

Chimera

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Abstract

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Chimera is a novel-in-progress about America, money and murder, and it represents the experience of a young American born of immigrant parents, coming of age during the Great Recession of 2008. The novel consists of equal parts fiction, truth, biography, autobiography, philosophy, meditations on multi-racial identities, ecopoetics, and various indictments of cultural identity, collective economic practices, conceptions of criminality and justice, colonialism, mutually-shared delusions, and the linguistic implications of policymaking. Told in the present perfect tense, the novel takes place over the span of one day in the year 2027, and in that one day, the narrator, Hank, recollects events from 2008 to 2017. The text itself is an experiment on form, time and reflection, and it utilizes the devices of memory and disjunction as a means to travel back in time to the recollected events. Those events take place during the end of marijuana prohibition, culminating in a homicide outside of a bar in a small town in Humboldt County, California in 2017.

Chimera

Prologue

Sheriff's Office Investigating Homicide After Shooting In Blue Lake

Press release from the Humboldt County Sheriff's Office:

On October 31, 2017, at approximately 11:30 p.m., Humboldt County Sheriff's deputies responded to the 500 block of Railroad Avenue in Blue Lake for a report of a homicide with shots fired.

Deputies arrived on scene and located a deceased male victim lying on the sidewalk with what appeared to be multiple gunshot wounds. The victim's identity has not yet been confirmed.

Also, while on scene, deputies detained one female suspect. The subject declined to provide a statement to law enforcement. Deputies collected evidence on scene and the subject was released pending further investigation.

A witness informed deputies that two subjects, one male and one female, fled the scene in the decedent's vehicle. The vehicle is described as a blue 1990's model Chevrolet Camaro with Nevada plates.

More information regarding this investigation will be released as available and appropriate. Anyone with information about this case is encouraged to call the Humboldt County Sheriff's Office at (707) 445-7252.

CHP Investigating Fatal Collision With Connection To Homicide In Blue Lake

Press release from the California Highway Patrol:

On 10-31-2017, at approximately 11:44 p.m., the Humboldt Area California Highway Patrol (CHP) began pursuing a vehicle traveling northbound on 101 at speeds in excess of 90 mph.

CHP intercepted the vehicle just north of exit 728 near Trinidad, responding to earlier reports from the Humboldt County Sheriff's Office Emergency Communication Center. The vehicle in question, a blue 1991 Chevrolet Camaro, was witnessed fleeing the scene of an earlier incident at The Logger Bar in Blue Lake, on the 500 block of Railroad Avenue, at approximately 11:30 p.m.

According to CHP, at approximately 11:47 p.m., the vehicle, a few miles north of Trinidad, switched off their headlights. Due to fog and unsafe road conditions, pursuit was momentarily staggered, and the vehicle was able to evade officers.

At approximately 11:54 p.m., near Patrick's Point State Park, for reasons still under investigation, the vehicle crashed. The vehicle was found occupied by one male subject. Officers performed lifesaving efforts on the subject, however, the male succumbed to his injuries on scene. The male's identity has yet to be confirmed.

While earlier reports from the Humboldt County Sheriff's dispatch indicated a fellow subject in tow, none was found at the scene.

CHP and the Humboldt County Sheriff's Department is encouraging anyone with information about this case to call the Humboldt County Sheriff's Office at (707) 445-7252. Once additional information is obtained, further press releases shall be issued.

Part I

1.

In northwest Seattle on the corner of Northwest 63rd St. and 24th Ave., there is a bar called Olaf's, and you can stand outside the bar on any given day, and you will not have to wait long before you hear a passing motorist honk their horn and yell "Fuck you." Patrons usually respond with a "Fuck you, too." It's how all the regulars say hello to each other. It's all in good fun. And that is about the extent of all my fun these days. I consider myself lucky to have come this far. Life has the tendency to surprise you and lead you to a place where you never thought you'd end up.

I never thought I'd end up here.

...

The end of summer always comes faster than you think. There is a moment, around mid-August, where that first unexpected cold-snap hits, and you realize that the sunshine, and the daisies, and the laughter is all temporary.

Impermanent.

Today I watched an orb-weaver spider spin a web. I only really see these bloodsuckers around autumn. I guess that means fall is here.

...

In autumn, I get contemplative. I'm not sure why. I think I'm turning into my old man. Or maybe it's because my birthday is in autumn. Every year, as that autumnal birthday approaches, I get that annual reminder of the circle of life, just when all the leaves start to change colors.

2.

When I was younger, my father was always wont to tell me that money isn't everything. He'd say, "It's about love, too, son. And *Los Raiders!*" He's a big Raiders fan, poor guy. And then my mother would tell me not to listen to my father when he's been drinking whiskey, because he would say dumb things like, "money isn't everything."

"You know how he is. The Raiders. Ha! He's crazy," she'd often say. It's charming. I love how they still bicker with each other. They're such an odd couple. Polar opposites in a perfect union. When I think about it, it's a miracle that they ever found each other at all.

The story of how the Vasquez family came to America, at least according to my brothers and cousins, is debatable. We were all told different stories as children. And I cannot decipher which stories are true, and which ones are nonsense. But over the years, as we grew older, we have all come to understand just who we are and where we come from. And why.

There are six siblings in the Vasquez clan. In the summer of 1979, my dad, Hank Vasquez Sr. and his older brother, Rodrigo, moved the family from San Juan, Puerto Rico to southern California. Their dad, my grandfather, Eulalio Vasquez, was a prominent activist during the Puerto Rican independence movements in the mid-1970s. He and my grandmother, Maricela Vasquez, led a series of anti-colonial marches in San Juan from 1975 to 1978. Together they endured a great many threats against their lives during their pursuit for an independent Puerto Rico, and their attempts to overthrow their country's colonial rule gained much civic attraction in those years. It's been said, by some in our family, that Eulalio and Maricela helped to form the *Ejército Popular Boricua*, or the Boricua-Macheteros Popular Army, an underground, left-wing nationalist organization that claimed responsibility for the bombing of a few power stations in San Juan in '78. In early '79, both Eulalio and Maricela

were assassinated when their three-vehicle convoy was ambushed while en route to a Marxist reading group with students and other various intellectuals in Río Piedras. Left with little choice, not wanting to keep the family in harm's way, my dad and my tío rounded up the rest of the young siblings, left everything behind, and started their new lives in Long Beach, California.

The transition was all but smooth. Coming from Puerto Rico, my dad and his siblings weren't immigrants – never were immigrants at all. But even with citizenship, they were still brown-skinned, second-class citizens – citizens who had emigrated from a country with strong anti-American sentiment – and they fit a certain *profile* in America. So in order to look favorable in the eyes of the man-in-charge, my father applied for a job with the California Highway Patrol and worked for CHP for twenty-seven years. I'd say he made the right choice. For many reasons. And not because he's saved my ass time after time. But because he was born to be a cop. All my life, I've watched my dad. He's one of those hypervigilant folks you meet out there in the shuffle, always trying to work some angle, always watching, always surveilling. Never off-duty, even off the clock. And that mindset, that comportment, helped him climb the ranks. You could say he's the kind of cop you'd want all cops to be like. One with good judgement. Not an asshole. Someone who won't hesitate to put a tweaker or domestic abuser on their backs, but also someone who knows better than to cite a person for smoking a joint in public. A professional. But some things, they never leave the DNA, and there are times where his cop mask disappears. It's tough to get a read on my dad sometimes.

I haven't been home in years, but I'm willing to bet that the fridge in the garage is filled with Corona and Modelo beers. And I'm sure he's got a backlog of crushed aluminum cans of Tecate. One of his favorite hobbies is recycling beer cans to buy more beer. He'd say, "I recycle to help the environment, son. And to get a burrito and a six-pack. It's good economics." He is

right – it is good economics, especially if you drink as much as he does. Or as much as my brothers do. Or me. Even my mom. We're a family of lushes, the Vasquezes. It's in the genes. In fact, if it weren't for alcohol, me and my brothers might never have been born. If it weren't for a few tequila shots and a place called The Aero Club Bar, an old dive in San Diego just off I-5, my dad probably wouldn't have even met my mom.

My mother, Aurelia La Rosa-Vasquez, was born in Sicily in 1958. Her father, Vicente La Rosa, owned a small bakery in the town of Avola, a coastal village in the southeastern region of the Syracuse province. And her mother, Violetta, aka "Grandma Battle Axe," as my brothers and I used to call her, was a school teacher. The second World War brought them together when their homes were pulverized during the Allied invasion of Sicily in 1943. After the war, they remained in Sicily, and they rebuilt Grandpa Vicente's bakery, where they continued to work until my mother was born. But as the politics of the region shifted, my grandparents decided to move to America. Before my grandpa passed in 1998, I can remember him telling me, "Hank, Socialism is bullshit." I can also remember him saying such things like, "I'm not a political person," and other nonsense like, "Bob Dole is the only thing that'll save America from that Clinton asshole." Grandpa was a proud American. Even if he was a full-blooded Sicilian.

In 1959, he, Grandma V and my mom emigrated to the United States and settled in Frenchville, a town in Aroostook County in northern Maine, right along the St. John River, a mere stone's throw away from the Canadian border. Why my grandparents decided to settle in Frenchville, Maine is still somewhat of a mystery. Before my grandma passed, she told me it reminded her of Europe. It makes sense: about eighty percent of the population of Frenchville are fluent French speakers, Quebec not too far away. My grandmother hated the French. So did my grandfather. Why? I don't know. It was all old history that I'd never understand.

Mom was a hippie who was raised Catholic. She's a sweet lady, my mom, and you'd never think that she had a rebellious streak. But she did. In 1974 she ran away from home spent two years on the road with the Grateful Dead. Which I still think is awesome. But it's a time of her life that she doesn't like to talk about. I'm guessing it's because of the Catholicism, but I really don't know. When I was little, my grandma – to gain the upper hand over my mom in arguments – would ask the question, “Remember when we had to pick you up in Palo Alto?”, as if the question were some sort of coda, a reminder of a time of great shame during mom's young life. Some sort of way to reestablish parental dominance. And it worked. Every time. To this day, I'm not sure if mom's guilt comes from her Catholicism, or if she really did do some shady-ass shit in Palo Alto in '76.

She went back home to Frenchville after Palo Alto, but she didn't stay long. I never did ask my mom why she hated Frenchville. I always thought it was beautiful. Then again, in southern California, a bioregion subject to perpetual wildfires and a lack of drinking water, any place with water and trees over forty feet tall can be considered beautiful. Still, she hated Frenchville. And she missed California. If I had to guess why she longed for California, I'd say it's the climate. A climate similar to the one she was born in. Whatever her reason, in the fall of '77, she pushed all her chips in and applied to UCLA. After she graduated in 1981, she got an entry-level job as a teleprompter typist for KTLA-5 News, and within a year, she was knocked up with my brother. Upon hearing about the pregnancy, my grandma wanted to know only one thing:

“What does the father do? You know who the father is, don't you?”

“Mom, of course. The father's a cop. His name is Hank. And we're getting married.”

“What?”

I can't prove it, but I think my mom married my dad in order to spite her parents. Appearances can be deceitful, because while grandma respected my dad's job, she hated my dad. During one Christmas, I think I was eight or nine, dad got hammered on pitorro. On this particular Christmas, my dad and tío Rodrigo made a strong batch, and they both kept yelling something like, "You can take the boy out of Puerto Rico, but you can't take the Puerto Rico out of the boy." It was ridiculous, hilarious. I couldn't stop laughing. He was so loud, the neighbors called the cops, and when the cops showed up, dad poured them a shot. It was the greatest thing I've ever seen. But my grandmother was horrified; she couldn't believe that cops in America were, in her mind, as morally corrupt as the cops in Sicily. "Lots of sin in him, Aurelia. How can he drink so much?" she asked my mom. And mom just had this big grin on her face. It was one of the best Christmases I can remember. To me, it showed that mom's way of rebelling was to marry a criminal. So, she married a cop. Go figure. Was it love that brought them together? I don't know.

One thing my mom did love was her job. She cherished her work at KTLA-5 News, and she took pride in reporting the news for her Long Beach community. At first her job was boring. All she did was type the script, and the script was often dictated by some unqualified, obese and perverted man with two divorces, a wife, a mistress, the gout and a huge belly. But eventually the man died, and she got promoted. After four years, she was elevated to the position of an on-air news journalist. And for thirty-six years she worked at KTLA-5. A lifetime of news and reporting. And together with my dad, a lifetime of law enforcement. It's a different side of the coin to see while growing up, watching a cop and a reporter operate in the field. To observe everything behind the scenes. To know of something, even for only a few minutes or hours before the public would know, was a privilege I enjoyed. I guess I still do.

...

During another Christmas, and I don't know why everything always happens on Christmas, I was probably fifteen or sixteen, when my mom told me, "I almost got an abortion in '81." She wasn't even drunk when she said it. She was stone-cold sober. And something must have been on her mind.

So I asked her, "Why didn't you? Could've been a kickass time, ma. All that freedom."

"Junior, please."

"Nah, think about it, mom: you could've been a single wealthy woman. Probably livin' it up in Beverly Hills too. And instead, you're stuck here with dad. Abortion sounds pretty good right about now, don't you think?"

"Hank, that's horrible! Abortion is a sin. I can't turn my back on God."

And those are my parents – poor, honest souls. Hopeless Catholics. Bound by faith and virtue. Circumstance. And religion. Always trying to do the right thing. Anything to please the Lord. Put your faith in God, and give your money to the taxman and the Church. I couldn't live like that. It's nonsense. This is America. And in America, this game is rigged. You gotta go out there and take it.

3.

Speaking of America, one trend that took flight in America throughout the 2010s was the installation of glass garage doors at bars and restaurants. No doubt, hipster-driven. The hipsters of that period fancied themselves as industrialists. At least they pretended to be industrialists. And nothing demonstrates the spirit of industrialization better than bars and restaurants with glass garage doors and the sentiment of the people they represent. There was a strong sense of DIY and self-reliance that emanated from these individuals. And along that same spectrum, in the other direction, an overwhelming amount of these folks were completely helpless. No skills at all. Some couldn't even cook. Some *still* can't cook. If it weren't for the microwave and Hot Pockets from the 7-11, many of them would starve. And if it weren't for income derived from questionable business practices, many of them would have died sooner.

I can recall a night with some of these same fools in 2010 at the Catalyst Club in Santa Cruz: it was a cold January night, and Slightly Stoopid was performing. A girl I was seeing at the time surprised me with concert tickets. It was perfect timing. She wanted to get drunk. I wanted to get laid. And we both wanted to see a concert. And after burning through my party stash, I needed to re-up. Marijuana was still illegal in 2010 and prohibition was in full effect, but in Santa Cruz, marijuana laws were lax and only enforced near school zones and churches. One of the best places to buy and smoke weed was at the Catalyst Club, a concert venue and night club on Pacific Avenue. In 2010 it was *the* one-stop shop for all your essential party needs. From a single vendor – unaffiliated with the Catalyst of course – you could buy a quarter-ounce of pot, a gram of coke, fifteen ecstasy pills, and two pepperoni slices to-go. It was like heaven. And it was a hell of a market to buy, sell, and trade in. I've never been on the floor of the NYSE, but I imagine it's a lot like what Pacific Avenue in Santa Cruz was like in 2010. Many

people went to the Catalyst for the concerts, and many others simply showed up and partied on the sidewalk outside the venue on Friday and Saturday nights. It was a great time to be alive, especially in northern California. With all the pot smoke, free love, cheap drugs and booze, you could let go of your inhibitions and your worries, and, for a brief moment, you could almost forget that the Great Recession, two years prior, had ever happened at all.

...

On warm and sunny summer days, Olaf's opens their glass garage door. And with the summer heat, a slow-moving clock and a lazy and pleasant breeze, an open-garage-doored Olaf's is a wonderful place to sit, relax, reflect, daydream and daytime drink. The bartender at Olaf's, Tom, mixes a hell of a Moscow Mule and a wicked Mai Tai, and during baseball season, it's *the* place to pregame before hopping in the Uber to T-Mobile Park for a Mariners game.

A few summers ago, while pregaming, an old coworker and friend from California showed up to the bar. Him showing up took me by surprise. I never thought I'd see him again, but there he was. "How the hell are you, Brian?" I asked.

"Ah, kid, I'm doing great. Finally retired now. And I'm thinking of moving here. It's beautiful. And it's got a great tax code. California's gone to shit. You know any good spots just outside the city? Need a good-sized place for the dogs and a big garden."

"Get outta' here, are you serious? That's great, Brian. Congrats. Yeah, there's a ton of places. Nice towns. Small towns. Smaller towns. All that jazz. There's even some homes here in Ballard. Let's scope some places out tomorrow."

"Right on, kid. Sounds like a plan. Knew I could count on you. Let me buy you a beer. Like old times, you broke ass."

"Ah, just like old times. Thanks, Brian. I'll have another Manny's."

Brian called out to Tom, “Can I get two Manny’s for me and my old friend here.”

“And two shots of Herradura. The añejo, please, Tom,” I added. “By the way, Tom, meet my friend, Brian. He was my old coworker down in NorCal, in Humboldt. We did a lot of work down there.”

Tom brought us our beers and shots. “Well right on. Nice to meet you, Brian. What kind of work did you and Hank do in Cali?”

Brian smiled. “Well. A little of this, a little of that. Lots of electrical work. Machine operating too. And we worked some of the old mills out there.”

“And grow pot?” Tom asked.

“Ah, no. Not me. Not us. We were contractors. A lot of our work came from a family out there. *They* grew the pot. Hank and I just did their irrigation and smoked the stuff.”

Tom laughed and poured a shot for himself too. “That’s awesome, man. Well, hey, welcome to Seattle. Always good to see the Humboldt folk come visit. Check out Stoup Brewery while you’re here. There’s some Humboldt expats there running the place.”

“Well alright, I’ll get Hank to drag my ass there tomorrow.”

“Worth it,” Tom said. “They got a great red ale.”

We raised our shots in unison. Glasses clanked. Shots went down. The tequila burned. And I chased with my beer. “Thanks, Tom,” I said.

Brian took a swig of his beer. “Mmm. This beer tastes like the old Steelhead beer. Remember Mad River Brewery, kid?”

“Sure do. Haven’t had a Steelhead in ages. That’s why I drink these Manny’s. Tastes a lot like a Steely.” I smiled. For a brief moment, my memory traveled back in time. I thought

about California, how much I missed it. And I thought about the old job, how crazy it was. And the beer. And the pot. The drugs. The sex. And the family Brian and I worked for.

Brian asked, “Hey, kid, you still got that old Ameritrade account the family set up for you a while back?”

“Yeah. Why? They just got bought out by Schwab, right? Anything I should know?”

Brian grinned. “Do yourself a favor, kid. Put in a couple investments. Write these names down.”

4.

The period between 1981 and 1996 in the United States was a time of accelerated growth and inflation. During that fifteen-year span approximately 72.1 million people were born in the United States, ushering in the country's largest population cohort in its history: the Millennial generation. In the first twenty-five years of this generation's existence, the Millennials would endure two major recessions; four moderate recessions; the events of September 11, 2001; a war in Afghanistan; two wars in Iraq; George Bush Sr. and George Bush Jr.; no Al Gore; and over \$400 billion dollars of student loan debt, ballooning to over \$1.6 trillion dollars by 2020. Together with the subsequent generation, Generation Z, or the Zoomers, these cohorts would go on to usurp the highest suicide rate in modern U.S. history, as well as the largest diagnosed-depression rate per capita. In many ways, these generations would inherit the sociopolitical, economical, and environmental messes left behind by previous generations of industry. My brothers and I are Millennials, and many of our cousins and friends are Millennials and Zoomers. Growing up in America as a Millennial has been complicated. For some reason, the Millennial generation has taken a lot of flak. And much of that criticism stems from their predecessors: the Baby Boomers.

Why? I don't know. Baby Boomers are a conflicted bunch. In America, there tends to be a collective tendency amongst this group of 69.5 million people to say one thing and do another, and many seem to oscillate between crossroads. There's an overwhelming sense of dissatisfaction within the Boomer generation. I have noticed their inner-yearning to shed old values, to subvert the cultural space that they've been assigned to. A space that they may have never wanted. Many believe in God, and yet many have stopped believing in God. Some believe in science, and some others do not. In various ways, the Boomers are a lot like

Millennials, and much like the Millennials, the Baby Boomers have had an irresponsible and downright toxic relationship to money, finance, and capitalism. Some claim that money is power, or money is freedom, or money is a sign of success. There are those who believe money is the ultimate goal, and there are others who think money is simply a means to an end, and that end may be entirely devoid of money and concepts of currency and value altogether. People do a lot of crazy things for money. People *believe* a lot of strange things about money. Money, guns, and religion have killed more people in the United States than heart disease and cancer combined. Well, I don't know if that's true, but it seems that way. I can remember a lot of childhood friends that were dead by sixteen. Shot dead. Stabbed. Thrown into the ocean. And for what? Two hundred bucks. A pair of Jordan's. An iPhone. Or pieces of jewelry, gold.

Growing up, me and my brothers came close to death more times than any of us would have liked. And that was life growing up in Long Beach. Long Beach is home, and Long Beach is dirty. Hot. Covered in trash. Water, brown like my skin. The clear water was in Malibu, where all the white folks lived. In Long Beach, it's Mexicans, Blacks, Filipinos, and mutt-mixed Italian-Puerto Ricans like me. Some, rich. But many others, poor. And not everyone gets fed. The awareness of lack is undeniable. Many long for a future that they'll never get to see. They're hungry. And when you're hungry – for food or money – you lie, cheat, steal, hustle, and you keep your Glock ready like a good American. Seems that way everywhere these days. It's rough and wild. Life or death. And with guns and money involved, it can be a short life, unless you got an escape plan.

My brothers took a traditional a Millennial route on their exodus from Long Beach: they chose to enlist and fight the oil and opium wars in the Middle East. And after discharge, my oldest bro, Jacob, got a job with the California Department of Corrections, and my other bro,

Chris, followed dad's path and got a job with CHP at the Sacramento Area Office. With the military experience, plus dad's old connections, it was easy for them to get well-paying jobs. I remember Thanksgiving 2010 when Jacob was telling me he had a base salary of \$90,000 as a correctional officer, and he made an additional \$130,000 in overtime pay.

“The system was meant to be abused, Hank,” he told me.

Like I said: people do crazy and shady things for money. Like work law enforcement. Or report the news. Or they go to school and learn how to commit white-collar crimes legally. By 2008, it was clear that in order to get a decent job as a young person in America, you either needed PTSD from fighting foreign wars, or you needed crippling debt in the form of a college degree. But those things, they weren't for me. Not my lines of work. Not my style. I wanted a different path.

Tío Rodrigo owned an auto repair shop. I worked there for a couple of years after high school. Learned a couple of things. Skills, tools, tricks – stuff like that. We’d get drunk, my tío and I, and we’d argue about cars.

“Tío, man, it’s all about the Mustang. Fuck the Camaro.”

“*Qué la*. Hank, listen here: I love you, and I want you to live, so don’t be stupid. Those Mustangs, they got that wheel-hop. You’ll crash that shit.”

“...The fuck. Just get the limited differential, or the whatever-its-called.”

“Ay, Hank, you’re not listening: *los Mustangs no son buenos para los borrachos*. You gotta think with your head, son. Can’t get away from cops in a Mustang when you’re drunk. Unless you’re fuckin’ pro like me.” He cackled, nearly fell off his stool. “*El Camaro* has way better handling if you wanna run from cops.”

My tío was funny like that. A cool dude, always teaching me little things I’d never learn in a school. He passed away a little after I turned twenty-two. Doctors say he had a heart attack. I guess all the steak and Coronas finally caught up to the old man. Shit, a young man. He was fifty-one when he went. Gone, just like that. It’s crazy. My aunt sold the shop after that. We almost kept it going, co-ran the place for a few months. But it just wasn’t the same. And I didn’t have the heart anymore.

But I was still broke.

And I didn’t want to be broke anymore. Before he passed, we talked about what I might do for a career. I told him I might want to go to school in northern California. “Somewhere near the redwoods,” I told him.

“Then why don’t you?”

“Ah, I dunno, tío. School’s for fools.”

“*Tonto*. You’re fucking dumb if you believe that, Hank.” His tone was serious. I’d never heard him like that before. “*Serio*, what are you gonna do? Stay in Long Beach forever? Your parents didn’t come to America for you to be some *puta* bitchass, working for nickels and dimes. Be real, son. Whatchu wanna do?”

“*No sé, tío*. I’ve thought about going to school. Maybe an English degree. Maybe welding. I could probably write. Graphic design. Law school. Or maybe start a business. There’s just so many things I want to do. But how am I going to do it? And how am I going to pay for it? In this economy, the last thing this country needs is more fucking artists.”

“Ay. See that’s where you’re wrong. You gotta follow your muse, Hank. Fuck economics, kid. That mindset’s a trap. It’s not real. I know you can get what you need. For real, son, you can’t stay here forever.”

He was dead less than a month later.

Some days, I wonder if I really knew my tío, who he actually was. He was always laughing, always smiling. But, somewhere in that head of his, behind that mask, the mask of a jester, a fool, I could tell he was hiding something. In a lot of ways, he was like my dad. He’d drop the joker act, emphasize safety, telling me to choose a Camaro over a Mustang. Because Mustangs – in his opinion – handle like shit. But he was also reckless, like when choosing a Camaro over a Mustang in order to evade police, which he has done – my dad told me the story. Growing up with the two of them, my tío and my dad, I think it warped my world. Made it difficult to tell right from wrong, because both of them were pretty bad. But at the same time, they were also good. It didn’t make sense. It still doesn’t. I do miss him. But I wonder if I really *knew* him, if I ever read him right.

But after he passed, I took his advice to heart, and around the time of the Great Recession, with my tío in mind, and with some advice from my parents about finding love and getting money and cheering for the Raiders, I left Long Beach behind and set out on a journey that would eventually lead me to the North Coast of California in Humboldt County. In southern California, Humboldt County had this mythical reputation. Humboldt is part of a triad of counties called the Emerald Triangle. All the counties of the Emerald Triangle – Humboldt, Mendocino, and Trinity – grew something like 65% of all the weed in North America. So they say. Before the end of prohibition, in certain parts of this country, I had heard that a pound of weed could sell for as much as \$5200 dollars.

I guess this all started out as an idea.

6.

Or maybe I was always like this. It's tough to tell. The idea took flight one day while visiting my cousin, Anthony, in Santa Cruz. He was attending UC Santa Cruz at the time, pursuing an advanced physics degree, and he was selling acid and growing tons of weed in his backyard to pay for school. I was still on the fence about school, still enrolled at the junior college back in Long Beach, but I was starting to figure out this whole school thing wasn't for me. After the auto shop, I didn't want to get a degree. I didn't want to get some job, taking orders from some bum while getting paid shit wages – paying the man for the rest of my life. And I didn't want to be a cop. I wanted to *retire*, like all those bailed-out bankers on Wall Street. So I stayed on the Central Coast for a couple of days, figured out my next move.

One afternoon, my cousin and I went fishing for rockfish on the wharf. Made great tacos that night; I'm a sucker for tacos. And it was a gorgeous day on the Central Coast. I remember it vividly, like an old photograph: the sunshine, cloudless. A 24-pack of Coors Light. Cudi's *Day 'n' Nite* blasting from a stereo in the distance. Blunt, burning. Fish, biting. Sea lions, fucking. And then, like a bolt from the blue, Anthony said to me, "Hank, help me out, and I'll cut you in for five hundred."

"Just drive, huh? Transportation, that's it?"

"Yeah, Hank. To Chico. The kids there go crazy for this shit, payin' top dollar. It's good profit, man. Ain't nothing to it. The buyer's at the Woodside Apartments on West Sac Ave. Apartment 4B. Tell 'em you're my cousin and you got what they need."

I didn't think too long about it. I was broke. I wanted to retire.

"Sure. I'll do it."

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There was a big demand for ecstasy and LSD in the northeastern crest of the Sacramento Valley in 2009, much of that demand stemming from Chico State University in Chico, California. The city of Chico and Chico State University, much like the Emerald Triangle, had their own mythical reputations. In 1987, *Playboy* declared Chico State the top-ranked party school in the country, and the school held that distinction for fifteen years until 2002, when *Playboy* shook up the rankings and dropped Chico State to number two, favoring the drunker students at Arizona State University. I had never been to Chico before. I had definitely heard about it. I can remember flipping through old issues of *Playboy* at my tío's house, reading 'Chico State' at the top of the list of the best party schools. Everyone in high school had a story or two about a crazy weekend in Chico. My brothers had their stories. Even heard my mom talk about it. With all the hype, I was excited to see this enchanted land for myself.

The morning I left for Chico, I was given seventy-five ecstasy pills and two bottles of Visine and was told not to get any liquid on my skin unless I was ready to have a good time. There was no turning back.

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It was Labor Day weekend in Chico. And it was hot as shit. For a Sicilian-Puerto Rican, you'd think the heat wouldn't be a problem, but I was pouring sweat. And my nerves were frayed. Transporting narcotics across multiple county lines was not a lifepath I thought I'd go down. But the job was simple. Deliver the pills and vials to a stranger's apartment on West Sac Ave., and they'd pay me \$2,400, five hundred of which was mine. Pure and simple. All business. Ain't nothing to it. After that, I was off the hook, free to party all weekend.

According to popular beliefs, there's a generalized rule in life to never mix business with pleasure, but some rules are bullshit, or maybe I suck at following rules, because every time I visited Chico, I was fucked up, constantly cross-faded. And my memories are all jumbled now. During those days, I walked around like I was invincible. A drink here, poppin' a pill there, and yes, I'd love a bump. How about another bump? And where's the keg? And why's the rum gone? You've got Four Loko's? Let's Party! The days floated by in Chico, like smoke from a 2:00 a.m. cigarette, and time meant nothing.

It was definitely the drugs.

Psychedelics tend to warp your sense of time. I remember a chick I met in Chico named Ana. She and her husband were good friends with my cousin, Anthony, and they'd smoke a ton of DMT. Her husband was a chemistry major at the university, and as a hobby, he'd synthesize DMT from acacia bark. And every once in a while, we'd trade DMT for LSD.

The last time I saw Ana, she had lost her mind. We were in her living room, and she was staring at the carpet like it was some ancient Vedic text she was trying to decipher. I'm talking about full-blown tunnel vision; I don't even think she knew I was in the room. Her husband told me she had smoked too much DMT the night before.

"I think she broke through and didn't come back."

"You mean she's still 'out there'?"

"Maybe. My Shaman told me this might happen if we didn't get our dosages right."

"Shaman? You hippies. You're all the same. Fuckin' junkies, chasing dragons, looking for enlightenment. When are you going to realize Terrence McKenna is full of shit?"

"Whatever, Hank. Just give it some time. She'll come back soon. Do you want a hit?"

"Well, yeah, sure. Why not?"

Last I heard, they had a kid. But I haven't seen them in ages. They seem like ancient memories now. Like many of my memories these days. But what I do remember: the day I met Joyce Fulton.

8.

From the city of Orland, I exited Highway 5 and merged onto Highway 32, driving east, eventually pulling into the Woodshire Apartment complex on West Sacramento Avenue. I'm not sure if those apartments are there anymore. I haven't been to Chico in years. The whole town could look different by now. And I didn't know what to expect. For all I knew, the buyer could have been gang affiliated. Or a tweaker. Or a gangster-tweaker. My heart raced, and I was scared. I knocked on the door of unit 4B. This lady opened the door, looked at me. Scowled. Asked me what I want.

“Oh, hi, I'm Hank.”

“Sure, Hank. What do you want?”

“I'm Anthony's cousin. I heard you might be looking for party supplies.”

She shook her head. “Come in, Hank. I got the AC cranked up in here. Shut the door and quit letting the air out.”

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Joyce Elizabeth Fulton's great-great-great-great grandfather, Cornelius Octavius Fulton, was a Civil War veteran from St. Louis, Missouri who settled in Humboldt County after the war in 1865. He pulled up stakes with his mistress, Ingrid Lane, his son, Cornelius Jr., from a previous marriage, his daughter, Margie Fulton-Lane, and their cat – a gray and white British shorthair named George.

During that time in history, Native genocide and the ego-driven philosophy of Manifest Destiny was on the mind of many westward-moving Americans, and the Bald Hills War had ravaged the Native population of Humboldt, so for a white man like Fulton, land was easy to come by. And so, because it was in his destiny, Cornelius Octavius Fulton purchased a 44-acre

parcel in the settlement of Blue Lake. By the time Joyce Fulton was born in 1984, the original homesteading apple trees were as fertile as ever.

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Little hints of lavender and incense hung in the air when I walked into Joyce's apartment that Labor Day weekend. Psychedelic tapestries adorned the windows and ceilings, and all the smiling little Buddha figurines put me at ease. This was hippie country, no doubt. A green zone. Ain't no trouble here. When the Buddha is around, I know things are gonna be okay. Sort of.

"Have a seat," she said. "Want a beer or anything?"

"Yeah, I'd love a beer. Thank you."

She rummaged through the fridge. "How come I've never seen you before, Hank?"

"Oh. Uh, well..."

"This Santa Cruz business is starting to get a little sketchy. All these different heads coming through my home – people I don't know." She handed me the beer. "I don't like doing business with people I don't know. I got a straight operation here. And I don't like bullshit. Why should I trust you? And where the hell is Anthony? You're the third person he's sent in two months."

She put me on the spot. I didn't know anything about her business with Anthony, and I didn't have an answer for her, not a good one at least. This was no longer fun and games. This was business, life or death. So I lied, told her some partial truths. And gave her what she paid for. "Lady, I'm broke as shit. I did this favor for my cousin, and I did it for the cash. I ain't in this long-term."

Some of our beliefs are funny. As I continue to reflect, I think I'm starting to feel the autumn blues. Have you ever had the autumn blues? They're more common than you'd think. I once met a guy at Olaf's who talked about his "higher self." Not some sort of drug high, but more like a level of awareness. He said, "Whenever I'm feeling crazy or destructive, I ask myself, 'What is the right thing to do? How would my higher self like me to respond?'. Now, my lower self, it usually wants to go wild, break windows and shit. But my higher self says, 'Walk away, man. Choose the healthy path,' or something like that. It helps to keep things on an even keel for me. Maybe it'll work for you."

"That's cool. Very Zen of you. Does it keep you accountable?"

"Sometimes. Not always. Tonight I told myself I'd only have one beer. That's a lie."

"How many have you had?"

"Six."

"Oh."

"But I'm feeling great!"

"Yeah, man, I can see that. How are you not shitfaced right now?"

"Did a bump in the bathroom."

"Oh."

"You want one?"

"Ah, I really shouldn't."

Sometimes I wonder if people know when they're lying to themselves. Delusion and denial can be great ways to live, especially if you're ready to deal with the consequences, and a

guilt-free life is usually a good one. It's easy to live the lie. People love the lie. It's comfortable. Familiar. Well-rehearsed. Predictable.

Like religion. And American politics.

I read a quote from Confucius a couple months back, at least I think Confucius said it. The quote was scrawled above the urinal in the bathroom at Olaf's. It said, "We live two lives, and the second one begins when we realize we only have one." Whoever scribbled that quote above the urinal is a jerk. That's a lot of heavy philosophical mojo to lay on a drunk person's mind. I don't wanna read that when I piss. Tell me a joke. Make me laugh. How about a pun? Or a poem. I don't want to think too hard. But that damn quote did get me thinking. Since then, I've been meditating, keeping that quote on the brain. I even asked myself, "When did you figure out you were lying to yourself?" It's not an easy question to answer. One: you have to acknowledge that you have lied to yourself, and that you do lie to yourself. And two: you're gonna find some things about yourself that you don't like. It sucks. No one ever told me Memory Lane was going to be rough road to navigate. But all that time travel into the past, that's where perspective comes from. And that perspective is golden. It's wisdom. It must not be ignored. There is freedom in acknowledgement. There is freedom in perspective. There is freedom in knowing who you are.

It turns out that I am a pretty good liar. And I was taught by the best.

One thing I learned at a young age was how often adults lie to each other. When I was a kid, my dad would have poker nights at the house with his cop buddies. They would play cards, drink heavily, and then drive home. And they'd let me play too. Before I ever learned how to read, I learned how to play poker. And every Wednesday night in the Vasquez household, for over twenty years, I'd play poker with cops.

Poker's a neat game. It's all about how you represent yourself, how you appear to other poker players. Statistically it's rare that you get dealt a good hand. Every once in a while, you'll get dealt the nuts, but in most cases, after the cards are dealt, no one ever really has a good hand. But everyone pretends they do.

And then they bet.

There are many different types of poker players. Like the bully – the one who capitalizes on intimidation. The bully likes to talk a lot, and they rely on their inherent odiousness. If they're good, you're in trouble. If not, they'll talk their way out of the game one way or another, and then you can take their money. After the bully, there's the beginner, who seems to win every single hand. Playing against a beginner can be difficult. They're tough to read, especially if they don't know what they're doing. There's also the nervous player – this is the one who'll check their cards every five seconds. Sometimes they'll lick their lips, stroke their chin. Maybe after they bet and throw chips in, their hands retreat to a protective position over their cards. There's usually some kinetic quirk or tic associated with the nervous one. And then there's the silent one. Be careful about the silent one.

Some cardplayers are math wizards, walking computers, calculating pot odds at the drop of a hat. Geniuses. They're usually pretty good. Both my dad and my tío were good with the numbers, and they were good at playing the odds. There is also a crossover amongst these roles and types. The silent one can also be a math whiz. Or the bully can be a math whiz. The nervous one may be the silent one. Or the beginner can be a bully. You meet all kinds of folks at the poker table. And behind all the different faces they wear, they're all liars.

Some of the most talented liars I've ever met have been cops. My dad's a perfect example. You wouldn't believe how many DUI's my dad helped my tío get away with. Once

when I was thirteen, my brothers and I got caught stealing car stereos. The arresting officer knew who we were, called my dad. And those two falsified a report, blamed everything on some mutual confidential informant they knew. Planted evidence. Fabricated witness statements. The works. The corruption was unbelievable. Demoralizing. I couldn't believe how easy it was to get away. But we did. And the press and media, they didn't help. They upheld the false narrative. The next morning after the arrest, headlines in the paper read, "*Known Gang Member and Associates Detained During Traffic Stop.*" There was even an interview with the arresting officer on KTLA-5 News.

For the longest time, the dominant narrative in America has preached that all cops are good. But what if that wasn't true? And what if you had proof? What if you knew the cops were bluffing, full of shit? That cop that arrested me and my brothers, that same guy would come to poker nights at the house. I went heads-up against him a few times. He's silent when he's sober. Like a shark. A predator. But when he's drunk, he's loud. Abrasive. He hurls insults. Most of the time, he bluffs, and he knows he's full of shit. He loses all control. And, if you play your cards right, he can make you rich. I never did mind taking money from that guy.

Growing up at a poker table made it easy to see all the lies we live. And all the lies we tell ourselves and to each other. To me, there is no better place to practice and master the pantomimes of political theatre than at the poker table. And the bar too. Very early in life, I learned that everyone participates in this collective hypocrisy we call "civilization." So if Confucius is right, and who knows if he's right – if a *person has two lives, and the second one begins when they realize they only have one*, then maybe asking myself, "When did you figure out you were lying to yourself" is the wrong question. Maybe I should be asking, "When did I decide to live my life?"

I guess it was the day I told Joyce, “I ain’t in this long term.”

Labor Day weekend 2009 in Chico, California, at unit 4B of the Woodshire Apartments on West Sac, I made a decision to live my life. That was the day I lied to myself and thought, *I can walk away from this at any time.*

“I ain’t in this long term,” I told Joyce.

