



VYTAUTO DIDŽIOJO UNIVERSITETO ŽURNALAS
2012 M. GEGUŽĖ / NR. 3

www.vdusesija.lt



i š t i k i m y b ė

THE GOOD FRIEND

■ Jaq Greenspon

Lecturer by VMU Political Science
and Diplomacy faculty

Robert Tyxe had been a legend more than half his life. He had put out his first album, fronting for a New Wave band called Surf, when he was nineteen. They had a hit single just before they broke up, pushing Tyxe himself into the solo spotlight. And that is where he has remained. For the past 25 years his name would open doors and cause paparazzi to arrive at parties. His songs were used to sell only high-end products and the Broadway show retrospective, although critically drubbed, sold out six months in advance. His life was filled with sunshine. And right now, a half hour before he was supposed to take the stage at the Hard Rock in Vegas for a special benefit show, Sunshine was filled with him. Not that he believed Sunshine was her real name. All he knew was that the pre-show blow-job Mike had arranged for him was doing its job, calming his nerves and putting him in the right frame of mind for the night's gig. He let his mind drift, the tension going with it. He was remembering shows from long ago, back when this was fun and new and—

"Wanna fuck?"

"What?" His voice came out much harsher than he wanted it to, and yet was right in line with what he was feeling.

"I asked," she said while desperately licking his softening cock. "If you want to fuck?"

He was angry now. Mike tells the girls not to talk. Talking wasn't the point of this particular exercise.

Tyxe pushed the girl away and stood up quickly, not bothering to tuck himself back in his pants.

"Get out."

"But..."

The anger left him, replaced by sheer exhaustion. This wasn't fun anymore. Not the girls, not the spotlight, not the singing. None of it.

"Just go. Tell Mike you did your job just fine."

Sunshine started to say something else but by then Robert Tyxe had turned away and wasn't listening anyway. He stared at the bar in his dressing room, the row of bottles all neatly arranged by height, or color or alcohol content...whatever Mike Jensen had written into the contract this week. It had become a joke with them – Mike would create the rider and Tyxe would try and figure out what it was based on the way the dressing room looked.

This game preceded the blow-jobs but had followed the blow. Anything to ease the boredom.

Mike was the only constant in Tyxe's life. Labels, hair and wives came and went but Mike Jensen was always the moat surrounding the star. Nothing got to Tyxe but through Mike. They had been friends before Surf's single "Dog in the Night" made both Rick Dees' and Casey Kasem's lists and the video was being introduced by The Mighty Quinn in the early MTV days. Mike drove Tyxe to his first stint in rehab and stayed in a nearby motel for the duration. The solo albums and sold-out stadium tours which followed stoked the fires of excess but did nothing for the creativity which started the ball rolling. It's hard to get excited when the world is offering itself on a silver platter.

"Put your cock away, I'm coming in."

Mike Jensen walked into the dressing room as if his money had paid for it. He carried a grocery bag in one hand and a wireless mic rig in the other.

"You didn't like Sunset?"

"Shine." Tyxe corrected as he buttoned the fly of his jeans. For not the first time he briefly thanked the fashion gods that the 80s were over.

"Whatever. She was a tasty piece of ass."

"You'd make a shit food taster."

Jensen laughed and set the bag down. Tyxe dug in and found a deli wrapped sandwich. "Turkey and avocado?"

"How would I know, I didn't taste it."

"You never taste anything. Sunshine was all right, not that you'd know."

"I'm saving myself for marriage."

Jensen attached the microphone while Tyxe ate. "You're introduced by Reza—"

"The mayor came out for this? I'm impressed."

"Whatever. He spends a few minutes thanking the masses for coming out and donating, then you. It's a quick and easy forty-five minute set. You can do fifty if you want but any longer and the grand finale doesn't make the 11 o'clocks."

"And I want to make the 11 o'clocks?"

"You do. They'll talk about your philanthropy and announce ticket sales for the upcoming tour all while showing a clip of you singing."

