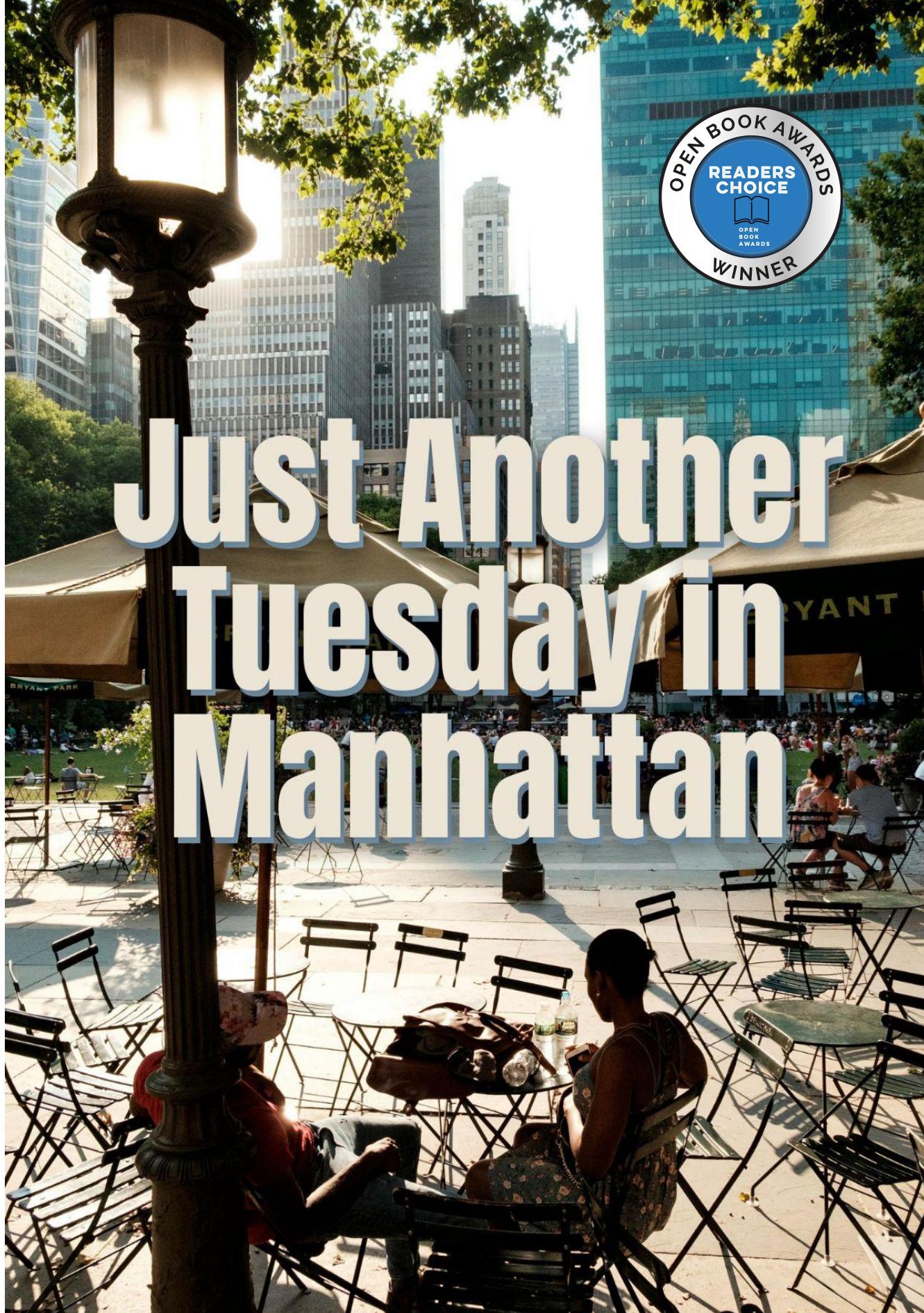




Just Another Tuesday in Manhattan



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Christopher Tradgett

Another Tuesday Morning

Andy took the same M train subway, at the same time each morning, from the 65th St station in the Woodside area of Queens heading into Manhattan. It was just a twenty minute ride in, to arrive at the specialist design studio on East 37th Street, just off the famous Madison Avenue - in the heart of the agency district.

