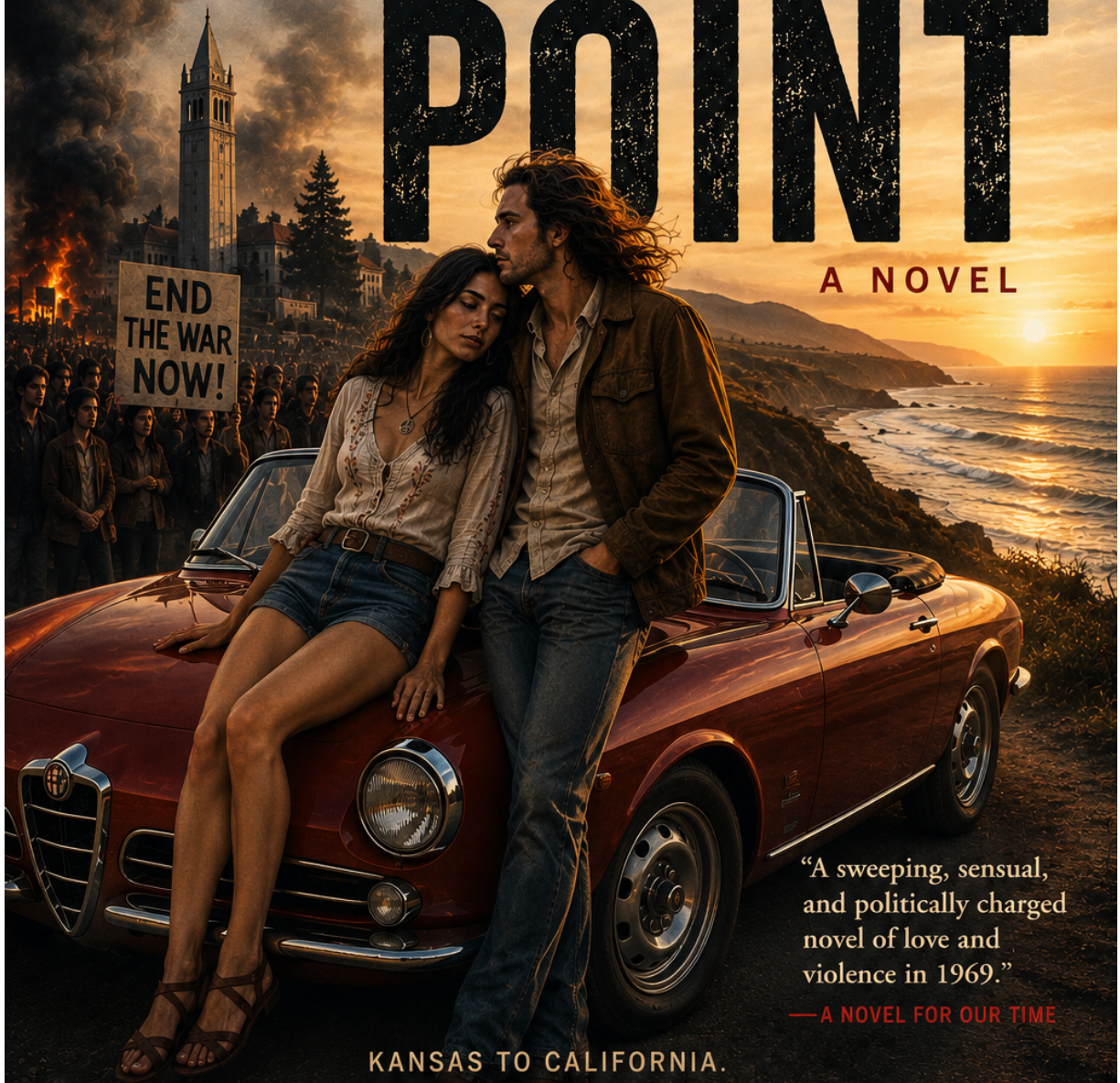


LOVE. FREEDOM. REVOLUTION.
AT THE END OF THE SIXTIES, EVERYTHING COLLIDES.

COLLISION POINT

A NOVEL



"A sweeping, sensual,
and politically charged
novel of love and
violence in 1969."

—A NOVEL FOR OUR TIME

KANSAS TO CALIFORNIA.
VIETNAM TO BERKELEY.
PARADISE FOUND. HISTORY UNLEASHED.

DON DETRICH

Collision Point

Don Detrich

A Novel

HISTORICAL THRILLER

A young man fleeing violence.

A Vietnam veteran haunted by atrocity.

A radical movement turning toward bombs.

A disgraced bully looking for revenge.

In 1969, their paths begin moving toward one another.

Carl Lee leaves Kansas after a brutal attack and finds refuge in the freedom of Northern California. But as he falls in love and becomes drawn into the antiwar movement, the country around him grows more dangerous. Protest becomes confrontation. Confrontation becomes violence. And the men who cannot tolerate Carl's freedom begin closing in.

From small-town Kansas to Berkeley, from Vietnam to San Francisco, from the beauty of Tomales Bay to the edge of political terror, Collision Point is a historical thriller about the moment personal trauma and national violence become impossible to separate.

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PART ONE: THE BOMB

February 1970 - San Francisco California

Police Sergeant Brian Donnelly watches his daughter gather her books and backpack off the floor. His son fumbles with a zipper on his jacket. "Get a move on you guys." His wife places a warm hand on his shoulder and gives him a soft kiss as he heads out the door. "See you at lunch dear". He walks the narrow sidewalk past the neatly trimmed lawn to the four-door, Ford Fairlane in the drive. His two teens run from the house to catch up. He doesn't say much as they drive the few short blocks to the High School, but listens as his son and daughter chatter about friends and a coming basketball game. Brian pulls to the curb in front of the bustling high school. His son crawls from the back seat. "Thanks Dad." His daughter gives him a soft kiss on the cheek as he turns his head to watch. Brian glances to make sure no cars are coming. "See-ya later Dad" she waves as she crosses the street. It is a crisp clear winter day as he drives the early morning streets of San Francisco's busy Sunset District. He turns a corner and glides into another world. Sunlight streams through tall misted trees creating dappled patterns on impossibly green lawns. A deeply shaded meadow hides a grazing deer, a family of ducks drifts on a glassy pond. He loves this drive through Golden Gate Park. He could have taken a slightly faster rout up Lincoln Way, but he likes the lazy wind past Stow Lake, Strybing Arboretum and the Bowling Greens. Brian Donnelly has been with the San Francisco police force for over twenty years, most of it stationed right here at Park Station, and he still enjoys this early morning drive. The Park Police Station is a two story Mission-style building with stucco walls and a tile roof. It was originally built as quarters for the Mounted Unit, but has been refurbished as an administrative center. Brian parks his car in the back lot, gathers up a brief case, which contains the lunch his wife made for him, and heads inside. The station is already a hive of activity. Brian casually runs a gantlet of "good morning" greetings as he makes his way to his desk. He places his brief case beside his chair, shuffles through a stack of papers without setting down, and turns to head for the coffee machine. Glancing through the window behind his desk he notices a box outside on the window sill. Brian stops, slightly perplexed, and takes a step closer. The massive explosion vaporizes the window in a cloud of fine glass. Nails and shrapnel packed in the bomb, obliterating Brian's face and tear the clothes from his body as he is thrown across the room. A hot hurricane from hell pushes desks chairs, books, paper and people in its path. The ceiling collapses in a tangle of wire and debris amid a choking cloud of smoke and dust. Suddenly everything stops and there is a moment of near silence, a slight hissing sound from several small fires and a tinkle of glass. Then choking screams of pain and horror shatter the air as survivors painful crawl from the wreckage. After five hours of feverish rescue, tears and chaos a final count is announced. Sergeant Brian Donnelly is dead and eight other officers are seriously wounded.

PART TWO: KELSEYVILLE

March 1969 - Saturday Night in Kelseyville Kansas

Saturday night in Kelseyville, Kansas. The cars roll slowly down the brick-paved Main Street, one by one, the headlights bouncing off the old buildings like ghosts of what once was. They pass the bank, the grocery, the old hardware store where the windows still carry dust like a badge of pride, and they round back, doing the U-turn at the end of the street, beginning again—just like they have, week after week, since time immemorial. The line of cars becomes a circle, and for a few hours, this little corner of Kansas becomes a theater, a stage for youth with no better place to be.

The year is the late sixties, and everyone—every teen not trapped by curfews or church bells—is here. They're showing off hot-rods, sedans, family clunkers. They're riding shotgun, hanging out windows, letting their arms flop out in the night air like lazy wings. It's a moving party, a car show, and sometimes it's a heartbreak. Kids cruising Main, because what else can you do in a town like Kelseyville when you're seventeen and desperate to find something—anything—that makes your heart beat just a little bit faster.

On either side of the street, the town stands like a monument to the past—old brick buildings with tin awnings that've seen more summers than any kid here. The sidewalks are concrete, tall and cracked, built to withstand the mud of old days when Main Street was nothing but dirt. Back then, it was horses and buggies; now it's chrome and glass.

Kelseyville used to be something. Back when farms were family-owned, and everyone knew the worth of their work. But times change. Consolidation, automation, collapsing crop prices—all those words no one wants to think about—they've choked the life out of places like this. Now the farms are going corporate, and the kids—the ones that don't leave—have to settle for factory work a few towns over. It's still work, but it doesn't feel the same, and everyone knows it, even if they don't say it out loud.

At the do-it-yourself car wash on one end of the street, the scene's electric—guys with greased-back hair and girls giggling, voices echoing in the chilly spring air. The hood of a Malibu Super Sport is open, a few of the guys crowding around like they're solving a riddle. They rev the engine, loud enough to rattle the air, just to hear it growl. They want everyone to look. They want to be seen.

Up the street is the Dairy Bell—not an official Dairy Queen, but close enough. Its buzzing neon sign is a beacon, a place where carloads of girls gather, sipping sodas and laughing, their voices floating out into the night. The guys hang by their cars, the girls hang by the Dairy Bell, but there are no rules—not tonight. It's a street party, and anyone can wander where they want.

And then there's Carl Lee, riding in a red '66 Alfa Romeo, top down, heater blasting against the chilly night air. Carl doesn't quite fit in here, and he knows it. He's got his friend Billy beside him, and they're both pretending like their ears aren't freezing off. It's worth it, though—to have the wind in their hair, to feel like they're really living, not just existing. Carl's from the suburbs of Kansas City, and moving to Kelseyville was like being tossed into a time warp. Everything here feels slow. Too slow. At first, it was maddening, the way people seemed to live like they had all the time in the world—no rush, no urgency. It was the silence that got to him most, the kind of silence that makes you feel like you might just disappear if you're not careful.

He tried to blend in at first. Keep his head down, do what everyone else did. But Carl, well, he's got a sharp tongue and a mind that doesn't know when to quit. He couldn't stay quiet. Pretty soon, he was cracking jokes in class, getting laughs from some, glares from others. Some kids liked him—liked the way he spoke up, said the things everyone else was too scared to say. Others thought he was a punk, a loudmouth who didn't know when to shut up. And maybe they were right. But Carl couldn't help it. He'd push right up against the line, then step over it, just to see what would happen. And when people got mad, he'd flash that grin of his, crooked and unapologetic, like saying, "Hey, I'm just kidding... unless I'm not."

Carl wore his difference like a badge. He had his bell-bottom jeans and he listened to Bob Dylan and Jefferson Airplane. He called himself a hippie, and in Kelseyville, that was as good as calling yourself an alien. Most kids here were raised to think the war was a duty, not a choice. It was something good boys did—they grew up, signed up, shipped out. And the ones who didn't—well, they didn't talk about that much. But Carl, he had his own ideas. He'd spent hours in his friend's basement back in Kansas City, listening to records, talking about Vietnam, civil rights, all the things that made the world feel like it was on fire. It made him see the world differently—made him question things. And in Kelseyville, questioning things was just about the worst sin you could commit.

Most of the kids cruising Main Street had known each other since they were in diapers. Their lives were tangled together like the roots of those old trees by the town square. Carl, though, he was new. And Billy, his best friend, he was new too—a military kid, used to packing up and moving on. Billy didn't care if he fit in. To him, Kelseyville was just another stop, another dot on the map. But Carl—Carl wanted to belong, even if he didn't want to admit it. He liked to think he didn't care, but deep down, it mattered. The friends he made felt temporary, like they could vanish at any second. One wrong move, and he'd be out, back on the fringes, and he hated that feeling—that uncertainty.

But tonight, none of that matters. Not really. Tonight, the wind is in his hair, and the stars are out, and the Alfa's engine hums beneath him like a promise. Billy's laughing beside him, and Carl feels something close to joy. Maybe he doesn't fit in here. Maybe he never will. But for tonight, with the road stretched out in front of him and the night full of possibility, it's enough.

Carl sighed, the eternal question slipping out of him like a tired breath. "So, what do you want to do?"

"I don't know. What do you want to do?" Billy shot back, his voice edged with a kind of hollow bravado, like he'd already accepted that there wasn't much worth wanting in the first place.

"I don't know. What are the choices?"

Billy shifted in his seat, considering. "Well, we can drive up and down this fucking street with all the other idiots, or we can get something to eat, except I'm broke as hell. Or we could drive out to Pork Chop Hill and smoke that joint you've got." Billy looked over at Carl, his eyes almost hopeful, like a dog angling for scraps from the dinner table.

"You never have any money, man. And that's the last bit of weed I got. Besides, I left it at home so we wouldn't be tempted."

"Man, there's nothing to do around here. This town is driving me nuts." Billy sounded genuinely aggrieved, like he expected more from this place, like maybe deep down he was hoping there was something—anything—better than just this. He rolled down the window and leaned halfway out, screaming into the night, his voice swallowed by the darkness. "I'm going out of my freakin' mind!"

Out of the shadows, Jake Walker's beat-up '62 Chevy pickup roared by, choked with bodies—three guys and two girls jammed together on the bench seat, their faces flushed from the cold of the night or just the youthful need to feel something. Jake hollered back without even slowing down, "You're already out of your fucking mind, Arnold!"

"Screw you, Walker!" Billy shouted, no real venom in his voice, just the obligatory return volley, a part of the ritual. Jake responded by gunning his truck, the blown muffler letting out a roar like some wounded animal, its aggression all sound and fury. Billy just laughed, a cackling, artificial sound, one that Carl had heard a hundred times before.

"Alright," Carl relented, feeling the fatigue of the night settle in his bones, "I'll buy some fries, but I'm saving the weed."

Billy gave him a sideways glance, testing. "How about we smoke the weed and forget the fries?"

Carl shook his head, a slow, tired smile on his lips. "You're lucky to be getting fries, pal."

The big U-turn at the top of Main led them back down the street, past Walker's truck and a few other cars that had gathered in front of the Dairy Bell. Carl swung the car into a spot at the far end, next to the side of the building where the shadows clung to the wall like old cobwebs. They crawled out of the car, stretching as if they had just completed some epic journey—the kind that only lasted five minutes but felt like a lifetime—and rounded the corner to find Walker and his crew loitering under the buzzing light of the Dairy Bell's sign.

"Are you still going crazy, Billy?" Walker called out, smirking as they approached. He turned to the others, his grin widening. "Watch out, these guys look dangerous."

"Hell yeah, we're dangerous. We busted outta the asylum yesterday," Billy said, his voice pitching up into something like a madman's laugh. It was a laugh that masked nerves, or boredom, or fear, or maybe all three.

Greetings passed around like smokes at a campfire—quick, casual, as if they all weren't in the same sinking boat, killing time in this town that felt like it had a grudge against them. Carl leaned against the side of the truck, making small talk with one of the girls, trying his best to ignore the hollow ache of the night.

Billy pulled out a cigarette and offered one to Walker. Walker accepted, and Billy produced a battered Zippo with a flick of his wrist. The flame caught Walker's face, his eyes narrowing as he lit up. He blew a few lazy smoke rings, their edges curling into nothingness, just like the evening.

Walker was one of those kids who seemed to have things figured out, or at least pretended he did. He was popular, the kind of guy who'd probably peak in high school but would make the most of it while it lasted. He had that easy smile, the one that people trusted, even though they shouldn't. He had a brother in college who gave him just enough taste of the bigger world that it made the rest of them think maybe he knew something they didn't.

He looked at Billy, eyes squinting through the smoke. "I heard Roy Welch and Eddie McGuire are looking for you guys." The words were casual, but the look that passed between them wasn't.

"Oh yeah?" Billy replied, but his tone had shifted, taking on an edge of forced nonchalance.

Walker's smile stayed fixed, but it was thin, like a blade. "That's what they said. I just saw them down at the car wash." He took another drag, letting the silence do the talking for him.

Carl caught the exchange out of the corner of his eye. He stepped away from the truck, his face tightening. "What do they want? I don't even know those guys."

Walker shrugged, his eyes flicking to Carl and back to Billy. "They seem to know you. They make it their business to know just about everybody around here." He grinned, that Cheshire smile that had too many teeth. "You're gonna have to deal with those guys at some point."

Billy didn't blink. He just took a slow drag from his cigarette, his eyes hooded, as if trying to act like Walker's words didn't matter. Carl, on the other hand, felt the tension pulling tight. He had this gnawing feeling in his gut—a mix of confusion and anxiety. He hated this game, this unspoken set of rules everyone seemed to know except him. He felt like an outsider, like he'd been dropped into a foreign country where no one spoke his language.

"Let's eat," Billy said, his voice suddenly light, breezy. He crushed his cigarette under his boot, the ember dying in a scatter of ash. "I'm starving."

Carl took a step towards the door, plastering a grin on his face, pretending the words hadn't just turned the night on its head. "Alright, catch you guys later." He tried to keep his tone cheerful, like nothing had just happened, like they hadn't just been talking about some shadow that seemed to be creeping closer, waiting.

A few of Walker's friends snickered, a couple of them mimicking Carl's tone with exaggerated cheerfulness. "Okay, have fun!" one of them called out, and Carl tried not to let the heat rise to his cheeks.

Billy just flicked the remnants of his cigarette into the gutter, the movement casual and precise. He turned and walked towards the door of the Dairy Bell, his stride loose, unaffected, like none of it mattered. Carl followed, his mind churning. He couldn't shake the sense that something was coming, something they wouldn't be able to laugh off. But for now, there were fries to eat, and the Dairy Bell's buzzing light above them, and the feeling of a summer night that stretched on endlessly, offering nothing, promising nothing—just the moment they were in, hanging there between something lost and something they hadn't quite found yet.

Dairy Bar

Inside, the Dairy Bell is packed, its walls straining under the weight of noise, thick with voices and laughter and the steady percussion of plates and silverware. The crowd is a cross-section of this small town—old men with caps perched on thinning hair, mothers with restless children, high school kids with eyes on each other more than their food—all crammed together beneath the low ceiling, the air too warm, almost stifling. It's a place where time seems to pool, where the hours gather in heavy clumps, and nothing much changes from one day to the next. The tables in the center are crowded with elbows and conversation, the four booths against the wall holding families and couples leaning in close. The counter, with its green Formica top scratched and scarred from years of restless hands, holds its usual five chrome stools—each with a seat worn smooth and shiny, the kind of wear that speaks of repetition, of a thousand different moments all blurring together.

Behind the counter, the kitchen is open to view, a small chaos of movement and noise. The grill hisses and spits, the woman behind it moving with an economy born of long hours and too many shifts, her hair frizzed from the steam, her face slick with sweat that catches the yellow light. She flips burgers with quick, practiced flicks of her wrist, shakes a basket of French fries with a rattle that cuts through the clamor, the hot grease dripping and spattering, a sheen of indulgence and regret settling over everything. The old soft-serve machine hums from the corner, its insistent noise like some background thought that never quite leaves you alone. The coffee maker gurgles away, the twirling punch dispenser—a relic from another decade—spins slowly, and stacks of paper cups, plates, napkins pile high, a cluttered testament to this place's purpose.

Carl and Billy step behind two preteen girls waiting at the cash register. It smells so good, the food heavy in the air. Billy's stomach rumbles, echoing the emptiness inside him. It's going to be a while, no seats free, and the cashier isn't even there. They just wait, the line not moving.

Carl leans closer to Billy, keeping his voice low, like the conversation itself was fragile. "So, what was that all about?"

Billy doesn't answer right away. He lets his eyes drift over the room, but Carl can see the way his jaw tightens, the small telltale signs of unease. "Doesn't sound good. No way do I want anything to do with those guys. That Welch is a monster."

It's not what Carl wanted to hear. He had been feeling a bit confused, sure, maybe a little uneasy, but now a cold twist of fear snakes its way up from his gut. He knows it's childish, but he can't help it. He blurts, "We don't even know those guys. They're not even in high school. How old are they anyway?"

He realizes he sounds like he's whining and tries to recover, straightening his shoulders and forcing his voice to sound deeper, steadier. "This is bullshit, man." He says it too loudly, a kind of overcorrection. The two girls in front shift uneasily, exchanging glances before looking back at him, wary.

Billy doesn't respond, just stares ahead like he's thinking about something else entirely. The silence stretches between them as they wait, each second feeling longer than the one before. The girls finally place their order, and Carl catches sight of a couple getting up from a pair of stools at the far end of the counter. Billy notices too, stepping forward without hesitation, sliding into the freshly vacated spot like he was entitled to it. Carl blinks, surprised. He thought they'd just get the fries and go, not hang around here like sitting ducks.

"You want to eat here?" Carl asks, the anxiety tightening his voice. The Dairy Bell always felt cramped to him, too many people, too much noise. Besides, the action was out on the street.

Billy just picks up a sticky menu and scans it with a nonchalant look. "Look out the window."

Carl twists around on his stool, his gaze falling on the plate glass windows lining the front. His eyes lock onto the red '65 Corvette double parked behind Walker's truck. Eddie McGuire and Roy Welch are out there, standing in the street talking to Walker, who's leaning against the hood of his truck, looking too damn comfortable.

Carl's stomach drops, the ground beneath him feeling unstable, like everything was teetering on the edge of a very steep cliff. Without looking up, Billy mutters, "This doesn't look good, man. They're waiting for us. Walker did us a favor by tipping us off. I'm not going out there."

Carl feels his mouth go dry. "What the hell do they want? I don't even know those guys. What did we do? I've only seen that Welch guy once, at the car wash. I never even talked to him." He knows he sounds desperate, and he hates himself for it, but he can't stop. The fear is bubbling up, uncontrollable.

Billy finally glances out the window, then back at Carl. "Stop saying that. It doesn't matter if you know them. This is their turf and we're on it. For whatever reason, or no reason, they're after us. The best we can do is just not let them catch us until they get bored. How about buying me a hamburger?"

Carl feels the bitterness rise in his throat. "Fine. Have a hamburger. I'm not hungry. Damn, I don't need this crap. I didn't do anything!"

Billy rolls his eyes, giving Carl a look that's a mix of disgust and pity. Carl shuts his mouth, his face burning with embarrassment.

They finally order, and Carl takes a kind of twisted comfort in the time it takes for the food to come. Each second they wait is another second they're not out there, facing whatever's waiting for them. Billy munches on his hamburger, slowly, deliberately, while Carl sips his Coke and stares out the window, barely touching the fries. He keeps glancing at the scene outside, his eyes darting from Walker's truck to the street to the people milling around. The longer they sit, the worse the feeling in his gut gets.

"They know we gotta come out eventually," Carl says, his voice shaky. "My car is out there." He wants to talk it through, make a plan, but Billy isn't listening, isn't even pretending to care. He's sucking the last of his drink through a straw, making that annoying slurping sound, his gaze fixed on something far away.

After a moment, Billy turns on his stool, leaning back against the counter, his eyes on McGuire and Welch. They're still there, talking to the driver of a Ford Torino, their body language relaxed, like they had all the time in the world. Billy watches them for a full minute, then turns to Carl.

"Look, I'm not going out there. You need to call your mom or somebody to come get you. Don't go out there, okay? Thanks for the burger." He says it so calmly, like it's the most logical thing in the world.

Carl blinks, confused. "What?"

Before Carl can process what's happening, Billy stands up, his movements quick and fluid. He strides towards the cash register, slipping around a guy placing an order, opens the hinged piece of counter that leads to the back, and disappears through the kitchen. The cashier, the guy ordering, and Carl all stare after him, dumbfounded.

Carl can't move. He feels like a ghost, like the world has shifted without him, leaving him behind. He turns back to the counter, staring blankly at the menu, his mind racing. He needs to do something—

anything—but he's paralyzed by the fear, the uncertainty. He orders a chocolate malt, just to have something to do, something to keep him anchored.

Sitting there, sipping his malt, Carl feels the walls close in. He knows what he should do—he should call his mom, should get out of here before things get worse. But he can already hear her voice, the questions she'd ask. "What did you do? Who are these boys? Why can't you just fit in?"

The thought makes his stomach twist. He doesn't want to deal with it, doesn't want to admit that he's scared, that he needs help. He just wants it all to go away. He feels stupid, childish, trapped in a situation he doesn't understand.

He glances out the window, expecting to see McGuire and Welch still waiting, but they're gone. Carl's heart leaps, a mix of relief and disbelief. He stands up so fast he almost knocks over his stool, rushing to the window to look down the street. No sign of the Corvette. He runs to the other window, nearly bumping into a middle-aged woman coming in the door, pressing his face to the glass. He can just see the back end of his Alfa sticking out of the parking spot. Nobody around. They're gone.

But are they really? Is this a trick? He knows it's possible, knows that guys like that don't just give up, but he can't stay here forever. He's got to take a chance, got to do something, even if it's the wrong thing.

Three Corners

Carl hurriedly pays, his hands fumbling for the cash. The cashier eyes him, her gaze sharp and suspicious. She's been watching him for a while now—first, he sits there watching his friend eat, then that same friend walks right through the kitchen like it's his own personal shortcut. And now Carl's chomping at the bit to leave, all nerves and jittery movements. She's a mother of three, and she's seen this kind of thing before. She knows when something's up.

"Is everything all right?" she asks, her eyes narrowing, taking him in with that keen, no-nonsense look.

Carl's eyes widen, his heart hammering in his chest. He wasn't expecting this. "Yeah, yeah, everything's fine," he stammers, trying to smile but failing. It comes off crooked, forced.

The cashier isn't convinced. She glances out the window, where the headlights still shine on Eddie McGuire's Corvette. She looks Carl in the eye. "Are those guys after you?"

Carl's face flushes. He shakes his head too quickly, his voice cracking as he says, "No, no, I'll be fine. I'm going home right now." He wants to get out of here, away from her knowing gaze, away from the whole scene. His whole body feels like it's trembling with fear and adrenaline, a horrible, jittery mix.

The cashier purses her lips, handing him his change slowly, the weight of her suspicion heavy in the air. She raises one eyebrow in a way that only a seasoned mother can—half concerned, half resigned. "Be careful," she says finally.

Carl grabs his change, mumbling a thank you before slipping away. The cashier watches him go, her eyes lingering on his back until he's out the door.

Outside, the cold air slams into Carl, jolting him, making his skin prickle. He steps out quickly, heading around the corner of the building, slipping into the shadows beside the parked cars. He tries to control his breathing, tries to steady himself. The hairs on the back of his neck are standing up, his senses on high alert. He slows down as he nears the back of the building, peeking around the corner. No one in sight. He can see his car, just beyond. Relief floods him, and he picks up the pace again, headed for the driver's side door.

But then a voice cuts through the night, stopping him dead. "Hey, Carl, what's going on?"

Carl's stomach sinks, his insides twisting. He cringes involuntarily, freezing in place. It's Eddie McGuire. Carl forces a smile onto his face, turning slowly, trying to mask the panic that's tearing at him from the inside.

"We were just checking out your car," Eddie says, his voice smooth, almost friendly, but there's an edge to it—something sharp, something cold that cuts right through Carl's thin veneer of composure.

Eddie and Roy move in, flanking him, one on each side as Carl keeps heading toward the car, trying to act casual, like everything's fine. He can feel Roy's presence looming over him, heavy and oppressive.

"Damn, that's a nice-looking car. What do you think, Roy?"

Roy lets out a snort, his lips curling into a smirk. "I like it, kind of small, though. I'm not sure I could even get in that thing. Bet you have a hard time getting a fishing pole and a shotgun in that trunk." He chuckles, a low, guttural sound. "But I don't suppose you do that much hunting and fishing anyway, do ya, Carl?"

Carl tries to swallow, his throat tight. "I do some fishing," he manages, his voice barely audible.

"What kind of car is that, anyway?" Eddie asks, looking it over.

"It's an Alfa Romeo," Carl says, feeling the tension tightening his chest. "It's Italian. You don't see too many around here."

Eddie lets the words hang for a moment before repeating, slowly, almost mockingly, "No, we don't see too many Alfa Romeos around here, do we, Roy?"

Roy steps in closer, slinging an arm around Carl's shoulders, and it feels heavy, crushing, as if Roy's trying to press him into the ground. The stench of stale beer and cigarettes hits Carl, making his stomach churn. He forces himself to stand still, trying not to flinch. Roy's arm feels like a vise, his voice a low rumble as he says, "That's kind of a strange car you got there, Carl."

Carl shifts under the weight, trying to pull away, but Roy just tightens his grip, and Eddie moves in front of him, leaning in close. "What do you think, Carl? Is your car a little bit strange or what?"

Carl doesn't answer, his eyes darting around, looking for some kind of escape, any opportunity. But Eddie's too fast, stepping in front of the door to block him, his eyes fixed on Carl, a smirk tugging at his lips.

"I sure would like to try driving this thing," Eddie says, his voice casual, his eyes anything but. There's something behind them, something dangerous, coiled tight, ready to strike.

Roy chuckles, playing along. "Go ahead. I'll follow you in the Vette."

"Nice try, Welch. You know nobody but me drives the Vette. You drive it?"

Roy's eyebrows rise, his grin widening. "Well, okay, yeah, sure."

Carl tries to interrupt, his voice a little louder now, more desperate. "No, I don't think so. Sorry, I gotta get going. It's not running that good right now anyway."

Eddie's face changes instantly, his eyes narrowing, his voice rising, cutting through the night air. "No? What do you mean, no?" He steps closer, his face twisted in mock disappointment. He looks back at Roy, shaking his head in exaggerated sadness. "Roy, did you hear that? Our little buddy here says he won't let you drive his car. What's wrong, Carl? You don't like hanging around with us? We don't have any fancy Italian sports cars? We don't have long hair or spiffy clothes?"

There's something dark in his voice, a growing edge of anger. He steps even closer, his breath hot on Carl's face. Carl knows this is a game, knows Eddie's playing him, but it doesn't make it any less terrifying.

Suddenly, Roy's arm is around Carl again, this time moving quickly, his hand digging roughly into the front pocket of Carl's jeans. Carl tenses, freezing as Roy's fingers close around the keys, yanking them free.

"No, Eddie, he doesn't mind. Do ya, Carl?" Roy says, his voice smooth, mocking. Carl just stands there, his whole body stiff, his heart pounding. He's too overwhelmed to speak, too scared to fight back.

Eddie moves closer, his face inches from Carl's, his voice a low growl. "Get in." He motions to the car, standing slightly aside as Roy crawls into the driver's seat. Carl hesitates, but Eddie's glare makes it clear—he doesn't have a choice. He slowly walks around, feeling Eddie right behind him, practically breathing down his neck. He opens the door and slides into the low bucket seat, his heart pounding in his chest.

Roy is huge, his bulk filling the driver's seat, his legs barely fitting under the wheel. He fiddles with the key, starting the car, revving the engine roughly. Carl cringes at the sound, his stomach churning as he watches Roy struggle with the shifter.

"Far to the left and up," Carl says, his voice barely a whisper.

Roy shoves the gearshift, the car jerking as he finally finds reverse. He grins, a grin too wide, too happy, like a child who's gotten away with something they shouldn't have. The Alfa backs into the street, and Roy glances over, his eyes wild, his grin still fixed on his face.

"Three corners!" Eddie yells, his voice cutting through the noise of the engine.

Roy responds, shouting, "Three corners!" without looking back as the car lurches forward, the tires squealing as he pulls away.

Carl feels like his whole body is vibrating with fear, his muscles tense, every nerve in his body on edge. They stop at the corner, and Roy revs the engine again, the Alfa springing forward, the force of it pushing Carl back against his seat. The cold spring air rushes in, swirling around them, seeping under Carl's collar and down his back.