"Singing what?"

"What do you think?"

Tyxe nodded in acquiescence. Jensen finished wiring his friend and slapped him on the back. "You've got about twenty minutes."

Kevin Burnham held the door open for Jensen as he left. Mike looked at him suspiciously. Their animosity was an open secret but Burnham came with the band and Tyxe liked his sound. Jensen didn't have to like it, but as long as Tyxe was happy everyone was happy. It was a small battle and Jensen knew when to take one for the team.

Burnham smiled too broadly and held up a joint for Mike's inspection. It appeared to have already been lit. "Wouldn't want the boss to miss out."

Jensen shook his head and kept walking.

"Miss out on what?" Tyxe asked.

"The boys got some good stuff delivered. Harper's got a guy."

"Harper's always got a guy. Let's see what we got."

Burnham handed the joint over. Robert Tyxe took an appreciative sniff. "This would really screw with my probation."

"Shame, really." Burnham took the spliff and turned away.

Tyxe grabbed it back. "What the hell," he said. "You only live once." He took the lighter

Robert Tyxe closed his eyes for the last time.
 "Jesus, Bob, what the hell happened?"
 Robert Tyxe groaned and rolled over. He
 opened his eyes. That the man standing
 over him was Mike Jensen he was pretty
 sure, but the room looked different, over-

The show went well. Tyxe picked up more energy as the set went on. By the time he was supposed to play his last song, he felt better than he had in years. Mike motioned to him from the wings, moving his hands in a 'wrap it up' gesture. Tyxe smiled, nodded and moved into the finale. The 11 o'clocks would get their story and ticket sales for the new tour would increase. But Tyxe was far from done.



Vilmanto Ramono nuotr.

>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>

He encored with a set of B-sides and lesser-known titles, songs the band had trouble remembering.

Coming off the stage, finally, Tyxe was glistening with sweat but seemed energized and excited. He brushed a damp strand of hair from his face and found Jensen.

"That was amazing!"

"That was 45 minutes too long."

"So? I'm Robert Fucking Tyxe."

"Bob the Asshole."

Tyxe grabbed his friend and kissed him on the forehead. "Get the Doc. I want to see him in the morning," he said in a more serious tone. He walked away before Jensen could respond.

"What do you mean I'm dead?" asked Tyxe.

Doc's gaze never broke from Mike's. "I mean according to the lab results, he shouldn't be alive."

"I shouldn't be alive?" Tyxe was confused.

"Explain," Jensen commanded.

"Toxicology showed positive for aconite. A little can kill. The amount in his blood..." The Doc shook his head in disbelief. "He's dead."

Jensen and Tyxe spoke simultaneously.

"But I'm not dead." - "He's not dead."

"What can I tell you?"

Tyxe ran a hand through his hair and thought absently he needed to get it cut. "So I'm dead," he said, more to himself than anyone else.

Doc headed for the door. Jensen followed. "Keep an eye on him for the next 48 hours," Doc said.

Mike put his hand on Doc's arm to stop him.

"Look, Mike. I know he's alive. I'm not an idiot and you pay me enough to know that."

Mike nodded. He had never seen Doc this serious. "I don't know what's going on, maybe the sample was bad. Fact is he looks great. Heart rate is strong, energy levels seem to be high. Hell, he looks younger than he has in years. Course, that could also be the new rug."

"Bob doesn't wear a rug."

Doc let a knowing smile cross his lips. "I'll be in touch."

Jensen closed the door behind him then joined Tyxe, who was standing on railing of the balcony, surveying his kingdom.

"Hell of a view, huh Mike?"

Robert Tyxe had purchased his Vegas home, a penthouse in one of the financially troubled hi-rises, for a song – ironically one he barely remembered recording – when the market had crashed. From where they stood, the entire Las Vegas Strip was laid out 250 below them, glistening in the desert heat like glass

pebbles under a shallow stream. Tyxe liked Vegas. He had homes in LA, New York, London and Berlin but for Vegas had always felt like home. He identified with the constant re-invention, the diurnal nature of the place. At night, those flat, dull pebbles would become stars, glittering and shining.

