



In The Stars

by

Nachiketa Baru

3525 Santoro Way

San Diego, CA 92130

(858)794-7868

DoB: Oct. 29, 1995

Contact email: sundari_baru@yahoo.com

Act I

Setting: On top of a small hill at night, with a pickup truck on top

Characters: Travis – A 20 something, unemployed slacker

Dustin – Travis's friend, similar in his circumstances

At Rise: The two are lying in the bed of the truck

TRAVIS

Ah... this is the good life man.

DUSTIN

Yeah, totally. Warm night, back of the pickup truck, the stars are out.

TRAVIS

Yeah... I like looking at the stars and picking out all the constellations.

DUSTIN

Constellation; isn't that what you get when you eat bad food and stuff?

TRAVIS

Nah man, you're thinking of constipation.

DUSTIN

Oh... what are constellations?

TRAVIS

A bunch of Greek guys looked up at the sky thousands of years ago and found little shapes in the star.

DUSTIN

Dude, the Greeks had it lucky. If I had been alive thousands of years ago, I could say absolutely whatever I wanted, and people would have thought I was a big genius.

TRAVIS

You can still do it today. All you gotta do is be rich. People seem to believe what rich dudes say. Like when someone tells you you can buy a house even though you know you can't.

DUSTIN

Don't rub it in man, that's why I'm stuck in a pick-up truck. Now come on, show me some constellations.

TRAVIS

'K... see those four over there making a kind of rectangle? And those several little sticks of stars coming out the sides and corners.

DUSTIN

I dunno... kind of looks like a pincushion or something. Anyway what is it called?

TRAVIS

It's called Ursa Major. I think it means bear in Roman.

DUSTIN

Bare as in naked or something? Or bear as in the animal? Like a bear market... you know, the kind of market that we have... always going down.

TRAVIS

Well I heard it's all gonna get better. The guy on the radio says we're going lower slower. It's like a mini-bear market. Like a cubs market.

DUSTIN

I hope it's not a cubs market, or we won't get better for more than a 100 years!

TRAVIS

Umm... wha'?

DUSTIN

Y'know, the Cubs, like in baseball... aw, never mind, it's a sports joke. You don't know anything about sports.

TRAVIS

Yeah I do! I know the Lakers are gonna win the Super Bowl this year for sure!

DUSTIN

Yeah... never mind. Anyway, how's the job search going. Any luck? You gotta find one before your landlord kicks you out or you have to go sober for more than two days.

TRAVIS

Not so good man, not so good. A lot of these big shot CEOs, man, they just don't understand. I went to a big financial company... dang, I forgot the name. I think it was AEG... IIG...

DUSTIN

Was it AIG?

TRAVIS

Yeah, that was it! And they asked what I would do to increase profits and income. I said I would work hard as I could and be as honest as I could... and I got passed over!

DUSTIN

Aww, dude... that sucks!

TRAVIS

Tell me about it dude. I threw it all away; I derailed the gravy train... they were going to offer me big bonuses for nothing. They said it was a company perk, man. And I threw it all away with a stupid interview. My momma always used to tell me to tell people I would work hard and be honest and I would get any job in a snap. But nowadays it's all about profits and how much money I have. I remember when people used to be happy with a million dollars they earned through working hard. Now people earn millions of dollars a day by sitting at a desk and manipulating a stock market, a whole world economy. Billions in bonuses for failing because someone had the brains and the savvy to write in lots of compensation in their contracts because they knew they were building a house of flimsy cards. I may not be as smart as the next guy or as ruthless a businessman as the guy after, but I know what's right and what's wrong, and I know that corruption and dishonesty is cruel and wrong. And if I'm ever involved in corruption, well, the police can lock me up and throw away the keys.

DUSTIN

You know what this totally proves dude?

TRAVIS

That the whole system of big corporations looking for profits at the expense of honesty and ethics is totally corrupted and the cause of most of the world's economic troubles?

DUSTIN

Nah... it proves that you should never, ever listen to your parents.

TRAVIS

Yeah man... that too.

DUSTIN

Yeah, that stuff really pisses me off. I feel for you, I really do man. Tell you what (gets out of back and gets into front seat) Let's listen to some music on the radio. Always seems to cheer you up.

TRAVIS

Yeah, wait, put on the news first.

DUSTIN

The news? What for?

TRAVIS

I don't know; I just want to know what's goin' on in the world.

DUSTIN

Dude, no wonder you don't have a job... you're so weird! The news? Fine, I'll put it on. Five minutes though, max. (Turns dial to news program. Announcer's voice comes on)

Announcer

And now we're back to Hollywood Hour, where we talk to some of the hottest names in show biz!

