

What Would Elvis Costello Say? A portion of a short story

by Steve Brun

"So, I met Elvis Costello today."

Ian raised his eyes briefly from his book to look at his friend. The action was pretty much the most acknowledgment he could've mustered at the time. He hadn't slept at all last night, and the small print of the novel made his eyesight blurry. He felt like throwing up. "Who the hell's that?" Ian asked groggily.

His friend Tyler's face changed to an expression that seemed to be somewhere between incredulity and bewilderment. "Who the hell is Elvis Costello? Do I know you?" Tyler asked.

"He an actor or something?" Ian asked without looking up this time.

Tyler made a kind of half-choking sound that Ian thought cats usually make. "He's a famous British singer/songwriter!"

"Oh yeah? What's he sing?"

"I don't know man," replied Tyler distractedly, "That's not the point anyway. The point is Elvis Costello's a pop icon. This is huge!"

"Great. Happy for you." Ian uttered, sounding drowsy.

Tyler sounded exasperated. "What you reading anyway?" he asked.

"Robert Browning" Ian was beginning to think Tyler

was purposely distracting him.

"Oh yeah, he sucks." Said Tyler mockingly as he turned and walked towards the kitchen. Ian seemed too lazy to come up with a response.

Truthfully, Tyler was worried about Ian. He had been partying and pending time with various girls lately, at the expense of his schoolwork and sleep. Which was strange because it was usually Tyler who was the so-called "party animal", the one who never woke up for class. Tyler had always been the better looking of the two friends, and valued quantity of girlfriends over quality of his grades. Ian had always been more for academics and broadening his intellect - he was reading Browning in his spare time for Christ's sake.

"So what were you up to last night?" called Tyler from the kitchen. Sound carried easily in their small apartment close to campus, so Tyler knew damn well what Ian was up to last night. God, how was he expected to sleep without earplugs and a mild tranquilizer? The sounds coming from Ian and his new little fling were, at the very least, good accompaniment for the sounds of the Red Hot Chili Peppers coming from Tyler's headphones. It was all about Blood Sugar Sex Magic, but mostly the sex part.

The question caused Ian to raise his head. "Went out. Party at James' dorm."

"Uh-huh. Then what?"

"You know. Typical after party stuff." Ian answered non-committally.

"Man, what's up with you lately?" Tyler asked his friend, although it was directed more toward the wall separating the kitchen and living room.

"You've been doing nothing but slack since the start of the semester. As Elvis Costello would say...well, forget that, I have no clue what he says. But my point is, if you get put on academic probation or something don't hold me responsible."

"I'm fine. You gotta have a good time mixed with all the stress of school or you'll explode, right?" Ian was becoming irritated with the increasing distraction of his best friend, not to mention his apparent obsession with this Elvis Costello person. They had been friends for nearly their entire lives and Tyler had never pestered him this urgently before. Tyler must've thought his attitude and laziness was getting worse, but it was normal. Wasn't it?

"So who's the new girlfriend?" Pressed Tyler.

"She's not a girlfriend, just -"

"A casual sex partner that you've never even met before?" Tyler interrupted, "Yeah, that's pretty smart pal."

"Why are you stressing about this? You'd do the same thing."

"I'd probably at least find out her name first. Did you happen to get her name, you stallion?"

"..."

"Didn't think so. Tell me you at least, um, protected your investment, shall we say?"

"..."

"You jackass. You'll be dead before you're thirty. You don't know where that girl's been. She could be the sexual partner record holder for all you know."

"I'm tired and hung over," Ian said in response to his friend's barrage, "I'm hitting the hay early tonight." He pulled himself up and began to saunter to the hallway leading to the two small, stuffy bedrooms.

Tyler watched him pass through the kitchen, trying to figure out why his best friend and he were growing apart so quickly, after so long. He shook his head and looked down at his hands, which were poised over a flattened expanse of Pillsbury Crescent Rolls, ready to separate and roll them into individual mini-buns. He realized his hands were shaking and, embarrassed, he set them on the counter. He knew it wasn't jealousy he was feeling for Ian and his new wild adventures, it was fear. Fear of losing his best friend, not just to a pack of drunken women, but emotionally as well.