

Chartreuse Pastures

April 1, 1999

I was jolted from my e-mail reverie by a bright metallic object striking my desk and clattering to a stop before me. I recognized it as one of those new ultra-techie Palm V units and I slowly lifted my gaze to regard its inevitable owner.

The clothing he was wearing is not available to the general public. Sort of a chain mail shirt made out of steel rings and leather loops, with a full-length periwinkle shaded poncho over his shoulders that looked like angora. I thought, "*Zorro meets Miss Piggy...*"

"**Bernard**," I advised, "I heard those things are pretty shockproof, but you'll scratch it up and put some dents into your pretty new toy if you throw it around like that."

Bernard gave me a severe look. "First, my son, I must advise you that my "pretty new toy" is something different altogether, and second, upon close inspection, you will come to understand that the article I have just cast toward you is a unique model — one-of-a-kind, singular. Fully Titanium clad with a diamond glass screen. Special gift from the prexy of 3Com as appreciation for my latest little exercise in industrial design."

I stared at it — yes, the screen did seem to have a special hard sheen to it, and the metal casing possessed a soft, gray buttery look that belied its mil-spec toughness. "Very impressive," I said. "Got a trip planned to Kosovo?"

Bernard rolled his eyes and gave me his *You're-So-Dumb-It-Takes-You-1½-Hours-To-Watch-60-Minutes* look. "It's about Bilbao — any idiot could see that — you know — Frankie Ghery's new Guggenheim — the capstone architectural achievement of the post-Marilyn Monroe era. Here — hold the Pi-Five to the light — see how the intersecting planes reflect the geometry of Ghery's monumental titanium surfaces?"

I looked. I saw. I didn't quite understand what Marilyn Monroe had to do with it.

"And this little item is for you, my fine friend. All for you. A parting gift..."

I didn't like the sound of this. Despite his crazed immoderation and the excessive \$450 an hour reckoning, he'd done a lot for us all, and the picture of plodding on without him wasn't pretty. So I changed the subject, remembering Bernard's exhaustive search for the right artificial bunny tails last year: "Things on track for the Stanford Easter Pageant?"

"Oh yes indeedy they are. We hop right off Saturday AM, and you shouldn't forego this one. Got Queenie all dressed up as Lola Bunny this time — Warners let me take her Intellectual Property right off Space Jam — and the place is gonna go nuts. But did you hear what I just said about this magnificent rare-earth item being all yours in fee simple?"

"It's beautiful, Bernard, and I will treasure it always, but what did you mean, **parting** — exactly what **parting**, and **parting** for what?"

"I'm done with consulting, boyfriend. From now on it's all going to be me, me, me. Fortune beckons — beckons me to the wilds of e-commerce. Your Bernie-baby's soon to

be just an on-line phantom of his former selfless self — an internet tycoon, gathering fabulous riches with each tippity-tap-tap of the billions of hungry keyboard fingers just itching to get their hands on what I have to sell.”

As was so often the case with Bernard, I wasn't sure if I wanted to know exactly what he might have to sell. “But what about the financing? You got your IPO process started? You got the VC boys backing you up?”

“Venture Capital?” He laughed heh-heh in a passable imitation of Beavis. “You're cranked my boy — that all went out with amazon.com a couple internet years ago. And just exactly how late do you think I am to this game? Do you think I'm just now getting on that creaky bandwagon? To quote my weedy little Jamaican friends, ‘No-No-Nooooo ... No.’”

“Haven't you heard of SP?” he continued. “The nowie-wowie name of the game is Sole Proprietorship. The whole e-commerce fragment has been all about millions of drooling of stockholders splitting up an empty profitless pie, but this Bernie and Doonesbury's Bernie have had a parting of the ways. Before you, you see the new wave: no stockholders whatsoever, but lots and lots and lots and lots of profit just pouring out of my little enterprise clusters. And all that money is going to be mine...”

“Profit from what, Bernard?”

“My friend, think www.chartreuse.com.

I blinked. Twice. I stared. “You're not serious...”

“*Au contraire, mon ami, très sérieux.* As of this very day, the start of *quartier deux, mille neuf cents quatre-vingts dix-neuf*, you can't buy a bottle of Chartreuse unless it's from me, your very own Bernard, and it's all — wholly — completely — unconditionally — absolutely — entirely and utterly 100% on-line.”