TRAVIS

Ugh... just tabloid junk. OK man, you can change the channel.

DUSTIN

No way! I love to hear about celebrities; at least I know there are a few people in this world more messed up than me.

Announcer

We have a very um... unique guest on the show tonight. Eva Starlight of Beverly Hills has made literally millions of dollars telling the fortunes of Hollywood stars for almost three decades. Can you explain to us the fine art of fortune telling Eva?

Eva

Well, it can involve a large range of practices and methods. Sometimes I look at a crystal ball, sometimes I consult the astrological charts or tarot cards. Usually the celebrities trust me, but there are skeptics amongst the ranks. Most notably, I was doubted when I predicted Paris Hilton a full 6 years before she happened...

DUSTIN

Dude... I got it!

TRAVIS

Got what? Bored of celebrity gossip already?

DUSTIN

No, an idea on how to get rich quick! Our ticket for the gravy train! Our map to the good life! Our boarding pass for high living airlines...

TRAVIS

Dude, I think you'd better stop. Your metaphors are starting to really suck.

DUSTIN

Sorry... but don't you see it? Remember when we were young; don't you remember the nineties?

TRAVIS

Ah, the 90s... our parents trying to live the sixties through us... what about it?

DUSTIN

Remember you were into reading crystal balls and tarot cards? Remember how I was always freaking out over the horoscopes and the position of the stars and stuff.

Remember how we would stick incense in my sister's backpack to tick her off?

TRAVIS

Yes.

DUSTIN (Slams dashboard in frustration)

Don't you see what I'm getting at?

TRAVIS

Our childhood was extremely awesome and you wish we could live it again.

DUSTIN

No! We should start a fortunetelling business!

TRAVIS

A fortune telling business?

DUSTIN

Yeah! We could set up a booth on the boardwalk and we could fill it with all our stuff; play some real mystical and calming music in the back...

TRAVIS

Like Bob Marley!

DUSTIN

Perfect! We could light some incense behind the drapes, rent a fog- maker or something, and read people's fortunes! We could become rich by lying to well-meaning but totally gullible people!

TRAVIS (In wonder)

Dude... this is just like AIG!

DUSTIN

Totally!

Act II

Setting: In the tent on a boardwalk, with several “mystical items” scattered

Characters: Travis

Dustin

Vinny Silver – A middle-aged, smooth talking banker

At Rise: Travis paces inside tent waiting for an absent Dustin

TRAVIS(Pacing nervously)

Come on, come on...

DUSTIN

Hey dude!

TRAVIS

Where were you, man! First day on the job and you show up five minutes before opening!

DUSTIN

Sorry. I was talking to the other guys who run stalls on the boardwalk. There's this one guy who was convicted of being a serial killer but was given parole because of A+ behavior; he sells the cotton candy now, but there's a health inspector who checks every few hours to make sure he isn't suddenly reverting back and putting arsenic in his cotton candy. And this weird lady from a freak show who's a contortionist, has a beard, and is the single mother of octuplets...

TRAVIS

Tell me the stories later dude. It's opening time (Runs around tent checking that everything is in order) Lights!

DUSTIN

Candles flicker in a highly ominous fashion. Check!

TRAVIS

Tarot cards!

DUSTIN

Organized by grossness of illustrations. Check!

TRAVIS

Orb!

DUSTIN

Misty and authentic. Check!

TRAVIS

Incense!

DUSTIN

A strange, nauseating, but mystic combination of rose petals and athlete's foot. Check!

TRAVIS

Star charts!

DUSTIN

A bunch of completely random names and drawings, but convincing enough to fool the average desperate suburbanite. Check!

TRAVIS

Background music!

DUSTIN

Soothing reggae Bob Marley style! Check!

TRAVIS

I believe we are ready for business!

(Several hours pass)

DUSTIN

Hey, hey! Travis, wake up, man!

TRAVIS

Wha'... aren't you supposed to be outside trying to get customers!

DUSTIN

You snore too loud! Everyone on the boardwalk could hear you!

TRAVIS

We've been open six hours and no one's even put their head through that door. Maybe we should just give up. The people here might be dumb, but they're not Beverly Hills dumb. Fortunetelling was a stupid idea. Just wished I hadn't blown two hundred bucks on the boombox and furniture.

DUSTIN

Just give it two more hours before you call quits, that's all man. Give it just one day.

TRAVIS

Fine; we can sit here all day twiddling our thumbs, and no one's gonna walk through that door...

VINNY SILVER

Hello. My name is Vinny Silver. I understand I can get my fortune read here.

