about. What's the matter with you Harold?"

"So why did you chase me away?"

"That was Theo's idea. She was shy about letting you hear it."

It didn't sound right. She wasn't shy about rubbing me where it felt good or wandering around inside my ear with her tongue. But shy about admitting something that her activities made evident? I didn't get it.

"So how about another drink?" Lance said.

Another drink? How many had I put away so far?

The numbness that had started earlier was deepening. I thought a while back I had a buzz. This here was new territory for me. This was the real thing. I was feeling it all over. And it was surreal, like I was sitting upright in a dream."

I told Lance.

"You're getting there," he said.

"You said you wouldn't get me drunk."

"And?"

"I'm drunk. You double-crossed me."

"So why are you smiling?"

I giggled.

"Are you having another? Or do you want to be a spoilsport?"

"I'll have another."

Sure, why the hell not?

"And since you like it so much, you pay from now on."

Me pay? I thought this was his party.

Okay, no problem.

I had another. And maybe another. And maybe one after that. I lost count, as consciousness grew dimmer and dreamier.

"Know what?" I said, blissfully in the dream. "I'd like to get laid. That broad put me in the mood. Let's drop in at a massage parlor or someplace. Do you know a spot?"

That was the gist of what I was trying to say. I was having trouble with words and I think my speech was slurred. Lance caught my drift, just the same.

"Shame on you, Harold. Such talk."

I giggled some more. "Come on, I'm serious."

"Finish your drink while I think about it."

I finished my drink and I staggered out, numb and pain-free, with Lance holding on and saying, "steady boy."

I think he was laughing.

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