Tyxe turned to Jensen and smiled. "I'm hungry. What do dead men eat?"

In this case, steak, medium rare, and scrambled eggs, washed down with a large glass of orange juice.

"That's a healthy appetite for a dead man," Mike pointed out.

"And I could probably eat another steak without thinking about it."

"You want me to order one?" He was already looking for a waitress.

"I want you to find out what aconite is."

"It's a plant, deadly—"

"And now something I don't know," Tyxe snarled.

Mike's eyes opened wide, registering shock and surprise. Tyxe realized he may have sounded a bit harsher than he intended to. There was something going on inside him. He felt good, better than good, really, he felt...clear. Every sound and smell was sharp and focused but he found himself feeling emotionally edgy. There was a nervous energy coursing through him, as if there was too much to do and not enough time to do it. He shut his eyes and took a deep breath, willing himself to calm down.

When he opened his eyes again Mike was looking something up on his smartphone.

"It's also known as Monkshood or Wolfsbane and was the poison of choice for James Joyce and Oscar Wilde."

"Great," sighed Tyxe. "I'm being poisoned by a poet." The earlier tenseness seemed to fade and Tyxe was able to laugh at his situation.

"Or at least an MFA student with a grudge."

A plastic tray containing the check and two mints was set down between them and Tyxe made no movement towards it. Mike grabbed his wallet and started to pull out a credit card. "It's on me," declared Tyxe magnanimously. "I'm feeling generous today."

Mike slid the card in his fingers back into the leather and pulled out a different one, this one embossed with the legend 'Robert Tyxe, Inc.' He wrote down a sizeable tip and put the card on the tray, exchanging it for the mints. As he popped one in his mouth he asked Tyxe about the plans for the day.

"I'm still dead. I'm taking the day off."

Mike laughed. "So...home?"

Tyxe smiled. "No... I think I'll go to the studio."

"I thought the 'late' Robert Tyxe was going to take the day off and have some fun?"

"Oh I am, I will."

"Which studio?"

"Kevin's recording today, isn't he? Where's he at? The Palms?"

Mike looked at him as if he were insane. "Please."

"That's right." Tyxe smirked. It wasn't that the studio suite at the hotel wasn't a good one or that it was too expensive, both of which were true. Instead, the reason Kevin Burnham wasn't recording there was because they didn't like him. Tyxe had recorded a song there, just for the novelty of laying down tracks while lying in bed. He'd put it out as a single and it was during that session that Burnham had worn out his welcome at the hip resort. At a place like that, where you were just as likely to run into an heiress as a \$5 a hand player, it didn't matter how talented you were with a six-string if you got obnoxiously drunk and didn't have a tabloid friendly name to back it up. And when you tried to use your boss's name as a 'get out of jail free' card it bordered on tacky and tacky didn't fly once you left The Strip.

"So where is he?" Tyxe asked.

Mike shook his head. "I don't think it's a good idea."

Robert Tyxe smiled. A real, honest smile, the kind shared by people whose friendship had been battle hardened and heat-sealed. The kind of smile that says we're going to do this because I want to and you're going along because you're my friend.

Mike shook his head again. "I really don't think it's a good idea."

"But you'll drive?"

There was a long silence during which Mike put the returned credit card back in his wallet and pocketed the receipt.

"I'll drive." He said finally. Not because he wanted to, but because it's what you do for a friend.

Tyxe smiled again. This time, there was nothing friendly in his smile.

