

The Summer Years

“What Time are we upon

The door to Cellblock G opened as it did every morning, with a screech that would pull Jack from his short-lived slumber. It was the start of correction officer Ingraham's daily routine; the one he went through twice a day, morning and night, on every day except Christmas. Jack knew this clamor well.

The clicks of several pairs of well-polished shoes on concrete would punctuate the deep blare and clink of the overhead lamps turning over; groans would follow as the prisoners did the same. They would cover their ears as a loud resonant banging swept through the hall. The wood of Ingraham's nightstick on the thin iron bars made for such a riotous noise.

There was something different about today though—at least for the prisoners who were made to listen to Ingraham's racket—different, because there was another noise beneath the sound: the slight flutter of paper on a shoestring, shuffling from the floor of one cell to another, carefully pacing Ingraham and his guard's march.

It stopped only when one cell remained. Jack's cell.

When Ingraham and his crew reached the end of the cellblock, they would do their about-face and carry on their way. And, as always, Jack would rattle off his typical exchange with the captain of the guard.

“Any Time now, Ingraham. Just you wait.”

To which Ingraham would reply, “Not in a million years, Jackie boy.”

All at once, the rising sun fell from sight, dragging a strange moon in tow over the crashed Chevy. All was quiet. And neither sirens, nor bullhorns blared as the earth and sky switched spaces around the two lovers. No sounds as the stars shifted, spattering the ground like the drops of blood flowing from Jack's hands.

Tears pooled in Jack's eyes as he cradled J.'s head. He let out a whimpering sob. They were supposed to have made it together.

Like a song cutting through radio static, sirens screamed in the distance followed by the amplified voices of the police.

He had to try.

Killing the engine, Jack knew there was no way he'd escape them in the car. The sirens were almost on him now; they would catch him for sure. Kicking open the passenger side door, Jack stumbled out into the desert.

He moved to run when suddenly, a roar came from all around filling his ears with a piercing ringing. He fell to his side clasping his hands to his ears to block out the sound.

Jack awoke from a daze in the cafeteria for what would be his last 'Time. In just a little while, the guards would come for him. He'd be alone in the yard or asleep, comfortable in the confines of his cell and they would release him into a world of which he had no concept. Glimpses from the TVs in the rec room were all he really knew of the outside. The 60s he knew and loved had long since been replaced by this new era, and now, even prison seemed more a home to him than his previews of the real world.

He hated to admit it, but the notion of being released made Jack feel old...and afraid. They had finally made him feel it: his age and not just the in the "old soul" kind of way. Jack was old. He could feel it when the wind from the north blew into the yard or when he looked himself in the mirror. And best as he tried to stave off his dreams by staying awake for days at a Time, he found himself in bed earlier each day. He couldn't do it like he used to anymore.

When the guards came to get him, Jack was sitting in his cell fresh from eating lunch.

"We've got some clothes here for yah from when you came in," one of the guards said.

He handed Jack a pair of dusty jeans, a leather belt, a pair of Chuck Taylors, and a denim button down that appeared almost two sizes too big for him. Changing out of his prison attire and into his old clothes, it seemed as though they were all too big for him save for his shoes. He had to pull his belt as tight as possible to keep his jeans from falling.

"We'll be making a stop at the commissary before you leave to collect the rest of your things," the other guard said.

As he was escorted to the commissary, Jack tried to think of what he would do first when he got out into the real world. Eat? Listen to music? He didn't even have a ride...and even if he did have a ride, where was he supposed to go?

"Last day, huh?" the commissary clerk said.

Jack nodded.

Hell, maybe I'll take up smoking, Jack thought. As he pocketed the lighter, the sight of something out of place drew his attention to the desert. It was a car, stalled, or maybe crashed, from the look of it into a thicket of tumbleweeds.

As he got closer, he recognized the model. A Chevy Camaro, an old one too. Whosever it is, they've got good taste. Jack thought. The car had seen better days though. Its back window was all but shattered and the tires on the right side were blown.

“Hello?” Jack called out.

There was no answer.

