

By: Reed Lowell

and where do I belong?”
Francesca Lia Block

But today there was a hope in Jack's voice that caught Ingraham off guard, a sense of triumph. Ingraham turned towards Jack's cell as the rest of his guard continued marching around the cellblock.

“What's got you so jazzed, Jackie boy?”

Jack winced whenever he used the nickname J. had given him. Ingraham had picked it up one day when going through Jack's letters and had used it to torment him ever since. Still, Jack managed a grin.

“I've been telling you every day and every night, Ingraham,” Jack said as he got up to stretch, “I'm gonna be leaving this place soon.”

“You're delusional, Jackie boy,” Ingraham said with a snort. “You and your whole generation.”

As he turned to leave, the string-bound piece of paper skirted through Ingraham's sight for a split second, finding itself in Jack's cell, right at his feet. Ingraham turned to face Jack with an unamused smirk.

“Alright, Jackie, you know the rules; read it, or we're coming in there to get it.”

Jack couldn't help but bare a full-toothed smile, a show of teeth. Today was the day. The floral pattern paper gave it away in an instant; the letter was from J. Jack picked the note up off the floor and took his time untying the shoelace knot that held it together.

“I'm gonna give you to the count of ten to read that note, Jackie boy.” Ingraham said.

Pulling back each fold, Jack knew exactly what the message would say; he really just wanted to know how she'd written it.

“Ten...nine...eight...seven...”

With an exaggerated clearing of his throat, Jack prepared to read the letter aloud.

“Six...five...four...”

“Sweet dreams, Jackie boy.” Jack said loudly enough to stop Ingraham from counting. “With love, J., X O X O.”

“Now what the hell's that supposed to mean?” Ingraham barked.

Jack grinned and dove towards his bed, pulling the mattress up and over himself like a makeshift shield...and plugged his ears for good measure. Suddenly, the wall opposite Jack's bedframe exploded with a roar, launching chunks of concrete in his direction.

Through the ringing in his ears, Jack could hear the sound of a car horn coming from the new hole in the wall. Classic J., he thought. Jack shoved his way out from under the mattress and dashed through the sundered concrete, to his newfound freedom and the early morning air.

And there she was, just as she said she would be, lit up with a spotlight, looking like an angel behind the wheel of a hardtop Chevy Camaro.

“Get in, Jackie boy!” she yelled.

Jack found himself at her car in an instant, windows down, radio blaring, headlights off. J. never ceased to amaze him. Hopping into the passenger seat, a loud crack rang out as J. floored it before Jack had time to close the door. She had always loved driving fast.

SomeTimes when I wake from my dreams, I have to convince myself that they weren't real. It's usually pretty easy, if a dream is happy or if I'm on the outside, well...it's probably too good to be true. Some dreams though, it's not that simple.

Yesterday, I dreamt that J. busted me out. She blew a hole in the wall of my cell and we took off in a Camaro. It was a nice one too; brand new I think. J. was smiling like she always does with that freakishly big grin that she's so bashful about. God, I love that smile.

It might have been the best dream I'd ever had, but after driving a ways, I looked down to see that she'd been shot. Her dress was soaked in blood and when she realized it, she slumped back in her seat. She lost control of the car and we crashed into a big pile of tumbleweeds.

I woke up after that.

Sadly, I'm still in prison, but J. just visited me the other day so I've got that going for me. The dream though, the crash...I could almost feel it. It was like waking up to a hangover. My body hurt all over and my head felt like I'd been punched between the eyes. I've been keeping the movement to a minimum today; sat in the corner at lunch, kept to the shade in the yard, I could barely shake the feeling.

I just hope it doesn't happen again tonight.

Jack was startled awake by the sound of his cell door opening. Two guards stood in the hall before him. One held a pair of cuffs for his hands, the other, a pair for his ankles.

“Get up, Inmate,” one of the guards said. “Your parole hearing is today.”

There must have been some kind of mistake, Jack thought. He had only been in prison for a few months. He’d have to serve way more Time before they let him out on good behavior. He considered correcting their error, but decided it was best not to pass up a chance at getting out early.

At the very least, it would be a change of pace.

Groggy, Jack got up from his place on the bed and put his hands out to be restrained. The first guard entered the cell and secured the cuffs around his wrists before proceeding to pat him down. The second guard entered shortly after.

“We going for a ride, boys?” Jack wondered aloud.

“Not today,” the second guard said as he cuffed his ankles from behind. “Your hearing is being held here in the Warden’s conference room.”

“Fancy,” he joked.

Fully restrained, Jack began to shuffle his way towards the iron door the guards came in from each day.