When Robert Tyxe walked in the front door, the receptionist stopped short. No matter how long you're in the business, there are some people you never expect to walk through your door and Tyxe was high on that list. He knew the effect he had on people and didn't like it from either side. He wasn't happy about being stared at and he didn't like putting people in a position where they wanted

to stare. He wasn't Woody Allan. He couldn't play anonymously in a bar band and have his number listed. When he showed up, it didn't take long before people knew about it. So instead, out of sheer survival, he had developed the Tyxe disguise. When he went out in public, like at breakfast that morning, he looked just enough like himself that no one believed it was him. Like Chaplin coming in third at a Chaplin lookalike contest. And today it wasn't hard. When he looked in the mirror that morning he looked like himself, but himself from five years ago. He couldn't swear to it, but it looked like his hairline was actually creeping back down his forehead. Maybe it was just that it had been so long since he had taken a good look at himself in the mirror he had forgotten what he looked like. Or maybe he looked like such shit backstage anything this morning was an improvement. In any case, the receptionist recognized him, stammered something decidedly against company policy about being a huge fan, asked him to sign something and pointed him towards studio 3. The look on Kevin Burnham's face, though, when he saw Tyxe staring at him from behind the soundboard, was not one of teenage fantasy fueled adulation. For just a minute, darkness clouded his eyes.

Then it passed. Burnham was all smiles as he waved Tyxe into the studio.

"What brings you down?"

Tyxe was all lips and teeth as he walked forward. Behind him, he heard the soft click as the studio door was closed and locked.

Burnham continued. "I figured I'd let you hear the tracks in rough form, see if you had any advice?" "Advice?"

Tyxe continued his advance. Burnham stepped back, retreating, stumbling over the cables and then the instrument stands as Tyxe backed him into a corner.

"Advice," Tyxe said again. "Yes, I believe I do have some advice."

When Burnham could go no further, Tyxe closed the distance between them quickly, his head darting down and then rising, as if he were following a smell. "My advice is if you're going to kill someone..." he paused, moving closer to Burnham's ear. "Make sure they stay dead."

Ten minutes later, Tyxe opened the back door of the studio. Mike Jensen was leaning against the car, waiting for him. Tyxe slowly, sadly shook his head. Jensen nodded and walked past Tyxe into the dark hallway. He tried not to notice the fresh blood smeared across Tyxe's hands and dripping from his mouth.

Inside the studio, the blood wasn't as easy to ignore. Looking around the room, Jensen could see blood had splattered the walls like someone slapping at the surface of a swimming pool. Little droplets, which had already congealed, gave way to larger circles still dripping viscera. The clear plastic barricade surrounding the drum kit had been shattered by some heavy weight and the drum set itself had been used to cushion the blow. The scattered cymbals glistened red and gold, reflecting grisly light into the room.

Jensen could smell the acrid, copper taste in the air. He swallowed hard and turned. Burnham's body was against the wall, intestines leading up to it like some meat trail left by a carnivorous Hansel and Gretel. It looked like something wild had ripped him open for sport and left him as a vicious warning sign, a scarecrow for zombies. His head was attached merely by the connection of the visible spinal column, the skin around it had been torn clean away.

A microphone stand had been used to make sure Burnham didn't get away, pinning him to the ground through the chest like a butterfly. Looking closer, Jensen saw that the impromptu spear had been put there for a purpose; the area around the wound looked like the body had tried to free itself. Blood was still bubbling slowly up and out around the metal shaft.

The body twitched.

On tour in Japan several years earlier, Bob had taken Mike to a very expensive sushi restaurant. Mike pointed out a fish in a tank and immediately a hand reached in and pulled the fish from the water. It was filleted into sashimi and brought to the table while the nervous system was still processing its demise. Mike had put a napkin over the still jerking head, waiting for it to stop before he could enjoy his meal.

He knew exactly why that memory had come flooding over him.

He leaned against the wall and waited for the body to catch up to the brain.

Then he wrapped the guitarist in the rug and, with Tyxe's help, put it in the trunk of the car, taking out the bucket and auto detailing supplies in exchange.

He called a taxi for Mr. Tyxe and met him at the apartment no more than two hours later.

It took three weeks for the police to find Kevin Burnham's body.