With the last light of day peeking over the mountains, Jack moved quickly round the trunk, and squinted through the shattered back window. No one was inside, but the passenger's side door was open as if someone had gotten out. What the hell? Jack thought. Scanning his surroundings, he saw nothing, not even footprints leading away from the car, just desert sand and cacti.

Then, Jack heard the howls of coyotes in the distance. Rather than be left out in the open, he hopped in the driver's seat and closed the door. With a deep breath, Jack began to plot his next move. He could sleep in the car for the night. That might not be the safest bet though, considering the condition in which he found it.

Fishing out his lighter, Jack looked around the car a bit more. The key was in the ignition, the visor was down, and a pack of L&M cigarettes lay slotted in in the center console. Jack paused. Why did that seem so familiar? As he reached for the cigarettes, birds began to chirp all around and light slowly peeked its way back into the car. How was that possible? Jack thought. It had just been sundown a minute ago. As he moved to get out of the Chevy, he realized with a strange sense of horror how impossible his situation had become.

There was a sunrise in every direction.

Passing what appeared to be a front desk area, the guards led Jack up several flights of stairs to a part of the prison he had never been to before. There were hardwood floors and a series of hallways full of doors with glass-panes and names stenciled on them. It drew such a stark contrast to the concrete and iron bars of his cellblock. He was surprised such a place would even exist in a prison, yet he felt a strange familiarity with the place, as if he had been there before.

Pulling open one of the doors, the guards led Jack into a room occupied by several men and women in suits. A couple of them were closing windows at the end of the room, while the others sat at a large wooden desk. The man at the center of the table spoke first.

“We’re all here now, so let’s get started, shall we?”

Gesturing towards a chair at the center of the room, he silently bade Jack to sit.

“Mr. Evermore, my name is Eric Miller and the purpose of today’s hearing is to again consider your suitability for parole. Upon arriving at a decision, the panel you see before you will consider your commitment offence, prior criminality, and social history, as well as your behavior since you were committed.

“Again?” Jack said softly.

“Why am I here?” Jack shouted. The guards behind him moved forward a number of paces until they were on either side of him.

“Mr. Evermore,” Mr. Miller began, “You are in prison for armed robbery which resulted in the deaths of three police officers and...”

Jack felt the air shifting around him.

“What do you mean?”

A piercing ringing rose in pitch and filled his ears.

“Mr. Evermore, please, remain calm.”

The room seemed to lose its color.

“Sedate him! Sedate him!”

And the sun beat through the windows in stark shades of grey.

Jack didn't know what day it was, or how far along the festival would be, all he knew was that up and over that hill would be what J. and he had dreamed of: music, freedom, peace...if only for a few days.

He shut the door to his car and huffed his way up the wet grass hill on shaking legs. They hadn't slept in days, but he figured they could sleep in between shows or the sets of the bands they didn't care for. As he reached the peak of the hill, he was frozen still at what he saw before him.

There was no stage, no crowds, nothing but cows and fields of green grass. They had missed it, by how long he couldn't tell, but there was nothing here. Jack dropped to his knees. How could they have missed it?

Jack turned to J. for answers and found nothing but a grassy knoll.

Suddenly, the ground began to shift beneath him. The ringing sound he had come to fear so much had returned and he began to shake. He felt numb and weightless, like someone who had floated in a tub too long. He closed his eyes.

A long, dim hallway lay before Jack. The floor was a darkened hardwood lit by a series of amber-colored sconces lining the walls. A figure stood at the end of the hall. It was J. She seemed to be waiting for him in front of a door with a pane of smoked glass at its center.

Jack reached out and found himself in front of her, holding her hands in his. He touched his forehead to hers and breathed a deep sigh of relief, in through his mouth and out through his nose.

J. laughed through held-back tears and leaned toward him.

Already there are threats pouring in of lawsuits from local business people who have been calling the event a disgrace, meanwhile, the kids are saying that it was just fantastic.

