

The Summer Years

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**Abstract**

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Peace, love, and music—Woodstock is on the horizon, but for Jack Evermore, the question is, "Which one?" In the wake of a botched prison break resulting in the death of his beloved, J., Jack finds that Time itself has warped around him, flinging him far from the flower power of the sixties and into the chaos of 1999. Through its jarring and fragmented narrative, *The Summer Years* follows Jack as he confronts the dangers of a faulty memory, idealized love, and nostalgia for a golden age that maybe never was.

# The Summer Years

By Reed Lowell

“What Time are we upon and where do I belong?”

Francesca Lia Block

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"What's got you so jazzed, Jackie boy?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Ten...nine...eight...seven...”

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

“Six...five...four...”

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

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

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

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

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

“Get in, Jackie boy!” she yelled.

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

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

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

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

*I woke up after that.*

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

*I just hope it doesn't happen again tonight.*

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

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

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

*He had to try.*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Jack nodded.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Hello?" Jack called out.

There was no answer.

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

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

Fishing out his lighter, Jack looked around the car a bit more. The key was in the ignition, the visor was down, and a pack of L&M cigarettes lay slotted in in the center console.

Jack paused. Why did that seem so familiar? As he reached for the cigarettes, birds began to chirp all around and light slowly peeked its way back into the car. How was that possible? Jack thought. It had just been sundown a minute ago. As he moved to get out of the Chevy, he realized with a strange sense of horror how impossible his situation had become.

There was a sunrise in every direction.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Fancy,” he joked.

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

He had been dreaming of that car crash again when the guards came for him. This time was different though. The crash didn’t happen to him this Time; it was as if he was stumbling upon it. God, I wish they’d give me something for these dreams, Jack thought.

As he reached the end of the hall, the guards beside him opened the door with a screech and led him into the administrative portion of the prison.

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

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

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

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

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

“Again?” Jack said softly.

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

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

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

“I do.” Jack responded. “But...”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Jack felt the air shifting around him.

“What do you mean?”

A piercing ringing rose in pitch and filled his ears.

“Mr. Evermore, please, remain calm.”

The room seemed to lose its color.

“Sedate him! Sedate him!”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

*We're not here to save the planet.*

*Fuck all that peace and love shit.*

*We're just here to get paid.*

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

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

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

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

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

*This would be a moment to be remembered.*

J.

*Do you remember that Chery? Shit, we had plenty of Times in that car...you were talking about Time...that if we got to Woodstock we might be able to change things for the better? Well it works, J. I'm not sure how, but you were right. I don't know how I'm doing it, but if I can get back to the right moment, maybe do it all differently, maybe I can fix this.*

*I'm trying to get back to you, J.*

*Yours,  
Jack Evermore*

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

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

*How do I get there?*

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

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

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

*I feel off lately. Like I've been misremembering things...things that should just come to me. Thompson walked by my cell the other day and I had the urge to call him Ingraham and not in a friendly "hello" kind of way, but with hate in my voice. I don't hate Thompson; he's always been kind to me.*

*This morning too, I looked at Dwight and wondered if he had always been my cellmate. I was convinced that he had been transferred from another block and that for some reason I'd always been alone in my cell. But Dwight and I have been friends since I got here...*

*I need sleep.*

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

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

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

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

“Are you listening to me, Jackie boy?”

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

“I'm listening.” Jack said.

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

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

Jack hummed in understanding.

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

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

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

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

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

“Neither are you!”

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

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

“Already have.” Jack replied with a smirk.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Jack frowned. He wouldn't let that happen.

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

"How much money do you have?"

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

"I've got a plan."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Hello,” the woman said impatiently.

“Oh...umm yeah.”

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

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

The woman gave Jack a lame grin.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“How much does it cost?” Jack asked.

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

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

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

Even music costs too much these days.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Finally, something he recognized.

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

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

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

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

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

"How much can this get me?"

"One stiff one or a couple beers."

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

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

"Fries are on the house," the woman said to him.

"So what's your story, guy?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The man got up and offered his hand in introduction. “The name’s Lou.”

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

“Where’d you say you were staying?”

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

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

“Dad, you’re not giving this guy a job!”

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

“You ain’t gonna steal anything are yah?”

“I wouldn’t have anywhere to go even if I did.”

“That’a boy.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Who the hell is she?” Jack thought.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“What about you?”

“I wouldn’t change a damn thing.”

“Bullshit.”

“Nope,” Dwight said.

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

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

Jack sensed the somber shift in his voice.

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

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

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

Jack contemplated Dwight’s words in silence.

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

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

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

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

“What took you so long?” J. asked.

“I was out getting supplies,” Jack replied

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

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

“Yup,” Jack said smiling.

“Where’d you get dynamite?”

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

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

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

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

“Last one, I promise.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The explosion shattered windows across the way.

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

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

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

Jack jumped over the rubble into the vault room.

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

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

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

J. was gone.

And the police had him surrounded.

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

“You left me,” Jack said.

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

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

“I’m sorry, J., I really am.”

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

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

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

“We’re gonna make it.”

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

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

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

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

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

“No.” J. replied sweetly.

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

They waited.

“You know I love you, right, Jack?”

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

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

Jack nodded, “We will.”

J.

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

*Yours,  
Jack Evermore*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Jackie...”

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

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

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

J.

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

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

*Yours,  
Jack Evermore*

J.

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

*Yours,  
Jack Evermore*

*J.*  
*For me, that summer never ended.*

*Yours,*  
*Jack Evermore*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

*Jill*

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

*Take care of yourself out there.*

*Yours,  
J.*