"Damn, this thing is fast," Roy says, his voice filled with a kind of reckless joy as he shifts gears, the car screaming down the dark side street. The Alfa takes off, the tires biting into the gravel, the force of it rattling through Carl's bones.

Carl tries to stay calm, tries to breathe through the fear, but his foot is jammed against the floor, as if he could find some kind of imaginary brake to stop it all. He glances at Roy, wondering how much he's had to drink, how much of this is just bravado and how much is a genuine threat. They come to a corner, and Roy tries to take it too fast, the car veering off-course, skidding towards the ditch. Carl braces himself, his heart slamming against his ribs. Roy overcorrects, bringing the car back on track, his laughter cutting through the tension.

"Where are we going, Roy? What's going on?" Carl's voice is tight, strained, a thread of desperation running through it.

"Nothing, nothing. Just a little party," Roy says, his words casual, dismissive. He sounds like it's all just a game, but Carl knows better.

The Alfa roars through another intersection, the engine growling, the headlights carving through the darkness. Carl shivers, a mix of the cold night air and the gnawing fear that's spreading through him like ice water.

Suddenly, Roy takes a hard right, pulling off the road onto gravel. The car jerks, the gravel crunching beneath the tires, and they roll into an open area called Three Corners. Cars and trucks are parked in a loose circle, headlights illuminating the ground like a spotlight. Roy pulls the Alfa into the middle, shutting off the engine and yanking the keys from the ignition.

Carl forces himself to crawl out of the car, his legs feeling like jelly. He takes a deep breath, glancing around, trying to assess the situation. He spots some kids from school—Tom, Mark, Bill, and Barbara. He walks over, trying to act casual, like this is just another night, like he isn't scared out of his mind.

"Hey, Tom, Mark. What's going on? Hi, Bill. And you're Barbara, right?" Carl says, trying to smile, to pretend he's comfortable. The kids nod, a few of them exchanging glances. They seem surprised to see Carl with Roy Welch, but they don't say anything. They don't act like anything's wrong.

Carl feels a flicker of hope—maybe this won't be as bad as he thinks. Maybe it's just a scare, a bluff. He tries to relax, talking with the others, but the tension in the air is palpable. He notices Walker has shown up, more cars pulling in behind him, headlights slicing through the night. The circle is getting larger, the voices louder, laughter echoing in the dark.

Roy's voice calls out, sharp and commanding, cutting through the chatter. "Hey, Carl! Come over here and show me this engine."

Carl's stomach twists, his heart sinking. He mutters under his breath, "Oh, shit." He hesitates, then forces himself to walk over, acting like it's no big deal. He pops the hood, the hinges creaking, and props it open. Roy peers in, but it's too dark to see much.

"Try turning on the lights," Roy says, and Carl leans into the car, flipping the headlights back on. The engine compartment lights up, the chrome glinting in the cold white light.

"Wow, that IS different looking," Roy says, leaning closer, his fingers brushing the metal.

"Yeah, well, these are overhead cams," Carl says, trying to sound casual, trying to keep his voice from shaking. "That's part of what makes it so efficient." He points at the engine, trying to explain, trying to keep talking, anything to keep the fear at bay. "These are dual, dual Webers. One intake for each cylinder. The air comes in here, right into the cylinder, and out there, into the header—"

But before he can finish, Eddie McGuire charges forward, his fist slamming into the side of Carl's face. Pain explodes in Carl's head, blinding him, and he stumbles backward, his hand flying to his cheek. Eddie doesn't give him a chance to recover—he comes at Carl again, fists flying, each blow driving Carl back, his hands coming up in a useless attempt to defend himself.

Carl trips, falling to the ground, his head hitting the gravel, the sharp rocks biting into his skin. He holds his face, the pain radiating through him, his eyes watering.

"Stop, stop," Carl begs, his voice breaking. He's shaking, the fear consuming him, his body crumpled on the ground.

Eddie looms over him, his voice dripping with disdain. "Get the fuck up," he commands. "Get up and fight, you pussy."

Carl just lies there, his body aching, his head spinning. "No, look, you win. I don't want to fight." His voice is small, broken, tears streaming down his face. He can feel the hot sting of humiliation burning in his chest.

Eddie's face twists in anger, his lips curling in disgust. He grabs Carl by the shirt, lifting him slightly off the ground before slamming his fist into Carl's face again, and again, and again. Carl curls into a ball, his hands coming up to shield his head, his body trembling.

"Get up and fight, you little queer!" Eddie yells, his voice echoing across the gravel lot.

Roy finally steps in, his face a mask of frustration. He grabs Carl by the arm, pulling him to his feet. His voice is calm, almost coaxing. "Come on, get up. You're all right. Go ahead, fight back."

Carl's knees are weak, his body barely holding him up. He looks at Roy, his eyes bloodshot and swollen, his face streaked with dirt and tears. "No, no, come on, Roy. You win. I don't want to fight. I can't fight you." He can't even think straight, the fear clouding his mind. "What did I do? I didn't do anything."

Roy's lips curl into a sneer. "Oh yeah, you've been doing a lot. We're just playing." He reaches out, grabbing Carl's wrists, trying to lift his arms, trying to make him fight. "Come on now, put up your hands. Go ahead, hit me."

Carl just shakes his head, his body limp, his hands falling to his sides. Roy slaps him, his hand cracking against Carl's cheek, the sting sharp and shocking. Carl barely reacts, his eyes glazing over, his body folding in on itself.

Roy lets out an exasperated sigh, shoving Carl roughly, sending him sprawling back to the ground. He turns, shaking his head, his voice dripping with contempt. "He won't fight," he yells to the others, his words hanging in the cold night air.

Carl lies there, his body aching, his head throbbing. He pulls his knees up, his hands covering his face, his breath coming in ragged gasps. The headlights glare down on him, casting harsh shadows across the gravel. He feels exposed, vulnerable, his humiliation on full display. He can hear the others laughing, their voices echoing around him, calling him names, mocking him. It feels like it will never end, like he'll be stuck here forever, trapped in this moment of pain and fear and shame.

Finally, Roy walks over again, his footsteps crunching against the gravel. He stops in front of Carl, his voice softer this time. "Are you ready to get up now?" Carl flinches, his arms coming up to cover his head, his body tensing.

Roy sighs, his patience wearing thin. "Come on, it's over. Get up." But Carl doesn't move, doesn't even look up.

Suddenly, Eddie appears, his face twisted with rage. "You fucking pussy, get the fuck up." He grabs Carl by the hair, yanking him up, his other hand coming down, his fist slamming into Carl's head over and over, each blow harder than the last. Carl cries out, his voice breaking, his hands coming up to shield his face, but Eddie's relentless.

Then Eddie kicks him, his boot slamming into Carl's ribs, then his back, then his head. The blows come fast, each one sending shockwaves of pain through Carl's body. He feels something crack, feels the pain explode in his side, his vision going black. His head hits the gravel, and everything goes dark.

Roy runs over, shoving Eddie away, his voice frantic. "That's enough! Jesus fucking Christ, Eddie, that's enough!"

People are shouting now, their voices urgent, panicked. "Leave him alone! He's had enough!"

Carl comes to, his vision blurry, his head pounding. He hears Roy's voice, feels someone lifting his head. "Hey, kid. You all right? You're okay, right?"

Carl tries to speak, but his throat is too tight, his mouth too dry. He blinks, the world coming in and out of focus. He can see Roy leaning over him, his face twisted with worry. "I can't see," Carl whispers, his voice weak, shaky. "I can't see."

Roy's face pales. He glances around, shouting, "He says he can't see!" He tries to wipe the blood away from Carl's eyes, but it's everywhere, covering his face, dripping onto the gravel.

Eddie bends down, his expression cold, dismissive. He looks at Carl for a moment before declaring, "He's fine. He's faking."

"Yeah, he looks fucking great," Roy snaps, his voice filled with anger. He's pissed now, at Eddie, at himself, at the whole damn situation. He doesn't understand what made Eddie go off like that. They've roughed kids up before, sure, but they never really hurt them. It was just supposed to be about putting people in their place, about reminding them who was in charge. But this—this was something else.

Eddie just shrugs, turning away, his face hard. "Fuck that little pussy," he mutters, strutting away, calling out to the others. "Let's get the fuck out of here."

Roy takes one last look at Carl, lying there in the dirt, blood pouring from the gash on his head. He turns to the group of kids from Carl's class. They look shaken, upset, but they don't say anything. Barbara, one of the older girls, glares at him, her eyes filled with anger.

"This is bullshit, Welch. You and Eddie are out of fucking control," she snaps, her voice filled with fury.

Roy ignores her, his face tightening. He points at Carl. "Clean him up and get him home," he says, his voice flat.

Barbara glares at him, her lips pressing together. He turns and walks away, climbing into the pickup with a couple of other guys. He's angry, his fists clenching. This kid, with his fancy car and clothes, his long hair—he's had it coming for a while. But not like this. Not like this.

Eddie gets into his Corvette, slamming the door, the engine roaring to life. He peels out, gravel spraying in all directions, the taillights disappearing into the night. Roy follows, his jaw tight, his face a mask of frustration. He knows he hasn't heard the last of this. He only hopes Carl isn't hurt too bad—not seriously. He's got a bad feeling about this, a sick feeling that something's gone wrong, that they've gone too far.

Meanwhile, Carl lies on the ground, his body aching, his head pounding. He can hear the others around him, their voices low, murmuring. He's too weak to move, too weak to even open his eyes. He feels Barbara's hands on him, gentle, lifting his head, wiping the blood away.

"Come on, Carl," she whispers, her voice soft, her fingers brushing his hair back. "We're gonna get you out of here."

He can hear the others, the fear in their voices, the concern. They help him up, his body sagging against them, his legs barely holding him. He leans against Barbara, her arm around his waist, her face pale, her eyes wide with worry.

"It's okay, Carl," she whispers, her voice trembling. "We're gonna get you home. You're gonna be okay." But Carl can hear the doubt in her voice, the fear. He doesn't believe her, not really. He knows it's not over, knows it's never really over.

Barbara

Carl was a mess. Blood everywhere—face, neck, all over his clothes. His head pounded like it was trying to break free from his skull, and he couldn't see a damn thing out of his left eye. Barbara and Tom stood over him, trying to make sense of the damage. Tom whistled low under his breath, surveying the scene.

"God damn, he looks pretty messed up. We may have to get him to a hospital," Tom muttered, scratching the back of his neck.

Barbara, holding onto Carl's arm like it might keep him from floating away, offered a bit of hope. "Can you get up? I've got a towel and some water. Let's see if we can clean you up."

Carl nodded weakly, still dazed, still crying without realizing it. Everything hurt, but his head was the worst of it—a dull, constant throb that made the world spin just a little too fast. With their help, he managed to stand, though his legs felt like jelly, barely able to hold him up. The whole world seemed fuzzy around the edges. His body was just going through the motions now, trying to catch up with what his brain hadn't even processed yet. They half-carried him to the car, where he slumped on the hood. Barbara went inside and came back with a towel and a canteen of water. She pressed the towel to his head, and Carl winced, the pain sharper now that he was more aware. His vision cleared as she wiped the blood from his eyes.

"You okay?" Tom asked, looking more than a little worried.

Carl nodded, though he wasn't sure how true that was. He had stopped crying, but something dark was bubbling up inside him, muttered profanities tumbling from his lips. Barbara and Tom exchanged a look, like this was somehow a good sign. But all Carl could think about was getting out of there. Eddie and Roy—those bastards—what if they came back? His heart thudded hard in his chest, panic rising.

"I'm going home," Carl said suddenly, struggling to his feet, eyes darting around like they were still out there, just beyond the shadows.

Tom stepped forward, hands out. "I don't think you should be driving, man."

"I gotta get out of here." Carl limped towards his Alfa, the only thing in this nightmare that still felt like his. The fear was choking him, making it hard to breathe.

Tom followed him, trying to reason. "Look, Carl, let us drive you home. You're in no condition to —"

"I can drive," Carl snapped, almost falling into the car as he grabbed the keys off the seat. His hands shook as he fumbled with the ignition. He had to get away. What if they came back? He didn't care if he was bleeding or broken. He just had to go. But when he turned the key, the car gave a weak groan, then nothing—just the dead click of a battery drained dry.

"Shit, shit, shit!" Carl slammed his hands on the steering wheel and felt the sobs rising again. Everything felt too heavy, too overwhelming. He slumped back, defeated.

Barbara stepped up gently. "Carl, you can't drive. It's okay. Let me take you home." Her voice was soft, like she was speaking to a scared kid, and maybe that's exactly what he felt like right now.

Carl didn't fight her this time. He was too tired. Too scared. The adrenaline was gone, leaving him empty and aching. They helped him out of the Alfa, and together, half-carrying him again, they led him to Barbara's car. He collapsed into the passenger seat, letting his body sink into the fabric, and closed his

eyes. He didn't want to be awake anymore. He didn't want to think about what had happened, didn't want to face what was coming next.

Barbara glanced out the window at Tom. "Thanks, Tom. I'll get him home."

"You sure? I can follow you if you need," Tom offered, concern written all over his face.

She shook her head. "I got this. Thanks, though."

Tom waved as they pulled away, though his eyes stayed locked on Carl, watching him like a hawk. As they drove, Carl cracked open his eyes, staring out the window. The Alfa was still sitting there, alone and abandoned. It made him feel even worse, watching it disappear behind them.

"The top's still down," Carl muttered. "I hope it doesn't rain."

Barbara shot him a sideways glance. "I think you've got bigger problems than rain, Carl."

He didn't respond, just started moving his limbs, checking himself over. His head still throbbed, but his vision was clear. His face felt swollen, his ribs ached, and his knees were scraped raw. But nothing felt broken. At least, not on the outside.

"My mom is gonna freak out when she sees me," Carl groaned, pulling down the visor to check his reflection in the mirror. What stared back was a mess. Blood everywhere, his face half-pulped, his shirt soaked in it. "Oh my god. My mom's gonna have a heart attack."

Barbara laughed, glancing at him. "She should freak out. I'm freaked out. You look like you've been through a war."

Carl snorted. "Feels like it." He was quiet for a moment before adding, "I just want to clean up a little before I go home. She doesn't need to see this."

Barbara shook her head in disbelief. "Are you nuts? You should be in a hospital right now, not worrying about your mom freaking out."

Carl shrugged, even though it hurt to move. "I don't think anything's broken. I just... I don't know. I just want to be clean." He stared down at his hands, covered in dried blood. "Jesus, I'm a fucking mess."

Barbara didn't argue with him anymore. Instead, she changed direction, pulling up to a small, white two-story house. The place looked old, like something from the 1920s, with a porch swing out front and no garage. Carl limped out of the car, wincing as pain shot up his side. He barely made it up the steps before collapsing into a chair in the kitchen, where Barbara could get a better look at him.

"How bad is it?" Carl asked, feeling the weight of everything pressing down on him.

Barbara grimaced. "It ain't pretty, Carl." She grabbed a towel and water, gently cleaning the blood from his face, careful around the gash on his head. "You're gonna have one hell of a black eye. We need to get some ice on that."

As she disappeared into another room, Carl took stock of himself again. The throbbing in his head had dulled, but the light still hurt his eyes. His ribs ached with every breath. Everything felt raw and exposed, and the weight of it all—the violence, the humiliation, the confusion—was starting to crush him. He couldn't understand it. Why him? What had he done?

Barbara returned with a washcloth, her face serious as she wiped more blood away. "Eddie and Roy... they don't like new faces, Carl. You came here with your car, your clothes, your attitude. You threatened them."

"Threatened?" Carl winced as she pressed ice to his face. "I'm just trying to survive the year and get the hell out of here. How's that a threat?"

Barbara shook her head. "They don't like change. You don't fit their mold, so they needed to put you in your place. That's how it works around here."

Carl's eyes filled with a mix of anger and disbelief. "I didn't do anything! I wear my hair long and maybe I talk in class, but since when is that a crime?"

Barbara sighed, shaking her head as she cleaned the cut above his eye. "It's not fair, Carl. But they see you as a threat. That's why it happened."

Carl was quiet for a moment, letting it all sink in. The world felt smaller, heavier. Everything about this town—the rules, the unwritten codes—was closing in on him.

Home

Barbara pulled up in front of Carl's house, the old porch light flickering in the Kansas night. She leaned back in her seat, giving him a small, relieved smile.

"Here you go, home safe and sound," she said, a chuckle escaping both of them, though there wasn't much to laugh about. It felt like an unspoken relief—a little moment where they could pretend everything wasn't as messed up as it was.

Carl reached for the door handle but paused. "Thanks, Barbara. I really appreciate your help tonight." His voice was soft, sincere, carrying more weight than he let on.

She reached out her hand, and he took it, her fingers warm against his cold, scraped skin. "I'm really sorry this happened to you," she said, leaning over and kissing him on the good side of his face. It wasn't much, just a brief touch of her lips, but it sent a warmth through him, making his face flush redder than it already was.

"I'll see you again soon—when I'm not so banged up," he said, smiling a little.

Barbara smiled back, her eyes bright and open, like she saw more in him than he realized. "Sounds good."

Carl opened the door and struggled out of the car, every step a reminder of the pain that had settled deep into his ribs and knee. His body ached, but he managed to stand, giving her one last grateful glance. "Thanks again," he called as he closed the door, watching her drive off into the night.

As Carl limped up the driveway and into the house, he could hear the TV buzzing faintly from his mother's room. The warmth of the house wrapped around him, comforting in its familiarity. But he knew what was coming.

"Carl?" his mom called from down the hall, her voice instantly cutting through the house.

"Yeah, it's me," he answered, trying to keep his voice steady.

"You're home early." There was a question in her words, something she always seemed to do, like she could read between the lines before there were any.

"Yeah," he said simply, knowing there was no avoiding it.

"Is everything all right?" Her voice had that tone, the one that always got under his skin. It was like she could sense something was wrong before he even said a word. Moms had that radar, like they were wired to pick up on every little thing.

Carl walked down the narrow hall, stopping just before the doorway to her room. He could feel her eyes searching for him, waiting.

"Okay, now don't freak out," he said, taking a deep breath. "I'm all right, but... I had a little accident."

"What?" Her concern was immediate, the sound of her moving in bed loud in the quiet house.

He stepped into her room, keeping the bad side of his face turned away. But it was no use. The second she saw him, she gasped, her hands flying to her mouth.

"Oh my god! What happened?" She was out of bed in an instant, crossing the room with that frantic energy only a mother could muster.

"I got in a fight," Carl said, trying to downplay it. "I'm banged up, but I'm all right."

"You don't look all right! Oh my god!" She was all over him, poking at his clothes, inspecting his cuts and bruises, pulling at him like she could fix it just by looking closer. He hated when she did this, the fussing, the worrying. It made him feel like a kid again, powerless.

"I'm fine, Mom, really," he insisted, though it was hard to sound convincing when you looked like you'd just gone through a meat grinder.

"Come into the kitchen," she said, ignoring his protests. "Let me get you cleaned up. Oh my god!" She was still saying it, over and over, like some kind of chant.

She sat him down at the kitchen table, her hands moving automatically as she grabbed a pan, filling it halfway with warm water. Carl sat there, feeling like a little kid again, bruised and bloody, waiting for his mom to fix everything. But he wasn't a kid, and this wasn't something she could fix.

"Oh my god," she murmured again, shaking her head as she pressed the washcloth to his face. "How did this happen?"

Carl groaned inwardly. Here came the questions.

"Eddie McGuire and Roy Welch. They decided to kidnap me and beat the crap out of me."

Her face paled. "Oh my god, not Dottie Welch's boy?"

"Yeah, well, he's a lot bigger now, Mom," Carl muttered, managing a smirk despite the pain.

She shook her head, still stunned. "What did you do?"

"Nothing," Carl said, frustration creeping into his voice. "I have long hair and I drive a sports car. Apparently, that's a sin in Kelseyville, Kansas."

"Oh my god." She was shaking her head again, her eyes wide with disbelief.

"Mom, can you stop saying that?" Carl rolled his eyes, but he felt a pang of guilt, watching her worry like this.

"Did you say something to them? Did you make them mad?"

"No, I didn't even know those guys! They're not in high school. Apparently, they do this to everyone—some kind of initiation, I guess. A perverse little Midwestern ritual no one told me about."

She stepped back, taking in the full extent of his injuries. "You might need stitches," she said, her voice quieter now, like she was trying to process it all.

"I'm not getting stitches, and I'm not gonna have a scar," Carl said stubbornly.

"Yes, you will."

"No, I won't."

"You probably have a concussion," she went on, undeterred. "I'm not letting you go to sleep."

Carl sighed. "Mom, I'm fine. I'm not even tired." He winced as she poked at his head again. "Ouch! Would you take it easy?"

She didn't stop fussing, didn't stop worrying. And even though it drove him crazy, Carl couldn't help but feel bad about it. She was just trying to take care of him, and he knew she'd been doing it his whole life—worrying, watching over him, always waiting for the next thing to go wrong. He didn't want to put her through that anymore, but here they were again, stuck in the same cycle.

After cleaning him up, she handed him some clean clothes, gave him a Vicodin, and made him sit on the bed with her to watch TV. "I don't want you falling asleep," she said, and he didn't even bother to argue.

They watched Johnny Carson, side by side, her eyes darting over to him every few minutes, making sure he was still awake. Carl kept drifting off, the painkillers making his eyelids heavy, but every time he closed his eyes for more than a second, she was there.

"Wake up! You're going to sleep!"

"Mom, I'm fine," Carl grumbled, barely able to keep his eyes open. "Just let me sleep."

Finally, after what felt like hours, she let him drift off, her own worry still hanging in the air. She watched him breathe, his face bruised and swollen, his body battered. It broke her heart to see him like this, to know that no matter how much she worried, how much she tried to protect him, she couldn't stop the world from hurting him.

Carl's mom admired him, more than he knew. She saw the mind and wit that made him different, special even. But it scared her, too. She worried that same mind, that same wit, would be the source of his greatest pain. And in a place like Kelseyville, where different meant dangerous, she knew Carl didn't belong. He had outgrown this place, and soon, she knew he'd be leaving. That thought made her heart ache in a way only a mother could understand.

She gently laid her head against his back, listening to his steady breathing, and tears filled her eyes.

Bruised

Carl didn't wake up until almost eleven the next morning, and the first thing that hit him wasn't the light streaming through the window—it was the pain. A deep, bone-aching hurt that seemed to crawl into every inch of his body. He lay there for a few minutes, staring at the ceiling, trying to muster the energy to move. Finally, he dragged himself out of bed, every muscle screaming in protest, and stumbled into the living room, where he collapsed onto the couch with a groan.

His mom, bless her heart, was already doting over him, fluttering around like a mother hen. She fixed him a big breakfast—eggs, bacon, toast, the works—and brought him a bed pillow for his aching head. Carl appreciated it, but even chewing was a challenge. He realized, with a grimace, that his upper teeth hurt like hell, and there was a nasty cut inside his lip that stung every time he tried to eat. His elbows and knees were scabbing over, stiff and sore, and his ribs felt like someone had taken a baseball bat to them. His mom reassured him that they probably weren't broken, but it didn't make the pain any less. And then there was his face—Christ, the right side was a swollen, bruised mess. He didn't even want to look in the mirror.

All in all, Carl was in piss-poor shape, and as he sat there, poking at his food, he couldn't help but reach one firm conclusion: life sucked. It sucked big time.

To top it all off, he couldn't stop worrying about the Alfa. It had been sitting out all night at three-corners, top down, wide open to the elements, and who knows what else. But the thought of leaving the house—of stepping back out into the world after what happened—made his stomach churn. He was afraid, and it wasn't a feeling he was used to. Not like this.

Lying there, feeling the weight of everything pressing down on him, Carl started to think about what had happened in a new light. This wasn't just some random beating. This wasn't just a bad night. It was personal now. He couldn't shake the thought that this must be what it was like to be Black in a place like Mississippi, where you didn't have to do anything wrong to be a target—you just had to exist.

All those political convictions he'd been spouting off for the last few years, all the arguments he'd had, all the philosophical debates—they felt different now. This wasn't just an idea anymore, something to get fired up about from a safe distance. He could see the cost of it all, feel the price of standing out, of being different, on his own battered, bruised face. He'd gotten his ass kicked for no other reason than being seen as a threat, as someone who didn't fit in.

And now, the danger that came with those convictions, the sacrifice people in the civil rights movement were making every day, wasn't some far-off struggle. It was sitting right here with him, pulsing in his swollen face, throbbing in his ribs. He wasn't sure what scared him more—the fact that he'd been hurt, or the realization that, for some people, this was their entire life.

Carl's changes started innocently enough, like most big shifts do, before you even know they're happening. Five years ago, he was just a kid, still wet behind the ears, biking through the thick Kansas humidity to catch a double feature at the old theater downtown. That theater was a refuge, the kind of place where the air conditioning felt like a gift straight from heaven on a scorching day. He couldn't even remember the first movie—it was the second one that hit him like a freight train. *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

Carl didn't know much about segregation back then. Not a single Black family lived in his neighborhood, and his school was a sea of white faces. The whole civil rights movement felt far away,

not something a kid like him gave much thought to. But watching Scout Finch's innocence unravel in the face of injustice, watching Atticus stand up when nobody else would—that stuck. That changed something deep inside him.

Afterward, Carl and his best friend Lowell pedaled to their usual spot by the creek, a shady little retreat under a weeping willow. Skipping stones, they started talking about the movie, about injustice. Lowell, being Jewish, was no stranger to the weight of discrimination. His family had stories—dark ones—about relatives caught up in the Holocaust. They'd never really talked about it before, but that afternoon, something shifted. They talked about Blacks, about Jews, about all the ways the world was unfair. And for the first time, Carl started seeing the world through a different lens.

A few weeks later, Carl found himself in Lowell's living room, surrounded by his family, all eyes glued to the black-and-white TV. President Johnson was giving a speech about some Voting Rights Bill. Carl hadn't paid much attention to politics before, but seeing the way Lowell's brother David, home from college, hung on every word—it sparked something. David had just been to Alabama, working with civil rights activists. Later that evening, sitting barefoot on the front porch, David told Carl and Lowell stories that would stay with them forever. He painted vivid pictures of the struggle in the South—of fear, hatred, and violence, but also of hope, courage, and resilience.

From that day forward, Carl was hooked. Politics became his obsession, and with it came a hunger for knowledge. He started reading everything he could get his hands on—science fiction from Asimov, philosophy from Sartre. He wasn't just a high school kid anymore; he was part of something bigger, something that felt like it could change the world.

But with all that idealism came hard realities. Civil rights marches turned violent, and Carl found himself torn. He understood the anger, but he couldn't let go of the idea that nonviolence—the way of King and Gandhi—was the only way. That tension weighed heavy on him, but it fueled his drive, making him question everything.

By the summer of '67, things had shifted again. It wasn't just about civil rights or the war anymore. It was about the culture itself. Everything was in revolt. The Summer of Love washed over the country in a haze of psychedelic music, bell-bottoms, and a big middle finger to authority. Carl embraced it all. He'd bought himself an Alfa Romeo, thanks to his after-school job, and spent his free time cruising to Volker Park, where the hippies gathered like a strange new tribe. There was a kind of camaraderie there, a bond sealed with peace signs and shared joints. It felt like rebellion, but it also felt like belonging.

That sense of belonging, though, didn't extend to Carl's home life. His dad was hardly ever around, busy being a traveling salesman. His mom—well, she'd started slipping. The loneliness and the strain of raising kids had worn her down, and the prescription pills she got from her doctor didn't help. By the time Carl's dad finally walked out, leaving her with her "mystery illnesses," Carl wasn't surprised. He didn't even know why his dad bothered fighting for custody in the first place—revenge, maybe? Whatever it was, it didn't last long. His dad remarried a younger woman named Beverly, who at first had seemed cool with Carl's political leanings but quickly soured when she realized what a "slob" and "problem" he was.

The final straw came when Carl threw a small party at the house while his dad and Beverly were away for the weekend. Carl thought he'd cleaned everything up, but apparently someone had used one of Beverly's precious antique cups as an ashtray. That was it. His dad had to make a choice—Carl or Beverly—and in the end, Beverly's tits won out.

Carl's life was shifting faster than he could keep up with, and through it all, the world around him seemed to be spinning out of control. It was exhilarating, terrifying, and he couldn't imagine being anywhere else.

Billy Returns

Carl has been moping around for about an hour since breakfast when he hears a knock at the door. He reflexively jumps in fear. Sneaking over he looks out the window and sees Billy. Carl opens the door and Billy's mouth drops open.

"Holly shit! Man, you really look fucked up."

"Thanks. And good fucking morning to you too, asshole."

"Oh man, I really feel bad about this now. Those son-of-a-bitches. What the hell happened?"

"Yeah, well thanks for abandoning me last night."

Carl steps aside so Billy can come in. He takes the opportunity to look up and down the street, then carefully closes and locks the door.

Carl tells Billy the whole story. Billy is visibly upset and angry.

"I feel like shit man. I never should have left you." Billy shakes his head

"They just would have beaten us both up." Carl says. "I'm afraid your next."

"They got' a catch me first, the mutha-fuckers. I've seen people like this before man, and I've always been able to dodge them."

"I'll have to admit, that was a pretty slick little tRob you pulled at the Dairy Bell. You're a master of evasion Arnold. That's a great survival skill. Your genes will go far." Carl smirks

"I try to spread them as much as possible. All for the good of the human race of course."

"I'm feeling pretty jumpy. I know it doesn't make any sense, but I keep thinking they're coming to get me. I'm thinking about going to the cops."

Billy raises his eyebrows, and then sets silently thinking. Finally he says,

"I'm not sure that's a good idea. You'll be out of this town in a few months, probably spending most of your time in KC and Lawrence this summer. Then you'll be off to college. Why make waves? Just let it go. If you go to the cops it will just stir up more shit."

"Yeah, well I thought about that. I know you're probably right, you sound like my mother. But the whole thing pisses me off."

Carl stops and thinks for a while. It's an uneasy silence. Then he says, "I didn't do anything wrong. They kidnapped me and beat me up. That's a crime."

"I know man, but sometimes you have to choose your battles. This town isn't worth it. As much as you bitch about this town? Who gives a shit? Do your time and move on. Think of it as prison. You got bigger fish to fry."

Carl laughs. "Like prison, you got that right. That's exactly how it feels. My sentence is up in three months."

"Let's go get the Alpha." Billy says. "I'll go with you, it'll be all right."

Carl throws some jumper cables in the trunk of his mom's car and a shot gun in the back seat. The two of them drive out to three-corners to get the Alpha. It's dusty, but undamaged. Carl is nervous the whole time. No matter how much he tells himself its safe, he is still afraid.

Justice

Carl stayed home from school on Monday. He wasn't afraid of facing his classmates—he was just too sore and tired, both inside and out, to deal with them. Around ten in the morning, after pacing around the house, he decided to take a drive downtown to the police station. It was a small, nondescript building tucked between the hardware store and the diner, one of those places you could pass a hundred times and never notice unless you needed it.

The police car parked right in front told Carl that Officer Larry Barns was in. Barns was an ex-Marine who'd done a stint as a cop in some big southern city before moving back here with his wife, settling into the quiet life. He liked it that way. Nothing happened in Kelseyville, and that was exactly how Barns preferred it. Carl could hear the faint sound of a basketball game on the radio as he stepped inside the station. The place smelled like old coffee and worn leather, and there sat Barns, leaning back in his chair, phone to his ear, arguing with his wife about who was picking up groceries.

The conversation was mundane, like the rest of life in Kelseyville, but Carl was on edge. He had to remind himself why he was here—to get something done. His face still throbbed, every movement reminding him of what happened Saturday night.

Barns hung up the phone and looked up at Carl with a familiar, easygoing smile. "Hey there, Carl Lee. What brings you in today?" He sounded like they were old friends, like Carl was here for a chat and not what he really had to say.

Carl didn't waste any time. "I wanted to talk to you about what happened Saturday night. Eddie McGuire and Roy Welch—they kidnapped me and beat the hell out of me."

The smile on Barns's face faded, but his tone didn't change much. He leaned forward slightly, his hands resting on his lap. "Kidnapped, huh? That's a pretty strong word, Carl. I heard a little about what happened, but you sure that's what you want to call it?"