I started to giggle. Even from Bernard this was a certifiably preposterous notion. First, the whole idea of cornering **that** particular market, then the absurd supposition of anyone making a fortune by selling profane moss-green liqueurs over the internet was too, too much.

“Bernard, you're joking of course. I know you're fond of the stuff, but it has — shall we say — ‘selective appeal?’ We're talking serious 110-proof paint thinner here. Wasn't it the favorite of the Republican side in the Spanish Civil war, heaving flaming bottles of the stuff at the Royalists — the main ingredient in the original Molotov Cocktail? Wasn't this what they used it to clean up after the Exxon Valdez? Isn't it what Mario Andretti spiked his jet fuel with at Indy?”

Bernard's black eyes shot me a look like the crack of a whip. “You need to learn some respect. The recipe for Chartreuse is 400 years old —one of the few incontrovertible classics in the beverage space. One hundred thirty-seven ingredients, and there are only three French monks of the *Pères Chartreux* in Voiron who know the recipe.”

“Ok, Ok.” I was still laughing. “But besides you, how many people actually dare drink this stuff?”

Now it was Bernard's turn to smile. “Oh, it's not exactly the same constituency as Bud Lite perhaps, but it runs about half a percent, one in two hundred. But that means that I have over one million customers day-one. And I figure just one bottle a year and I'm in very tall grass with about \$10 a bottle average net profit plus a buck or two on the shipping and handling fees. The business plan is pretty straightforward — I'm sure you understand.”

“But the import rights, Bernard — you can't possibly get an exclusive on the rights...”

“Heh-heh. Remember when I was doing the infomercial thing for Turner a couple years back? Well, Ted was also buying out the MGM film library at the time. Now go back a ways and recall when Ed Bronfman at Seagrams was getting his knickers all in a twist playing around in LA with movie stars and then buying up Polygram so they'd treat him seriously but everyone

decided he was just rich and crazy. Well, when he finally hit the cash crunch Ted got me in there and I got Ed out of trouble by selling *The Graduate* and *Fargo* and the rest of the Polygram library — to MGM of course so Ted could handle that too. Then double back and remember Ed's brother Joe Bronfman at Seagrams — about four years ago I cooked up his Freedom of Vodka campaign for Stoli— you know, those Stolichnya neo-constructionist ads that are still all over the back covers. Well, all these things came together when Ed said I was nuts to work on his brother's old white-goods so he made me a bet: if my Freedom campaign doubled Stoli's brand share inside of five years he'd hand over the import rights to any minor franchise. Not that they were his to give, but anyway last November Stoli hit 2X and Ed had to pony up. Of course, Joe didn't know about the bet, and he was just a little bit upset, but with Stoli going through the roof and the stockholders were deliriously happy — well — net-net-net he wasn't exactly going to sweat the Chartreuse."

I couldn't believe it. Bernard, off to run his own internet company dealing lethal liquors, and me, left visionless pushing PIN numbers, making sure our PC prices tracked the industry norm and having my ear bent with warranty issues.

And no more ingenious ideas like **ISS45** *Express* or **I4I** or **The Pig** or 45 for 45 for 45. Even —"The System Formerly Known as ISS45" was starting to look brilliant. No more lectures on the legacy of Versace, no more crystal platform shoes.

"Bernard, you can't leave me now! Things are going great — this last quarter was incredible, but how are we going to compete without your help? All this success has been your doing — I admit it — I'm just an admin along for the ride. If you split now, the competition will catch their breath and start to make up distance ..."

"Boyfriend, fly. You need me no longer. All you need to know is engraved on the back of my little giftie to you. Besides, if the competition were any dumber you'd have to water them twice a week. Now I simply must be gone..."

He vanished, leaving me stunned. What now? How to proceed? How to go forward alone, never to share his wisdom again?

I gently picked up Bernard's farewell gift, the Titanium Pilot, turning it slowly over and over in my hands, numb, unbelieving. I read the inscription:

*If you want to get to
Hang-chou before Fang Li,
feed gravel to his ox.*

To your success,

Tony
Tony van Seventer
Director: 