

CHANGE HELL¹

(an adaptation of the novella and screenplay)

by Edward K. Brown II

A rhapsody of hues during rush hour, local colors scrambled underground to escape the storm, scurried throughout the Penn Station's corridors, jostling each other as they hurry to their respective subway platform, drenched with humour from this uncanny cultural war. A saxophonist stood ready, hunched in a improvised posture, waiting for his pedestrian audience to arrive, an audience of which Peter Wasworth was one. Unfathomable high and low octaves echoed. This abstract, atonal artist chose "Take the 'A' Train" to reveal his soul, to create his attack, hoping that by adapting this classical jazz tune to his avant-garde style, he would procure enough money from the subway-goers for cab-fare home. Wasworth tossed a dollar in change into the saxophone's bell, and demanded that the slaughtering stop immediately; the music was inflaming his hangover. The jazz-artist took a moment from his battle hymn and commented nonchalantly that his rendition was a work-in-progress, and that if he was disturbed again by such immature solicitations, he would shove a number three and a half reed under that person's fingernail! With that stated, he blew. The musician continued his rehearsal, his creative movement. Wasworth stepped back, grinned, and bore the melody.

Wasworth was charmed when the "A" train arrived, and took him downtown to Soho. He stood on Canal Street, gathered his bearings, and darted towards Wooster. Coins jingled in his pocket as he tried to avoid the rain, puddles and people who were also attempting to navigate their way around a sewer effluvium. Within little time, Wasworth reached headquarters, the STOREFRONT.

The STOREFRONT was a co-op, alternative gallery, that is until an artist from the Machiavelli School, Valerie Sabuccia, became sole curator and owner of this for-profit

establishment. The gallery display window was steamed. The condensation on the window was more opaque than the sheer curtain that masked the gallery's interior. Wasworth had been forewarned. He should have arrived early for this reception because of the rumored popularity of this GenX personality: British Post-pop artist Adam Fareswell. Realizing that he was late, Wasworth stratified his gameplan before entering the gallery: skip the gossip, but not the wine. He repeated this mantra to himself as he dashed inside the gallery.

The STOREFRONT was packed with slick, yammering people. No one was paying any attention to the artwork on the walls. They were more intrigued with their own witticisms. Face to face they were, in tune with their own thoughts. From what Wasworth could discern from the corner of his eye while a volunteer, masquerading as a bartender, sloppily filled his second glass of wine was that the paintings were, in pseudo-artspeak, neo-abstract minimalist conceptualism. The paintings, he thought obliquely, were more abstract than conceptual. While sipping his wine and scanning the room for curator Sabuccia, he counted roughly seventeen paintings, oil on canvas, three by five feet. Each consisted of either a singular or di-juxtaposed colors. There were four colors: red, yellow, green and black; however, there was one painting with a quadri-juxtaposed color scheme.

By now, Wasworth had targeted Sabuccia. He raised his glass, toasting her, accidentally splashing wine on his already stained trenchcoat. Noticing Wasworth's buffoonery, Sabuccia approached him, apologized and dabbed his coat as if she had spilled the wine on him after he told her a funny, but vile joke. She then moved fashionably away. Wasworth, charmed by the jouissance that she was able to bring to even the most trifle conversation, chuckled nervously to himself, checked to see if anyone observed the incident, then went to the bar for another drink. Becoming conscious of his desperate looking attire, he wished he could duck into the back office and wait for the others for whom grunge was fashionable, even though the style made one look more wanting than those who were fixtures on street

corners holding a paper cup full of change. Wasworth wanted to be with those who did not belong anywhere except in some back room, in their sanctioned safe haven; he hated adults, wannabe adults even more. However, Sabuccia always made sure to place the bar in front of the office to prevent any gallery-pirates, or any other type of pilferers for that matter, from looting her treasures. Since hiding out was not possible, Wasworth thought a style change was in order, so he fastened the top button of his shirt and blended right in.