He had been dreaming of that car crash again when the guards came for him. This time was different though. The crash didn’t happen to him this Time; it was as if he was stumbling upon it. God, I wish they’d give me something for these dreams, Jack thought. As he reached the end of the hall, the guards beside him opened the door with a screech and led him into the administrative portion of the prison.

“Well it looks like I’ve got a couple things here for yah, but not much,” the clerk said. Pulling Jack’s belongings from a darkened plastic bag, he began to recite its contents. “We’ve got one wallet, leather, containing 14 dollars and 19 cents, and a now expired driver’s license.”

Yep, I’m old, Jack thought, looking at his driver’s license.

“One silver chain necklace, complete with one silver locket, contents: none” the clerk continued, “and one brass lighter.”

Trying the lighter with his thumb, the clerk sparked a weak flame. “Huh, still works. Guess they really don’t make ‘em like they used to.”

Jack stared at his belongings. The wallet and the necklace were his. He remembered that much, but the lighter; he hated smoking. Regardless, he took the lighter along with the rest of his belongings and turned to walk out the front doors of the prison.

“There’s a town about six miles west of here,” the clerk said, pointing to the road running between the prison and the desert. “See if you can’t get there by dark; there’s a motel that’ll help you out until you find yourself a job.”

It was dark almost as soon as Jack started walking. As if being in prison wasn’t punishment enough, they just had to put the damn place in the middle of nowhere, didn’t they? Jack knew it would be getting cold soon and his thirty-year old clothing wasn’t going to be keeping anybody warm. His best bet was to try the town the clerk had mentioned.

As he walked down the road, Jack wondered if he’d find a job. Would he make friends? Could he? Did he even have Time to start again? He was pushing sixty after all. And who was he now? Would he be the same person that wound him up in prison or someone new? Maybe someone good for once. Pulling his new old lighter from his pocket, Jack flipped the lid open and struck the spark wheel, drawing a small flame as the clerk had done earlier.

The night had closed in and a sea of bodies surrounded a siren standing solemnly on her stage. Swaying, her dress shone like sapphires. And suddenly, she was bathed in an amber glow. Her song began. Wailing and moaning, her howl washed over the onlookers.

There was a pain in her voice as it echoed through the crowd. She sang as if in a daze, tired perhaps, but maybe possessed by a heightened sense of things.

They had come to hear her song. She knew that. They were the reason she sang.

“Since you have requested legal counsel, we have provided you with a public defendant who will be representing you today.”

A woman sitting beside Jack nodded. He hadn't noticed her sitting there before, nor had he remembered requesting any form of counsel.

“With that said, in these proceedings, do you swear to tell us the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?”

“I do.” Jack responded. “But...”

“Mr. Evermore, of your 25 year sentence, you have served fifteen years, do you feel that you have been effectively rehabilitated?”

Jack laughed nervously. “I've only been here for three months now, and my sentence is five years, not 25.”

The woman beside Jack began to speak. “Mr. Miller, after reading through my client's file, it has become apparent to me that during his time here, Mr. Evermore may have suffered some form of psychotic break. It's possible that he doesn't even know why he's incarcerated.”

Mr. Miller looked from the woman back to Jack. “Is that true, Mr. Evermore, do you not know why you're here?”

Jack felt cold. “I'm here because I robbed a bank; what do you guys think I did?”

Mr. Miller looked from Jack to the other suits beside him and back to Jack's defendant again.

“Mr. Miller,” the woman began again. “With your approval, I would request, as a stipulation of his release, that Mr. Evermore be court-ordered to see psychiatric evaluation at a clinic of your choosing.”

Jack slumped down into the chair, his face sullen and tired.

“You left me,” Jack said.

J. leaned closer to the glass partition and spoke in a whisper. “I had to, Jackie. The cops pulled up on us the moment you lit the fuse.”

“I’m gonna get you out of here,” J. said. “I promise.”

“I’m sorry, J, I really am.”

“Hey, look, I found something for yah.”

Reaching into her bag, J. pulled out a newspaper clipping. Woodstock. Three days of peace and music.

“It’s only a couple weeks out, J., there’s no way...”

“We’re gonna make it.”

J.

Do you remember that Time in the car? You were talking about Time—that if we got to Woodstock we might be able to change things for the better? It works, J. You were right. I'm not sure how, but it works. I'm not sure what triggers it, but if I can get back to the right moment, do it differently, maybe I can do it. I'm trying to get back to you now.