What happened this weekend at Woodstock was more than an invasion of hip youngsters. These kids endured twenty-mile traffic jams and several-mile hikes exacerbated by intense heat and sudden rainstorms just for a chance to spend a weekend getting stoned on their drugs and grooving to their rock music.

In spite of it all, what didn't happen is possibly more significant than what did. There was marijuana as well as LSD at the festival, but strangely, no rioting. However, just because nearly half a million drugged up youth can get together and not tear each limb from limb is no assurance that the rest of us can stand such closeness to our fellow man.

We're not going to stop them from killing the monks in Tibet.

We're not going to stop them from cutting down the rainforest.

We're not here to save the planet.

Fuck all that peace and love shit.

We're just here to get paid.

A grey sky hung over a tented stage. The early morning rain had subsided and the once sprawling crowd had dwindled to less than half as many bodies. Wet, muddy, sleepless, they waited intently for the rapturous sounds to play again. A movement at the side of the stage drew their attention. A dark skinned man clad in blue and white began to sing, not with his voice but with the instrument in his hands.

He sang an old song, but with a new sound, the sound of the new generation.

This would be a moment to be remembered.

“Are you listening to me, Jackie boy?”

He wasn't. Jack did that more often than he'd like to admit, not listen. He was always somewhere else, planning the next job or their final get away. And when J. would look over at him sitting there in the passenger seat, she'd see him fiddling with her lighter, staring out the window, in his typical not-listening fashion.

“I'm listening,” Jack said.

Of course, J. knew he hadn't been, and he knew that she knew. She was smarter than that, much smarter, but she'd keep talking, just in case he wandered back in. Of all the people he would zone out on, Jack always tried his best to be present for her.

“Okay, so here's the deal,” J. said. “If I understand Mr. Einstein correctly, and I do, the theory is that Time is relative to the mass of a given point in space; space like space between you and me, not outer space.”

Jack hummed in understanding.

“What that means is that if an object is big enough, supermassive as they say, its gravity starts to effect Time. For anything close enough to that giant whatever it is Time starts to slow down and maybe even stop under the weight of that massive whatever's gravity.”

“So what are you trying to say?” Jack said, flipping the lighter closed.

J. continued to drive in silence. This wouldn't be their first last job. It would be the eighth, in fact. They were both crooks, even before they met. They had started small, knocking over clothing stores and gas stations, but their last job had been a jewelry store and that had set them up nicely.

“You know I've always got your back right?” J. said.

“I know, and you know I've got yours too.” Jack replied.

“I just...I'm always gonna be there for you, but if you paint a big enough target on our backs, one day we're not gonna be able to outrun what comes gunning for us.”

Jack frowned. He wouldn't let that happen.

J. bumped a cigarette out of her pack. “You better be right, Jackie boy.”

“How much money do you have?”

“Enough for the next few tanks of gas and some smokes, why?”

“I've got a plan.”

Jack awoke with a start, drenched in sweat. His denim jacket turned blanket felt like a wet towel as he peeled it from his face. Shielding his eyes from the sun, he realized that he had fallen asleep in the front seat of the abandoned Chevy.

Strange, he thought. He hadn't remembered nodding off, let alone covering himself up and getting cozy. With a wheeze and a heavy cough, Jack realized how dry his throat was. Now was probably a good time to get out of the car. Evidently, tumbleweeds like the ones the Chevy was nestled in offered little shade. The metal-framed derelict may as well have been his own personal oven in the midday heat.

Through the hole that was the back window, Jack could hear the sounds of cars whizzing by. He hoped that the town the commissary clerk had spoken of wouldn't be too far.

Jack pushed the driver's side door open, but stopped as a thought occurred to him. He looked to the center console and again saw the cigarettes. They looked as though they'd had never been opened. He took them.

Pocketing the pack, Jack stepped out into the desert using his jacket as a sun breaker. As he looked down at the ground to avert the sun's gaze, he froze. Before it had been too dark to tell, he could now clearly see a faint trail of footsteps leading away from the Chevy and off into the desert. The tracks ran a staggered line away from the road.

Whoever they were, Jack thought, there's no helping them now.