After she handed me that cash, I knew there was no going back. This was just too easy. And things with Joyce were easy. She was all business. A professional. And ruthless. “I’m the fuckin’ the coke baron of Greek row,” she’d often say. And it was true. Joyce didn’t fit the typical profile of a major narcotics dealer. Her record was clean. She had all her teeth and hair. She paid taxes. And for part time work, she volunteered at the local Montessori school, teaching four-year-old’s how to finger paint. On the surface, Joyce was an honest civilian. An educator. Just another one of the thousands of students living in a party-college town. It was the perfect cover for a narcotics operation. I didn’t know how deep the operation went when I first met Joyce. But as time moved forward, the more I came to know the extent of what she was in to.

It turned out that Joyce had family working all over California, including the Port of Oakland. On average, the Port of Oakland handles about 2.6 million shipping containers per year, and none of the workers at the port know what those containers hold. It’s the same situation at the Port of Long Beach. The Long Beach port averages about 8.1 million containers per year, and just like folks in Oakland, the employees at the site know very little about the cargo they handle. For a few years, before my tío opened his auto shop, he worked as a longshoreman at the Port of Long Beach, from ’89 to ’95. I can remember one day at the shop, him telling me something like, “Hank, everything gets shipped through the ports. Alcohol, guns, drugs, nice fancy Persian rugs that your aunt likes. And cars, shoes, food, exotic animals. Even people. All

that gets shipped in these containers. And none of us knows what we are loading or unloading at any time. At least we're not supposed to know. But every once in a while, we'd get good info. How do you think you, your brothers, and your cousins all got the new Jordan's for Christmas?"

"Serious? You stole our Jordan's for us? And some of the containers might've had people in them? The fuck."

"¿Loco, no? Fucking crazy what goes on at the ports. Don't tell your dad, ok? He's gonna be pissed if he knows where I used to get his whisky from."

I don't know why I didn't see it then, why I didn't see how shady Tío Rodrigo was. Thinking about it now, all those years growing up, watching him – all those hours at the shop working with him, the stories he'd tell and the things he'd do. Maybe he was a bad apple. And maybe I justified it in my head, rationalized the things I saw. But he was good at what he did. He was good at making money. And every day working with him, I'd learn to score. A few dollars here, a few dollars there.

...

About every four weeks or so, Joyce would drive from Chico to visit family in Oakland. After visiting her family, she would return to Chico with one kilo of cocaine, and upon return, she'd notify the three dealers on her payroll: Braxton Papadakis of the Theta Chi fraternity, Aubrey Davis of the AGR fraternity, and Caitlin Cromartie of the Delta Gamma sorority; and she would give 330 grams to each of them, keeping ten grams to herself to party. Within two weeks, the coke would be sold; the dealers would get their fifteen percent cut, about \$15,000 dollars or so; and Joyce would get paid: \$55,000. And because she cut out the cost of mules and assumed all transportation risk, she didn't need to pay anyone else. It was all profit. In total, the operation generated \$1.2 million dollars per year, with the dealers netting \$180,000 a year, and Joyce

racking in over \$660,000 a year. Not bad for a Montessori teacher and a couple of frat and sorority kids.

...

Back at the apartment, Joyce gave me the shakedown and asked, “Why should I trust you?”

“Lady, I’m broke as shit. I did this favor for my cousin, and I did it for the cash. I ain’t in this long-term.”

“I don’t care if you’re broke. That’s not what bothers me. It’s the commitment.”

“Commitment? The fuck?”

“Yeah, the commitment. These one-and-done deals – shady, dude. Can I trust you to shut the fuck up about this? Will you tell anyone?”

“Just Anthony to give him his money. That’s it. Swear. Nobody’s gonna figure out shit. I’m just trying to get paid.”

“That’s what the last guy said. He got popped back in Santa Cruz. Another one of Anthony’s sketchy friends. He reminds me of you. A fool just looking to get paid, careless with everything. Had to get him a good lawyer. Took a lot to get him to shut up. If you get caught, you gonna talk?”

That was my tipping point. That question, that implication – snitching – it pissed me off. “We’re done here,” I said and got up from the couch. “What’s with the shakedown? Chick, you got your shit, and I got mine. I’m out. Peace.”

“Wait, wait. Sorry. Please. I didn’t mean anything by it. I just want to know if we can make some good money together? You know, long term?”

“Don’t know. I’d have to think about it.”

“Well, how much are you getting out of this?”

“Five hundred.”

“Oh.”

“Oh?”

“That’s it?”

“Am I getting played?”

She reached in her pocket, pulled out a few hundred. “Here. Take it.”

When you’re a whore like me, stuck in your script, it’s hard to walk away from easy money. I didn’t know what to say. Or what to think. At that point, I had only ever bought drugs. Never sold them. The whole situation felt so new to me. Like when a baby tastes Coca-Cola for the first time. The baby sees a dark liquid, and they don’t know what it is, but they drink it anyways. And then it happens: that joy, that thrill. That damn sugar high. It gets you going. And all you can think about is you want more. More coke. More, more, more, now! So I took the money. “Thanks, I guess.”

“I just want to make sure my people get paid, make sure we all eat.”

“Okay, I feel you. I can appreciate that. Why didn’t you just say that?”

“Don’t take it personal, Hank. I’m thorough with everyone. Speaking of getting fed, you wanna order a pizza or something? I’m starving.”

...

There is nothing better than serendipity. Sex, maybe. Or free pizza and beer. And tacos. But the sex, pizza, tacos and beer that find you without you looking for them, it’s a magical feeling, and if you’ve ever experienced the phenomenon, then you know what I’m talking about. Life has a way of working itself out, and some things have a way of getting to you, even if you weren’t looking for them. Like when your \$1 dollar scratcher wins enough money to pay for

your 6-pack. Or when you get a stimulus check. Or a free shot of tequila when you close your tab at the bar. You could say that Joyce and I meeting was serendipitous. You could also say that it wasn't. I can't say for sure if I found her, or if she found me.

“Can we get tacos too?” I asked Joyce. “Me and my brothers have been arguing about whether tacos north of Santa Barbra are actually any good.”

“Sure,” Joyce said. “Pizza and tacos, sounds good. I got a bottle of Cabo we can break out. Should I order nachos too?”

“Hell yeah.”

On warm spring afternoons in Tepatitlán, Jalisco, you can climb to the top of a small hill and survey the sprawling fields of Agave tequilana. While the agave plant is harvested year-round, the plants tend to reach peak-sugar levels during the dry season in March, April and May. About five or six years after their initial planting, the agave plant will sprout a *quiote*, or a stalk, that can grow up to fifteen feet. After the *quiote* sprouts, field hands are sent to cut the *quiotes* and trim excess leaves, about every two weeks or so. The trimming ensures that the *piña*, or heart, of the plant has enough nutrients to propel optimum sugar production, and this process can continue for five or six more years. Eventually the *piña* will burst forth from the soil, and some *piñas* can weigh as much as 300 pounds. *Jimadores*, those who harvest the agave, are careful not to harvest too early, for an early harvest often results in a tequila that is too bitter or too sweet. The *jimador* will know *piñas* are ready for harvest when the *piña* starts to shrink, developing red spots on its leaves. Once the spots appear, the *piña* is cut from its stalk, and the *jimador* will take their razor-sharp *coa* and cut away the remaining leaves until only the *piña* remains. On a good day, a *jimador* can harvest up to one ton of *piñas* a day. Those *piñas* are then shipped to factories where they will be broken down, baked and mashed under a large stone wheel called a *tahona*. The resulting wort, or liquid, is then transferred to wooden barrels or steel vats to ferment. By law, two distillations are required, and after the secondary distillation, the tequila is either bottled or aged in wooden barrels.

Cabo Wabo añejo is aged in oak barrels for a minimum of fourteen months, with some batches aged up to five years. And during Labor Day weekend in 2009 in unit 4B of the Woodshire Apartments in Chico, Joyce and I took shots of Cabo añejo, smoked a joint and munched on tacos, nachos, and pizza. Nothing brings people together better than food and

alcohol, and after breaking bread over the course of a few hours, we got to know each other a little better. Turns out Joyce was much more of a softie than I thought. The no-nonsense act was just a front. She spoke of her love for cats, especially her cat, George, and she loved teaching at the Montessori.

“Those kids, they’re my life. Maybe someday, when I get out of this stuff, I’ll teach full-time. I gotta figure some things out before that point. Soon, I hope.”

“That sounds great. My grandma was a teacher back in Sicily. And my mom almost got into teaching too. I have no clue what I’m gonna do for a job. My dad and my bros work law enforcement, and they keep telling me to join the police academy. I’m just not up for it, you know?”

“Yeah, I hear you. My dad was in law enforcement too. He was a sheriff’s deputy.”

“Oh wow. How long has he been in the force?”

She said nothing for a moment. Her eyes wandered, staring out at space, at some horizon I couldn’t see. “He was killed when I was twelve. Shot by some tweaker while trying to serve a warrant.”

I dropped my taco. “Jesus. I’m sorry.”

“It’s okay. Don’t be. I’ve had a lot of time to think about it.”

I didn’t know how to respond. I’ve never been any good at handling heavy news like that. Usually I make an ass of myself and say something stupid. Which is exactly what I did. “I can’t even imagine what that’s like. I’d hate to think if it happened to my dad. How did you get over it?”

She rolled her eyes. What a dumb question. “Hank, it’s not something you get over. But I have to keep moving.” She paused again, poured two more shots. “His murderer was killed in jail.”

“Serious? What happened?”

She smiled, said nothing. Silence filled the space between us. And the silence behind her smile was menacing. I felt chills up and down my spine. And I got my answer in that silence. There’s an unfortunate truth to American policing; it’s no secret that it’s a boy’s club. And her dad was very much a part of that club, a club that has a reputation for taking care of matters in-house. It wasn’t a mystery what happened to her dad’s killer. In that moment I thought, *Don’t fuck with this one, Hank.*

She flipped the script to me: “So how long has your dad been a cop?”

“Since ’79. Right when he emigrated, got the job. He only applied because of that show *CHiPs*.”

“No fucking way.”

“Serious. No joke. He loved that show. He still does, watches reruns all the time. My pop became a cop because of a T.V. show. At least that’s what I heard.”

“You see, that’s what’s wrong with America. Everyone does what they see on T.V.”

“Yup. It’s ridiculous.”

“Like that damn *Laguna Beach* show, or that stupid *O.C.* show.”

“Well Mischa Barton is sexy. C’mon.”

“Yuck.”

“Are you serious? What about Rachel Bilson? She’s pretty, no?”

“I’ll give you that one. Rachel Bilson is hot. But Barton, yuck. I bet you think any naked woman is hot.”

“Duh. Don’t you?”

“You men are all the same.”

“It’s important to be consistent.”

“Wow.” She shook her head and poured another two shots. The añejo went down smooth. You could taste the little hints of vanilla from the American oak and the fiery fumes of the agave.

I coughed hard after the shot. “Whoa, I need a beer. I’m getting pretty faded from that tequila, gotta slow down.”

“Get me one, too,” Joyce said. “There’s a ton of Pabst in that fridge. Let’s finish ‘em tonight.”

“Goddamn, you’re going hard, huh? Well, fuck it. Let’s do it,” I said and grabbed two Pabst’s.

Joyce said, “So I have confession: I have all the episodes of *The O.C.* on DVD.”

I scoffed. “That’s some pot-kettle shit right there. Are you serious?”

“Yes I’m serious.” She laughed. “Yes, T.V. and people might be stupid, but I still love the fucking show. Do you wanna watch?”

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Joyce wasn’t kidding when she said she wanted to finish all the Pabst. After we put the food away, she put a thick serving plate in the oven and cranked the heat.

“What’s that for?” I asked. “I don’t think I can eat anymore. I’m stuffed.”

“It’s not for food.”

“Oh?”

“The hot plate makes the rock easier to grind down.”

“What? What rock?”

Joyce opened a cabinet door above the range hood, pulled out a small bag and tossed it to me. “Have a taste,” she said.

It tasted like shit. And petroleum. “Is this what I think it is?”

“Yup. From Oakland.”

“Oh. I’ve never tried.”

“Well get ready. This plate’s almost done warming.”

I felt like I was being tested. Initiated. Joyce pulled the plate from the oven and sifted a couple of white rocks from the bag onto it. “You got a credit card?”

“Um, yeah.” I went through my wallet. No credit cards. Not debit card either. “I have my school ID. Not sure I’ll need it anymore.” I handed Joyce my LBCC ID card and watched her pulverize the rocks and divide their powder into eight lines. She grabbed a ballpoint pen from a drawer, took it apart, and handed me the empty barrel.

“It’s probably going to burn. And you’ll feel it at the back of your throat. It’s gonna feel a lot like those Cabo shots. But you’re gonna be okay.”

I gulped and looked at the plate. “I guess it’s now or never,” I said. And then I picked a line, put the barrel to the plate and went to the moon.

Joyce put on *The O.C.*, but we never got around to watching it. After the coke, it was tough to sit still. My heart raced. Perspiration gathered around my forehead and in my armpits. And my lips tasted like gasoline. It suddenly made sense why people paid so much for coke. I felt amazing. Unconquerable. And sober enough to drink even more.

“Ain’t it great?” Joyce asked.

“It’s like I’m a whole new person, without a nap either. You got a cigarette?”

“In my purse. Get me one too,” Joyce said. She filled the shot glasses again. “Another shot?”

“Hell yeah let’s go.” As the tequila dwindled, I got slurry. And horny. Joyce got handsy. Then I got handsy too. She nibbled on my ear and I grabbed her breasts. And her ass. And shoved my hand down pants.

“Wait,” she said. “Not yet.”

“Um, okay.”

“Let’s go grab champagne before last call.”

I didn’t even want to drink anymore. I wanted to fuck. But around 1:30 a.m. we grabbed a bottle of champagne from the gas station down the street and poured ourselves a nightcap. And it was a good call on Joyce’s part. The champagne washed the taste of the petroleum away, and it cranked the velocity of the coke back down to a comfortable level.

“I actually feel a lot better,” I told Joyce while pulling off her pants.

“Good, stop talking. Take off your shirt.”

...

After we fucked, I passed out and dreamed. I dreamt I was walking side-by-side with a gray cat through a foggy redwood forest. In the distance, crows were cawing, and I could hear the ocean, waves lapping on the shoreline. Suddenly the earth quaked and the forest floor split open, exposing a vast sinkhole. The cat and I fell in, but before we hit the bottom of the hole, the earth opened once again and spit us out, transplanting us back to that same redwood forest. Only this time, there was no fog; the sun was shining; the cat was purring; and the ocean was calm.

...

The next morning, I woke up with a cat sleeping on my chest. I'm not sure how it got there, or where it had come from, but there the kitty was. It was nice, actually. The cat was warm and Joyce's air-conditioned bedroom was freezing. I saw the cat's collar, it read "George V."

"George *the fifth*? Wow, bud, you sound like royalty. Hi, I'm Hank."

"Meow."

"Yeah, I'm hungry too. And hungover. Let's find your mom. And some water."

"Meow. Meooww."

"Chill out, dude. Where's your mom?"

George leapt from my chest, dashed out the bedroom and ran toward a door down a small hallway. I could hear music and smell pot smoke from just beyond the door. I opened it – it was the garage, but it had been converted to an art studio. There were tubes of paint and brushes everywhere. A crayon here, a colored pencil there, pastels all around. Piles of construction paper and canvases strewn about. Even beads and stones to make jewelry. Joyce was on the ground, laying on her stomach, drawing a landscape. "Morning, Hank. And good morning my sweet prince!"

"Meow."

Joyce picked up George and cupped him in her arms like a baby. “Sorry, Hank. Did he wake you up?”

“Nah.”

“Oh good. He can be a little shit some times. But he’s my baby. Aren’t you, George?”

“Meow.”

I studied Joyce’s drawing. It was a sunset through a thicket of trees. It looked like the trees in my dream. “Wow, that’s beautiful. It looks familiar.”

“Thanks. It’s from a beach near my hometown.”

“Oh.”

“Do you still have to leave today?”

“Afraid so. Anthony’s been a big ball-buster about his money. And I should probably do some homework, go to class.”

Joyce pursed her lips. “Oh. Okay.” She seemed disappointed. I said nothing. “You want breakfast before you leave?” she asked.

“Sure.”

...

George and I sat at the kitchen table and watched Joyce cook breakfast. “Are you sure you don’t want any help?” I asked.

“Nope, I’m sure. You’re my guest. I got this.”

“Well, just let me know. And thank you, Joyce. It’s nice to have regular breakfast for a change. Usually I go to Carl’s Jr. on mornings after I drink too much. Only place besides Jack-In-The-Box that serves burgers this early.”

“You eat *burgers* for breakfast?”

“When I’m hungover, sure. Why not?”

“Hank, that’s terrible. How can you eat that garbage?”

“It’s a lot easier than you think.”

“Meow. Meow.”

“See, even George agrees.”

Joyce laughed. “Oh whatever. You’re getting eggs and bacon. How’s that sound?”

“Bacon and eggs sound good. What about George?”

“Him too.”

“Isn’t that bad for his cholesterol?”

“You eat burgers for breakfast. And you’re worried about his cholesterol? Get out of here.”

...

After George and I finished breakfast, I took a shower and gathered my things. I didn’t bring much. Just the ecstasy pills and acid and a change of clothes. I reached into my pocket, felt the cash in there. Then grabbed my wallet, phone, and keys, and went out the door.

“Well. I guess this is it.”

“Next time be sure to bring a few extra thizzles. We’ll party again.”

I grinned. “Next time? What makes you think I’ll come back?”

“Oh shut up. Tell you what: next shipment you bring, I’ll give you the twenty-four hundred plus an extra two thousand for transport. You don’t even need to tell Anthony. What do you say? I think we can make this work.”

...

Five hundred from Anthony. Plus an extra two thousand from Joyce. And crazy sex. Every two weeks. Didn't sound that bad to me. I felt like Julia Roberts in *Pretty Woman*. And Drake. No more fucking for free. When I was still in school, I read this brochure about welding.

Apparently, welders make about \$60,000 dollars per year on average. Not bad. I thought about pursuing a career in welding after the shop. I can still weld today. But a welding career pales in comparison to the drug business. It wasn't very long until I was taking trips back and forth to Chico from Santa Cruz every couple of weeks. It was steady work, incredible job security. And I couldn't get enough of Joyce and that ass. So long as the kids in Chico kept partying, there was always going to be a demand for party favors. But working for Anthony got old really fast. I thought, *Why should I be taking all this risk for only five hundred? Sure, he doesn't know about the extra two thousand. But all he does is sit on his ass and collect profits. It ain't his ass that's on the line – it's mine.*

It turned out that I didn't need to fret. Little did I know that my time in the acid and ecstasy industry would be short-lived. One day while getting ready to leave Joyce's, she said to me, "Take a trip up north with me soon. I need to pick up."

"Sure. Where to?"

The Mad River in northern California flows for 113 miles in a northwesterly direction. Its headwaters stem from the slopes of the Six Rivers National Forest where they funnel into the R.W. Matthews Dam and form Ruth Lake, or Ruth Reservoir, in southern Trinity County. From Ruth Reservoir, dozens of creeks disperse in every direction as the river wriggles into Humboldt County. Along the river's banks, giant, ancient redwoods and gray owls meditate, and from their vantage, with omniscience, timelessness, they survey the land and its lakes, its streams, its bears, its birds, its beavers, its elks, its salmon, and its great beer. As the river drifts through Humboldt County, it undulates through the dense redwood forest, dancing all the way to the coast with the ponderosas, the maples, the madrones, the hippies in communes, the far-out fungi, the oaks and the wind-breaking eucalypti. The deer and the mountain lion coexist and drink from it. The salmon, the steelhead, and the humans swim in it.

As the river nears the coast, the land suddenly flattens, and the town of Arcata appears. The river zigs and zags past Arcata until it finally makes a sharp right and continues north towards the unincorporated community of McKinleyville. There the river meets the estuary, and then the mouth, where it finally empties into the Pacific Ocean.

...

The city of Blue Lake in Humboldt County is the home of Joyce Fulton. And there is no lake in Blue Lake. Not anymore. When its tributary, the Mad River, changed course in the 1920s, and there are many debates and theories as to why it changed course (some natural, some unnatural), the mythical, once-large, blue body of water in the city's lake – the inspiration behind the city's naming – shrank to the size of a small pond. The pond still exists today, in myth. And on private property, so I've been told. I lived in the original Fulton-Lane house in Blue Lake where

Joyce grew up. She told me it was haunted. But the land was fertile. Something about the coastal fog meeting the valley heat at that juncture. Like a natural cycle of some sort.

“My great-great-great grandma picked out this plot,” Joyce told me once.

Part II

Humboldt Area CHP And Humboldt County Sheriff's Office Investigating Homicide And Fatal Collision On US-101.

Joint press release from the California Highway Patrol and Humboldt County Sheriff's Department:

The Humboldt Area Highway Patrol (CHP), and the Humboldt County Sheriff's Department are currently investigating a homicide and a single-vehicle traffic collision that occurred on October 31, 2017 at approximately 11:54 p.m. on US-101 near Patrick's Point State Park.

Upon arrival, it was determined that a 1991 Chevrolet Camaro, driven by 33-year-old **Joyce Fulton** of Blue Lake, was attempting to turn from the northbound traffic lanes of US-101, across the center divider, to southbound US-101. Due to the high rate of speed and wet roadways, the vehicle rolled over several times and came to rest on its right side, facing a westerly direction, blocking both traffic lanes of southbound US-101.

Officers performed lifesaving efforts to Fulton's passenger, 42-year-old **Richard Worthy** of Palm Springs, California; however, he succumbed to his injuries and was pronounced dead on scene. While it was determined that **Fulton** was the driver, upon arrival, she was not on scene. Officers are currently investigating her whereabouts. As of November 2, 2017, **Fulton** is considered the main suspect of a homicide (Cal. Penal Code § 187) in Blue lake. A warrant has been issued for her arrest. She is currently at large and is considered armed and dangerous.

Earlier reports from the Humboldt County Sheriff's Office indicated that the 1991 Chevrolet Camaro had fled the scene of a homicide in Blue Lake less than half an hour before the crash. According to the Humboldt County Sheriff's Department, at approximately 11:30 p.m., deputies responded to reports of a homicide with shots fired at The Logger Bar on the 500 block of Railroad Avenue in Blue Lake. Upon arrival, deputies located one male victim with gunshots wounds lying on the sidewalk. He was pronounced dead on scene. The man has been identified as 69-year-old Humboldt County District Attorney **Adam Freeman**.

According to witness **Heather Fulton-Lane**, owner of The Logger Bar, the homicide stemmed from a physical altercation between **Freeman, Worthy**, and one female suspect who declined to provide a statement to law enforcement. The female suspect was later released, pending further investigation. According to **Fulton-Lane, Freeman** struck **Worthy** several times after **Worthy** had accused the district attorney of malpractice in a previous case. The altercation shifted from the bar and into the street. **Fulton-Lane**, who was still in the bar at the time of the shooting, said she heard seven shots in quick succession, but did not witness who had fired the shots.

A witness on scene, on the condition of anonymity, told deputies that they had witnessed **Richard Worthy** and **Joyce Fulton** flee the scene in **Freeman's** stolen Chevrolet Camaro. The witness declined to say whether they saw the shooting occur. Multiple witnesses on scene were interviewed on that Halloween evening and in the interim, but so far none have confirmed the identity of the shooter, nor have any claimed to have witnessed the shooting.

CHP and the Humboldt County Sheriff's Department is encouraging anyone with information about this case to call the Humboldt County Sheriff's Office at (707) 445-7252. Once additional information is obtained, further press releases shall be issued.

A lot of my Millennial and Zoomer family and friends are big movie buffs. Same with the Generation X fam too. It's safe to say pop culture from the '70s, '80s, and '90s has had a lasting impact on these three generations. Generations who grew up in front of televisions and theatre screens. I can remember reciting vague lines from *T2* or *Aliens* as a kid, playing with my brothers and cousins. I can even remember acting out scenes from that movie *The Quick and the Dead* with Sharon Stone and Leo DiCaprio, my brothers and I drawing our fake guns from our crudely-crafted holsters, shooting the shit out of each other. The ice cream truck in our neighborhood sold toy air guns that shot hollow rubber projectiles, and my brothers and cousins would buy these guns and play. We soon found out that if you filled up the tips of these hollow bullets with hot glue and froze them – when shot – they'd hit the skin even harder. One time my brother accidentally shot Grandma Battle Axe, and she chased him six blocks up the street with a slipper and whipped his ass, fucking hilarious. But she was right to do so. It was for our own good. Those guns we bought from the ice cream vendor, they looked like real guns. Had things gone a little differently, had grandma not set us straight, we might not have been so lucky. We could have shared the same fate as Tamir Rice. Police lit him up, and for what? A toy gun? And therein lies Grandma Battle Axe's lesson: even pretending can get you killed.

Life's not a movie.

In Hollywood movies, it's easy to see who is who and what is what. With film, as viewers, we can keep track of plot points, and we can examine the film's form or forms, and we can even trace the story's narrative arcs with camera angles and music and such – all these different tools help you decipher the trajectory of the story and figure out the basics, like who is the protagonist, the antagonist, and the major and minor characters. And there are times when

the representation of reality within film can be so accurate or skewed, it can affect the viewer's ability to determine the difference between what is true and what is fabricated.

So what is true? What's the truth? And what isn't?

When I lived in California, there was no such thing as autumn. In Long Beach, it was always summer. During the winter, it was sunny. During the fall, it was sunny. During the spring – yup, sunny. Autumn days with little sunlight in Long Beach might as well have been lies as far as the weather was concerned. I had no idea what cold meant until I got to Washington. And I had no idea what seasons were until I moved to Humboldt. But even in Humboldt the transition from summer to fall didn't always happen on time. Sometimes summer would last until November in Humboldt. That certainly isn't the case in the Pacific Northwest.

One truth I learned since I got to Ballard: the difference between summer and fall in the Pacific Northwest is like night and day. Sure, there are many sunny days interspersed within the autumn season, but when fall comes to Washington, you know. The snow starts to pile up at the passes, and the temperature plummets from its summer averages. The fog rolls in and lingers above the tree line, blocking the sunlight from reaching the ground. The lively chickadees who had frequented the olive tree all summer have gone off to greener and drier pastures, maybe to Long Beach to get some good sun. And the rain falls down in the form of thick sheets. Thick sheets of water pour from the skies and blanket the Puget Sound. Thick sheets of water stack themselves like waffles and pancakes piled high on a hungry stoner's empty plate at the all-you-can-eat-breakfast buffet at a bottomless strip club at 1 a.m. on a Tuesday in Vancouver, British Columbia. And this pattern persists through the winter and into spring. I am convinced these sheets of water and the shorter days of autumn get me to reflect during this time of the year. I wasn't always like this. But the contemplative autumn blues, they roll in like clockwork now.

Like fog over a tree line. It's been said that one of the origins of the blues comes from a longing for one's home.

The other day I went down to the Lux Pot Shop on 17th. I was feeling a little homesick, so I figured I'd look for some pre-rolls from Humboldt. The budtender there, a dirty northwest hippie named Bodhi, pulled out some samples.

"Humboldt-grown huh? Well we got pretty standard stuff. For pre-rolls, you got your OG, Girl Scout Cookies, Green Crack."

"Oh hell yes, Green Crack. Man, gimme four of those. Shit I haven't had Green Crack in forever. Not since I moved."

"So you're from Humboldt?"

"Long Beach originally. But I lived in Humboldt for a good minute before I split and came here."

"What were you doing in Humboldt before you moved?"

"I was... a contractor. And part-time farmer."

"Oh. Ok. I see you. Do you still farm?"

"Nope. Retired."

It was a trip to see all the different labels and brands. Buying and selling pot ain't what it used to be. Today I find it funny to read a "Humboldt Grown" label on the packaging of pre-rolled joints and small jars of weed. And the names of strains that growers come up with are hypnotic, enchanting. With the marketing, as a consumer getting caught up in the commoditization, you almost forget that beyond the fancy names, it's just weed. It's not as if strains like Blue Dream, God's Gift, Wedding Cake, and 707 Headband named themselves. People did that. People named these plants. People wrote laws and made these plants illegal.

And then legal. In this country, it amazes me just how quick you can go from criminal to law-abiding citizen with just one change in policy and legislation. As if all previous crimes were absolved by ink and paper. Maybe the Mayan Civilization and their calendars were right.

December 2012 was going to bring the end of the world. And when December 2012 came, it brought sweeping changes that transformed the sociopolitical and economic landscape of this country, and suddenly prohibition was over in Washington state. The beginning of the end of a way of life had commenced, and there was nothing anyone could do to stop it. It brings tears to my eyes just to think about it. I think it's official: I've become an old man, and my time has passed.

Something's been bothering me lately. One question in particular: why Ballard? How did I end up here? I never intended to live here. I never wanted to leave California, but given the circumstances... Well, I still think only fools proclaim to be victims of circumstance, but I'm not a victim. A fool, maybe. Definitely. But a victim? No. Maybe I already know why I'm here. I made this bed. My decisions brought me here, most of them anyway. I can't argue with that. But life isn't just about the things you do; life also consists of the things that *happen* to you. It's true: shit happens. Time goes on, and more things happen. Then one day you wake up and you ask yourself, "How the fuck did I end up here? Is this really my life?"

One of the first people I met here in Ballard was a woman named Denise. Denise is an old hippie who, coincidentally, is also a Humboldt expatriate. We met by chance at the Thursday-night pottery classes at the Anecdotes Pottery Studio on Ballard Ave. One night during class, I told Denise, "I moved here from northern California not too long ago."

"Oh, whereabouts? I'm from California too."

"Humboldt County, about eighty miles south of the Oregon border."

"Oh wow, I know Humboldt. I graduated from Humboldt State and lived in Arcata. What a small world."

"Holy shit, yeah small world. What brought you up here?"

"I got a job here after undergrad. King County was looking for social workers, so I applied. That was sometime in the late seventies. Or it might've been in '81 or '82."

"Were you born in Humboldt?"

"No, I was born in Salinas actually. Down in Monterey County."

“Oh wow, yeah, I know Salinas. My brother works in Soledad in south county. What a trip.”

“Yeah, my parents originally emigrated from Italy. They found work in the produce fields of the Central Valley, picking green onions and lettuce. They were nomads, seasonal workers. That’s what brought them to Salinas. My dad bought property in Salinas around the late 1940s or early 1950s. Before then, my mom and him were always renting, always moving. But, my mom got tired of it and put her foot down. After she got pregnant with my brother, she told my dad that they were going to buy property and settle. My dad hated the idea. Maybe he thought he was always gonna go back home to Italy someday, but that day never came. He never saw Italy again. So he bought a small plot. Right off of Natividad Road, right next to the Chinese cemetery.”

...

Sometimes gut-checks happen when you least expect them, like while you’re high on hash, talking to a nice hippie lady about how you both ended up where you ended up. If you ever want to drive yourself crazy, try retracing your steps. Take stock of your past decisions. I mean really go back far enough to specific moments in your life when you made huge choices. You’re gonna find that there are about six or seven major decisions in your life that have brought you to where you are. If you’re a fool, like me, you’ll go even further down the rabbit hole and make the mistake of wondering what could have been.

Don’t.

It’s a trap. And it leads to depression.

Depression, maybe that’s what I’m feeling this autumn.

It makes me wonder if I'll ever see California again. After Denise told me that story, I looked at my life. I wanted to ask her more about her dad, but I dropped it. I left the pottery studio and wondered if I was never going to see *my* home again. Come to think of it, I am starting to wonder if I even know what the word "home" actually means.

What does it mean to be an immigrant? An expatriate? What do all those blues singers who lament about their faraway homes have in common? What is it like to pull up stakes, risk everything, and just leave everything you know? I think about that, a lot, and I think about the journeys that my mother and father took to get to America. I think about them crossing the ocean to get here. How it must have been like to leave their homeland to live in another country. To assimilate to a culture that they did not fully understand, or maybe even agree with. What did they think about? What did Denise think about moving from Humboldt to King County in the 80s? What did her parents think about when they left Italy? Did they experience a sense of displacement like my grandparents? And when they got to America, was what they saw similar to what they imagined America would be? Fifteen years ago, did I imagine living in Ballard? No. Did I envision this faraway place as my home? No. But life writes its own chapters. And I'm still trying to figure out if control is possible, or if control, at least the perception of control, is illusory. Meanwhile, here I am, Ballard, Seattle, Washington. Making the best of it. With all the concrete, it's hard to imagine that Ballard was once home to a lush and ancient forest. The first time I saw pictures of Ballard from the 1880s, I was shocked. It was as coniferous as Blue Lake is.

In one of many beginnings, over 165 million years ago, a series of tectonic events shaped and formed the landscape of the west coast of the North American continent. Those events were set in motion when the Farallon Oceanic Plate subducted under the western portion of the North American plate during the early Jurassic period.

The Farallon Plate was one of three ancient oceanic plates of the Panthalassa ocean, the prehistoric superocean that surrounded the continent of Pangea. As the planet continued its evolution, the Farallon Plate converged with its cohorts, the Phoenix Plate and the Izanagi Plate, and formed a triple junction, and from this triple junction, the Pacific Plate was formed with its chain of volcanoes. As the Farallon Plate continued to subduct beneath the North American Plate, a coinciding event, called the Nevada Orogeny, occurred, producing magmatic arcs and granite rock formations below the earth's crust. About 4 million years ago, through the geological process of accretion, the granite formations and their volcanic arcs sprung from the soil and formed the Klamath Mountain Range and the Sierra Nevada. Along the same relative timeline of the Nevada Orogeny, two other events stemming from the same Farallon subduction also materialized. These were the Franciscan Complex and the Great Valley Sequence.

One hundred and fifty million years ago, the western half of California's Central Valley began its ascent as the descending, east-dipping Farallon Plate continued its dive into the earth's mantle, initiating the Franciscan Complex. This slow plunge created a subduction zone along California's continental margin, underpinning ocean-floor basalt and other sediments to the bottom of the North American Plate. Over millions of years, these sediments continued to accumulate below the earth's crust, creating an immense buildup of pressure. This pressure was inevitably released, and it helped uplift oceanic crust, thrusting an ancient deep-sea trench above

the waterline, adding new landmasses to the existing continent, forming the California Coast Ranges. About sixty miles east of the Franciscan Complex and the brand-new California Coast Ranges, on the western slopes of the Sierra Nevada, volcanoes derived from the Nevada Orogeny erupted and eroded at a high rate, dumping granite and other volcanic sediment westward into the newly-formed basin.

Eventually, the majority of the Farallon Plate subducted beneath the North American Plate, leaving behind five microplates: the Cocos and Nazca Plates, under Central and South America; and the Gorda, Juan de Fuca and Explorer Plates, subducting below the north end of the western coast of North America. Progressing from the Farallon's early momentum, the Juan de Fuca Plate continued its eastward subduction beneath the North American Plate and formed the Olympic and Cascade Ranges, catalyzing the accretion of at least fifteen volcanoes, including Mount Baker, Glacier Peak, Mount St. Helens, Mount Adams, and Mount Rainier.

To the south of the Juan de Fuca Plate, the Gorda Plate sits off the North Coast of California. While other plates tend to maintain their structural integrity, the Gorda Plate bucks this trend, and it endures a considerable amount of intraplate deformation, causing frequent earthquakes, most notably the 1980 Eureka earthquake, which clocked a 7.3 magnitude. Despite the Gorda's tectonic tendencies, it still carries the tradition of its ancient ancestor, as the plate's eastern side forms a convergent boundary, subducting beneath the North American Plate. This subduction, along with earlier influence from the Nevada Orogeny, aided in the formation of the Trinity Alps, Mount Shasta, and Lassen Peak.

All of these processes occurred over millions of years, and they are still occurring today, right below our feet. Long before we were born, this planet was in motion. And long after we die, this planet will continue that same motion. In a sense, finality is an illusion. Because what

do “end times” really look like? And if time is “ending,” then whom is it ending for? And it also makes you wonder: what is time?

And what about memories?

Memories are tricky. Memories can lie. Like an old photograph, memories can beautify, but memories don’t often tell the whole story. Maybe our memories are self-correcting. Or maybe they’re self-rationalizing. There are some that claim memories don’t exist outside of the realm of the perceiver.

I’m not sure about anything anymore.

Memories, it seems, are piecemealed. Non-linear. Volatile. Even unreliable. Some memories are recalled without impediment. Yet some memories require a sensory jolt prior to excavation. Like how a string of one-night-stands remains embedded in the scent of stale tobacco. Or how painful breakups, queued from the annals of prehistoric memory banks, taste like the little hints of vanilla from smoky American oak barrels and the bourbon they store. And how dim beams of light from overhead lamps in dark barrooms can resurrect ancient moods long forgotten. If one is inclined to journal, then the emotions of a recorded memory can enjoy the luxuries of preservation as well. I find that my memory is often deceitful. It has a tendency to embellish, to protect. Protect who or what?

Then again, I find that I am not much different than any other person. I, too, self-aggrandize, and I like to believe that I am hot shit – the king of the underground. The man “in the know”. But it’s all a lie. The reflection during this autumn season has been one of a necessary maintenance, to defrag past moments of self-deception, and during the course of this maintenance, I have looked back at certain times, and I find that I am guilty of perceiving those times through a lens of nostalgia. Nostalgia is a great device for remembering and forgetting.

Nostalgia allows you – even encourages you – to forget. To forget about the pain. The turmoil. The suffering. Nostalgia gets people to say dumb things like, “The 1950s were a great time in America,” while ignoring the plight of racism and the bludgeoned face of Emmet Till’s lifeless body in an open casket. It seems that forgetting is akin to nostalgia, and like nostalgia, forgetting is an American ideal. A closely-held value and social pillar of the American cultural identity. But not everything stays forgotten. If you look outside your neighborhood, signs of yesterday still abound the streets of today. And every once in a while, a conversation with a stranger or an old friend, or even a long walk can bring forgotten memories into fruition, and suddenly you’re transplanted back to a time not so long ago, in a place not so far away.

The imprints of a region’s history aren’t always obvious. Often, they’re easy to miss. Especially if you’re busy, busy, busy. But, if you go slow, walk south on 24th Avenue towards Market Street, and you’ll come across tiny remnants of the original Ballard municipality before its annexation into Seattle. Between 20th and 24th Avenue, and from Northwest 65th Street to Leary Avenue, there are light-blue and white mosaics embedded into the sidewalk, and they mark the original street names of Ballard as it stood in 1907. Some days I walk from my apartment on Northwest 63rd, located on the original Polk Street, to the 7-11 on Northwest 62nd, formerly Post Street, and I catch a glimpse of these mosaics, and they stop me in my tracks. I don’t know why. Sometimes I pretend like I’m one of the original Ballardites walking through the mud and cow shit to buy beer and Tim’s Jalapeño Chips at the store. Tom at Olaf’s told me a story about the town’s cow problem towards the end of the nineteenth century. Apparently free-roaming cows in Ballard were a nuisance. The bovines were fucking things up for everyone, eating food that wasn’t theirs, shitting and pissing anywhere they wanted to. So in 1903 the

town issued the Cow Ordinance, a law which prohibited free-roaming cows south of Ship Street, or modern-day Northwest 65th.

...

The memory, as I recall it, comes in patches. Much of that memory and that year has now been painted over with nostalgia. Forgetfulness. And falsehood. Yet somewhere in there lies a semblance of truth. Of objectivity. Purported objectivity.