*Yours,
Jack Evermore*

I've just received word—and you can take this with as many grains of salt as you want—that the brown acid that is going around is not exactly as good as people have been saying. It is suggested that you try and stay away from that stuff. Of course, it's your own trip so be my guest but please be advised that that stuff is coming with a bit of a warning. Alright? Cool, now let's keep rocking.

The ringing subsided and Jack's ears were assaulted by the roaring of a crowd. The grass at his feet had turned to tarmac and the overcast skies he had seen were black and filled with smoke. Was this it?

As he made to stand, a man came frantically rushing towards him. He was shoved off his feet into the crowd and then bounced back towards the swarm of flailing bodies. A fist moved through his periphery for an instant before connecting with his eye socket, knocking him to the ground.

Suddenly a hand reached for him and pulled him to his feet. As he made to acknowledge its owner, Jack caught a glimpse of a face, a sliver of a jawline. It was J; it had to be. Jack began to run through the crowd as best he could. He had to find her.

Coming to a clearing in the masses of people, Jack saw her face through a wall of flames. It was J. It had to be. She was screaming, thrashing about at whatever she could.

Jack felt dizzy. Before he even heard the ringing, he was falling.

“Well, if we get to Woodstock, and there’s enough of us there, theoretically, we could stop Time and from there, change the course of history, change the world, for the better.”

Jack snorted, “I’m not sure that that’s how it works, J.”

“Oh, now you’re the scientist, huh?” J. said snatching the lighter from Jack’s hands.

“Neither are you!”

“Either way,” Jack said. “California to New York ain’t exactly a short trip if we don’t have any money.”

“We’ll think of something, I’m sure of it.”

“Already have.” Jack replied with a smirk.

“Dammit, Jack, you said we weren’t gonna do this anymore.”

“I know, J, I know. Just listen to me, one more gig and I promise we’ll be gone. We’ll get to the concert and then we’re in the wind, I promise.”

J. visited me yesterday. She was wearing a dark blue sweater-dress and one of those cloche hats she's so fond of. I joked that if she'd be my Bonnie, I'd be her Clyde. That got a small laugh out of her. Something I needed more than anything lately. I asked her if she had any plans to break me out. She said that she might have one or two in mind with a wink. J. always has a plan, but I don't think she's that bold.

She talked about Woodstock and I lit up like a Christmas tree when she pressed the newspaper ad against the glass divider. The set list was rocking already. If I don't get out soon, I'm gonna miss it.

When she went to leave, she kissed her hand and pressed it against the glass.

"Don't worry, Jackie boy." She said. "I'm gonna get you out of here."

As he walked down the road, the town seemed much closer to Jack than it had the previous night. He could make it out in the distance now. It was a good-sized place, not too big, not too small, but certainly away from the bustle a bigger city would've offered. He might actually be able to start over there.

But where would he start? It wasn't like he had any family or friends to call on. He probably had enough cash for a night or two at a motel, but after that? What about food? If worse came to worst, he could always sleep in the Chevy again, but if homelessness was all that waited for him on the outside, he'd rather just rob a store and get himself back in prison.

Now and then, Jack would catch the sight of a driver passing by. From their strange cars of the future, some would crane their necks to look at him while others paid him no mind. He was haggard, unshaven, his jacket held high over his head, walking into a town far from any major city. He probably looked more like an escapee than a former convict.

As Jack reached the town, he saw a sign. Welcome to the town of Fairview, it read, population 3,524. Jack could say that the town lived up to its name with the exception of a few buildings, chiefly the only one he could recognize. A blue sign stood high above a parking lot adorned with a red six.

"Wow," Jack said aloud. The motel looked run down, not old, just too beat up for how old it seemed to be. The bright white stucco bore a stark contrast to the scuffed blue doors and rusted fences lining the second floor walkway. These used to be a lot nicer, he thought.

Stepping through the front doors, Jack took in the lobby. The decor was so different from anything he had known. The floor was covered in off-white colored tiles and a strangely patterned carpet led from the front door to the front desk. At the far side of the room, a water fountain hung from the wall. With a lurch, Jack leaned in, pressed on the dispenser, and began to gulp water as fast as the machine would allow.

The woman snorted at Jack. “Yeah, thirty years ago; you been living under a rock since then?”

“Yeah,” Jack said, with resignation in his voice. “Something like that.”

Jack turned to leave, but wondered if he might be able to bargain with the woman.

“Look,” Jack said glancing at the woman’s nametag. “Sheila, is there any chance I could take a quick shower? I’ll pay you what I’ve got, but I just...”

““Honey, I know, I’m just givin’ yah a hard Time.”

“You kn...that I’m coming from prison?”