Carl felt his teeth clench. "Kidnapped, Officer Barns. They grabbed me, threw me in the car, and beat me. What would you call that?"

Barns sighed and sat back in his chair, his face softening with a fatherly tone that grated on Carl's nerves. "Look, Carl, I've been doing this a long time. I've seen kids get into fights, and I know it can feel like the world's ending when you're on the losing side. But these things? They have a way of working themselves out. Give it a few days, cool off, and I bet this will blow over."

Carl's heart pounded, not with fear this time but with frustration. "They're not kids, Officer Barns. I'm the kid here—they're in their twenties. And I don't even know them. They grabbed me, beat me up for no reason. Look at me. Does this look like something that's just going to blow over?"

Barns's eyes flicked over Carl's bruised and swollen face, the black eye, the cut lip. For a moment, he seemed to consider it, but then he leaned back, nodding slowly. "Well, you're a healthy kid. You'll heal up in no time. Things like this happen. Best thing you can do is let it go."

Carl felt the heat rising in his chest, his fists clenching at his sides. He tried to keep his voice steady. "Officer Barns, they could've done a lot worse. They've been beating up other kids too. Isn't that something you're supposed to stop?"

Barns shifted in his seat, clearly uncomfortable now. He wasn't used to this kind of pushback, not from a kid, not from anyone in this town. "I don't like it either, Carl. I'll talk to them. I'll see what's going on. But let's not make this bigger than it needs to be."

Carl shook his head. "I'm not trying to make it bigger. I just want justice. I'd like to file a complaint."

Barns's face hardened, and his tone shifted. He leaned forward, the easygoing smile gone. "Now listen here, Carl. Filing a complaint is just going to make things worse. For you, for me, for everyone. Let me take care of it. I don't need you stirring up trouble where there doesn't need to be any."

Carl stared at him, the knot of anger and frustration tightening in his chest. "I didn't ask for trouble. I didn't do anything wrong. All I'm asking for is some justice. Is that too much?"

Barns's eyes narrowed, his voice taking on an edge Carl hadn't heard before. "I'm the one who decides what justice looks like in this town, Carl. Now you go on home, get back to school tomorrow, and let me handle this."

Carl nodded, but inside he was fuming. "Thanks, Officer Barns. I appreciate it."

Barns leaned back again, the smile creeping back onto his face, like everything had been settled. "That's what I like to hear. Now, don't you worry. I'll take care of it."

Carl left the station, the cold morning air hitting him like a slap. Nothing felt resolved, and the easy tone in Barns's voice made it clear he had no intention of doing anything more than talking. Carl got into his Alfa, his hands gripping the steering wheel so hard his knuckles turned white. He could feel the frustration, the anger, swirling in his chest like a storm, building with every second.

The cold front that had come in overnight made everything feel heavier, darker. The sky was a blanket of gray, the trees bare, the fields dead and brown. Everything looked lifeless. Kansas winters had a way of pressing down on you, making you feel like the cold and gray would never lift. Carl drove out of town, the road stretching out in front of him like an endless, empty line. He pressed down on the gas, letting the Alfa roar as he sped down the highway.

Maybe Billy was right. Maybe he should just keep his head down, wait it out, and be gone by summer. It wasn't like this place was worth fighting for. But the thought of letting Eddie and Roy get away with it, of just sitting back and doing nothing—it burned in him, made his hands tremble on the wheel. Why couldn't he just be normal, like his mom said? Why couldn't he just fit in and let it go?

The road stretched out ahead of him, the horizon flat and empty. Carl pushed the car faster, the engine whining as it hit a hundred. The overpass loomed ahead, coming up fast. He thought about it, really thought about it—just one quick turn of the wheel, and it would all be over. The pain, the anger, the fear—it would all disappear in an instant. No more fighting, no more trying to figure out where he belonged, no more waiting for things to make sense.

The steering wheel felt heavy in his hands, and for a moment, he almost did it. The bridge was only seconds away. He could picture it—twisted metal, broken glass, everything gone in a flash. But when the moment came, he couldn't turn the wheel. It wouldn't move, like something was holding it in place. He screamed as he flew under the overpass, the sound lost in the roar of the engine. He watched the bridge disappear in his rearview mirror, his heart pounding in his chest.

There would be another bridge soon enough. But by then, Carl knew he wouldn't turn the wheel. Not today.

He drove on to Ottawa, the cold wind howling outside the car, the bleak landscape rushing past. The cop in Ottawa isn't any happier to take the complaint than Larry Barns. Later that day a Sheriff's deputy visits Roy Welch and Eddie McGuire. He asks some questions about the incident, takes some notes and files a report. A hearing will be set within thirty days. Kidnapping is a serious charge, and the DA can

press charges or even file a warrant for their arrest now, forcing them to make bail. A detective handling the case calls Larry Barns to inform him of the complaint and to see what he knows about it. The detective isn't surprised that Barns is well aware of the situation. Of course, as always, the implication is that this is something that happened on Barns watch, in Barns town and now it's an issue. That means trouble and Larry Barns hates trouble.

But as Carl drove home, the gray Kansas sky stretching out endlessly above him, he couldn't shake the feeling that nothing had really changed. Justice might be coming, but it would come slow, and it wouldn't come easy.

Eddie McGuire

Eddie McGuire grew up just outside of Kelseyville, a mile or so down a dusty, rutted road, in a weather-beaten farmhouse that had seen better days, the kind of place where the boards creak with every step and the wind whistles through the cracks in the windows. His dad bought the place nearly thirty years ago, back when the land was cheap, and the family grew into it the way you settle into an old pair of boots, rough around the edges but solid enough to hold you.

His dad, a long-haul truck driver, was gone more than he was home, spending weeks on the road, crisscrossing the country in an eighteen-wheeler, chasing down miles like most folks chase after sleep. But when he was home, it was like the house lit up. He had a way of bringing energy with him, filling up the rooms with his stories, his big laugh, and his love of rough-and-tumble games. The whole family would pile outside, playing touch football on the front lawn, or basketball on the cracked, uneven court they'd set up near the garage. His dad taught them all how to play smart, not just hard, drilling into them the strategies of the game, how to read the field, how to be quick on their feet. And Eddie, well, Eddie was a natural. He was quick, he was aggressive, and more than anything, he was a competitor. He liked to win, but he hated to lose even more.

Being third in line of four kids, Eddie always felt like he had something to prove. His oldest brother was the golden child, the one who did everything right, who never got in trouble, who made good grades and made his parents proud. His second brother, on the other hand, was a hell-raiser, always getting into scrapes, fighting, drinking, and causing a mess. Eddie felt like he was caught between the two, never quite measuring up to either, and his mom, well, she was tired by the time Eddie came along. By the time his baby sister was born, all the love and attention in the family seemed to go straight to her. And Eddie? Eddie felt like he was always fighting for a sliver of the spotlight, always trying to make his mark in a family that didn't seem to notice.

But Eddie's dad—he saw something in Eddie, something tough, something strong. He took a special interest in him, especially when it came to sports. Eddie was the kid who could take a hit and keep going, the one who didn't flinch when things got rough. He was the kid who fumbled the ball when he was young, but his dad drilled one lesson into him over and over: “Hang onto that ball, Eddie.” It was more than just football advice—it was a lesson about life, about grit, about not letting go when things got tough. And Eddie took it to heart.

Out of high school, Eddie's dad helped him land a solid job working local deliveries for a beverage company. It wasn't glamorous, but it paid well, and it kept him close to home. With his dad's help, Eddie fixed up an old outbuilding on the property into his own little place—a one-room setup with a kitchenette and bathroom. It wasn't much, but it was enough for Eddie, and it kept him close to the family. He didn't have many expenses, so after a while, he saved up enough to buy a used Corvette, red and sleek, his pride and joy. That car was everything to him, a symbol of what he'd earned, what he was worth. On the surface, things were good. But Eddie often found himself angry for no reason, that old, familiar sense of dissatisfaction simmering beneath the surface. He drank too much, and though people liked Eddie, they all knew he had a temper, that mean streak that came out when the bottle was in his hand.

His mom called him stubborn. His dad, a hothead. And the truth was, Eddie was both. He could be charming, likable even, but you never knew when he'd flip. He was the kind of guy who'd punch a wall

just as easily as he'd crack a joke, the kind of guy who could go from laughing to seething in a second. Maybe it was because of his brothers, always fighting for attention. Maybe it was just how he was wired. But everyone knew you didn't want to cross Eddie when he was mad.

Eddie met Roy Welch in ninth grade, and the two of them clicked instantly. Roy was big, quiet, a bruiser who didn't need to say much to make his presence known. Eddie, on the other hand, was loud, wild, always ready for trouble. Together, they ruled the school. By tenth grade, they were the ones everyone looked up to, or feared. Roy became a football star, the biggest guy on the field, and Eddie was the crazy one, the one who'd do anything, who didn't care what people thought. They were at the top of the social ladder, the kind of guys who didn't need to worry about the future because, for them, high school was the future.

But five years out of high school, things were starting to change. Most of the kids they'd grown up with had moved on—some got married, some had kids, others left town altogether. Roy didn't seem to notice, content to live out his glory days in the same old place. But Eddie felt it—he could feel the ground shifting under his feet, could sense that the world was moving on without him. And he hated it. The thought of being stuck in Kelseyville, of losing his place at the top, gnawed at him, though he'd never admit it out loud.

When Eddie stormed over to Roy's house after hearing about Carl Lee filing that complaint, he was fuming, barely able to keep it together. He banged on Roy's door like he was trying to break it down, his hands shaking with rage. Roy opened the door, his eyes wide with worry. His parents weren't thrilled about the sheriff showing up, and Roy was feeling the weight of it all more than Eddie realized.

"I'm gonna kill that son of a bitch," Eddie growled, storming past Roy into the house.

Roy shut the door quietly behind him, glancing over his shoulder, nervous that his parents might hear. "You need to calm down, Eddie. This is serious now."

"Calm down? I'm gonna get that fucker." Eddie's eyes were wild, his fists clenched so tight his knuckles were white.

Roy's voice was steady, but the fear was there, hanging in the air between them. "My dad says it's his word against ours, but Carl Lee's family has money. This could get bad, Eddie. Real bad."

Roy wasn't angry like Eddie. He was scared. His dad had nearly knocked him flat the night before, screaming at him about jail, about how serious the charges were. Kidnapping, assault—these weren't high school pranks anymore. Roy wanted to lie low, to let things blow over. He wasn't about to get caught up in something that could land him behind bars.

"I'm done with this, Eddie. I'm not getting mixed up in it anymore," Roy said firmly, his voice low.

Eddie's face twisted in fury, pacing the small living room like a caged animal. "Everyone's turning into a bunch of fucking cowards. I hate that little shit. Fuck!" Eddie's voice was getting louder, angrier, his movements jerky, like he was about to snap.

Roy was getting nervous, not just about Eddie, but about his dad hearing all the shouting. Eddie was a loose cannon, but this wasn't high school anymore. This was real, and it was starting to spiral out of control. Roy's dad had made it clear—if this didn't stop, they were both going down, and Roy wasn't about to let that happen.

"Just drop it, Eddie. Carl's graduating this year. He's leaving town. Let it go." Roy tried to keep his voice calm, but he could feel Eddie's anger, could see it burning in his eyes.

Eddie shook his head, his jaw tight, his voice low and dangerous. “That’s why I gotta get him before he goes.”

Roy stared at Eddie, baffled. “Why do you care so much about Carl Lee?”

Eddie didn’t answer right away. He didn’t know how to explain it, didn’t really understand it himself. It wasn’t just the car or the clothes or the way Carl looked at him like he was better than everyone else. It was deeper than that, something primal, something Eddie couldn’t shake. Carl represented everything Eddie hated—everything that was changing, everything that threatened the world Eddie had built for himself. Carl was the outsider, the threat, the guy who didn’t play by the rules, who didn’t belong. And Eddie couldn’t let that stand.

Roy couldn’t understand it. Roy didn’t care about any of that. Roy just wanted to stay out of trouble, to ride things out. But Eddie? Eddie was different. He needed to prove something, needed to hold onto the power he felt slipping away. And Carl Lee was the symbol of everything that threatened to take it from him.

Back To School

Carl walked toward the side door of Kelseyville High School, unnoticed at first. But once he hit the long stretch of hallway leading to his first class, everything changed. The moment he stepped inside, the quiet murmur of conversation died. Faces turned. Eyes locked onto him. Whispers started, not even quiet ones. He could feel them watching him, sizing him up, taking in the damage. His body tightened with each step, his nerves humming with the effort of pretending like it didn't bother him. But it did. It ate at him.

Walker, one of the few kids Carl halfway trusted, approached him before first period. Walker was tall, with a lanky frame and an easygoing demeanor that made him approachable. He always had a hint of mischief in his eyes, which Carl found oddly reassuring—it was like Walker had a knack for slipping under the radar, and that gave Carl some comfort. “Damn, they really fucked you up, man. I tried to warn you about those guys. I’ve had my own run-ins with them, but not like this.” He nodded at Carl’s bruised, swollen face.

“Yeah,” Carl said, not bothering to hide the bitterness. “Guess I’m not as wily as Billy.”

“I heard you pressed charges,” Walker said, his voice low but impressed.

“Yeah, I did.”

“No shit? Man, that’s really gonna piss McGuire off. Good luck with that.” Walker looked around, his tone carrying more skepticism than support.

Carl didn’t respond, just gave a half-hearted nod. He was tired of explaining himself, tired of the warnings, tired of the feeling in his gut that this wasn’t over. Walker glanced at the clock and shrugged. “Well, I gotta get to class. Catch you later.”

“Yeah, later.”

Carl felt a knot in his stomach tighten. He needed to get out of the hallway, away from all the eyes, the stares, the whispers. He found himself wishing for a desk in the back of the room, or better yet, a dark closet where no one could see him. Hell, a cave would be even better. His emotions churned inside him—shame, humiliation, anger, fear—all swirling together in a nauseating mix that made him want to throw up.

It didn’t help that Carl had always taken a certain pride in his appearance. He liked dressing sharp, liked keeping his long hair neat. He was the kind of guy who’d take an extra minute in front of the mirror just to make sure everything looked right. Now? He looked like something straight out of a late-night horror flick. His left eye was swollen halfway shut, the skin around it a patchwork of black, blue, purple, and yellow, running down from his hairline to his neck. He didn’t just have a black eye; his face was a swollen, throbbing mess, the kind of thing people winced at when they looked too long. And they were looking—everyone was. Getting a date to senior prom? That was a joke now.

As he slunk into first period, he made a beeline for the back corner, picking a desk on the right side so he could keep the worst of his face turned away from the class. He buried his head in his book, pretending to read, pretending not to notice the other kids staring at him. He could hear the whispers behind him, feel their judgment. Sympathy wasn’t exactly pouring in.

Carl had never been one to fly under the radar. He was the new kid, sure, but more than that, he had a way of rubbing people the wrong way. He was outspoken, never afraid to voice his opinions, especially in class where he’d challenge teachers and classmates alike. He was confrontational, and that

rubbed people raw. His clothes were always a little too stylish for small-town Kansas, a casual confidence that bordered on arrogance. It was all too much for some kids, who saw Carl as an outsider who wasn't interested in fitting in. He was opinionated, loud, always ready to argue, especially in class. Some kids thought he was a know-it-all. The teachers, especially Mr. Clark, liked him just a little too much, and Carl's clothes—slick, hip, always a little too polished for small-town Kansas—didn't help. Add in the sports car, and he was practically asking for trouble. At first, people had been curious, intrigued even, but as the months wore on, that curiosity turned into irritation. Carl wasn't just different—he was an outsider who didn't try to fit in. Some kids felt sorry for him now, but others thought he'd had it coming.

The morning dragged on. Every class was the same—whispers, stares, the occasional sympathetic look that did nothing to dull the ache in his chest. By lunchtime, it was a freak show. Kids wandered by his table, pretending to need something from the other end of the cafeteria just to get a better look at his face. Carl kept his head down, eating as fast as he could, but the knots in his stomach just kept getting tighter.

After lunch came American History with Mr. Clark. Carl had always liked history, especially Clark's class, but today was different. He wasn't sure he had it in him to face Clark's intense stare, the inevitable questions, the scrutiny of the other kids.

Joe Clark was a no-nonsense ex-marine with a reputation as the toughest teacher in school. He once dragged a troublemaker out of class by the collar for talking back, the kind of move that earned him both fear and respect. He had no patience for nonsense, and his stern methods were legendary among the students. He had a chiseled jawline, a buzz cut that screamed discipline, and a no-smiles-allowed demeanor that had terrified students for years. But there was something underneath all that toughness, a glimmer of heart that made him surprisingly well-liked. Clark didn't exactly approve of Carl's rebellious streak, but he respected him. Carl was different. He had opinions about history, real opinions, and he wasn't afraid to voice them. Most kids in Clark's class sat quietly, did their assignments, and moved on. But Carl? Carl dug in. He read the books, argued the points, challenged Clark on things that most kids wouldn't even think to question. Clark didn't agree with him, but there was a grudging respect there.

Carl knew Clark saw him as a project. The teacher was convinced that Carl's left-leaning ideas were the result of reading too many "radical" books, and Clark took it upon himself to steer Carl back to a more conservative, sensible way of thinking. There was one particular debate that stood out—when Carl argued that the Vietnam War was driven by economic greed, Clark had shot back, his voice tinged with irritation, insisting it was a fight for democracy and freedom. The back-and-forth had escalated, with Carl challenging Clark's sources and Clark accusing Carl of being naive. The tension in the room that day had been palpable, and even though neither of them backed down, there had been a mutual respect, forged in the heat of argument. Clark was tough, but Carl was sharp, and their back-and-forth had been a highlight of the year for both of them. What had started as spirited classroom debates turned into a real intellectual sparring match, and even the other students started chiming in with their own opinions. Clark might not have admitted it, but he was enjoying the challenge.

But today, as Carl slid into his seat in the back of the room, it wasn't the same. He felt miserable, worn down by the looks, the whispers, the weight of everything that had happened. Before class started, a few girls came by to offer their sympathy, which lifted Carl's spirits slightly, but it was a brief reprieve. He could still feel the judgment in the room, and it sat heavy on his shoulders.

Mr. Clark walked in, briefcase in hand, setting it down on the desk with a thud. He began pulling out papers, the day's lesson plan, all the while pretending not to notice Carl sitting in the back. But Carl saw the double take. Clark had heard about the fight in the teachers' lounge, but seeing Carl's battered face in person was something else entirely. Clark's jaw clenched as he turned to the blackboard, scrawling Supreme Court in thick chalk.

"If the legislature makes the laws, why do we need the Supreme Court?" Clark asked, turning to face the silent classroom.

He pointed to Jamie, who immediately looked panicked. "Uh, they're a bunch of judges who decide legal cases," she said, her voice shaky.

Clark raised an eyebrow. "That's true, but what kind of cases?"

Silence.

"Constitutional cases," Clark answered himself, turning back to the board. "They decide whether the laws are consistent with the Constitution." He wrote Constitutional Cases on the board in thick, deliberate strokes, but his gaze kept wandering to Carl in the back. It was hard not to. Carl's face was a walking reminder of everything Clark hated about small-town politics and unchecked violence.

For the next half hour, Clark droned on about the Supreme Court and precedents, but it was a slog. The class was half-asleep, and Carl, usually eager to jump in, hadn't said a word. Finally, after what felt like an eternity, Carl raised his hand. Clark almost smiled.

"Carl?" Clark prompted, a bit softer now, curious where this was headed.

Carl's gaze never wavered. "It's about fear," he said, like the words had been sitting in his chest, growing, festering. "It's all about fear."

Clark shifted his weight, crossing his arms. "Go on."

"They were afraid of the people. Afraid that the legislature would pass laws that took away their freedoms. It's called the tyranny of the majority—the tyranny of the popular, of the normal." Carl's voice picked up momentum, each word hitting the room like a slow, steady drumbeat.

Clark's eyes gleamed just a little, that glint of approval he gave when a student hit on something real. "You're right, Carl. In the battle for political power, the legislature might pass unconstitutional laws. By protecting the rights of the few, we're protecting the rights of everybody in the long run. The Supreme Court is there to uphold fairness."

Carl leaned forward, his voice stronger, more sure. "Which brings us back to fear. Most of the Founding Fathers came from small towns like Kelseyville. They knew about fear. I've been learning about fear myself these past few days."

A ripple moved through the room—uncomfortable shifting, the kind that happens when someone says what everyone's thinking but nobody wants to admit. The air felt heavier, thick with the unsaid things hanging over their heads. Carl wasn't talking about the Founding Fathers anymore, and everyone knew it.

Clark cleared his throat, a bit too loudly. "That's why we have laws, Carl. Kelseyville is a pretty safe place. Most people don't even lock their doors."

Carl's eyes darkened, his face tightening with something sharp, something that had been building for far longer than just these few days. "Well, it doesn't feel safe to me, Mr. Clark. Sure, there are laws to protect us, but laws only work if people are willing to enforce them. But if you're a little strange, or if you're Black, or Jewish, all those good people, the majority—they just look the other way."

Clark's lips pressed together, his expression tightening like he was trying to hold back an argument, maybe even trying to convince himself. "I don't think that's true, Carl."

Carl leaned back in his seat, his posture relaxing, but his voice had turned colder, edged with a bitterness that seemed to cut through the classroom's silence. "Yeah, they do. I should have a right to be weird without being afraid. My mom keeps asking me why I can't just be normal. But I should have a right to be weird, to be different."

The weight of Carl's words settled over the room like a heavy blanket, suffocating in its quiet truth. He wasn't asking for permission. He wasn't looking for validation. He was stating a fact, something real and raw that lived in the pit of his stomach. The right to be different, to be weird, to exist in a world that often demanded sameness. And the fear—of rejection, of violence, of the slow, quiet ways people could tear you down when they didn't understand you—was always lurking, even here, in this small, safe town where no one locked their doors.

Clark didn't have a ready answer. The classroom was too quiet now, too still, the conversation having dug its claws into the things they all knew but never said aloud. And for a moment, Carl felt like he wasn't so alone in his fear, even if no one else in that room would admit it.

Barbara

Carl called Barbara late on Friday afternoon, the nerves knotting in his stomach almost making it hard for him to hit the dial button. She had just gotten home from work, a cashier job at the hardware store in Ottawa that she often complained about—long shifts and customers who couldn't be bothered to say thank you.

"Hi, this is Carl."

"Oh, hi, Carl," Barbara said, her voice lighting up in a way that made something twist inside his chest, a warm ache. "How are you feeling?"

"Sore, but much better," Carl answered, trying to keep his voice casual, his heart thudding all the same. "I was wondering, would you wanna drive to Lawrence with me tonight? Maybe catch a movie or something?"

There was a pause. Carl could hear her sigh softly, the rustle of something in the background. He braced himself.

"No, I'm kind of tired tonight," she finally said. "It's been a long day."

The words hit Carl like a light slap, stinging but not surprising. He swallowed, trying to keep his disappointment in check. "Oh, well, okay. That's cool," he managed, but he knew she could hear it. The letdown was all over his voice, no way to hide it. He knew it had been a long shot. He looked like he'd been run over by a freight train, and Barbara—she was older, more put-together. What did she see in him anyway?

"I know you probably think I'm blowing you off," Barbara said, her voice softening, "but I really am tired. This job kicks my ass. I just don't have it in me for a night on the town. Maybe tomorrow night?"

"Okay, that's cool. Yeah, tomorrow," Carl said, trying not to sound too eager.

"But," she added, her voice picking up again, "you could come over to my house and hang out if you want. I'm just staying in tonight, nothing fancy."

"Really?" Carl blurted out before he could stop himself, the excitement bleeding through, and he winced. Dumb. He sounded like a little kid.

Barbara laughed. "Sure, whenever you want. I'm just hanging out at home."

"Okay, yeah. I can drop by in, like, an hour or so, if that's cool?"

"Yeah, that's cool. See you then."

"Okay, bye."

"Bye."

Carl hung up, a grin spreading across his bruised face. Alone at her place. Maybe he'd get lucky—if he didn't look like a car wreck, that is. But what the hell, maybe the sympathy vote would work in his favor. Barbara had helped him after the fight, and he'd been thinking about her ever since, the way she'd held his hand, her touch soft and caring. The way her eyes had lingered on his when she'd leaned in close, concern written all over her face.

Her house wasn't far, only three blocks away. Carl decided to walk. He didn't want to park the Alfa out front, draw attention to himself. The thought of it sitting there, shiny and loud, made him uneasy. It would be easier to sneak over on foot, stay in the shadows, unseen. He didn't want to be seen—being seen meant being vulnerable, and ever since the fight, Carl had had enough of that to last a lifetime.

It was already dark when he stepped out of his front door. The night was crisp, the kind of fall evening that made everything smell sharp and clean. As he walked, he glanced into the windows of the little bungalows that lined the streets. The warm glow spilling out made them look cozy, safe. He thought about how those people, sitting on their couches, watching TV, had no idea what it felt like to be afraid to walk to a friend's house.

The big old oaks and maples loomed overhead, their roots cracking the sidewalks, breaking them up into uneven patches. Kelseyville always seemed like a place from another time, a town that hadn't changed in decades, maybe longer. But Carl knew better. There was no such thing as a simpler time. Wars had touched this place just like anywhere else, left their scars. People had died in those far-off battles. The town had felt the tremors of social change—prohibition, jazz, the rise of technology, the beat of hippie culture. The roots of those old trees had cracked more than sidewalks. They'd cracked the town's sense of itself, warped it, reshaped it.

Carl moved carefully, keeping to the shadows. He was out in the open, and it made him feel like a target. He waited until no cars were in sight before running across the street, slipping up to Barbara's porch. He looked over his shoulder. Nobody. He knocked, the sound echoing too loudly in the stillness.

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A block away, Jane Wilkins was walking her dog, a small yappy mutt that sniffed and snorted at the grass, taking its sweet time finding the perfect spot to pee. She has never been able to figure out why one spot is so much better than another, but it seems extremely important to her dog so she patiently follows. Jane sighed, shifting her weight from one foot to the other, her eyes wandering idly. She looked down the street just in time to see someone run across to Barbara May's front door. She squinted, moving closer, tilting her head to the side as the door opened and the porch light clicked on. She caught a glimpse of Carl—bruised face and all—before he slipped inside.

"Well, that's interesting," Jane murmured to herself, a smirk tugging at her lips.

Barbara opened the door wearing an old T-shirt, jeans, and cowboy boots, her hair loose around her shoulders. She looked like every bit the small-town girl, and Carl's heart skipped a beat.

"Hey," she said cheerfully, stepping back to let him in. "How're you feeling?"

Carl stepped into the warmth of her house, the smell of something cooking drifting in from the kitchen. He stood awkwardly while Barbara gave him the once-over. He felt her eyes on his bruised face, and a flush of embarrassment crept up his neck.

"You still look pretty banged up," she said, not unkindly, just matter-of-fact. "You want a beer?"

"Sure," Carl said, trying to regain his composure, reminding himself to play it cool.

Barbara walked to the kitchen, returning with two cans of Coors. She sat down on the couch, tucking one leg up under her, turning to face him, her smile soft, her eyes bright. Carl took a long drink, needing the cold liquid courage.

"I've been thinking about taking some classes at KU," Barbara said, her voice casual. "I mean, I got good grades in high school. I don't think getting in would be too hard."

Carl nodded, eager to latch onto the topic. "That'd be awesome. KU's a great school."

Barbara smiled. "It's close enough I could still live here, you know? My dad said as long as I'm in school, I can stay here for free. He might even cover tuition."

"That's amazing. Seriously, you should do it," Carl said. "I might end up at KU too. Lawrence is such a cool town."

"Yeah, I know." Barbara's smile widened, her eyes brightening. "Honestly, one of the reasons I want to go is just to meet new people. It's like everyone here still thinks of me as who I was in high school, and I'm just... I don't want to be that person anymore." Barbara knows she has a bad reputation. Once established, a bad reputation is almost impossible to live down in a small town.

Carl nodded, understanding. He put his arm on the back of the couch, his fingers brushing against her shoulder. "Times are changing, you know? You can do whatever you want. You don't have to stay in Kelseyville forever. Hell, come with me to Kansas City or Lawrence anytime. I'll show you around."

"Really?" Barbara's face lit up. "I'd like that. I'd really like that."

They lapsed into a comfortable silence, sipping their beers, and Carl felt a warmth in his chest that had nothing to do with the alcohol. Barbara looked at him again, her gaze lingering on his eyes, then drifting to his lips. Slowly, she leaned in, her lips brushing his, soft, tentative. Carl's heart skipped, and he kissed her back, more firmly this time. She tasted like beer and something sweeter, something familiar.

They leaned into each other, the kiss deepening, Barbara's hands sliding to his chest, fingers curling into the fabric of his shirt. She kissed him harder, her tongue tracing his lips, coaxing them open. Carl felt her weight shift, her body pressing closer. She is a sexy kisser, lots of tongue. Carl works up the courage to touch her breast through her T-shirt-shirt. To his surprise she doesn't object.

Barbara pulled back just enough to look at him, her lips curling into a teasing smile. Her hand dropped to his lap, her fingers brushing against his jeans, feeling the hardness beneath. She raised an eyebrow, that crooked smile of hers widening. "No damage here, huh?"

Carl laughed, the sound coming out shaky, breathless. "Guess not."

Barbara kissed him again, harder this time, and Carl let himself get lost in it—lost in her, in the warmth of her house, in the feeling of her body against his, and, just for a moment, the world outside disappeared.

Carl didn't notice how long they stayed like that, the rest of the world blurring at the edges, leaving just Barbara's warmth and the sensation of her lips on his. It was as if time had slowed, everything distilling into that moment. There was something comforting in it, something that felt real, like maybe he wasn't alone after all, like maybe there was still a place for him somewhere.

They eventually pulled apart, Barbara leaning back, her eyes soft but searching, her fingers tracing the line of his jaw where the bruises had begun to fade. She studied his face as if trying to understand him, or maybe just to understand why she felt drawn to him.

"You know," she said, her voice just above a whisper, "I think you've got more going for you than you realize, Carl. I think you're stronger than you think."

Carl swallowed, the knot in his throat tightening. He wanted to believe her, wanted to hold on to this feeling of being seen, of being understood. "Yeah? Maybe," he said, his voice barely audible.

Barbara gave him a lopsided smile, her hand still resting against his cheek. "More than maybe. Don't let this place define you, okay? Don't let them make you think you have to be something you're not. You're better than that."

Carl looked at her, the words sinking in, a warmth spreading through him that had nothing to do with the beer. He nodded, unable to find the right words, and instead leaned in, pressing his forehead to hers, his eyes closed, just feeling the closeness, the reassurance in her presence. It felt like something shifted, something small but significant, a tiny piece of hope that he hadn't realized he needed.

"Thanks," he whispered. "For everything."

Barbara smiled, brushing her thumb across his cheek. "Anytime, Carl. Anytime."

And they sat like that, the world quiet, the two of them just being there, and for the first time in what felt like forever, Carl didn't feel quite so lost.

Eddie

Eddie is seriously contemplating murder. He keeps running the scenario through his mind like a movie. He parks around the corner, sneaks up from the side yard, kicks in the door and blows that little punk's brains out. No, he would blow that bitches' brains out first. Then blow his brains out. He can see them begging for their lives and blood everywhere. But then the movie sputters like a broken reel. Somebody sees his car parked around the corner and the cops know he is the one who did it. No matter how he plays it they figure out he did it and he gets caught and sent to the electric chair.

Fuck it. He is so mad he doesn't even care if he gets caught. He can see himself being chased by the cops in the Vette, shooting back at them with one hand like an old fashioned western and when he finally gets cornered, he crashes at 140 miles per hour in a spectacular blaze of glory.

Then he comes back to where he is, leaning against a Chevy at the car wash as Earl Ikes bitches about the price of hogs. He takes a long slog of watered down 3.2% beer. He isn't fucking stupid. Hell no, he doesn't want to get caught, but he still wants to kill that pussy son of a bitch.

Eddie glances around distracted. This is his town but somehow, it's starting to look too familiar. It's the same old bullshit. On the other side of the parking lot between two cars he sees a group of young Junior High kids. He knows all of them. They are looking at something conspiratorially. Tami Harrison has something, and she is showing it to the other kids. It's probably some pot. Drugs have already arrived in Kelseyville. Pot is common. Even coke and speed are around sometimes. Eddie prefers booze but a little weed now in then is good for a few giggles. A few minutes later one of the Junior High guys' walks by.