(Travis and Dustin leap to feet)

DUSTIN

Yes, this is indeed the finest divinatory establishment this side of the boardwalk. Please take a seat. Would you like your future read in the crystal ball, found in the tarot deck, or charted in the course of the stars.

VINNY SILVER

I would prefer a crystal ball.

TRAVIS (Takes a seat at table across from Vinny Silver, has orb in the middle)

As you wish. Now, I want you to look deep into the ball and open up your mind. Let me read what the spirits have planned for you. Hmm... I see great happiness and material possessions in your future. I see you tanning yourself on yachts in Miami, spending weekends out in Vegas. I see you driving to work at fancy offices in New York in sleek Italian racing cars while your children attend the finest private schools and your wife spends thousands of dollars on handbags and shoes. Why, your future looks extremely bright Mr. S.

VINNY SILVER (Looks up as reading ends)

Well, this is fantastic news. Please, allow me to introduce myself more fully. I'm essentially a stockbroker; investors give me money, be it \$100 or even more than a million dollars, to invest. If I invest wisely and earn more on the investment, I get to keep a good share of the profit. If what you say is true, then my golden years in the business must still be ahead of me.

DUSTIN

Um, well, congratulations... in the future I guess.

VINNY SILVER

No, no, thank you. Please take my card (hands card to Dustin) You've given me a great deal of hope and confidence. Now, if you'll excuse me, I have one more favor to ask of you. I was wondering if you mind telling other folks that come in that they would do well to invest with Vinny Silver.

TRAVIS

Well, that might be against the ethical practices of us soothsayers...

VINNY SILVER

It's not exactly wrong. It's just a little bit of PR. And you know, people like me, in the business that I'm in... we pay for PR. We pay quite a bit for PR, if you catch my drift.

DUSTIN

How much would you pay for publicity dude... I mean, sir.

VINNY SILVER (Leans in and whispers to Dustin and Travis)

Howsabout this... every investor who gives money to Vinny Silver because of you guys is an extra \$200 in each of your pockets.

TRAVIS

Well... now that we've got those pesky moral dilemmas out of the way, we see no reason to gratefully and gleefully accept your offer.

VINNY SILVER

Excellent. Ah, and here's my money for your reading. (Tosses wad of cash onto table and winks) There's \$10 for the reading. The rest is the tip. (Exits)

DUSTIN

That was totally made-up wasn't it?

TRAVIS

What do you think dude?

DUSTIN

Do you realize what we just did man?

TRAVIS

Made ourselves a bit richer while promising to aid a complete stranger in his alien business ventures?

DUSTIN

Correction... we could make ourselves a lot richer.

TRAVIS

How many people you think we can get to invest?

DUSTIN

Don't know. But what say you we use the tip and get ourselves a nicer space?

Act III

Setting: Inside Travis's and Dustin's new space at an office block

Characters: Travis

Dustin

Andrew and Mary – Two unsuspecting customers

Agent 1 and Agent 2 – Two big, tall, and deep-voiced FBI agents

At Rise: Travis and Dustin sit in their office, relaxing during a lull period

DUSTIN

What a week man, what a week. \$2,000 dollars earned from divinations; \$2,000 in Vinny Silver's commissions.

TRAVIS

Totally, man; I'm making money for doing nothing! I totally should have gone to AIG.

DUSTIN

Yeah... man, I've been thinking about something. What if all those commissions and money we're earning isn't right? I mean, are we morally justified telling random, gullible, but well-meaning strangers to go give money to him? Is this the easy money that you talked about earlier? The money with no strings attached? The money with no questions asked? Is this right? Are we turning into the very people we used to despise and look down upon. Are we actually selling out and sacrificing everything we believed in to chase the profits? Profits we probably didn't even deserve?

TRAVIS

Man... I think you are asking way too many rhetorical questions with no good answers. We're only really making a few thousand, and helping dozens of others get richer in the process. Sell outs is the wrong word; heroes is what we are.

DUSTIN

Yeah dude, yeah... wait, here's someone else (A man walks through door) Hello, sir, and welcome Crystal Clear, where everyone's future becomes, well, crystal clear.

ANDREW

Hello. I would like my fortunes read through tarot cards please.

TRAVIS

Yes, yes, please take a seat whilst I take out the cards and the ghosts of the future choose the symbols of your life. (Shuffles deck and takes out five random cards) Ah, here is the Ten of Cups; you shall have a fantastic future of financial luxury ahead of you. And here is the King of Pentacles; you shall be King Midas, with the ability to turn anything you touch into gold!

