

quite as good..." The man was speaking English. He had glasses and a black moustache. "I feel like the quality on these is going down," he said in a frank tone.

"Hello?" I said to him. "You speak English."

"Sure," he said. "Who are you?" He had his hands full of flutes and he was turning them over, really giving them a thorough look.

"Rex Reynolds," I said, having recently started to think of myself as an older man and the name seemed to be fitting more and more. "I've been stuck here for so long," I said. "How do I get out of here?"

"Well," he said, still consumed with the tiny instruments. "You can go anywhere. Any direction leads away from here."

"But I mean can you give me a ride?" I said.

He gave the flutes back to the men and addressed me directly.

"I'm Paul Allen," he said. "Of Microsoft."

"Hello," I said, feebly.

"I'm a wealthy, powerful man in this region and also in the world. Beloved by some, hated by others." He adjusted his glasses and then took out his wallet. "I am eccentric," he said and gave me two one-hundred dollar bills. "And I spend my money freely and unpredictably, but often on things that improve life for everyone, in ways that are not immediately obvious, but which will ultimately benefit us."

"Why did you give me this?" I said, holding out the bill. "I just need a ride."