Picture it:

It is December 2020. The Pandemic. Empty roadways. Masked citizens. Over 300,000 dead in the United States. Thousands of cadavers sit in frozen storage. Undertakers, backlogged. Olaf's, closed. And the cyclical La Niña weather pattern is blanketing the Pacific Northwest with rain, snow, short days, and long nights. It's one of the few sunny days during that winter. I must have been craving a drink, and instead of driving around to find a drink, I must have wanted to walk, because on that day, I did walk, to Reuben's Brews, a brewery on the corner of 14th Avenue and Northwest 51st.

I crossed a trafficless 24th and walked east on Northwest 63rd. A cold front the night before brought snow to the lowlands. The street with its parked cars were partially covered in snow, which added a little charm to that frosty morning, Christmas only a few days away from that point. Reuben's Brews was one of the few businesses open during the pandemic, so, like all drunks, I set out to get my fix for the day. Before approaching the Ballard Baptist Church, I caught a glimpse of something I never thought I'd see in the middle of a concrete jungle: amanita muscaria growing beneath one of the few ancient Western red cedar trees still standing in Ballard. I stopped. Took a picture of it with my phone. Even uploaded it to Instagram. And then I kept walking east. No more than fifty yards later, on the corner of Northwest 63rd and 20th

Avenue, there it was: Polk Street's light-blue and white mosaic embedded in the sidewalk. In that moment, something clicked in my head, and I thought, *Wow, Ballard really was a logging town in the middle of a forest – a forest clear-cut by loggers and settlers.* I put that little tidbit of insight into my back pocket and kept walking, eventually getting to 14th Avenue. While walking south on 14th, not paying attention to my steps, I rolled my ankle on one of the rails of a defunct train track that cut across the street. I fell, hit the concrete, shook my fist and cursed the Christian God and the Sun God Ra, took a seat on the jagged sidewalk, and grabbed at my foot to check for damage, but there was none. I was fine. But in pain. It was a good thing I was less than a hundred yards away from sweet, wonderful, golden delicious beer.

...

For the sake of recollection, I must depend on rumors and hearsay, foggy memories. Even second and third-hand accounts. I do not know what happened on this land prior to my arrival, nor do I know, aside from the obvious eventualities, what fate befell the indigenous Natives and early settlers upon their first encounters with each other in the Evergreen State. Not to mention what ever happened to their predecessors, the dinosaurs and giant ferns and other prehistoric lifeforms, during the Cretaceous and Jurassic periods. Some answers are easier to come by, and other answers, not so much. Through written accounts, and through the benefit of perspective, we can confirm the occurrences of various acts of man and acts of nature: melting glaciers, volcanic eruptions, genocide, illegal seizures of land, sickness, disease, monotheism, blight, famine, and so on. And some early photographs depict the lush greenery of the Seven Hills of Seattle prior to its current industrialization. But many of these photos, like our memories, fall short and misrepresent the land formed by the Vashon Glaciation over 20,000 years ago.

The forests of the Puget Sound and the Seattle region are home to a wide range of conifers. While the 2,307 square miles of King County still maintains a hefty amount of its flora, prior to the industrial clear-cuts at the end of the nineteenth century, three species of tree dominated the landscape: *Thuja plicata*, *Tsuga heterophylla*, and *Pseudotsuga menziesii* – otherwise known as the Western red cedar, the Western hemlock, and my old friend from Humboldt, Douglas fir.

Over the course of time, with the help of lightning strikes and with the aid of volcanic and geological activity, the forests were subject to cyclical patterns of wildfires, which, in turn, disbursed vast quantities of minerals and nutrients to the soil. This process benefited the mighty Douglas fir, which, on average, reaches heights of 120 feet, and they can achieve this growth in less than 200 years. The detritus of these fires also created secondary tree environments, most suitable for the growth of Western hemlock trees, and these hemlocks, post fire, took root amongst the Douglas firs and blanketed the rest of the bioregion. For a brief period, *Pinus monticola*, or the Western white pine, had its moments of triumph in the higher elevations of King County and the surrounding forests, but a blight of white pine bluster rust, from the fungus *Cornartium ribicola*, wiped out a large number of the trees in the last half of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century. In spite of this, as time passed, more fires ensued, forests burned, trees grew and the cycle repeated, much like it does today.

But today, things are much more volatile. Humanity's propensity for preservation has led to the suppression of the small and frequent, naturally-occurring wildfires, and this suppression has manifested an unintended consequence: a tinder-box landscape ripe for much larger and widespread wildfires, similar to those that burned much of California during the year of the pandemic. It seems that human intervention has changed the course of earth's natural cycles.

Human intervention has clear-cut 5,540 acres of hemlocks, firs, cedars and pines from the city of Seattle. And the logging of the hills around Lake Washington, coupled with more human intervention, necessitated the construction of the Lake Washington Ship Canal, a canal built to transport the cadavers of ancient trees to Ballard's lumber mills. And the entire lumber industry itself prompted the demand for more railways, both public and private, many of which ended up in Ballard. And it was on one of those old rails, on a cold December morning during the pandemic, in the middle of modern-day 14th Avenue, right across Reuben's Brews, where I rolled my goddamn ankle.

...

Drinking during the pandemic wasn't a problem. It was damn easy. But drinking at a bar, restaurant, or brewery during the pandemic was a challenge. The state-wide ordinances at the time did not allow indoor seating. If establishments had outdoor seating, or if they could somehow produce the capacity to provide outdoor seating, then the business could remain open. And Reuben's Brews was one of those places. I limped into the brewery that day in December, and before I could get a seat, I had to check in with the host.

"Hello, I'd like a table please"

"Sure thing. How many people are joining you today?"

"Just me."

"Okay. Pick any seat you like. At your table, there is a QR code. Scan that code and it'll take you to an up-to-date list of the beers we currently have on tap. Take some time to peruse the list from your table, then come up to order at the register. We ask that you keep your mask on while navigating the brewery, and to and from the restrooms. And we also ask that you not switch tables during your stay. But other than that, welcome to Reuben's."

“Right on. Can I just order right now? I’m good off the tap list. I’m in a ton of pain, and I’ve been craving a pilsner the whole walk over here.”

“Pain, huh? What happened?”

“I rolled my damn ankle on one of those old rail tracks while crossing the street.”

“Ouch. That sucks. Gotta’ pay attention. Well, let’s get you set up. Follow me.”

I followed the host and the social-distance arrows taped to the ground that led to the register at the front counter. “Can I pay you for two right now, and just come back for the second beer when I finish this one?”

“Sure. Can’t see why not.” She paused for a moment and asked, “Say, are you from Humboldt?”

The question caught me off guard. “Yeah. Sort of. I moved from Humboldt about three years ago. Why do you ask?”

“Your jacket says ‘Mad River.’ There’s only one Mad River Brewery I know. I went to Humboldt State.”

“Get out of here. Really? Wow, small world. Yeah I actually did a lot of work for the Mad River Brewery while I lived there.”

A patron standing behind me interjected and asked, “Hey, Humboldt! Do you know a place called ‘Redwood Curtain’?”

I turned around. “Hell yeah that’s one of my favorite breweries.”

“Oh yeah, they’ve got great beer there. I went to school with the owner.”

“No way! Damn this is like a Humboldt reunion.”

“Ha! What are you drinking? Let me buy that beer for you.”

“Hey, thank you. That’s very generous. I’m drinking the pils... uh, the barley wine.”

The host asked, “You still want your pilsner, too?”

“Oh for sure. I’ll double-fist ‘em.”

Before I knew it, the host, me, and this random patron were breaking Covid-19 protocols, sharing a table, drinking some of the tastiest beer in the Pacific Northwest, exchanging old Humboldt stories. It’s difficult, given how much time has passed since that cold winter, to recall what we talked about. I can remember drinking at Reuben’s, and then I remember walking to Stoup Brewery one block over and drinking a couple of red ales before I stumbled home. I can remember the host talking about how she had gotten married one year prior, and for her wedding in Bellingham, her friends from Humboldt had brought her three cases of Steelhead. “I used to get hammered at all the Humboldt Crabs baseball games,” I remember her saying. And the patron, whose name escapes me, told stories of how he used to drive from the Bay Area to Humboldt in order to purchase pounds of marijuana in bulk.

“Bay Area, huh? And you moved here to Seattle? What brought you up here?” I asked him.

“Same thing that brings anyone anywhere: jobs. I was in tech. Microsoft. Thirty-two years. Now I’m retired.”

“Mmm...retired. Me too.”

...

It’s fair to say that jobs, or a job, brought me to Ballard too. I used to think I was unique, but I guess I’m no different than anyone else. We all need jobs, especially if we want to eat and keep the lights on, sleep indoors and whatnot. After the Great Recession, jobs were tough to come by. My parents lost most of their savings, and their retirement accounts were almost worthless. No one was hiring. Every business was firing. And the semi-reversion to feudalism and wage-

slavery was all but certified for over 1.8 billion young people, including the 166 million Millennials and Zoomers here in the United States. It was a painful year. It's no wonder, less than three years after the recession, my friends and I were throwing rocks and bottles at UC Santa Cruz PD during the height of the Occupy Wall Street protests. And it's no surprise that I ended up slinging coke, X, LSD, and DMT to spoiled Millennials with rich parents. And it makes sense why I ended up in Humboldt. Then Ballard.

Ballard was the first community in the Washington territory to incorporate after the region declared statehood in 1899. Up until 1907, Ballard was its own city, with a population of over 17,000 people, making it the second largest city in King County at the time. After killing a good number of Natives in 1852, an English homesteader named Ira Utter filed a homestead claim for an 820-acre parcel of land and lived alone on those 820 acres for almost twenty years. That parcel consisted of the land of what is now modern-day Ballard. In 1871, Utter sold 720 acres to a farmer named D.W. Crooks. Crooks bought the land for its rich timber and its strategic location along the Salmon Bay. Around 1882, it was divided into ten-acre plots with sixty-foot-wide streets. The abundance of salmon and clams in Salmon Bay made it home to a lucrative fishing industry, and the demand for timber drew many loggers to the area to harvest the surrounding hills and work the mills. Folks called the town Farmdale back then.

Then in 1887, two investors and a guy named William Rankin Ballard formed the West Coast Improvement Company. They consolidated their land holdings, profiting from development. Under the watch of the West Coast Improvement Company, the Seattle Cedar Company and ten other red cedar mills sprung up on the Salmon Bay, and the number of saloons and brothels in Ballard soared through the roof. The age of industry was here to stay.

But the good times didn't last forever.

Ballard has shit water. I don't know if it's literal shit-water, or if the water quality is just shit here. But in 1907, with its sweltering population, the citizens of Ballard reluctantly voted for annexation into the city of Seattle to secure a sanitary fresh water supply.

Shit-water or not, this neighborhood has character.

There's a lot of grit in the people here. Hard-working industrialists. Fishermen. Mariners. Dockhands. Laborers. Machine Operators.

And pastry chefs.

There's this bakery a couple blocks from Olaf's called Café Besalu. They got the best damn croissants I've ever had. They do this pistachio-lemon croissant – holy shit! When I'm not stuffing my face with croissants, I'm drinking. And whenever I'm not drinking at Olaf's, I go to Tarasco, right off of 70th and 14th Ave. It's a nice little dive. Dim, black walls, shoddy electrical work, great Mexican food, especially the tacos, and the best damn Moscow mule I've ever had. And on Wednesdays they got karaoke too.

It was November of 2017 when I got here. It hard to imagine a decade has passed since I split from Cali and made my dash for Washington state. Not much of a dash, really; I got into a nasty car wreck right before I left the Golden State. Messed my leg up pretty bad, so it was more like I was taxied up to Seattle. Or, better yet, I was *chauffeured* here, with my right leg wrapped tight in a cast. Then later, a walking boot. And I wore that walking boot for three months.

It was a quiet three months, and I didn't get out much. The atrophy in the thigh, hip, glute and calf was intense. I could barely walk. Down the driveway and back, that was it. Even had to drive with my left leg pushing the pedals. Drove like that for one year. In this city – can you believe it? On *these* narrow streets. With these shitty drivers? Lost the right side-view mirror of the truck trying to drive like that. I pissed a lot of people off that year, let me tell you.

Physical therapy was helpful. And all the booze and pot the family stocked me with helped manage the muscle spasms. Eventually, when I was healthy enough, I would trudge on over to Olaf's for some corn dogs, but for the most part, I was grounded. A flight risk. A cripple. Under strict orders. So I watched a ton of T.V. and fiddled with my Ameritrade account, that was about it. And I watched coach Jack Del Rio and the Raiders go 6-10. Coach Jack got fired. I remember dad calling. He was so pissed. And I remember winning my fantasy football league too. But it just wasn't as much fun winning without the crew around. I missed my home. My tribe. The action. And the sun.

It was a dark time for a lot of people. The Trump presidency *did* suck for a lot of us. And for others, it was the catalyst for a period of prosperity. Out there in the world, there were rumblings and grumblings, rumors and whispers about imminent changes to the tax code of the United States. The Trump administration was getting ready to enact the Tax Cut and Jobs Act,

amending the corporate tax rate from 35% to 21%. In some social circles, throughout the general populace, this was terrible news – proof of America’s moral corruption, somehow. But to investors and entrepreneurs, in the spirit of business, it was the beginning of a new era of capitalism, and it was proof that prohibition was over. It was a time of rebirth. Redemption. Second chances. Third ones too. A clean slate. But there is a natural order to things, and as is the case with every paradigm shift, in order for new eras to begin, the old ones must end. Long story short: all of the capital allocated during prohibition – off shore or domestically – needed cleansing, and the fee for legitimizing and absolving past crimes and indiscretions was a new 21% corporate tax rate, including a one-time repatriation tax rate of 8% for profits in overseas subsidiaries. Suddenly retirement no longer seemed like an unattainable goal, especially for a couple of generations who never believed retirement was possible.

As far as numbers go, in 2016, economists estimated that the marijuana market was worth \$52.2 billion dollars, with \$46.1 billion coming from the black market. No matter where you stood in 2017, whether you supported the legalization of marijuana in California, or if you were a proponent of the black market, it was the perfect time to cash out, and it was the perfect time to cash in. And, like a good American, it was the perfect time to take advantage of insider information, diversify your financial portfolio, free up liquidity, talk to your broker, and place some absurd, downright questionable call options. For retirement. Because by the end of 2018, over 2000 cultivators applied for licensing in California, and by the end of 2019, there were over 900 state-recognized dispensaries, and about 2700 unlicensed dispensaries state-wide.

Moratoriums were lifted all throughout the Central Valley and Central Coast, and companies like Taylor Farms and Fresh Express and Driscoll’s started growing vast fields of hemp and marijuana in an attempt to corner the market. The almond and citrus farms of the northern crest

of the I-5 corridor in the Central Valley became pot and hemp farms that sold almonds and citrus fruit as a side-hustle. From Baja to Chula Vista, and from Chula Vista to Crescent City, pot shops, hash labs and processing plants sprung up like wildflowers on California hillsides during springtime, and Napa-Wine-like THC and CBD resort-towns appeared. I even saw this marijuana-farm-turned-family-resort in Humboldt where you could camp overnight, harvest blue berries in the morning, pot in the afternoon, and enjoy blueberry jam and a blunt for dinner. It was incredible. I never thought I'd see the day. With billions of dollars up for grabs, Big Business, Big Ag, and the marijuana and agricultural hemp industries were on a collision course with the New York Stock Exchange and the Dow Jones Industrial Average market index. And it all came to fruition in 2020 when Biden and a pot-friendly legislature helped complete a coast-to-coast distribution pipeline, legalizing recreational and medical pot in Arizona, Montana, South Dakota, Missouri, New Jersey, and Vermont. Hell, even Oregon went a step further and decriminalized all narcotics. And like a sweet and bright-red Maraschino cherry on top of a sundae, gambling companies like DraftKings, Penn National Gaming, and FanDuel, which were trading at about \$9 dollars per share one year prior, shot up to over \$65 dollars per share by the end of 2020. Legal gambling and legal drugs: the mob won. The family's wealth was ensured. And many Americans got away with murder, fraud and theft at the highest and lowest levels of government, finance, law enforcement and business. The liquidity levels in the market were astounding.

That's what the voters in 2020 didn't understand. They didn't understand just how much of a power-grab the 2010s actually were. Going as far back as Occupy Wall Street and the Arab Spring, or even further, to the 2009 Iranian Presidential Protests and the formation of the Tea Party, while there many demonstrators marching in the streets, protesting for their rights, fighting

for their future, cheering for their cult leaders, there were other folks out there stealing with impunity. Stealing like politicians. People with enough sense to steal like a good American. A real American. That's what all the hopeless and indoctrinated schmucks will never understand: you don't have any real rights. If you're not stealing, you're living wrong. Once the rose-colored glasses come off, you can see how rigged everything is, how fucked up this civilization really is; how innate its corruption is; how dirty you need to get; and how many similarities America shares with the social structures at many of our for-profit or non-profit prisons around the country. The system was meant to be abused, because that's how it was constructed – constructed by overly-educated arm-chair philosophers who evaded taxes, owned slaves and profited from the genocide of over forty million Natives.

This is why I don't celebrate Christmas anymore.

I like the champagne of New Year's Eve better anyway.

And I don't believe in good guys or bad guys, or good women or bad women. Life is much more complex than an either-or binary. Of course, there are psychologically-inclined folks out there that would have you believe in the nature versus nurture theory, how some people are born bad, or they're born good. Or they're born with the capacity to do good or bad things based on the assumption that the spectrum of good and evil is *not* subjective, that the definitions of *good* and *bad* are clear, concise and uniform amongst all observers. Which they're not.

Philosophical reflections aside, what I can tell you: I slept well on election night of 2020 – my investments, they hit big, with the help of a few friends and some good insider information. But I didn't sleep much in 2017. I had to sleep with that walking boot for twelve weeks. What a pain in the ass. The first thing I did when I was finally able to walk without a boot was explore

the neighborhood, and then the rest of the city. It was during this time of exploration that I stumbled into the neighborhood of Queen Anne, about four-and-a-half miles south of Ballard.

The neighborhoods of Queen Anne, West Seattle and Ballard have a complicated history, and they share much in common. One of those commonalities is that the land was stolen. Three white men, Thomas Mercer, David Denny, and Ira Utter, filed land claims, and with the help of written laws that meant absolutely nothing, they stole, legally, the land from the Suquamish, Muckleshoot, Duwamish, Stillaguamish, and Coast Salish tribes. Stolen land – sounds a lot like Humboldt. And Long Beach. Most of California, actually. Damn-near the entire country was stolen, now that I think about it.

And as far as the Queen Anne neighborhood goes, I gotta admit, I've never been to the top of the Space Needle. Fear of heights – what can I say? I'm a sissy. So that kept me away from Queen Anne for a good number of years. And a few other things, too, mostly the crime in the neighboring district of Capitol Hill. After the pandemic, I avoided Capitol Hill like the plague. Or the corona virus. For some reason, the city thought that defunding the police was a good idea, especially around the Capitol Hill neighborhood. So when public services, like fire and police and ambulance services dwindled, crime thrived. It turns out that crimes still occur, with or without visible police. Stupid hippies. Looking back, it would've been great to tap into the Capitol Hill market of 2020 if I was still slingin'. Lots of fentanyl went through those homeless camps during those years, millions in profits. But by 2020, I was done with that, gone completely legitimate.

...

Last fall, on the stolen land of Queen Anne, the Museum of Pop Culture displayed a D.B. Cooper exhibit. I've always found D.B. Cooper's story fascinating. There's something about breaking the law that just seems so American. But why? Why are American figures like Jesse James, Frank Lucas, Billy the Kid, John Dillinger, Bonnie Parker and Clyde Barrow immortalized in our

culture? What do films like *Heat* and *Ocean's 11*, and videogames like *Grand Theft Auto*, say about our cultural identity? Why do these stories spark our interest? Why are they so prevalent? Why is *getting away with it* so pleasurable? And why is D.B. Cooper's story so intriguing?

The last time anyone saw D.B. Cooper, he had two hundred thousand dollars in ransom money, and he jumped out of a 727, somewhere over southwestern Washington. He was never seen again, according to lore. The daring escape was pulled off the night before Thanksgiving, November 24, 1971, when Cooper walked to the counter of the Northwest Orient Airlines at Portland International Airport and bought a one-way ticket with cash for Flight 305 bound for Seattle. From seat 18C, he ordered a bourbon and waited for takeoff. After takeoff, he finished his bourbon and handed a flight attendant a note and told her he had a bomb in his briefcase. He asked her to sit with him. The attendant sat next to Cooper, and he opened his briefcase, revealing a mass of wires and components. To this day, no one really knows if the bomb was real or not. He took the briefcase with him when he jumped out of the plane where it is assumed he did not survive. FBI investigators say with the windchill alone, sixty-nine below, give or take, would've killed him – no way he'd survive. If the stories and reports are true, then it makes sense that he died after he jumped.

But I like to think he survived. Call it a hunch. The consensus amongst the flight crew and the investigating officers is that Cooper must have known the land well, and in all likelihood, he had lived in southwestern Washington all his life. And besides, \$200,000 in cash in 1971 equates to about \$3.1 million dollars today. Three million dollars – that ain't a bad cushion to fall on. It'd make a great retirement package.

What does the word “retirement” mean? What does it look like? At what age is it appropriate to retire? And which jobs afford an early retirement?

Different question: What does it mean to “work for the law”? I’ve never considered my work as lawful. The opposite, actually. What I do – what I’ve done – is criminal. But the link, the veil, between lawfulness and criminality is a line that is often skewed, hindered by perception. Let’s indulge a hypothetical: a man steals a purse from a woman – without any other details, according to observation of the action, we can deduce that the action was an immoral one, because we have been taught that stealing is bad. Let’s take that same hypothetical, but this time, let’s add context: a man has no money, nor is he employed, and the man’s wife and kids are hungry, so he steals a purse and uses the stolen money to buy food for his family. With that in mind, two questions arise: is the act of stealing the purse immoral? And is it wrong for the man to feed his family? I don’t know. Maybe there’s some philosopher out there who knows the difference between right and wrong.

These are the things I think of nowadays. Sunny days. Cloudy days. Late summer days. Day drinking. At Olaf’s. At Tarasco. Or at Reuben’s. And while day drinking, I think about the law. And I think about the connections between a lawful citizen – a cop – and a criminal, how similar they look and act. And I think about how lawfulness and criminality, how we characterize these labels, and how they brought me to Ballard. It amazes me just how many Humboldt expatriates live in Ballard, as if Ballard has some magnetic pull. Maybe it’s the brewery scene. Maybe it’s the tax code. The pot. And maybe the Millennial gentrification of the late 2000s and early 2010s contributed to the influx of interstate migrants, especially those from Humboldt. Or maybe it’s the perfect place to hide, to blend in, like all the other average

Joe's. Of course, there's the Fulton connection. All the land the family owns out here. The apartment I live in. Brian's house. A few other hideouts. Maybe all the Humboldt expats here worked for the Fulton's like I did. And maybe they're retired too. I don't know. But maybe – just maybe – I know *exactly* why I'm here. I just can't quite put my finger on it.

Ballard, this land. It feels so *familiar*.

I think I'll go to Tarasco tonight. Gotta do something to shake off these autumn blues. Plus, it's Tuesday – trivia night. And tacos. And good people. I've met some cool folks at Tarasco since I landed in this neighborhood. During the last trivia night I met a foreman from the Ballard Locks. It seems like a difficult job from what I've seen. So I asked him how tough it really was.

He told me, "Well all I do is yell at people all night. These ships come in, and I yell at them. And then I tell people where to go and what to do. And I rip cigs non-stop. It's pretty great."

"So all you do is yell at people? That's actually sounds like a pretty fuckin' sweet job. How'd you fall into that?"

"Old buddy of mine got me the job. Got the 401k, dental, four weeks paid vacay. The works. It's great man. But stressful. If I don't have at least three beers in me, or a joint, I'd lose my shit."

"Seems kinda dangerous directing ships through a canal all cross-faded, no?"

"Lots of ships passing in the night, man. They all know what they're doing. If not, I get to ban their ass. And I don't get even get drunk anymore. The stress balances out the booze. The pot's just so I can stay normal."

What can I say? He's a professional. And a lot of working-class professionals end their day at Tarasco. At Olaf's too. Every bar is different. It's all about the mood, what you're looking for. At Olaf's, it's well-lit. Well-ventilated. There's a couple of flatscreens and a pinball room next door. Tom plays the Grateful Dead station on Sirius Radio, and the kitchen does these killer fried chicken sandwiches and in-house corndogs. It's hippie country, punks too. At Tarasco, it's dark. Lights flicker. A total dive. A little scary. But the tacos are great. *And* the burritos. There's a couple of flatscreens too. Dartboards. And a game of pool is only fifty

cents, not bad. The locals tell me the bar's been around since the 1970s. And some rumors say that around the 1880s, it was a brothel. But no one I've met knows if it's true.

One local did tell me that the plot where Tarasco sits on was always the site of a bar. That little corner of 70th and 14th Avenue has been a place for people to gather, a place for food and games and drink. Where the action is. Where it was, and where it will be. It's full of life, and everyone's got a story to tell. At any given moment, you just never know who you're sitting next to.

What's their story? Where do we come from? Where are we going? Why did we leave? All of those age-old questions get asked at the bar. I've met a lot of these folks over the years. All their faces, wrinkled. Souls, beat. Tired. Over-worked bastards. But resolute. Some of the strongest I've ever met. Like all the other hard-working *borrachos* back home in Long Beach and Humboldt. Seems to me that the best liars are at the poker table, and the hardest workers are at the bar.

I can recall a conversation at Olaf's one night with a retired professor from UW. We were drinking bourbon, watching the Huskies lose to Stanford in a double-overtime game. The bourbon-drinking inevitably turned into a philosophical discussion. He stressed the importance of good role models, teachers too. And I agreed with him: I might be in a better place if I had better role models. No doubt. And the U.S. presidential election of 2020 showed everyone just how detrimental things can be when you don't invest in a good public education system. Baffles the mind just to think about how many believed in QAnon.

At the same time, given the conditions of that period, I'm not surprised. Many of us relinquished the agency of our decision making and gave it to Facebook. And capitalism. And as a capitalist, that hurts me. If there was ever an indictment against capitalism, and there are

many, it's that capitalism drives the individual towards self-deception and delusions of grandeur. And delusions of grandeur can allow your mental health to devolve, unchecked, into a cycle of complete madness. Like Kanye West. Or Jim Jones and David Koresh. The Facebook feeds of billions of social media users during 2020 showed you why you don't need money to be delusional. Or bat-shit crazy.

Outside of the sphere of social media, life is simple to understand, and all one needs to do is walk down skid row or the red-light district in any town or city and talk to some of the people there. Try the corner of Aurora and 85th at 10 p.m. on a Friday, and you'll see what I mean. You can meet some of the most brilliant minds on the planet on that corner; it's where I bought my Odyssey putter. But at that same corner, I've also met grand wizards, angels, tweakers and demons, and I've met a ton of ice queens, sirens, damsels and maiden warriors. Each one certain of their existence, their purpose. Their destiny. Their delirium tremens. Their truths and the things they told themselves. The things that they thought were real, things they believe.

The truth is that bad ideas are deadly.

And in truth, it was the ludicrous idea of an early retirement that brought many people to the Emerald Triangle in northern California from 1980 to 2015. Because that's why I moved to Humboldt. I wanted to retire. And I wasn't the only one. I was a *type*. A *profile*. An *everyman*. Like all the other stereotypical southern California stoners who decided to grow large amounts of marijuana so they could retire by the age of twenty-five. Or get buried in a shallow grave, which, unfortunately, was one of the most common work hazards while working in the hills of Humboldt. But to those of us who didn't get murdered and buried in a shallow grave, eventually, once we found work on the hill, on the farm or in the forest, whenever we had free time – and during the off-season we had plenty of free time – we would find ourselves at the bar

with everyone else, and at one bar in particular: The Logger Bar in Blue Lake. The Logger has been pouring drinks since 1889, and it's still open today. Many souls have walked in and out of the doors of The Logger over the years. For a few years, my soul walked in and out of those doors. Sometimes for a quick afternoon drink. Other times, I'd close the fucker down with the regulars. And many of those regulars, once-upon-a-time, were just like me: southern California seekers. Some seekers were more well-off than others, and some even had their own farms. Many were nice, but some of them were assholes. The same assholes from back home. Even in NorCal, five hundred miles away from home, they still acted like shitheads. Nature versus nurture, my ass. Whenever they offered work, it was easy to turn those jobs down. Jobs like that, with growers who didn't give a fuck about you, ain't worth your time. Or your life. There were always other jobs, other contracts.

A common misconception is that every fool who went to Humboldt to work during prohibition was a farmer or a trimmer, but it's just not true. There was lots of work available. And these jobs didn't always involve marijuana. Some farms needed other skills: mechanics, welders, heavy-equipment operators, etc., and if you were lucky enough to find a job with a good boss, they usually had great work to offer, with incredible pay, even benefits.

Such a boss was Richard Worthy.

Part III

Unidentified Human Remains Recovered In Southeast Humboldt

Press release from the Humboldt County Sheriff's Office:

Humboldt County Sheriff's deputies have located human remains in Southeast Humboldt.

The remains were recovered today, August 28, 2014, in the area of Highway 36 between Bridgeville and Dinsmore. The identity and sex of the deceased are unknown at this time. Cause and manner of death are also unknown, pending further investigation.

This is an active investigation. More information regarding this case will be released when available and appropriate.

Sheriff's Office Opens 'Suspicious' Death Investigation After Human Remains Found Off Highway 36

Press release from the Humboldt County Sheriff's Office:

On August, 28, 2014, at about 1:45 p.m., the Humboldt County Sheriff's office was contacted by the U.S. Forest Service and the California Highway Patrol to assist with a possible traffic accident on Highway 36 near Milepost Marker 88.

Prior to arrival, deputies learned that emergency personnel on scene had located a deceased adult female approximately 100 feet down the embankment of the eastbound traffic lane of Highway 36.

Humboldt County Sheriff's Special Services deputies responded to assist in the recovery of the body and to search for any other possible victims. Only one victim, the decedent, was located and recovered around 5:51 p.m.

Upon further investigation, deputies determined this death to be suspicious and it is now being investigated by the Humboldt County Sheriff's Criminal Investigations Division.

This is an active investigation. More information regarding this case will be released when available and appropriate. Anyone with information about this case is encouraged to call the Humboldt County Sheriff's Office at (707) 445-7252.

Sheriff's Office Seeking Homicide Suspect After Identifying Remains Found Last Week Off Highway 36 As Belonging To Missing Person

Press release from the Humboldt County Sheriff's Office:

The Humboldt County Coroner's Office has identified human remains recovered on August 28, 2014, as that of missing person, **Sinead Worthy**, of Palm Springs, California.

Worthy, aged 20, was reported missing by her family to the Humboldt County Sheriff's Office on April 21, 2014. According to her family, **Worthy** had booked a Greyhound trip on April 18, 2014, bound for Palm Springs. On the morning of April 19, 2014, **Sinead Worthy** and her brother, **Richard Worthy**, spoke briefly before she departed her workplace and traveled to Eureka to board the Greyhound. According to records and passenger logs, **Sinead Worthy**, failed to board the bus that day.

A vehicle associated with **Worthy** was reportedly located on Highway 36 near Milepost Marker 88.10 by the California Highway Patrol on August 28, 2014, approximately 100 feet down the embankment near the eastbound lane. Through further investigation into this case, deputies determined **Worthy's** disappearance to be suspicious.

A cause of death determination for **Worthy** is pending forensic examination of her remains. However, based upon the investigation thus far, deputies determined **Worthy's** manner of death to be homicide and have identified 66-year-old Humboldt County District Attorney **Adam Freeman** of Eureka as a Person of Interest in the case.

This is an active investigation. More information regarding this case will be released when available and appropriate. Anyone with information about this case is encouraged to call the Humboldt County Sheriff's Office at (707) 445-7252.

Blue Lake is a town that you think would only exist in movies and fairy tales. It must be that mythical place that Timothy Leary was always searching for. Some call it Valhalla. *El Paraíso*. And the Garden of Eden. The town sits at this curious geographical point, a societal transform boundary of sorts where the valley heat meets the ocean breeze, and where the communities of coastal Humboldt and the inhabitants of rural Humboldt collide in a clash of cultures and lifestyles. Ranchers, loggers, farmers, hippies, and law enforcement don't always get along. There's a constant fight for territory. Control. Power. And for some, local political representation.

Part of the allure of Humboldt County and the North Coast of California is its isolation. The county stretches for 4,000 square miles, and within those 4,000 square miles is a population of roughly 130,000 people, with 85,000 of those people living along a forty-two mile stretch of coastline, from Ferndale to Trinidad. It's a big small town with little-to-no cell reception. As it was told to me when I moved there, Humboldt County is a place to go when you don't want to be found. Whether if you're dealing with depression, the ups and downs of strong emotions, tough life-choices, or organized crime, it's the perfect place to manage these issues, or to disappear. It's no surprise that Humboldt has the highest missing persons rate per-capita in California.

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Both Blue Lake and the city of Arcata during the summertime are magical places. There is nothing like a summer in Humboldt. It's hard to put in words. While the summer solstice of the northern hemisphere occurs around mid-June, in Humboldt, summer starts early, by the second or third Saturday in May, right when the students at Humboldt State University graduate. I used

to say, and maybe the locals still say it too, that when the outdoor tent at the Mad River Brewery comes down, it's time to party. After a long and wet winter cooped up indoors, everyone in Humboldt is ready to let loose, and every year, like clockwork, when the poppies start blooming in May, the party commences and an endless summer ensues. Humboldt summers have a certain feel to them. I don't know if it's the sunshine, the outdoors, the clear skies, the hot days swimming in the river, the bonfires at the beach, or the pheromones, but when summer comes to Humboldt, it feels like everything and anything is possible. The trade winds shift. The sun rises in a different location. Shadows are shorter. Winter constellations migrate to the southern hemisphere, and colorful wildflowers continue to bloom and paint the countryside well through dog days of August. And that is a typical summer in Humboldt. And it was during the summer of 2011 when I met Richard Worthy.

My first night in Blue Lake, Joyce and I stopped to get a drink at The Logger Bar. The bar was packed when we walked in, and a three-piece band, called Kingfoot, was performing a live set, and it was one of the wildest sets I've seen. Kingfoot has a stand-up bass player named Jimmy Foot, and for some of his solos, he climbs the top of his bass, like a jungle-gym at a kid's park, and he slaps the shit out of that bass. That night with Joyce was the first time I saw Jimmy on top of his bass, his head nearly touching the ceiling. I couldn't believe what I was seeing. And I couldn't stop smiling. I had fallen in love, and her name was Humboldt and The Logger Bar.

The band was finishing up a song called *Steely*. Jimmy spotted Joyce in the crowd and screamed from the top of his bass, "Is that Joyce Fulton back in town?"

"Hi Jimmy! Yup, it's me. Please don't fall down."

"Never, Joyce. Let's catch up after this set."

“Sure, Jimmy.”

“Who is that?” I asked.

“That’s Jimmy. Him and his band play here at least once or twice a month.”

“Damn that’s awesome. This song kicks ass. Does he always climb up like that?”

“Here, yes he does. All the time. Some venues don’t let him climb up though. Liability or whatever. But we don’t give a fuck here. You know, if you like the song, you’re gonna love the Folk Life Festival.”

“What’s that?”

“It’s a week-long festival here in town. The folk bands from around the county play live sets at different venues each night. Festival starts Saturday, down at the brewery. Something like five bands or whatever. I’ll take you. It’ll be fun, Hank!”

“Kickass, I’m down. I didn’t even know there was a brewery here.”

“Down the street. They got some of their beers here on tap. You wanna try one?”

“Sure.”

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It was probably my fourth or fifth beer by the time I met Richard. By that point, police had come and stopped the band. Apparently, the band was playing too loud for a Thursday night. I didn’t even know it was a Thursday. All I knew was that I had a new favorite beer. But I was so drunk, I had forgotten what it was called when I tried to order my next one.

“Hi, can I have a Steel-fish?”

The bartender stopped, stared at me. Scowled. “What did you say?”

“Uh, I’m not sure what it’s called. ‘Steel-fish’? Oh, I don’t know. It’s the freakin’ beer with a fish on its label, from the brewery down the street.”

The bartender snickered. I think she picked up that I was new in town. “Sorry, son. I didn’t catch that. Say again?”

I tried to explain, but to no avail. It’s tough to remember things when you’re drunk. I felt defeated, so I gave up. “Damn, I don’t know what it’s called. Can I just get a Coors Light?”

Suddenly this voice bellowed out from just behind me, “Ah, Heather, quit busting the newbie’s balls, and get him a Steely already, will ya?”

“Steely! Hey, like the song. *That’s* what the beer’s called. Yeah, that’s the one I want. One *Steelhead*, please.”

The bartender mumbled to herself, grabbed a chilled glass and poured beer from the Steelhead tap. “What’s the name on the tab?”

The stranger said, “I got that, Heather,” and took the seat next to me. “I can’t let you order Coors Light, kid.”

“What’s wrong with Coors Light?”

“Well, nothing. It’s great beer. Some of the best. But it just ain’t right to drink that lawn mower beer while you’re at the source of some good craft shit.”

I looked at him like he was speaking a different language. “Man, I’m so fucking drunk right now. I have no idea what you just said. But, uh, thank you for helping me. And the beer. What’s it called again? ‘Steely-fish’?”

“Steelhead. Like the fish.”

“Right. Steelhead. Got it. Thank you, man. I’m Hank. Nice to meet you.”

“Hiya, Hank. I’m Richard. Richard Worthy. I saw you walk in with Joyce. You her friend from SoCal?”

“Yup. From Long Beach.”

“Well right on, brother, I’m from Palm Springs.”

“Oh sweet – do you live here?”

“On and off. I travel back and forth for work these days. Pretty much here for spring, summer, and fall, and then I’m back in SoCal for winter. Can’t stand the damn rain. I love the sun too much.”

“Yeah, shit, man. I know how you feel. I’m like a damn fish out of water without the sun.” I chugged my beer. “So, what brought you to Humboldt?”

“Came here on a football scholarship, then stayed for work. Moved here spring of ‘91, started school at HSU that fall. My friend from back home got offered a scholarship a year before I did, so he pulled some strings and got me one too.”

“That’s pretty sweet. Got to go to school for free.”

“Well, that is true. It was free. If only I had graduated. No degree for me, kid. I got kicked off the team, and the work I fell into was just too good to pass up.”

“What do you do for work?”

“I work at a construction company. Say, you up for a game of pool?”

It’d been years since I had last played. Figured I’d give it a shot. “Sure, I’d love to play.”

The Loma Prieta earthquake wasn't the only thing to shake things up in 1989. A young junior running back named Richard Worthy from Palm Springs High School made waves too when he broke the California state high school football records for rushing yards, rushing attempts, catches, total touchdowns, and yards-from-scrimmage. The historical performance was lauded nationwide, and the University of Notre Dame even offered young Richard a scholarship. But he turned down the offer. And no one understood why. Nine Division I-A schools had offered Richard scholarships, but he declined all of them. To the dismay of college scouts, he instead chose a small Division II school in northern California, and in the fall of 1990, Richard Worthy accepted a full-ride football scholarship to play running back for the Humboldt State University Lumberjacks. His friend, Jeff Foreman, had received a scholarship to play quarterback one year prior, and he lobbied the coaching staff at HSU to give his friend, Richard, a scholarship too. "He's a beast," Jeff told his head coach. When Richard showed up for spring football practice in late February of 1991, he was 18-years-old, 225 lbs., and the coaches unofficially clocked his forty-yard dash at 4.47 seconds.

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On June 4, 1993, CHP pulled over and detained Jeff Foreman and Richard Worthy in Kern County on California State Route 58, fifteen minutes west of Tehachapi. With 727 pounds of processed marijuana in the trunk of their car at the time of the traffic stop, both young men were booked into the Kern County Jail on trafficking charges (Cal. Health & Safety Code §11352).