This Tuesday was no different - just another Tuesday. Riding the subway gave him the chance to listen in to podcasts, like the 'Resourceful Designer' and the 'Logo Geek'; there was always something to make him think about how he approaches some design issue or other in packaging or branding.

Glancing up at the faces of the others in the car, they were all immersed in their own audio worlds, into their tunes, heads nodding or in a podcast world, like himself.

His route into town emerged into daylight by Bryant Park, into another of those bright Manhattan mornings. He'd grown to love the short walk through the wide green open space, stopping at his favoured coffee stand for a Macchiato. Somehow

the trees around the pathways seemed to have a calming effect - the regular faces around him that he'd come to recognise, looking way more chilled than those on the street, sipping their coffees and soaking up the last of the early morning glow.

Other commuters were pausing to sit and read newspaper headlines, to meet friends, or just take a breath before starting their day. Others were on a cooling-down jog across the grass, or doing their final stretches after the morning run.

It felt kind of... almost insulated from the noise of the traffic - and the sidewalks, packed with intense sharp suited types, all seemingly on a mission, heading to the offices which towered around them.

This was of course, a very different vibe to living in south London and the design agency off Balham High Street, or even to London's West End where he'd almost taken a job at one of the famous global agencies. But he'd chosen this one, here at 'The Packsmiths' agency in central Manhattan, and he'd really warmed to the whole New York lifestyle over his nearly two years here.

He set off the few blocks south, to dive back into the hustle of the street, towards his agency building and his design studio.

Andy crossed over the street and heard a shout behind him, "Hey," which made him look back over at the tall guy with a moustache, in a green Yankees cap, who was looking straight at him, waving to him, calling out - "Hey, Hey Gino! See you later in Dillon's - I'm going to try and bring Michelle along too."

Andy did a bit of a double take - not sure if he recognised him from somewhere - and was wondering why the guy was calling at him! He tried to call back, but the traffic had moved on, with delivery vans now blocking his view. He thought again, the guy had definitely been talking to him, but, Gino? What's that about...?

His curiosity was definitely piqued, and being how he was, he couldn't just dismiss it, so he fought his way back across the street, through the jam. He had to find out who this guy was and how he thought he knew him. But looking in all directions for

a hat and 'tache, he drew a blank. The guy had just disappeared among the faces coming along the sidewalks and through the park.

So, did the guy know him, or had he mistaken him for someone called Gino (or Geno with an e maybe)? Still searching in vain for the green cap, Andy took a sip of his coffee, before giving up and going back across the street on his way to work.

It had taken just a few seconds - but had him thinking. So, should he recognise the guy with the 'tache? Maybe they'd met in a club or one of the bars - but he couldn't pin it down to anything recently. Plus, 'Andy' could never have been misheard as 'Gino/Geno'! Perhaps he just looked a bit like the guy's friend Gino, perhaps? A trick of the light maybe. Who knows?

Andy pushed the door into the agency building on E 37th, swiped in and took the elevator to the 9th floor. He shared a cheery 'good morning' with Serena at reception and headed across the studio to his desk. While he waited for the Mac to power up, he went over the strange encounter he'd just had with his friend Denny, working on the desk next to him.

Denny couldn't place a guy with a green cap and moustache, based on Andy's description, certainly not in the agency world around here. He had hit it off pretty well with Denny on the workstation next to him straight away after coming to The Packsmiths. They were similar ages and backgrounds and had similar routes into the product and pack design specialism, though Denny had moved here from a small town outside Raleigh, in North Carolina.

