

## COMMENTS LEFT ■

Eric D. Goodman

“That ain’t all that. I seen better.”

Harry stood on the New York side of Niagara Falls, listening: 43.080 degrees north, 79.071 degrees west.

“This is stunning. It really is one of the wonders of the world.”

Harry had come here from his Baltimore home for a little peace and quiet.

“I proposed to my wife at this location.”

But the comments rang in his head. Even here.

“You should go to the Canada side. It’s even better, eh?”

Harry thought of the relative peace and quiet of Times Square. There was a time when he found Times Square intimidating with its flashing lights, imposing advertisements, sleepless persistence. But the city’s ban on audio comments made Times Square one of the last protected locations in the civilized world. Even Baltimore’s Inner Harbor, Hampden, and Towson were all busy with ongoing audio commentary.

“This is where I’m ending it. If anyone who hears this gives a shit, someone jumped right here where you’re standing.”

Did anyone give a shit? Harry didn't. There was a time when he would have cared. A time when he would have geo-tagged audio comments of his own. But what was once an exciting new medium had become the Facebook or Twitter of a new generation. He continued to walk along the sidewalk, the mist of the fall encasing him.

“Hey, stop here for a minute. I've got a story to ...”

Harry didn't stop for the longer commentaries. He didn't really want to hear any of them.

“Looking for a nice place to stay, but trying to save a Benjamin? Say “yes” for directions to The Twin Falls Inn, your escape ...”

Harry escaped the advertisement. Yes, the marketers were not far behind the egoists. Walking anywhere these days was like submerging yourself in the blogosphere of yesteryear. It was almost enough to make him turn off his iChip. Almost. How could anyone unplug completely?

Sometimes there was beauty. Once, when Harry was visiting the undeveloped lands of Michigan, strolling through the woods, he stumbled upon an unexpected geo-tag. “Hello friend,” said a warm, grandfatherly voice. “Stop for a moment, take a load off. Let me tell you a story. A story about how things used to be.”

That had been worth hearing, Harry considered now as he tried to ignore the comments all around him. That had been unexpected, without an agenda, simply the sharing of a

story, the initiation of a conversation between generations, the marking of an era and a space. That was what geo-tag audio comments had been intended for.

“Kay-Kay was here.”

Now, they had become intrusive graffiti in the air. He needed his iChip to stay in touch with the world, to know where his friends were, what the news was, where the next event was taking place, what time it was, what the weather would be. He needed to stay connected. But sometimes he wondered what it would be like to turn it off. To disconnect. He imagined what life would be with the iChip turned off, the comments left.