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It was June 5, 1993, when Heather Fulton-Lane and her daughter, Layla Fulton-Lane, drove to Bakersfield and posted bail for Jeff Foreman and Richard Worthy. During that same day, Kern County District Attorney, Ed Jagles, solicited sex from a minor (Cal. Penal Code § 261.5) and

paid \$350 dollars to 17-year-old Layla Fulton-Lane. When Heather Fulton-Lane showed Ed Jagles the compromising photos of his purchase, Jagles experienced a change-of-heart, and he dropped all charges against Foreman and Worthy, and \$500,000 of bail money was reimbursed to the Fulton Construction Company.

Jagles retired in 2010 with full pension.

...

In the early spring of 1865, Cornelius Fulton, Ingrid Lane, and Ira Utter met by chance in southwestern Washington. Cornelius and his family were migrating west from Missouri to seek a brand-new start, and Utter was fishing at a river bar on the Columbia. Upon hearing of their long journey, Ira Utter offered to house the family in exchange for help at his King County property. The family obliged and took refuge in King County for eight months before they departed for Humboldt. Towards the end of their time in King County, in an effort to get the young couple to stay, Ira Utter offered the family a parcel of land, but Cornelius and Ingrid had their hearts set on California. As a sign of gratitude, Ira Utter gave them the land anyway, and before the family left, Cornelius Fulton, Ira Utter, and Ingrid Lane formed the Chimera Real Estate Company, with the gifted property listed as the company's sole asset. The company would've remained unknown to the family's descendants had Layla Fulton-Lane not discovered the original paperwork in an old box at the Fulton-Lane House in Blue Lake in 1987. Following the reclamation of the company, the business transitioned from sole proprietorship to an LLC in 1989 under a new name: The Chimera Holding Company. Upon establishment, the newly-formed holding company's first economic ventures, under the umbrella of their subsidiary, the Fulton Construction Company, were a \$250,000 dollar investment in the up-and-coming Mad

River Brewing Company and the purchase of a 66-acre-property in southern Humboldt, about one mile north of milepost marker 42.1 on Highway 36.

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In the summer of 1997, Deputy Sheriff recruit, Jeff Foreman, completed the College of the Redwoods Basic Law Enforcement Academy and was sworn into the Humboldt County Sheriff's Department. Later that year, his new wife, Layla Fulton-Lane – under the umbrella of the Chimera Holding Company, in partnership with the Fulton Construction Company and their C.O.O., Richard Worthy – purchased the Tip Top Club, an adult entertainment bar at the south-end of Eureka, about a half mile from the South Bay Elementary School and the Sequoia Humane Society.

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Ingrid Lane was born July 27, 1845, in Ziguinchor, Senegal, a short distance from mouth of the Casamance River. Her real name was Mariama Badji. In 1855 her family was murdered by Dutch slave traders, and she was captured, renamed and sold at auction to Doc Kiffin of the Kiffin Cotton Company in New Orleans in early 1856. She escaped one year later, fleeing to St. Louis County in Missouri, taking refuge with local abolitionists, Aaron and Hagar Fulton and their son, Cornelius. After the death of Cornelius' first wife, he and Ingrid began a relationship, and in 1864, Margie Fulton-Lane was born. Margie's granddaughter, Ann Marie Fulton-Lane, was born at St. Joseph's Hospital in Eureka, sixty-three years after the end of slavery, in 1926.

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On October 9, 1996, Joyce's dad, 32-year-old Humboldt County Deputy Sheriff, Andrew Fulton, was shot and killed while serving a warrant at a residence in Arcata, on 2200 block of Wisteria Way, near the corner of Foster and Alliance. Fulton was killed by Eureka resident, Tommy

Freeman – brother of Adam Freeman, an up-and-coming public defender renowned for his questionable business associates and law practices. Five days later, on October 14, a riot at the county jail ensued. According to county records, inmates cornered Tommy Freeman and stabbed him seventy-seven times, with thirty-one stab wounds located at the head, neck, and face area. He did not survive.

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On November 6, 2017, I woke up with my right leg wrapped in a tight cast, on a bed without sheets, in an unfurnished apartment in the heart of Ballard, 600 miles north of Humboldt. On the bedside table, a bottle of Vicodin and a Glock 19. At the foot of the bed, a duffle bag with a non-disclosed amount of cash, one pound of weed and eleven grams of coke. During that same week, an autopsy conducted by the Humboldt County Coroner's Office determined that the fatal shot which killed District Attorney Adam Freeman was the first shot, which entered his neck, slightly above the clavicle, vaporizing his jugular vein, severing his spinal cord from his brain. The last six shots were postmortem.

One week later, a flood swept through the basement of the Humboldt County Coroner's Office building, destroying all records. Shortly thereafter, the Coroner-Public Administrator of Humboldt County resigned.

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Two years prior, in February of 2015, the Humboldt County Sheriff's Office merged with the Humboldt County Coroner's Office. Local officials cited budget concerns as the reason for the merger, and the measure was passed without voter approval.

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On October 15, 1990, Andrew Fulton and his cousin, Heather Fulton-Lane, purchased The Logger Bar for \$120,000 dollars. Six years later, almost to the day, Heather Fulton-Lane adopted Andrew's daughter, her niece, Joyce Fulton.

You can learn a lot at the bar. At the bar, everyone is an expert. Especially when they're whiskey-drunk at 2:00 p.m. on a Wednesday. At a bar called The Crown and Anchor in Monterey, California, I met one of these experts, a guy named Steve Bourke. We'd met by chance about a year before my tío passed. It was summer 2010, and I was in Monterey to see my brothers. I hadn't seen either of them since they had enlisted and moved from Long Beach. My oldest brother, Jacob, had just been discharged from the Marine Corps and got a job working corrections at the Salinas Valley State Prison in southern Monterey County, so me and my other bro, Chris, decided to meet up, crash Jacob's new pad, eat his food and celebrate for a week or two. One day after a round of golf, we stopped at The Crown for beers and their special curry fries. Jacob was wearing his Titleist Pro V1 hat with its Marine Corps insignia, talking about how fucked up his golf swing was, drinking beer, cursing the Raiders and JaMarcus Russell, when this drunken-slurry guy walked to our table and asked, "Hey, are you a Marine?", pointing to Jacob.

"Yes I am."

"Well alright. That's what I like to hear. I'm a Marine too. Grenada. And Desert Storm. Name's Steve – Steve Bourke. It's always great to run into a brother."

He didn't look like a Marine to me, wearing a suit. Then again, what are Marines supposed to look like anyway?

Jacob said, "Nice to meet you. I'm Jacob, and these two fuckers here are my brothers. That one's Hank," he said, pointing to me. "He's the baby. And that one there, that's Chris. Don't talk to him; he's one of those pussy-ass Army fucks."

"You know what 'USMC' stands for, right?" Chris asked.

“Oh wait, I know,” I said. “It stands for ‘u suck my...’”

“Shut your mouth, Hank. I’ll beat your ass and send you packing back to mom and dad’s,” Jacob said.

Steve laughed. And he checked his watch. “Hey you ever see a \$40,000 dollar watch? Check it out.” He shoved his wrist up to my face, revealing a Tag Heuer watch.

I thought, *That’s what \$40,000 looks like? Looks like a regular watch to me. You’re a fool, Steve.* I never understood why anyone would spend more than twenty bucks on a watch. My G-Shock from Target still works fine after all these years. Materialistic folks, I’ll never understand them. “Wow, sweet watch, Steve.” I leaned over and whispered over to Chris, “This fucking guy...”

Chris laughed. “So Steve, you from around here?” he asked.

“Arizona. Here on business. Just closed a deal, so I’m celebrating.” He took a swig of his whiskey and said to Jacob, “You know, I like helping my fellow Marines. What if I told you I could custom-make you a driver that’ll increase your distance off the tee by twenty or thirty yards?”

“No use,” Chris said. “Jacob’s the fucking slice king. Don’t waste your time, Steve.”

I was curious, so I asked, “What kind of driver are you talking about?”

Soon as he started talking again, a little part of me wish I hadn’t asked. “Well, kid, you know, I’m not just this guy in a \$50,000 dollar suit, wearing a \$40,000 dollar watch, driving a \$250,000 dollar car. I’m a scientist too. A metallurgist. You got a phone? Look up ‘Bourke Industries Kryon Armor.’ Read the little description there on the site.”

I rolled my eyes, shot glances at Jacob and Chris. Chris smiled, held back a laugh. Jacob shook his head. On my phone, the Bourke Industries website was the first Google result that

came up. I clicked on it and started reading, showed Steve the phone. “This what you’re talking about?”

“Yup, that’s me. That’s my work. My baby.”

“What’s it say, Hank?” Jacob asked.

I zoomed in on the description and read it aloud, “Kryron is a state-of-the-art proprietary aluminum alloy and the optimal material for ballistic armor plates. Compared to industry-standard personal protection ceramic plates, Kryron Terminator armor is lighter, far more durable, and completely eliminates shatter, spall, and ricochet.” Turns out this Steve Bourke character was legit, even if he was obnoxious and annoying, and the company even had stock for sale over-the-counter, selling at \$0.02 cents per share.

“You said you just completed a deal?” Chris asked.

“You bet your ass. We outfitted Bernalillo County Sheriffs last week in New Mexico with the armor, and we just closed a deal with the Monterey County Sheriff’s Department today. About an hour ago. And I’ve been hammered ever since.”

Chris took my phone, browsed the website. “This is incredible, Steve. And here I was thinking you’re just a fucking suit. Man, this is brilliant. Any chance these plates gonna see combat overseas anytime soon? And any chance I could get a hook up?” Chris had one tour left before discharge.

“Beginning of Q3 of ‘11, they’ll hit the shelves for commercial use. But I could help you out, even if you are an Army fuck, ha! I gotta close a few more deals around the country. Hopefully we get the Border Patrol contract by the end of this year; that Obama is deporting like a motherfucker. If we get that, we’re gonna take off. To the moon.” Steve looked over both his

shoulders, like a paranoid scanning for spies. “I ain’t supposed to say this, but you might want to put some money down. Open a position with Bourke Industries, ticker symbol: B-O-R-K.”

Chris scoffed. “It’s two cents a share, Steve. Pink sheet shit. The fuck kinda money can we make with penny stocks?”

“Trust me. If we get the Border Patrol contract, that price’ll shoot up. You have my word.”

Later that night, Jacob helped me open my first brokerage account with Fidelity. I’d later go on to transfer my Fidelity securities to Ameritrade when I got to Humboldt, but back then, when I opened the Fidelity account, I had no clue which broker was which, and I really didn’t give a shit. The sore feelings from the bank bailouts from a couple years back were still raw. I can remember a story in October of ‘08 involving AIG, how the company used their bailout money for a week-long retreat for their executives at the St. Regis Resort in Monarch, California. That really pissed me off. After AIG and all those other New York finance jerks threw the country under the bus with their monetary recklessness, they had the nerve to spend American tax dollars on expensive vacations and year-end bonuses. I hated everything about Wall Street. But I did want to make money. And so did Jacob and Chris. So we opened positions with Bourke Industries. Chris bought some Tesla too, at \$4.26 a share, that bastard. “Get a load of this stock,” he said. “I like the name. Think I’m gonna buy it. You think it has anything to do with Tesla coils?”

That was my first experience investing. Before Bourke Industries tanked, and before Steve got arrested and charged with a DUI in Phoenix, my brothers and I watched the stock rise from \$0.02 cents, and then \$0.09 cents, and then \$0.70 cents. By April of 2011, the stock had reached \$4.00 dollars per share, each of us up over \$10,000. And then gravity took over: the

company went bankrupt; Steve went to jail; the patents for Kryon were sold to keep the business afloat; and Jacob and I were left holding the bag, losing all our money, Chris the only one smart enough to sell. When the Bourke saga was all said and done, Jacob and I walked away with one of the most important lessons for investing: the profits ain't real until you take them off the table. And I learned something else too: the bar is ripe with insider information. And sometimes that information has a serendipitous way of finding you. It might even buy you a beer or two. Or four. So when I got to Blue Lake and walked into The Logger Bar in early July of 2011, fresh off the heels of a tough economic lesson, I knew Richard Worthy was a drunken fool worth listening to.

A mighty whack echoed through the bar as Richard broke the pool rack, sinking two striped balls and one solid. He surveyed the table, singled out the 14-ball, aimed, and sank it. “Stripes!” he exclaimed. “How’s that Steelhead treating you, kid?”

I looked at my pint glass, smiled. I was speechless. Happy. Drunk. And a little high too. “This is the best beer I’ve ever had. No shit, I didn’t know beer could taste this good. Back home, my dad and my uncle drink Coronas and Modelos. My brothers drink a ton of Coors. In Chico, at Joyce’s, it’s nothing but Pabst and Natty Ice. But this,” I said, raising my glass and spilling beer on the floor, “takes the cake.”

Richard laughed. “Kid, if you’re up for it, the brewery’s looking for part-time labor this summer. I might be able to put in a good word. Joyce says you’re looking for work. You want the job?”

“That sounds great. But, uh, I don’t know how long I’ll be in town. Not sure what Joyce’s plan is, if she’s going back to Chico or not.” I scanned the bar, trying to spot Joyce. “Where is she anyway?”

Richard looked around but couldn’t find Joyce either. “She’s probably smoking or something. Maybe the patio.” Suddenly the front door swung open, and a cold draft filled the bar. It was a cop. A small hush drew over the banter and laughter. “Well, well,” Richard said, “We’re fucked now. Heather, I think you’re in trouble.”

The cop shook his head. “Dick. How many have you had tonight? Go home” he said. And then the cop said to Heather, “Mom, you gotta turn down the music. I can’t keep the heat off this place forever. Goddamn mayor’s busting my balls about the noise, won’t stop blowing up my phone.”

Heather grabbed the jukebox remote and shut it off, leaving the bar in silence, save for the chatter and clinking glasses. “Is that better, officer?” she asked in a sarcastic tone.

“Ma, don’t be that way. I can’t play favorites; you know that. I’m just doing the job.” He took a seat at the bar. “Can I get a Steely? One for Dick too.”

“And one for Hank,” Richard added.

“And a shot of Herradura, the añejo,” I said.

“Ooo good call, kid. Mom, make that two shots.”

“Ah, three,” the cop added.

Richard and I set our pool cues down and joined the cop at the bar. I was nervous. Something about the uniform still gets to me. Every time I see a cop, I get the urge to run. Conditioning, I guess. Richard asked the cop, “So, Jeff, catch any criminals tonight?”

“I did, actually. It was wild. Out on Acacia street, about two hours ago. Chased his ass down Evergreen and tackled him right before he got to Raymar. That same fucker who stole Old Jenny’s chickens from her front yard last week.”

“Oh shit,” Richard said, “is that what those sirens were?”

“Yup. Should’ve seen it, Dick. I still got it. Tweaker speed ain’t got nothing on my jets. Remember back in ’94, the game against Seattle Pacific when I chased down the guy I threw an interception to? Just like that.”

Heather brought us our beers and shots, and she poured a shot for herself too. “I remember that game,” she said. “Homecoming, right?”

“Yeah, ma. Homecoming. Still can’t believe we lost.”

Heather laughed. “Oh get over it. It’s been seventeen years. Are you really still hanging on to that crap?”

“Don’t listen to her, Jeff,” said Richard. “She just doesn’t get it.” He grinned like the Cheshire Cat.

“You boys. Fucking sports. Are we taking these shots or not? Quit babysitting. Bottom’s up, c’mon.”

We clanked glasses and threw the shots back. I took a bite from my lime wedge and Jeff asked me, “You Joyce’s friend from SoCal?”

“Yup. I’m Hank. Nice to meet you.”

“Right on, Hank. Joyce says you’re good people. You know, I worked with your dad a couple summer’s back, at the Ukiah Area office.”

A sense of relief came over me, and I felt the weight fall off my shoulders. I holstered my guard. “Oh, wow, small world,” I said. “I *do* remember that transfer. It was over pretty fast.”

“Wasn’t a transfer, Hank. Is that what your dad told you? He had to clean up shop: all the officers were fucking each other’s spouses. It was a hot mess. So he fired a few, transferred the rest out to other areas, hired new recruits. Your dad and I filled in for a few shifts that summer. It was a good experience. I learned a lot the from the lieutenant. Your dad’s an OG, kid. Did he make LC?”

This was all news to me. “Yeah, he got promoted to Lieutenant Commander. But, man, I had no idea about the Ukiah office. He told me and my ma that it was some special assignment from the Governor’s Office. Wow, that’s fucking hilarious. I gotta tell my bros; they’re gonna get a kick outta this one.”

The front door swung open again, and in walked a scruffy guy in a grease-stained jumpsuit. He spotted Jeff and Richard. “There you two are. We got a situation.” He was nervous. Rushed. Pressed for time. The mood in the bar shifted. Mom un-dimmed the lights and called a pre-emptive last call for the patrons. “Ok everyone,” she said, “last call! We’re closing up shop early tonight. Square up your tabs, and get the hell out.”

“What’s up, Brian?” Richard asked the greasy man. “You wanna do a shot?”

“Not now, Dick. Hate to break up the party, but we gotta get to work. Property manager’s coming to the house tomorrow. We gotta get everything out of there. Now.”

“Whoa, hang on,” Jeff said. “I thought they said they weren’t coming until Saturday? Dick and I were gonna get everything out tomorrow morning.”

“Change of plans, boys. I just got the email. They’ll be at the house at noon tomorrow.” Brian looked at his watch. It was just after midnight, Friday morning. “Check that: noon today. C’mon. Drop your dicks, and let’s get the fuck outta here.”

Jeff sighed, shook his head. Richard whined, chugged the rest of his beer. Joyce came in from the back patio, and I shot her a nervous glance. Then Jeff said to Heather, “Mom, call Layla please, tell her I won’t be home til later. And can we get a few Jell-o shots to-go?”

“Give us the rest of the Jell-o,” Richard said. “We’re gonna need the sugar.” He asked Joyce and I, “Think ya’ll can give us a hand?”

I looked to Joyce, deferred to her. “Sure,” she said. “Sorry, Hank. Guess we’re helping the fam tonight.”

“Thanks, you two,” Jeff said. “We could really use the help. And the rocket fuel. How much you got, Joyce?”

“Fourteen, maybe fifteen grams.”

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Off the corner of J St. and Blue Lake Blvd., there is a little, white, nondescript one-story house with a small Magnolia tree on its front lawn. From the outside, the house looks like all the other homes on J Street. Big homes. Small homes. Family homes. Homes with brand-new siding. And weathered homes, some which still resemble the way they looked when they were built in 1910. And a century later, in the summer of 2011, with fourteen or fifteen grams of coke, a brown paper bag filled with Jell-o shots, a cop, two strangers and a hippie chick, I walked through the door of the home on 690 J Street. As I walked in, my senses were ambushed by intense humidity, strong fragrances of fruit, pine, and skunk, and blinding rays of light from overhead-hanging, orange-tinted LED bulbs. I was speechless. I couldn't believe my eyes. "Is this... are those... how ma..."

"One-hundred-sixty-six, give or take," Brian said. "And they all gotta come down by sunrise."

"Jesus. Who lives here?"

"No one," said Joyce. "Not anymore. It belonged to one of the bartenders at the brewery, but she got a new job in Ashland. We took over her lease after she left."

"Fuck me," Jeff said. "Well, only one way out of this. Joyce, where's that bag?"

Richard put a plate in the oven and Joyce handed Jeff the coke. "Brian," she said, "meet Hank. He's my friend from Santa Cruz."

"Hey, Hank, good to meet you. Santa Cruz, huh?"

"Nice to meet you, Brian. I'm from Long Beach originally, but I've been living in Santa Cruz on-and-off for the past year or so. Something about the redwoods. I just can't stay away."

“Well I hear ya there, kid. Redwoods, they’re something else. And I love me some Santa Cruz. Used to do a lot of work down there. Tons of hippies. Great seafood. Lotsa mushrooms too. You ever been to a joint on Pacific Ave. called ‘The Catalyst’?”

“Yeah, totally. I go to shows there all the time. Great spot.”

“*Great spot!*” Brian exclaimed. “Aha, well ok, Hank. I’ll have to look you up next time I’m in town.”

Richard pulled the plate from the oven and sifted a few white rocks onto the plate’s hot surface. He pulverized the rocks with his Visa card and procured a fifty-dollar bill from his pocket, rolled it into a tight cylinder, and cleared his throat. “Ahem, ladies and gentleman: dinner is served!”

“Gimme that,” Jeff said and snatched the rolled bill from Richard. “Quit pussy-footing, Dick. We don’t got a lot of time.” He took long snort and passed the plate to Joyce. Joyce did her line, passed the plate to me. I picked a line, put the bill down, and took a big snort. Suddenly I was sober as a bird, hyperaware. I thought, *Wow, doing blow with cops: is this forreal? What the fuck is going on?* I handed the plate to Richard.

“*Calmate, Jeffery,*” said Richard. “We got plenty of time. One plant at a time. Right, Brian?”

Brian laughed and shook his head. “Dick, don’t piss off boss-man over here,” he pointed to Jeff. Jeff flipped Brian off.

“Alright, alright,” Richard said, “what’s the game plan, *Jefe?*”

“Joyce and I will cover the bedrooms,” Jeff replied, “and you, Brian and Hank take care of the garage. We’ll meet here and finish the living room.”

Joyce handed each of us a Jell-o shot. “Sounds good, *Jefe*,” she said. “Let’s try these out first. They got tequila. Mom mixed the lime and strawberry Jell-o’s for this batch.”

...

Four raised garden beds occupied the garage. Above the beds, from wall to wall, freshly-cut branches filled with marijuana buds hung from metal wires. Orange-tinted lights filled the room with artificial sunlight while electric fans controlled the humidity. I felt sticky. I’ve never been to Florida, but I imagine that’s how it feels too: sticky. Brian handed me a set of Fiskars and said, “Ok, kid. I know it looks like a lot. And it is. But the job’s simple. Ain’t nothing to it.” He grabbed a branch full of wet buds. “So you take the branch like so, and then take your Fiskars and trim the buds off, cutting as close to the main stalk as possible. Once you’ve cleared the stalk, take all the buds and throw ‘em in that blue barrel over there,” he said, pointing to a 50-gallon drum. “We ain’t looking to manicure these buds for sale, not yet. That’s a job for the trimmers, and we don’t wanna take work away from them. We just gotta get everything the hell outta here as fast as possible, so go quick, but don’t be careless either. Go ahead. Give it a try.”

I took a hanging branch from one of the overhead wires and studied it. For a moment, I felt a sense of accomplishment. Like I had crossed some sort of finish line. All those years in Long Beach, buying this stuff from shady folks on street corners, nearly getting killed because of it. And now here I was, at the source, with more than I’d ever seen in my life. Fiskars in hand, I put blades to branch and snipped, buds falling by the wayside. And then I snipped again. And again. And I kept going.

“And pop goes the cherry,” Richard said.

“Just like that, kid. Good job,” said Brian. “Only a thousand more of these and were done.”

“Brian, where’s the Bluetooth speaker?” Richard asked. “Bill Burr’s got a new podcast up. I wanna listen while we work.”

...

About an hour into the work it occurred to me just how intelligent Brian really was, that there was more to this gruff man in a greasy jumpsuit. He was an electrician by trade, one of the best in Humboldt County, and he owned a tow company and scrap yard in Arcata. His phone never stopped ringing, and his email inbox was often filled with a deluge of requests for his labor. Humboldt County businesses and property managers were his most consistent clients, but it turned out his skills and expertise were also in high-demand from entities all across the country. While we talked shop that night, debating whether the Mustang was a good car or not, I asked him, “How many pounds are we trimming?”

“I’d say 130. Maybe 120 when we get everything processed.”

“And this is all going to one buyer?”

“Yup. East Coast, last I heard from Heather. Not too sure on the details. I’m gonna meet the mules in Nevada next week, and then I’ll be in Reno for about a month.”

“Reno?” I asked.

“And three weeks in Carson City,” he added.

“Vacation?”

“Nope. Work. Company from the Bay is building a factory out in Sparks, east of Reno. Got hired to do electrical work, gonna be a good-paying job. And they have a facility in Carson City that needs work too. Looking at 110k for forty-five days of work.”

“Goddamn, Brian,” said Richard, “which company?”

“Can’t say. Plans for the factory are still under wraps. Lotta legal implications. I had to sign an NDA just to even get the job. But they’re gonna pay for lodging, transport, and my Burning Man pass, so I figure, why not?”

“You’re getting comped for Burning Man? Fuckin’ a. Ok, c’mon, spill it. Who are you working for?”

“All I’ll say is the company’s got a lot invested in Nevada. And they make cars.”

I stopped trimming; my Spidey senses tingled. “Do they make batteries too?” I asked.

Brian smiled. “Yup, kid. Nailed it.”

“That’s awesome. Congrats, Brian. That’s a big job. My brother, Chris, bought a bunch of their stock last year. News is looking good for them. But I just don’t know. I can’t see my future Mustang running on batteries.”

Richard grew impatient. “This is gonna kill me the rest of the night if I don’t find out.”

Brian laughed. “Ask Hank. My lips are sealed.”

“Have you heard of Tesla coils?” I asked Richard.

...

Periodically, Joyce would come to the garage with the plate to help us refuel, and by the time we finished the job, all the Jell-o shots were gone. As the sun rose, we loaded Brian’s flatbed with the garden boxes, empty pots, excess trimmings and soil, and by 10:00 a.m., the house was spotless, ready for the property manager. I was amazed at how efficient we were. And I was still in a daze trying to comprehend everything that had occurred in the past twenty-four hours. I’d sure come a long way from Long Beach. Brian told me later that he sold the lot at \$2100 dollars per pound, \$262,500 dollars in total, and the buyer was nice enough to round up an extra

\$500 dollars for bookkeeping purposes.

“What the hell are you guys gonna do about the smell?” I asked.

Richard laughed. “Ha, fuck it! Let the new owners deal with it.”

Jeff checked his watch. “Well people, I’d say now’s a time if any to clock out. Anyone up for breakfast?”

West of South Fork Mountain in southern Humboldt, one mile northeast of Dinsmore, the Mad River cascades between hillsides as its northwesterly flow runs parallel between Salyer Mad River Road and Forest Route 1N15. A few yards off the path of Salyer Mad River Road, on a southern-facing hillside, beneath a canopy of Douglas Fir, Bigleaf Maple and Scouler's Willow, there sits a dull iron gate, just out of sight from the road's westbound lane. Beyond that gate, a jagged dirt driveway leads to a sixty-six-acre parcel of fertile land. Prior to the land's purchase in 1989 by The Chimera Holding Company, according to local lore and various history accounts, the land was long-inhabited by the Nongatl Tribe, but as the Bald Hills War raged on from 1858 to 1864, California militias, volunteers, and U.S. Army soldiers slaughtered the Nongatl people, as well as the rest of the bands of the Eel River Athapaskan peoples, including the Wailaki, Lassik, and Sinkiyone Tribes. One hundred years after the genocide, utopian-seeking hippies from the Baby Boomer generation, with their inherent dissatisfaction and "back-to-land" philosophies, fled their affluent city and suburban lives and flocked to hills of southern Humboldt, some settling amongst the various plots of land within the sixty-six-acre parcel northeast of Dinsmore. When Heather Fulton-Lane purchased the land in 1989, she evicted the remaining hippies and seekers and clear-cut thirty-three acres of lumber, contracting labor from Maxxam Inc., who had engaged in a hostile takeover of the Pacific Lumber Company in Scotia just three years prior. Following clear-cuts, the Fulton Construction Company commenced building operations on the land and contracted a young freelancer and electrician named Brian Cramer. Brian was tasked with the design and construction of a multi-acre drip irrigation system, siphoning water from the nearby Mad River. Upon observation of the incredible efficacy of his design, the Chimera Holding Company hired Brian as a permanent consultant.

Twenty-two years later, in the spring of 2012, Brian Cramer and I met at the dull iron gate of the Fulton-Lane property and prepared for work.

...

Before I got to Humboldt, when I first started working at my tío's shop, I didn't know what the hell I was doing. There was no hiding my incompetence. Tío Rodrigo would ask for a socket wrench, I'd hand him a crescent wrench. When he requested a flathead, I gave him a Phillips. When he'd say "no onions" for his cheeseburger, I'd get him onions. I have no idea why he never fired me. Even if we were blood, I'd have fired my ass. But he kept the faith, stuck with me. And he helped every step of the way. Less than a year into the job, I started to get the hang of things. No more confusing socket wrenches with crescent wrenches, no more mixing up synthetic oil with full synthetic oil, and no more lighting cigarettes and joints with the plasma cutters. That's the silver lining to incompetence: it's temporary, if you want it to be. You can learn a lot through osmosis, observation, and embarrassing mistakes. The accumulation of skill and expertise isn't something that occurs overnight. Those skills are built over time, often, on the job.

...

The beginning of the end of marijuana prohibition and the illegal marijuana trade coincided with the parabolic rise of electric vehicle demand during the early 2010s, and these events sent a sequence of shockwaves throughout America's legal and illegal commodity markets. In the years that followed the Great Recession, as political rhetoric towards legalization increased, marijuana prices on the west coast decreased from an average of \$1,000 to \$500 dollars per quarter-pound. In legal markets, around the time Brian and I worked the Fulton-Lane property in early April of 2012, the price of oil was trading for \$105 dollars per barrel, and shares of Tesla

sold for \$6.98. Less than three years later, those same Tesla shares were trading at \$41 dollars apiece, while oil prices sank to \$44 dollars per barrel. Meanwhile, the price of nickel rose from \$13,000 to \$19,000 per six-tonne lot. And as the dominoes of this dizzying path of cause-and-effect continued to fall, the insatiable demand for nickel grew stronger, and some marijuana farmers watched the value of their land skyrocket to all-time highs.

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Nickel ore deposits form under two different geological conditions. The first consists of the formation of laterite deposits, a near-surface process in which nickel is formed by intense weathering of ultramafic rocks in tropical climates. The second process occurs underground, over many millennia, resulting in the formation of magmatic sulfide deposits. These deposits develop when the mantle partially melts, ascends to the lower crust, interacts with immiscible elements and fresh magma, subsequent accretion, cooling and crystallization. Approximately 750,410 metric tonnes of nickel are required to produce twenty million environmentally-friendly Tesla cars per year. What Tesla and the rest of the auto industry won't tell you is how toxic nickel mining is. The process often produces hazardous plumes of Sulphur dioxide, darkening the skies, blanketing the earth with cancerous ash and dust, turning rivers red, obliterating the surrounding flora and fauna.

...

Along the eastern edge of the Gorda Plate, on the fringes of the convergent boundary with the North American Plate, on a sixty-six-acre parcel of land, behind a dull iron gate on a brisk April morning in 2012, I asked Brian, "What the fuck are we doing here?" I was pissed. I had to cancel a tee time with Jeff and Richard that morning.

"We got a special job to do, kid. How good are you with an excavator?"

“Never used one in my life.”

“Well, you’re gonna learn today.”

This was my first experience with the Caterpillar 301.8 Mini Excavator. The machine had amazing digging power, but it was skinny enough to fit through tight areas and small gates, so you could tow it without commercial vehicles, no need for specially-licensed trucks. And with the state-of-the-art touchscreens, it was easy to operate, even if you had five or six beers, maybe a couple hits off the joint.

“Brian, this is a hell of a lot of effort for, well, I’m not sure what for. Why do we even need this machine? We really need this thing to grow pot?”

Brian was keeping a secret.

“We ain’t here for that, Hank. Not yet at least. Today, we’re just digging four holes. Actually, *you’re* digging four holes. The holes need to measure fifteen feet by fifteen feet at a depth of one foot, two feet, three feet, and four feet. Think you can handle that?”

“That sounds like a whole lot of work for a whole lot of nothing. What, are we digging graves? Brian, seriously, what are we doing here today? I cancelled a tee time for this. And I got a horny old lady at home ready to kick my ass for not cleaning out the gutters I promised to clean. What’s going on?”

“The boss lady says we need soil samples. For, uh, the...EPA. Yeah, the EPA needs to run soil samples. They’re looking for, uh, nickel and cobalt.”

“You know, we’ve played a lot of poker together. Whenever you stutter and pause like that, Brian, I know you’re lying. C’mon, man, spill it. What do you know?”

Brian sighed. He surveyed the land, land he had worked for three decades. In the distance, crows cawed, dogs barked, and the echoes of high-caliber rounds fired from the guns of

nearby growers bounced off the hillsides. From a cooler in his truck bed, he grabbed two non-labeled beer bottles and handed one to me. “Here,” he said, “misfills from Mad River.”

“Steelhead?”

“IPA.”

“That’ll do.”

We drank in silence. The rushing snowmelt splashed amongst the rocks in the Mad River. Gunshots rang in the distance. The sun approached high noon, melting the early-morning dew. “You know, kid, when I got here from SoCal in ’77, I swear the hills across the river were a lot smaller, shorter.”

“Tectonics, man. Earth’s alive.” He was going down a nostalgia trip, the old man. I let him have his monologue.

“That’s right: the earth *is* alive. It’s amazing, this planet. Have you ever really *thought* about the dirt? What it does? I tell you, kid, prepping gardens, planting, watching that first sprout burst from the soil, there’s nothing like it...” His voice trailed off, eyes fixed on some invisible horizon. “Thirty-five years, kid. Thirty-five. That’s how long I’ve been here, growing and working, and I’ve seen a lot of things. Drought, blight, fires. I’ve watched men wither and die working these hills. Some of those men, well, this world is better off without them. Others, gone too soon. And I’ve watched the Fed – with their helicopters, wasting taxpayer’s dollars – invade these hills, trying to tell people what to do. Kill a way of life. What’s man to do when they can’t work anymore?”

I wasn’t quite following what Brian was getting at. “What do you mean ‘can’t work anymore,’ Brian? What’s troubling you?”

“The family has decided to sell the land. And there’s rumors that the family is gonna exit the marijuana business altogether.”

It was the first I’d heard about it. Joyce hadn’t mentioned anything. “The hell do you mean they’re getting out of the industry? That doesn’t make any sense. Prohibition is ending, Brian. We’re about to go to the moon.”

“That’s just it, Hank. Prohibition *is* ending. When Washington state passes that law in November, everything – this whole way of life – is over. Prices are going to plummet. You really think people are still gonna pay \$2000 dollars a pound? No way. Big Ag is coming. Commercialization is coming. Commoditization is coming. The fucking *Man* is coming, with his goddamn tax ledger. This is over, Hank. It won’t happen overnight, but it will happen.” He grabbed another couple beers from the cooler, lit a joint. “It’ll happen, and you gotta be prepared for transition. That’s why we’re here today.”

“Transition? I don’t understand. And why the fuck are we digging holes?”

“You remember last year? The work I did in Nevada?”

“For the electric cars right? Yeah, sure, I remember.”

“They made the boss lady an offer for this parcel.”

“So, what does that mean?”

“It means this land fucked.”

The Eel River extends for 3,684 square miles and flows in a northwesterly direction through the California Coast Ranges. Home to a wide range of wildlife, including steelhead trout, lamprey, Chinook and Coho salmon, the Eel River watershed shares borders with the Mad River basin to the north, the Sacramento River to the east, the Mattole River to the west, and the Russian and Ten Mile Rivers to the south. The headwaters stem from the southern slopes of Bald Mountain in Mendocino County and flow in a southeasterly direction into Lake County where they channel into Lake Pillsbury, a reservoir created by Scott Dam. From the dam, the river glides west for thirteen miles and reenters Mendocino County where its waters gather at the Van Arsdale Reservoir, a small lake formed by the Cape Horn Dam, about fifteen miles east of Willits and four miles north of Potter Valley. At the Cape Horn Dam a divergence occurs, and the Eel River's flow is partially diverted from its northwesterly-flowing mainstem, as water from the dam also travels south through a one-mile tunnel into the Russian River. From this man-made confluence, the Eel River continues its 200-mile flow northwest as the mainstem travels through a long and narrow valley teeming with ancient groves of Coastal redwood, Fremont cottonwood, Blue oak, Creek dogwood, Madrone and Foothill pine. I can recall the roar of cicadas in this valley during hot summers, the convective layer within those the granite walls baking the valley floor. And with fondness, I can remember a certain summer morning in 2015 while camping in this warm valley, how the sizzle of frying bacon sang in unison with those boisterous cicadas in heat. And Joyce, also in heat, skinny dipping in the cold river, nearly hooking herself on my cast fishing pole.

As the river cuts past that valley campsite and drifts by the small communities of Hearst and Longvale, it meets the Middle Fork at Dos Rios, seven miles east of Laytonville. From this

junction at the Middle Fork, the river runs north for twenty miles until it makes a slight northeasterly turn and meets the North Fork. At this confluence, both the mainstem and the North Fork roam into southwestern Trinity County, with the North Fork heading in an east-northeast direction before redirecting to a northwesterly course, while the mainstem continues its northwest trajectory, touching base with the Franciscan Complex remnant, Island Mountain. After its brief Trinity County visit, the mainstem of the river approaches Alderpoint in Humboldt County and continues its northwesterly destination, passing the unincorporated communities of Fort Seward, Blocksburg, Oak Glen, Whitlow, Fruitland and McCann until it reaches the Dyerville Bar and the South Fork to the west, near the town of Weott. As the mainstem separates from its confluence with the South Fork, it twists and turns past the communities of Holmes, Shively, Stafford, the old Pacific Lumber Company in Scotia, and Rio Dell. About five miles north of Rio Dell, a stone's throw away from the town of Alton, the mainstem converges with Van Duzen River to the east before separating again, roaming north towards the city of Fortuna. At Fortuna, the river cuts west across a coastal plain and meets a large estuary fifteen miles south of Eureka, and then the mouth, where it finally drains into the Pacific Ocean.

...

A few miles south of the headwaters of the Eel River, the headwaters of the Russian River spring from the Laughlin Range atop Pontiac Peak, six miles east of Willits. There is no water at this peak. A gaze upon this speck of land would note dense thickets of *Pseudotsuga menziesii* with *Acer macrophyllum* and *Populus fremontii* fighting for space in between. Without rainfall, it is tough differentiate this particular ridge from the other lush green gullies that run down the southern face of the mountain. A terrible drought struck California from 2013 to 2016, and this small canyon ran dry for a few years, and much of the agriculture in the surrounding regions

suffered, except for the Cabernet grapes, which tend to thrive in drought. Some of the best bottles of Cabernet Sauvignon stem from that drought from 2013 to 2016. But in periods without drought, during years of regular rainfall, the silty mainstem of the river meanders through the valley floor in a southerly flow, passing many of those Cabernet vineyards, running past Redwood Valley and the town of Calpella where the river meets the East Fork.

On the eastern side of the Laughlin Range, six miles east of the mainstem's headwaters, the head of the East Fork of emerges one mile south of the man-made confluence at the Cape Horn Dam and snakes through the fertile agricultural lands of Potter Valley. Unlike Redwood Valley, Potter Valley is situated two hundred feet higher and is subject to extreme heat during the day and frigid temperatures at night. With such fluctuations in temperature, the region is the perfect place to grow grapes for wines like Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay, Riesling, and Pinot Noir, and on some plots of land in particular, the marijuana strains of Green Crack, Maui Wowie, and Sour Diesel.

As the East Fork runs parallel to the mainstem and continues its southerly course, about six miles south of its head, the fork shifts in a south-southwesterly direction for four miles until it empties into Lake Mendocino, the reservoir formed by the Coyote Valley Dam. From Lake Mendocino, the East Fork joins the mainstem at their confluence, about 1.5 miles east of Mendocino College. And three miles south of this confluence lies the city of Ukiah.