If the guy earlier was someone Andy had randomly met before, then it may be worth following up - it doesn't harm having options to grow your network in this town. It was a puzzler.

Andy opened up the day's work list in the Jira scheduling app - and looked blankly at it, as he asked himself, "So, who was that guy - and Gino? That must have been the name he had called out." He took a quick look through LinkedIn at New York contacts with a 'tache in their profile pic, but couldn't see anything resembling the guy earlier.

It was rather intriguing. He could of course just ignore it and move on - that wasn't going to happen, so how should he follow it up and see where it leads?

"OK, Denny," Andy resolved, thinking out loud, "I know I'm a bit obsessive, and I'd just stew over it, so I just have to find out what's going on," addressing Denny, "so, OK, he must have been talking about the Peter Dillon's Irish bar on 36th, the next street down. That has to be it. However, I ask you..." turning to face him and raising his finger, "when, exactly, is 'later' going to be?"

Denny laughed, "Sounds like you've really had a weird one there, man. Obsessive or not, I'd say it makes sense to find out who the guy was - could be a 'career useful' type contact - and you must have met him somewhere, I guess."

The decision only took a moment, "OK, I'm decided," he resolved, "I just can't **not** go there 'later' - whenever that is; maybe I'll find out who that was and how this guy thinks he knows me. I'm thinking I'll do an early shoot this afternoon and go hang out in Dillon's, just to see if he turns up - and take it from there."

It was probably going to be worth that small effort - at very least, he'll maybe be useful to know, "...and if you're curious, you can join me when you're done here. Worst case scenario - at least we can have a few beers together, if it turns out to be a wild goose chase."

Tuesday felt like a very long day - mainly because the jobs on today's list didn't really get the creative juices flowing. Three jobs adapting existing packaging, labelling and box artwork to a slightly smaller size of a series of product flavors - the joys of shrinkflation. And editing the existing product merchandising brochure, with new shelf barkers - in the vain hope to make the smaller products appear not to be any smaller!

What had happened to his lofty ambitions, branching out from the small South London agency for a life of cutting-edge creativity here in the heart of New York's Adland? Much of the actual work was similar - but just on much bigger brand names.

Plus, there's the new work that punctuates the run of the mill stuff. The occasional full brand refresh, exhibition graphics and exhibition stand design, which can have an almost architectural component. But it's the opportunity to work on projects that touch thousands or even millions of lives that still fired Andy. Even these simple packaging changes - they'll be appearing in thousands of grocery stores across the US and Canada.

Checking the time later on, he saw it was 4:30 already and he'd worked through most of the jobs in less time than he'd expected. Amending the work cards with the timings to 'DONE' in Jira for billing, Andy closed down his Mac for the day.

Collecting his stuff together, he made for the door, "This is it, I'm off," way ahead of his usual time, to station himself in Dillon's Bar to find out whenever 'later' was.

Denny looked up as Andy waved, "I'll join you later man, when I've finished this last job. Is there a Newcastle soccer match on the TV there again?"

Andy said he'd take a look, they were always entertaining to watch even for a neutral supporter, and Dillon's was the official home of the Newcastle United 'Toon Army' in Manhattan. Much the same as the Football Factory was the home of Chelsea, his Dad's team - which he also followed, but not seriously. It looked like a good spot to meet up with other ex-pats from London though, and he'd made a couple of good friends there.

But - this was about seeing the guy with the 'tache, and see why he thought he recognised him - maybe find out more about him, if he might be useful to know - and whoever Gino was, if there was one - and if it doesn't happen, then it's a couple of beers with Denny, which will be good anyway before heading to the gym.

Tuesday - 'later'

Taking a first sip of his Guinness, Andy made for a seat at the beer barrel table in the centre of the bar area - the ideal way to end the work day as well. It was good to know that this was a proper drop of the black stuff, still brewed in the Dublin brewery. Despite the Newcastle connection here, he'd never really got on with the Geordies' legendary Brown Ale. So it was Guinness - after all, this was an Irish Pub!