"Hay Freddy, come over here." Eddie calls.

Freddy stops in his tracks. He's not sure whether to be afraid or flattered. Eddie McGuire is actually talking to him.

"Freddy, come on over. It's alright. I just want to talk too-ya for a minute."

Freddy strolls over trying to look cool. He's still a little nervous.

Eddie puts his arm around Freddy and pretends to punch him in the stomach. "How-ya doing? You and your brother still go hunting out by Rock Creek?" Eddie is walking him off to the side a little so they can talk privately. Nobody thinks anything about it. "Yeah Eddie, we been hunting quail out there a lot." Freddy says excitedly.

"That's a great spot, done some hunting there myself." Eddie lowers his voice. "Let me ask-ya something Freddy. What has Tami Harrison got over there?"

Freddy looks down and doesn't say anything.

"Don't worry you're not in trouble or anything. I just want to know. What has she got?" Eddie asks. Freddy looks around, and then whispers.

"She says she has some drugs. Speed or coke or something, I don't know. I think its bullshit."

"Why is that?" Eddie asks.

"I don't know any place to get stuff like that, where would she get it? Pot maybe."

"What does it look like?" McGuire is really interested now.

"Some white powder in a baggie." Freddy whispers.

Eddie thinks about this for a few seconds. "Okay Freddy. Thanks for the information. I won't say anything, and don't you say anything either. This is between you and me, right?" Eddie gives him an unmistakable 'Or-else' look.

"Oh yeah, Eddie I won't say anything to anybody."

"All right." He pretends to punch him in the stomach again and ruffs him up playfully.

"See ya latter." Eddie says.

Freddy starts to walk away. Eddie watches and then changes his mind.

"Hey Freddy, come on back her for a second." Eddie calls.

Freddy turns and trots back.

"I want you to do something for me. You know Barbara May, right?"

"Sure, I do." Freddy says.

"You know where she lives, over on Maple?"

"Sure, it's a white house."

Two thirds of the houses in town are white but Eddie still figures he knows where it is.

"Look, I want you to go see if Carl Lee is over there. His car may not be there, so you will have to look in the window. Real secret now, don't let anybody see you. And don't tell anybody either. This is a secret mission just for me. Do you think you can do it?" Eddie asks with mock seriousness.

"Freddy's eyes are wide with excitement "Absolutely Eddie, I can do it."

"Good job. No go check it out and report back to me. Remember, top secret."

Eddie swats him on the butt and sends him on his mission.

About ten minutes later Freddy walks by and just nods his head to Eddie. McGuire discreetly gives him a thumbs up.

Eddie knows Tami Harrison's dad. He hangs out at the bar across the street. He is a mean old son of a bitch and a drunk just like everybody else in that place.

"Hey Roy." Eddie calls. Roy looks up. "Let's walk over to the bar for a little while."

The bar is a featureless one-story cinder block building. The one window in front next to the scuffed door has a neon sign that simply says, BAR. Nobody is likely to mistake it for anything else.

When Eddie steps in, the place is packed. A nondescript three chord country twang is playing on the jukebox. It's around ten o'clock and everybody is pretty much hammered already. John Harrison and three other guys are playing liars dice at the bar. Eddie holds off for a couple seconds to let them finish a noisy round. The air is thick with cigarette smoke and smells like stale beer. Eddie walks right up.

"George, John, how-ya doing? Hi Ray."

"Hey Eddie, how's that Corvette running?" George slurs, holding a beer and weaving slightly. "That's a damn fine machine."

Eddie looks at George and thinks to himself, 'what a fucking looser'. "Running great George, I'll have to take you for a ride sometime." McGuire says supper friendly while he thinks to himself 'fat fucking chance'.

Eddie turns to John Harrison and asks under his breath. "Hay John ya-got a second?"

John looks a little surprised but no big deal "Sure Eddie."

Eddie steps a little closer to be discreet, but the other guys are still setting right there and can easily hear every word he is saying. "John, I'm not sure how to tell you this, but I thought you should know. I just saw Tami over at the car wash with some other kids and I could have sworn I saw her with some

drugs." The smiles instantly fade from all three faces. "I can't be sure, but she has a baggie with some white powder in it and it sure looks like drugs to me." Eddie says a little louder.

"What?" John says his face scrunched up trying to comprehend what Eddie just told him. Eddie continues

"I'm just into drinking, you guys know that. I sure hate to see these drugs taking over our town."

"What the fuck!" John has finally grasped the news and he is on his feet in a rage. "Where is she?" he bellows. Every head in the bar turns to see what is going on "God damn it, where is she?" he is heading for the door. The other guys are up now.

"Son of a bitch."

Two guys ask George "What's going on."

"Tami's got some drugs."

"Oh my god." A woman nearby says.

Ray is talking to some people at a table. The news is spreading like wildfire. John is making his way out the door and is screaming across the street for Tami. "Tami! Tami! Get your ass over here."

It's all Eddie can do to get himself out the door because so many people are crowding outside to see what's going on. Kids at the car wash are calling Tami.

"Tami, your dad is calling for you"

Tami appears between the pickups, fear on her face. She is half running to cross the street. She has heard her dad's voice like that before, and she knows it ain't good. That drunken, raging voice has preceded several severe beatings and she is terrified. She runs across the street and then slows seeing the raging red face of her father and the crowd of people. She is afraid to come closer.

"Get your ass over here right now." He screams.

She slowly obeys, her head lowered now, warily watching for the first blow. Her father grabs her violently by the arm, the tears start flowing.

"Where is it? Where are the drugs?" He sticks his hand in one pocket and then another. Out comes a baggie. There is a gasp from the crowd of people.

"Oh my god" a lady exclaims.

"What is this? What is this?" Harrison screams shaking her violently by the arm. Tami is crying hysterically, cringing in pain.

Eddie steps forward, "let's see it John." John Harrison hands the baggie of drugs to Eddie. He opens the bag and smells it. "It looks like speed or maybe heroin." He says loudly. The crowd is buzzing "Son of a bitch. Unfucking believable. No fucking way. Oh my god." Everyone is angry. John shakes Tami violently and is screaming at her again. "Where did you get it, where did you get this shit." He slaps her across the face. Tami screams in terror, trying to cover her face with her hands.

Eddie steps closer. "Did Carl Lee give it to you Tami? Is he the one? Was it that guy Carl Lee?" She doesn't understand at first, but Eddie keeps at her. "Is Carl Lee the one? It's his fault not yours Tami. Is he the one?" She finally catches on. She nods her head and says meekly "Yes, Yes, He's the one."

"What did she say?" someone asks. Eddie speaks up.

"She says that Carl Lee gave it to her. Carl Lee, that new hippie guy. He's been giving her dope. He's been giving all the kids dope"

The crowd is buzzing even louder now, angry voices are rising up. "Son of a bitch. Unfucking believable. No fucking way. Oh my god."

The lie has worked for Tami. John lets go of her arm.

"Who? Who did it?" John Harrison asks confused.

"That new hippie guy, Carl Lee." McGuire tells him. John doesn't even know who Carl Lee is. But it's all sinking in now.

"I'm going to kill' em. I'm going to kill' em." John is in a white-hot rage as are half the people at the bar.

The significance of what she had said was finally sinking in for Tami. "No, stop," she managed, her voice cracking. She took a step back, her eyes wide with desperation, but Eddie jumped in before she could say more. He had that look in his eye—fire and cruelty, a twisted kind of delight that froze everyone in place.

"Are you having sex with him, Tami?" Eddie's voice cut through the night, sharp, slicing. The question hung in the air, each word like a bullet. The silence that followed was deafening. Everyone caught their breath, the crowd frozen, eyes locked on Tami. Tami looked back at them, her face ashen, shock rippling through her features, followed closely by humiliation.

"No," she said, but her voice was small, a whisper barely heard over the restless mutterings of the crowd. Eyes bored into her, suspicious, expectant, filled with judgment. She felt the disbelief settle around her, and it felt like something heavy, something that clung to her skin, something she couldn't shake off.

"No, I'm not," she repeated, her voice rising. She screamed it this time, her words cracked and raw, her hands trembling as she tried to hold herself together. "I'm not!" Her body shook, and she could feel the tears stinging her eyes, blurring the faces of those who watched her crumble. She was hysterical now, every nerve on fire, her entire frame trembling, collapsing in on itself, falling apart under the weight of it all.

"You don't have to protect him, Tami," Eddie said, his voice dripping with mock gentleness, as if he were giving her permission to be weak. As if he cared. His eyes were hard, and they glittered with something dark, something that only made her fear him more.

"I'm not, I'm not!" she screamed defiantly, her voice straining, cracking under the pressure. She collapsed then, her knees buckling, her sobs wrenching from her chest, a torrent of fear and anger and desperation.

John looked stricken, like someone had ripped the earth out from beneath him. He swayed slightly, his face paling as if the ground beneath him had vanished. "Oh God, God no." His voice was barely a whisper, the words choked out, his eyes darting between Tami and Eddie, filled with confusion and disbelief. He hesitated, then grabbed her arm, his grip almost painful, as if holding onto her would stop his world from falling apart. "You're not screwing this guy, are you?" His eyes were wide, frantic, his voice pleading, searching for a truth that he could handle, something that wouldn't crush him.

"No!" she screamed again, but he wasn't hearing her. He was off, tearing at his hair, stumbling backward, his face twisted in pain. "I'm going to kill him. I'm going to kill him," he kept repeating, his voice rising in pitch, each word echoing out into the night, a promise that shook those around him.

And Eddie, watching it all unfold, couldn't keep the grin off his face. He could feel the energy shifting—the crowd's clenched fists, their narrowed eyes, the way some stepped forward, their agitation growing. The anger was building, transforming into something uncontrollable.

"Let's get that motherfucker! We're not going to let this happen in our town! We're done sitting back!" Eddie yelled, his voice loud, urgent, a spark that set the entire powder keg alight. The crowd erupted, their rage roaring to life, their voices overlapping, mingling into a single, boiling mass of anger and fear and hate.

That was all it took. The ball was rolling now, unstoppable.

Eddie was laughing. The sound was drowned out by the chaos of the crowd. Nobody even noticed him anymore. They were too caught up in it all, too swept away by their fury, to see the satisfaction etched across Eddie's face.

Eddie looked around, his eyes narrowing with a glint of cruelty as they locked onto George. He grabbed him roughly by the arm, pulling him close, whispering in his ear, his tone dripping with dark excitement.

"I know where he is," Eddie said, his words like gasoline on the flames.

George blinked, his eyes unfocused, his thoughts sluggish from the alcohol. "You do?" he slurred, a dazed look crossing his face.

"Yeah, he's shacked up with that slut, Barbara May. She lives right around the corner, on Maple Street."

"He's at Barbara May's?" George repeated, confused, the pieces not quite clicking together in his fogged mind.

Eddie glared at him, his frustration rising. He thought, 'What do you want me to do, write it down for you, you dumb fuck? Jesus, this guy is pathetic.' Eddie took a deep breath, forcing himself to stay calm, repeating it slowly, carefully, as if speaking to a child.

"George. Carl is at Barbara May's house. It's on Maple Street."

Something clicked then, and George's face lit up with sudden understanding. "Carl Lee is at Barbara May's, right around the corner. Carl Lee at Barbara May's, right around the corner," he started yelling, stumbling toward the rest of the crowd, spreading the news like it was gospel. He was proud of himself, like he'd just figured out the secret to the universe.

Eddie was laughing wildly, his face twisted with glee as he watched the chaos spread like wildfire. People were running around in an uproar, shouting, screaming, grabbing whatever weapons they could find—guns, bats, anything to make them feel powerful. Every once in a while, Eddie screamed along with them, "Kill him! Kill that bastard!" He was caught up in it, his laughter wild and reckless, drunk on the chaos he had created. The crowd's roar swelled, an almost physical sensation of the energy shifting. Eddie's grin widened, his eyes shining with satisfaction, feeding off the fury that had taken root in every face around him.

And then he added, a touch of inspiration, a little more fuel for the fire. "Watch out, he may be armed! He's a drug dealer, he probably has a gun! Watch out!" He yelled it into the crowd, his voice carrying, repeating it until he could hear it echoing back to him, whispered and shouted by those around him. "He has a gun, watch out."

The tension was fever pitch now, a throbbing, pulsing mass of anger, ready to explode. Eddie stepped back, his heart pounding, his eyes wide, taking it all in. He thought to himself, 'These people are so fucking stupid. So easy.' His grin grew wider, satisfaction bubbling up inside him. He could almost taste the chaos, the control he had over these people, and it was intoxicating. It was like watching an old-

time movie, the kind his dad used to watch, with pitchforks and torches and a mob that moved as one, a beast of many heads, many hands, driven by fear and fury.

People were piling into cars, engines roaring to life, guns being pulled out of trunks, their barrels gleaming in the dim light. The mob was transforming into something monstrous. Eddie ran over to his Vette, the grin never leaving his face, adrenaline surging through him. He better hurry—these people were ready to roll, and he needed to be at the front of the pack. He jumped in, revving the engine, the roar filling his ears, making his pulse race. He wanted to lead them there, wanted to see it all happen, wanted to be the one to bring the fury down on Carl Lee.

He screamed with delight, his laughter mixing with the chaos around him, congratulating himself, marveling at how easy it had all been. The satisfaction swelled in his chest as he watched the mayhem unfold, feeding off the panic and fury he'd sparked, savoring the control he had over these people. The stupidity, the gullibility—it was almost too easy. They were moving now, engines roaring, tires screeching. It was only a few blocks, but it felt like a world away, the line between what was and what would be.

Back At Barbara's

"You feel so good," Carl said softly, his lips brushing against her neck, his voice thick with desire. He hesitated for a moment, his thoughts flickering between his excitement and the uncertainty of where this night might lead.

She was rubbing Carl through his jeans, her touch confident, knowing. She smiled, a playful glint in her eyes. "I'm not ready to go all the way just yet, but I can take care of you," she said, her voice low, teasing.

Carl blinked, startled, his breath hitching. He wasn't used to this—wasn't used to someone being so direct. His pulse quickened, and he could feel a mix of excitement and nervousness rising in his chest. The girls he usually dated from high school—there was always so much build-up, so much negotiation. Hours of heavy petting, kissing, pleading, trying to get to the next base. A blow job was like hitting a home run after weeks of careful effort, the kind of thing that came after promises and assurances and a lot of time. But Barbara... Barbara was something else.

"Okay," he said, his voice cracking slightly. He tried to play it cool, but he could feel his pulse quicken, his heart pounding in his ears. A wave of uncertainty washed over him, but it was overwhelmed by the thrill of the moment—by the sense that he was stepping into something new, something grown-up. He swallowed hard, hoping his nerves wouldn't betray him. He couldn't believe his luck—these older girls were where it was at. This was a whole different ballgame. And he was ready. Or at least, he hoped he was.

Barbara smirked, her fingers nimble, her movements fluid and practiced, exuding a quiet confidence. She leaned in, her lips brushing gently against his ear, her breath warm against his skin. "Just relax, Carl," she whispered, her voice soothing but charged. "I've got you."

Carl blinked, surprised by the bluntness. He wasn't used to this—this forwardness, this casualness. In high school, everything was different—heavy kissing, petting, the endless back-and-forth of begging and negotiating. A blow job was the elusive prize, something you worked toward after weeks of clumsy, fumbling courtship. But here, now, it was offered up like a cigarette after dinner. He stammered, "Okay," the word coming out lame, awkward, like he wasn't quite sure if he was even in control of the situation.

Barbara's fingers worked deftly, and Carl, feeling the inevitable rush of excitement, hurriedly finished unbuttoning his own pants, hands shaking with a blend of anticipation and dread. His mind raced, grasping for some neutral ground to regain control. Think about the Alpha, think about changing the oil. He pictured himself beneath the hood of that old car, the smell of engine grease, the rhythmic tightening of the oil filter. It helped, for a second.

Barbara, sensing the tension, paused, her lips brushing his as she came up for air. Her hand still lingered, gently stroking, but with less urgency now. It was as if she understood the delicate balance Carl was fighting to maintain. She kissed him again, slower this time, less mechanical, almost tender. It was an odd moment for Carl, who was still teetering between the dizzying pleasure of the present and the mental checklist he was using to keep himself from losing control.

Barbara was no stranger to situations like this, but Carl felt different. There was something in his wide-eyed sincerity that struck her as both innocent and sad. She had spent years perfecting the art of getting what she wanted from men, usually through sex. It had started innocently enough—attention from the popular guys, a way to feel seen. But the years had worn that strategy thin, leaving her with

men who only sought to use her, never bothering to offer anything in return. They treated her like an object, a means to an end, and somewhere along the way, she had started to believe them.

But Carl wasn't like the others. He seemed grateful, almost reverent, as if he couldn't believe his luck. He talked to her like she mattered, even if it was only in passing. And in this small town of Kelseyville, where expectations were low and reputations were set in stone, that little bit of respect went a long way.

Barbara smiled to herself, a small, wry smile, and decided Carl was worth a little more of her time. She paused again, looked him in the eyes with that little raised eyebrow of hers, and said, "On second thought, maybe I would like to take you to bed."

Carl blinked, his heart racing, excitement mixing with disbelief. Was this really happening? It felt like the universe had thrown him a gift wrapped in velvet and lace. But just as he was about to respond, a sound cut through the moment—squealing tires, roaring engines, the unmistakable noise of something chaotic approaching from the distance.

Barbara froze, her smile fading as she looked toward the window, her mind piecing together what that sound could mean. Carl, still half-caught in the moment, felt a chill crawl up his spine. The sounds grew louder, more urgent, like a storm building on the horizon, and whatever was coming their way, it wasn't good.

His lucky night was unraveling fast, and somewhere deep down, Carl knew that whatever was coming for him was far worse than losing control.

Panic hit Carl like a punch to the gut. He shot up from the couch, yanking at his jeans, stumbling as he tried to pull them up. His fingers were shaking, his heart racing, but all he could think was I need to get out, I need to hide. He half-hobbled, half-ran to the front door, pressing his pale face to the small window. His blood turned to ice.

Eddie McGuire's Vette screeched to a halt in front of the house, the tires spitting gravel, and before Carl could fully comprehend it, a gang of cars and trucks piled up behind him. The headlights cut through the dark, beams bouncing off the street like searchlights. Doors flung open. Men poured out—twenty, maybe more—armed with shotguns, rifles, and handguns, their faces set with the kind of determination that said this night wasn't ending until somebody bled.

Barbara grabbed Carl by the arm, yanking him toward the stairs. "Hide upstairs!" she shouted, her voice edged with something sharp and frantic, like she knew what was coming. Carl fumbled with his jeans, tripping over the cuffs, his legs feeling too heavy and stupid to move fast enough. Barbara gave him one last push, her eyes darting toward the window.

Carl scrambled up the stairs, his heart slamming against his ribcage. They're coming, they're going to kill me, was the only thought that raced through his mind, over and over, like a record stuck on a scratch. Below him, Barbara turned from the window just in time to see the mob gather in the street. Twenty-two men, some carrying rifles, some with shotguns slung over their shoulders. They hesitated for just a second, waiting for John Harrison to take the lead, his broad shoulders casting a long shadow across the lawn.

Barbara's eyes flitted to the two cans of Coors on the table. She grabbed one, sloshing half the beer onto her hand, and chucked it under the couch, knowing full well it wasn't enough to cover up what had been happening but too panicked to think straight. Heavy boots clomped up the wooden steps outside, each step like a hammer striking closer. John Harrison reached for the doorknob, twisting it with no

patience. When the door didn't budge, he stepped back and slammed his boot into it, hard. The doorframe splintered with a deafening crack, and the glass pane shattered. The door swung open with a violent crash, shards of glass falling like rain.

Barbara whipped around, surprised by the sight of John Harrison charging into her house like a bull, half a dozen men behind him, all armed and grim-faced. "Get out, get out!" she screamed, but John ignored her, his eyes scanning the room like a predator looking for his prey.

Carl was nowhere to be seen.

"Find him!" John bellowed, and the command spread like wildfire through the group. "Find him! Find him!" The men tore through the house, overturning furniture, knocking over lamps, their boots thudding like the drumbeat of an oncoming storm.

Barbara's screams rose in pitch, shrill and furious. John grabbed her by the arm, yanking her toward him, his hand coming down hard across her face with a sickening slap. Blood sprayed from her nose, splattering the floor and her chin. She reeled, stunned for only a second, before her rage ignited. Barbara wasn't the type to go down easy. She had been hit before, beaten down by her father, by boyfriends, but it never stopped her. She came back swinging, clawing at John with a wildness that scared him for a moment. He slapped her again, but she was ready this time, her arms flailing, blocking the worst of it. "Where is he?" John demanded, his face flushed with anger.

"He's not here, you mutha-fuckers!" she screamed, her voice ragged, her eyes blazing with defiance. Blood streamed from her nose, staining her lips and chin, but she didn't care. She kicked at John's knee, catching him just right, and for a moment he winced, the pain flashing across his face. Furious, he threw her back, sending her sprawling over the coffee table, knocking over the lamp. The table cracked under her weight, but Barbara scrambled up with another scream, launching herself at George as he passed by. They tumbled to the ground in a heap, Barbara on top, her fists flying as she punched him in the face, nails digging into his skin, her teeth bared like an animal.

George screamed, trying to push her off, but Barbara's grip was iron. She didn't care about anything now but the rage that poured out of her like a flood, fists slamming into flesh, nails tearing at his eyes.

Meanwhile, Carl was upstairs, standing frozen in a tiny bedroom, his mind a whirlwind of terror. There was nowhere to hide. No way out. He could hear the crashes and screams from below, the heavy footsteps thundering up the stairs. It's over, he thought. I'm dead.

Then his eyes caught it—a small square of wood in the ceiling of the closet, an access panel to the attic. Without thinking, Carl scrambled up, using a shelf to hoist himself into the dark space above. The wood splintered under his fingers as he pushed the panel aside and pulled himself through. The attic was musty, dark, the smell of rotting wood and insulation thick in the air. He fumbled for the panel, trying to cover the hole, his hands shaking, his breath coming in shallow gasps. He couldn't find it.

Below, men stormed into the room. Carl froze, his heart thudding in his chest so loud he was sure they would hear it. He could see through the hole—the men rifling through the closet, pushing aside clothes, pulling out blankets. One of them stood so close Carl could reach down and touch him if he dared move. But the man didn't look up.

Carl's breath hitched in his throat. He could hear John Harrison cursing, throwing things, smashing anything he could get his hands on. "He's not up here!" one of the men shouted, but John wasn't convinced. He barreled into the room, rage fueling his every step.

Carl balanced on the rafters, careful not to step between the beams where the sheetrock would surely crack and send him crashing into the room below. His hands fumbled in the dark, finally finding the panel. He placed it carefully over the hole, sealing himself in the pitch-black silence.

Below, John stormed through the closet, flinging open drawers, shattering glass figurines, his breath heavy with frustration. "Where the fuck is he?" he bellowed, his voice reverberating through the walls.

Carl didn't breathe. He didn't move. He could feel the weight of John's presence just below him, feel the thud of his boots as he kicked over furniture, as he cursed and spat in fury.

"Get out, get the fuck out!" Barbara's voice rose again, still fighting, still clawing. Downstairs, two men were trying to pull her off George, but she was feral now, her bloodied face contorted in rage, her screams slicing through the house like a knife. The men cringed as she fought them, backing toward the door, retreating in the face of her madness.

"He's not here!" someone shouted from the kitchen. The call spread through the house. "He's not here!" "He's not here!"

Eddie McGuire stood on the porch, arms crossed, waiting. He wanted to see Carl Lee dragged out, beaten, broken, maybe dead. But now it looked like he wasn't going to get his show. "God damn it," Eddie muttered, kicking the dirt. "I know that fucker was here." He stomped across the yard, cursing loudly, his frustration palpable.

The man Barbara was attacking shoved her hard, sending her sprawling to the floor. She was up in a flash, bloodied but unbroken, chasing after him as he ran for the door. The rest of the men filed out, cars already rumbling to life. George's face was streaked with blood, his ear half-torn. When he saw Barbara, he skittered sideways, giving her a wide berth, his eyes full of fear.

Barbara followed them into the yard, her voice hoarse but relentless. "Fuck you!" she screamed, over and over, her hands balled into fists, her face a mask of rage and blood. "Fuck you! You're all gonna fucking pay for this!"

John Harrison was the last to leave, but Barbara wasn't done. She charged at him, her screams ringing in his ears. He swung at her, but she ducked, too fast, her fury propelling her forward.

"Get the fuck off my property!" she howled,

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Carl sat trembling in the darkness, his body curled tight, as if making himself smaller might somehow save him. His breath came in shallow, rapid bursts. The screaming had grown distant, muffled, as if the violence that had torn through the house was now just a bad dream. But it wasn't. He could still hear the echoes of it in his head—the crashing, the shouting, the glass shattering.

"Are they leaving?" His whisper was hoarse, barely audible in the stillness of the attic. His heart pounded in his chest as he strained to listen. The sound of a car starting reached him, then another. More distant screams, but they were outside now. His limbs felt numb. Then, silence. It pressed down on him, thick and suffocating.

Suddenly, the fear broke loose inside him. Carl began to sob, the tears coming in waves, choking him. "I can't take this. I just can't take this," he whimpered to himself, his voice cracking. His body trembled uncontrollably, nausea rolling through him. He felt like he might throw up but didn't have the strength. He wanted to disappear, to vanish from this nightmare.

Outside, Barbara stood in the middle of her yard, motionless, her body a torn and bloody mess. The adrenaline that had fueled her rage was gone now, leaving her hollow. Her chest heaved as she struggled

to catch her breath, but the silence weighed on her too, pressing in from all sides. She stood there, her fists still clenched, listening to the cars fade into the distance, the taillights disappearing like ghosts. Then, as if someone had pulled the plug, she collapsed to her knees, her head falling into her hands. The sobs came deep and heavy, moaning cries that sounded more like an animal than a person. Tears mingled with the blood that covered her face, dripping down her chin, staining the grass.

The minutes ticked by, slow and endless. Then, the sound of tires on gravel, a lone vehicle pulling up. Larry Barns stepped out of the town's one police car, his boots crunching on the loose stones. He surveyed the scene cautiously, his gut twisting with dread. This wasn't just another bar fight or domestic squabble. This was something else, something uglier.

He spotted Barbara first, still on her knees, crying quietly, her shoulders slumped, hair tangled in knots. He approached slowly. "Barbara, are you all right?" His voice was calm, but his eyes scanned the yard, taking in the blood, the broken remnants of her fight.

Barbara looked up, her face a raw, twisted mess of blood and tears. "Fuck no, I'm not all right!" she screamed, her voice hoarse and ragged, the words bursting out of her with all the anger she had left.

Larry took a step back, startled by the intensity of her response. "What the hell happened here?"

Her voice cracked as she spoke, "A bunch of guys with guns broke into my house and beat me up. That's what fucking happened here! They said they were looking for Carl Lee." She tried to stand, but her body moved slowly, painfully, as she straightened up, holding her back with one hand.

"Did they get him?" Larry asked, alarm bells going off in his head.

"I don't think so," she muttered, wiping blood from her face with the back of her hand.

Larry's frown deepened. "What do you mean, you don't think so? Is he here or not?"

"He ran upstairs when we saw them coming," Barbara said, her voice calming now, the fight draining out of her.

Larry rushed back to his car, his heart racing. He grabbed the radio and called for backup and an ambulance. "We got a situation on Maple. Send backup and medical. Possible assault. Hurry."

He walked back to the house, his hand instinctively resting on his holster. The door was wide open, the frame splintered and the glass pane shattered, the place a complete wreck. His boots crunched on the broken glass as he stepped inside, eyes sweeping over the destruction. The coffee table was overturned, blood smeared across the floor. The air was thick with the scent of violence and fear. He walked slowly to the bottom of the stairs and called up, "Carl Lee! This is Officer Barns. Come on out!"

No response.

Larry took a few steps up the creaking stairs, each step feeling heavier than the last. "Carl, come on out. It's safe. They're gone. Nobody's gonna hurt you now."

He paused, listening. For a moment, he thought he heard movement from upstairs—something small, like a shuffling. He took two more steps and looked up. There, at the top of the stairs, Carl appeared. His face was streaked with tears, his eyes wide and hollow, the weight of everything crashing down on him. His clothes were a mess, his pants barely on, his body slumped like he was carrying the whole world on his shoulders.

Larry stretched out a hand. "Come on down, Carl. You're okay now. They're gone."

Carl moved slowly, like he was in a daze, his feet dragging on each step. When he reached the bottom, he hesitated, his eyes flicking toward the door. He didn't want to go outside. Didn't want to see what waited for him out there.

“What’s going on, Carl?” Larry asked softly. “Why are these guys after you?”

Carl shook his head, his lip trembling. “I don’t know. I swear I don’t know. I didn’t do anything! What’s wrong with me? Why are they doing this?” His voice cracked, and then he broke down completely, his body shaking with sobs.

Larry placed a hand on his shoulder. “I don’t know either, Carl. But I’m sure as hell gonna find out.” The flash of blue lights caught Larry’s attention. A Franklin County Sheriff’s car pulled up out front, the siren quiet now, but the weight of authority heavy in the air.

Larry turned back to Carl, his voice steady, reassuring. “Come with me, Carl. You’re safe now.”

Carl followed, his legs heavy, the weight of everything still pressing down on him, but there was something in Larry’s voice—something that made him believe, just for a second, that maybe he wasn’t alone in this.

As they stepped out into the yard, the blood, the broken glass, and the remnants of the chaos lay around them like the aftermath of a storm. And for the first time in what felt like forever, Carl breathed—deep, jagged breaths of the night air, as if he was gulping down whatever hope remained.

Carl sat in the back of the sheriff’s car, numb, staring out the window, though he wasn’t really seeing anything. His face streaked with dried tears, his mind swirling with the confusion and terror of what had just happened. He didn’t know how long he’d been sitting there, but time felt irrelevant, stretched out like a shadow in the afternoon sun. He could still hear the distant screams in his head, still feel the weight of Barbara’s hands on him, the fear clawing at his chest like some wild animal that wouldn’t stop.

Outside, the lights from the ambulance flickered as it pulled up, red and blue flashes cutting through the quiet night. The paramedics moved over to Barbara, talking softly to her, but Carl couldn’t make out what they were saying. Barbara was a bloody, tattered figure standing in the middle of her yard, her body swaying slightly as if the wind might knock her over. She didn’t look up as they approached her, didn’t move except to wipe the blood from her nose with the back of her hand, smeared across her face like war paint.

Larry Barns stood by the sheriff’s car, his hand resting on the roof, talking in low tones with the sheriff. Their words were lost to Carl, who sat in his own world, barely holding himself together. The Highway Patrol had arrived, the sound of boots on gravel, doors slamming shut. Then Barns got into his car, the door slamming with a finality that made Carl flinch, and the police cruisers pulled away, leaving Carl behind with the ghosts of what had just happened.

Bar

Back at the bar, the vigilantes were already deep into their drinks, the adrenaline from the night's chaos mixing with the alcohol, making their voices louder, their tempers shorter. People were spilling outside, clumped in small groups, talking heatedly. The whole place buzzed with the energy of violence barely contained. They wanted blood, and the talk was about finishing what they had started—Carl Lee hadn't been found yet, and they were ready to go after him again, this time to his house. The general consensus was that Carl Lee was scum, a hippie drug dealer who didn't deserve to breathe the same air they did. Castration was thrown into the mix—someone said it like it was a joke, but nobody laughed. They were all thinking it.

Larry Barns pulled up outside the bar, the Highway Patrol car following close behind. He stepped out, immediately surrounded by half a dozen men, all of them talking over each other—statutory rape, drugs, the destruction of the town's moral fiber. Barns raised his hand, signaling for silence. The crowd fell quiet, eyes on him, waiting for answers, for some kind of justification for the violence brewing in their hearts.

"I'm looking for John Harrison," Barns said, his voice calm, but there was a weight behind it, a warning.