...

The word "Ukiah" comes from the Central Pomo word "*yokaya*," which translates to "south valley." Before Anglo settlers brought their diseases and genocidal tendencies to the region, the Pomo occupied the lands between Willits and Santa Rosa, from the coast to Clear Lake basin. The people referred to as "Pomo" were not a single tribe, but rather members of a group of over

seventy independent bands of village communities. Each band had their own name and home territory, and they spoke one of seven different languages, unified under the colonially-inspired label, “Pomoan.” As more westward-moving migrants poured into the south valley to let their cattle graze and prospect for gold, conceptions of ownership arose and tensions escalated, reaching a boiling point in 1850, resulting in the Bloody Island Massacre.

The Bloody Island Massacre stemmed from the enslavement of scores of Pomo by Anglo settlers, Andrew Kelsey and Charles Stone. One day in the spring of 1850, the enslaved Pomo rebelled and killed their captors, and in response, the First Cavalry Regiment of the U.S. Army, under the command of Lieutenants Nathaniel Lyon and J.W. Davidson, murdered sixty Pomo on the island of Badon-napo-ti at the north end of Clear Lake, though conflicting reports indicate that the number killed had eclipsed over two hundred. The regiment would go on to murder seventy-five more Pomo along the Russian River.

As the nineteenth century drew to a close, the Pomo were coerced onto small rancherias and reservations, and the rest of their lands were seized, paving the way for gold miners, ranchers, loggers, homesteaders, profiteers, criminals and entrepreneurs. Such a man was D.K. Freeman, the great grandfather of Adam Freeman.

...

The grips of modern civilization breached the final fortress of the Redwood Curtain in 1889 as the San Francisco and North Pacific Railroad completed the line from Ukiah to Cloverdale, connecting Mendocino County to the national rail network. In the years that followed, the age of industrial agriculture swept through the city of Ukiah and the surrounding regions, and this call to industry brought many characters to the fertile valleys north of San Francisco. Many of these characters found their way to Ukiah by rail, while others traveled by stagecoach. One of those

characters was a man named W.W. Van Arsdale, a San Francisco tycoon who co-owned the McCloud River Railroad and several banks and lumber mills. In 1905, Van Arsdale, who had grown dissatisfied with Ukiah's electricity dependence from the city's lone coal burning plant, rounded up the region's Russian migrants, destitute Chinese laborers and indentured and enslaved Pomo, and commenced work on the Cape Horn Dam. Meanwhile, back in San Francisco, news of Van Arsdale's project spread like wildfire throughout the port city, eventually making its way to forty-five-year-old Donald Klein Freeman and his young Irish mistress, sixteen-year-old Nessa Loraine O'Leary.

O'Leary was born at high tide on June 5, 1889 off the coast of Delaware on the SS Roanoke, a passenger and cargo ship that operated a trade route from New York City to Norfolk, Virginia. Her parents, Conor and Sheena O'Leary, fled New York City to escape the violence and discrimination of the Anti-Irish movements that swept through the city at that time. From Norfolk, with baby Nessa in tow, the O'Leary's joined the flock of westward-moving Mormons on the Norfolk and Western Railway, eventually making their way to Salt Lake City, Utah. And it was at this confluence of immigration at the Great Salt Lake where they met a local distiller and saloon operator named D.K. Freeman.

D.K. Freeman was born February 12, 1860, three years before the Emancipation Proclamation, and was the lone descendent of slave owners, Harvey and Kerry Freeman of the Freeman Cotton Company in Ellenton, Georgia. As the family's wealth dissipated with the abolishment of slavery and the fall of the southern, cotton-based aristocracy, the Freeman's migrated to Victoria, Texas to escape – in their view – the ungodly assault against their freedoms. The relocation was far from graceful. Harvey's propensity for outspokenness and white supremacy earned him a bullet to the head as he was killed in a duel near the banks of the

Guadalupe River. To protect her son from sharing her husband's fate, and in order to thwart their descent into poverty, Kerry took employment with Victoria's top procuress, Rosa María Iglesias.

It's been said that the women under Lady Rosa's employ were the finest in all of southeast Texas. Vaqueros, fishermen, blacksmiths, war veterans, opiate addicts and all men of industry in the Texarkana region are said to have visited Lady Rosa's establishment at one time or another. At Lady Rosa's, the moonshine flowed like honey, the piano never ceased, the blackjack dealer dealt round the clock, the breakfast was fantastic, and the women could melt all your troubles away – for just a few of your hard-earned American dollars. Such was the norm in those days. Brothels and saloons were as abundant as general stores and Christian churches, and as the wave of industrial progress cast its influence upon the continent of North America, brothels established themselves as cultural cornerstones of America's social infrastructure.

...

One block south of the court house in Ukiah sits the McKinley Building, a two-story brick structure located on the corner plot at 101 W Church Street. The exact year of the building's construction is still up for debate. Some historical maps say it was built in 1885, while others claim it was built in 1893. A further dive into history indicates that the building was officially designated a "female building" in 1898, and for about a century, a large rock with a commemorative plaque sat at the side-entrance to this building. The plaque read, "To the ladies of the night who plied their trade upon this site." At this site, in the years that followed the groundbreaking of the Van Arsdale Dam in 1905, Nessa O'Leary plied her trade, while D.K. Freeman paved entrepreneurial inroads into Mendocino County, distilling and fermenting exclusive batches of moonshine and cider for the saloon. Their presence in Ukiah would remain short-lived however, for in 1907, O'Leary gave birth to Lawrence Tiberius Freeman – the

grandfather of Adam Freeman, and upon Lawrence's birth, Nessa said to D.K., "I've been told by the dam workers of a town on the North Coast. They say the land is as green as the old country in Ireland. Something tells me that I ought to see this land. Do you think we can visit?"

On July 8, 1907, D.K. and his family boarded the SS George Elder of the North Pacific Steamship Company at Pier 17 in San Francisco. Eighteen hours later, on the early morning of July 9, 1907, the SS George Elder docked at the F St. pier in Eureka, California. Upon docking, the Freeman family checked into the Vance Hotel, right across the street from the Oberon Saloon.

Change is difficult. The land is forever forming, forever becoming. Tectonic plates shift. Sea levels rise. And change is constant. But whether or not people can change, I do have my doubts. I have often contemplated whether people change, or if – day by day – people *become* who they *are* and *were* meant to be. Who they *have always been*. Can one truly escape their nature? Can people *change*? A dam can impair the flow of a river, but the river's course remains *fixed*. One may ask for forgiveness, yet one's infractions do not *unbecome*. Time sees all. Time numbs; it does not heal. And time does not forgive nor forget. The inescapability of time is absolute. And after a hard-day's work in early April of 2012 at the Fulton-Lane property with Brian Cramer, time's inescapability hit home as we sat for dinner at the Oberon Grill on 2nd St. in Eureka, right across the from the old Vance Hotel.

Brian said, "You know, back in its heyday, this place was a brothel. And an awesome saloon from what all the stories say. I heard it's haunted too."

I was staring out the restaurant's arched window, out at the old Vance Hotel and the cobblestone sidewalk, mesmerized by the Victorian architecture of Old Town Eureka. The doors of the restaurant were wide open that warm evening in April, and the sounds of clinking glasses and laughter filled the packed dining room. Outside, the squawk of seagulls hung in the distance, and live music from the Siren Song Tavern echoed from down the street. Meanwhile the aromas of porterhouse steaks and grilled salmon wafted with the maritime scents of the nearby ocean docks, and a late sunset painted the blue sky with shades of orange, red and pink, as patrons sipped their cocktails and celebrated the end of winter and the arrival of spring. I can recall the wonderment of that moment, how even after a century, the hustle and bustle of 2nd St. was as active as it was in 1912. "This was a brothel, huh? Must've been pretty wild. One of the

regulars at The Logger mentioned something about it, said folks fresh off the boat from Frisco would check into the Vance and then come here to get drunk, play cards and get laid.” I soaked in the atmosphere, imagined I was a stranger visiting the North Coast for the first time, coming off one of the ships in the harbor, standing in awe at the redwood-covered mountains. I took a swig of my gin and tonic and studied the ornate woodwork of the bar. “Is that the original bar?”

“Nah, a replica. Wallace and Heinz made it.”

“No shit. That shop in Blue Lake, right? Across the street from the brewery?”

“Yup. Not sure whatever happened to the original bar. This place was pretty messed up before its restoration. It belonged to the Freeman family back in the day.”

“Freeman family?”

“Yeah, you know that cocksucking DA? His great grandfather owned this place for a few years.”

“Are you serious?”

“Dead serious. What a shit-trash family, those Freemans.”

...

Much of the Oberon Grill’s history is shrouded in mystery, save for a couple of stories, one in particular:

In the spring of 1910, the eugenicist and author, Jack London, boarded the FA Kilburn at Pier 17 in San Francisco and set out on a journey to Eureka, California. After the FA Kilburn docked, London checked into the Vance Hotel, and upon check-in, he ambled across the street to the Oberon Saloon and ordered a bourbon with bitters. After London finished his third or fourth bourbon, a man named Stanwood Murphy – whose family owned the Pacific Lumber Company – walked into the saloon, recognized London, and struck a conversation. Local historians have

debated what the two men talked of. Some say politics. Others say economics. Whatever the nature of their conversation, it probably wasn't friendly, because Murphy struck London in the face with a right hook, and a violent brawl ensued in the saloon, eventually spilling out onto the street. News of the fight, however, never reached the papers, as both men sought to maintain their reputations. But the legend of the fight maintained its legacy through the stories that witnesses told and retold. And two of those witnesses there on that spring evening in 1910 were prospective buyers of the Oberon Saloon and Brothel, D.K. Freeman and Nessa O'Leary.

...

Three years before the brawl, on the warm summer morning of July 10, 1907, Nessa O'Leary, D.K. Freeman and baby Lawrence sat for breakfast at the busy Oberon Saloon. As they finished breakfast, Nessa said, "I don't want the boy to grow up in this life, Don. He ought to be able to go to school, not work some mill or saloon. I overheard some passengers on the ship talking of a school being built out near Arcata. Perhaps we purchase a plot there. They say most of the Indians will be cleared from the land by year's end."

The thought of settling never occurred to D.K. Staying in one place for more than a few years was not something he had ever contemplated. He knew of no other way to live. His was a life of migration, violence, money, sex and alcohol. But things changed when Lawrence was born. The path of fatherhood was not something that he anticipated, especially at the age of forty-eight. He was scared. He did not want his son to share his fate. He wanted to change. So he asked, "And what do you suppose we do for work?"

"Maybe we can start our own business."

...

I chugged the last of my gin and tonic and flagged down the waiter for another one. “I still can’t believe the family’s gonna sell the land.”

Brian groaned. “Oh, Jesus, kid, can’t you just chill out? Winter is over – it’s finally spring; people are enjoying themselves; we got free steaks; and you’re still mopey. Knock it off already. Listen, we got about 400 starts to plant tomorrow, and another 700 or whatever the next day. And don’t forget about the Jacoby Creek house, the one in McKinleyville too. We got plenty of work to keep us busy. Land ain’t goin’ nowhere anytime soon. Besides, California still isn’t ready to legalize. Washington state’s the guinea pig. We got a few years. Don’t dread.”

“But a nickel mine, Brian? That’s just so, uh, *disrespectful*. Why can’t they just sell the land to another grower? Nickel mining is so corrosive; I’ve read Joyce’s textbooks. With a sale to another grower, at least they’ll have more respect for the land.”

Brian laughed, mocked my observation. “Respect for the land? You can’t be serious. That’s liberal, utopian-delusion bullshit right there. You’ve been spending too much time with Joyce’s hippie friends, Hank. Ain’t nothing respectable about what we do. Look at all the water we steal. And all those pesticides we use. You stupid hippie-commie: this is *business*. You wanna let some other fuckers sell the land for its nickel? C’mon, kid, be smart. Those deposits are far more profitable than any grow-op. This is our chance, Hank. To get out clean. To retire.”

Retire. I let the word float around in my brain, contemplated what it meant. Thought about what it symbolized and what it represented. Wondered if it was even real or not. “Alright, fine. You don’t gotta be a dick about it, Brian. I’m just sayin’...”

“What are you saying?”

“I’m just saying... it can’t end like this.”

“Hank, in this business, it’s not often you get to write your own ending. *Any* out is a *good* out.”

“You’re speaking in metaphors, old man. Shove it up your ass,” I said and laughed.

The waiter came back with a gin and tonic and handed Brian the check. “Aha, fuck you too, Hank.” He scanned the bill and shoved cash into the check presenter. “I got this, you broke ass. And hey, don’t fret, kid. Everything’s gonna be okay. And just so you know: breakfast is on you tomorrow.”

“Sure thing. Where do you wanna meet?”

“Let’s meet at the Café Waterfront. It’s just down the street. Say 8:00 a.m.?”

“Sounds good.”

The antiquity of the Weaver Building, on the corner of 1st and F St. in Eureka, has been crystalized for more than a century. Aside from infrastructural modifications, like electricity and plumbing, much of the building has remained unaltered since its construction in 1892. A hallmark of Queen Anne architecture, the building displays meticulous woodwork on its door columns and window frames, and handcrafted, Romanesque corbels wrap around the building, adorning the cornice and horizontal course. Elegant etchings bedeck the north-facing windows, and outside the main entrance, on the building's eastern wall, a plaque reads, "This property has been placed on the National Register of Historic Places by the United States Department of the Interior."

The building was originally the site of two businesses. On the first floor was the Wave Saloon, a boisterous watering hole for fishermen, mariners, loggers, and other drunks. And upstairs was the site of The Bluebird Rooms, a brothel owned by Margie Fulton-Lane and her brother, Cornelius Jr. When I visited the Weaver Building for first time, on a sunny spring morning in April of 2012, it was the location of Café Waterfront, and while waiting for Brian to show up for breakfast that morning, I took note of the artful etching of a bare-breasted woman in the glass above the front door and thought, *Hmm, maybe this really was a brothel*. Brian was running late. His phone was going straight to voicemail. So I ordered a coffee and sat at the bar. The restaurant was still closed, but the bartender was kind enough to let me wait inside.

"You're a bit early, kid," the bartender said. "Kitchen doesn't open for another twenty minutes, but if you wanna order, I can take it now."

"Ah, no problem. I'm waiting for someone anyway. Coffee's fine for now."

“Sure thing, boss. Holler if you need anything. I’m just gonna finish setting the rest of the tables.”

Before he walked away, I asked, “Actually, before you go, I did have a question: was this place really a brothel?”

The bartender smiled. “Yes it was. A lifetime ago.”

“How long was the brothel here?”

“Until the mid-1920s, or so. It was owned by the Fulton’s.”

The revelation was a pleasant surprise. “Shut up. Are you serious?”

“Serious. They ran the place for a few years before they sold the building in 1913.”

“Holy shit. Why’d they sell?”

The bartender leaned close, and in a whisper, he said, “A few rumors claim that one of the Fulton’s shot and killed D.K. Freeman.”

“Whoa. Why does that name sound familiar?”

“Great grandfather of the DA.”

“Oh, Jesus. Did the cops ever catch the shooter?”

“Nope. Killer got away.”

“Oh damn. There any truth to the rumors?”

“Which ones?”

“About who killed D.K.”

“There’s a few theories. Some say it was Josiah Fulton – his dad ran the saloon. Or it could’ve been Margie Fulton-Lane – she was the madam upstairs. I heard it was revenge for D.K. doing something shady. But the case was never solved. That’s probably why his son got into the law business.”

“The *son* – so is that...”

“...Lawrence Freeman, the DA’s grandfather, yup. A family full of cops and lawyers. And one meth dealer. Both families have hated each other ever since.”

I shook my head in disbelief trying to comprehend the absurdity of this local history. Two families causing such a fuss. “Fuckin’ a. That’s crazy.”

“You said it, boss. Crazy family drama. The police found D.K.’s body out there floating in the harbor.” He pointed out the window, towards the marina. “Yeah, just right out there. That’s where they found him.” The bartender shook his head, clicked his teeth. “That poor bastard. You know the Oberon Grill down the street?”

“Sure. Had dinner there last night.”

“That was owned by the Freeman’s. And these two spots had a rivalry back in the day. Freeman’s wife worked here for a bit. She poached some clientele from here when she and D.K. bought the Oberon. Fulton’s weren’t too happy about that. Probably why D.K. got popped in the first place. But who knows?”

I the heard front door open behind me, and a cold draft of salty air wafted into the restaurant. “You’re late, Brian,” I said, not turning around.

The smile on the bartender’s face disappeared. I could sense his anxiety. His nerves, on edge. He walked behind the bar, queued his customer service voice and said to the entrant behind me, “Good morning, sir. Nice to see you this morning. Great day we’re having. Can I get you some coffee?”

It was strange to watch the bartender quiver. I felt a knot tighten in my gut. Something was off. A tall, pepper-haired man in a black suit took the seat next to me. When I realized it

wasn't Brian, I kept my eyes on my coffee and tried to ignore the suit. I thought, *Of all the seats at this empty bar, bud, you sit right next to me. Whatever happened to the one-gap rule?*

The man said, "Yes, please. Thank you. Kitchen open yet?"

"Not yet, but I'm sure I can fire up the stove and get something going for you if you're in a hurry."

"Oh, no, that's fine. I can wait. But I will have some of that coffee."

The bartender set a mug in front of the man and filled it. He said, "Now if you'll excuse me gentlemen – I'm going to finish setting the tables," and walked off in a hurry.

I sat there in silence, staring at my coffee, not making eye contact. I checked my phone to see if Brian had called or texted, but there were no messages. After sitting silent for a few minutes, the man broke the ice and said, "Hello, Hank."

My heart dropped, the knot in my gut tightening. I looked up from my coffee and at the man. "Hello. Do we know each other?" I took mental notes of the man's appearance: black suit, black shirt, black shoes, designer watch, a funky Masonic ring on his right pinky, a goatee, the smell of a strong after-shave, dark bags under his eyes, and inside his suit jacket, the sight of a brown leather strap from a shoulder holster. I couldn't make out the model of the firearm.

"Of course."

"Oh?"

"And I know your scumbag friends, Richard and Brian. And your junkie girlfriend, Joyce."

He hit a nerve. I wanted to kick his ass. But without a gun, I checked myself, kept my temper holstered. I let the rhetoric do the talking. "Uh, well, I don't know you, man, and I ain't tryna start shit with any locals, but I'm gonna ask you to watch your tone." I sipped my coffee.

It was cold. And I was pissed. “Don’t talk about my old lady like that. I don’t know you, dude.”

“Hank, how are things going down on the Dinsmore property?”

I wasn’t sure if he was talking about the pending sale or the grow. “Where’s Dinsmore?”

“There’s a rumor going around about a big crop down there. A bigger crop than normal. The kind of ‘big’ that gets noticed by people. People like me.”

“Yeah, well, people need to mind their own fucking business.” I drank the last of my coffee. “Who the hell are you, anyway?”

“My name’s Adam – Adam Freeman.”

“*Freeman*. Aren’t you the DA?”

“Yes I am.”

“Oh. Shit. Hi.”

“And one thing I don’t like: when SoCal fuckers like you come to my town, with your rap music and Millennial bullshit, thinking you can ‘*make a killing*’ growing a bunch of pot.”

I scoffed. “From what I’ve seen, most growers who claim local-ness weren’t actually born in Humboldt. A lot of ‘em are from Sacramento. And Ventura. San Diego. Palm Springs. Salt Lake City and St. Louis. What the hell does ‘local’ even mean, anyway? Gimme a break – this ain’t *your* town. It ain’t the growers’ town either. This land is stolen, bud. This is America. We’re all just a-buncha’ poor orphans in the land of fanciful ideas. Didn’t Lenin say something like that?”

“Don’t gimme that hippie shit. My great grandfather settled this land, fought the Indians fair and square, and won. That makes this *my* land.”

“Good Lord, you’ve gone fucking sideways. You really *do* think like that, don’t you?”

“I have papers. Treaties. Contracts. Land leases. All those documents *prove* I own the land. So I don’t give a fuck what you think.” He cleared his throat, calmed himself. He put on his politician mask and said, “I’ll tell you what, son, I know what you and Richard and Brian and the rest of the Fulton’s are up to. And I know you about the land sale and the big crop going to the Russians in October.”

Russians? This was news to me. In that moment, I started to wonder just what I had gotten into. And who Joyce was; who the Fulton’s, Fulton-Lane’s, and Freeman’s really were. Outside the window, across the street, I saw Brian’s flatbed pull up and park, and he and Richard got out.

Freeman continued: “If you wanna keep news of that crop from the papers, you can cut me in for thirty percent. I don’t need much. Just enough to keep quiet.” He pulled cash from his wallet, paid for his coffee, and got up to leave. “I know you’ll do the right thing, Hank.”

The front door swung open and in walked Richard and Brian.

“Freeman,” Richard said, “th’fuck are you doing here?”

“Hey, Dick. Hello, Brian. I was just introducing myself to your new employee.”

Brian said, “Fuck off, Adam. Aren’t you supposed to be working? What the hell are paying you for? You’re a goddamn waste of tax dollars.”

...

After Adam left, Richard, Brian, and I got a table by the window and ordered Bloody Mary’s and chicken fried steaks. Richard asked, “You okay, Hank? You look sick. What were you and fuck-face talking about?”

I did feel sick. Freeman got a good read on me. He hit all the right nerves, knew what to say to get a rise out of me. I thought about my family, what they’d think about what I was doing,

and what Grandma V would say if she had to read about my arrest in the papers. “He was asking about the property.”

“What about the property?” Brian asked.

“He said he knew about the sale.”

“He say anything else?”

“Yeah. He said he wants thirty percent to stay quiet.”

Richard laughed. “Thirty percent, ha, what a fucking asshole. Next time, Hank, you tell him to fuck off.”

“I think I need a gun,” I said. “He was carrying.”

Richard and Brian looked at each other and grinned. “You mean like this one?” Richard asked, lifting his shirt at the waist, revealing a Glock in an appendix carry holster.

“Or this one?” Brian said, lifting his right pant leg, boasting a .357 in an ankle holster.

“Jesus. Am I the only one not carrying?” I reached the bottom of my Bloody Mary and got to work on my breakfast, shoving a good forkful of biscuit, country gravy and steak into my mouth.

“Oh, dude, we all do,” said Richard. “This ain’t no fuckaround, Hank. There’s fucking bears here, man. Bears! And mountain lions. Have you ever heard the cry of a mountain lion? It’s fuckin’ scary man! Plus, tweakers and thieves. The job. Can’t be too careful, dude. Tell you what, I’ll talk to Jeff and tell him to meet us out at the property today. We’ll get you strapped.”

“We should pick up some targets at the Big 5 before we head out,” Brian added. “We’ll get you some practice, Hank. Jeff’s a firearm instructor down at the academy. One of the best. He’ll get you set up. These days, it ain’t a bad idea to work on your shooting.”

“I dunno, guys,” I said. “I’m not much of a gun person.”

The both chuckled. “C’mon, Hank. This is America. Get with the program.”

I didn’t know what to think. I was still on tilt from the Freeman interaction. My hands were shaking. “Dude, that Freeman guy gives me the creeps. What if we get pinched?”

“Oh, fuck that guy,” Richard said. “He’s been saying the same shit for years. He’s a *politician*, Hank. It’s all for show. Small-dicks like him, it’s all about power – his ego.” He leaned close and whispered, “Why do you think we still haven’t been caught? He needs us. We justify his wages. It’s symbiotic. You gotta relax more, Hank. Live a little.”

“Dick’s right,” said Brian. “I’ve been here a long time, Hank, and that Freeman fuck hasn’t done a thing except turnout more meth dealers back to the population. And the heroin problem, my fuck. All those needles. Look at the state of this place. Goddamn, just mentioning all this makes me want to register to vote and get his ass out this November.”

Richard’s phone rang. “Hmm, I gotta take this.” He got up from his seat and walked away towards the door. As he was walking out, he said, “Hey, Sinead, you and ma get the brownies I sent you?” and went outside, his voice trailing off.

Outside I watched Richard lean against Brian’s truck while he talked on the phone. On the flatbed was a pallet of soil and four small trees. I pointed to the cargo on the flatbed and asked Brian, “What’s with the trees?”

“We got another request straight from the boss lady, gotta plant those trees in the holes you dug yesterday. Said she wants to plant them for a spiritual tribute to the land.”

“That’s weird. But, okay. Cool. What kinda trees are those?”

“*Betula nigra*. River birch. We picked ‘em up at the nursery at Miller Farms today. That’s why we were late, sorry bud.”

“Oh.”

“The family’s already on their way to the property. We all gotta get to work today. Also, Joyce told me to tell you she’s going down to Chico today, but she’ll be back in a week. She also said take care of the animals and the gutters, and get all the firewood out the driveway.”

“Really? The fuck...why didn’t she me?”

“Jesus, Hank. You ever been told you ask too many fuckin’ questions? I’m not the fucking Messiah, kid. I don’t have all the answers.”

“Alright, alright, chill out, old man.”

Richard knocked on the window and screamed from behind the glass, “Hey, fuckers, let’s go! We’re on the clock, ya bums. We gotta go, c’mon, c’mon! You’re a ‘waste of tax dollars,’ Brian, aha!”

Brian flipped Dick off and handed me the check. “Take care of this, Hank. I’ll meet you outside.”

There are those moments in life where you meet a kindred spirit, someone whose intuitive wavelengths run parallel to yours. In these moments, connections crystalize, and when these collaborations occur, incredible manifestations often appear. Enthusiasm runs high as your hopes are similar to their hopes. Your goals mirror their goals. Even their cynicism matches your cynicism. And perhaps you both enjoy pineapple on pizza, but you'd never admit it to anyone but each other. Such was the case when Layla Fulton-Lane and I met.

...

Layla Fulton-Lane was born April 4, 1976, at St. Joseph's Hospital in Eureka. She never met her father, at least as far as she knew. Some rumors have alleged that Brian Cramer is her dad. Hearsay from regulars at The Logger claim she's the daughter of Adam Freeman. Not much is certain, but when her mother, Heather Fulton-Lane, held Layla for the first time, she took note of her daughter's piercing-green eyes, showered her with kisses and said, "Hi, baby Layla. It's me, your momma. Hello, you. I'm here. And I love you." Baby Layla cooed and took comfort in her mother's warm embrace. In the early hours of the next morning, Heather's blood pressure dropped, and she lost consciousness. Doctors rushed her to the operating room, conducting emergency surgery to treat severe hemorrhaging from a placenta accreta. The surgery was a success, but not without its complications, and Heather would remain hospitalized for an excruciating six-week recovery. And for the first six weeks of Layla's life, she was cared for by her grandmother, Ann Marie. Layla told me once, "The smell of burning cigarettes reminds me of my grandma."

...

The smell of fresh-cut grass hung in the air the morning I first met Layla – the same morning in 2011 after Richard, Brian, Jeff, Joyce and I cleared the house on 690 J St. It was sometime after 10:00 a.m. when Jeff checked his watch and said, “Well people, I’d say now’s a time if any to clock out. Anyone up for breakfast?”

“You know, now that you mention it, I am pretty hungry,” Richard said, “even after all the fuckin’ blow. I could sure go for a chicken-fried steak and a Bloody Mary. Or maybe a mimosa.”

“Yeah, I’m hungry too,” Joyce said. “Haven’t eaten since yesterday morning. Hank and I should probably eat something. Then pass the fuck out. Yeah, babe?” She pinched my arm. “You hungry?”

I pinched her ass. “After a glass of water, sure. Let’s definitely smoke a bowl and get breakfast.”

“Atta’ baby,” Richard said. “We going to Arcata or Eureka for breakfast?”

“I already texted Layla,” Jeff said. “We’re going to the Tip Top.”

Joyce groaned. “Ugh, really? Can’t we go somewhere else? I hate the Tip Top. It’s so dirty there.”

“Tip Top?” I asked. “Which restaurant is that?”

Jeff and Richard smiled. “Okay, we’re going to the Tip Top,” Jeff said. “You gotta see it, Hank. We just got the new flatscreens installed.”

...

According to radio advertisements broadcasted across Humboldt County, “*There is always a party at the Tip Top*,” and while I lived in Humboldt, those advertisements rang true. But it wasn’t always that way. When Heather, Layla, and Richard purchased the venue, the plumbing

was shot; the electrical work was shit; the purple velvet chairs reeked of vomit and tobacco; the dancers were hooked on heroin, and the crusty red and green carpet was disgusting. That all changed in 1997 when the Fulton Construction Company assumed ownership and commenced a full-scale renovation, which included: a brand-new, handcrafted redwood bar, stain-resistant carpet, three disco balls, a state-of-the-art lighting system, two pinball machines, a new stage, a glassed-tabletop Ms. Pac-Man machine, and a small back patio for smokers after Heather banned smoking inside the club. After Heather and Layla purchased the first two High-Definition television sets in the county in 1998 and put them in the venue, clientele nearly tripled, and with this parabolic rise in traffic and commerce, Richard and Jeff installed a flat top stove, a top-of-the-line range hood, an oven, a broiler and two deep fryers.

...

The curtains were pulled back, and the sun was shining through the bay windows of the Tip Top Club when we pulled into the parking lot that morning.

Jeff said, “Hang outside for a bit, guys. I gotta talk to the wife first. Something tells me I might be in trouble.”

“Why would you be in trouble? The hell did you do this time?” Joyce asked.

He sighed. “It’s complicated. She thinks I’m having an affair. Not coming home last night, that ain’t gonna fly well with her.”

“Whoa, *Jefe*,” said Richard, “watchu doin’ fuckin’ around on the boss lady?” He laughed. “Of all the people to have an affair with, why would they pick *you*? Look at you – your ugly bald fucking head and fat-ass belly.” He slapped and kneaded Jeff’s stomach and sang, “Pat-a-cake, pat-a-cake, baker’s man!”

I felt a wave of déjà vu. The way these two acted, it was like watching my tío and dad on holidays, dad waving his job around, trying to be serious, and tío Rodrigo just fucking with him, picking on his little brother. It was hilarious. Jeff laughed and shoved Richard off. “Fuck off, Dick. Don’t even tempt me, man. I’ll fuck your mom. I will.”

“She’s in a wheelchair, you sicko.”

“Well that’ll make things easier. No struggle.”

Joyce yelled, “Oh. My. God. Will you two shut up?” She grabbed her cigarettes from her purse and lit one. “Jeff, I’m fucking hungry. Go inside and make nice, and then let’s fucking eat.”

“Yeah, *Jefe*,” said Richard, “hurry up, man. And pour me a mimosa while you’re at it.”

“Pour your own damn mimosa,” Jeff said and walked to the club.

Richard clicked his teeth. “Dead man walking. Hey, Joyce, you got another one of those?” he asked, pointing at her cigarette. After she handed him one, he lit up, took a big drag, exhaled and said, “So, Joyce, Hank, how’s the sex with you two?”

“Oh my fuck, I’m going inside. Here, Hank, finish this.” She handed me her cigarette and followed Jeff.

Richard and I smoked and stared out at the horizon. I let the sunshine hit my face, a combination of nicotine, coke, and THC running through my veins. It was a beautiful, sunny summer morning on the North Coast. No wind. Not a cloud in the sky. Here I was, at the source. The freakin’ pot Mecca. The mythical Emerald Triangle. At a strip club. Across the four lanes of US-101 and a marshy wetland, I could see the small fishing community of King Salmon, and beyond it, the north and south jetties and the mouth of Humboldt Bay.

Richard pointed north to a few smoke stacks and cylindrical structures and asked, “You see those vent thingys? And those white circular things that look like water tanks?”

I squinted and gazed at the direction he was pointing in. “Yeah. I see ‘em. What are those?”

“That’s a nuclear power plant.”

“No shit?”

“No shit. Where we are here, at Humboldt Hill, this place has got the nation’s highest child-leukemia rate per capita, so I’ve been told. And I bet it’s probably got something to do with that power plant right there.”

“Jesus. Has anyone looked into it? And why the hell would you build a nuclear plant in a marsh? That just seems fucking dumb.”

“It is dumb, isn’t it? Courtesy of the White Man himself. PG&E shut it down back in the 80s, and they’ve been deconstructing it ever since. The company has literally dug a giant hole in the Mojave Desert, and their plan is to bury all this stuff. No real solution to recycle anything. Everything’s irradiated. And you know what’s fucked up? There’s no solution to dispose of the nuclear rods. Some of the rods are even missing.”

“Wait, what do you mean *missing*?”

“Four rods are unaccounted for. No one has a clue where they are. Ain’t that a trip? Like how the fuck do you *lose* one, let alone four? It’s not like these fucking things can walk themselves out the door. And the rods that are still there – they’re buried under tons of concrete and cooled by these crazy industrial freezers. If any one of those freezers craps out, the heat of the uranium rods will get so damn hot, the rods will start sinking. Theoretically, they could sink all the way to the core.”

“Oh my God. What the fuck?”

“This is what happens when you plan important jobs and major civil engineering projects while fucked up on booze, mushrooms, acid and dope, goddamn hippies. Gotta stay sharp, Hank.” He finished his cigarette and flicked the butt away. “Now, let’s get fucked up and day-drunk on mimosas and watch some baseball.”

...

I really didn’t know what to expect when I walked into the Tip Top that morning. I had never been to a strip club before. The thought of breakfast, or any food at all, from a strip club did not sound appetizing. But the food was fantastic. And the club was beautiful. At night, it’s true, the Tip Top can be dark, dirty, disgusting and dingy. But in the day time, with the curtains drawn back, and with the natural light coming through the large bay windows, with the ocean view and the flatscreens and all the sports games from the DirecTV sports package, the Tip Top was heaven.

One of the flatscreens was broadcasting the San Francisco Giants game. It was the first inning, and Tim Lincecum was pitching against the Padres, when a tall blonde woman came up to me and said, “It’s nice to finally meet you, Hank. Joyce says good things. I’m Layla, Joyce’s sister.”

“Hey, it’s nice to meet you too.”

“The boys ordered a couple pitchers of mimosas. Can you help me carry the drinks to the table? And what do you want for breakfast? I’ll let the chef know. Follow me.”

“Sure. I’ll have a chicken-fried steak.” I followed Layla. From behind the bar she procured four bottles of champagne from a fridge. “Whoa, four bottles?”

“The pitchers are big. Two bottles apiece.”

“Oh, wow. I might have to take a champagne nap today.”

“That’s why I don’t drink. Melts your brain. Get no work done. But you’re young – you got time. Just don’t end up like Dick. Or fuckin’ Jeff.” She popped the cork off a bottle and leaned over the bar and whispered, “Be honest with me, Hank: where were you last night?”

For a family of drunks, it was surprising to hear she didn’t drink. And I didn’t expect her question. For some reason, I felt caught. But I hadn’t really done anything. Not anything too bad, in my mind at least. And I wasn’t sure what to say. Was she asking about Jeff? The grow house in Blue Lake? What did she want to know? “Uh, I was with, um, Joyce. Yeah. We went to see Kingfoot at The Logger.”

“You, uh, were, uh, with, um, Joyce?” She gave me the famous Fulton-Lane scowl. “C’mon, kid. Ain’t got time for that bullshit. Don’t lie now.”

Fuck you, I thought. “I was with Joyce all night. And Richard and Brian.”

“And Jeff?”

“And Jeff, yes.”

“All night?”

“Yes. All night. We, uh, had to...help someone move.”

She sighed. “For your sake, and for ours, I hope you never get arrested and interrogated.” She threw a bottle into a recycling bin and popped the cork off another bottle. “Hank, c’mon, dude, I know about the house, the grow. Jeff told me everything.”

“Oh.”

“And thank you, by the way. I appreciate the help.” She topped both pitchers with a touch of orange juice. “I like you, Hank. You’re not like Joyce’s others. Dick says you’re looking for work?”

“Sort of. I’m really not sure how long I’ll be in town.” I glanced up at the television; Pablo Sandoval hit into a 6-4-3 double play to end the inning. “Wait, what do you mean ‘Joyce’s others’?”

“Oh, don’t worry about it, Hank. Joyce tells me she plans to stay til the end of August, maybe even take a semester off to help with the harvest. Think you’ll be around til then?”

“End of August, huh? She hadn’t mentioned that. But, yeah, sure, I think I’ll be around til then.”

“Great. We’ll get you an interview at the brewery on Monday. They need a set of hands on the production side. And you’ll get free beer, so, hey, there you go. You can fund your habit. I can finish your paperwork this weekend, get you on payroll. And I’ll need your social and bank info for direct deposit. But first, let’s eat.” She picked up a pitcher and some pint glasses. “Grab another couple glasses and the other pitcher, will ya?”

...

After a feast of chicken-fried steaks, over-easy eggs and French toast, the Padres spoiled Tim Lincecum’s shutout in the fourth inning of the game, and Layla served us apple pie. Richard and Jeff migrated to the bar with their pie and watched the game, while I hung back at the table with Joyce and Layla. Layla was talking shop with Joyce about the family’s business affairs in Oakland, and when I asked about work at the brewery, I soon found out how extensive the Fulton-Lane family’s corporate structure was.

Layla said, “The brewery is a money-loser, and The Logger is a money-loser too. The businesses operate on very thin margins. Profits are scarce. In the twenty-two years of the brewery’s existence, it’s only recorded one profitable year. That was 2009, two years ago. And The Logger has never been profitable. Our laundromats operate in much the same fashion. The

maintenance costs on those machines are outrageous. On paper, the only profitable arms are the tow yard and the Tip Top.”

I asked, “Maybe I’m missing something, but if these companies don’t make money, then why not sell them?”

“We need taxable income. And the write-offs are great. Which is good, because we ain’t exactly involved in honest business. When the tax man comes with his audit, and he will come, we’ll need a paper trail. A clean one. And that’s where the Chimera Holding Company comes into play.”

Layla’s business savvy was impressive. She was clearly in charge here. “Chimera Holding Company? Sounds sinister.”

She devoured a forkful of pie and laughed. “Why thank you.”

“So are you, like, the CEO of Chimera?”

“On paper, yes. But mom and I make decisions together with Joyce. And we make sure all the dancers here at the club get their vote.” She plated another piece of pie, stared out at the ocean from the bay window. She said to Joyce, “We’ve come a long way, haven’t we?”

Joyce forced a smile. The air pressure in the club must have changed, something was afoot, and I could feel her sadness, could feel my heart drop too. I squeezed her hand, smiled back at her. “Yeah, we have,” she said.

Layla sighed. “Things have been complicated, Hank. Isn’t that what life is anyway? A series of complex, non-binary, nuanced complications? Sorry, I’ve dated a lot of whisky-limp philosophers in my time. Anyway, when I went to HSU, I stripped here a few years with four other girls from school. It was an easy way to pay for tuition. And I still remember all those girls. I can still remember young Gwen; she was a Wildlife major. My roommate, Maggie, was

an English major, and she and I worked here Friday and Saturday nights. And Bella and Angie were in the Nursing Program. My freshman year in '94, the heroin started showing up and it hit this club and all of Humboldt like a hurricane. Gwen OD'ed in late '95. Then Bella got a DUI, and she dropped out of the nursing program; I never did find out what happened to her. Poor Angie, she gave birth to her daughter while in rehab. The judge wouldn't let her near the baby 'til she got clean. But eventually she did get clean, thank goodness. She and her daughter live in Coos Bay now. And Maggie went to a rehab facility in Utah. After I got my second DUI in '96, the judge ordered mandatory inpatient treatment, so I joined her. I turned twenty in that facility. I might not have made it out if it weren't for Maggie. After she got out, she went back home to New York. And I finished my degree when I got out, been sober ever since. After I passed the CPA Exam, I took control of the business with mom, hired Richard and Jeff."

I was stunned. "That's...one hell of a life. I'm sorry. I didn't know any of that."