Unbeknownst to the reception guests, who were still engrossed completely in their matter of facts, Fareswell stood before one of his works, the red one, with his back to it. He looked at everyone in the gallery to get their attention. No one was interested in the slightest. Fareswell peered across the room to Sabuccia who stood in the corner waiting. She puckered her lips, shrugged her shoulders and offered her hands, touching at the wrists, to the artist insinuating that these were his people, his flock of children on whom he must cast his spell, implying if he did this, she would be his. Feeling the vibe of Sabuccia's psychic transference, Fareswell took a deep breath, then burst joyfully with a hearty yell while his arms flailed about as he gestured congenially. Once he had enough of that, he moved on to the yellow painting and roared ferociously. He raked the air with his hands, gnashed his teeth and furled his brow. Spit flew from his mouth like sparks from an ignited fuse. Realizing that he was becoming too absorbed with the ire of the yellow painting, he placed himself in front of the green one. His voice and gestures, subdued as if disinterested, lethargic--barely a peep out of him. Fareswell, aware that he was losing his audience, stepped before the black painting. He moaned in anguish, contorting his body for emphasis. Emptiness was brought forth as he stood with mouth gaping, his body going limp. The artist continued on through the di-juxtapositions, comparing and complexing his voice and gesticulation respectively to each color in hybrid combination. When Fareswell got to the final painting, the quadi-juxtaposition, he frenzied until exhaustion consumed his senses. He fell to the floor in exasperation. The performance

had been executed; however, the show was about to begin. The now silenced guests viewed the artist and concluded instinctively that this exhibit was a work-in-completion. They followed suit by primally expressing their opinions, grunting and groaning individually and in groups, about the paintings. An awareness charged the gallery, creating a continuity amongst the attendees up to the point when they all became enraptured in convoluted convulsions, in an ominous, gregarious chant.

Wasworth, too inebriated by the wine to be intoxicated by the aesthetic happening-turned-event that was around him, toasted Sabuccia who remained in a corner of the gallery, equally unaffected, scouting for buyers to hawk Fareswell's work. The soon-to-be alcoholic guzzled what was left in his glass, chuckled to himself and placed the glass aside as he headed towards the door. Before leaving, he gave the devious curator a confirming glance by flexing his eyebrows and mouthed, "Nice opening." He slalomed his way through his perception of perturbing, posturing people enmeshed in their psychic primitivisms. On his last dodge before reaching the door, he stumbled over a foot. The foot belonged to the artist, Fareswell, who was still on the floor curled up in a fetus position, eyes closed. Wasworth, with envious contempt in his eye, thought about kicking the artist in the kidney, but he felt the deadly eye of the curator bearing down on him, so instead he opened the door violently and slammed it behind him. Fareswell wobbled on the floor, trying to hold back from bursting with laughter. From outside, Wasworth tried to spy on Sabuccia through the window to see if she had begun her sale-schmooze, but the window was still fogged even though the rain had stopped. He could hear the people's voices inside, dropping off in exasperation.

Wasworth began to cross the street to escape from the success he just witnessed. He took a few steps, reversed his direction back around to the STOREFRONT's window, deeply inhaled through his nose, which sounded like grinding gears, to collect all the mucous he could. Wasworth spat. Contracting from his spitooey, he watched his artistic expression

descend, by the laws of physics, spontaneously down the window. Pedestrians hurried around him. Transfixed by his afterlife in descent, Wasworth caught a glimpse of something printed on the bottom, left-hand corner of the window. Moving in for a closer look, he discovered in embossed lettering, the title of the exhibit. It read: EVERY PERSON HAS A SENSE OF HUMOUR--The Art-Stylings of Adam Fareswell. Wasworth took a quarter out of his pants pocket and scraped across the title. Satisfied with his retribution, he went to the street corner to use the payphone to crank-call Sabuccia. Placing the quarter into the toll slot, Wasworth dialed as if he was trying to poke someone's eye out. Each key tone lasted a few seconds. The last number dialed, stuck. He had to pry the button out with his poorly manicured nails. The call was placed, but the line was busy. A little upset to say the least, he hung up the phone. The quarter did not drop into the coin return. After intensely inspecting the compartment a couple of times and flipping the return lever, he realized his insane behavior and shook it off. Accepting the fact that he was gypped, Wasworth decided to head towards the Bar, where the after-reception-party for Fareswell was going to be held. He whistled poorly "Take the 'A' Train."

Most of the people who had attended the reception were at the BAR when Adam Fareswell arrived with a couple of newfound friends. They did not fight their way through the crowd. They nudged their way to a spot toward the middle of the bar. Farewell asked the groupies to join him for some cocktails, but had not asked them their names, just if they would be his patrons for the evening. Getting to know them was not his intention. He wanted free drinks and cheap laudations. The groupies were more than accommodating with the libations. The two women, twenty-somethings, wanted to hear Fareswell's anecdotes about "the Philosophy of Adam: from Red to Black." Actually, the women wanted to challenge his ideas--rape *him* of his identity. They all laughed and did shots of various liqueurous elixirs in order to prepare for their good time. Little time had passed before the questioning ensued.

"I was there for your opening, Adam, oh, excuse me, ha, Mr. Fareswell, and I think the initial concept was...excellent, but the paintings and the performance was a bunch of sshhit," provoked the first groupie slightly intimidated by the words she used to describe her artistic experience.