The word passed through the crowd, and after a few moments, John Harrison appeared at the door of the bar. He limped slowly toward Barns, his face twisted with a mix of righteous anger and self-pity. His knee ached, though he couldn't quite remember how it got hurt. Maybe it was during the commotion, maybe before. It didn't matter. He was the victim here. He'd been wronged.

"I'm glad you're here, Barns," John said, his voice swelling with indignation. "That fucking hippie drug dealer raped my daughter and's been giving her dope. You need to do something about it." His chest puffed out, his pride wounded but intact, a man standing tall on the moral high ground.

A murmur of agreement rippled through the crowd behind him. Someone shouted, "What are you gonna do about it, Barns? You should've taken care of that drug-dealing hippie a long time ago."

Barns nodded slowly, his expression unreadable. "Okay, John, I intend to get to the bottom of this. Get in."

He opened the passenger door of the police car, and John limped his way in, careful with his knee. The crowd watched silently as Barns circled the car and slid into the driver's seat, driving them a short way down the road, away from the prying eyes and the growing tension at the bar. Inside the car, John told his story in full detail, his voice gaining confidence as he spun his version of the night's events—how he and the others were just trying to bring Carl Lee to justice, how it was all about protecting the town, protecting his daughter. He left out the part about the guns, the violence, and the threats of death. In his mind, those were just details, irrelevant to the righteous cause.

To prove his point, John reached into his pocket and proudly handed over a small bag of powder. "This is what that scumbag gave my daughter," he said, his voice thick with disgust. "This is what's been destroying our town."

Barns took the bag, studying it for a moment, then sniffed the contents cautiously. He dipped his pinky in and touched the powder to the tip of his tongue. A sour look crossed his face. "Wait here, John," he muttered, stepping out of the car.

Barns motioned for the Highway Patrol officer, and the two of them stood behind the car, talking in low voices. The officer tasted the powder too, his face mirroring Barns's disgust. They exchanged a few more words, and then Barns walked back to the car, opening John's door.

"Where's your girl, John? I'd like to ask her a couple questions. Is that okay with you?"

John nodded, pointing to his truck a few cars away. "She's in the truck."

Barns approached the truck and knocked gently on the window. Tami, who had been lying on the front seat, jumped up with a start. When she saw Barns, a look of relief crossed her swollen face. She rolled down the window, her movements slow and hesitant. Her face was a mess, one eye already turning black, her lip split. Barns felt a knot tighten in his chest.

"Tami," he said softly, "I need to ask you a few questions, and I need you to promise me you'll be absolutely truthful. You already know this whole thing has gotten completely out of control because of the lie you told earlier." His voice was calm, steady, but firm.

Tears welled up in Tami's eyes, and she lowered her head. "I promise," she whispered.

"Did Carl Lee give you that bag with the powder in it?" Barns asked gently.

Tami shook her head, her voice barely a whisper. "No."

"That's aspirin in that bag, isn't it?"

She nodded, the tears falling freely now. "Yes."

"Where did you get it, Tami?"

"From home," she muttered, her voice small, ashamed. "I thought it'd be cool to make the other kids think I had some drugs."

"Do you even know Carl Lee?"

She shook her head again. "No."

Barns sighed, his heart heavy with the weight of what could've happened. "This almost got Carl Lee killed, Tami. And it almost got your dad and a bunch of these men sent away to prison for a long time. Do you think drugs are cool now?"

Tami burst into tears, her body shaking with sobs. Barns leaned in, his voice soft. "Listen, Tami, this was a stupid prank. You're just a kid, and kids make mistakes. You've learned your lesson, right?"

She nodded, still crying.

"You're not in trouble, at least not with me," Barns said. "But your dad? He's in some serious trouble."

Tami sniffled and wiped her tears with her sleeve. "Thank you, Officer Barns," she whispered.

Barns gave her shoulder a gentle squeeze. "One more thing, Tami. You let me know if your dad ever hits you again. You hear me?"

"I will," she said, her voice small, but there was a flicker of strength in her eyes as she looked up at him.

Barns walked back to the car, talking to a few more people as he went. The pieces of the story were falling into place. Eddie McGuire had been the one to stir things up, feeding John Harrison's paranoia about Carl Lee. It was all clear now.

When Barns got back into the car, he turned to John, his voice low, almost disappointed. "John, this bag contains crushed aspirin. Your daughter got it from the medicine cabinet at home. And she doesn't even know Carl Lee."

John's face went slack, the color draining from his cheeks. "You almost killed a high school kid for no reason," Barns continued, his voice hardening. "And if I hear about you hitting Tami again, you'll be spending even more time in jail than you're already looking at now."

John covered his face with his hands, unable to comprehend what had just happened. Barns stepped out of the car and motioned for the Highway Patrol officer. "Come on out, John," Barns said quietly.

John stepped out, his movements slow, defeated. "You're under arrest for breaking and entering, and assault," Barns said, turning him around and cuffing him. John didn't resist. He just limped to the patrol car, his face a mask of shock and shame.

The crowd that had gathered was stunned into silence as Barns led John to the patrol car. The whispers started. "They're arresting John Harrison." More people spilled out of the bar, eyes wide, anger bubbling just beneath the surface.

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Larry Barns stood like a shadow at the front of the police car, the dim streetlights barely catching the outline of his worn boots against the cracked pavement. The night air was thick with the scent of gasoline and damp earth, a cold breeze whispering through the deserted street. Muffled conversations echoed from the distance, the creak of an old sign swaying above them, its rusted hinges groaning like a ghost forgotten in time. The crowd—angry, drunk, but now subdued by the weight of his presence—hung in the air, a collective murmur of guilt and confusion threading through them. Faces flushed with alcohol and adrenaline began to slacken as Barns raised the baggie in his hand, the small plastic catching the light faintly in the muted glow.

"I see that a lot of you have been doing some heavy drinking tonight," Barns said, his voice low, measured, the kind of tone that quiets a room, but not from fear—something deeper. "Anybody got a headache?" The words hung in the air, awkward, like a misplaced thought. A few heads in the crowd cocked sideways in puzzlement, others just stared. Barns lifted the baggie higher.

"Well, if you do, I got just what you need right here. This bag—" He paused, letting the silence linger a beat too long, the air almost thickening between his words. "This bag contains aspirin. Crushed up aspirin. Tami Harrison got it at home from the family medicine cabinet." His voice curled around the last few words, letting them settle like a slow, heavy rain over the crowd. A murmur rippled through the gathering. Eyes dropped, feet shifted on the dry dirt and gravel beneath them.

"Carl Lee did not, I repeat, did not give this to Tami Harrison," Barns continued, each word like a stone dropped into a pond, sending ripples of realization through the gathered mob. "In fact, Carl and Tami don't even know each other." The weight of the truth landed harder than any accusation, and a murmur spread through the crowd, like the first gust of wind before a storm—soft, ominous, full of regret. Eyes flickered, and shoulders slumped. Shame was beginning to gnaw at them, piece by piece.

Barns scanned their faces, eyes narrowing with something between disgust and disappointment, a bitter taste he couldn't quite swallow. He shook his head slowly, like a preacher lamenting the fall of his flock. "I am ashamed this could happen in our town. What the hell were you people thinking?"

Silence. It stretched out, heavy and suffocating. The sky above them seemed to bear down, low and oppressive, the stars too dim to offer any solace.

"You just about killed an innocent high school kid," Barns said, his voice steady but tired now, the kind of tired that runs deep, that doesn't go away with sleep. "And I know about the guns."

There was no response, only the stillness of a crowd that had been confronted with its own ugliness. Some glanced at their feet, others stared into the darkness, as if the answers were out there, somewhere beyond the black horizon. But Barns wasn't done yet.

"I'm arresting John Harrison," he said, each word clipped, clean, final. "And some of the rest of you vigilantes can expect to see warrants in the next few days." He let that hang in the air, the implications sinking in like cold water on a hot day. "And I better not hear about anybody harassing that kid. He's done nothing wrong." His eyes swept over the faces in the crowd, daring anyone to challenge him, to say a word.

Silence.

"Is that clear?"

The crowd, cowed and broken, nodded in sullen agreement. Barns stood for another moment, letting the weight of his authority settle into them. Then, without another word, he turned and climbed back into the town police car. The engine grumbled to life, a low rumble that seemed to echo down the empty street as Barns backed out slowly, the headlights carving a path through the thickening darkness.

Barbara House

Carl and Barbara sat on the porch steps of her broken home, the night folding in around them. The paramedics had come and gone, leaving nothing behind but the smell of antiseptic and the dull ache of bruised ribs and swollen noses. Barbara touched her face gingerly, wincing as her fingers brushed her nose, which the paramedics said was probably not broken, but close enough.

Carl stared at the ground, his hands trembling in his lap, his mind a storm of self-recrimination. He could feel every mistake he'd made since arriving in this town, each one piling up like stones on his chest. The fear, the anger, the helplessness—it all mixed together until he could hardly breathe. He thought of his parents, of how they had hoped this move would give him a fresh start. Instead, all he had done was make things worse for himself, and now for Barbara too. He felt the weight of it all, the gnawing sense that he just wasn't strong enough to handle any of this. "I'm sorry," he muttered, barely audible.

Barbara turned to him, her eyes soft with exhaustion and sympathy. "You're sorry? Carl, you have nothing to apologize for. Look at me. Look at my house. I'm the one who should be sorry. I couldn't protect you."

"You? Protect me?" Carl scoffed, shaking his head, but the gesture was hollow, weighed down by guilt. "They were coming for me, Barbara. They had guns. And I ran like a coward." His voice cracked, a thread of despair creeping in, tears welling in his eyes. "I left you to fend for yourself."

Barbara placed a hand on his shoulder, the warmth of it pulling him out of the spiral of self-loathing, if only for a moment. "You did the right thing, Carl. You didn't have a choice. I'm mad, sure, but not at you. At them. And I'm going to press charges. Big time."

Barns' car rolled to a stop in front of Barbara's house, the headlights briefly illuminating the damage—a broken door hanging crookedly on its hinges, the remnants of shattered glass sparkling in the dirt like fallen stars. He stepped out, his boots crunching on the gravel as he made his way toward them.

"You two have had one hell of a night," Barns said, his voice lower now, almost gentle, as he placed one foot on the first step. "Eddie McGuire pulled a fast one on all of us tonight, and there's not a damned thing I can do about it."

Carl's face twisted in disbelief. "He stirred them up. Eddie's the one who got them to come after me."

Barns nodded solemnly, his expression grim. "I know. And it bothers me that they didn't come to me first. If I'd known, I would've been on you like white on rice. But instead, they took matters into their own hands, and now look where we are."

"Mr. Barns," Carl said, the bitterness rising in his throat like a bitter wind cutting through him, sharp and relentless. "I'm done. I'm leaving town. I can't stay here anymore."

Barns sighed, deep and slow, like a man who had seen too many nights like this. "I get it, Carl. I do. But just think about it. You've got a few months of high school left, and I swear to you, you'll be safe."

Carl shook his head. "I can't. I came here thinking I could just be me, and look what that's gotten me. This town... it's not for me. I didn't fit in, and I was arrogant to think I ever would."

Barns studied Carl, his face a mixture of sympathy and resignation. "You didn't do anything wrong, Carl. You're not the problem. This town—" He trailed off, glancing at the broken door, at Barbara's

bruised face, as if the whole place had turned into a symbol of something rotten he couldn't quite name. "This town's got some growing up to do."

Carl looked back at Barbara, his eyes softening. "It's your town, Barbara. You were born here. You should stay and fight for it. But me? I have to move on."

Barbara took his hand, squeezing it tight, her voice breaking. "Carl, you've changed me. Don't go."

Carl held her gaze for a long moment, then looked away, his decision made. "I'm sorry, Barbara. But I'm already gone."

Barns stood off to the side, waiting, patient. Finally, he stepped forward. "I'll take you home, Carl. And I'll have someone keep an eye on the place tonight. You'll be safe."

Carl stood up slowly, the weight of the night pressing down on him like a stone. He looked at Barns, then at Barbara, his heart heavy. "Safe?" He shook his head. "No, Mr. Barns. This isn't blowing over. It's blowing up."

Home

As Carl steps into the house, he hesitates for a moment, his shoulders heavy, the weight of the night still pressing down on him. His mother calls out to him. “Carl?”

“Yeah, it's me.” He tries to keep his voice casual, light, like everything's normal. He needs to sound this way, needs her to believe that he's alright, even if he feels like he's unraveling inside. It's easier to pretend, to put on this mask, than to let her see just how much he's struggling.

“Are you alright?” She's always got that worry in her voice lately, a quiet tremor that makes him ache.

He walks into her room, the dim light of the bedside lamp casting a soft glow across the space. The air feels thick, almost still, with the scent of lavender and old books lingering. He finds her sitting on the side of the bed, her slippers barely touching the carpet, ready to get up. “I'm fine, Mom. See?” He holds out his arms, spinning in a slow, exaggerated circle, his smile forced and eyes just a little too bright, trying to prove it. His mother watches, her lips curving into a small, skeptical smile, the kind that doesn't quite reach her eyes. There's relief there, but also a lingering fear that she can't quite shake. “Just the same as when I left.”

She looks at him with that mother's gaze, the kind that can see straight through you. Her eyes are gentle but skeptical. “Yeah, well, you weren't looking all that great when you left,” she says, the edge of fear softening to teasing.

She lies back against the pillows. Beside her is an open book, spine bent and pages folded like wings. It's one of her old romance novels, the kind with a windswept heroine on the cover, longing for love and escape. It's her way of finding a bit of comfort, a bit of a different world where everything somehow works out in the end. She picks it up, replaces the bookmark, then pats the bed beside her. “Come sit with me,” she says, her voice soft, almost wistful, a small smile touching her lips. “We'll watch Johnny Carson.”

Carl kicks off his shoes, walks around to her side, and flops onto the bed, the mattress sagging beneath him with a familiar creak, the springs groaning softly as if echoing his exhaustion. He tries to feel young again, just for a moment, letting the old bed creak under his weight like it used to when he was small. “What are you reading?” he asks, his voice curious, a hint of teasing behind the question.

“Oh, nothing. Just one of my silly romance novels.” She smiles, still touched by whatever fear is lurking beneath. Carl knows that look well by now—he's put it there enough times.

He leans back against the cushions, rubbing his eyes with the palms of his hands until he sees spots dancing behind his lids. He lets out a sigh, long and low, the weight of the world trying to squeeze itself out through that breath. “It's crazy out there, Mom.”

Her voice catches, just slightly. “What's wrong?”

He doesn't answer right away. Takes another breath instead, longer this time. He doesn't know where to start—how much to tell her, how much to keep. He's tired of making her worry, tired of the fear.

“They tried to get me again tonight,” he says finally, voice almost a whisper. He can feel her tense beside him.

“Oh my God, not again. I was afraid this wasn't over.” The fear has made its way back into her voice, thicker now, undeniable.

He nods, looking down at the quilt, tracing one of the patterns with his finger. “I was at Barbara’s house. Eddie McGuire and a bunch of his guys came looking for me. I hid upstairs. They went away, but...” He trails off, leaves the rest unspoken. The shouting, the pounding on the door, the threats—she doesn’t need to hear that. Not tonight. She’ll find out soon enough anyway.

“Oh, Carl, no.” Her voice cracks, a pain there that makes his chest tighten. “I just don’t understand it.” Her eyes are on him again, searching, pleading. She reaches out, pulls him closer, and he lays his head on her lap, like he used to when he was small. She strokes his hair, smoothing it back, her fingers gentle and cool against his forehead.

“I don’t understand it either, Mom. Why can’t I just be normal?” His voice trembles. To Carl, ‘normal’ means being able to go out without looking over his shoulder, without feeling the weight of other people’s eyes, judging, fearing, or hating him for reasons he can’t control. It means not having to hide, not being the target of someone else’s anger. It means being able to just live, without the constant fear gnawing at the edges of his mind. The pain of being different, of standing out in a way that makes others want to hurt him, is almost unbearable. He’s trying to keep it in, all the fear, the anger, the helplessness. But it’s there, thickening his words, making them heavy.

“I’m sorry, son,” she whispers, her fingers tracing slow, soothing circles on his scalp.

“I’m sorry too, Mom.” He closes his eyes, tries to forget, just for a minute.

They lay there silently for a while, his head on her lap, her hand in his hair. The room is quiet, save for the faint hum of the old ceiling fan, its blades spinning lazily overhead. The dim lamplight casts soft, flickering shadows across the walls, giving the space a gentle warmth. Wrapping them in a cocoon of nostalgia and comfort. There’s a tension in the air, something unsaid, something they both know but are afraid to give voice to. She knows he’s going to leave—he’s trying to find a way to tell her.

“I wanted so much to make this a home for you. Kelseyville has always been such a quiet and peaceful place to me.” But for Carl, Kelseyville had always felt different—more like a cage than a refuge, a place where everyone seemed to be watching, where fitting in felt impossible. He wished he could feel the peace she talked about, but all he ever found here was tension and fear. I’m sorry it didn’t turn out that way for you.” Her voice is soft, her eyes welling with tears she doesn’t bother to wipe away. “I just hate to lose my little boy.” She strokes his cheek, her thumb brushing the edge of his jaw.

“You’re not losing me, Mom. I’m just growing up, that’s all. It happens to everybody.” He sits up, his hand resting on hers for a moment before he lets go. “I’d have been moving out in a few months anyway. I talked to Lowell’s parents in Kansas City, and they said I could come and stay with them for a while.”

“That’s probably for the best,” she says, though her voice is hollow, the words empty of any conviction.

Carl gets up, walks to the TV, and clicks the knob over two channels until Johnny Carson’s face appears, grainy and flickering on the screen, the static crackling softly as the old tube warms up, filling the room with that familiar hum of nostalgia. They only get three stations, but somehow, tonight, it’s enough. Carl lies back down beside her, his head resting against her shoulder, and they watch in silence as George Carlin tells jokes about the absurdities of life.

Carl laughs, softly, then closes his eyes, the tension finally loosening its grip. For a fleeting moment, he feels a sense of safety here, like he did when he was young—wrapped up in his mother’s presence, the world outside fading to nothing. It’s not enough to erase everything, but just enough to let him drift,

to let go of the fear, even if only for a little while. He falls into a fitful sleep, his arm draped across his mother's lap. She stays awake, her fingers running through his hair, her eyes on the screen but her mind somewhere else, tears slipping silently down her cheeks as she holds onto these last few moments with her little boy.

Crash Landing

The night was heavy, a damp weight settled over Kelseyville like an old, worn blanket. The air smelled of earth, a mix of rain-soaked grass and mud, and the humidity clung to their skin, sticky and oppressive, wrapping around them like something they couldn't quite shake off. John Harrison was taken to jail, the door of the cell clanging shut with a finality that echoed far beyond those bare walls. Everyone else at the bar drifted home, some stumbling, others simply walking with heads bowed, to sleep it off. A strange quiet had settled over the town—the kind of quiet that comes after something breaks, leaving a stillness where uncertainty lingers like a sour aftertaste. Folks were stunned, shaken by the actions of the drunken vigilantes, who had taken things much too far.

The younger ones in town—Carl's schoolmates—they felt something shift, a tremor beneath their feet that had them looking around at their neighbors, friends, and even family with new eyes. They couldn't help but wonder who would be next, who might face the same blind rage that had come down on Carl. Some of them feared that just speaking out could make them targets, while others began to realize how deeply unfair it all was—that the world could turn on you for being different, for stepping out of line. They felt the unease settle in their bones, a realization that the safety they had always assumed was theirs could vanish at any moment. They sympathized with Carl's plight, not just out of some sense of righteousness, but because they could feel the changing mood—that dark, unpredictable current running beneath the surface. It wasn't just about Carl anymore. It was about all of them. Until now, the boys had accepted the pecking order, the roughness of McGuire and Welch as part of growing up, just like the fists of their fathers and the cold dismissiveness of their older brothers. But this—this was something different. It was like the world had lost its balance, tipped over like an overloaded hay wagon on a steep hill, spilling everything into chaos—something crazier, something dangerous.

Yet there were others—people who didn't see Carl as a victim but as the problem itself. To them, things had been fine until he showed up, with his loose ideas and his strange ways. They didn't like the kids getting any ideas about "this hippie thing." They had seen the news. The college campuses, the anti-war protests, the long-haired, scruffy dope smokers that made their skin crawl. They called it disgusting, even frightening. It wasn't just the rebellion; it was the idea that the old ways, the ways they understood, could be swept aside. Communism, betrayal, a cultural war—all those fears, which had been bubbling for years, now found a target. Maybe John Hanson was hasty, maybe he went too far, but wasn't his concern justified? The rumors had been swirling—whispers of drugs, of Carl Lee bringing in dangerous influences, of things changing too quickly for a town like Kelseyville. John had heard it all from friends at the bar, from neighbors, even from his own brother. He wasn't a bad man, but he felt something slipping, something about the town he had known all his life. The fear of losing that, of seeing his home become something unrecognizable, drove him to act. It wasn't right, but to him, it had felt necessary—like he was defending something worth saving. Carl Lee, with his unkempt hair and suspicious eyes, was the enemy of everything safe and known, a threat that needed rooting out.

So the bar crowd, the elders of Kelseyville, found themselves short on sympathy for Carl Lee but full of sorrow for poor John Harrison, now sitting behind bars. But they were also angry—angry at Eddie McGuire. Even in their stupor, they knew they had been deceived by Eddie. True, maybe some of them weren't all that smart. Maybe years of drinking had dulled the edge of their judgment. But they weren't stupid enough to miss how Eddie had pushed Tami into lying, stirred up their anger, and

manipulated the whole situation. They hated Carl Lee, but Eddie—he had played them, used them as fools, and now John Harrison was paying the price for it.

By the following Saturday, the whole town was buzzing with the story. The gossip was everywhere, as thick and cloying as the heat of a Kelseyville afternoon. At the diner, voices were lowered as people leaned in, sharing tidbits—how Eddie had manipulated Tami, how Carl had looked when he ran, and how John Harrison had sat in the cell, quiet and bitter. On porches, the older women whispered, shaking their heads, speculating if Carl had really gone to California or if he was hiding somewhere closer. The bar buzzed with accusations and justifications, each man trying to make sense of the chaos, their words carrying a mix of anger and uneasy laughter. People were split in their judgment of Carl Lee, but it hardly mattered now; he was long gone. Rumor had it that he went to California, and that didn't surprise anyone. California was where people like him belonged—where they drifted, lost and free, far from places like this. But this had been the most excitement Kelseyville had seen in years, and with Carl gone, things seemed to slip back into their familiar rhythm—or at least, almost.

Saturday night brought the cruising scene back to Main Street, a ritual so ingrained that it had the comforting familiarity of a hymn. Maybe it was the warmth of an early spring, maybe it was the first of the month and folks just got paid, but Main Street was alive again. People leaned against cars, drank beer, laughed too loudly—trying to pretend that the world hadn't just tilted sideways. They tried, but the unease lingered, like a chill that refused to leave even in the warmth of spring, settling in the collective quietness of the crowd, a silence that spoke of everything left unsaid.

Eddie McGuire hadn't been seen since the mess last week, but when his Corvette pulled into the car wash, heads turned. The crowd of boys—Jake, Roy Welch, and a few others—stood by their cars, talking, while the girls sat in Jake's truck, giggling over a pile of eight-track tapes. But as Eddie climbed out of his car, the laughter quieted, replaced by a heavy silence.

Eddie was already drunk, his clothes disheveled, shirt half untucked, and his eyes red-rimmed and glassy as he muttered to himself, staggering around the Vette, a beer in hand, the movements exaggerated like a bad actor on a cheap stage. He swaggered over to the group, his voice loud and mocking, "Where's the fucking party?" Silence. Nobody moved, nobody answered, the air thickening with tension. Eddie took a swig of beer, his eyes scanning the group, the corners of his mouth turning downward as if the taste was bitter.

"Hey, Roy, let's go cruise around for a while," Eddie said, casual-like, as if nothing had changed.

"I don't think so, Eddie," Roy said, his voice flat, distant, like the words were barely worth the breath.

Eddie's face twisted, a sneer crawling across it. "Come on, you're all acting like a bunch of fucking women." He drank again, the beer spilling down his chin, anger building beneath the drunken glaze. "Nobody wants to have fun anymore."

Jake was closest, standing there with his arms crossed. Eddie turned to him, his voice sharp now, commanding, "Okay, well come on, Jake, let's go."

Jake didn't move, didn't flinch, his silence a challenge, his eyes steady on Eddie's face. Inside, a mix of fear and defiance churned. He knew Eddie was unpredictable, but he was tired—tired of the bullying, tired of always backing down. His heart pounded in his chest, but there was something in him that refused to budge, a determination to stand his ground no matter the cost.

The blood rushed to Eddie's cheeks, his skin flushed, fists clenching. "What? Now you're fucking deaf? I said, let's go!" Still, Jake remained, unmoving, his glare unwavering.

Something snapped inside Eddie. The rage boiled over, his fist shooting out, grabbing Jake by the shirt. He started swinging, punching Jake in the face, the blows landing with dull, sickening thuds. Jake, stunned, took the hits, then pushed back, defiant, his own fists coming up in retaliation.

Roy Welch moved like a storm, sudden and violent, like a bull breaking loose from the pen at the county fair, all raw power and unstoppable force, familiar yet fearsome. A heavy blow caught Eddie across the side of his head, sending him staggering back. Roy was on him, his hand like a vise around Eddie's neck, lifting him off the ground. Eddie's fists flailed, helpless, his face purpling as Roy held him there, his breath choking off, the fight leaving him. Roy threw him down, Eddie sprawling on his back in the dirt, gasping, scrambling away, defeated.

He got to his feet, rage still burning in his eyes, though now mixed with fear. He spat at the crowd, "Fuck you people. Fuck all of you. Fuck this town." He turned, slamming the car door behind him, the Corvette roaring to life, tires screeching as he peeled away, the sound echoing off the brick storefronts.

Sixteen-year-old Jenny Lane had held her driver's license for only two months. The thrill of newfound freedom mixed with the nervous excitement of being behind the wheel without her parents' watchful eyes made her hands tremble slightly as she gripped the steering wheel. For two weeks she had begged her mom to let her drive the family Dodge Dart to the Dairy Bell, just her and her best friend, for hamburgers. She promised it would be a straight drive there and back, nothing more. She had even calculated the route, convinced herself that her mother would never know if they took a couple of loops down Main Street. This was it—the big time for Jenny and her friend, cruising Main like the older kids, feeling the pulse of freedom for the first time.

Now, they were staring, frozen and wide-eyed, as Eddie McGuire's Vette roared towards them, tires smoking, headlights swinging wildly like a predator's gaze. The acrid smell of burnt rubber filled the air, and the heat radiated off the Vette's engine, pressing against their faces as if the night itself was on fire. The screeching rubber cut through the night air, a sound that rattled down their spines, a gut-clenching discord. They held their breaths, the world collapsing to this single moment, waiting for the crash. Jenny's mind scrambled, already thinking about how she'd explain it to her mom, silently making promises to God that she would never disobey again. Time slowed to a crawl, the space between them and the Vette shrinking impossibly fast. But at the last possible second, Eddie's Vette swerved, the tires screaming as it veered right, narrowly avoiding them, and then sped up Main Street only to screech to a halt behind Johnny Wheeler's Pontiac Tempest. Eddie was stuck in the slow parade.

As McGuire crawled along in the line of cars, his face contorted with rage. His knuckles were white on the wheel, his breath coming in sharp, heavy bursts. "Fuck this town. I hate all these cock-suckers. They're all a bunch of fucking cowards," he spat, his voice low and venomous. "Couldn't even catch that piss-ant little hippie." His mind raced, the anger swallowing him whole. "I'm going to kill him. I'm going to kill all of 'em. Fuck 'em. Fuck 'em all." Half a block away, he spotted a side road that headed out of town. "I'll be back," he growled, eyes burning, "and then you'll pay, you'll all pay."

Officer Larry Barns stepped onto the porch in front of his office, surveying the commotion on Main Street with a cigarette between his lips. His mind was already turning, trying to piece together what was happening. Was this just another drunken stunt by McGuire, or had things escalated beyond control? He felt the familiar tightening in his gut, that mix of frustration and responsibility, knowing that tonight

might be another night where the line between law and chaos blurred—and he was the one expected to hold it steady. He still hadn't confronted Eddie McGuire about what happened last week, though he had thought of little else. He knew he had nothing substantial to pin on McGuire yet, but the days of turning a blind eye were over. He had spoken with town leaders, and even with the differing opinions on Carl Lee, they were all united in their disgust for the vigilante action that had transpired. The whole ordeal had thrown Kelseyville into an uproar, and it reflected poorly on Barns. He was the cop, the one paid to keep law and order, and yet chaos had reigned. The sooner things returned to normal, the better.

Barns squinted down Main. Sure enough, there was McGuire's Vette, parked at the car wash. He wasn't sure, but something about the scene looked off—some kind of commotion maybe. Suddenly, the Vette burst out of the car wash, tires smoking, damn near hitting a Dodge Dart as it careened up the street. The driver of the Dart, eyes wide with panic, swerved hard, barely managing to avoid a collision, their horn blaring in fear and anger. The Vette continued its reckless path, screeching to a halt just inches from a Pontiac Tempest, whose driver leaned out the window, shouting obscenities as they struggled to regain control. Barns didn't hesitate. He threw down his cigarette, dashed to his cruiser, and the siren wailed as he slammed it into reverse, backing onto Main.

Barns drove down the middle of the street, lights flashing, the siren cutting through the dark like an avenging angel's call. The red and blue lights reflected off the storefront windows, casting flickering shadows across the empty sidewalks, while the echo of the siren bounced off the buildings, amplifying the urgency in the night air. He had just enough space to squeeze between the rows of cars lining Main Street, their drivers frozen in shock at the spectacle unfolding before them. When he caught up to McGuire, Barns swerved left, the cruiser jerking sideways to block Eddie's way.

Eddie spotted Barns coming, and before Barns had even stopped, he threw the Vette into reverse, tires shrieking as he backed up about ten feet, cranking the wheel left and fishtailing around. The maneuver was bold, reckless, leaving just enough room between the parked cars for Eddie to escape. But as he straightened out, the side of his Vette scraped against Lowell Hager's old '59 Chevy pickup. The right side of the Vette shattered, the headlight ripped from the body, metal screaming against metal. The truck, pre-disastered by years of heavy farm use, barely flinched. It was a collision that slowed McGuire down, but it didn't stop him. He saw the middle lane open up, clear down the two lines of cars, and gunned it. He knew his 427 Corvette could outpace the Ford Fairlane cruiser. He figured Barns had no chance of catching him.

Five cars back, Jan Myers sat behind the wheel of her father's Buick Electra, her eyes wide, her pulse drumming in her ears. She had seen the whole thing—the screeching tires, the near-collision with Jenny Lane's Dart, Officer Barns cutting McGuire off, and then the Vette escaping. Her heart pounded with a mix of fear and fury, each moment tightening the knot in her chest. The helplessness she had felt watching Carl be driven out of town was morphing into something else—something fierce, a determination that swelled with every reckless move Eddie made. She watched as Eddie sideswiped Lowell's truck, the metal crunching, and now the Vette was barreling toward her, determined to get away. Jan knew what Eddie had done to Carl Lee. She knew he had driven him out of town, knew Carl hadn't shown up to school all week. The sadness had sat heavy in her chest, a dull ache she couldn't shake.

But now, in this moment, something was changing. Somewhere deep inside Jan Myers, the nicest girl in town, the one who fed stray animals and never had an unkind word to say, anger boiled. She

thought of Carl Lee, the way he had smiled at her in history class when no one else would, how he had defended her when others mocked her quiet nature. The memory of his kindness mixed with the image of him being driven away, helpless and alone, stoked a fire she could no longer ignore. It came roaring to the surface, a kind of righteous fury that nobody who knew her would have thought possible. She was tired of being quiet, of sitting by and watching the world fall apart. She pinned her foot to the accelerator and cranked the wheel to the left. The Buick Electra, that hulking ship of a car, wheezed for an instant, then lurched forward, hurtling into McGuire's path.

Bobby Brown, parked on the other side in his beloved 1968 GTO, watched the scene unfold, heart in his throat. The Electra bore down on his GTO, and for a split second, Bobby thought he might become the youngest heart attack victim in Kelseyville history. But just as suddenly, Jan stood on the brakes, the Buick shuddering to a halt inches from Bobby's door. Eddie was trapped, nowhere left to go, and the moment hung suspended in the air, heavy as judgment.