Joyce said, "You gotta understand, Hank, the county is poor. That fucking meth is taking over now, but the heroin is coming back too. And the kids here, a lot of 'em have given up hope. Their parents are hooked on this shit. Jeff told about a case, this young couple who OD'ed in their car, while their toddler napped in the back. No wonder suicide rates are crazy here; jobs are scarce. Drugs have taken over. This pot nonsense, it ain't a way to make a living. And all the women in poverty in this county, all the single moms, nobody has their back. WIC is so underfunded, it's bullshit. That's why we all do what we have to do. Fuck the government. We take care of each other. And here at the club, we've cut in all the dancers, given them shares of ownership in the club and the rest of the company. We have retirement and pension plans, healthcare. And we do that for all our employees, Brian, Jeff and Richard too."

“Through our subsidiary, the Fulton Construction Company, we own this place, and we own the Dinsmore property,” Layla said, “and under the umbrella of Redwood Entertainment – another one of our subsidiaries – we own The Logger and The Mad River Brewery in Blue Lake. The Fulton Construction Company also owns Brian’s tow yard, Patriot Towing, in Arcata. And to top it off, we also own the Chimera Real Estate Company and the Chimera Investing Group LLC, both of which are out-of-state, up north in Washington. It’s been quite an undertaking, this business. It’s as American as it can get. We built it all from the ground up.”

“Wow,” I said. “You know, back in SoCal, all we hear is that Humboldt is paradise, like heaven. This place without troubles. Guess I was more naïve than I thought.” I plated another piece of pie. “But it is impressive, what you’ve built. Ya’ll run a lot of shit.”

“Thanks,” Layla said. “It’s a lot of work. And with the grows in Jacoby Creek, McKinleyville, and the Dinsmore property, plus all of Joyce’s stuff from Oakland, it can be stressful. Operating costs can creep up if you don’t stay on top of things. That’s why I want you to start at the brewery on Monday. What a money-pit, that Mad River Brewery. I need you to figure out how much shit is broken. The whole facility is due for a renovation, some new equipment.”

My head was spinning. I wasn’t sure if I wanted to run away or dive deeper. This was more than just some marijuana business. The pot, the coke, the club, the brewery, the bar, and the international commerce implications of these businesses: all of these operations, through their intermediaries, contributed to the national GDP, like a natural confluence of black and white markets, legal and illegal business. This was America, unmasked and uncensored. I wanted to run away. But in my own sick and amoral way of thinking, it felt good to contribute, to be a part of something. I felt proud.

And then I finished my dessert.

I said, "This pie is great by the way."

"Thank you. I baked it myself," said Layla. "Those apples came from the house in Blue Lake. The apples came super early this year. Aren't they sweet?"

"Which house in Blue Lake? The grow house?"

Joyce said, "Oh, no, we haven't been there yet." She finished her piece of pie too.

"Did you two go straight to The Logger when you got here from Chico?" Layla asked.

"You know it," Joyce said and chugged the rest of her mimosa. "But we're gonna go to the house after this. Hank and I need a nap." She winked, grabbed a cigarette and lighter from her purse, and went out to the smoking patio.

Layla said, "It's beautiful there, Hank. There's five apple trees on the property. My grandma and I planted one of them. It was a tradition of hers to plant a new apple tree every year. The tradition was passed down to her from her grandmother. Mom and I still go out to the Dinsmore property every year to plant and graft a tree."

"Sounds like a fun tradition. I can dig it."

"It's silly, but these freakin' apples, they mean a lot."

The Fulton-Lane house sits at the end of Hartman Avenue and is less than 1000 square feet. The detached garage and shed are much bigger. There was an asbestos siding upgrade in 1921 and then again in 1936, and after the end of the war in 1945, there was a house-wide, single-pane window installation. For heat, there is a wood stove in the living room, which is wonderful, because during winter, the indoor temperature can dip to as low as thirty-nine degrees Fahrenheit. And the two bedrooms, quite small, not much room at all.

The house was built in 1868 near the settlement of Korbelt, at a logging site. In 1880, the home was physically relocated to the Fulton-Lane homestead on a 44-acre plot in Blue Lake, four miles west of the remote Korbelt logging site, and in 1881, Ingrid Fulton-Lane and her daughter, Margie, planted the first apple tree on the property, grafting Roxbury Russet scions to a *Betula nigra* tree on the plot. The following year, after a visit to King County, Ingrid and Margie returned with Rhode Island Greening and Tompkins King scions and grafted three more river birch trees around the home. One hundred years later in 1982, Layla Fulton-Lane and her grandmother, Ann Marie, grafted the last river birch on the property, splicing Gravenstein scions to the tree. "These are great for cider," Ann Marie told Layla.

I have always wondered how the family ever managed to move the home from Korbelt to Blue Lake. How many people and horses did it take to get the job done? Did they cut the home into two or three sections and put them on a wagons? Was anyone hurt in the process? Was the house never built in Korbelt and the whole story made up? I never did find out.

...

After we finished eating breakfast and watching the Giants game at the club, Joyce and I went home to Blue Lake and pulled into the long gravel driveway of the Fulton-Lane house at 530

Hartman Avenue. Though many years have passed, I can still picture that home. I can see every detail. Like an old photograph, I can see it now, just how it existed from 2011 to 2017. In my mind, in my memories, the image has crystalized, and I can see that big yard. I can recall the late summer and early autumn evenings standing on the porch, dogs barking in the distance, leaves of deciduous trees changing colors, a backdrop of mountains brimming with conifers, redwoods, and other evergreens, long shadows, the smell of barbecue, rising smoke from wood stoves, Joyce painting, dinner cooking on the old gas stove, cold beer and the sound of live music from the Mad River Brewery. I wish I was there now.

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In the concrete jungle of Seattle, behind the QFC on Holman Road NW, at the end of 6th Ave NW, you can access the southern trailhead to the Pipers Creek Trail. The trail runs parallel to Pipers Creek, a 1.4-mile, northwesterly flowing urban stream within Carkeek Park, between the Blue Ridge and Broadview neighborhoods. While walking this trail, you'll come across the remnants of an ancient forest of western hemlocks, red cedars, Douglas firs, bigleaf maples, sword ferns and deer ferns, and in the creek, towards the end of October and early November, you can watch hundreds of chum salmon return to the place of their birth to spawn.

About half a mile north of the trailhead, a clearing emerges, and Pipers Orchard appears in the middle of the forest, with thirty-two apple trees sitting atop a western-facing hillside. A considerable amount of the orchard was cultivated by a baker named Andrew Piper and his wife, Minna, after Andrew's bakery was destroyed by the Great Seattle Fire in 1889, but the original apple trees were planted by loggers and homesteaders during the Washington territory's early days of European colonialism. As time moved on, the camp was abandoned. When Ira Utter stumbled onto the empty logging camp and the orchard in 1863, he took note of the apples,

recognizing a few from his days in New England, including the Roxbury Russet and Rhode Island Greening. Sensing an opportune business venture, he negotiated with nearby homesteaders and procured scions of Gravenstein apples and grafted trees for cider production. By 1865, with poor water quality throughout the acreage of modern-day Ballard, local demand for Utter's cider sweltered, and the orchard was producing more apples than he could harvest by himself. The time for finding reliable fieldhands to work the orchard had come, but Utter found it difficult to trust his neighbors. One day, by chance, while fishing at a river bar on the Columbia River in southwestern Washington, Utter met a young westward-moving couple and from Missouri. The couple shared tales of the war with him; and they told him incredible stories of miraculous escapes from thieves and rogue, AWOL military regiments – bands of blood-seeking mercenaries who fought for neither the Union nor the Confederacy. As a westward-moving soul himself, Utter listened intently, empathizing with the travelers. To help the couple and their children, Utter offered the family a chance to make enough money for their journey to California and said to them, “Cornelius, Ingrid, I may have a way to help. What do you two know about cider?”

Part IV

Unidentified Human Remains Found East of Orick near Redwood Creek Trailhead

Press release from the Humboldt County Sheriff's Office:

On January 21, 2018, at about 1 p.m., Humboldt County Sheriff's deputies were dispatched east of Orick for a report of a deceased body located near the Redwood Creek Trailhead.

Humboldt County Sheriff's deputies and a deputy coroner responded to the scene and recovered the remains. The remains have not been identified and appear to have been decomposing for some time. No further information is available at this time.

More information will be released when available.

Anyone with information about this case is encouraged to call the Humboldt County Sheriff's Office at (707) 445-7252 or the Sheriff's Office Crime Tip line at (707) 268-2538.

Remains of 33-Year-Old Humboldt County Woman Found East of Orick

Press release from the Humboldt County Sheriff's Office:

On January 21, 2018, shortly before 11:00 a.m., a Humboldt County citizen located a suspicious object near the Redwood Creek Trailhead, approximately 1.5 miles northeast of Orick. The citizen promptly called law enforcement.

Humboldt County Sheriff's deputies arrived on scene and began an investigation, eventually requesting a forensic unit from the Humboldt County Sheriff's Criminal Investigations Division and a deputy coroner, as well as a response from the U.S. Forest Service and the California Highway Patrol. CID members identified the suspicious object as a severely decomposed human body. The remains were removed from the scene and transported to the Humboldt County Coroner's Office.

On January 23, 2018, the remains were confirmed to be that of an adult female. The female was later identified as 33-year-old **Joyce Fulton** of Blue Lake. **Fulton** was last seen fleeing the scene of a homicide in Blue Lake on October 31, 2017, and was considered the main suspect in the murder of Humboldt County District Attorney, **Adam Freeman**.

Anyone who may have had contact with **Fulton** is encouraged to call the Humboldt County Sheriff's Office at (707) 445-7252 or the Sheriff's Office Crime Tip line at (707) 268-2538. This investigation is ongoing.

DA's Office Concludes Blue Lake Homicide Investigation; Opens Suspicious Death Investigation

Humboldt County Office of the District Attorney press release:

Deputy DA Lindsey O'Leary has completed her review of the investigation regarding the murder of 69-year-old Humboldt County District Attorney, **Adam Freeman**, on October 31, 2017. The Humboldt County District Attorney's Office, Humboldt County Sheriff's Department, and California Highway Patrol conducted the investigation. The Humboldt County Coroner's Office and the California Department of Justice - Bureau of Forensic Services provided additional investigative resources.

The investigation revealed that shortly after 11:30 p.m. on October 31, 2017, deputies from the Humboldt County Sheriff's Department responded to reports of a homicide with shots fired at The Logger Bar on the 500 block of Railroad Avenue in Blue Lake. Shortly thereafter, at 11:32 p.m., off-duty Humboldt County Sheriff's Investigator, Jeff Foreman, and Humboldt County Sheriff's Deputy Rodney La Rosa, requested information from dispatch. Once on scene, Foreman and La Rosa located one male victim with gunshots wounds lying on the sidewalk. At 11:40 p.m., when it was determined that scene was clear of an active shooter, Deputy La Rosa pronounced the wounded man dead on scene and requested a deputy coroner and a forensic unit from the Humboldt County Sheriff's Criminal Investigations Division.

At approximately 11:44 p.m., the Humboldt Area California Highway Patrol (CHP) began pursuing a vehicle traveling northbound on US-101 at speeds in excess of 90 mph. CHP intercepted the vehicle north of exit 728 near Trinidad in response to earlier reports from the Humboldt County Sheriff's dispatch. The vehicle, a blue 1991 Chevrolet Camaro, was spotted fleeing the scene of the homicide at The Logger Bar at approximately 11:30 p.m. According to CHP Officer Christopher Vasquez, at approximately 11:47 p.m., the vehicle, a few miles north of Trinidad, turned off their headlights, and the vehicle was able to evade pursuit. At approximately 11:54 p.m., near Patrick's Point State Park, the driver, 33-year-old **Joyce Fulton** of Blue Lake, attempted to turn from the northbound traffic lanes of US-101, across the center

divider, to the southbound lanes of US-101 during which she lost control and the vehicle rolled over and came to rest on its right side, facing a westerly direction. The vehicle was found occupied by one deceased male subject, 42-year-old **Richard Worthy** of Palm Springs. An immediate search of the perimeter determined that **Fulton** was not on scene.

At approximately 11:50 p.m., deputies at The Logger were informed by **Heather Fulton-Lane**, owner of the bar, that the homicide stemmed from a physical altercation between **Freeman**, **Worthy**, and **Layla Fulton-Lane**, who initially declined to provide a statement to law enforcement, was subsequently detained, and later released following investigation. According to **Heather Fulton-Lane**, **Freeman** struck **Worthy** several times after **Worthy** had accused the district attorney of detrimental conduct in a previous case. The altercation shifted from the bar and into the street. **Heather Fulton-Lane**, who was still in the bar at the time of the shooting, claimed to hear seven shots in quick succession, but did not witness who had fired the shots. Multiple witnesses on scene were interviewed, but many refused to cooperate. A witness on scene, 52-year-old Simon Henderson of Arcata, who had previously requested anonymity, told deputies he witnessed **Richard Worthy** and **Joyce Fulton** flee the scene in **Freeman's** stolen vehicle. Henderson declined to make a statement on the identity of the shooter. An autopsy by Dr. Rossenbach of the Humboldt County Coroner's Office on November 11, 2017 revealed wound paths consistent with one shooter firing from a fixed location.

On November 2, 2017, **Fulton** was designated the main suspect in the murder (Cal. Penal Code § 187) of **Freeman**, and a warrant was issued for her arrest. For eleven weeks, she had remained at large, until January 21, 2018, shortly before 11:00 a.m., when a Humboldt County citizen located a suspicious object near the Redwood Creek Trailhead, approximately 1.5 miles northeast of Orick, prompting the citizen to call law enforcement.

Humboldt County Sheriff's deputies arrived on scene and after initial investigation, requested a forensic unit from the Humboldt County Sheriff's Criminal Investigations Division and a deputy from the Humboldt County Coroner's Office, as well as a response from the U.S. Forest Service and the California Highway

Patrol. CID confirmed the suspicious object as that of decomposing human body. The remains were transported to the Humboldt County Coroner's Office where an autopsy by Dr. Rossenbach was conducted. The remains were confirmed to be that of 33-year-old **Joyce Fulton** of Blue Lake. According Dr. Rossenbach, the autopsy revealed patterns consistent with a heroin overdose. However, with evidence collected on scene, the Humboldt County District Attorney's Office, in conjunction with the Humboldt County Sheriff's Office and the California Highway Patrol have determined **Fulton's** death as suspicious and have collectively opened a suspicious death investigation, assigning the case to the Humboldt County Sheriff's Criminal Investigations Division and Lead Detective Jeff Foreman.

The Deputy District Attorney has concluded that **Joyce Fulton** was indeed the shooter who shot and killed **Adam Freeman** and now considers the case closed. However the case of her suspicious death remains open. Anyone who may have had contact with **Fulton** is encouraged to call the Humboldt County Sheriff's Office at (707) 445-7252 or the Sheriff's Office Crime Tip line at (707) 268-2538.

This case illustrates the difficult reality of the non-cooperation of witnesses with law enforcement. When law enforcement and witnesses fail to work together, investigators cannot efficaciously complete their tasks, giving potential suspects and guilty parties additional resources and time to evade the administration of justice. The investigation of this case revealed that HUMCO Sheriffs and CHP personnel acted in a manner in which their abilities to successfully investigate and process crime scenes were severely hampered, thusly trickling these detriments to subsequent departments, including the Humboldt County Coroner's Office and the Humboldt County District Attorney's Office.

The District Attorney appreciates the efforts of all involved administrative and lawful entities to achieve a resolution to the case of the Blue Lake Homicide as well as all forthcoming witnesses. However, this office simultaneously emphasizes the call for communal cooperation for the case of **Fulton's** suspicious death, and is asking any citizens within the

community who may have information to come forward and aid in the swift and successful conclusion of this saga.

My parents used to warn me about my temper. They said it started when I was little, when my brothers would tease me, play keep-away with me, tossing my favorite football around without giving me a chance to play too. Mom said I'd throw tantrums. Dad said I used to pee my pants whenever I got too angry, my little body not quite able to handle all the adrenaline running through my little veins. Over the years, things mellowed. The pot helped. And Joyce. And once the nieces and nephews popped out one after the other, I started to get things under control. But every once in a while, that demon within would get loose. It was the whiskey. The whiskey and I don't mix well anymore. Back then, with a few glasses of Scotch, I'd lose my shit. Screaming matches with Joyce, neighbors snooping, cops knocking on doors. Apologies and tears. The drama. God, the drama. No more whiskey for me. That's why I've switched to tequila. I had to change.

And everything did change when I got arrested in June of 2014.

A few months prior, Richard's sister had gone missing. None of us slept much. There were search parties, news interviews, all the works. Day by day, hope faded, little by little. And at home, with Joyce, things were rocky. She'd spend a week in Chico, come back for a few days, then leave again, never saying a thing. Maybe it was because I'd cheated on her a few times with some dancers from the Tip Top. And when I found out she fucked her ex, Richard and I cornered the bastard in Arcata one night, in the alley between Humbrews the Arcata Scoop, and whipped his ass. It was a bad time. I had gone crazy, detached from reality. I tried to blame the booze, but there was no denying I'd lost it. These were dark days. Except for Jeff, who got promoted to detective and the criminal investigations division. But for Richard and I, we were hitting the bottle hard, from sunrise to sunrise, day and night – night and day. One day, Richard and I decided to get breakfast at the AA Bar and Grill, right across the court house in Eureka.

The AA Bar and Grill in Eureka has some of the best damn steaks in America, but from the outside, the AA Bar and Grill looks like one of the shadiest and seediest bars in America. I should've known better than to judge a book by its cover, but I couldn't help it. I can remember driving past the first time, seeing the Motel 6 just up the block, seeing all the tweakers outside smoking cigarettes, and all the tweakers in screaming matches with invisible strangers, arms and legs flailing uncontrollably. Then one day I walked in with Jeff and Layla, and all those preconceptions and opinions crumbled. To my surprise, it was a kickass bar, discounting the 1970s wood-paneled walls, but, then again, that's part of the bar's charm. Six flatscreens occupy the eastern and western walls and a large U-shaped bar occupies the center of the building, offering patrons plenty of seating in addition to the booths and tables. A large, regularly-updated chalkboard with the restaurant's menu stretches across the southern wall, and like an Excel spreadsheet, patrons can browse their choices for breakfast, lunch and dinner. As far as steaks go, you can get a ribeye, top sirloin, porterhouse, filet mignon, and you can add fish or prawns to any order. What's not to like?

When Richard and I walked into the AA for breakfast in early June of 2014, we took a seat at a table by the chalkboard, and I ordered a sirloin and two over-easy eggs, while Richard ordered chicken-fried steak.

The bartender asked, "Any drinks, boys?"

"Jack and Coke," said Richard.

"Me too," I said, "and a Jell-o shot."

"Make that two Jell-o shots," Richard added. "And this is going on the 'Foreman tab.' He said he'll take care of it this afternoon for lunch."

The bartender walked off to mix the drinks. I felt burnt out, dazed. Richard sat in silence, staring at his hands. Neither of us had slept for the past thirty-six hours, both of us coming off the fringes of another coke binge. I had a headache, should have been drinking water. One of the T.V.'s was replaying highlights from Game 2 of the NBA Finals. "Damn, LeBron went for thirty-five. Looks like we got ourselves a series."

"Doubt it," said Richard. "I wouldn't bet against Coach Pop."

"I'll take that bet."

"Yeah? Okay, you're on. What's your call?"

"A thousand on the Heat to win it all. Plus a steak dinner, from here at AA."

"Ha, easy money. You're on," he said and shook my hand. "I always did want to try the filet mignon here anyway."

I laughed, threw the crumpled paper from my straw at him. "Oh shut up. Don't get cocky, man. Spurs can't keep winning forever. The youth are gonna take over soon."

"Pfft, what are you, Jim-fucking-Morrison? 'The youth are gonna take over soon' – gimme a break. Get outta' here with that hippie crap."

The bartender brought us our drinks. "Alright two Jack and Coke's and two Jell-o shots, here you go. The food should be out in a few. Can I get you two anything else?"

"Yeah," Richard said, "I think my friend, Hank, here and I are gonna play a little shuffleboard after breakfast. Can we get the pucks?"

"Sure thing. I'll bring 'em to you with your food."

"Thanks," I said, and the bartender was off again. Richard and I ate our Jell-o shots, and I swigged my Jack and Coke. "Whoa, stiff."

"Yeah, they mix 'em right here. I love this place. As much as The Logger."

The front door opened behind me. Richard's brow furrowed, and his smile disappeared. I watched him clench his fist. And then I heard a familiar voice say, "Well, look at this. Crazy running into you two here. You mind if I join you?" It was Freeman. In his black suit. And his stupid grin. Richard said nothing.

"Yeah, Adam," I said. "I mind. Shouldn't you be working? Fuckin' waste of tax dollars – why don't you go bother someone else? Go free one of your meth-dealing, inbred fucking cousins, or something, you dick."

Adam grabbed a chair and took a seat at the end of our table. "Hello, Hank. Profane as ever, I see. It's good to see you again. Tell me: how's your father doing? And how are things at home with the old lady?"

The bartender came with our food and the shuffleboard pucks. "Oh, dear," she said to Adam, "I hadn't noticed you'd come in, sir. How are you this morning? Great day we're having. Can I get you something to eat?"

"Oh, coffee's just fine. Thank you," he said. When the bartender walked away, he continued: "It's a shame about Sinead, boys. What's it been, seven weeks? And still no word?" He clicked his teeth, shook his head. "Don't you think it's strange? How she disappeared, I mean."

"You better watch it," said Richard. "You're this close, Adam. This close. Don't cross that line. I'll beat your ass right here."

Adam said, "Dick, c'mon, no need to make things personal here. Violence isn't the answer now. I'm just saying. The Greyhound stop is only, what, six miles from the Tip Top? How could she have gone missing driving from the Tip Top to the bus stop?"

"You tell me," Richard said. "What kinda fuckin' progress has your office made, huh?"

“My office, well, none. But me, personally, I’d be lying if I said I hadn’t gone to the club to see her a few times. She’s got a great little body, that one. You Worthy’s got great stock, you know that?” He sipped his coffee and laughed. He leaned close and whispered, “You should’ve seen her, sliding up and down my cock, earning her money like the good little slut she is. Or was.”

In that moment, something came over me. I don’t know if it was the Jell-o shot, the residual nicotine and coke still flowing through the bloodstream, or if it was the adrenaline from my whiskey-fueled temper, but the next thing I realized, I had my hand wrapped around Adam’s throat, and I had a shuffleboard puck in my hand – and as our table flipped over and glasses shattered – I must have hit Adam five or six times over the head before he got a good right hook on me. And then a left one. It rung my bell. But primal instincts kicked in, and all those years fighting my older brothers, all that vague military training had reawakened from dormancy, and I went for the Muay Thai clinch, got a good right knee to his solar plexus and knocked the air out of him. The bartender was screaming, pleading with us to leave. Blood, booze, broken glass and the remnants of two uneaten breakfast platters covered the floor and the walls, and the tussle spilled out the front door, onto the two lanes of southbound US-101. It must’ve been a crazy scene to passing motorists: a grown man fighting some young, drunk-stoned kid, throwing hands in the middle of the highway, right across the county jail and court house. Horns honked. Men screamed. Mothers clutched their crying children and ran away. Dogs barked. Crows cawed. And then the cops came.

...

I was cuffed, but I wasn’t taken to holding. Instead, officers brought me to Jeff’s office. When I walked in, Freeman was sitting on a couch clutching an icepack over his left eye. I could see the

imprint of my hand around his neck, blood clotting down the side of his lip, and the cuts and bruises on his knuckles. Jeff was pissed, judging the way he was glaring at me. “Hank, am I gonna have to keep you cuffed,” he asked, “or are we gonna be able to talk like adults here?”

“Let’s try the adulthood path, sure. You can take these cuffs off me. Ain’t gonna get any bullshit on my end. Unless Adam’s got a problem.”

“No problem here,” said Adam. “Let him go, boys,” he said to the officers.

They uncuffed me. I winced, gripped my left wrist. I wondered if it was broken. But I shook it off and took an open seat in front of Jeff’s deck.

Jeff got up from his seat and stared out his window. With his back to us, he said, “Well, good news: I talked to the Times Standard and KIEM; they’ve agreed to keep this out of the papers, off the T.V. broadcast. The Outpost and the Journal’ll get back to me too, same with KAEF and KBVU. I’m sure they’ll keep quiet. It’s not a good look for us, you know, our DA, in a fucking drunken street fight, on the goddamn highway, at 10 a.m.” He turned around and snapped. “Th’fuck is wrong with you two? Huh?” He glared at me, and I looked away like a guilty dog. “Look at you – you look like shit. How much of that stuff have you and Dick shoved up your fucking noses the past two days? You need to drink some water and go to sleep.” And then he pointed to Adam. “And you, you fucking fire-starter. You goddamn instigator.” From a desk drawer, Jeff pulled out a manila envelope and tossed it to Freeman. “You think you’re so fuckin’ untouchable? And, what, you think we don’t got cameras at the club? Dumbass.”

Freeman opened the envelope and studied a series of compromising photographs of himself at the Tip Top. It was the first time I’d seen him nervous. Maybe he was a human after all. He pursed his lips, put the photos back into the envelope. He said, “Well, Jeff, when you’re

right, you're right. It is bad for us – it's bad if our DA gets cast in a bad light. I'm sure we can all keep things hushed, put this whole saga behind us. We are a community, after all." He cleared his throat. "But him," he pointed to me, "how will I know this thug isn't gonna try and kill me again in broad daylight?"

I thought, *Thug? Thug these nuts, bitch, I'm still gonna kick your ass.* "I promise, Jeff, Adam, you'll get no retaliation from me." I wondered if I was lying. I couldn't think straight. The booze and coke started to fade, and the painlessness of drunken boxing disappeared. My wrist was killing me. And my jaw ached.

"Good," said Jeff. "Let's keep it that way. We got enough to deal with. None of us needs bad press." He sat down behind his desk, sifted through scattered papers. "One thing, Hank: we can't just release you today."

"Fuck do you mean you can't just release me today?"

"Too many witnesses. If you're out back on the street today, seen anywhere around town or in Arcata or Blue Lake, it's not good. I gotta keep you in holding the rest of the day."

"Jeff, you've gotta be kidding me."

Adam laughed. "Ha! Would you look at that? Have fun in jail, kid."

Jeff slammed his hand on the desk and screamed at Adam, "Enough! Adam get the fuck out of here before I finish the work Hank did on your fucking face. Go on, git. You're still on the clock, motherfucker. Get to work. And send in those two officers."

Adam got up and left without another word. As he walked out, the two officers came back into the office. Jeff pointed at me said to them, "Take him to the tank. Get him processed." I got up from my seat and they re-cuffed me. "Until 8 a.m., Hank. That's the best I can do. I'm sorry."

“Gotta do what you gotta do, Jeff.”

...

After they took my mugshot and fingerprinted me, the officers marched me to a cell with seven other drunks. There were a couple of benches and a few metal folding chairs scattered throughout the cell, and an old tube T.V. was mounted on the wall in the corner. I walked in, heard the door close behind me. I scanned the cell. It smelled like piss. I found an empty chair and dragged it towards the T.V. and took a seat next to another drunk watching a broadcast of Judge Mathis. The drunk squinted, looked at me through his one good eye. “You look familiar,” he said. “I’ve played pool with you at The Logger before, haven’t I?”

“Maybe. Not sure. I play pool there most nights.”

“Yeah, yeah, I do know you. I saw you at the Folk Life Festival last year. We played cutthroat with your girlfriend. And then she passed out on the bar, and you two got kicked out.”

I did remember that. “Holy shit!” I took a closer look at the dirty drunk. “Simon Henderson? Is that you? Ah, what’s up man? Long time no see. You ever get that vendor to trade you a taco for that joint?”

“Nah, I traded it for pizza instead. The hell are you doing in here?”

“Same as you, Simon. Here to watch Judge Mathis.”

“Mmm hmm.”

...

Eventually I fell asleep in that chair. Early the next morning I woke up dehydrated and with a terrible headache. Simon was asleep next to me in his chair. He had pissed himself. The population of the cell had nearly doubled too, and a couple puddles of piss accompanied Simon’s puddle. Suddenly a voice boomed from behind me, jolting a few of the other drunks from their

slumber. “Vasquez! Up and at ‘em. You’re free to go.” I turned around, saw Jeff. And standing next to him was someone I didn’t expect to see, someone I didn’t want to see, especially at that moment. I was embarrassed.

“Mornin’, Jeff.”

“G’mornin’, Hank. Someone’s come to post bail.”

“Yep. I can see that.” I gulped. “Hey, dad. Good to see you.”

“Hello, son.”

...

Dad, Jeff and I walked from holding to the parking lot. My dad handed me a pair of sunglasses. I put them on and pulled my hood over my head. Jeff said, “Well, L.C., looks like we’ve got everything squared away here. Nothing’ll hit the wire. Everything’s been hushed. Local media has agreed to cooperate. There might be gossip amongst locals, whatever witnesses saw. But for the most part, we should be good. And we’ll scrub his record. It’ll be like nothing ever happened.”

My dad said, “That’s good. Thank you again, Jeff. I’m sorry we had to see each other like this. Junior and I are gonna have a long talk.” He shook Jeff’s hand. “Congratulations on your promotion. CID – that’s big, kid. You can rise up from there. It’s a good spot to be in. Play your cards right, you can get to the top, then walk away on your terms.”

“Thank you, sir. I appreciate it. And, sir, I just wanna let you know: your son’s a good kid. The DA, he’s...”

“I know. I’ve heard about this Freeman character too. Say no more.” They nodded to each other and we walked in opposite directions. I followed my dad to the car and got into the passenger seat. Dad pulled out of the parking lot and got onto northbound 101, and we drove in

silence for a few minutes as we left Eureka. After we passed Arcata and merged onto Highway 299, dad broke the silence and asked, “The brewery open? Let’s grab a beer before I leave. We need to talk.”

...

As we zoomed passed the Almquist Lumber building, I said, “Sorry, dad. I don't know what came over me. I swear. It was like somebody else punching his face. I couldn't help myself.”

He said nothing for a moment. And then: “Well, son, did you win?”

“What?”

“Did. You. *Win*?”

“Well, yeah.”

“Then forget it. I wouldn't lose any sleep over it. But watch that temper next time. And don't worry, I won't tell mom. But give her a damn call soon, will ya? We barely hear from you anymore. You're lucky Jeff called.”

“Thanks, pops. Sorry about all this. I owe you one. And I promise to call her soon.”

“Another thing, Hank.”

“Yeah?”

“This Freeman guy, he could be a problem, okay, so please don't bullshit me, Hank. I know you; I know my son. You're my boy, you know? And I don't get to see you as often anymore, so let's not bullshit here. I know you're gonna do whatever you want, no matter what anyone tells you. Since you were little, it's always been your way. I can accept that. So, whatever it is you've gotten into up here, I don't wanna know. But next time shit like this happens, I might not be able to help. Understand?”

“I understand.”

“And another thing: I'm looking into this Freeman, and I got others looking too. There's word goin' round that he's an informant. Now I don't know if he's FBI, ATF, DEA or something else – we're trying to figure it out – but if you get caught, I can't help you. You understand?”

This fed news about Freeman was concerning. My head spun. I wasn't sure if Jeff, Layla, Heather or anyone else knew anything about it. “Yeah, dad. I understand.”

He unlatched the glovebox in front of me. “So, next time something happens, I can't help you, okay? Next time something happens, I might not be there. So, you might have to take care of it yourself. Okay? You hearing me, son?”

Something glimmered from the opened glovebox. My dad fixed his eyes on the open road. The Freeman-working-for-the-fed revelation was already dizzying enough, and I couldn't process what my eyes were seeing with what my ears were hearing, and when I fixed my gaze on that familiar L-shaped silhouette in the glovebox, I reached in, wrapped my hand around its grip, stared down the rear sight, and engaged the mag release. “Dad? I, uh, wha...”

“Glock 19. Nine-millimeter. Seventeen plus one. You ever fired a handgun before?”

I was shocked. “A few years back. A Glock 17. I had some practice with Jeff. But, dad, this is...I can't...what are you saying?”

“You know, son, you always were more like your tío. Down to a ‘T’. My whole life, I tried to get him to change his ways, go straight. And your whole life, I've been trying to protect you. Protect you from, well, him. And yourself. But maybe I was wrong to. I just...I never wanted this for you, Hank.” He pulled off the road and killed the engine. “I ever tell you how your uncle and I, and all your other tíos and tías came to America?”

“No. I don't think so. I remember some things Jacob and Chris told me, about how grandma and grandpa died from a car accident. But that's it.”

He sighed. You could see the gravity, this heavy weight, fall on his shoulders as he sank into his seat. “There’s no point in keeping this from you. You’re going to find out eventually, so I might as well say it now: your grandparents were assassinated.”

The truth bombs kept dropping. I couldn’t find any shelter. “What the hell? What do you mean ‘assassinated’?”

“*I mean* your grandparents were *activists* for the Boricua-Macheteros Popular Army. A group of left-leaning radicals. I know, crazy. And it was a violent time in Puerto Rico, the rest of America too, when they passed.”

I couldn’t believe what I was hearing. “Dad, what...”

“And after your grandparents got killed, your tío and I paid one of their friends a visit. A friend who Rodrigo suspected. Someone who, from what Rodrigo said, someone who set them up. His name was Jaime Villegas, a teacher and governmental loyalist, and he lived down the street from us in San Juan. Was our neighbor for all my life, since I was born. We trusted him.”

I didn’t like where this story was going. “Okay...so what did you and tío Rodrigo do?”

“So your uncle and I, we bust Jaime’s door down one night. And we go in there. All I remember was the screaming. And I remember throwing things, flipping over tables and chairs. Glass breaking. The cursing. I was angry. And then I see your uncle reach for his waistband. He pulls out a gun. And without a word, he shoots Jaime. Cold blooded. Shoots him through the fuckin’ neck, blood splattering all over the walls. The shot, it was just so loud. And then Jaime falls, wraps his hands around the wound. You could still hear him gasping, fighting to stay alive. And Rodrigo was frozen, in shock. I don’t think he realized what he’d done til he saw the blood. He just stood there. So I take the gun from him. And, then, I dump the rest of the mag into Jaime and get Rodrigo out of there. Next day, Rodrigo and I and the rest of our siblings

get on the boat to Santo Domingo. After that, we got on the plane, came here to California.

That's our story, son. I'm sorry I've kept it from you so long. But, this – it's how we came to America.”

After dad and I got beers at the brewery, he drove me back home to the Fulton-Lane house. We pulled into the driveway, and we spotted Richard, Layla, and Heather in the backyard picking early-blooming apples from the trees. I couldn't spot Joyce.

"You gonna introduce me to your friends?" dad asked.

I didn't know what to say. I couldn't concentrate. And I couldn't look at my dad the same. He wasn't a cop – he was a killer. A criminal. And so was tío Rodrigo. It made me sick to think about. I didn't even know who they were anymore, or who I was anymore. Maybe I was more like them than I thought, but I couldn't admit it. Or accept it. Did mom know? Did my brothers know? I pulled down the visor, looked in the mirror, and I didn't recognize the face staring back at me. I could see the bruises and cuts from the fight, my torn septum. And I saw my mom's eyes, my dad's nose, my tío's hair, Grandpa V's chin and Grandma V's dimples. I flipped the visor back up. I thought, *Who am I?* And then I tucked the Glock into my waistband. "Sure, dad, I can introduce you."

Snoop Dogg's *Doggystyle* album was playing from a Bluetooth speaker when we got out the car, and the sun was shining bright. It was another hot summer morning in Blue Lake. A heatwave had been scorching the North Coast that week, and the thermometer was already teetering over seventy-five degrees at 10:30 a.m. Heather was sitting on a lawn chair beneath the shade of the Roxbury Russet tree, while Richard and Layla picked from the Rhode Island Greening tree. I swung the gate open and walked into the yard.

Richard climbed down the orchard ladder and shook my dad's hand. "Well, well, this must be Hank Sr.," Richard said. "I'm Richard – Richard Worthy. It's nice to finally meet you."

"Hello, Richard. It's nice to meet you."

Layla was sitting on a bough up in the canopy. From there she said, “Hello, Hank Sr. I’m Layla. It’s nice to meet you.” She jumped down to shake his hand. “Oh, wow, you and your son look like twins!”

“Hi, Layla, it’s nice to meet you too. You know, believe it or not, little Hank actually looks more like his mom than me.” He pulled out his iPhone and started showing Layla pictures. “Ah, here, see: there’s him and his mom.”

“Wow,” said Layla, “you weren’t kidding.”

Dad scrolled some more. “Oh, and here, look: this is him in fifth grade at a science fair. Look at his belly, that headgear.”

Layla laughed. “Holy crap look at him. Hank, I didn’t know you were a brace-face.”

“Three years,” I said. “That headgear, man, fuck that thing.”

“Ah, I hear ya,” Richard said. “Me too, kid. I had a headgear. Two years. From twelve to fourteen. Hated it. God, and my ma made me go to school with that thing. What a shit time that was.”

Layla asked my dad, “Will you be staying for dinner?”

“Oh, no, I can’t. I got a flight back to Long Beach at 5 p.m.”

“Oh, shame. Well, are you and Hank gonna do anything while you’re in town?”

Dad and I looked at each other. I wasn’t sure what his plan was. I didn’t even know he had a flight back to Long Beach that day until he said something. We hadn’t discussed an itinerary. He said, “Well, I figure I just hang out with him, see what he’s up to.”

“Well, maybe you and Junior can help us,” Richard said. “Layla’s a hell of a baker. Right now, we’re harvesting for cider, but if we can pick enough apples, she can bake us a pie.”

My dad looked up at the tree. “Hmm... the apples came early this year.”

From her lawn chair, Heather said, “We had a good spell of rain from mid-March to mid-May. Much more rain than last year. This drought is taking a toll, and I don’t think the trees anticipated receiving as much water as they did. I think they went into shock, blossomed and bore fruit early.” She got up from her seat and introduced herself. “Hello, I’m Heather. I’m Layla’s mom. It’s nice to meet you, Hank.”

“Hi, Heather, nice to meet you.” He pointed to the tree she was sitting under. “What about that tree? Will it bloom early too?”

“Maybe. Anything’s possible.” She smiled. I don’t think I’d ever seen Heather smile until that point. “My great-great grandmother planted that tree back in 1881. It’s been feeding us ever since.”

“That’s...incredible,” my dad said. He surveyed the rest of the yard, admiring its apple trees, the garden, the blackberry vines along the fence line. “This is a beautiful orchard, Heather.” He smiled too. Then he said to Richard, “You know what, man, I think Junior and I will help. Pie does sound good.”

“Doesn’t it?” Richard asked. “Okay, right on. Let’s get to work.”

...

Apples grown from seed are rare. If one were to take the seed of a Red Delicious and plant it, it’s reasonable to suspect the seed will produce a Red Delicious apple tree, but it’s just not the case. That’s because apples are cross-pollinators and require pollen from another apple in order to produce fruit. The apples we see and eat today are hybrids that carry a bevy of traits from their genetic ancestors. For many millennia, honeybees and bumblebees mediated the transfer of pollen from one apple tree to another. But somewhere along the way, human intervention entered the equation.

Long ago, an ancient human identified an apple worth eating. As time moved forward, the ancient human came across another apple worth eating. When they realized how tasty these apples were, the ancient human harnessed their inner-bumblebee and snipped a scion from the first tree and grafted it to the rootstock of the second tree, and once the wound of the graft healed, the DNA from both apples combined, and together they produced a desirable hybrid apple, much like the ones we see today in our supermarkets. The seeds of hybrid apples can produce a wide range of genetic manifestations, and they carry a multitude of genes that aren't stable. While the first generation of fruit from a graft is simply a cross between two separate fruits, the seeds of the second generation of fruit carry the genetics of several different apples. It is entirely possible to plant ten seeds from hybrid apples and produce ten trees that are entirely different than the fruits they came from.