The barrel table was also the perfect vantage point to spot anyone coming in the door. He guessed there couldn't be a live game this evening like the FA Cup game he caught with Denny a while back. A poster listed the upcoming fixtures, mostly early morning, which made sense for a 3pm UK kick off. There was a rerun showing on the big screens however, of the home game against Liverpool from earlier in the season.

Dillon's was pretty quiet but it was early still - just before 5, so hopefully he'd be in good time for whenever 'later' was going to be. That could be any time after work, he guessed, so he'd better pace himself. He overheard a few British accents around him, mostly blokes, but no Geordie voices that he could hear. He settled down with his Guinness, put his earbuds in and went back to listening to the podcast from this morning, glancing at the door and then up at the football now and then - and waited.

A few people came and went while he was sat there, none he recognised which wasn't that unusual he supposed. After just over half an hour, Andy glanced up and

spotted the tall guy with the 'tache coming in off the street, sharing a joke with his friend - who looked to be about his own height, with dark red-brown hair, similar to his own - and at first glance, could be Andy's double.

As they came closer, it was clear that the only difference between them, that Andy could see, was that his hair was styled and shorter, and that he looked to be a sharp dresser, in a quality suit.

The tall guy scanned the bar and visibly stopped in his tracks and did a double take as he spotted Andy staring at them - looked back to his friend, who followed his gaze as he looked back - and, almost comically, both just froze, mouth open and wide-eyed.

Andy stood up - in the same, almost cartoon pose.

Now it was obvious why he'd been mistaken for the friend - who must be the Gino he thought he'd been calling out to this morning.

After what seemed like an age, they came over towards him; Andy and Gino stared at each other.

"What the...?"

"Er... I was thinking the exact same thing!" Andy took in his features, same green eyes, same colour hair, same dimpled chin. He reached out to shake hands, "I'm Andy Jordan - and I'm guessing you must be Gino?"

"Yeah - Gino Bianchi - what the?... How do you know me? - and hell, how - why do we look... so alike? Though, it sounds like you're British, am I right? This is so - just weird," looking back at his friend, "I was thinking, is this your idea of a joke, Max? But... hell, I was a bit confused when you said you'd seen me this morning..." staring again at Andy, "and now it's plain to see why... jeez!"

"Hell yeah!"

"And that's how you knew I was Gino..."

Andy nodded, "yep. And that's what brought me here this afternoon - it's Max, is it? You were looking straight at me and shouted over the street, 'see you later in Dillons'. I just had to follow that up and find out more."

"Yeah, too right I did... Whew! That must have spooked you - now we're all about as confused as each other!"

Andy was still taking in Gino's face, "...and you're from round here, from the sound of it. How... were you born here? - it's like we're kind of doppelgangers? I'm thinking it's surprising we've not been mistaken for each other before.... Though, then again, I've only been living here a couple of years, so maybe it's not."

"Hey, this is a big buzzing city - and no Gino, this ain't no joke." Max looked from one to the other. "I can't believe what I'm seeing here. Now, I've gotta work this out - but first, I think I need a drink - you too Gino, Andy, Guinness is it?" asked Max, as he headed for the bar for some beers, "I think we'll *all* need one."

To break the ice, Andy told Gino how he'd moved to New York to work, as a packaging designer at an agency on the next street - and that he was around this area all the time, or where he lived, in Queens, in a rental apartment near Woodside.

Gino gave Andy a brief outline as well; that he was in real estate, remodeling and leasing up town near Columbus Circle, mostly swanky overpriced apartments near the park. "I often meet up with Max and the guys here, so yeah, it's really strange this hasn't happened 'til now. And, hey, I live in Astoria in Queens, so we can only live about a mile or two apart! So, yeah, it's amazing we've not come across each other before."