“Excuse me,” the woman at the desk said. “Are you here for a room?”

Wiping his face, Jack took a few breaths and looked over at the woman. She looked only a little older than Jack did, though her face was particularly stern. She had been working at this motel for too long. Jack could only imagine what he must’ve looked like to her.

“Hello,” the woman said impatiently.

“Oh...umm yeah.”

Reaching into his jacket, Jack pulled out the money the commissary clerk had returned to him and spread it out on the desk before the woman.

“There’s fourteen dollars there. How many nights will that get me?”

The woman gave Jack a lame grin.

“Honey, if we charged half nights, that’d get you one,” the woman said. “It’s gonna’ be thirty dollars or no deal.”

“No way,” Jack said. “You guys used to charge six dollars a night!”

Jack made his way down the street. It was surreal being out after all this time. Being among people, seeing stores. Everything was the same, but...different. The people who passed him looked different. Their clothes, their hair, it was all so new and strange.

Some of them wore colorful jackets that rustled as they walked, jeans were still a thing, but most were torn and loose and others were pulled up past their waists. And the stores, some seemed familiar, a diner, a bakery, but there were ones that Jack had never heard of. Video Mirage...what was a video?

Suddenly, Jack heard something. Music, like he had never heard before, coming from one of the shops down the main drag. It was a record store; it had to be. Running towards the sound, Jack heard the music more clearly now. Its pitch was low and booming and the lyrics of the song ran together as if they were all one word. This was definitely not his kind of music, but he was drawn to it as much as it deterred him. Jack went inside.

Jack looked around, ecstatic. Posters of bands he knew from his youth hanging from the ceiling and the walls of the store. Classic rock, the signs beside them read. Walking through the aisles, he looked down to see tiny records in square cases.

Skimming through the cases, he stopped at the sight of a familiar face and flipped the case over. Electric Ladyland—the Jimi Hendrix EXPERIENCE the case read in bright curved lettering. He had to play it. Jack turned to the cash register where two kids were talking.

It was dark out as Jack left the record store. He debated whether he should walk back to the Chevy. At the very least, he'd have a roof over his head for the night.

Next door was a pawnshop. He could sell his lighter and his jacket, and maybe return to the motel to try haggle with Sheila again, but he doubted that what he made would make up the difference.

Across the street, raucous sounds of a crowd emanated from a place called the Nine Pound Hammer, a bar with a neon silhouette of a railroad worker. Screw it, Jack thought. He'd have a beer and make his way back to the Chevy.

A woman sitting at the bar turned her head towards Jack as she sipped her beer.

“You’re gonna be givin’ us our money back,” the man said as he pulled a knife from his boot.

“Yeah,” his friend added. “We ain’t about to be hustled by some con artist.”

Jack palmed the cue ball from the pool table and braced himself for his first attacker. It was true, he had hustled them, but he wasn’t about to admit to it and as far he was concerned, the money was his. They just didn’t know they were playing the game that they lost.

As Jack began to cock his arm, the woman at the bar top slipped swiftly from her seat and stood tall next to Jack, as tall as a woman of her size could stand.

“Hey!” She shouted over the bar’s radio.

Grabbing a cue from the table, the woman quickly slammed it down over her knee snapping it in half.

“If you want him,” she said passing a broken end to Jack, “you’re gonna have to go through me!”

Jack and the men around the table exchanged hesitant looks between themselves.

“Who the hell is she?” Jack thought.

Three days of peace, love, and music ended with arson and rioting late last night and into the early morning at Woodstock '99. Concertgoers destroyed property, started fires, and rioted into the early morning. Scattered bonfires raged out of control for several hours, vending stalls were looted, and light towers were toppled.

Tentative plans to host another Woodstock concert in Europe may have to be put on hold.

Tune in for the full story tomorrow morning at 7:00.

“Put yourself in their shoes for a second, look at what the people at that festival did, and tell me they weren’t standing up for themselves like your generation did,” The bartender said.

“Setting shit on fire isn’t standing up for anything, those people are just confused,” Jack replied. “The hippies I knew didn’t have to riot to be seen.”