Every once in a while, the fruits attempt to revert back to their original type. When this happens, genetic instability ensues, and mutations occur, and about one in every one million apples produces a fruit that displays both dominant phenotypes of its parents, resulting in an apple of two different colors split down the middle.

...

Dad and Richard climbed to the top of the canopy and shook the tree, while Layla and I gathered apples as they fell to the ground. It was funny to watch my dad up in this tree, shaking the shit out of a ton of branches, laughing like a kid. And Richard too, giggling like a child at the county fair.

“You ever do shit like this in PR?” he asked my dad.

“All the time. You should see the avocado trees there. You ever been?”

“Nah, never. But I always wanted to. Maybe next summer I’ll take a trip. Maybe check out the Bacardí distillery too.”

On the ground level, Layla said to me, “Your dad’s pretty cool, Hank. I like him. He’s a lot like you.” She glanced up the tree. “He’s got a great ass.” She laughed. “And, about yesterday...”

“Yeah, I know. I’m sorry.”

“Oh, no, don’t be sorry. Adam had it coming. Someone had to do it sooner or later. I’m just glad you’re okay. Glad you got out.”

“Yeah, well, I had some help. Tell Jeff I said thanks. I just didn’t expect him to call my dad.”

“Well when Adam talked about pressing charges...”

“Yeah, I hear you. It’s all good. It’s actually nice to see my dad. Been a while.”

As Layla and I talked, and as apples continued to fall, Heather joined us and gathered apples too. As she was gathering, she spotted one that stood out. In a pile of green apples, she noticed one that was half red and half green. She picked it up. “Hey, look,” she said. “Hey, come down from there, boys. You gotta check out this apple.”

Dad and Richard climbed down. “Which apple?” Richard asked.

“This one,” she said and showed them the funky-looking fruit. “See how it’s half red and half green? Wow. I haven’t seen one of these here in decades, not since Layla was born.” She handed the apple to her daughter. “Check it out, babe.”

Layla studied the apple. She smiled. “I remember Grandma Ann told me a story about an apple like this. Apparently the chances of this happening are about a million to one.”

“Million to one odds,” my dad said. “Hey, Junior, those are good odds for a small bet, huh?” Layla handed him the apple. “This is really cool,” he said. “I’ve never seen one before.” He handed it to me.

I studied the apple too. I held it up to the sun, tossed it around from hand to hand. I had never seen anything like it either. “I wonder what it tastes like?” I asked. “Has anyone ever had one?”

“I have,” said Heather. “My mom – Layla’s grandma – she and I found two here when I was a little girl. That must’ve been 1952 or so. I would have been five or six. She and my Grandma Diana made a pie that night. It was one of the best pies I’d ever had.” She smiled, enjoyed a walk down memory lane. “I miss my mom. My grandma, not so much; she was mean, but I do miss my mom.”

“I do too, mom,” Layla said and gave her mom a hug. “Grandma was the best.”

I handed the apple back to Heather. She said to me, “You know what they call these apples? When a split like this happens?”

“No. What’s it called?”

“It’s called a chimera apple. It’s named after the chimera myth – that animal that’s part lion, part goat, and part snake. Ain’t that neat?”

A lightbulb went off in my head. “*Chimera*, huh? Hey! Like the name of the company!”

Who is the arbiter of truth? Who yields the agency – the power – to determine truth from fiction? Right from wrong? Bad from good? Should the government decide? Would the private sector get a say? When the churchgoer listens to the sermon, can the churchgoer certify that the preacher's words are devoid of ulterior motives? Does something else lurk behind the preacher's rhetoric? Or – under the frames of traditional, antiquated lenses – is the preacher a deity with a direct line to the word and voice of God? And is a strict adherence to the preacher's guidance necessary for one to lead a decent, just life?

Let's not fool ourselves.

Outside the realm of spiritualism, the question remains: who is the arbiter of truth? And how can we be sure? What is the danger of misconstruing truth for belief? Or belief for truth? With our collective societal tendencies towards binary modes of thought, is there any middle ground for nuanced degrees of correct and incorrect? Good and evil? Right or wrong? When a child is born into this world, and as that child roams the earth, who are they to trust? And what can they trust? Can they trust others? Perhaps. Or must they only trust themselves? It's debatable. Do the academia-based philosophies of Kant, Nietzsche and Confucius hold sway? Or is one's life experience more reminiscent of the poetry of KRS-One, Mos Def and Talib Kweli? If America is the land of cops and robbers: can a cop not also be a robber? And between the cop and the robber, which one is the criminal? Or are they all one in the same?

I don't know.

Sitting here at Olaf's this late-August afternoon with a pint of Manny's, during this brief moment in the temporal dimension between summer and fall, I ask myself what is true? I wonder, have I relinquished my agency? Have I yielded my power to make my decisions? To

think my *thoughts*? How many of my decisions have been based on *lies*? Perhaps I'm much more of an American than I thought. In that regard, I can see why our culture celebrates the individual's right to *forget*. But on that same spectrum, I cannot forget. I can run, but I can't hide, and I can no longer deny my nature, who I am. Because when the inebriation fades, and when the drugs are gone, and when the party ends, time sees all; the future is never guaranteed; and your past is all there is.

And I am who I am.

I am that someone you meet in the middle – the one who occupies that edge, that thin veil between two contrasting worlds. Someone born dead. A product of cops and hippies. A combination that should not exist. An American. A chimera.

Here I am.

Part V

Officer-Involved Shooting North of Dinsmore

Press release from the Humboldt County Sheriff's office:

On April, 11, 2012, at about 2:30 p.m., deputies attempted to serve two search warrants to investigate illegal cannabis cultivation in the Dinsmore area. Upon arrival, deputies observed two adult males brandishing assault-style rifles. Deputies issued verbal commands in an attempt to disarm the men, however both men opened fire. Deputies returned fire, striking the gunmen.

The two adult males were transported to a local hospital. The extent of the injuries and their conditions are unknown to law enforcement at this time.

This case is still under investigation. More information will be released when available and appropriate.

Anyone with information about this or related criminal activity is encouraged to call the Humboldt County Sheriff's Office at (707) 445-7252 or the Sheriff's Office Crime Tip line at (707) 268-2538.

Humboldt County Sheriff's Office and the Critical Incident Response Team (CIRT) Is Investigating After Two Dead, One Deputy Wounded After Shootout In Dinsmore

Press release from the Humboldt County Sheriff's Office:

On April, 11, 2012, at about 2:30 p.m., deputies attempted to serve two search warrants to investigate illegal cannabis cultivation in the Dinsmore area. Upon arrival, deputies observed two armed adult males. After the two males failed to comply with the deputies' request to disarm, both men opened fire. Deputies and civilians on-scene returned fire and struck the gunmen. The two adult males were transported to a local hospital, where they were pronounced dead on arrival. The men have been identified as brothers, 19-year-old **Aaron O'Leary** and 21-year-old **Calvin O'Leary** of Arcata.

Deputy Jeff Foreman was the first deputy on scene at the incident, accompanied by three civilians who have requested anonymity. Foreman was injured when shot in the shoulder by **Aaron O'Leary**. The three civilians reacted to the threat, exchanging fire with and neutralizing the suspects, and then moved Foreman to a position of safety. We are thankful to report that Deputy Foreman is doing well and recovering from his injuries.

Deputy Rodney La Rosa arrived on scene shortly thereafter and cleared the perimeter with two of the anonymous civilians. After it was determined that the scene was clear of any additional subjects, a medical unit was requested, and deputies with the Humboldt County Sheriff's Office Marijuana Enforcement Team (MET) arrived and served the two search warrants.

Two parcels were investigated during the service of the warrants. During investigation, deputies eradicated approximately 4,269 growing cannabis plants. Deputies seized and destroyed approximately 121 pounds of packaged cannabis bud, 921 pounds of processed cannabis and over 1,850 pounds of cannabis shake. Assisting agencies found six water diversion violations (up to \$8,000 fine per day, per violation), nine water pollution violations (up to \$20,000 fine per day, per violation), and numerous fuel and oil spills associated with

generators used on the parcels. Additional violations with civil fines are expected to be filed by the assisting agencies.

The Humboldt County Sheriff's Office would like to thank the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, the California State Water Board and the Humboldt County Environmental Health and HazMat Team for their assistance in serving of the warrants. The Sheriff's Office would also like to extend its gratitude to the three assisting civilians who exemplified courage and strength throughout this incident.

Anyone with information about this case or related criminal activity is encouraged to call the Humboldt County Sheriff's Office at (707) 445-7252 or the Sheriff's Office Crime Tip line at (707) 268-2538.

America and her guns are inseparable. In the land of guns and money and cops and robbers, guns are a part of life, the idea of gun ownership – the philosophy of guns as a means for civic equilibrium, a check and balance to keep a government from descending into autocracy – makes sense on paper and in theory. But how that philosophy has manifested onto this physical plane, I’m not sure the writers of the Constitution had this reality in mind. Words are tricky like that. How one interprets rhetoric and text may not resemble the interpretation or translation of another, and when misinterpretation occurs, conflict arises and chaos ensues. Who knew *words* could cause so much trouble?

The morning I first met Adam should have been a peaceful one. But it wasn’t. After the encounter, Richard, Brian and I bought targets and ammunition at the Big 5 and set out for Dinsmore with the four birch trees and soil. Richard had called Jeff and told him to bring an extra handgun for training. By the time we arrived, Jeff was already there, and so were Layla and Heather. We pulled up alongside them, and Brian killed the engine.

“You’re late, boys,” Layla said. “What took you so long?”

“Sorry,” said Richard. “We had a run-in with Freeman during breakfast, that fucker. Ask Hank.”

“What happened, Hank?” Heather asked. “What did he say to you?”

I told them about the encounter. About how Freeman wanted thirty percent of the money from the grow.

“Well, he can go and fuck himself,” Layla said. “You did right, Hank. Don’t tell him a goddamn thing.”

“Yeah. Thanks. I guess. What are you and your mom doing today?”

“We’re gonna take a ride up the property. There’s a clearing out near the northern border of the property. Mom and I are gonna plant some apple trees.”

“That’s...cool. With birch trees though?”

“Birches take the grafts well,” Heather said. “It’s tricky, and it’ll take a few scions, but the birch does well to help the apples grow.”

“I see. Have you done this before?”

“My mother taught me. We’ve planted a few over the years. And same with Layla and I. I would like to get Joyce out here soon though.”

From behind Heather, I could see Layla’s eyes narrow. She was staring at Jeff and Richard. “Hey, you two, what are you doing?”

Richard and Jeff were gripping pistols. “Uh, we’re teaching Hank to shoot,” Jeff said.

“Hank,” said Layla, “is that true?”

“Yeah. Today with Freeman, well, I think I need to be prepared for anything.”

“I hope you know what you’re doing,” Heather said. “Once you cross the line, there’s no going back.” She paused for a moment. “I hate guns, Hank. You boys...I’ll never understand you. You get one life, and you choose to live it like this?” She turned around. “C’mon, Layla,” she said and walked towards the flatbed.

Layla said, “Hank, be careful. Mom’s right. There’s no going back if you walk this path. I don’t want you to regret anything.” She gave me a hug, and I clutched tight, squeezing her breasts against my body. With breasts like Layla’s, it’s tough to turn down a good, tight hug. “So if you pull the trigger, you better mean it.” She got into the driver’s seat of the flatbed.

“Now remember, Layla,” Brian said, “easy on the clutch this time. No need to go over twenty up here. Steady as she goes.”

“Yada, yada, yada,” she said. “Yeah, yeah, I hear you, Brian. I won’t mess anything up. Now, go on. Have fun shooting. And don’t get hurt.”

Layla kicked in into gear, and they set off. As soon as they were out of sight, Jeff handed me a gun. “Glock 17,” he said. “Nine-millimeter. Seventeen plus one. This one belonged to Joyce’s dad.”

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“Shooting a pistol is easy once you hammer out the fundamentals,” Jeff said. “Those fundamentals are gonna help you to shoot accurately. But accuracy is only one third of the equation. In a critical situation, you must be able to shoot accurately and quickly. And while shooting accurately and quickly, you must be able to shoot under stress.”

I was staring down the sights, the Glock pointed down range. “Accuracy. Speed. While under stress – got it.”

“Okay, good. Now the problem is, when you shoot, the recoil pushes the gun up. Then you gotta bring it back down, find your sights and re-aim, then shoot again. At the range, or while you’re practicing, it’s no big deal. But when you’re under stress and you’re shooting fast – and if you don’t have a proper thumbs-forward grip – you’re gonna go pop-pop-pop-pop, and that gun is gonna dance all over the place, and you won’t hit your target. You’ll be dead.”

“Dead without a proper thumbs-forward grip. Got it.”

“So the goal with a proper grip is to get the gun to basically act like a jackhammer. You’ll pull the trigger – pop-pop-pop-pop-pop – and with that grip, the gun will barely move it all.”

“Like a jackhammer. Okay, got it.”

He called Richard to come help demonstrate. “So, Hank, a proper thumbs-forward grip depends on where you place your support hand.” He said to Richard, “Okay, Dick, I want you to point down range with the gun just in your left support hand.” Richard pointed down range. Jeff walked to the right side of Richard and pointed to Richard’s left thumb. “Okay, Hank, so you see Dick’s left thumb? So the base of this metacarpal right here, I want you to get that as high up as possible, and I want your left arm as far out as possible. Go ahead and give it a try.”

This was the first time I’d handled a firearm in eight years. The last time I had fired a shot, I was with my dad and my brothers. We had gone boar hunting in the hills of the Salinas Valley, east of King City, at one of my dad’s coworker’s property. I can remember shooting a boar from twenty yards away. Well, I guess I didn’t shoot it – more like I shot *at* it. I just didn’t have the heart to kill the little piggy. *Charlotte’s Web* was one of my favorite stories growing up – what can I say? I should’ve shot to kill the first time. Because when that buckshot zipped passed the piggy’s head, it got pissed and charged at us, so the four of us unloaded on the bastard. It was traumatizing, that poor pig. The carnitas were delicious, made great tacos that night, but I swore I’d never handle a firearm again.

And then I got to Humboldt.

I pointed the Glock down range, pinpointing the base of my left thumb as high as I could, locking the left wrist.

“Good,” Jeff said. “Now point down range with just your right hand.”

I pointed down range with my right hand and stared down the sight.

“Good again. Okay now grip it with both hands. I want your left thumb parallel to the slide, and I want that right thumb overlapping the left thumb. Your goal is to put as much friction on the gun as you can so the gun doesn’t dance too much while firing.” Again I pointed

down range, this time with both hands, a proper grip and locked wrists. Jeff inspected. “Good,” he said. “Locked wrists, nice. See, you got this.” He stared down range at the targets Brian had set up, about twenty yards away. “Okay, Hank, you see that target with the dots in all four corners? I want you to aim for the top right dot and shoot.”

I identified the target. With my feet set, I aimed down range. I inhaled, then exhaled. I inhaled again, and exhaled. And then I inhaled again, and pulled the trigger.

“Hit,” Richard said. “Nice shot, kid. Let’s see another one.”

Jeff said, “Okay, Hank, now I want you to aim for the lower left dot.”

I zeroed in on the bottom left dot. Feet set, with the same breathing technique, I aimed and shot, striking the target dead on.

“Fuckin’ a,” said Brian. “Okay, let’s see a proper grouping. Go for big target in the middle. See if you can get three well-placed.”

I looked to Jeff. He nodded, saying nothing. I nodded back, and then I aimed. I pulled the trigger – pop-pop-pop.

“Okay,” said Jeff, “guns down everyone. Let’s go check the new guy’s damage.” We walked down range and Jeff pulled the target from the wooden target stand. He held it up to the sun and counted. “One, two, three, four. Hmm...you shot three on that last one, didn’t you?”

“Yeah. Why?”

“There’s only four holes. Two in the corners, and two in the middle. You shot the middle three times, right? Did you miss?”

“I dunno.”

Brian and Jeff exchanged puzzled looks. Richard grabbed four empty beer bottles from Layla's truck. "I got an idea," he said. He set the four bottles, some at eye level, and some knee-high. "Okay, let's walk back, and Hank: shoot these four bottles."

We walked back, and I picked the Glock back up. Jeff said, "Okay, Hank, like Richard said, shoot the four bottles. But shoot as if you're under stress. Shoot like someone's shooting back. Let's see how fast and accurate you can be. Are you ready?"

"Sure."

"Okay, on the count of three. One. Two. Three."

I had an out-of-body experience. The drone of a single-engine plane hummed overhead. The smell of cordite and Richard's burning blunt lingered in the air. Crows cawed in the distance. It was as if I was a stranger observing from above, and I could watch myself pull the trigger. Then the gun went pop-pop-pop-pop, and I fell back to earth, standing behind the trigger of a gun that had just vaporized four bottles.

"Okay," Richard said. "Hank – I call bullshit. There's no way you're not a gun person. Because what you just did, that was so fucking cool!"

Jeff asked, "And you say you haven't fired a gun in eight years?"

"Yup. Eight years. This is my first time with a pistol actually. I've only shot a 12-gauge."

"Get the fuck outta' here," said Brian. "Well, shit. Glad you're on our side."

Richard laughed. "No kidding. Goddamn, kid. You're a natural."

"Must be the genes," Jeff said.

We heard the hum of a couple of dirt bikes approach the gate. A man got off one of the bikes, unlatched the gate, and then both men drove up the road towards us. I couldn't recognize them, but Brian did. "It's the O'Leary brothers," he said.

I asked, "Who are the O'Leary brothers?"

"Freeman's cousins," said Richard. "Buncha' inbreds, all fucked in the head. Goddamn, I hate that fucking family. All of 'em, the Freeman's and the O'Leary's."

They stopped about a hundred yards from us. I hadn't noticed the rifles slung to their backs. Then the first O'Leary dismounted and pointed his rifle at us. I froze. I watched Richard dive down and take cover. And then I saw Jeff clutch his shoulder. He screamed and dropped to the ground. But I couldn't hear his cry. Richard yelled at me – I could see his lips move – but I couldn't hear him either. My hearing was gone, and everything moved in slow motion. I watched the bullets tear through Jeff's windshield, glass shattering everywhere. Richard dragged Jeff behind the car and took cover, exchanging fire with the gunmen. All of a sudden, I felt a hand grip my left shoulder and pull me down. It was Brian. "What the fuck is wrong with you? Shoot back, Hank!"

I snapped back to reality. My hearing returned. Glass continued to shatter around us. Fright or flight engaged. Richard worked his way to us. "Jeff's gonna be okay," he said, "but he's out for the count. These fuckers with their AR's. So much for a fair fight. Next election, I'm voting for gun control."

"We gotta get 'em when they reload," Brian said.

"The only way, huh? Okay, lets do it. Hank, you see that pile of lumber down there?" He pointed a large pile of wood about fifty feet to the left of us. "When they reload, I'm gonna make a run for the pile. When they aim for me, you and Brian take care of 'em, okay?"

“Got it.”

“And, Hank: don’t miss.”

Brian emptied the rest of his .357 and reloaded. The O’Leary’s responded with more gunfire. I could hear one yell, “Adam says hello, you motherfuckers!” That pissed me off.

And then it happened:

As soon as one of the O’Leary’s went to reload, Richard’s dormant athletic gracefulness came to life as he made a beeline to the lumber pile. Odd as it is, in the middle of gunfire and chaos, I can remember watching him run in that moment, and I remember thinking, *I can’t believe you didn’t play ball for Notre Dame. Richard, you fool.* And then like a set of dominoes falling one after the other, Brian immediately pulled out behind Richard, and as the O’Leary’s fixed their sights on Richard, Brian shot the reloading O’Leary, dropped him dead. Brian took cover behind Layla’s truck, and the last O’Leary returned fire. When I heard his gun click, instincts kicked in. I got up from behind the truck and extended my arms, aimed down the sight. I can still remember the look on the guy’s face, his eyes wide, staring down the barrel of a gun. From my peripheral, I could see Richard emerge from behind the wood pile, his gun too aimed at the last O’Leary. I pulled the trigger – pop-pop-pop-pop – and felt the recoil of the gun reverberate throughout my body. Then Richard pulled his trigger – pop-pop-pop. He reloaded, then Brian and I approached the wounded O’Leary’s. The first one was dead. Brian’s .357 blew the guy’s face off. But the second one was still alive.

“Jesus,” said Richard, “seven shots and he’s still kicking. I don’t believe it.”

I walked over to the dying O’Leary, stared down at him. He tried to communicate, but no words came. Only gasps. But his eyes were filled with rage. So I didn’t think twice. I pointed the gun at his face and fired three more shots.

“Whoa, whoa,” Brian said. “Okay, Hank, he’s gone. Gimme the gun. That’s it. There you go.” He handed the gun to Richard and pulled me away and sat me down on. “Look at me,” he said. “Are you okay?”

I said nothing for a moment. I stared out at a horizon that didn’t exist. “Yes.”

Jeff clutched his shoulder and came out from behind his car and surveyed the damage. He saw the dead O’Leary’s, Richard off to the side taking a piss. And Brian talking to me. “Jesus, Hank. This isn’t good. Gimme that gun.” He took the gun from Richard and put it back into his car. “Okay, we need to fix this. We need to make this look right. This isn’t good. So here’s what we’re gonna do: the O’Leary property is a half-mile down the road. We gotta get their bodies into Layla’s truck, drive em’ down there. And then we’ll stage it, make it look like they opened fire when we arrived. Hank, when you get questioned, you tell the interrogators I told you to assist. You tell them I cornered you at the Murrish Market in Hydesville and gave you no choice. They’re gonna ask what kind of capacity I requested from you. You tell them ‘in a legal, official capacity,’ and you tell ‘em nothing else until the lawyer gets there. Do you understand?”

“Yes. I understand. Gonna tell them you requested my assistance, and I assisted in a legal, official capacity.”

“Good. I’ll call Deputy La Rosa. I can count on him to keep quiet. When he gets here, I’ll call it in officially. And one more thing, Hank. Raise your right hand. We gotta do this right.”

I was confused. But I went ahead and raised my hand. “Why am I raising my hand, Jeff?”

“Repeat after me,” he said. “I, Hank Vasquez Jr...”

Suddenly I understood. “I, Hank Vasquez Jr.”

“Do solemnly swear...”

“Do solemnly swear.”

“That I will support the Constitution of the United States, and the Constitution and laws of the State of California...”

“That I will support the Constitution of the United States, and the Constitution and laws of the State of California.”

“That I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same, and defend them against enemies, foreign and domestic...”

“That I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same, and defend them against enemies, foreign and domestic.”

“And that I will faithfully and impartially discharge, the duties of a peace officer, to the best of my ability...”

“And that I will faithfully and impartially discharge, the duties of a peace officer, to the best of my ability.”

“So help me God...”

I paused for a moment, considered the weight of the oath, it's sequence of words. A bunch of words that would help me get away horrible crimes. Off to the side, I watched Brian and Richard carry the first O'Leary and dump him into the bed of the truck, the thud of his lifeless body slamming against cold metal – a sound I'll never forget. “So help me God,” I said.

“Good. Are you okay, Hank?”

I didn't know how to answer the question. How could I? My ears were still ringing from all the gun fire. I shivered, felt cold. I wanted to go home. Looked down at my pants, saw that I

had pissed myself. What bothered me then – what still bothers me today, besides pissing myself – is that after I killed Calvin O’Leary, I thought I’d feel remorse. Sadness. Depression. Guilt. But I didn’t. And I think that’s what still gets to me to this day. And it scares me. It scares me because after taking Calvin’s life, I thought I’d feel terrible. But I didn’t.

I felt nothing.

“Yeah, Jeff, I’m okay. I am a little hungry though.”

To Be Continued...

From a certain perspective, high above the clouds perhaps, it appears as though I have been writing this thesis, this book, for thirty-one years. But how can that be? I cannot say, with any certainty, if the unfolding of thirty-one years of life was necessary for this book's catalyzation, if the amalgamation of life and experience was the key to manifest this story, to harness it from the metaphysical plane of the imagination to the physical plane in the form of language and paper and ink. I don't know. And yet, this thesis, this book, remains unfinished. As the first half, or even the first third of a novel, this manuscript is well on its way towards attaining cohesion, towards *becoming* the story it was meant to be. In the meantime, however, there is much left to be told. Given the time constraints of the thesis, deadlines and such, I will be turning in the beginning installment of this much longer work. The book, or books, I foresee, should they reach the finish line, can present the final image of the narrative's conveyance.

Over the course of a span of thirty-one years, I have come to believe in certain things, much of which I cannot explain. And some beliefs, I may never understand. Yet, with faith, and a touch of foolishness, I can accept these beliefs. Sitting here today, Sunday, April 11, 2021, the sun is shining, the sky is clear, and I'm three coffee's deep. I scroll through my endless Facebook feed, and I come across a news article that has been making the rounds in the theoretical, particle, quantum and astrophysics communities. The article is controversial. The article is exciting. And the article upends everything we *thought* we knew about life, particle physics and the Standard Model.

So what?

Half a century ago, physicists formed the Standard Model, a theory which aimed to describe *everything* in the universe from the basis of its fundamental particles, like electrons and muons. It's an ambitious task, to describe *everything* in the universe. With ignorance, and a

dash of arrogance, I wonder: is such a task is even possible? Maybe. Who is to say it *is* impossible? I can't. And I won't. But, to summarize the article, and to frame this Poetic Statement, according to top scientists, a set of sub-atomic particles, known as muons, do not behave as scientists thought they ought to behave, according to the theory of the Standard Model. In other words, some "thing" is contributing to the unexpected behavior of muons. And, in more other words, we still don't know how the universe works. Perceived one way, this is an exciting revelation: if the scientific team behind the discovery reaffirms their findings, then we may be on the precipice of discovering a new form of matter that we have not seen before. But, perceived another way, this discovery may be uncomfortable for some. Because while science doesn't lie, narratives do. And for those who have perceived life through the purported rhetorical truths that the Standard Model claimed to uphold, and especially for those scientists and other academics who have published papers to disprove views that stand in contrast to the Standard Model, this revelation is disconcerting, and it shatters many narratives that have been built. When John Steinbeck sat to write *East of Eden*, he journaled his day-to-day experience and chronicled moments of reflection and realization, and in David Wyatt's introduction to the 1992 edition of *East of Eden*, Wyatt quotes from Steinbeck's journal entry: "Disillusion is that emotion we feel when any of our safe patterns are disturbed. It is actually a kind of anger that we have been wrong" (Wyatt xi). New facts can be difficult to accept. So what is true? Who is the arbiter of truth? Can one *claim ownership* of what is perceived to be true? And what is the difference between truth and belief?

These days, I know nothing. But when I was younger, I knew *everything*. In other words, I took comfort in my delusions, in our mutually-shared illusions. I *knew* the *truth*. I was *safe*. I had *security*. I truly believed that I was knowledgeable, that I was much more on top of

things, that I was intellectually adept. Unstoppable. I *knew* things. Fast-forward to today, and perhaps this is a cynical point of view: I'm suspicious of anyone who *knows* things. And I fear rhetoric more than I fear the gun, knife, or bomb.

Ten years ago, I bought an old Smith-Corona typewriter. I was at a house party one night, and one of the folks who lived at the house had a Smith-Corona typewriter from the late 1960s. As a creative way to chronicle the party, and to encourage partygoers to write or type anything they wanted to, the typewriter was strategically placed on the counter in the kitchen, right across the beer pong tables. Many nights were spent at that house, and many beers were drank, many cigarettes, blunts, and joints were smoked, many pills were swallowed, many lines were snorted, and many lines were written – typed – on various pieces of paper. I can recall the thrill of typing nonsense while drunk. And, when sober, I remember how much noise the typewriter made, how writing *sounds* in the process of its formation. (It sounds like work, like metal clanking against metal.) And I remember how difficult it was – given how sensitive modern electronic keyboards are these days – to physically hit the keys. If you gently tapped a letter key, like a modern keyboard, the letter would not appear on the paper – you really needed to hit the key with enough kinetic force in order for the ink to register on the physical page. I used to laugh at old teachers in elementary school, how they'd use only their index fingers to type documents. Years later, I'd laugh at myself for treating an antiquated typewriter like a computer keyboard, and I'd come to realize that my old teachers and I weren't so different after all. In any case, ten years ago, I bought a seafoam green Smith-Corona Corsair Deluxe, and while learning to use the writing instrument, calibrating spaces, indentations, and shift key functions, and realizing how much I take the backspace key in MS Word for granted, I wrote the first draft of this thesis. Only I didn't know it was going to be a thesis; I didn't know those

pieces of ink-ridden paper would serve as the Ur text for this thesis. I did not realize that those loose, beer-stained pages would bring me to the Pacific Northwest and the University of Washington Bothell. I just wanted to write a story. And now, ten years later, here I am, and not much has changed, save for one thing: I *am* writing the story, this book, the one that has laid dormant at the edge of my imagination for as long as I can remember.

To tell you the truth, I happen to believe in magic, and if it weren't for a few serendipitous moments, I'm not sure if I would have ever evolved in this MFA at The University of Washington Bothell, nor do I think I would have written anything at all. The first moment of serendipity came at the age of fourteen. *East of Eden* was part of a summer reading list for school. I didn't read it. I decided to play basketball, football, videogames and flirt instead. So, naturally, I failed the reading test. It would take another fourteen years and two seemingly random conversations about the book with friends in Portland, at the age of twenty-eight, when I would finally fulfill the summer reading requirements of high school and finish reading *East of Eden*. The wait was worth it. Had I read *East of Eden* at fourteen instead of twenty-eight, I don't know if I could have appreciated it as much as I did, or as much as I do now. At fourteen, I had never been cheated on, and I had never cheated; I had never experienced a toxic relationship; my illusions had not yet been shattered, not all of them at least; and the dynamics amongst us humans – the lies we tell each other, the cheating, and the hustling – were things I was ignorant of, things I had not yet experienced. Things I had not yet *felt*. But, by the age of twenty-eight, I had come to experience all of these things, and, thankfully, I was in a place in life where I could look back at these experiences – from a point of detachment, distance, to queue a memory as one queues a film – and finally let go.

In my early twenties, before reading *East of Eden*, the experiences accumulated, and I wasn't ready to deal with them. I wasn't ready to let go of my illusions and delusions, the only things I knew. Like Adam Trask in *East of Eden*, I could not let go of the *idea*. The idea of life, how I preconceived life, compared to how life actually is, how messy it really can be. The disillusion was all-consuming. I was angry, only I didn't know why. And I was lost.

Then came the summer of 2020.

It can be tough to trace the arc of the past, to pinpoint the moments of great change in one's life. But not impossible, especially if one is inclined to journal. And I am lucky enough to have journaled, so in the summer of 2020 when I sat to write this book, I didn't write anything. I reflected. And I read. At first, I re-read two books that we had read during the previous academic year: *The Lover* by Marguerite Duras and *A Sorrow Beyond Dreams* by Peter Handke. And after I read those books, I read from three of my old journals. Journals that – two of them at least – I had not opened in ten years. It was like opening a time capsule. It was embarrassing. Twenty-one-year-old Joe was something else. I opened these journals, and I read the words of a depressed, lost, moody, selfish, foolish, dumb young child, a child that could give Holden Caulfield a run for his money.

By 2020, I had forgotten a lot. I had forgot about the housing crisis and the Great Recession in 2007 and 2008. I did forget about the dread of graduating high school in 2009, graduating into a world with record unemployment levels, two ground wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and ballooning college fees and tuition. I forgot about the suicides of neighbors who had lost their homes and all their life-savings. I forgot how those homes stood empty for many years, and how tall the grass grew on their unmanicured front lawns. It was a time of hopelessness, of empty homes. It was a time of depression, of five-dollar-gallons of gasoline and rising costs of

cigarettes. It was a period where oxycontin pills were gobbled up like gobstoppers and gumdrops. It was a time of prohibition. A time of war. And it was a great time to party. The sociopolitical and economic events between 2007 to 2017, it seems, were fucked up. A good number of historical recessions are; the fifty-year charts of the NASDAQ, Dow and S&P are undeniable: in spite of new all-time-highs in each index, many companies within the indices have still not recovered the losses of those parabolic drops in 2009. And I don't know if I was too fucked up to notice, or if staying fucked up helped numb the pain. And, generationally, I know I'm not alone in this feeling, this experience. (As a generation, we have created pharmaceuticals to aid with opioid induced constipation. There are so many painkillers in circulation in America, we can't even shit naturally anymore; we've been so fucked up on heroin and other opiates.) With the help of old journals, the words – the language – of previous evolutions, subductions and forgotten memories, I started to remember. It all came back like an acid flashback: the pain, those moments. Of love lost. And of loved ones lost along the way.

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It is now Wednesday April 14, 2021. I'm sitting in my apartment, CNBC playing on the television in the background. The sun is shining, the sky is clear, and the spring winds are blowing in full force. I can't help but smile. I never thought I'd make this far. A lot has changed since the pandemic began, creating its own mayhem. Many businesses have closed permanently. Many people have lost their jobs, and many are still unemployed. And as of today, the total reported number killed from COVID worldwide is 2.9 million, though that number may not be accurate.

I hate to admit it, but during the pandemic, I thrived. Though, I had a head start; my personal "covid isolation" started in August of 2019 when I tore my Achilles tendon. The injury

and subsequent surgery and physical therapy locked me in place well before COVID-19 struck. And I consider this a silver lining. Prior to attending UW Bothell, I was living in Humboldt County. And in Humboldt County, I was partying my face off. And I was reckless, took life for granted. I used substances to avoid things that were uncomfortable, things I had refused to acknowledge, things I had been in denial of. There is no doubt in my mind: if the pandemic hadn't occurred, I would have probably dropped out of the MFA degree program and – it's highly probable – I'd probably be dead from some sort of overdose.

It's been a long journey.

Detoxing from a life of partying, readjusting to a life of academia: one of the toughest evolutions thus far. When I look back at the trajectory of my life in 2019 prior to the injury in August of that year, I cannot see how there was any way I could have landed this ship. I would have crashed it.

When the global pandemic hit, I took advantage of it. It's not often that one is afforded the opportunity to reflect in such a manner, especially under such profound circumstances. There was a brief time, last spring, where I thought I was going to die. And a lot of other people – even some in the MFA – felt the same way. I thought I was going to die, alone, far away from my family and friends. It was depressing. It was terrifying. And I had no idea how to handle these emotions. So I did the only thing I could have done: I prepared for my death. And I poured my energy into writing, into art. And after some reflection, a metaphorical lightbulb went off in my head, and I asked myself, *What will you leave behind?*

Full disclosure: I've eaten a lot of psychedelic mushrooms in my life. In 2011, before considering law school, when I was still considering a major in neuroscience and bio psych, I learned that psilocybin, the active compound in psychedelic mushrooms, is a tryptamine, like

serotonin – the neurotransmitter that regulates sleep, mood, and hunger in the brain. I also learned that psilocybin is a serotonin agonist that mimics the effects of a stroke, and it deactivates – temporarily – parts of the brain. After watching a TED Talk from Dr. Jill Bolte Taylor, wherein she describes, moment by moment, what she was experiencing while having a stroke (which sounded a whole lot like a mushroom trip), I put two and two together (Taylor 18:19). A further dive into the science indicates that psilocybin affects the 5-HT_{2A} serotonin receptor in the frontal lobe – with the frontal lobe being in charge of executive decision-making – and this specific receptor mediates the functions of associative memory, repressed memory, anxiety, and depression.

In a sense, while under the influence of psilocybin, one can experience their death. As morbid as it sounds, I’ve experienced my death multiple times. And I’ve enjoyed it. It’s an odd feeling, to experience death. When the psilocybin takes hold, and your psyche enters a state of existential dread, in all honesty: it’s refreshing. Sometimes I wonder what the word “death” really means? And when the brain experiences “death” – either through an actual physical death, or a “mimicked/temporary death” via psilocybin, or, as Dr. Taylor indicates in her TED Talk, the experience of death via the survival of a stroke – why do repressed memories arise from the depths? The anxiety and depression, sure, these make sense; I’d be anxious, probably depressed, if I was dying. But why do *repressed* memories come to the fore? What is it about *death* that forces one to confront that which they have buried?

In March of 2020, the threat of imminent death, coupled with physical immobility and isolation, forced me to sit and think. As I sat and reflected, in isolation, a lot of old memories arose. With all bars and breweries and restaurants closed, it was easy to block out the noise, the distractions, to get in touch with that inner voice. To really ask myself, *What have you been*

doing? What do you want to do? What habits are holding you back? Your relationships – they have been toxic, haven't they? Your perceptions and definitions of love, self-love, self-respect, and self-worth are out of whack, aren't they? You have a fucked-up definition of "ownership," don't you? I felt like Bill Murray in *Groundhog Day*. But much like Bill Murray in *Groundhog Day*, after many moments of dread, and after many "deaths", I evolved, or at least I tried to. Perhaps not physically, but mentally, I *feel* different, even if I can't vocalize or contextualize how or why. After many long nights and endless days, after many moments of dread and isolation, moments of self-analysis, moments of death, I took stock of all the ghosts I had been carrying.

And then I made a decision. I decided to kill these ghosts.

With ink.

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Many readers, scholars, and literary critics have expressed their doubts about the validity of the character of Cathy, or Kate, in *East of Eden*. Upon the book's release, many did not believe that such a character could exist – that someone could be that evil, that they could be that bad. Steinbeck even admits, "You won't believe her, many people don't. I don't know whether I believe her either but I know she exists" (ix). So I can also see why many have accused Steinbeck of misogyny, especially with how Kate is characterized. Along that same spectrum, I can also see – theorizing what Steinbeck's own poetics could have been while writing *Eden*, and considering the fact that this book was written while he was in the middle of a divorce – why Steinbeck had a bone to pick. As David Wyatt describes Steinbeck's marriage to his second wife, Gwyn, "She became a kind of monster in John's mind. This making the verbal connection to Cathy Trask. The marriage fell apart in a way that allowed Steinbeck to project onto Adam

and Cathy a sense that men are passive and women are angry. And the parallels between fiction and experience were drawn by him” (xi). It’s an interesting quote, “the parallels between fiction and experience were drawn by him”. The quote begs the question: what is fiction? And: why do we need fiction? Also: where is the line between fiction and non-fiction?

It has been said, by many, even me at times, that writing and creativity satisfy the inherent need for expression, to exorcise that which we have been holding – to rid ourselves of that which no longer positively contributes to our lifelong evolution. And, metaphorically, it helps us to take a look in the mirror, to identify areas of neglect, to own up to our own irresponsibility and shortcomings. As an undergrad, I had a professor who’d often say, “Never let the truth get in the way of a good story.” In a sense, fiction, I believe, serves as a buffer for protection, and fiction grants the writer space and distance, a necessary detachment in which to analyze and quantify the magnitude of events in one’s life or the lives of others, and then, finally, to let it all go. For as much as I want to admit that much of what I’ve written in this thesis is fiction, it’s not. A lot of what’s described in the thesis really did happen.