ANDREW

YES! YES! And they told me I was a gullible, unrealistic dreamer! Who's laughing now MIT!

TRAVIS

Ah yes, and I see there is a man helping you towards your fortune, a man who has the King of Pentacles in his favor as well. A spiritual, mystical figure who will guide you in life; yes, yes, he is an investment banker!

ANDREW

Amazing! Go on about this banker, please!

TRAVIS

He is a magician of finances and money who will work his magic upon your investments. Choosing to invest with him is like spinning this Wheel of Fortune card, as well as like the television; the chances of losing it all are very small, while the chances of making thousands, nay, millions, are huge!

ANDREW

Please, do these cards tell you this great man's name? I must find him and place all my money with him alone, aphorisms about eggs and baskets be damned!

TRAVIS

Why, I see his name... it is clearing in my mind, floating to the top in the floods of my consciousness... yes, I see his name! It is Vinny Silver, offices located at 3567 Pride Avenue, just one block before Fall Street!

ANDREW

(Leaps to feet) Thank you, thank you, thank you! I must go to his offices now and make my millions! So long dubious strangers! (Tosses wallet onto table) Take it all! I won't be needing it when I'm sunbathing in the Bahamas! (Exits)

TRAVIS

Good luck man! And remember, according to this final card; you'd have to be an absolute fool not to grab this opportunity!

DUSTIN

Fantastic. Your best and most convincing read so far, even if it was corrupted and slightly dishonest

TRAVIS

Dishonest? Come on, I even used the actual meanings of the cards. I just used them to give them a pre-determined message. All fortune tellers do it, trust me.

DUSTIN

I wasn't complaining dude. Let me just call up Vinny tell him that we're four thousand dollars richer. (Dials) Hello... hey Vinny, just called to tell you another one's on his way... yes I told him the correct address. Pride comes before Fall, right... yes, good. Oh, I'm sorry, you have some visitors over? Very urgent and important? Oh, I'll let you be then. You might be sending your visitors over later? There are a lot of them? Excellent, just tell them to come over quickly, it's close to closing time. Oh, we have a guest of our own just coming in, bye! (Turns to entering visitor) Hello ma'am, how may we assist you today here at Crystal Clear?

MARY

Hello, I was hoping to get some readings from the stars. My horoscope in the newspaper today wasn't encouraging and I've been depressed all day.

DUSTIN

Optimistic and cheery readings? Our specialty ma'am. Please follow me to the star charts. (Consults images of stars and constellations) Yes, you can see many stars; it shows that your future should be clear and free of the clouds of misfortune and hard times. In fact, it will be more than just easy –sailing; the peculiar brightness of the stars tell me your future will be a shining beacon of happiness and material wealth.

MARY

Great! How about my horoscope, what does it say! Please, tell me the truth; but make sure it's good, or I might get angry.

DUSTIN

Oh, don't worry, I understand. When were you born?

MARY

August 16th.

DUSTIN

Ah, a Leo. Let us see what the celestial beings have in store for Leo in the next few weeks. (Pores over charts) Even better! It says here that Leo will have a great triumph very soon, and will roar with joy and ferocity like a lion, or should I say a lioness.

MARY

Wow! Thank you! I might pay you extra just for putting me in a good mood.

DUSTIN

But wait... I see what you must do to truly achieve your potential. There is a man of another zodiac sign whom you must trust with your money.

MARY

Who is he? What is his sign? Why must I go to him?

DUSTIN

He is a Taurus, a bull... that's it. He is an investment banker, who will create a bull market of his own even in times of economic turmoil. Give him your money and your investments will charge; but instead of charging at red, it will charge from red to green.

MARY

But what is his name! I need to know! I must know!

DUSTIN

Wait, the stars will have the answer, they always do. I must just read it slower and absorb the meaning. Ah yes, wait, it is clearing up... yes, I see his name!

MARY

Yes?

DUSTIN

His name is Vinny Silver... his office is at 3567 Pride Avenue. All you need to do is get down there as soon as possible, and ...

TRAVIS

Dustin, I think you need to come out to the front.

DUSTIN

What is it? I'm giving this good lady her fortune, and your interruptions disrupt the cosmic waves.

TRAVIS

I think you really need to come out here. It can't wait. There's someone really important at the door.

DUSTIN

They can't be that important. Are they guests?

TRAVIS

Well, let's just say that they're the people Vinny Silver promised to send over. And they want us to pay them. A visit.

DUSTIN

Stop talking in stupid riddles. Do we know them?

TRAVIS

Are you familiar with the Federal Bureau of Investigation?