“Hippies wouldn’t have had the balls to riot,” the bartender replied.

Jack shook his head in disbelief. “Least we stood for something,” He said under his breath before taking another sip of his beer.

A voice at the end of the bar spoke. “I like this guy, Franny.”

“Uh, I’ll just have a couple of whatever he’s having.” Jack said gesturing to the man at the end of the bar.

“Cool.” The woman turned and pulled back the tap handle to pour Jack his beer.

“Fries are on the house,” the woman said to him.

“So what’s your story, guy?”

Jack looked up. The bartender was actually talking to him.

“Your story, you look pretty wrecked and you smell it too. Where you from?”

If Sheila knew where he was coming from, Jack doubted he could fool anyone else in town. “To be honest, I just spent the last thirty years in prison and I’ve got no job, no family, and no place to go but right here.”

The woman raised her eyebrows and glanced down the bar towards the old man whose order Jack had mimicked. “You hear that, Dad?” she said, “Got ourselves a regular Time traveler here; that’s gotta be a new record.”

“I don’t think I ever asked you, man—would you do it again, the thing that got you locked up here?” Dwight asked. “If you could go back, would you have played it the same?”

Jack didn’t have to think about the answer to that question. He had thought about it every day since he was arrested. “I’d go back and change everything about that summer. Everything but the moments I spent with J. I would’ve quit early. Way before we did anything that would’ve landed us real Time anyway...probably would’ve taken her to a few more shows too.”

Dwight exhaled sharply through his nose. “Yeah...sounds about right.”

“What about you?”

“I wouldn’t change a damn thing.”

“Bullshit.”

“Nope,” Dwight said.

“Bull...shit; there’s got to be something you’re missing on the outside.”

“Remember, not too many.” J. said as she passed Jack her lighter and three sticks of dynamite from the pile that now sat in the Chevy’s center console.

Jack gave her once last look and stepped out of the car.

As he walked down the alley, Jack thought only of what came after. If they pulled this off, they’d be set for life. No more robbing banks, no more hustling for money; they could finally settle down.

Hunkering down behind a dumpster, Jack placed the bundle at the base of the wall. Hopefully this would be enough.

As Jack lit the fuse on the sticks, J. watched with wide eyes as a police cruiser pulled up to a stoplight at the end of the alley.

“Jack!” J. yelled as loud as she could.

Jack gave J. a thumbs-up and ran around the wall to take cover.

J. yelled again, but Jack had already covered his ears.

The explosion shattered windows across the way.

The dumpster was in the street now, smashed into the tail end of a nearby car.

J.

Time has robbed me of you, I know that much. I can barely piece together what happened between us. There's just glimpses, fragments of it all. And even now, I can hardly remember your name. I know how this must sound, how this all must look, but this is what made sense.

I'm trying to find you, J. God, I hope I find you.

*Yours,
Jack Evermore*

J.

For me, that summer never ended.

*Yours,
Jack Evermore*

They were shooting now.

Using the side view mirror as a guide, J. tossed the stick onto the hood of the nearest police car causing it to swerve off the road before exploding out of sight.

Another crack rang out followed by the sound of metal on metal and suddenly, the car sank to one side. Jack turned his head in Time to see an officer with a shotgun in hand leaning back into his car. The cruisers were pulling back.

“Jackie...”

Jack looked over at J., her hands covered her stomach and her dress was soaked in red.

Before Jack could react, the tires on the right side of the Chevy blew causing the car to swerve wildly off the road and into a thicket of tumbleweeds.

J.

How many Times have I relived these moments? Does anything ever really change or do I just remember it differently each Time, forgetting something different, adding something else...how much of this is real?

*Yours,
Jack Evermore*

Will it stop if I end it here? Will Time allow it?

Reaching into his pocket, Jack grasped J's brass lighter and flipped it over in his hand. He admired it's dull shimmer before lazily, he let it fall into the blackness of the ravine.

“Goodbye,” he said aloud and then moved to stand and walk in the direction from which he came.