In the early drafts of this thesis, the character of Joyce was not named Joyce. Her name in the story was originally Joey. And Joey is a real person. And I guess the wounds are still healing, because every time I read the name, “Joey”, I winced. To be fair to the real Joey, she’s a wonderful, loving human being, and an incredible artist and a proud dog momma. There are no hard feelings, at least on my part; I have nothing but love for Joey. My only regret is that we met each other the way we did, at that specific point and stage in our lives. Like a classic trope, we had met under volatile circumstances, at a bar, through mutual loneliness, mixed with alcohol, and we used each other. In March of 2020, while in isolation, I reflected on my connection with Joey. As I continued to reflect, and as I re-read embarrassing journal entries about other past

relationships in 2012, 2013, and 2015, I noticed a pattern: how I had approached love and friendship and relationships and sex and drugs and alcohol back then in 2012 had not changed. So when I met Joey in 2017, it was no surprise that things didn't work out. When I realized this, I got angry. And I got depressed. I played the should-coulda-woulda game, got stuck at the bargaining stage of the five stages of grief. I tried to blame everyone else. But all I could do was blame myself, my own immaturity, my own delusions. After a while, I started to laugh at myself. I realized, to put it bluntly, that I couldn't act like an asshole and expect good things to happen. I laughed at how dumb I was at twenty-two, twenty-three, twenty-five and twenty-seven. I laughed at how much I clung to a life that would never manifest, a life based on flawed ideas and lies and terrible attitudes. I laughed, and it felt *good* – it felt good to let go. And I laughed at how much I had in common with a fictional character named Adam Trask. For some reason, that made me feel better – to know that somewhere out there, whether in books or in real life, were other fools just like Adam Trask and me.

In chapters twenty-five and twenty-six of *East of Eden*, Adam Trask experiences a moment of catharsis when he confronts his ex-wife, Cathy, at her brothel. As readers, leading up to and within these two chapters, we're presented with certain images of Adam and Cathy, each caught in their scripts: Adam Trask – the docile man, a fool who had clung to an idea of a life that did not exist; Cathy Trask – evil personified, someone who seeks to subvert societal expectations and control the world through sex. Both chapters describe their encounter – the first encounter since Cathy had shot Adam and ran off to Salinas. They exchange insults. They exchange truths. They admit their faults, their deceitfulness, to each other and to themselves. As their meeting ends, and as both of their illusions shatter, a turning point in the novel occurs:

He [Adam] turned slowly. He smiled at her as a man might smile at a memory. Then he went out and closed the door gently behind him. Kate sat staring at the door. Her eyes were desolate. He was glad to be going home. He wanted to see how the twins had grown in the two days he had been gone – he wanted to see the twins. ‘I’m free, she’s gone,’ he chanted aloud. (Steinbeck 326-330)

As a general rule, it’s important, as readers, that we don’t assume that the narrator is the author. But in this case, with *East of Eden* serving as an autobiography and biography of the Hamilton and Steinbeck families, the narrator is closely related the author; Adam Trask’s story is inseparable from Steinbeck’s story, and it’s difficult not to imagine that this “I’m free” moment Adam Trask experiences is not something that Steinbeck felt as well. As a reader, I projected my experiences onto the text, especially these two chapters. These chapters just felt so *familiar*. It was refreshing to realize that I wasn’t alone, to realize that letting go of ghosts and past haunts is possible. And I think that’s part of the power of fiction. Fiction doesn’t always heal, but it can. Fiction has much more in common with non-fiction than we think. Those commonalities present themselves in familiar archetypes and tropes, through their words, through language that unites us, the language we all share.

...

On a day like today, with the sun shining and the birds singing, it seems silly to sit and write about grief. But, today, Friday, April 16, 2021, I scroll through the Twitter feed on my phone, and I see that America has experienced another mass shooting, this time at a FedEx facility in Indianapolis. The shooter has been identified as a nineteen-year-old Brandon Scott Hole. The news media – along with the definition of an “adult”, according to the laws that govern the United States and the rest of the world – would define Brandon Hole as a “man”, but at

nineteen-years-old, he was not a man – he was a boy. When this shooting occurred late yesterday, it coincided with the release of heartbreaking bodycam footage from the Chicago Police Department. The footage showed the moment where thirty-four-year-old Officer Eric Stillman shot and killed a boy, thirteen-year-old Adam Toledo. I watched the video. I don't know why. But I did. And, cynically, it makes me wonder if things will change? Is police reform possible? Is America's relationship to guns a toxic relationship? The grief is immense. Why do we keep killing our children? Why do so many children have weapons? What kind of country have we formed? When I think about it all, whatever "it" is, I can think of a few questions that unite all the terrible feelings about these shootings: What the hell is going on? Why? And when will this end?

Maybe I'm blowing hot air, talking to a brick wall. When I look at a list of the five stages of grief, I'm trying to figure out what stage I'm in – what stage we, Americans, are in. A gaze upon the rhetoric of those on social media platforms about these two shootings seems to indicate that we Americans are well-represented throughout all five stages, and the immensity of our collective grief is not unique. It's *repetitive*. It's *familiar*. It's *shared*. It's as if this story has been told before – in Columbine and Sandy Hook. To tell you the truth: I don't know how I feel right now. Grief is complex, difficult.

Sitting here, reflecting on grief, I think of Peter Handke's *A Sorrow Beyond Dreams*, and I think about how difficult it must have been for him to sit and write about the death of his mother. With a title like *A Sorrow Beyond Dreams*, I have to imagine that the sorrow he felt was also beyond words. In August of 2019, one month before I started the MFA degree program, a friend of mine passed away while on a solo hiking trip. I can still remember the day the news came through the wire. It was a Sunday, and I was six days post-op from my Achilles surgery. I

was scrolling through my Facebook feed, and an article was posted with his picture and the headline, “Missing Blue Lake Man Found Dead In Trinity Alps.” It was news that I was not expecting. Reading the news on Facebook, for some reason, made it much worse. That’s when the first stage of grief – denial – hit me like a train, and I thought, *No way. This can’t be. He’s too good of a hiker for this to have happened. This must be some joke. He’s made that hike dozens of times.* Afterwards, I didn’t get angry, nor did I bargain. I went straight to stage four: depression. I had just seen him days before. The whole situation didn’t feel real. The grief came in waves, and I didn’t realize how sad I was until later.

The first quarter of the MFA program, I thought about my friend, Dan, and I thought about how much of an impact Dan had on the community of Blue Lake and Humboldt as a paramedic and volunteer firefighter. I thought about all the people who would miss him. So I decided to write about these thoughts and feelings. As I wrote, besides not having a clear picture of what to write about, I came across a conflict: I did not want to misrepresent him; I wanted to honor him. He wasn’t some literary character – he was *real*. To this day, and in this thesis, it is something that I struggle with. How *do* you write about someone without turning them into a character? I struggled with this question all throughout that fall quarter in 2019. And then came Peter Handke.

In the introduction to the 2012 edition of *A Sorrow Beyond Dreams*, Jeffery Eugenides notes, “The most striking thing about the book is Handke’s disciplined detachment from his subject, a mode of inquiry that offers nothing remedial or heartwarming in the way of a typical account of a parent loved or lost” (vii). Eugenides goes on to say:

Despite this self-exhortation, speechlessness constantly threatens Handke’s written account. He is suspicious of employing the usual narrative procedures.

He refrains from describing his mother in such detail and from presenting his feelings about her. Doing so will make him feel as if he's 'writing a story,' and this will turn his mother into a 'character,' which will betray her. To avoid that, he decides to write sentences that will be applicable not only to his mother but to 'the biography of a woman with my mother's particular life'...It's unclear how sincere Handke is about this kind of analysis. He makes repeated attempts to theorize his mother's life, to put it into sociopolitical context, but this might be merely another exhausted strategy. (viii-ix)

Throughout the book, Handke utilizes a multitude of abstractions to describe his mother. He goes into great detail about his grandparents and his family history. And at times, he "breaks the fourth wall," and *talks* to the reader. About writing. And form. At one point he says, "And the more fiction we put into a narrative, the more likely it is to interest others, because people identify more readily with formulations than recorded facts" (Handke 16). As the book unfolds, and as a reader, I found it difficult to determine what was fiction and what wasn't fiction. The words were so *real*. Handke writes:

Consequently, I first took the facts as my starting point and looked for ways of formulating them. But I soon noticed that in looking for formulations I was moving away from the facts. I then adopted a new approach – starting not with the facts but with the already available formulations, the linguistic deposit of man's social experience. From my mother's life, I sifted out the elements that were already foreseen in these formulas, for only with the help of ready-made public language was it possible to single out from among the irrelevant facts of this life the few that cried out to be made public. (29)

Reading *A Sorrow Beyond Dreams* in January of 2020, with these passages in particular, it was perfect timing, to read a book about Handke, his grief and his mother's death, all while I grieved the death of a friend. I decided not to write about Dan, another time perhaps. But I took note of Handke's use of ready-made public language, and the language helped frame a few important aspects of this thesis, namely how I would "create" characters, how the biography – the *language* – of people would form these characters.

Working in the alcohol industry and part-time in the illegal marijuana industry, I've met a lot of people from many different walks of life. And the many bars, from Seattle to Los Angeles, have also put me in touch with many different people throughout the years. Coming from a large family of medical professionals, first responders, law enforcement officers, and other federal employees, electricians, contractors, accountants, engineers, card dealers, computer programmers and whatnot, I've also been acquainted with a wide-range of folks. I've heard their stories, stories about their lives, their jobs. And they're all mostly drinkers. Or maybe I'm a drinker, and my habits tend to put me in touch with other drinkers or retired drinkers – I still haven't figured it out yet. In any case, most of these people I've met do drink, some more than others, and whether they drink a lot or a little, when they get drunk, and when I get drunk, we share stories – and while some of those stories are filled with embellishment, they do contain truths, at least purported truths. And within these embellishments and purported truths, within the collective language of *us* – within our "linguistic deposits" – there is writing material, straight from the source.

In this thesis, the characters are more like ready-mades rather than real people. They're tropes. And tropes are necessary for this type of mystery narrative. And that's where form, trajectory, archetypes, reoccurring themes and rhythm of rhetoric and characterization occur. A

few years ago I bought this poster of archetypes from The Museum of Pop Culture. The poster depicts twenty illustrations of different reoccurring characters and archetypes and stories in the genre of fantasy or fantasy fiction. This poster, introduced to me by a good friend from Humboldt State, helped shaped this story more than I could have imagined. Whenever I got lost in the writing, stuck at some point, I went back to this poster. It helped me get back on track, helped me to stick to the basics, to the existing ready-mades already in circulation.

The narrator, Hank, is based on some of my own life, but also the life of an old friend from high school, named Mario, whose father worked law enforcement for over thirty years. I took aspects from stories he and his father had shared with me, and coupled with stories from my family members in law enforcement – combined with my own experiences with drugs and cops and guns and crime and booze and all the crazy things you see on the job – I “created” Hank. He *seems* real, but he’s the furthest thing from real. He’s a formulation, a chimera, like the central metaphor of this thesis, this book. And much of Hank’s persona can be found within the archetypes concerning the forms and psychology of rebirth. Carl Jung, in his book, *Four Archetypes*, notes that there are five aspects to rebirth (47), and three aspects in particular are embodied by Hank: metempsychosis, reincarnation, and participation in the process of transformation.

Jung describes metempsychosis as “the transmigration of souls [where] one’s life is prolonged in time by passing through different bodily existences; or, from another point of view, it is a life-sequence interrupted by different reincarnations – it is by no means certain whether continuity of personality is guaranteed or not: there may only be a continuity of karma” (47).

Regarding reincarnation, Jung writes:

This concept of rebirth necessarily implies the continuity of personality. Here the human personality is regarded as continuous and accessible to memory, so that, when one is incarnated or born, one is able, at least potentially, to remember that one has lived through previous existences and that these existences were one's own, i.e., that they had the same ego-form as the present life. As a rule, reincarnation means re-birth in a human body. (47)

While forming characters, I attempted to link the present moment in which the story takes place (the year 2027) with the histories of people and places from the not-too-distant past. There is a feeling, an atmosphere of timelessness, that I tried to cultivate within the thesis. A feeling of having lived through certain times, like prohibition of marijuana. And I wanted to demonstrate a different way to perceive time, to emphasize how recent slavery actually was in our history, and how influential the attitudes of industry and the peak-age of brothels were in the United States. Blue Lake and Ballard – two different logging towns/cities formed in the middle of coniferous ecosystems in the 1870s – have much in common, in spite of how different they look today. And many of the other logging towns of the east coast and west coast share similar inceptions and characteristics: settlements that were necessitated by industry and the need for social capital. I also wanted to emphasize the role of family history, genetics, and how genes are passed and inherited through the bloodlines that we share with our families. In Hank's case, the bloodlines he shares with his father – a cop; his mother – a hippie; and his uncle – a criminal, a hybrid of both cop and hippie. The idea of chimera apples as a metaphor for genetic inheritance and genetic instability came from a Facebook group called The Lost Apple Project. Members of this nonprofit organization, some of whom have access to the Washington Territory's maps of homestead plots from the mid-nineteenth century, travel to the site of old settlements and search

for the original homesteading apples (some thought to be extinct) that settlers planted during their migrations from east to west. One day, while scrolling through Facebook, a member posted a picture of a chimera apple from Garfield, Washington, and they described the phenomenon that manifested this half-green and half-red apple – how fruit trees try to revert back to their original type because of genetic instability. The science behind the apple was so intriguing, I just had to include it in this thesis. And that is how Hank was formed.

Purposefully, I wanted to blur the lines of Hank – and I wanted Hank to be conflicted. I wanted Hank to observe, along with the reader, which behaviors Hank had inherited from his parents and his uncle. And his ancestors. There are two scenes where these observations take place. The first scene in question occurs in chapter nine when Hank reads the Confucius quote and wonders when he started living his life. I view this chapter as Hank's metempsychosis and his reincarnation, at least his own observation of his metempsychosis and reincarnation. This observation does not depict his "physical" death, like the death of his body, but it does represent a death of ego, a death of personal narrative. And it's one of the first moments after chapter five where we start to see the similarities between him and his uncle. Along with the "continuity of karma" from metempsychosis, as well as the "continuity of personality with access to memory" from reincarnation, we can see just how much of his uncle's persona was inherited. And these trends continue all throughout the story.

The second scene in question, where we observe Hank "revert back to [his] original type," is the last scene in the final chapter where Hank commits murder (or self-defense, depending on how one perceives the killings of the O'Leary brothers). The final chapter embodies Jung's definition of the fifth aspect of rebirth, or the participation in the process of transformation and experiences induced by ritual. Jung writes:

The fifth and last form is indirect rebirth. Here transformation is brought about not directly, by passing through death and re-birth oneself, but indirectly, by participating in a process of transformation which is conceived of as taking place outside the individual. In other words, one has to witness, or take part in, some rite of transformation...The initiate may either be a mere witness of the divine drama or take part in it or be moved by it, or he may see himself identified through the ritual action with the god. In this case, what really matters is that an objective substance or form of life is ritually transformed through some process going on independently, while the initiate is influenced, impressed, 'consecrated,' or granted 'divine grace' on the mere ground of his presence or participation. The transformation process takes place not within him but outside him, although he may become involved in it. (48-51)

Aside from the cocaine initiations with Joyce in chapter eleven and the grow house scene in chapter twenty-five, the final chapter of this thesis shows us Hank's ultimate transformation. In one paragraph, Hank talks about not having the heart to "kill the little piggy," and just a few pages later, we see Hank "point the gun at [Calvin's] face and fire three more shots." It's big leap. And the leap takes place (besides the actual killing) when Jeff – whose corruption is also depicted in this chapter – trains Hank to shoot a Glock with a proper thumbs-forward grip. And the transformation is finalized when Hank is deputized and takes an oath to the Constitution, becoming a cop himself, just like his father. The third paragraph on page 193 demonstrates the rituals he engages in and the transformation:

I had an out-of-body experience. The drone of a single-engine plane hummed overhead. The smell of cordite and Richard's burning blunt lingered in the air.

Crows cawed in the distance. It was as if I was a stranger observing from above, and I could watch myself pull the trigger. Then the gun went pop-pop-pop-pop, and I fell back to earth, standing behind the trigger of a gun that had just vaporized four bottles.

While much of Hank's story is derived from personal experience and the experiences of others, Hank is one hundred percent literary and fictitious. A trope. A drunk. A profile built with words. He was formed, day-to-day during the writing process, with the help of lots of coffee and a lifetime of watching movies, reading books, and listening to stories. And in addition to Hank, some of the other tropes in this thesis are easily identifiable: the everyman and unreliable narrator; the cop-hippie dichotomy, and the good cop-bad cop archetype; the fool; the unlikely hero; the sidekick; the rogue; the warbringer; the wise wizard; the witch; the muse; the maiden warrior. With a story like this, a mystery narrative that's part biography, part autobiography, part historical fiction and such, there is a delicate balance of how much truth – how much of you, others, and the probable rhetoric of people who have been in such situations – you'd want to disclose, if any at all.

Part of the conflict while writing this thesis was how much truth I want to inject, and how much falsity I needed to counterbalance those injections. The character of Tío Rodrigo is based on a good friend of mine named Gannon Rogers. Gannon passed away in 2018 at the age of fifty, almost a year-to-the-day that Dan passed. I can still remember the day I heard the news. Unexpected. As painful as Dan's passing. And I still remember the day Gannon told me to go to school, about a month before he passed. I wasn't sure if I wanted to apply for more school after already getting my undergraduate degree at Humboldt State University. And I can still remember that moment he said, "Go to school. Follow your muse." I followed the advice. I still

carry that moment, that conversation, close to my heart. That moment is long-passed. But it still exist. In memory.

What occurred to me while writing this thesis is how *timeless* language can be. It's as if language, whether the language of others or the language of one's own experience, has the tendency to unite all times. (More of this "uniting of all times" later.) Jung writes:

Rebirth is not a process that we can in any way observe. We can neither measure nor weigh nor photograph it. It is entirely beyond sense perception. We have to do here with a purely *psychic* reality, which is transmitted to us only indirectly through personal statements. One speaks of rebirth; one professes rebirth; one is filled with rebirth. This we accept as sufficiently real. (50)

As far as formulations, words, and language are concerned, it's important to note that while both Handke and Jung depend on formulations, they are still both in different intellectual camps. Handke frames his writing through a Marxist lens, while Jung emphasizes gestalt formations that pre-exist history and economic conditions. My concentration is on the *language*: the body-based, physical manipulation of the larynx to convey meaning. And feeling. And I contend that the *feeling* of grief in 1972, when *A Sorrow Beyond Dreams* was published, feels as grievous as it does in 2021. The word "grief" has not changed much since it showed up in the English language around the early thirteenth century. And when one says or thinks of the word "grief," the connotations and denotations of the word, I assume, are understood. When Ocean Vuong in his novel, *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*, describes an encounter that the narrator's mother had with a nail salon client, wherein she attempts to empathize with a grieving client and says, "My mom, too, she die from the cancer," Vuong attempts to depict this inherent understanding, this shared sense of grief (11). And when I say, "I am sad" in English, and when I say, "Estoy

triste” in Spanish, I’m saying the same thing. It’s all vocal utterances. Sounds, pitches, intonations that convey shared images and ideas. As Jung states, “The mere fact that people talk about rebirth, and that there is such a concept at all, means that a store of psychic experiences designated by that term must actually exist. What these experiences are like we can only infer from the statements that have been made about them” (50).

Perhaps that’s why we turn to fiction, at least one of the reasons that we indulge in fiction: to consult the statements, the language. And, in this thesis specifically, to cope with grief. And grief – in my view – transcends language, and, intuitively, without words, grief unites the human collective. With fiction, we can share stories; we can empathize and eliminate difference and otherness, and we can dissolve preconception and illusion. We can work through our grief. We can exorcise, let go. And remind ourselves that we are not alone. And it’s this grief – our language – that has helped shape this thesis. Because when I sat to write this thesis, in the throes of grief, mourning the loss of a friend, I took a deep dive back in time, dug into old journals and manuscripts and ancient thoughts, and I started the reflective exorcism that would later become my thesis. I accepted death and rebirth once again, in the middle of a global pandemic, during one of the most interesting and disruptive years on record, and I got to work, looking for words.

...

It’s Friday, April 23, 2021. I’m sitting in an Airbnb in Sedro-Wooley. Yesterday, I was at the tulip festival, hypnotized by the colors, at the persistence of life. I also visited the Temperate Habits Brewing Company, the eighth brewery visited on this trip. By the time I leave Sedro-Wooley and head back to Seattle, I’ll have visited eleven of the thirteen Skagit Valley breweries, plus four more in Bellingham. All of these visits to these breweries, I’m reminded of a certain

time, not too far in the past. It was October of 2017; I had been laid off from my job, and I was contemplating my next move in life. I came to Seattle to visit a friend, and I also came up to see if this whole “going back to school” decision was the right decision. And as I thought about my decision, I visited many breweries, just like I have done on this current trip to the Skagit Valley. One brewery from 2017 stands out from the rest of the bunch: Naked City Brewery on Greedwood Ave. The brewery is closed now, gone forever. It’s a shame. They had great beer. I can still remember their red ale. I can still *taste* that red ale. But, now, it’s just a memory. A memory of a moment, of a few moments, that are long gone. Memories – what are they? Do they exist? What do they look like? I remember the fragrance of nearby strawberry patches on hot July days in the Salinas Valley as a child. I remember the hot sand beneath my feet, that one sunny day in June at Carmel Beach, many years ago. I remember the roar of the ocean and the slimy seaweed in my fingers when I threw some at my brother, then ran away for dear life.

Memories: are they accurate? And in what context? How does one measure the accuracy of a memory? Does it matter? In my experience, I have found there to be a connection between memory and image, like an album of photos buried somewhere in the frontal lobe of the brain. When I write, I have relied on my memories for inspiration, formulation. And there have been times, many in this thesis, when I have grafted memories onto other memories, recycled tropes, studied archetypes, all in order to build a literary world for a narrative to occur, crafting characters out of thin air. And with the linguistic deposits of our collective experience, our public language, these characters *seem* real. As do the situations these characters find themselves in. But they’re not real – they’re fake, parts of them at least. And it begs the question: when memories make the literary transition, from image to text, and from text to orality, regarding the one who remembers – can they *claim ownership* of those memories? Or

are those memories now a part of the collective? Is it even possible to *own* a memory? Are those memories *real*? Are they *true*? Are they *reality*? Whose *reality*? And to those who are remembered, are these memories not theirs as well?

I am reminded of Susan Sontag's *Regarding the Pain of Others*. In the book Sontag says, "Photographs objectify: they turn an event or a person into something that can be possessed. And photographs are a species of alchemy, for all that they are prized as a transparent account of reality. Often something looks, or is felt to look, 'better' in a photograph. Indeed, it is one of the functions of photography to improve the natural appearance of things" (81). With this in mind, there is a case that can be made: memories aren't photographs. But, to take a contrarian view, I'd contend that memories and photographs are the same – meaning that photographs present us with one still frame of a moment, and in the mind, when synapses fire off and memories arise from the depths, the still frame plays out, like a video on auto-play from a social media feed. But I really don't know how the memories of other people work. I don't know whether other people think in images, with sounds and sights and smells, videos on auto-play or whatnot. I can only speak on behalf of my own thoughts and memories. In my mind, in my brain, my memories take the form of images.

Last year, while formulating ideas of what to write, I had to consult my memories. I knew that if I wanted to write about Humboldt – a region 600 miles south of Seattle – and I knew if I wanted to write about California and events that occurred from 2007 to 2017, if I wanted to resurrect those moods and atmospheres, during the middle of a global pandemic when travel was discouraged and nearly impossible, I had no choice but to flip through the old photo album in my mind. To consult the *image*. To *remember*. And, specifically, that is where Marguerite Duras came to mind, and her autobiographical novel, *The Lover*.

I'm not sure what it is about *The Lover*, why I enjoyed the book so much. Maybe I like it because I took comfort in the words, took comfort in the fact that there were and are other people like me, people who think in images – people who can still *see* those images long after the moments of those images have passed, whether the images even existed. Duras writes, “I often think of the image only I can see now, and of which I've never spoken. It's always there, in the same silence, amazing. It's the only image of myself I like, the only one in which I recognize myself, in which I delight” (3-4). As the narrative unfolds in disjunctive fragments that serve as a refrain throughout the book, she describes the image: “So, I'm fifteen and a half. It's on a ferry crossing the Mekong River. The image lasts all the way across. I'm fifteen and a half, there are no seasons in that part of the world, we have just one season, hot, monotonous, we're in the long hot girdle of the earth, with no spring, no renewal” (5). You can almost *feel* the humidity of this image, this memory, the thin layer of perspiration on the skin, the *heat* of a region with no seasons except hot, monotonous. And with this intuitive sense of heat and humidity, you can almost see the rusted steel of the ferry, its chipped paint, and the lights of Cambodia, Vietnam, and Thailand – the sights, the sounds, the smells. As Peter Handke writes, “In general, these memories are inhabited more by things than by people: a dancing top in a deserted street amid ruins, oat flakes in a sugar spoon, gray mucus in a tin spittoon with a Russian trademark” (22). From these selected passages, it seems as though memory and image are inseparable. And it would also appear as though memory and things and images retain their sensory perceptions.

It has been said that taste and smell and memory are linked in the brain. In literature, film and television, this relationship is explored in great detail. There is an episode of *Breaking Bad* where Gustavo Fring and Walter White share dinner and discuss the role of taste, smell, and memory, how old family recipes and certain combinations of spices can remind one of their

parents, grandparents, or other loved ones. And I can recall a scene in Mario Puzo's novel *The Godfather*, where Signora Corleone is frying bell peppers with olive oil in cast iron, and how Sonny Corleone breaks the news of the assassination attempt on the Don; Signora Corleone leaves the kitchen to grab her coat and Sonny takes a piece of French bread and dips the bread in the cast iron, scooping up pieces of bell pepper, the hot oil dripping down his fingers. It's funny: these scenes aren't real – they never occurred outside of the fictitious stories in which they are depicted, yet I can still *taste* them, and I can still *remember* them. And in this thesis, this book, the role of memory and sensory perception play a big role. In terms of themes and the form and style they take, I wanted to geolocate the reader, to give the reader a chance to *remember* the excesses of the Great Recession and marijuana prohibition, to transport the reader across time and space to Humboldt, so I relied on smell and taste. Both are so *memorable*. I can still taste the beer at the Mad River Brewery in Blue Lake, and I can still smell burnt oak and I can see the rising smoke from chimneys in Blue Lake during autumn and winter. In the late summer, with the humidity of August, the fruity, piney odors of blooming marijuana plants are hypnotic, timeless. I can still remember Joey's dog, Lola, how soft and fluffy her coat was. And I remember a hot day in July of 2019 when my friend and I placed second in a bocce ball contest in town. Physically, I have left Humboldt. But my senses have kept Humboldt's memory alive. But these memories, images, things, sights, sounds, and smells – these things aren't Humboldt. They're fragments of an image of Humboldt that doesn't exist.

As Sontag says, photographs objectify and improve the natural appearance of things, and the images of Humboldt in this thesis give the reader an image of Humboldt that is fabricated. Referring back to *The Lover*, as the narrative oscillates between the recollected image on the Mekong and the meditation of the Mekong image in the present moment, Duras write:

I think it was during this journey that the image became detached, removed from all the rest. It might have existed, a photograph might have been taken, just like any other, somewhere else, in other circumstances. But it wasn't. The subject was too slight. Who would have thought such a thing? The photograph could have been taken if someone could have known in advance how important it was to be in my life, that event, that crossing of the river. But while it was happening, no one even knew of its existence. Except God. And that's why – it couldn't have been otherwise – the image doesn't exist. It was omitted. Forgotten. It never was detached or removed from all the rest. And it's to this, this failure to have been created, that the image owes its virtue: the virtue of representing, of being the creator of, an absolute. (10)

What occurred to me while writing, while reflecting, while exorcising, was that the act of remembering and the act of forgetting go hand-in-hand. It was both painful and cathartic to revisit moments in time – both painful moments and moments of joy – to observe them, with detachment, with a 30,000-foot view above the clouds. To see yourself as one would see another. To forgive oneself. To forgive others. To *love*. To quantify the importance of a past event, or to realize how unimportant an event was. To own up to those feelings and emotions in that moment, those moments. And then to let it all go. To move forward. Because while memories still exist in the mind, the moments of these memories are long-gone. And in March of 2020, I realized it was time to raise the anchor, to leave the past behind, to kill the ghosts I've carried once and for all. To forget.

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Saturday, April 24, 2021 - An Airbnb in Sedro-Wooley. The rains have come back to the Skagit Valley. After two gorgeous, sunny weeks of sunshine and near-record high temperatures, gray skies have returned, and with it, a certain somberness. The other day in Bellingham, I got a chance to reconnect with an old friend named Max. He and I met in Chico in late 2009, and I hadn't seen Max since 2013. The last time I saw him, we were right in the middle of a heavy drug scene with tons of hippies and other junkies - some of my best friends. It was great to see Max after all these years. I had lost touch with many of my Chico friends after I was accepted to Humboldt State for my undergraduate education.

Max and I met up at Cornwall Park in Bellingham; we played a round of disc golf, and we talked about what the hell we'd been doing for the last eight years. He caught me up to speed on the old friends, how many of them are now married or are getting married - such a far cry from the "free-love-I'm-gonna-fuck-who-ever-I-want" spirit that we all embodied in the not-too-distant past; some friends are now parents too.

It's amazing to think how far we've come. It's incredible to see how many of us have evolved, moved past a certain saga, a special place in time - a fun one, but a destructive one too. Because unfortunately, not all of us made it. In early 2012, I had a feeling that I was on a dark path. My substance abuse was getting the best of me. I was lying, justifying shady behavior, selling stuff to buy more pot or ecstasy or other pills. And Chico was my marketplace. And in 2012, while getting ready to choose which school to attend for undergrad, I enrolled at Chico State. But, at the last minute, I had a change of heart. The redwoods of northern California and Humboldt State called me. The pull, the call, was too strong to resist. I can't explain it. But I feel lucky to have answered that call.

Around early 2013 was the last time I was in to Chico, the last time I saw Max. At that time, the drug use and substance abuse was out of control, especially in our friend group. Our friend, Mario, (the inspiration behind Hank) dropped out, too many drugs. And in 2015, another one of our friends, Alex, overdosed. Max told me the cops found his body out in the middle of the street. And when his funeral came, only two friends showed up; his death was so sudden - no one knew about it until it was too late. And after Alex passed, Max told me he knew he had to get the hell out of Chico, before the drugs took control, so he made his exodus, checked into rehab, decided getting fucked up all the time was stupid, and got clean. And that path brought him to Bellingham. He's getting ready to propose to his girlfriend. I'm very happy things have worked out for the two of them. In a way, Max and I have mirrored lives – they *look* the same, but they are different. And, metaphorically, it's nice to look in the mirror and see things are working out. We've come a long way.

To tell you the truth, I've forgotten a lot about those Chico years. Those years of incomprehensible drug abuse. I had forgotten how depressing it was - how depressed everyone else was, and how we lied about our depression, masked the pain with drugs and altered states of mind. Yesterday's reunion with Max was such a down-to-earth moment, a moment of realization after many moments of forgetfulness. It's amazing how forgetfulness can resurrect ancient memories. Without forgetfulness, I don't think I could have written this thesis, this book. Without forgetfulness, I don't know if I could have remembered.

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What put both *The Lover* and *A Sorrow Beyond Dreams* into context was an essay entitled "In Defense of Forgetfulness" by X.I. Selene. In the words of Selene:

Forgetfulness was the master key to time. Without a clear idea of who we had been and what we had done, we appropriated eternity for our invisible biographies...Only the possibility of forgetting transmutes something undergone into something experienced. For those of us old enough to remember, a perfect memory is the death of experience. (63-64)

Certain idioms came to mind while reading Selene, Duras, and Handke, three in particular. The first one: "Can't see the forest for the trees." The second one: "In the weeds." And third: "In the thick of it." To me, they all mean the same thing: struggle. It's a struggle when you're in the thick of it, in the weeds, and you can't see the forest for the trees. (Imagine trying to translate that sentence in an ESL class.) And when I re-read old journals and manuscripts while formulating this thesis, it occurred to me just how myopic I was from 2007-2017, how much I had forgotten, how much of a struggle that time was. To put things into perspective, in 2008, at the age of eighteen, in my mind, my only options in life were enlistment or enlistment. I almost didn't attend undergrad, almost gave up school altogether. My brain was half-melted by drugs and delusions. My oldest brother had already been enlisted, and my middle brother was on his way towards enlistment, so it seemed natural that I'd follow in the steps of not only my brothers, but many of the other Millennials who found themselves in similar situations during that time in history.

It is easy now to look back at that time, to see myself, to see others, to see what our collective mindsets were. How stoned we were. When I graduated high school at the tail-end of the market crash in 2009, I thought it was the end of the world, and I wasn't the only one who was thinking that way. And it's no wonder why so many other Millennials and I thought fighting a ground war in the Middle East was our only option. We couldn't see the forest for the trees.

Though that time has passed, I don't want to minimize how staggering that time was: I lost a lot of friends in those wars. A lot of people did. And the ones who came back, well, they still haven't come back, and, mentally, I'm not sure they will. The drugs haven't helped. And the mind, especially at the age of eighteen, is impressionable, and some images can never go away, will never be forgotten.

But I did *forget*. I have already forgotten about the beginnings of those wars nearly twenty years ago. I forgot about the struggle, the economic hardship of that time. The worry in the voice of my parents, how they wondered if they could put food on the table. I forgot about past relationships, drug use. I forgot about Santa Cruz, Chico, Arcata, and Blue Lake. Even while writing this thesis – this narrative of revisionist history – I have forgotten. My memories, they're faded. Dependent on old journals and familiar smells and tastes. And my memories, like photographs, are suspect, with a propensity for embellishment and beautification. And as these memories manifested from brain to text, a betrayal occurred. I betrayed those who I remembered, my friends and those in my family. I turned my life and the life of others into a story, a story that doesn't exist. An object. A thing. Fiction. In the words of Duras:

For memories too it's too late. Now I don't love [my mother and my brothers] any more. I don't remember if I ever did. I've left them. In my head I no longer have the scent of her skin, nor in my eyes the color of her eyes. I can't remember her voice, except sometimes when it grew soft with the weariness of the evening. Her laughter I can't hear anymore – neither her laughter or her cries. It's over, I don't remember. That's why I can write about her so easily now, so long, so fully. She's become just something you write without difficulty, cursive writing.

(28-29)

Some words are true. And some words are lies. But, to me, I think they're all pretty cool. When harnessed for good, words can do a lot of great things. They can tell stories. They can share. They're inclusive. Participatory. And they can bridge gaps. They heal. They communicate. They *love*. But they can also destroy. And when I think of how destructive words can be, how powerful they are, and how much consequence – intended and unintended – words can carry, I think of the pandemic. And this past year. These past two years. The last three presidencies. All the years. And I think of January 6, 2021 in Washington D.C. How words got people to go nuts and commit sedition and insurrection. And I think of April 9, 1938, when Adolf Hitler gave his speech on the justification of Austria's annexation. So I think about how susceptible one can be to the persuasive abilities of words. How deadly words are, what they can justify. Our laws are written with words, our ideas. The constitutional laws, of this country and of others, are written with words. The nine seats of the Supreme Court of the United States must consider the *definitions* of words when ruling on cases of great importance, and of great consequence. Because what does *ownership* mean? What is the definition of *property*? What is the definition of *probable cause* and *proper use of force*? What is *manslaughter*? What is *murder*? What is the definition of *marriage*? What is the definition of a *scheduled drug*? A *legal grow*? *Surface* rights? *Mineral* rights? Qualified *Immunity*? The Earned-Income-Tax-*Credit*? A tax *passthrough*? We must not be careless with our rhetoric. There's too much at stake. We must be careful with our words.

So, what is true? Who is the arbiter of truth? The government? The private sector? The people? Writers? Poets? Artists? Can one *claim ownership* of truth? What is perceived to be true? And what is the difference between truth and belief? Where is the line between fiction and non-fiction, true or untrue? How can you tell? How do you know?

...

I could go on and on with this statement. But at a certain point, and that point is now, I need to wrap it up. When it is all said and done, for this thesis, this book, there have been many inspirations. In fact, there are thirty-one years worth of books read, films watched, videogames played, and thirty-one years of reflection. Well, maybe not thirty-one years of reflection. I can't remember if I did any reflecting at twenty-four months old. What occurs to me – what amazes me – is how I can write so much crap and still not know a damn thing. I look at my brain, what it has accumulated over the years, and I think, *Damn, kid, maybe it's time to free up some space on the hard drive. Or maybe get an external hard drive and write some of this shit down.* There were many inspirations behind this book. Like Christina Alger's *The Darlings* and the suspenseful hook at the beginning of the novel. For the prologue in this thesis, I followed Alger's example with a captivating hook – a death and a mystery. Another inspiration from Brian Evenson's *Father of Lies* played a key role when drafting this thesis, specifically the clinical, back-and-forth, tense-shifting parts of his novel, and how they inspired the press releases for the thesis. And how the present tense narration from a murderer and rapist in *Father of Lies* – a pastor of the Mormon Church – sent chills up the spine and helped form the basis of Hank's hidden murderous past.

There was also inspiration from Kazuo Ishiguro's *An Artist of the Floating World* and Tom Robbins' *Another Roadside Attraction* – how the present perfect tenses in those stories made this thesis – this type of orally-inspired form of storytelling, the tale of the drunk – possible. In *An Artist of the Floating World*, the narrator, Ono, is unreliable, and Ishiguro uses “you” almost as a way to soften Ono's delivery and mask Ono's unreliability. It's also a bit unsettling, to have a narrator talk to “you” directly, as if Ono were talking to the reader through

the page. I found it to be quite hypnotic, and as a reader, my interest was piqued immediately. In earlier drafts of this thesis, the use of “you” was much more pronounced. Depending on how the rest of the narrative unfolds, during the writing process, I may eliminate the use of “you,” or I’ll add to it. In any case, the opening sentences of both this thesis and *An Artist of the Floating World* use “you.” I find it to be a great storytelling device. And in *Another Roadside Attraction*, the use of “you” is also utilized. For years, I struggled to write this thesis. Mainly, I struggled with shifting tenses; I wanted to hop forward and back in time, and it wasn’t until I had read these two books and Selene’s “In Defense of Forgetfulness” did I realize that I could hop back and forth in time and tell the story I’ve been wanting to tell for so long.

Another inspiration was Jack Kerouac, his ecopoetics, his loneliness, his drinking, and his descriptions of the flora and fauna of the west coast in *The Dharma Bums*. And his interactions with people in *On The Road* was something that I found quite relatable. Many of the drunken encounters with random patrons in the bars within this thesis were inspired by *On The Road* and my own experiences. Also adding to the inspiration was *The Brotherhood of the Grape* by John Fante and *The Postman Always Rings Twice* by James Cain – their descriptions of infidelity, the burden of fatherhood and of being born, and images of the Central Valley, the deserts of southern California, and rolling hills of northern California. There was also Newton Thornburg’s *Cutter and Bone* and the fictional character of Richard Bone – his southern California roots and his role: the archetype of the drunk, the drifter, and the unlikely hero.

A big inspiration came from Joan Didion’s *Play It As It Lays* and *The White Album* – how Maria Wyeth’s musings as a gambler, and how Didion’s meditations as a writer, paint the image of California’s propensity for fantasy, madness, drugs, strange hippies, colorful flowers, and behind-closed-doors politics. There was also Bukowski’s adventures in *Post Office* and

Factotum, how the dialogue within those two novels flows like honey, off the tongue, in such an organic fashion, as if the words, the conversations, weren't fictionalized, but real. And then there was Natalie Singer's literary memoir, *California Calling*, a work that examines ancestral and personal interrogation, the power of personal and cultural myths, the yielding of power, assimilation, silence, longing, and images of a certain time in the Bay Area and southern California – words that were comforting during a time of pandemic, isolation, fear, and reflection.

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