Max came back with the beers, "OK, OK, so guys - I need to get my head round this... Andy, so you're definitely a Brit, I take it," Andy nodded, "and Gino, I know you're from Queens - hell, we grew up together..." he paused to think, "There's like, seven billion people on this planet and you're right Andy, I've heard stories where people have a doppelganger who looks a bit similar, like you said. But from where

I'm standing - as the one who can see you both, you're not just similar. You two are so alike - you could even be twins!"

Gino looked at Andy "That's a crazy idea Max. How would that work?"

Max pointed at each of them, "Similar age, same height, same hair colour, same chin. So, let's take a test. OK Andy; you're a dead ringer for Gino - and you both look a similar age, so as a start, what's your date of birth?"

"Well, you already know my birthday is 3 August, you send me a card every year. Born in 1981."

Andy just stared at him "Er... and same here - 3rd of August - nineteen... eighty... one."

Max almost shouted "Holy crap!!" - startling the group stood next to them watching the football, "Sheesh! I did not expect that! Now, that's *never* just a random coincidence, it just can't be! No way! So much for my test. So how does that happen?"

Andy's mind was racing while Max was speaking, "Just an idea, but were you by any chance adopted, Gino?"

"I was, yes... I've known my whole life. I grew up in Queens, but don't know much about where I actually came from. Adoption was never something we discussed - or that I even thought about - we're too close a family for it to have been a thing really."

"Same here. I was adopted too, but my Mum told me some of the details years ago, about me being born in Dublin but I don't remember everything as it didn't seem important. So I'm not totally sure either."

"Oh man! That's got me thinking, Andy - same birthday and both adopted... I am just gonna have to call my mom and find out what else she knows, and see if it ties in - this minute. Oh wow!"

He couldn't have been more agitated, "hey, I've an idea - Andy, can I get a photo of the both of us to send to mom? - I just have to talk to her," angling for a good double selfie, "Now this photo might just totally freak her out - but guaranteed it will make her call back. How should I put it," he typed, "so, 'guess who I bumped into?' - that should do it. And, here goes!" as he hit send.

About 20 seconds later, Gino's phone rang. He smiled, "Yep, mom took the bait," and headed for the door to take the call.

Andy suggested another round of beers, "I've a feeling we might need it!" He headed to the bar, with his mind turning over what was happening here. 'It's just not something that happens - you don't just discover a twin - a brother like that'. He rejoined Max with refills in hand.

"I guess Andy, you wondered who the heck I was this morning?"

"Too right! it was just so clear that you were looking directly at me - I tried to cross over and find out what you were saying. I was thinking maybe we'd met at some agency event or something, but you'd just disappeared."

"Yeah, I was in such a rush heading to a meeting. If I'd thought about it, I shoulda known somethin' was up if it had been Gino hangin' around Bryant - it's well outside his usual pitch. But now I see you both together, it's no surprise I mistook you."

While Gino was outside on the phone, Denny arrived and came over to them from the bar, "holy shit Andy, that was so weird, bud. I just saw a guy looking a bit like you outside, talking on the phone - no wonder he just ignored me!" he laughed.

Following right behind him, Gino was just finishing his call and came back to join them, "Oh wow, guys! You gotta listen to this."

Denny turned - and just stared at them both. "Gino, this is Denny, my mate from work. Denny - Gino. And Max, as you can see here, is the guy who called out to me this morning."

“Oh shit man! - Who’s... You didn’t tell me about a... a brother, is it?” Denny was looking from face to face, “I was thinking this was just going to be a mistaken identity thing, bud!”

Gino laughed, “Hey, good to meet you Denny. Oh boy! Have you just stumbled into the twilight zone here!” as he turned back to Andy and Max, “Now, listen up... Well - man, that was very interesting. I’ve learned more from Mom about my adoption in the last three minutes than literally any time before in my life,” as Denny continued to look open mouthed, from one face to the other.

“...and?” Max prompted, impatiently, “OK, come on - what have you found out?”

“Andy, how much do you know about your adoption?” Gino asked, smiling.