Intermittent ooh-ahhs splattered with chuckles trickled from the other instigator. From the background to the fore, Wasworth, not wanting to be noticed, made his way cautiously to where the *menage a trois* stood so to hear what they were saying.

"That's the point," replied Fareswell unshaken. He spoke accenting his British accent so to distinguish the *distingue* of his answer from the churlish question. "I do believe everyone, with the exception of the curator who had to keep an eye on the work at my request, everyone eventually participated in the performance. So, you did, to a certain degree, believe in that, as you say, 'shit.' It is my opinion that everyone in the world, and yes, even in the Global Village art-world, bases their life according to some color scheme that evokes a pattern of personality."

The women enjoyed Fareswell's stuffiness. The three all snickered themselves into hysterics, being too happy-go-lucky. Wasworth, definitely not liking what he overheard, angrily ordered a double for himself, and made sure to lick the whisky that dribbled onto his fingers. He listened even more intently as the second groupie harped about the exhibit's theme.

"C'mon, really Adam. 'EVERY PERSON HAS A SENSE OF HUMOUR'—that is the name of the show right? Okay. You're in New York City. Shit happens every day. Not every one finds it humorous. Doesn't that mean your art is not universal, or 'Global' as you say? There are a lot of distinctions within the art world. Allow me to clarify what I mean with my list of paradigms. There's Tofu Art--intense protein factor/minute fat content; art of physique, that improves muscle tone if you consume it on a regular basis, but also turns your bowels into mush. There's Candy Art--sweet and delicious, but too much of it will make you nauseous. There's Beauty

and the Beast Art--beauty on the outside, beastly on the inside, and it works the other way around. B&B Art is similar to Candy Art, like M&Ms--color coating on the outside, yummy chocolate on the inside--but B&B is more of an intellectual toy, food for the brain, as opposed to C.A., or even T.A.--something that is physically digested. This dichotomy is interesting, but I don't want to get off track. Am I making sense? There's High/Low Art--uppers and downers, quick and slow paced. There's Icon Art--artist/viewer esotericism/eroticism. There are a million morphological interpretations. I'm sick and tired of conceptual art that enlarges the societal microcosms. These *things*, as I affectionately term them, that get blown way out of proportion are the things, if you will excuse the double-oblique metaphor, that are the furthest from the truth as well as relevant to society in general. Their meaning is too minute to be taken seriously, yet those same things command our attention--and just for such a short while. No pertinent info-nympho is being exchanged. They're trends. You are a trendsetter, Fareswell! Trendsetters aren't looking any semblance of truth; they're trying their damndest to hide it. In short, you are the phony, you are a/the joke: at best a piece of candy. There is no discussion about the human dilemma of living. You're not even interested in technique. That's all I have to say."

Not really understanding a word she said, Fareswell was invoked into a diatribe himself. "Art/Life is not only about technique, or concept, or both in tandem. Primarily it is about making connections to/with other forms of being. Please excuse me, but you must be the type of critic who is unable to travel intellectually, let alone physically, any further than the limited aesthetic experience lodged in your minute instantaneous memory. I say that because you came up with those half-baked paradigms about contemporary art, which says to me that you are most likely missing the point of my work. So, about my work, let me begin by saying that everything, everyone is interconnected. Most people ignore this connection, or have it removed from their thought process because of hegemonic cultural dictums. But Art and true artists do explore this 'dilemma' as you call it. They explore it even if it has to be disguised in a

bowl of fruit! Yes, the truth is ever so hidden; however, it is continuously staring directly at you.

"To have an interconnection there must be something that bonds us together, not physically mind you. (Perhaps some of that later, eh!) I propose that it is the concept/precept of color that bonds us together. Now understand, one color on a canvas is somewhat comprehensible both mentally and emotionally to the juvenile eye. Juxtapose two colors representing mental and emotional differences, living on the same canvas--or in a metaphysical sense, the Global Village. That is a bit more difficult to discern. I am not talking about shading. I am talking about the basics: simplicity, one plus the *other* one. For some, it is daunting to comprehend and live with this difference, differences we all share! How complex life can be through four unassuming, primary colors, the attitudes that are already inside us, but not fully explored. I think it is a waste of life not to explore the basics, these foundations of art.

"Speaking of foundations, I received a fellowship to present this exhibit--a nice sized fellowship too. So, there are very important people in the art community, at least, who find confidence in my work. The concept, the paintings, the performance are not a joke--for those who know how to count."