“You think you’re the only ex-con that comes walking into this town? We’re the only place around for miles.”

Jack felt relief wash over him. “So does that mean I can get a room?”

“Well that depends, you found yourself a job yet?”

“Not yet, I’m just now getting into town.”

Sheila pulled a keyring from the corkboard behind her and placed it on the front desk. “The first night’s gonna be on the house then. Tomorrow though, you’ll be out there looking for steady work. No one gets to stay here for free for too long.”

“Hey,” Jack said. “Do you know what kind of music this is?”

The kids looked at Jack with a confused stare. “Uhh...rap...hip hop,” one replied.

“Do you think you could put on a record for an old timer like me,” Jack said holding up the Hendrix album. “Something from around my time?”

“Dude, they’re called CD’s,” the younger of the two kids answered.

“Oh, well, could we put the CD on the record player then?” Jack said.

“How old are you man?” the older kid asked. “It’s called a CD player and you gotta buy that first if you want to listen to it.”

“How much does it cost?” Jack asked.

“Probably twenty dollars, just like the rest of them.”

“Yeah, and a good player is around \$200.”

“Oh,” Jack replied. “I guess I’ll just put it back then.”

Even music costs too much these days.

I keep having these dreams. J. and I are together. We made it to Woodstock...I can't see her with me, but I can feel her next to me. Have I been here this whole Time? There's never been a chance for me to leave...

There has to be a time when she and I are together again.

How do I get there?

The tallest of the men was the first to speak. “I ain’t about to fight a lady...”

“Yeah...wouldn’t be much of a fight,” the woman replied.

As the men turned to leave, the woman threw her pool cue back on the table and reclaimed her seat at the bar top.

Jack looked at the snapped pool cue in his hand and placed it back on the table.

“Hey, you didn’t have to do that, you know?”

“I know. I just didn’t want to see them bust up a cute face like yours.”

“Well, thanks anyway.” Jack said, cracking a smile.

“Don’t thank me just yet. You’re gonna’ be buying me drinks until I can’t feel that cue on my leg anymore.”

“You’re gonna’ be paying for that too,” the bartender interrupted.

“Fair enough,” Jack replied taking a seat at the bar top. “Say, what’s your name?”

Jack pushed open the doors to the bar and was welcomed by the familiar smell of spilled beer and the sound of rock music.

Finally, something he recognized.

Jack took note of the army memorabilia and biker slogans decorating the walls as he took a seat near the end of the bar. He wasn't exactly in the mood to talk with anyone, save for the person who would be serving him his drink.

“What're yah having?” the bartender said to him as he took a seat at the nearest barstool.

“Well, you'll have to forgive me; I haven't had a drink in a long time, what do you have?”

“Beer or the hard stuff,” the woman said. “Ain't much choice other than that.”

Jack pulled the crumpled bills and change from his pocket and placed it on the bar top.

“How much can this get me?”

“One stiff one or a couple beers.”

Jack's attention was drawn to the man the bartender had previously addressed as Dad.

"You remind of my brother when he was younger; all peace and love and shit," The man said.

The man got up and offered his hand in introduction. "The name's Lou."

Jack shook the man's hand and gave his name.

"Where'd you say you were staying?"

"At the Motel 6 at the edge of town." Jack said. "Why?"

"Whelp, that won't do for too long; we've been needing a new dishwasher, why don't you come work for us? Maybe after a while you can find yourself a better place than that old half-way house,"

"Dad, you're not giving this guy a job!"

"He served his Time, same as me I figure," the man said gesturing to the Vietnam service placard on the wall.

"You ain't gonna steal anything are yah?"

"I wouldn't have anywhere to go even if I did."

"That'a boy."

Jack swung a canvas bag into the center console of the car and got in.

“What took you so long?” J. asked.

“I was out getting supplies,” Jack replied

Expecting food or cigarettes, J. quickly pulled back the flap of the bag.

“Is that what I think it is?” she asked.

“Yup,” Jack said smiling.

“Where’d you get dynamite?”

“Same place I got the bag,” Jack said. “You’d be surprised what a few construction workers can part with after a few six packs.”

“You spent the last of our money bribing construction workers for dynamite?”

“Not all of it,” Jack said pulling a few bills and some change from his pockets. “Besides, we’re not gonna have to worry about money for a while after this.”

“I don’t know about this, Jack. We’ve never tried something this big before.”

“Last one, I promise.”

“People like me don’t have it the same out there as people like you, Jack.”

Jack sensed the somber shift in his voice.

“I’d be happy if all I had to cry about was some perfect girl and some missed shows, but no, last I checked, they’re still shooting people like me on balconies for having strong opinions.”