“As I said, I was probably born in Dublin. I grew up in south London - in Brixton, but I know I was adopted via an Irish Catholic charity that Grandma had suggested - she was a strong Catholic - and I might have been born in or around Dublin. I don’t know a great deal more - though Mum always said that’s where I got my hair colour. She will know all the details I’m sure.”

“Okay - well Andy, I think you’d better put your beer down... Mom really opened up to me just now - and I’m sure I’ve not heard any of this before. They too had adopted me from a Catholic charity, would you believe - based in Dublin!”

Max stared at them both, “Is there likely to be more than one over there? - I guess it’s a pretty catholic country so there could be a load of them. But what if it was the same place...”

“When mom saw that photo of us two - I was right, it sure did blow her mind! She’d had no idea about other children there at the time, let alone one who could be a twin. I was the only child she’d seen there - and the nuns had not mentioned anything. You may well have been there at the same time. It just has to be that we’re twins - there’s no way that could have been two different charities surely.”

Andy nodded, "That seems to make total logical sense Gino. Dublin's not that big a place either, though the only time I've been there was on a stag weekend, so we didn't see that much of the city, just the pubs around Temple Bar and the river."

Andy gestured with his phone, "Can you share that photo with me, Gino? I'd love to send it to my mum. I am just going to have to call her in the morning. It's a bit late over there now, and I might just prime her first before sending it over - don't want to spook her, like you did to your mom! I can hopefully find out what other information she's got, like the name of the charity. What else did your mother have?"

"Well, I now know my Mom and Pop flew over to finalize the adoption legalities at the charity in Dublin and then flew home with me, when I was just a few weeks old" Gino caught brief flashes from his childhood running through his head as he thought through what was happening here.

Max laughed, "There's a delicious irony in discovering a Dublin adoption story, drinking Guinness in the middle of an Irish bar! Michelle will be so pissed at missing all this - she missed it all for another evening of jazz."

"...and Andy says we yanks don't understand irony! Hey," Denny put his arm around both of them, "you guys are going to have to get a DNA test. The likeness is just, well... and your birthdates it's just - so obvious," as he looked between the two identical faces, "but you'll want to know 100%, I'm sure."

"Good call Denny," Max suggested, "you guys should swap deets, if you are related somehow - then you two are gonna need to stay in touch."

Andy and Gino exchanged numbers, "thanks Gino. I'm going to have to shoot soon. I've actually got a yoga session booked at the gym later on - but I'm thinking that we'll be speaking to each other quite a bit from now on. I'll phone my mum in the morning - then call you around breakfast time, just before 8, if that works for you."

"Sounds perfect Andy. Holy cow, I'm still trying to get my head around all this. Mind. Blown! Eh Max?"

“100% - this is the weirdest random pub conversation I’ve ever been sucked into. I can’t wait to find out more.”

Andy and Denny got up to leave the two friends, “I’ll give you a call in the morning after I’ve talked with my mum. Speak to you soon - my maybe brother!”

“Can’t wait Andy - speak to you then.”

They left Gino and Max, still looking shellshocked, back to the subway past Bryant Park, which was now almost in darkness, Andy thought through what had just happened - feeling the same way that Gino looked as he’d left. This was the most unsettling thing he’d encountered for some while.

If Gino was in fact a lost twin and they were separated at birth, that opens a whole new experience to deal with - and a new type of dynamic between them. Twins psychology was not something he’d ever thought he’d need to know about.

One thing was certain, he knew for sure that he’ll be speaking to Gino again. That was after talking to Mum - now that was going to be an interesting conversation.

Reviews

“...it is a nice book to read, simple and enjoyable. I recommend it for a rainy but bright afternoon, or maybe a festive read; though it isn’t about Christmas at all, it brings to mind that period, I don’t know why – again, perhaps a New York-fable trope. Christopher Tradgett has impressed me with this one, and left me keen to read more from him. Take a look; you’ll enjoy it, I’m sure.”

Matt McAvoy, [Goodreads](#).com

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