Barns had the cruiser in park and paused for a heartbeat, his mind racing. He knew this could be it—the moment where things either calmed down or spiraled further out of control. His gut tightened, but he couldn't hesitate any longer. In an instant, he was out the door. He ran toward the Vette, his boots pounding the bricks of Main Street, his breath ragged in the spring night air. He yanked open the driver's side door, his hand gripping the collar of Eddie's shirt, and pulled him out. Eddie swung at him, a wild, unfocused punch that caught Barns on the jaw. Barns staggered, but the years as a Marine kicked in. Life in Kelseyville had made him soft, but not soft enough. He drove his fist into Eddie's stomach, feeling the air rush out of him, then pulled him over his knee, flipping him onto the hard brick street. The crowd watched, stunned, their faces a mixture of fear and fascination. Some had their mouths slightly open, eyes wide, while others clenched their jaws, fists tightened by their sides. The world had narrowed to the two figures in the street, their breaths held as if afraid to disturb the fragile balance of the moment.

In another second, Barns had his knee in Eddie's back, the handcuffs clicking into place. Eddie lay there, gasping for air, the blood from his nose dripping onto the street, mixing with the dirt and grit. Barns stood over him, his chest heaving, his eyes on the crowd now gathered, the red and blue lights from the cruiser flashing across their faces. The tension in the air was thick, a stillness that seemed to stretch into eternity. Kelseyville had seen something tonight—something that would linger, a weight that wouldn't lift, not even when the lights were turned off and the street was empty again. This event would leave cracks in the town's foundation, altering how neighbors looked at each other, how trust was given, and how easily it could be shattered. The lines between friend and foe, right and wrong, had blurred tonight, and the repercussions would ripple through Kelseyville for a generation—changing relationships, hardening hearts, and perhaps waking others to the fragility of the peace they had always taken for granted.

Eddie After Kelseyville

Eddie did not think of himself as political. Politics was for men in suits who talked too much on television. Eddie believed in simpler things. A man stood his ground. A man did not let people laugh at him. A man protected what was his, his car, his town, his name, his women, his country if it came to that. Nobody had to explain those things. They were natural, like weather.

But after Carl Lee left, nothing felt natural.

At first Eddie expected the town to come back around. People always did. They got mad, talked their shit, then forgot. Kelseyville had a short memory when remembering required courage. But this time the forgetting did not happen. Conversations stopped when he came near. Men who used to slap him on the back now nodded without smiling. Girls looked away. Roy would not ride with him. Even the losers at the bar, men Eddie had secretly despised for years, watched him with that dull accusing look, as if he had embarrassed them by showing them what they were.

That was the part he could not forgive.

Not Carl. Not really. Carl was gone. The little hippie coward had run off to whatever soft place took people like him. What Eddie hated was the shift in the eyes of people who stayed. He had done what they all wanted done, or what they would have wanted if they had the guts to say it. He had seen the fear in them when drugs were mentioned, when daughters were mentioned, when hippies were mentioned. He had given their fear a direction. Then they blamed him for it.

That was politics, though Eddie did not know it yet.

A few weeks later he found a folded flyer under the windshield wiper of his Corvette. At first he thought it was an advertisement, some stupid sale at a tire shop or a church dinner. He almost threw it away. Then he saw the words.

American Alliance of Youth.

Under that, in block letters, was a line that caught him.

The time has come to defend America from communist filth.

Eddie stood in the gravel lot outside the car wash and read the whole thing twice.

It was not well written. Even Eddie could see that. Too many capital letters, too much Bible talk, too many warnings about traitors, radicals, race mixers, dope pushers, and campus degenerates. But the feeling underneath it was clean and hot. Whoever wrote it understood something. The country was being taken away. The old rules were being mocked. Boys like Carl Lee could walk into a town, sneer at everything, corrupt the girls, talk down to decent people, then run crying to the law when somebody pushed back.

For the first time since the night everything turned against him, Eddie felt the humiliation settle into a shape he could use.

Maybe he had not gone too far.

Maybe he had not gone far enough.

That thought surprised him. Then it steadied him.

He folded the flyer and put it in his shirt pocket. The paper touched his chest all afternoon, a small square of permission. When he drank that night, he drank slower. He listened more. Men at the bar were talking about Berkeley, about Panthers, about long hairs spitting on soldiers, about college kids burning flags, about girls who did not wear bras and boys who would not fight. Eddie did not say much. He only

felt the flyer against his skin and understood, dimly but with growing force, that Carl Lee had never been just Carl Lee.

Carl was a symptom.

That was the word one of the men used, symptom. Eddie liked the sound of it. A symptom meant sickness. A symptom meant there was something larger to fight.

He began to watch the news with the sound turned up.

PART THREE: VIETNAM

February 1967 - Vietnam

Drew's Journey: A War of Conflict and Corruption

Fear in the Skies

Flying in choppers always scares the hell out of Drew, but he's trying not to show it. The mission wasn't even supposed to be his—he got stuck with it because a coworker went on leave. Usually, Drew Kroll spends his time in Saigon, where things are safer, more predictable. He's an intelligence officer with the 525th Military Intelligence Group, responsible for locating and identifying the enemy, figuring out their routes, tracking their origins. Sometimes, to do that, he has to go into the field to pick up captured documents or sit in on interrogations. But that kind of work is meant for the 'military type' guys in his office, not for Drew. He's five-foot-ten, a New York Jew with thick glasses and a complexion more accustomed to dim library light than the relentless sun of Southeast Asia. He doesn't fit the macho, rugged image of a field agent. Drew's strengths are different—language skills, an Ivy League education. He's an expert at piecing together fragmented documents. Unfortunately, none of that got him out of this mission, and now he's gripping his seat in the helicopter, trying to keep his terror in check.

Drew comes from a moderately wealthy, well-connected Jewish family in upstate New York. Harvard shaped his path—an economics major, research on multinational corporations in France. The military was never in the plan. But the draft board had other ideas. Like many 'better-educated' young men facing conscription, Drew figured enlisting was the better option. The Army agreed; a man with his background should be in 'Area Studies,' not in the jungle with an M-16. That sounded reasonable—an assignment analyzing data, a couple of years as a bureaucrat, then back to normal life. But Drew soon learned that 'Area Studies' was just a euphemism. It meant intelligence work. It meant being a spy. And here he was, in a chopper, headed to do a job he never imagined for himself.

Chapter 3: Saigon Secrets

Drew's fluency in French and passable German led the Army to send him to language school to learn Vietnamese. After school, they shipped him to Saigon, where he spent most of his time setting up press covers for French spies who ran back and forth from Cambodia to Saigon. Of course, the U.S. denied that espionage operatives were using press covers, but everyone in the local press knew about it. It had been covert policy since the beginning of the war.

None of this surprised Drew. What did surprise him was how willing Esso Standard Oil was to provide logistical support, like fuel depots and transport routes, in Cambodia for the CIA and Army Intelligence, along with about a hundred other companies offering similar covert assistance. The IRS, Treasury Department, and Immigration Department regularly falsified documents to hide the money being paid to spies for bribes, assassination, and corruption. It was all just business as usual; everyone was in on it.

Back in college, Drew had believed these institutions and multinational corporations contributed to world peace, welding the world together. Now, that naive idealism seemed laughable, shattered by the harsh reality of corruption and exploitation. The truth was far more cynical—these corporations all collaborated with Uncle Sam, competing for a share of the spoils. For example, oil companies provided logistics and cover to ensure they remained in favor with intelligence agencies. These institutions gladly provided cover for operations no one was willing to talk about in polite society. It wasn't about national security, that was just an excuse to keep things swept under the rug. The real reason was that if the people back in the States knew what was happening behind the scenes, they would feel the same disgust Drew felt. It was all a corrupt, rotten mess. Those old idealistic dreams he had studied in college—his vision of becoming a future corporate leader—were all tainted now. Everything had the same stench of corruption and incompetence as the Army.

Drew figured that was just part of waking up to the real world. Today, unfortunately, he was stuck with the real-world job of running this suck-ass pick-up and interrogation. With less than two weeks left on his tour, he just hoped it would be his last.

He had always suspected the war was bullshit even before he joined the Army. Now he knew for sure that the thin veil of justifications he'd read in the newspapers back home was a sham. The U.S. was backing a totally corrupt puppet government, and apparently, everyone but the U.S. taxpayer knew it. The war had already been lost, but no one—not the politicians, not the generals—had the guts to admit it. No one wanted to take the blame for losing the war, so it just kept grinding on, brutal and horrific, with an unstoppable inertia of its own.

For Drew, the disillusionment ran deep. As he contemplated going back to the States in a few weeks, all those upper-class aspirations he had once clung to had faded. They no longer seemed like a viable alternative, and he kept wondering where his new idealism would come from. What would replace the growing feelings of cynicism, mistrust, and shame? It bothered him.

Most assumed it was just the working-class student protesters who were disillusioned, but even the best and brightest, the shining elite, faced much the same disillusionment. They saw the lies, the corruption, the horrors as systemic and realized they were all in the same leaky boat.

Mission Preparations

Around 0700 hours, the company Drew was assigned to make a final check of their weapons and equipment and moved to the loading area. The deafening sound of the arriving lift helicopters and gunships filled Drew with dread. LTC Paulson had just departed in the command and control helicopter. With the final coordination for artillery and combat assault completed, the first elements of C Company lifted off. "War Lord" gunships came in from their base at Chu Lai, approaching from the north. The lead gunship advised the net control station by radio that they were holding over the operational area pending commencement of the combat assault. Drew was on the second wave of nine lift ships making their way to the landing zone while avoiding the gun-target line for artillery preparation. The artillery barrage only lasted five minutes.

When the shelling began, the people working in the surrounding rice paddies sought cover along the dikes and in the numerous buffalo wallows that dotted the fields. Inside the hamlet, people ran for cover in makeshift shelters adjacent to their homes.

Life in Saigon

For Drew, life in Saigon was sweet. He spent short hours in the office and long hours by the pool. He had what passed for a luxury apartment in Saigon and enjoyed the nightlife. By Vietnamese standards, he was rich. Drew had settled in with a regular Vietnamese girlfriend, Mi. They spent long hours drinking and talking by the quiet pool at his apartment, far away from the chaos of the city and the carnage of the war. Mi spoke perfect French and good English. They both preferred French, though Drew loved the sound of her French-Asian accent when she spoke English. She was twenty-two, a college student—smart, educated, and beautiful.

Like all the paid "girlfriends" in Saigon, she probably hoped he would marry her and take her back to the States—anything to get out of Vietnam—but Mi never mentioned it. She seemed to live life as if each moment were her last, as if she had surrendered to her fate. She cherished each experience, savored each meal, laughed with joy, and made love with abandon. Beneath the surface, Drew sensed her despair—the realization that her beauty would soon fade, and her education and intelligence would be lost in the chaos of the world she had been so unlucky to be born into. She was like an impossibly delicate flower in the middle of a construction site.

Mi's mother collected Drew's monetary 'gifts,' which he was glad to pay, though he couldn't escape the feeling that these payments were the price of maintaining a comfortable lie—of pretending he wasn't exploiting Mi's precarious situation. It gnawed at him, even if he tried to ignore it. It was also Mi's mother who awkwardly asked him each time they met when he would marry Mi. Drew always answered, "Maybe some day soon." The mother scowled and told him what a fine wife Mi would make, as she palmed his American dollars. The mother didn't trust him one bit, and she was right. Drew had no intention of marrying Mi. He knew she would never fit into his upper-class Jewish family back in the States. He would be home in a couple of weeks, back in the "real world." With his education and family connections, Drew knew he had a bright future ahead of him, and he was already setting up opportunities.

Mi's father had been a mid-level French official back when it was the French fighting this war. When the French finally wised up and left, Mi's mother had been left behind with a young daughter and no money. Her mother went from being a well-cared-for concubine to a dirt-poor street urchin in a single day. None of this mattered to Drew, or so he told himself. But underneath, he was haunted by the fact that he loved Mi.

When Drew watched Mi stand at the pool's edge, the air seemed to quiver around her, the heat rising in shimmering waves, her lean, smooth, brown-skinned body in that tiny white bikini, the glint of the sun capturing each curve. It was more than lust that stirred in him—something more profound, something that clawed at his insides and left him unsettled. Mi stood there, her figure luminous against the deep blue of the pool, and it was as if the world slowed down just for her. Her features—those Caucasian cheekbones, the exotic tilt of her Asian eyes, her long black hair cascading down, almost veiling her expression—seemed to defy any easy categorization, like she had sprung out of the collective memory of different worlds, a mysterious synthesis of desires and dreams.

To Drew, she was the most beautiful woman he had ever seen, let alone touched, let alone been with. And it amazed him. Drew was, by most standards, a decent catch—reasonably attractive in a preppy sort of way, his hair always neat, his smile easy, the kind of guy you could take to dinner with your parents

and trust to make a good impression. But a woman like Mi? She was out of reach, at least back in the States, where lines were drawn more firmly, where beauty of her kind was put on a pedestal or hidden in corners, never standing at the edge of a pool under the open sun, unapologetic in her allure.

But Drew knew it was more than Mi's beauty that held him captive, more than the transformational sex, the passion that seemed to break the boundaries between them, leaving them breathless and raw. No, it was the inconvenience of love that gnawed at him, a love that demanded recognition despite the circumstances, despite the fleeting nature of their lives. It was the sharp intelligence in her eyes, the way she surprised him with her wit, her incisive comments that made him laugh, made him think, the sly, knowing smile she would flash his way when he least expected it, like she could read his mind, like she knew all his secrets.

He respected her—that much was clear. But there was more. Drew knew he was falling for her because of the sadness he glimpsed behind all that beauty, behind the laughter and the cleverness. It was there when she lay by the pool in the mottled shadows of the palm trees, her face half-hidden, her gaze fixed somewhere beyond him, somewhere distant, unreachable. A sadness that spoke of something lost, something she never talked about, but which lingered in her eyes, in the depths of her voice when she whispered to him at night. It haunted him, this sadness, this awareness that seemed far beyond her years, as if she had seen more of the world than she ever let on, as if she carried the weight of unspoken stories, of a history she could never fully share.

It was this sadness that pulled at Drew, that made him want to hold her closer, to protect her from whatever ghosts haunted her. It was what gave her eyes that depth, what made her cries of passion—those cries that echoed in the night, filling the silence between them—seem like they were not just cries of pleasure but also of sorrow, of a loss that could not be named. There was an abandonment in the way they made love, a desperation, as if they were both trying to escape something, trying to find solace in each other's arms. And in those moments, Drew felt that Mi's sorrow became his own, a weight that settled deep in his chest, leaving him breathless, leaving him wanting more, not just of her body but of her soul, her past, her secrets.

The sun beat down on them, the air thick with the scent of chlorine and sun-warmed skin, the cicadas buzzing in the distance, a constant, unending rhythm. The shadows shifted, lengthened, and Drew watched her, feeling something inside him break open, something he hadn't even realized was there. He wanted to reach out, to touch her, to pull her back from whatever distant place her mind had wandered to, to tell her that he was there, that he saw her, not just the beauty, not just the laughter, but the sadness too. And maybe, just maybe, that was enough—that seeing her, all of her, was enough to make him love her, inconvenient or not.

It was this sadness, this awareness beyond her years, that made him love her. It was the source of her knowing eyes and the depth in her cries of passion—cries that were somehow also cries of the deepest sorrow and loss.

The Descent into Chaos

Drew tried not to concentrate on the fact that his helicopter was skimming the treetops at a suicidal pace. Smoke and fire rose from the artillery as the inbound helicopter banked. Rockets and machine guns erupted from several of the choppers as they headed for the already-prepared landing zone a couple of hundred yards from the hamlet. Any VC in the area had plenty of warning and had already faded into the jungle's safety.

Finally, they dropped like a stone. Drew reflexively grabbed his seat and closed his eyes, struggling to endure the rollercoaster descent. The deafening roar of the rotor blades filled his ears, and the sharp smell of fuel hung thick in the air. He could feel the humid, chaotic jungle closing in as they approached the clearing, smoke and ash swirling around them. They hit the ground with a thump. He immediately scrambled out, ducking and running through the hurricane of prop wash, and seconds later, the choppers were gone.

Amazed to still be alive, Drew followed the others to a gathering point. After some confusion amid the chaos of running soldiers, stacks of equipment, and nearby gunfire and explosions, he found the commanding officer. Drew knew the drill. He would interrogate several previously captured prisoners and interpret some documents written in French.

An NVA tunnel and bunker complex near the hamlet had been taken yesterday. Two NVA doctors and four nurses had been hiding in the bunkers with medical supplies and black uniforms. Drew knew that this kind of interrogation could be nasty. Watching torture wasn't something Drew looked forward to, but he had been through it before. Current intelligence could be extremely useful, and Drew thought of himself as a hardened professional. He was an intelligence officer, a spy, and torture was just part of the information-gathering game.

Captain George wasn't much older than Drew. His glasses made him look like an accountant.

"You're from MI," the Captain stated.

"Yeah, I'm here for the documents and the interrogation."

"We'll probably have some more before the day is out. I have reason to believe this gook village has additional assets. We had one hell of a time dragging those cocksuckers out of that complex yesterday—heavy mortars, traps, snipers. Fucking VC all over the area. We should be able to wrap it up in a couple more days. I need all the intel you can give me."

"That's what I'm here for."

"Good," the Captain said, turning to another soldier. "Harrison, take him down to the prisoners and show him what we've got. Then take him in. I want him around if we find more documents."

The Captain immediately started talking to another Marine about chopper problems. Harrison turned and walked away without a word, and Drew followed. They walked along the edge of a lush green rice paddy into the darkness of the vine-covered jungle. The muffled sounds of the battle were ever-present beneath the constant droning buzz of the jungle. They soon came to a small clearing. It was hot, and the sun-drenched clearing seemed blinding after the darkness of the trees. The sun was high, and the heat and humidity were oppressive. Sweat ran down Drew's face, stung his eyes, and soaked his shirt.

A tent was set up as a shade structure, and stacks of supplies littered the area. About a dozen soldiers were involved in various activities. Four men were standing and talking in the tent's shade. As Drew approached, he saw the prisoners tied to chairs behind the tent. They were unconscious, looking half-

dead. Drew walked over to the prisoners and gently touched their heads, inspecting them. The men in the tent stopped talking and watched.

Drew stepped into the shade of the tent, his face tight with anger. "How the fuck am I supposed to get anything out of these guys if they're already dead? Bring some water, get them into the shade. Son of a bitch. Who the fuck did this?" The four men just stood there.

"Who's the interrogator here?" Drew demanded.

A sergeant spoke up. "Yeah, well, we already interrogated them. We got everything right here." He pointed to a small table littered with papers, surrounded by supply boxes.

"Then why the fuck am I here if you've already interrogated them? They're useless now."

"Good, then we can kill 'em. They've been stinking up the place." The sergeant's voice was hardened, and the others laughed. The sergeant had been in the bush for years and had no patience for ninety-day-wonder lieutenants.

Drew shook his head, disgusted, throwing his hands up in resignation. "How about the nurses? I understand you've got some nurses?"

They looked at each other and snickered. "Yeah, well, we're done interrogating them too." They all laughed raucously.

"What the fuck? So you're telling me they're dead too?" Drew's voice was laced with disbelief.

"Yeah, pretty dead."

"Where are they? I want to see them."

"Believe me, you don't want to see them," the sergeant said dryly.

Drew felt compelled now to follow through and inspect the nurses. Were they really nurses? Maybe he could find some detail of significance. He certainly didn't trust the judgment of these men.

"Are they far?"

"Not far."

"Well, get these guys out of the sun and give them some water. Have they had any food?"

The men just looked at Drew like he was nuts.

Reluctantly, they came out of the shade and dragged the prisoners under the tent. They poured water on them and tried to get them to drink. Drew could see that the prisoners were missing fingers, had been badly beaten. God knows what else had been done to them.

"I want to see the nurses. Are you sure they're dead?" Drew asked.

"They're dead, but be my fucking guest." The sergeant's tone was defiant. He didn't need this "college boy" lieutenant busting his chops over a bunch of worthless NVA prisoners.

Drew was the superior officer, and the sergeant was way over the line. The entire situation was over the line.

"This is bullshit. I intend to raise major hell about this. Do you understand? Now take me to the fucking nurses." Drew sputtered in the sergeant's face.

The sergeant shrugged, nonplussed. "Fine." He motioned to one of the other soldiers. "Take him to the nurses."

The soldier gave the sergeant a "why me" look, then reluctantly headed for a path behind the tent. Drew followed. It was a good quarter-mile through the thick jungle before they came to another clearing. As they approached, the smell of decay hit Drew like a wall. The scene that lay before him—

the bodies of the nurses, brutalized and bloated under the unforgiving sun, their empty eyes staring blankly—was more grotesque than anything he could have imagined. He felt a sickness rise within him.

It was a grotesque tableau, impossible to reconcile with the euphemisms of "interrogation" and "assets." Drew tried to take it in—tried to see it clinically, as intel—but all he saw was barbarism. His legs weakened, his stomach turned. He stopped, hands on his knees, struggling to keep from throwing up.

The other soldier hung back, standing in the shadow of the trees.

During the walk back, Drew fought to gather himself. This was war. He had seen horrors before, but this—this was different. He forced himself to harden up. He told himself it was just another part of the game.

When he got back to the tent, the prisoners didn't look much better. Drew stormed up to the sergeant. "Who is responsible for this? Did you do that to those women?"

"Hey, we don't know a thing about it. We left them there last night, and when we got here this morning, that's what we found."

"You expect me to believe that?"

"Believe what you want, Lieutenant. We don't know a thing. Welcome to Vietnam. Shit happens. Besides, they didn't know anything." The sergeant's voice was cold, openly defiant. The others stood back, grinning.

"Heads are going to fucking roll for this. You got that?" Drew stared at the sergeant, seething.

The sergeant glared back. "We'll see. Anyway, who gives a fuck about a couple of gook bitches, especially NVA?"

Drew was trembling, his face flushed with rage.

"This is unacceptable," he shouted, turning and storming up the path toward the command post.

The four soldiers looked at each other, shaking their heads in contempt. One spat on the ground.

"That guy's gonna be a problem," the sergeant muttered under his breath.

The Battle for Control

All hell had broken loose. The world around Drew roared and shook. Gunfire echoed like a staccato of angry drums. Explosions reverberated beneath his feet, each blast a jolt that seemed to travel up his spine, shaking him to his core. The concussions felt like the earth itself turning against everything on it. In the distance, the hamlet seemed swallowed by fire and rage—a scene of absolute chaos, a battlefield turned nightmare. This was the kind of nightmare Drew had desperately hoped to avoid, the kind that left him feeling powerless. The image of those slaughtered nurses clung to his mind, a grotesque memory, vivid and alive, as if it had been carved into his thoughts.

The command post was madness incarnate. Shouting, the constant roar of helicopters taking off and landing—an overwhelming cacophony that made every conversation a battle to be heard. The CO stood in the center, shouting at two men while others waited impatiently, tension hanging in the air, so thick it was almost a physical force. Drew, too, had to wait his turn, like a soldier awaiting a hopeless judgment. His frustration simmered, a slow boil beneath his skin.

Finally, Drew pushed through to the Captain. He didn't waste time, his words bursting out, "Those prisoners are half dead! How the hell am I supposed to interrogate them when they're already dying?" His voice cracked, barely audible above the roar of a departing chopper.

The Captain's response was dismissive, almost indifferent. "We already interrogated them. What about the documents?"

Drew's anger surged. "I haven't looked at the documents. I was trying to see if I could revive the prisoners, and then I found out those nurses were killed—slaughtered, more like. It's an outrage! They were—"

"I don't give a damn!" the Captain cut him off, his voice a roar of pure venom. "I need the information from those documents. Get back down there and translate them. You speak French, right? That's why you're here—to translate the goddamned documents."

"But this is outrageous! They murdered those—"

The Captain's eyes were cold. "What the hell are you talking about? This is war, Lieutenant. Get your head out of Saigon. Men are dying up there—dying for me, every day, fighting the enemy. We got ambushed yesterday—some of my best men, gone. And you come here with your bullshit complaints? In fact, forget the documents. We're getting new prisoners now. Get up there, see if you can pull some useful intel from these gooks." He turned away, his attention already elsewhere, snapping orders to his staff. "Get this guy with Kelly's platoon. And try to keep out of my men's way."

Drew felt a hand clamp down on his arm, pulling him away, the world around him a blur of movement and chaos. He grabbed his pack and rifle, his heart pounding with a mixture of anger and disbelief. He had known hard-ass officers before, but this kind of coldness—this disregard for life—felt like something else entirely, something monstrous. As he followed, he promised himself he would not let this horror be buried, not this time.

The Massacre at My Mai

He was passed off from one Marine to another as they moved toward the hamlet, and Drew struggled to keep up, his feet crunching on the narrow path. Then he saw them—the bodies. They lay in the ditch, sprawled, lifeless, often still clinging to one another. Men, women, children—villagers, not fighters. The sight made Drew falter, his mind reeling. Maybe they had been caught in crossfire, he tried to tell himself. But then he saw the animals, the cows, the chickens, even a dog, lying dead, and he knew. This was no accident. Helicopters loomed above like vultures circling, explosions and screams echoed from the village, merging into one anguished, endless note.

The village of My Mai was supposed to be a quiet place—a cluster of red-brick houses and thatched huts surrounded by lush rice paddies and the glinting South China Sea. It was prosperous by local standards, with its proximity to the river providing ample fishing and irrigation. Life had gone on here, despite the war—the villagers selling food to the Viet Cong when they came through, cautious but hopeful, believing maybe the storm might pass them by. But now, the storm had come, and it brought ruin.

Drew spotted Lieutenant Kelly, a blur of motion, giving orders, his men dragging villagers out of their homes, setting the huts ablaze. Gunfire cracked, a grenade's blast shook the ground.

"Lieutenant Kelly!" Drew called, running to catch up. "Lieutenant Kroll from the 525th MI Group. I'm here to assist in interrogations and gather intel."

Kelly barely gave Drew a glance. "Fine. Interrogate whoever you want. But make it fast. We're clearing this entire village. Set aside anyone you think we should hold." And then he was gone, lost in the confusion, swallowed by the violence.

Drew was left standing alone, chaos swirling around him. He took a breath, tried to steady himself, tried to find some anchor in the madness. A group of villagers had been rounded up nearby—kneeling, hands on their heads, chanting in terrified unison, "No VC! No VC! No VC!" Drew caught the eye of a sergeant, gesturing toward the huddled crowd. "I'm from MI," he shouted. "I need to interrogate prisoners."

The sergeant looked at him, then shrugged. "No problem," he yelled back, his voice raw over the gunfire.

Drew turned to the group of terrified villagers, his eyes scanning the faces—mostly women, children, some old men. Their eyes were wide with fear, tears streaking their cheeks, and their bodies shook as they knelt, desperate and hopeless. His gaze landed on an older man with a Western-style watch. "That one," Drew said, pointing. Two soldiers dragged the man forward. He stumbled, crying, "No VC! No VC!" Drew spoke to him in Vietnamese. "Who is the headman of the village?"

"Truong Moi, Truong Moi," the man stammered, pointing toward a bridge. Drew switched to French. "Parlez-vous français?"

"Oui," said the man, his voice trembling.

The conversation continued in French. The man spoke of his past, working with the French military, insisting there were no VC here—only the occasional group passing through, demanding food. Drew believed him, saw the truth in the desperation in his eyes. He nodded, thanked the man, then turned to the sergeant. "Alright, I'm done with him. Bring me that one," he said, pointing to another elderly man.

Before Drew knew what was happening, the sergeant grabbed the first man by the collar, threw him to the ground, and drove his bayonet into the man's back. The scream was short, a strangled sound, and then blood pooled in the dirt. Drew's stomach lurched.

"What the hell!" Drew shouted, his voice cracking. "What did you do that for? I didn't say to kill him!"

The sergeant looked at Drew, his expression blank. "He's VC," he said, as if that explained everything.

"No, he's not!" Drew screamed.

The sergeant sneered. "He's a gook. That's enough for me."

Drew's rage boiled over. "You didn't have to kill him!"

The sergeant didn't even flinch. "It's payback for all these fuckers," he muttered, and before Drew could react, he turned his rifle on a middle-aged woman kneeling nearby, firing. Her body slumped, blood splattering over the others. The young woman beside her screamed, clutching her stomach, falling. The bullet had gone through both of them.

Drew lunged forward, grabbing the sergeant's rifle. They struggled, their boots digging into the dirt, kicking up dust. "What the fuck are you doing? Stop!" Drew yelled, his voice hoarse.

The sergeant wrenched the rifle back, shoving Drew off balance. Drew stumbled, nearly fell. "Halt fire! That's an order!" he screamed, trying to regain his composure, trying to breathe.

The sergeant glared at him, hatred in his eyes. Drew straightened, forced himself to stand tall. "I'm not done questioning these people. Do not harm them. They're probably not VC. That is a direct order," Drew said, his voice trembling but loud.

The soldiers stood silent, their eyes hard, unmoving. Drew turned, walking down the path the prisoner had indicated. He could feel their eyes boring into his back, the weight of their anger like a physical force. He wondered if they'd shoot him, wondered if this would be the moment he joined the dead, sprawled in the ditches.

Behind him, the sergeant wasted no time. He grabbed the arm of the next man Drew had pointed out. Another soldier joined him, and they dragged the old man to the well, his screams lost in the din of war. The sergeant pulled the pin on a grenade, tossing it in. The explosion sent a column of smoke and water shooting skyward, the sound like a cannon's roar. The acrid stench of gunpowder filled the air, mixing with the dampness of disturbed earth.

The madness carried on, and Drew walked on, each step heavier than the last, each breath tasting like despair.

Pham

Pham is a quiet but active ten-year-old girl. Her spirit is tucked away behind wide, dark eyes that seem to hold a thousand unspoken thoughts. She belongs to one of the wealthier families in the village, but wealth is relative here. Her father, brothers, and uncles work some of the best rice paddies in My Mai, and they own two prized water buffalo—solid creatures, their dark eyes reflective of a wisdom Pham can only guess at. She loves those buffalo. Loves their gentle breath on her face, the feel of their sturdy backs as she rides them through the fields, her sister Mui beside her. To Pham, the buffalo are not just animals—they are family.

Pham loves sitting on the wide veranda of her family's brick home, shaded by tall bamboo trees that sway like old, patient guardians. There, with her mother, she weaves baskets, her small hands working the reeds while her mother hums an old melody, the kind that makes the world feel like it will always stay the same. The house sits on the northern edge of the village, where the forest meets the world of humans—a boundary place, a spot where the ancient seems to brush against the everyday. It is a home that has been in the family for generations, each brick telling a story of survival.

Pham and her fourteen-year-old sister, Mui, take care of the family's two water buffalo. These animals, though enormous and potentially dangerous if startled, are gentle as shadows for Pham and Mui. Each day, the sisters ride them to and from the fields, the buffalo's backs swaying beneath them, their rhythm as familiar as a heartbeat.

When the shelling starts, Pham's father and brothers rush to gather everyone. The noise is deafening, shaking the air itself, the sky tearing open. The smell of smoke fills her nostrils, acrid and sharp, making her eyes sting. Her father's face is tight, his voice urgent as he herds them to the tunnel below the house—a place of supposed safety. The smell of fear is thick, even for Pham, who doesn't fully understand what is happening, only that her youngest brother has started crying, and her mother is trembling, her prayers like a whispering mantra. The earth quakes with each explosion, and then, the silence between blasts feels like an eternity.

The helicopters come next, a terrible whirring in the distance that gets closer and closer, until it feels like they are right overhead, tearing the sky apart. One of her brothers, unable to bear the suffocating silence of the shelter, leaves. He never comes back.

When they hear the shouts above, four American soldiers finding the tunnel entrance, Pham's father knows they must emerge. He leads them out, his face drawn, his eyes hollow. Pham clings to her mother's skirt, her small body trembling, her heart racing faster than the helicopter blades. One by one, they kneel on the ground, the soldiers shouting, the cold steel of their rifles pointing. Her father kneels, his voice breaking as he pleads, "No VC! No VC!" over and over, the words torn from his throat like a prayer gone unanswered. Pham has never seen her father like this—crushed, terrified, his pride stripped away. He had always been the strongest, the one who never bent.