"This is not a joke?! This is not an artist," satired Wasworth who obviously had too much to drink, enough though to give him the courage to make a fool of himself. "This is not a pipe," continued Wasworth as he smacked his forehead. "This is not my beautiful house!" Again, he smacked his forehead. "This is not by beautiful wife!!!"

The other groupies were amused; Fareswell was--not.

"But this is an asshole," labeled the primary colored one.

"Well if the paintings and performance were not a joke, what the hell are they," posited Wasworth, as his face turned double-red. The two groupies were willing to let the situation get out of control--after all, that's what the women wanted. They each leaned in closer to better

hear Fareswell's comments.

"I take that you have been listening to our conversation from a distance, so let me make it easier for you to hear/grasp what I am saying. I shall provide a reference point, if it so does please you. Right. The concept of my art ...is an extrapolation from the Middle Ages and the Renaissance--a way of thinking that I have evolved to fit the nineties. The colors represent different moods of a person's character. The moods and colors were thought of, during that time, as humours. Red was considered to represent the joyous--sanguine; yellow, anger--choleric; green, dull or phlegmatic; black, affected, or in a more meaningful word, melancholic. Mixing the humours created different moods to the already established moods--or so it was believed. Even though this alchemy myth is mumbo-jumbo, I thought you sophisti-cats knew all of this. I should not have to explain it to you. You should at least know the nearest location of the library to check the facts."

"You're full of shit," steamed Wasworth, continuing to heckle. "You got to come all the way over here from Lon-don and insult our intelligence with that shit? I don't believe this shit!! Those paintings that you've done, are not art! Art is...If I am not politically activated to do something, or if it is not entertaining, then it is not art. Bourgeois intellectual bullshit doesn't float on this side of the Atlantic, buddy. Not with me it doesn't. There's no meaning in that crap you're pandering. There is no trace common sense civility. Oh, by the way, I walked out on your shitty performance, umm, art!"

"That is the best compliment I have received all evening. Thank you. I have succeeded in meeting the postmodern challenge. Cheers."

"Po-mo?! That stuff isn't even sir-real. It's disingenuous, imperialist, anti-marginalist guff. Don't mistake me for a philis-tea drinkin'-fundamentalist, or anything like that. I do have an open mind, yessah, and my masters, it's just that your stuff isn't about people. People make the mark around here, not ideas. So what do you have to say about that? See ladies, the

man is speechless. He has no concept whatsoever. I blew his fuckin' mind! I tell you, Fareswell's full of shit!! This here is imported Gothic bullshit!!!"

Having heard enough, Fareswell grabbed a recently vacated barstool tipped over by a fleeing patron for fear of pending violence. The three flinched as the artist picked up the stool and set it upright on the floor. After which, he gasped, then belched while he rubbed his stomach. Unfastening his belt, unzipping his fly, then pulling down his pants and drawers to his knees, Fareswell crouched over the bar stool to take a dump. His face turned the four humours as he gave birth to yet another of his creations. Wasworth and the groupies, to their relief, were finally adequately shocked.

"Napkin, please."

The once undaunting Wasworth assisted with the finishing touches.

"Thank you kind sir, may I have another?"

Wasworth obliged.

Fareswell completed his duty, then quickly zipped and fastened his belt.

"Indeed you are correct, my friends. I am full of shit. The reason, it would seem, is because I have ingested, digested and excreted all of your criticism. As you can see, it was quite nourishing, but ran right through me. Right, at least it was not mush. I will entitle this inspired masterpiece in the name of this fine watering-hole: IMPORTED BAR STOOL. This artifact is a gift from me to you, to all of you," Fareswell shouted. He continued with his dedication, "Share in the celebration of my affection. I would like to propose an exchange program with you fine people. Come, please come visit me in London. I would like each and every one of you to create/perform this artwork in a bar overseas. Here is my card, if you need a personal guide to the PUB. Right. Barkeep! Another round for the lot of us! I would like to propose a toast to conclude this enchanting evening. Don't be timid. Take the drink. Yes, the toast. GOD SAVE. . . (guzzle) . . . MY ASS!!!"

Fareswell placed the glass on the bar and left swiftly. Wasworth was speechless

"Don't leave! I was wrong. You *are* the work of art. Stay," cried the first groupie.

"That man exhibits such genius! And he isn't afraid to admit when he is wrong,"
lamented the second.

"And so polite too. Gimme that napkin! It's better than an autograph!"

"Let's *get* his autograph, and offer him a place to stay for the night."

The two women ran after Fareswell. Wasworth remained, disintegrated.

¹ While this short story is inspired by my experiences in New York City and Philadelphia, PA, all characters represented are fictional. Any character's likeness of living or dead persons is merely coincidental.