DUSTIN

Wha'...? The FBI are here? Let's go! (Rushes to the front with Mary and Travis. At the door are two FBI agents) What is the meaning of this, coming in here and disrupting us. I can see a lawsuit in your future...

Agent 1

Please, spare us the tough talk. It is you who are in very big trouble... if that is, you are Travis and Dustin of Crystal Clear Fortunetelling and Divination Services.

TRAVIS

What do you want?

Agent 2

We want you to give us a straight, short answer. Were you or were you not acquaintances of Vinny Silver.

DUSTIN

We might have had a few beers together... gone out to dinner... met at a party... talked a bit on the phone.

Agent 1

YES or NO!

TRAVIS

Um...yes...sir.

Agent 2

And weren't you willing accomplices in his nefarious and dishonest Ponzi scheme?

DUSTIN

Ponzi scheme? He took money from increasing numbers of investors, kept it all and lied about his returns while splurging it all on his own personal pleasures? We would never help him in that. We are honest, hard working fortunetellers, real blue collar and salt – of – the – Earth...

Agent 1

Really? Well I'm afraid Vinny Silver tells a different story. According to him, a fair amount of his investors came to him thanks to your corrupt, dishonest, totally shameless sham "fortunes" encouraging people to invest with him.

TRAVIS

Totally fabricated lies! We're being framed! You can't prove any of this!

MARY

I can! They told me that the stars predicted I would become rich if I invested all my money with Vinny Silver! They lied to me! I would never suspect that from a mystic!

Agent 2

I'm afraid you two will have to come with us for some questioning. From this point, anything you say can be used against you in court. You also have the right to remain silent, although it would make our lives so much easier if you would just talk now. We don't want to have to waterboard you...

DUSTIN

Oh come on! So a few gullible people gave him a few hundred bucks! How bad could this possibly be?

Agent 1

We'll give you an idea just how serious. He racked up several million dollars from over hundreds of investors. We haven't even started seizing all his assets seriously, but we already know that he bought a yacht in Miami and spent long and glamorous weekends at casinos at hotels in Las Vegas. He bought a brand new office high rise in New York City even though he only works there part-time. His wife alone had thousands of dollars worth of clothes, shoes, and handbags, and his three children were all sent to very fancy expensive private schools. And that's just the tip of the iceberg.

Agent 2

Do you two have any idea how serious this is? Exactly what it means?

TRAVIS

Yeah. It means we actually read one fortune right.

Act IV

Setting: A cell in a prison at night

Characters: Travis

Dustin

At Rise: The two are lying in bunk beds in the cell

TRAVIS

Hey, man. You still awake?

DUSTIN

Yeah. I can't go to sleep. This bed is made out of concrete and the prison gruel was really bad and oily. I think I have constipation.

TRAVIS

Dude, it's constipation.

DUSTIN

Oh... yeah.

TRAVIS

Cheer up, dude. We might get out in a few years on parole if we behave well, and tell the judge that we didn't quite know what we were doing.

DUSTIN

Well, I don't think the judge we had this time believed us when we said we were incompetent and clueless.

TRAVIS

Why do you say that?

DUSTIN

Well, when we were walking out, he leaned in and asked me if I could do a tarot card reading during our appeal.

TRAVIS

Oh then. I think you should get used to the prison grub. Maybe it works like poison.

DUSTIN

What do you mean?

TRAVIS

If you eat it in small quantities each day and increase the amount each day, you become immune or something. I saw it in a movie.

DUSTIN

Yeah... (Long pause) The stars look pretty tonight don't they?

TRAVIS

Yeah. If I had a better view I could probably read the stars and tell the future.

DUSTIN

If you don't shut up I'll drop these concrete pillows and blankets down on your head.

TRAVIS

Come on, I'm just joking.

DUSTIN

OK, I understand... I guess.

TRAVIS

You know, a long time ago, I said that if I ever succumbed to corruption, they could lock me up forever. I used to say that it didn't matter how much money you got, it was all in the spirit, all in being honest and straight with yourself. But then we had the chance for cheap money, to get rich without having to ask any questions and to grab loads of bucks without any strings attached. Maybe that's why everyone's in such big trouble; all the big corporations and the CEOs are just like the two of us, two guys with morals when it was fashionable to have them but too greedy to ask any questions when we had to put them in practice. Maybe that's what needs to happen to all the greedy bankers and investment bankers; they should stick them in cells like us and put them on concrete beds with food that'll make them as sick to the stomach as the rest of are when we see their inflated and ill-gotten profits.

DUSTIN

That was totally amazing dude. But you might want to keep it down.

TRAVIS

Why?

DUSTIN

You don't want to wake up the serial killer in the next cell.