Suddenly, the soldiers open fire. Pham's eyes widen as she watches her father's body jerk, as if possessed, bullets ripping him apart, flesh and blood exploding in all directions. Her brother falls beside him, their bodies a blur of red and movement, until they stop moving altogether. The instinct to run takes over. Her mother grabs Pham and Mui, dragging them with her. Pham feels her mother's body jerk as bullets find her, sees her fall in slow motion, her hands still outstretched, reaching for Pham even as she crumples.

Pham runs, her small legs pumping, her bare feet hitting the hard earth, her breath ragged in her chest. She doesn't know where she's going, only that she must move. She finds herself inside the house, standing in the middle of the room, her breath coming in panicked gasps, her mind a swirl of terror, confusion, disbelief. She hides under a table, curling herself into the smallest ball she can, her ears ringing from the noise, her heart pounding in her throat. Then, it stops. Silence, thick and heavy, presses down. She shivers, waiting, praying.

The screams start then. Mui's voice, high-pitched, desperate. Pham's body reacts before her mind does, crawling out from under the table, peeking through the window. She sees her sister, her clothes torn away, her small body pinned beneath a man—an American soldier, grunting, his face twisted into something unrecognizable, monstrous. Another soldier stands nearby, laughing, his rifle dangling loosely in his hands. Mui's eyes meet Pham's for a second—just a second—and Pham sees her sister's fear, her pain. Pham feels her heart break, powerless to help. Mui tries to push the man off, but he is too strong, too heavy, a grotesque figure of power. When he finishes, he stands, buckling his belt, and Mui, sobbing, tries to crawl away. Pham watches as the man picks up his rifle, points it casually, and fires. The sound is sharp, final. Mui's body jerks, blood splattering, her head snapping back. She collapses, still.

Pham's breath catches. She cannot scream. She cannot move. Her body goes numb, her mind floating somewhere above her, as if this is not her life, not her world. She runs then, blindly, finding a cabinet to hide in, squeezing herself inside, closing the door, and burying her face in her knees. She trembles, cries without sound, her body shaking so hard the wooden walls seem to vibrate around her.

After what feels like hours, she hears her mother's voice, weak, calling her name. Pham scrambles out, her heart pounding, stumbling towards the veranda. Her mother sits there, in her usual chair, holding her baby brother's lifeless body in her arms, as if this is any other day. The chicken pecks at the ground, oblivious to the horror, while the other chickens lie dead, feathers scattered, their bodies twisted unnaturally. The buffalo, too, are dead—still and cold, their massive bodies crumpled where they were shot. The sight is surreal, the ordinary and the horrific colliding in a way that makes no sense.

As Pham approaches, she sees the gaping wound in her mother's stomach, her intestines spilling between her fingers, her face pale, her eyes distant. Her mother sees her, and a small smile touches her lips.

"Pham, you must hide," she whispers, her voice barely audible.

Pham runs to her, falls to her knees beside her, burying her face in her mother's chest, feeling the warmth there, the fading rhythm of her heart. "No, mama, no," she cries, her voice muffled. "I want to stay with you."

"Run away and hide, Pham, so you can live... As for me, I think I am going to die... I can't live much longer." Her mother's voice is distant, almost detached, her eyes staring somewhere far away, past the village, past the pain.

"You must hide, Pham, so you can live," her mother says again, her fingers brushing through Pham's hair, her touch light, fleeting.

Pham holds her mother, feels her breathing slow, feels the life leave her, feels her go silent. The world goes silent too, nothing left but the sound of Pham's own breathing, her own heartbeat, the weight of her mother's body heavy against her.

The quiet settles in, heavy and absolute, a stillness that seems to swallow everything. The distant rustle of leaves is the only reminder that the world still exists. Pham kneels there, holding her mother, her tears falling silently, her eyes staring at the yard, at the dead buffalo, the scattered feathers, the empty sky.

Go, go quickly!

Drew stumbled upon a small footbridge spanning a ravine. The wood creaked beneath his weight, each step heavy. Each breath was a struggle. Below, dozens of bodies, piled like discarded refuse, mostly women and children. Their faces were twisted in final moments of terror, eyes still wide open, their clothes soaked with blood and dirt. The air was thick with the stench of death, the ground littered with fragments of their shattered lives. He knew now—mass execution, nothing accidental, nothing left to interpretation. These were not caught in crossfire, not casualties of confusion. There had been no return fire, no fighting at all. Drew hadn't seen a single shot from the other side. He stopped, shaking his head, anger and disgust coiling tight in his chest, his fists clenching, jaw set hard against the rising bile. These were villagers—simple, innocent—and this was slaughter, a massacre, pure and simple.

How can this be happening? Where are the officers? Does the Captain know? He must. He must know about killing on this scale. And if the Captain knows, what about the LC? The regional commander? How far does it go? How far up does the rot reach? The Secretary of Defense? The President? His mind spiraled upward, grasping at names, at ranks, trying to make sense of something that had already slipped beyond reason.

He moved forward, feet dragging, until he came to the house where the prisoner said he would find the headman of the village. He was too late. The path was cluttered with bodies. An older man in a Western shirt, face obliterated by a high-caliber round—Drew knew that must have been him. The one he was looking for.

“What am I doing here?” Drew screamed, his voice raw, splitting the hot, suffocating air. “They’re all dead! How can I find out anything if they’re all fucking dead?” He spat the words at the emptiness, his own voice echoing back to him, taunting. “What does it matter? What does it fucking matter? They’re going to kill them all anyway. This is fucking insane.” He yelled at no one. The world was empty of witnesses. Everyone was dead or gone. Drew moved on.

The huts were on fire, the smoke curling upward, black tendrils clawing at the sky. Drew ran around the side, away from the smoke, away from the heat that licked at his skin. Drew ran around the side, away from the smoke, away from the blistering heat that scorched his skin, each breath burning in his throat. He stumbled into a small clearing—a Buddhist temple. Bodies lay in neat rows before it, fifteen, maybe twenty older women, slumped beside each other. They had been praying. Executed as they knelt, one by one, each waiting for her turn, accepting it, resigned. They had known their village, their way of life, was gone—forever gone. Drew could feel the depravity of the scene seep into his bones, the kind of evil that his relatives once spoke of when they whispered about Nazi Germany, about the Jews burned alive in their synagogues. The full horror, the weight of it, pressed down on him, heavy and unrelenting. He had heard about atrocities, but he had never imagined—never knew it could be like this. He never dared dream it was like this.

He stumbled on, his body moving without thought, his mind fractured, words slipping from his lips, trembling. “I didn’t know,” he mumbled, voice cracking, barely audible. “I didn’t know.” He kept repeating it, a mantra, trying to explain away his presence, his complicity. He knew now. He knew, and there was no turning back.

Tears streamed down his face, his head pounding, a steady, relentless beat of pain. He couldn’t go back. Not like this. Not to them—not to the Captain, to Lieutenant Kelly, not to their smug faces. How

could they let this happen? How could he live with himself now, knowing he had stood by, knowing he had been a part of this horror?

He kept moving, down the path, away from the huts that still burned, their crackling lost behind him. The landscape around him was beautiful—so starkly, painfully beautiful. The green of the rice paddies on either side, the jungle dark and deep behind them. Gunfire faded to whispers behind him. Drew's feet carried him on, stumbling, directionless, until he came to a small, quiet house. Soldiers had been here too—bodies lay in the dust, lifeless. Drew felt hollow, a numbness settling over him. He wanted to run, to get away, but where could he go? The thought of going back twisted his stomach, bile rising in his throat.

He walked on, lost in his despair, when a movement caught his eye. Drew stopped, blinking, trying to focus. There, on the porch, a little girl sat, rocking gently in a large wooden chair. She stared forward, her eyes blank, unseeing, shock etched into every line of her small face. The chair creaked, a haunting, rhythmic sound, cutting through the quiet. Next to her, a woman and a small child, both covered in blood, both dead. Drew moved closer, each step hesitant, as if the world might crack open beneath him.

On the dirt, a naked girl lay sprawled, her body violated, torn apart by bullets. Fragile. Ripped to shreds, her innocence shattered, left to rot. The rest of the family lay scattered, lifeless in the yard. Drew's heart twisted painfully. This little girl on the porch—she was the only one left. The only survivor.

He looked back at her. She still rocked, slowly, her eyes empty, her small body lost in that too-large chair. Drew stepped closer, the wood of the porch creaking beneath his foot. The girl stopped, her head turning, her eyes meeting his. Drew felt the air leave his lungs, frozen under her gaze. There was no fear in her eyes, no anger. Just questions, silent and damning.

"Who are you?" her eyes seemed to ask. "Why have you done this? What kind of creatures are you?" Drew couldn't move, couldn't breathe, those eyes pinning him where he stood. He felt her questions echoing within him, reverberating, unending. "What have we become? What have I become? What kind of horrible creatures are we?"

Time slipped, and Drew felt himself surfacing, as if from beneath deep waters. He blinked, his mind snapping back. They would come soon, the others, to finish what they had begun. He knew it. He knew they would not leave any survivors. They would come for her, this small girl, the last living shred of innocence. Drew felt a terror unlike any he had ever known. He couldn't let them take her. She was all that was left—the last pure thing, the last hope, the last bit of beauty in the world, in his heart. And he was the only one who could save her.

He scrambled up the steps, his hands trembling as he reached for her, gently lifting her from the chair. "Di, di, mau!" he whispered, urgent, his voice trembling. "Go, go quickly!"

The girl blinked, her trance breaking, her eyes focusing. She didn't know, didn't understand, but she heard him, heard the urgency. Somehow, despite all she had seen, she knew Drew was trying to help. She let him guide her down the stairs, toward the jungle, her bare feet moving over the dirt path.

"Di, di, mau!" Drew whispered again, his voice cracking. He watched as the girl moved, step by step, her small figure swallowed by the dark, protective green of the jungle, disappearing into its depths.

"Di, di, mau!" he called, his voice barely more than a breath, a plea, as she vanished from sight.

Believe me, it'll be a damn pleasure

The sergeant Drew first argued with about the tortured prisoners and dead nurses approaches another sergeant—the one who stabbed the prisoner with his bayonet. He stands with two other Marines, watching as the last few huts are set alight, flames licking skyward, embers swirling like fireflies.

"What the hell is going on with that Lieutenant from the MI Group? I heard he was busting your chops." The first sergeant's voice is gruff, tired. "He was just over here busting our ass about those two NVA prisoners. We haven't even killed 'em yet, and he's already whining about 'inhuman' treatment." He sneers. "Then he flips out about those damned nurses."

The second sergeant glances at him, irritated. "Jesus Christ, I keep telling these guys to clean up after themselves when they do that shit. Blow 'em up with some C4, get rid of the evidence, done and done."

"Yeah, well, I think this guy's trouble. He went straight to the old man. The old man blew him off, of course, but that guy could stir up some major shit, and it'll be our heads. The old man'll claim he didn't know a thing about it."

"Yeah, right." The second sergeant spits into the dirt. "That jackass is walking around flipping out about everything. I've had it with these do-gooders from Saigon, coming in here, never spent a day in the bush, telling us how to feel, how to act, like we're supposed to love gooks. They haven't had their asses shot off, haven't seen their buddies blown to bits by these little slant-eyed bastards like we have. Kill 'em all, I say. That's our job. That guy is trouble. Mark my words. He'll start some do-gooder bullshit, and it'll all be on us."

The first sergeant glances around, scanning the smoking ruins, the bodies strewn like broken toys. "Where is he?"

"Across the bridge, looking for someone to interrogate. Only problem is, there ain't nobody left to interrogate." They both laugh. "He'll be back soon."

They watch the huts burn. The first sergeant speaks up again. "These Saigon boys don't understand how dangerous it is out here. They think this is all theory, a game. It's amazing we haven't had more American casualties, considering how many VC we had to kill." He smiles crookedly, his teeth yellow in the firelight.

"Damn, I hope nothing happens to him." The second sergeant snickers, lighting a cigarette, the flame reflecting in his cold eyes. "Maybe I better go make sure he's all right."

"You sure you want the job?"

"Believe me, it'll be a damn pleasure."

The Shrapnel of Memory

The girl has escaped into the thick, impenetrable jungle, vanishing like a whisper swallowed by the night. Drew makes his way back to the landing zone, his thoughts spinning, tangled, a haze of horror and confusion. The world seems unreal, a twisted nightmare that he cannot wake from. All Drew wants now is to get back to Saigon, to Mi, to the quiet refuge of his swimming pool. Once back in his world, maybe he could do something about the things he had seen, the atrocities, the horror. It feels like a mission, like purpose. Something to hold onto amid the madness.

The huts along the path smolder, black smoke curling upward, twisting into the sky like unanswered prayers, fading into nothingness. Drew moves quickly, hurrying past, the acrid air biting at his throat, stinging his eyes, the world around him an inferno of memory and regret. Then something shifts, a movement on the ground—a flicker in the corner of his vision. He stops. A rat, he thinks, but no—his eyes lock on it. A grenade, rolling, coming to rest, the dull metal glinting in the dim light.

Time fractures. He turns, his feet pounding against the earth, each step echoing in his ears. One step, two—maybe three—and then the blast. A roar splits the world, deafening, tearing at the edges of his awareness. The pressure builds, unbearable, his ears ringing as though a giant hand reaches from the chaos, snatching him up, squeezing every breath from his lungs, twisting him in midair like a ragdoll before slamming him down, down into the unforgiving earth.

Silence falls, the quiet of oblivion, a vast emptiness where nothing moves. Drew's world narrows to a single point of dim light, pain threading through him like hot wires, and he cannot remember why—cannot remember anything but the crushing weight, the wrongness of it, the feeling of being suspended, floating in a dark sea, lost in a world where nothing makes sense.

When Drew opens his eyes again, there is only dim light, pain threading through his body like electricity. He feels suspended, floating in thick, suffocating gel, unable to remember why or how. He knows something is wrong, terribly wrong, but the memory won't come. He is in the intensive care unit of a VA hospital in Saigon, a week after the grenade nearly tore his life away. His injuries are severe—a collapsed lung, three broken ribs, a shattered collarbone, and a left leg broken in three places. They almost amputated the leg.

Drew comes and goes from consciousness, his thoughts a blur, a tangled mess of memory and fear. When he can, he tries to tell someone, anyone, about what he saw in the village. The words are slurred, jumbled by drugs, caught in his throat like broken glass. No one listens. He is just another broken soldier, another body in a bed, haunted by his own private war. The faces come to him at night—the man he had interrogated, his wide, terrified eyes, the blood, the shredded bodies. The eyes of the little girl, watching. Always watching.

A Heart in Ruins

Two months pass. Drew is scheduled to return to the States. His body has healed enough to leave the wheelchair behind, though he still moves slowly, leaning heavily on crutches. A fellow officer from his unit in Saigon visits him in the hospital. Drew tries to speak of the massacre, the horror, but his friend shifts uncomfortably, his eyes darting away, and promises to “look into it.” He leaves quickly, his words empty as the space he leaves behind.

Drew begs his friend to find Mi, his Vietnamese girlfriend. He needs her to know what happened, needs her to know he’s coming back for her. His friend nods, assures Drew he will find her, but his voice holds no conviction.

Back in the States, Drew’s recovery is slow. The pain medication leaves his thoughts clouded, his days running together in a blur. It is weeks before he feels clear enough to try again, to tell someone what he saw. He speaks to officers, tries to file a report. They listen, or pretend to, nodding politely, their faces blank. They tell him they’ll “look into it,” or tell him coldly to “file a report.” Drew has filed the report. He is still waiting for a response.

And Mi—Drew tries to contact her, writes letter after letter, each one more desperate than the last. The words spill onto the page like confessions, each letter a plea, each one heavier than the one before it. He pours his heart out, trying to make her understand what he couldn’t say when he was there, what the chaos and the fear had swallowed. He writes until his hand cramps, until his heart aches from the emptiness that follows each unanswered word. He worries about her, imagines her face, tired and strained, wonders if her mother has fixed her up with some other GI. The thought twists in his gut—wondering if she’s surviving, or if she’s alone, as lost as he is. The letters become a ritual, a way to hold onto her, a way to believe she still exists somewhere beyond the silence. He realizes now, too late, how much he loves her, how much he needs her. He writes to tell her this, to beg her to come to him, to tell her that he was a fool. He writes, knowing each time that there may be no one left to read it, that his words may vanish into the void, like all the others.

The letters go unanswered. The days stretch into weeks, each one filled with a silence that gnaws at him, that leaves him hollow. Desperation pushes him to try other means. Drew places a long-distance call to the owner of his old apartment. He imagines the phone ringing in that tiny, familiar space, imagines Mi picking up, her voice soft, uncertain. But it’s not her—it’s a stranger’s voice, gruff, indifferent. The man tells him Mi is gone. That word—gone—hangs in the air like a death sentence. Drew’s stomach drops. He presses further, but there are no details, just a flat finality.

He calls the places they used to visit, the bars, the cafes, the places where they had once been happy, where they had laughed, where her laughter had filled the spaces around him like sunlight. He reaches out, grasping at shadows. No one knows anything. Or maybe they are lying. He cannot tell. The voices on the other end are disinterested, hurried, like they want to be rid of him, and he knows that the world keeps moving, that her memory means nothing to these people. They want to forget. He cannot.

He reaches out to his colleagues in Saigon, the ones who had once boasted of finding needles in haystacks, of infiltrating enemy lines without a trace. He asks them to find her. They are spies, for God’s sake, surely they can find one woman. He waits, the days slipping by, his hope wearing thin, replaced by something darker, more desperate. Weeks later, they respond: she’s gone. Maybe she returned to her village. But Drew knows—he knows there is no village for Mi, no home to return to. She was born in

Saigon, raised there. There is no other place for her. He tries to imagine her wandering the streets, alone, no family, no friends, nothing to anchor her. He imagines her vanishing into the noise, into the chaos, and it tears at him. The uncertainty gnaws at him, a festering wound that refuses to heal, that grows deeper with each passing day, each unanswered question. He wants to believe she's out there somewhere, alive, waiting, but the silence is suffocating, and the longer it stretches, the more it feels like a void that will never be filled.

The dreams come then—night after night. Mi, the little girl, their faces blending, merging into one. Their voices echo in his mind, fragmented, haunting, relentless. Mi calling out to him, the girl's laughter twisted into a scream. Sometimes it is Mi's face, sometimes the little girl's—he cannot tell the difference anymore, and it does not matter. He runs after them, shouting, “Di, di, mau!”—“Go, go quickly!” But she stands there, waiting, frozen, her eyes wide, staring into his, unafraid, her silence more devastating than any cry. The world slows, death creeping nearer, and he cannot reach her. His feet feel as though they are sinking into the earth, each step heavier, slower, futile.

Drew's despair is a wasteland, a vast emptiness that stretches on without end, devoid of hope, devoid of redemption. His heart feels like a shattered, bleeding thing, the pieces scattered across this barren terrain, torn between guilt and rage, love and shame. He is drowning in it, the weight of his failures pressing down on him, choking him. And yet, through it all, he is thankful for the pain. The pain is something, a reminder that he is still alive, that he can still feel, even if what he feels is only agony. The drugs help, blurring the sharpest edges, turning the screams into echoes, the blood into shadows, masking the hollow emptiness where his soul used to be.

Drew and Darin

At first Drew went to meetings because he had nowhere else to put the rage. He could not sleep with it. He could not tell his parents about it. He could not explain it to doctors, or officers, or old Harvard friends who still believed the country made mistakes only by accident. The meetings gave the rage a room. That was all. A room, folding chairs, cigarette smoke, bad coffee, flyers stacked on card tables, young men and women speaking in voices too large for their bodies.

He did not trust them at first. They seemed too clean to him, too certain. They spoke of imperialism and genocide as if the words themselves were tools, as if naming a thing was the same as surviving it. Drew had seen bodies in ditches. He had smelled them. He had watched a girl vanish into the jungle carrying the weight of every dead person he had not saved. The students had theories. Drew had ghosts.

But the students also listened. That surprised him. Not all of them, but enough. A girl with wire rim glasses cried when he described a village without using the worst details. A law student took notes with trembling hands. A veteran from Oakland sat silently through the whole meeting, then came up afterward and said, "Yeah, man. I know." That was all he said. Drew almost broke down in front of him.

So Drew kept going back.

He learned the factions slowly. The peace people, the draft resistance people, the campus people, the Panthers, the hippies, the hard core organizers who never seemed to sleep. Each group had its own language, its own saints, its own grudges. Drew moved among them with the limp the grenade had left him and the careful politeness of a man trying not to show how much he despised politeness. He could organize. He could speak when he had to. He could read documents, find patterns, remember names, make calls, arrange rooms, secure bail money, get bodies where they needed to be. Intelligence work had trained him better than he liked to admit.

That was how he met Darin.

Darin was not loud at first. That was part of his power. He had a narrow face, sharp eyes, and a way of listening that made people feel chosen or judged, sometimes both at once. He did not waste time on peace signs or spiritual talk. He had no patience for guitar songs, no interest in gardens, no visible nostalgia for childhood. He had come out of Chicago, or claimed he had, and carried himself like a man who had already watched liberal hope get beaten to death in the street.

The first time Drew heard him speak, Darin said, "They are not confused. They are not waiting to be persuaded. They know exactly what they are doing."

The room went quiet.

"That is the first thing you people have to understand. Power understands power. It does not understand shame. It does not understand moral witness. It does not understand folk songs. If you block a door, they drag you away. If you march, they gas you. If you bleed, they photograph you and call you dirty. They do not care what is right. They care what costs."

Drew hated the certainty in his voice. He also felt the pull of it.

After the meeting, Darin found him in the kitchen, where Drew was rinsing out coffee cups no one else had bothered to clean.

"You were in Vietnam," Darin said.

Drew looked at him. "A lot of people were in Vietnam."

"Not like you."

Drew smiled without warmth. “You don’t know anything about me.”

“I know you look at the door every time somebody comes up the stairs. I know you sit with your bad leg facing out. I know you don’t like speeches unless they have a purpose. And I know you’re angrier than the rest of these people.”

Drew turned off the water.

Darin leaned against the counter. “The question is whether you want to do anything with it.”

Drew did not answer. He dried the cup slowly and placed it on the rack. He should have disliked Darin. In some ways he did. But there was a relief in hearing a man speak without pretending the country could be awakened by decency alone. Drew had tried decency. He had filed reports. He had written letters. He had told the truth into official rooms where the truth dissolved before it reached the walls.

“What do you want?” Drew asked.

Darin gave him a small smile. “I want the war brought home.”

The phrase stayed with Drew for days.

He told himself Darin was dangerous. That was obvious. But Drew had begun to distrust the safe people even more. Safe people had uniforms and offices. Safe people signed forms. Safe people told him they would look into it. Safe people sent boys into villages and called the dead collateral. Darin might be dangerous, but at least he did not pretend otherwise.

That was the beginning of it, though Drew would not have called it that then. He would have said he was only listening. He would have said all movements had hotheads. He would have said he was useful because he could keep people like Darin from doing something stupid.

That was the first lie.

PART FOUR: TOMALES

April 1969 - Leawood Kansas

Heading north from San Francisco, across the Golden Gate Bridge, Carl took the first exit. He wound his way under the freeway and up a hill that overlooked the bridge until he found a small turnout and pulled over. The view was spectacular. The Golden Gate stood proud and immense, a scarlet monument against the glistening blue of the bay, and beyond it, the San Francisco skyline shimmered in the sunlight, almost like the Emerald City from *The Wizard of Oz*. It made him catch his breath. The natural beauty of the Bay Area was beyond anything he had ever seen—so lush, so full of life and possibility. It was like the land itself was trying to tell him: you've made it, you're free.

He jumped back in the Alfa, heart pounding with excitement. Next stop: Point Reyes. Through a tunnel, then down past more shimmering views of the bay, Carl caught sight of a bunch of funky houseboats, swaying gently at anchor. Hippies were everywhere—leaning on railings, sitting on the docks, waving from their ramshackle floating homes. He turned off the freeway in Kentfield and passed a sign for the College of Marin. "So that's where it is," he muttered to himself. That was the school he hoped to attend come fall.

On he drove, through funky little towns, over a winding pass, through a redwood forest that rose tall and silent around him. As he crested a hill, Tomales Bay stretched out in the distance—a glistening sliver of silver blue. By the time he pulled into Inverness, he was jittery with anticipation. He stopped to call Kate, and she sounded happy to hear he had made it. She gave him a few last-minute directions and told him to come on out. His room was ready.

The road snaked along the shore of the bay, lined with small houses on piers, ramshackle motels, and little roadside restaurants. The air was thick with the tang of salt, and the vegetation was a dense, vibrant green. The smell of ocean mixed with the scent of damp leaves. It was intoxicating, and Carl felt a giddy, childlike excitement bubbling up in him.

Soon the road curved up a long hill. Carl took a quick right, and a magnificent view opened before him—the ocean and the Point Reyes Peninsula stretching into the distance. Far below, a long sandy beach ran perfectly straight to a rocky point. Carl followed the road until he saw the turn-off Kate had mentioned. Up a little grade, he hit a gravel road, slowing the Alfa as he crept along, trying not to stir up too much dust since the top was down. The views were stunning. Verdant green fields stretched all the way down to the ocean, miles away. He passed through a dairy farm, where cows lumbered slowly across the road, indifferent to the car. Finally, the road began to slope down, and he could see Tomales Bay in the distance.

The road turned to pavement, and there were two drives ahead—one straight, one veering to the right. Kate's directions hadn't mentioned two drives, and there was no posted address. Feeling a little lost, Carl decided to take a chance on the first one, which curved down and ended beside a cinderblock house. He parked in a pull-out to the left, where four other cars were already parked. Thick Bay Laurel trees surrounded the parking area, their mentholated scent thick in the cool air. Carl took a deep breath—it was dark, damp, almost like a forest temple.

He strolled toward the house, a bit unsure. A path led either to the front, where he glimpsed a view of the bay, or off to the right, through a breezeway behind the house. He decided to try the front. As Carl rounded the corner and stepped onto a broad cement patio that ran the length of the house, he was struck by the view of Tomales Bay—a panoramic sweep of water and mountain that stretched for miles. He

stopped for a moment, just to marvel. Then he noticed them: two young women and a guy, lying naked on lounge chairs, sunning themselves. Carl stopped, stunned and embarrassed, not sure what to do. Was he even in the right place? He considered doubling back and trying the breezeway instead. The sunbathers were oblivious, their eyes closed. He was about to turn when a woman stepped out of a door at the far end of the house. Relief washed over him—she was dressed, wearing shorts and a tank top. She saw him and waved.

"Hi!" she called cheerfully.

"Hi. My name's Carl Lee, and..."

"Oh, hi, Carl! I'm Kate. Welcome," she said, smiling warmly.

Carl walked closer. The people sunning on the deck didn't move. "Nice to meet you," she said. "How was your trip?"

"Good. It's so beautiful here." He turned to look back out over the bay.

"Isn't it? I just love this place." She glanced at the sunbathers, then leaned in slightly toward Carl, lowering her voice. "People like to sunbathe naked here. It feels so good." It was like she was confiding a playful secret.

Carl looked back at the trio, all young and attractive. "That's cool," he said, trying to sound nonchalant. He told himself he wasn't going to be shocked by anything—he was on an adventure, after all. He was stepping into a new world, and whatever the customs were, he'd adapt and accept until he could make a judgment for himself. He wasn't going to make the same mistakes he had made in Kelseyville.

"It's a good way to lose your tan line," Carl added, trying for humor.

Kate laughed softly. "Come in. I'll show you around." The house was made of pinkish-colored cinder blocks, with a wood-beamed roof slanting from front to back. The dark wood beams and ceiling lent warmth to an otherwise stark structure, the walls brightened by India print spreads and tapestries. To the right, a large fireplace sat in the middle of the room. Beyond it was the kitchen. They moved around the fireplace and into a spacious living area. The entire front of the house was lined with large plate glass windows—the view from the living room was as spectacular as the patio's. A large table stood in front of the windows, and against the back wall sat an old upright piano. The room was furnished with several couches, a few chairs, and a large, low coffee table. A big fake Persian rug covered the tile floor. In the kitchen, a long-haired guy in shorts, no shirt, and no shoes was eating a sandwich at the table.

"Jack, this is Carl, David's friend," Kate said. Jack looked up with a smile. He wore glasses, had an intelligent-looking face, and a distinctive gap between his two front teeth.

"Oh, hi," he said, closing the book he was reading. Carl saw the cover—it was "Dune."

"Hi," Carl said. "That's a great book. I just read it a couple months ago."

Jack's eyebrows rose. "Yeah, it's pretty good. So you're into science fiction?"

"Yeah," Carl said, trying to sound nonchalant. "I really like Asimov. I've read just about all his stuff."

"Cool. I like Asimov—I, Robot, and all that."

"Great to finally meet you both," Carl said, looking back at Kate. "David told me a lot about this place. I appreciate you letting me stay here."

They continued the tour. "This is the kitchen. We really like to cook around here. We have our own garden, and Auggie—the gardener—is the best. He knows how to grow things really big. You'll see what I mean."

They walked through the breezeway and down a short hallway that curved behind the fireplace. To the right, a long hallway led to a bathroom and three bedrooms. The first door opened to a large bathroom, with a bathtub and shower at the far end.

Kate gestured to the next two doors as they walked. "These are the other rooms," she said. At the very end of the hall, she opened the last door. "And this is yours."

The room was long and narrow, with the same wood-beam ceiling as the rest of the house. It looked Spartan, but what stood out was the bed—a raised platform stretched across the width of the room, with two full-size mattresses side by side. Behind the bed was a huge window that ran the entire width of the room, giving a full view of the bay. The sight was breathtaking.

"Wow, what a cool bed," Carl said, stepping up on the wide wooden step to get a closer look. The view from the bed was amazing. He climbed up, looking out at the mountains beyond.

"Isn't it?" Kate crawled up beside him. "I love this bed."

"It's spectacular. Thanks. I think I'll just spend the rest of my life right here," Carl said, laughing.

"Sounds good, but maybe you'll come out to eat," she teased.

"Maybe. Occasionally."

Kate laughed again. "Come on, let me show you the rest of the property."

They headed out front and down a path lined with high bushes. As they descended, dense Bay trees and thick shrubs hung overhead. It was like walking through a tunnel made of leaves, the smell of salt and earth filling the air. Soon they came out into the open, and a lush garden spread out behind a tall wire fence. Flowers and vegetables grew in neat rows. A path continued down toward the water.

"That's Auggie's garden," Kate said. "You'll meet him later. He's incredible—he'll show you around. Let's head down to the landing."

They followed the path, passing bushes blooming with vibrant blue flowers. The path opened onto a flat landing overlooking the bay. "Wow, another awesome spot," Carl said, awestruck. They sat on a bench, gazing out at the water.

"It's so amazing, Kate. I'm serious—I never expected a place like this. Pinch me, I think I'm dreaming."

She laughed. "I know. I felt the same way the first time I came here. No matter how many times I see it, it still amazes me."

Carl got up and wandered around, trying to take it all in. Over to one side of the landing were stairs leading down to a tiny beach. "Watch out for those," Kate warned. "They're old and falling apart. Really dangerous. We should tear them down, but we just haven't gotten to it."

Carl and Kate headed back up to the house. Carl brought in his stuff from the Alfa and began to settle in. That night, the house filled with the smell of food and the chatter of voices. Everybody pitched in to cook and clean, a communal effort that felt seamless, almost like a dance. The Tomales House wasn't a commune—just a shared rental—but there was something here that went deeper than convenience. A bond, an unspoken promise of respect and freedom. No rules, really. Just hang loose, help out, and be tolerant.

Jack and Kate had been together for three years. Jack had the look of an East Coast fraternity boy—thick-rimmed glasses, a brown mop of hair that fell into his face, and an inquisitive expression that hovered between fascination and incredulity. Some people might have pegged him as a nerd, but there was a hipness to Jack, a keen awareness of his surroundings. When Jack's mind latched onto something,

it was like watching the gears of some precise, finely-tuned machine turn over—each idea clicking perfectly into the next.