“Well shit, I’m sorry, man, when you put it that way...”

“It’s cool, but food for thought, while you’re up all night trying to repeat some past that’s all butterflies and moonbeams, some of us are just trying to go to sleep and wake up some Time when people don’t want to kill us just for being us.”

Jack contemplated Dwight’s words in silence.

“You’re the closest thing to a friend I’ve got in here, Jack.”

“Thanks, man. I could say the same about you.”

“Try and get some sleep though; you’re not as fun when you’re tired.”

Jack rushed through the smoke to where he had lit the bundle. As he moved, he tripped over piles of bricks that now scattered the ground.

The wall to the bank was in ruins. They had used too much.

Jack jumped over the rubble into the vault room.

Banker boxes lay sundered from the explosion. Stacks of bills and other valuables were strewn across the floor.

Pulling the canvas sack from his neck, Jack began to fill the bag with whatever he could. Jewelry, torn bills and rocks alike. He could hear the sirens now playing in unison with the bank's alarm. He had to be quick.

As Jack emerged from the hole in the bank with his haul, he realized with abject terror, the Chevy had left.

J. was gone.

And the police had him surrounded.

J. and Jack sat with their backs to the Chevy, a sky of stars hanging above them and a quiet desert.

“How many sticks of that dynamite you got?” J. asked.

Pulling open the canvas sack, Jack quickly counted the sticks out. “Twelve. Why?”

“Well we gotta test ‘em out don’t we?” J. held out her hand with a smile.

“I s’pose you’re right.” Jack said, passing J. one of the sticks. “Don’t you want to try ‘em out in the morning though; when we can see it better?”

“No.” J. replied sweetly.

Stepping away from the car, J. pulled her lighter from her pocket and ignited the fuse in a bright sparkle. With a snicker, she hucked the stick into the desert as far as she could and plugged her ears as she ran back to her spot beside Jack.

They waited.

“You know I love you, right, Jack?”

Jack turned to look at J. She was rarely so explicit with her feelings. As he made to speak, a bright flash erupted from the darkness, illuminating the desert around it. The explosion jolted Jack in his place. His ears were ringing. Rocks and other debris showered the car. J. gripped his arm tightly.

“We’ve gotta give it up after this, Jackie.” J. said, her voice solemn.

Jack nodded, “We will.”

“There gonna be on us any minute, J.” Jack said as the Chevy sped out of town. “You’ve got a plan, yeah?”

Jack passed J. her lighter and nodded to the pile of dynamite in the center console. “Give ‘em hell, J.!” he shouted.

A squadron of police cruisers had fanned out on the road behind them. Grabbing a stick of dynamite, J. lit the wick and waited a moment before tossing the explosive from the window.

Jack craned his head and watched as the stick disappeared under the mob of approaching police cruisers. An explosion rang out and the car in front of the brigade flipped through the air. Some came screeching to a halt while others scattered and continued their pursuit.

“Wooh!” Jack cheered. “Keeping giving it ‘em, J.! We’ve got enough dynamite for all of them!”

Grabbing another stick, J. began to light it when suddenly the back window shattered followed by a series of loud cracks. Two police cruisers had pulled up behind and close beside them.

J.

*I've been trying so hard to go back and figure it all out, but it keeps getting worse. I can't do it, J. When should I have met you?
When was our Time?*

*Yours,
Jack Evermore*

Jack found himself in a daze, hunched, limping through a vast desert spread far before him. The blackened sun had long since bathed the ground in grey and cracked the earth beneath his feet. His face, his lips had been blistered by the heat and yet he continued to walk.

Blood, dripping from an array of cuts on his hands and arms trailed beside his footsteps and over the horizon. How long would he walk for, how long had he already?

Jack stopped suddenly as the desert ground ahead of him gave way; a massive canyon had appeared in its place. Gazing down over the precipice, he saw nothing but shadowed forms, dim blurs of foliage and rocks.

As he stared, a weary calm came over him. Was this what he had been looking for? Moving to a crouch, he leaned back so he could sit at the edge of the cliff.

Jill,

I went for a drive today...ended up heading out East. I'm not sure where I'm going or when I'm gonna head back, but something about this feels right. These new cars are pretty nice, it ain't like the Chevy, but it'll have to do. Anyways, I was getting in the car to leave town today and I looked over and imagined that you were here riding copilot with me. I swear I could almost see you smiling. Every so often, I wonder what you're doing out there, if you're happy, if you finally got to settle down like you wanted.

Take care of yourself out there.

Yours,

J.