Carl and Jack hit it off immediately, driven by their common interests and that undercurrent of friendly rivalry. Carl wouldn't admit it out loud, but Jack had him beat when it came to science and nature—no question. Jack was a professional student, educated in the sciences. Carl? He was just an amateur with an attitude. But Jack's knowledge drew Carl in, and he was glad to learn from him. For Jack, Carl's curiosity was refreshing. It wasn't often that he found someone who wasn't in his field but genuinely appreciated the intricacies of science and had the guts to challenge him. Carl was just sharp enough to be fun without being a threat. Jack was a natural teacher, and there was something invigorating about sparring with Carl—feeding his inquisitiveness, pushing him further.

Rob, an artist, lived in the room next to Carl. He was studying at the College of Marin and worked as a baker at a natural-foods bakery in Inverness. Each morning, Rob got up at three o'clock, heading out before dawn, which meant he went to bed early—often around six or seven in the evening. How he managed to sleep through the racket of the house was a mystery, but he never complained. There was a quiet steadiness to Rob—an easygoing acceptance of the chaos around him.

Wayne rolled in just before dinner, already stoned and probably a bit drunk. Nobody minded—in fact, the room seemed to light up when Wayne walked in. He had the kind of looks that came from his Spanish side—tall, broad-chested, bronze complexion, and that wide, infectious smile. Wayne had a charm about him, a quick wit that seemed sharper with a few drinks in him. He was the kind of guy who made everything feel like a party.

Auggie, the gardener, was quiet, always smiling. He was the shaman of the house, a presence that felt ancient and wise. He lived in a small shack by the garden, bringing armfuls of vegetables and herbs up to the house each day. Together, he and Kate would spend hours preparing meals, transforming the produce into vibrant, delicious dishes. Vegetarian food had always been something Carl thought you choked down for health's sake, but Tomales House had changed his mind. Here, with fresh ingredients, the right herbs, and creative flair, vegetarian cooking became a revelation—flavorful, satisfying, and surprisingly comforting. Carl even found himself enjoying cooking, learning from Kate and Auggie. But there were still times when he'd sneak out for a hamburger—after all, he was just a boy from Kansas.

Kate was the matriarch of Tomales House. She had a sharpness to her that Carl admired—nothing got by her. When they first met, there had been an immediate connection. Kate was twenty-six, with a solid, attractive figure and a California-girl tan. Her long, dishwater blonde hair was often a little frazzled, but her eyes were sharp, as clear as morning air. Carl would never admit it, but Kate had helped ease his transition, replacing some of the support he had always leaned on his mother for.

Kate had come from Ann Arbor, Michigan. She'd been a student at the University of Michigan since '62, studying liberal arts and working toward a Master's in education before she decided to move out west last fall. Tomales House had been an accident—she had come to visit a friend and had ended up staying. She had worked at an alternative school in Ann Arbor—a place where students were encouraged to learn on their own, to follow their interests. She talked to Carl about alternative education, about breaking free from the rigidity of traditional learning, and Carl listened, fascinated. Jack had worked at the school too, part-time, which was how they'd met.

A few days after settling in, Carl drove into town to buy a few things for his room. From Pier One Imports, he bought some cheap India print spreads to cover the walls, a red paper lampshade with fringe,

a reading lamp, and a bunch of candles. He even found a used stereo in the classifieds. He bought two sets of dark blue sheets for the two mattresses on his massive bed, along with matching soft, furry bedspreads. Once back, he set it all up—candles lit, stereo playing softly. He jumped onto the bed, leaned back, and looked out through the enormous window that made it feel almost like he was outside. He sighed, feeling something in his chest unclench.

Carl stopped by the library to pick up books on Point Reyes—flora, fauna, geology, history. He read everything he could, got himself a map, and started exploring. He hiked trails, drove the winding roads, breathed in the salt air, and felt the thrill of freedom settle deep in his bones. Point Reyes was a wonder—elk, rare white deer, more species of birds than anywhere else in North America. The beaches were empty and vast, the cliffs rising against the horizon, the ocean crashing below. It was everything he had needed.

Life at Tomales House had its own rhythm. During the week, things were quiet. Rob and Wayne often stayed in town during the week, but today was Saturday, and everyone was home. Carl had left early for a hike down the coast by Limantour Beach. It was mid-afternoon when he returned, and the house was alive with people. Four were sunning themselves naked on the porch. Others lounged around the living room, laughing and chatting. Kate and Auggie were in the kitchen cooking, and Jack had taken a few guests out sailing. People wandered in and out, friends of friends. Short-term guests were always welcome, and the diversity of people passing through was one of the things that made Tomales House so special.

Carl stepped in through the back door, and Kate looked up from the counter. "Hey Carl, how was the hike?"

"Fantastic. I found this waterfall that comes right off the cliff, down to the beach. No one was there. Just the sound of the water and the ocean." Carl was still buzzing with the excitement of discovery. Everything here felt new.

"Wow, I know! I love that hike, but I haven't made it as far as the waterfall. You'll have to show me sometime." Kate smiled, chopping onions, her hands moving deftly.

"Auggie and I are working on dinner. Want to help?" she asked.

"Sure. I'm not much of a cook, but I can wash dishes," Carl offered, grinning. Kate laughed.

"We'll see about that," she said, and Carl went to take a quick shower before returning to the kitchen.

Kate didn't just have him washing dishes—she put him to work making a vegetable casserole. She showed him how to chop without losing a finger, how to read a recipe properly, how to get the cheese sauce just right. The kitchen was a swirl of people—tasting sauces, introducing themselves, rummaging through cabinets. Rob decided to bake a dessert. The space was crowded, but no one seemed to mind. It was chaos—the kind of chaos that felt warm and safe, like a living thing. Carl was having the time of his life.

Jack and the sailing group returned, cold, hungry, huffing and puffing from the hike up the hill from the boat. They burst into the kitchen, their energy spilling over, filling every corner of the room. They grabbed wine, stuck their fingers in the food, shared stories, laughed. The room was packed—shoulder to shoulder—and the air buzzed with that infectious joy. Carl took a step back, watching, smiling. The scene made him laugh—it was all so alive, so different from anything he had ever experienced before.

The food was finally cooked, and they spread it out across the table. The aroma mingled with laughter and conversation, filling the room with warmth. Plates were filled, voices rose in compliments,

and Carl couldn't help but blush at the praise directed his way, feeling a warmth that reached deeper than he expected. His casserole was a hit, and for once, he felt a sense of quiet pride—maybe he could cook after all.

After dinner, Jack and the boat crew, along with a few others, pitched in to clean up the kitchen, their teamwork a testament to the easy camaraderie of the house. Carl and Kate settled into the living room, sipping on coffee. It was unlike any coffee Carl had tasted before—dark, potent, and almost overwhelming. He had to lace it with sugar and cream before he found it drinkable, but once he did, its bitterness transformed into something comforting. He was discovering new tastes, new sensations, and he liked it.

One of Jack's sailing companions, Mary, approached and sat down beside them, her dark eyes catching the flickering candlelight. She was tall, with dark eyes and angular features that seemed to come alive under the dim lights. There was a curiosity in her gaze, as if she were studying them. Kate, always tactile, would touch Carl's shoulder as she spoke, and Mary wondered for a moment if they were together—until Jack came in, kissed Kate, and lounged beside her. Mary decided Carl was fair game.

The wine was flowing, and Wayne sat at the table rolling joints. The scent of marijuana, earthy and sharp, drifted around the room, blending with the smell of wine and candles. Not everyone smoked; Kate didn't, and Carl wasn't much of a drinker, knowing that alcohol usually put him to sleep. It was one of those quirks he had learned to navigate, preferring to stay present in moments like these. But it hardly mattered. The room was alive with laughter, conversation, flirtation. Carl was feeling lighter than he had in a long time.

He and Mary hit it off, a spark between them that fed Carl's confidence. He still harbored a sense of uncertainty about whether he truly fit in here, but these people made it easy. They celebrated the strange, the different; eccentricity was something to nurture. It wasn't like Kelseyville. Here, he could breathe.

Jack moved to the piano, pulling out an old Beatles songbook, the yellowed pages reflecting countless gatherings like this one. Carl stood beside Mary, their shoulders almost touching, and as Jack began to play, Carl sang along. He knew all the harmonies, and Jack's eyebrows shot up, impressed.

"Great harmonies, man. Not many people know how to sing harmony like that," Jack said, nodding approvingly. They continued with more songs, and soon enough, other voices joined in, their laughter filling the room. Mary leaned closer, her smile wide, and Carl felt his heart swell. Compliments on his voice came from every direction, and for once, he wasn't just a kid from Kansas—he belonged.

Later, Carl showed Mary his room, thinking maybe he'd get lucky. She admired the view, leaning against the frame of the large window, her silhouette illuminated softly by the distant streetlights. They kissed, tentative at first, then more insistent. Her hands on his chest felt electrifying, but she pulled away, murmuring about her boyfriend back in New York. It stung, but only for a moment. They went back to the party together, and Carl tried to play it cool. He felt a pang of disappointment, sure, but the night's vibrancy was enough to keep that feeling at bay, his heart still soaring from the sense of belonging.

Carl moved around the room, talking, laughing, and feeling buoyant. The energy of the house wrapped around him like a familiar embrace, the kind he'd been craving for so long. The acceptance here was palpable—an embrace of who he was, flaws and all. It was a far cry from the whispers and pointed looks he'd left behind in Kelseyville. He felt free, untethered, like he was finally finding his place.

The crowd gradually began to thin, people drifting off to bed in twos and threes, leaving the house with an intimate, hushed energy. Mary and her friends were heading back to San Anselmo. She kissed Carl goodbye at the door, a lingering brush of lips that promised something more someday, maybe. He watched as they left, then wandered back to the kitchen, where Kate stood, cleaning up the remnants of the night.

"Kate, I just want to tell you what a great time I had tonight," Carl said sincerely, his voice low. They leaned against the counter, and Kate looked up, her eyes soft. She touched his arm, giving him a brief hug.

"You seemed to be having a blast. For a while there, I thought you'd get Mary to stay the night." She shrugged, her voice teasing. Carl shrugged back, a slight frown on his face.

"She was interested," Kate added, her voice warmer now, more reassuring. "You're going to do fine here, Carl. Trust me. A lot of people come through this place, and you'll get your chances. You're a good guy, and people see that." They both laughed as Jack entered the kitchen.

"What's all this talk about?" Jack asked, feigning suspicion as he put an arm around Kate, nuzzling her neck.

"Just saying he's going to do fine here," Kate said, turning her head to give Jack a quick kiss.

"He'll do more than fine," Jack agreed, his grin wide as he gave Kate a playful nudge. "Now, let's head to bed, yeah?"

"You better be ready for it," Kate said, her voice half-mocking, half-challenging. Jack saluted, his smile lazy.

Carl shook his head, laughing. They all said goodnight, and Carl retreated to his room, closing the door behind him. He climbed onto his bed, the candles still flickering on the makeshift shelves. He sighed, closing his eyes. The warmth of Mary's kiss lingered on his lips, and he felt a pang of longing. As he drifted to sleep, he told himself that things were different now. He was in California, surrounded by people who understood him, and that was more than he could have asked for.

He was ready for whatever came next.

Woody

About a month after Jack and Kate moved to the Tomales house, Jack bought a small sail boat from the classified ads in the bay area. He had to rent a trailer and borrow a truck to bring it to Tomales bay, then launch it in Inverness and sail it all the way to the Cove next to the Tomales house. Plus, he had to rig up a mooring by creating a heavy concrete anchor. It was worth the effort.

The boat is a Concordia Gaff Rig Sloop. It's all wood, with Carvel (plank on frame) construction, using native oak for the keel, skeg, stem, stern and frames. The planking is cedar and the decks are white pine. It is a thing of beauty with lots of bright work. Jack named her Woody, because he says sailing her gives him a woody. Carl has never had that particular reaction but he can see how it might be possible.

The design of the boat is based on an inshore lobster boat, which were common on the east coast in the 1850's. A gaffe rigged sloop with a flying jib, she has a simple rig with only two strings to pull to hoist her sails. Her mast is short and doesn't have any standing rigging, which is a benefit of the gaff rig. Like most gaffers, she sails best off the wind on a broad reach or a run, but doesn't point very well. In a light breeze it takes a lot of patience to get her moving, but once under sail when she heels over and lays on her lines, she is stable and fast, especially down wind in a stiff breeze. Jack loves sailing her.

On Sunday, Jack asks Carl to join him for a sail. It is a bright, but windy, late spring day. Woody is tied to a mooring in the middle of the cove. They use an aluminum canoe which is kept hidden in the bushes to row out to her.

Jack starts teaching Carl all about sailing as soon as they climb aboard. Every time he does something or uses something, he calls it by its name. Then he makes Carl repeat back to him the names and the functions. It is all completely foreign to Carl. He has never been on a sailboat before. Carl is intrigued.

Soon they have the sails up and Jack has Carl climb up on the front of the boat. Laying on his stomach he carefully unclips the boat from its mooring. It is a tricky maneuver and requires pulling the boat up to get some slack. The canoe is already tied to the mooring and keeps getting in the way. Carl finally gets them loose and the boat gradually drifts around and floats peacefully toward the center of the bay. They both put on life vests.

They are behind a tall ridge, which is blocking the prevailing wind coming off the ocean. However, when they come around the point they will be naked to the wind that rips down the middle of Tomales Bay. For now they continue to float along peacefully. "So Carl, how do you like sailing so far?" Jack asks, nonchalant. He sees the wind line ahead. "Nice, really nice. It sure is a beautiful day." Carl responds, leaning back in the sun, enjoying the views as they drift along.

"Yeah, it's really nice. Sailing can be really mellow, but not always." Jack says, as he takes his position to wait for the onslaught of wind. The boat is picking up a little speed. "Better hang on Carl." Says Jack.

"What?"

Suddenly they come out from behind the point and the driving wind grabs the boat and tips it on its side. Jack knows just how far to let it go, The boat leaps ahead as Carl scrambles. He is climbing up the side of the boat, eyes wide, hanging on for life. "Holly shit." Carl screams. Jack is laughing. Carl gets it now. He is laughing as well. "You son of a bitch. Thanks for warning me."

"I told you to hold on." Jack laughs. "Sailing is 'Mellow' right?" Jack says, hiking out over the side. Carl crawls up and emulates Jack.

Jack tells Carl how to work the jib and how to hike out using the hiking straps at his feet. "I wondered what those were for." Carl says.

They rip across the bay and Carl loves it. They are moving somewhere shy of twenty miles and hour, but it feels like a hundred. Jack teaches Carl all about the physics of sailing, showing him the techniques and teaching him the terminology. Carl is eager to learn. It reminds him of driving the Alpha on a windy road, feeling the edge of control and danger. "I'll take you for a ride in the Alpha." Carl promises Jack.

"Yeah, I'd like that." He responds with a grin. Finally Jack lets Carl take the helm. He's a natural and he's hooked.

Marshall Tavern

It's a mellow Saturday. Rob and Auggie are not around, and nobody is visiting. After lunch Wayne and Carl are sitting around talking as Jack and Kate putter in the kitchen.

"So Carl, I bet you haven't even been to the Marshall Tavern yet, have you?" Wayne asks.

"No, I've never heard of it. Carl replies.

"Oh man!" Wayne calls to Kate and Jack. "He says he has never been to the Marshall Tavern." Kate walks in drinking a smoothie and flops on the couch. She grins at Carl.

"That's right; he's never been to the Marshall Tavern. That could be the answer to all your dreams, Carl." She says, as Jack comes in behind her and joins her on the couch.

"What? What dreams?" Carl says.

"Pussy, man, pussy. If you can't hook up with somebody at the Marshall Tavern you're in trouble." Jack chimes in.

"That's right, man. Marshall Tavern is the hottest place around, great bands, right on the bay, all the hot hippie chicks come there, it's a far out place." Wayne is ecstatic. "Let's go."

Sounds good to Carl. "Sure, let's go. Where is it?"

"Right there" says Kate pointing out the window toward the bay.

"What?" Carl is confused.

"It's right there." Says Jack, as he stands up and points out the window. "See those buildings over there across the bay, the white one, where the boats are moored? That's it." He points with his finger as Carl stands up to look. "Yeah, I see, far out. Can we take the boat?" Carl asks.

"I've been wondering about that myself." Jack says. "I think we can do it if we prepare ourselves. First, the wind is supposed to die down tonight, so we'll have to take the oars to row back. It's not far. The other thing is finding our way. We should be able to get a decent compass reading, but the tide, the movement of the water, will screw up our navigation so we need to leave a light on in the house. But, it could get foggy. We may just have to make our way across, see where we land and then go up or down the coast until we find the cove." Jack says. "I think we can recognize where we are, even at night."

"That sounds a little risky. How about a lantern on the beach or something reflective?" Carl asks. Carl and Jack are off in their own world now thinking and planning how to sail back from the Marshall Tavern at night.

"It looks like were going." Kate says to Wayne as she sips her coffee.

A couple hours later they are on the bay. They plan to sail for a while, have dinner at the Tavern and party the night away. They have no idea what band is playing.

After tying up at the dock in Marshall they make their way up the stairs to the landing. It's a beautiful view and they can easily see the house across the bay. Jack and Carl take a compass reading on the house and write in a notebook, calculating a return course.

The Marshall Tavern is a big old two story roadhouse constructed in 1873. It's one of the oldest roadhouses in California and was built for the railroad which once ran along the Tomales Bay. Next door is the original old Marshall Hotel. As you enter the tavern there is a wide hall way. To the left is the bar, with windows facing the front on the left, with the stage at the back and a long bar. To the right of the hallway is the restaurant, with windows overlooking the bay all along the side and back. It's all old and

funky, with tongue and groove wood ceilings and walls, and oak floors that creak when you walk. The whole thing is built on stilts and hangs out over the bay.

The tavern is already packed and there is a wait for seats in the restaurant. That's fine with them, they're in no hurry. They stroll around town, which is just the tavern, hotel and a few houses. The hotel looks full as well. They go back out to the landing to check the boat. It's doing fine.

Several other people are enjoying the view and they strike up conversations.

"Yeah' we live right over there" Carl says to a cute little blond he just met.

"Really? Where?" She says, intrigued.

"Right there. See the house above the bluff. That's our cove to the right. We sailed over. That's our sailboat down there at the dock." As if everybody arrives by sailboat.

"Far out!" She says. "My name is Laura." Carl checks her out and chalks her up as prospect number one.

"Yeah, we plan to sail back after the show. It should be fun. We got a compass bearing and everything." Carl says as if it's no big deal, they got it covered.

"Far out!" She says. "You like to dance?"

"I love to dance." Carl says looking deep into her eyes.

"Far out! Me too." She says, with a flirty little smile.

"We're having dinner now, but I'll see you later." He says touching her arm "I really want to dance with you." He says.

"Far out! Me too. See-ya."

Carl is not looking for intellectual stimulation tonight, neither is Laura. It's party time at the Marshall Tavern and the vibes are thick with flirtatious fun. Maybe Carl and Laura will develop a deeper level of interest and respect as they get to know each other. All that matters now is someone fun to dance with, and if the vibes are right, spend the night with.

As they walk back to the restaurant Kate is chuckling. She puts on a sweet little voice.

"Far out Carl! Will you dance with me too?" Blinking up at him all dreamy eyed. They all laugh.

Wayne says. "Damn, I saw her, but before I could say anything Carl swooped on her." He grabs Carl like he is ready to fight, and they hit and bump against each other playfully.

"This may be your lucky night kid." says Kate.

Just to be fully prepared, Carl has fried oysters for dinner. They are the freshest and the most delicious oysters he has ever had. By the end of dinner they have met everybody sitting around them. Carl has two more dance partners who have clearly deduced that some lucky girl will be sailing back across the bay with Carl tonight.

The music that night is being performed by a guy Carl has never heard of, Van Morrison. Needless to say, Carl is impressed. The club is rocking, packed to the rafters. Carl can't order drinks from the bar because he isn't twenty one, but being in the club is apparently no problem. Besides, Carl prefers pot and there is plenty of that making the rounds. He dances and flirts with all the ladies. The music is great.

Van Morrison has a strong soulful voice and the songs are impossible to get out of your head. When the band is rocking with "Brown Eyed Girl" everybody is up dancing and sweating, the whole room shaking. And when Van does a sweetly soulful ballad like "Into the Mystic," the young women are like ripe fruit waiting to be picked.

Carl finally settles on that first cute blond he met on the landing when they first arrived. They take a stroll out to the end of the landing pier with the sound of the band still playing. It's dark and cool. The sweet ocean air surrounds them as they listen to the water gently lapping against the boats below. Not a breath of wind. The bay is like a lake of molten obsidian. They kiss. Carl places his hand on her tight little ass. She feels his cock through his pants. "How does the rigging check out?" he asks.

"I think you pass inspection." She laughs.

"Were defiantly Okay abaft" he says as he gives her ass another little squeeze.

She whispers in his ear, still touching his cock through his pants "I would love to go for a sailboat ride tonight."

"That can be arraigned, as long as I get to navigate." Carl says.

"Are you sure I pass inspection?" She says with a pretend pout.

"We'll see about that later." He says with a crooked smile as butterflies of anticipation flutter in his stomach.

Carl is the only sober one in the boat, so Jack appoints him captain. Wayne has a woman with him as well and they are both roaring drunk. Jack and Kate are feeling pretty happy themselves. Laura is only a bit tipsy. Of course Carl is stoned but that's widely recognized as being less of an impairment than being drunk. One look at Wayne confirms this bit of wisdom.

First Carl makes them all put on life jackets. A fair amount of grumbling accompanies this decision and Carl is afraid he may lose his command to a mutiny before they even leave the dock.

Though they put up the sails there is no wind. That means they have to row. They came prepared for this eventuality with two oars. Normally they don't carry oars when sailing because they take up too much space in the boat and get in the way. However, tonight they are essential. They take turns rowing.

Carl looks at the compass. Jack and Carl have checked the tide tables and determined that the tide will be going out about half a knot. With some calculations in their notebook and a bit of guess work they determine a heading. Carl steers and carefully watches the compass.

"Pull harder, ye swabbies." Carl barks.

"Fuck you man, I need another drink" responds Wayne at the oars. Everyone screams with laughter. You can hear them laughing, giggling, cursing and clunking around for miles across the glassy surface of the water as they slowly make their way across the bay.

It's chilly out. They switch places rowing. Jack is far more effective than Wayne's drunken and clumsy effort and they soon come to the other shore. Carl announces "I see the light at the house and its right where it's supposed to be." Captain Bly is the hero after all. Carl takes over the oars as they attempt to hook up to the mooring. Jack almost falls in. There are screams and more raucous laughter.

Finally they make it back up to the house. Everyone immediately says good night and goes to their rooms. When Carl and Laura get into Carl's room they quickly take off their clothes and jump in bed. They are both cold from the ride, and they cuddle up to one another just to warm up. Lara is drunk and tired and Carl is stoned and tired. They kiss and she pulls Carl on top. He slips inside her. It's warm and good and they pant and groan with pleasure. Carl only thinks about changing the oil on the Alpha for a little while, then coms, rolls off and they are both asleep within seconds.

When Carl opens his eyes it's early and Laura is already awake and setting up in bed. She has opened the curtains and is looking out over the bay. "This is the most amazing view. What a wonderful way wake up."

He cuddles up to her. They are both warm and cozy now. She wiggles back down into bed and they lay there for a while cuddled together, watching thin wisps of clouds drift down the bay.

After a while Laura turns to him and then, without saying a word moves down and starts sucking his cock. "Oh yeah, that is so good." He says stretching out and thoroughly enjoying himself. He peeks under the covers to watch this beautiful blond girl working on his cock and thinks, "Man, it can't get much better than this."

As far as Carl is concerned, he has arrived. Maybe it's because it's early, or maybe it's because he got some sex last night, but Carl doesn't have to think about changing the oil on the Alpha even once. She moves on top of him now and they fuck for a long time. Finally Lara touches herself to reach orgasm and after Carl cums, she rolls off and both fall asleep. They don't wake up again until well after noon.

Auggie's Wondrous Garden

One of the great things about the Tomales house is its privacy. The back and sides of the house are completely surrounded by thick trees and bushes making it invisible from the road. Even the drive is protected from the front of the house so if someone does stumble down the drive they won't immediately be confronted by a group of naked hippies lounging in the sun. The view from the large arching patio in the front is open to the bay, but the water is far below and away from the house. A boater with binoculars could certainly get an eye full, but if this has ever actually happened, no one knows for sure and frankly they could care less. Let them look.

On warm days everyone goes naked. It's a comfortable way to live. You would probably think that open nakedness must inevitably lead to a highly charged sexual environment, but it is surprising how fast people get used to seeing other people naked. For most people the first few hours are a bit of a thrill, but soon they find themselves ignoring other people's body parts and even feeling comfortable with their own nakedness. Everyone is free to lounge around without feeling ogled or self-conscious. Plus, it feels good lying in the warm sun and losing all that restrictive clothing. Once the initial shock has passed, most people take to it immediately.

Not that there isn't a fair amount of sexual energy in the air. These are young, attractive and uninhibited people after all. If a young naked woman leans over to pick up something it may well draw the attention of Carl and the other guys. However, if she were to lean over to pick up something while wearing a swim suite or even a tight pair of jeans there is a good chance that it would catch their attention as well. If it's a nice ass and worth look at, clothed or naked, guys will take a look. If they also just happen to get a little glimpse of some fresh beaver, well that's just icing on the cake. Undoubtedly, having a bunch of naked young women around is a pleasant diversion for the guys, but what is really surprising is that the real head-turner of the house turns out to be one of the guys.

Down a short path, you will find the community garden. Next to the garden is a small shed that has been fixed up and turned into Auggie's cabin. Auggie loves to garden and this is his little patch of heaven. Being so close to the ocean, it never freezes at Point Reyes and everything grows with exuberance. Auggie's garden is a work of art, a veritable jungle of every kind of plant and flower, all slightly overgrown. He produces a bounty of delicious and healthy food which he sells at the farmers market in town. On most days you can find Auggie working contentedly in his garden.

Part Black and part Hispanic, Auggie is tall, lean and muscular with a smooth milk chocolate complexion. By any measure Auggie is a very handsome guy. But what really catches people's attention if they happened to stroll down the lush path overlooking the garden is the incredible size of Auggie's cock. It is a schlong of truly stunning proportions. As you stroll by you can see it hanging down and flopping around with happy abandon as Auggie pulls weeds or works with a hoe. People usually try to observe discreetly and hide their amazed expressions. Some claim Auggie has been misusing the Miracle-Grow.

Some women claim that size is not important, but Auggie is proof that this opinion is far from universal. Auggie is indeed very popular with the ladies. Not everyone jumps in his bed, but naked days at the Tomales house are certainly effective advertising for Auggie's gift from god and he usually has some more than willing woman at his disposal.

However, Auggie's natural talents also create an intimidating situation for the guys. Carl has always prided himself for being a bit better hung than most, but next to Auggie he feels downright puny. If there is any consolation it is that all the other guys are in the same boat. It also tends to dampen any exhibitionist exuberances among the men. If some new guy decides to parade around in an ostentatious display of his wares, a sight seeing trip to the garden is soon organized.

One day three acquaintances of Kates come to visit. They are all secretarial types enjoying the opportunity to be hip, even if they are a bit older. In their early thirties they are still looking good, even if they may be carrying a few extra pounds. All three are having a great time lounging naked on the sun deck, drinking wine and smoking pot. After a while Kate takes them for a little walk and they disappear down the path chattering and laughing. A short while later they all come back joking and swooning over Auggie and his amazing schlong. They have never seen anything like it. One of the women, a bold red head with a solid build and ample breasts, threatens to go back down and see if Auggie is up for a little daytime fun.

She asks Carl "So, is Auggie in any kind of relationship?"

Carl chuckles, "Nope, I can assure you Auggie is free as a bird and he has been known to pick the juiciest fruit from the garden all for himself."

"Really" she says.

All three are laughing and making bawdy comments. The red head keeps threatening to go meet Auggie.

"Go on, go down and talk to him." The other two women are saying. "I dare you" None of them think she will do it.

With a little more encouragement she finally gets up her nerve and defiantly strolls off, flashing her friends one last wicked grin as she disappears down the garden path. The other women are laughing and joking about how crazy she is. Nobody really thinks that she will hook-up with Auggie. But, as the minutes turn into an hour and the hour turns into two hours, everyone is starting to wonder what is going on. However, nobody has the nerve to actually go down and check out the situation.

Finally one of the women says "I think I see her coming." Everybody is silent; all eyes watch as she slowly comes up the path. She finally appears. Her face is beaming with a smile the size of Wyoming. The other women are screaming. "Oh my god, don't tell me. No, it can't be true. What happened, what happened?"

She slowly, obviously continues up the path taking one step at a time, her body limp, legs rubbery. She is radiant and silent as she heads to a lounge chair where she flops down as if she has spent her last ounce of energy. The other women are hysterical now "What happened? What happened? Did you really sleep with him? Oh my god. Come on, tell us." In reply the red head slowly stretches herself out, takes a deep breath, spreads her arms out wide as she looks straight up into the crystal blue sky, opens her mouth and bursts forth with one long, heart felt, operatic note of joy.

The Trip

It is a beautiful spring morning and Carl has just finished his breakfast when Kate comes and sits by him at the table. "Auggie has some very clean window pane acid and Rob and Auggie are planning on dropping some today. Would you be interested?"

"Yeah, maybe." Carl says thoughtfully.

"You have done acid before, right?" She asks

"Yeah, a couple of times. David got it for us."

"Oh, will then it was probably good stuff." She says. "I'm not taking any and will be straight, so if anything comes up I can take care of it. And if you are feeling a little too high, I will be there to talk you down. This is a wonderful place to trip." She smiles.

"Yeah, I've been thinking about it. I would love to." He says.

She comes back a few minutes later with a tinny translucent square.

"Here it is, have fun. I will be around if you need me." She gives him a little hug and walks off.

He swallows it with some milk, then goes into his room and reads for a while feeling nothing. After about an hour he goes to the front porch to sit in the sun. Rob and Auggie are there and greet him friendly smiles.

"Feeling anything yet?" Rob asks.

"I don't think so." Carl says

"I think I am just starting to come on."

Carl sits back in the chair. He feels excitement and fear in the pit of his stomach. Dropping acid is always an intense experience, not something to be taken lightly. It can be terrifying and dangerous in the wrong situation.

Carl can feel it now, he feels a little dizzy and things around him are looking more colorful. Auggie is in the lounge chair next to Rob. The three of them sit side-by-side as though it is a carnival ride, but this is bound to be wilder than any ride yet invented.

"Oh man, I am definitely coming on now" Auggie says.

"Me too man" Rob giggles.

"I'm flying too. Hang on." Carl says

They all laugh out loud. Rob lets out a little whoop as the roller coaster starts to roll and they all join in.

Carl is flying. It feels like all his senses are opening and he is being bombarded with sight and sound, emotions suddenly bubbling up and then just as fast spin away. Carl remembers when you first come onto acid, in the first couple of hours of a trip, that it can be a white knuckle experience, but you usually to level out after an hour or two. That may be reassuring information to remember, but when you're just coming on it's hard to remember anything. Carl is enjoying the view of the bay and trying to maintain.

After a while Kate comes out.

"You guys are looking pretty zoned. How is it going?"

"Far out." says Rob

"The clouds are moving." Says Auggie

"What?" Says Carl

"Okay, your all still talking, though I'm not sure 'What' qualifies." She chuckles. How about some fresh squeezed orange juice to bring you back down to the personal level? Sound Good?"

"Far out." says Rob

"The trees are moving." Say Auggie

"Oranges?" Says Carl

Kate brings out some fresh squeezed orange juice in plastic glasses. It takes a while to consume, but it's a hit, an explosion of flavor, even if they aren't in the least bit hungry. Carl is starting to feel overwhelmed. Kate comes and sits by him.

"How are you doing Carl?" She asks. He is looking wide eyed and a bit out of control. "Let's bring you in out of the sun. You need to mellow out for a while."

"Okay, I liked the orange juice." Carl says seriously.

"Good, I have something else for you until you start to level out." He follows her in and she guides him over to a big chair in the living room where it's cool and quiet. He sits down and in a couple minutes she comes back with a stack of photography books. "Check these out. I think you'll like them." She stacks them by the chair and walks away.

Carl picks one up. 'Macro Photography' the book is titled. It is filled with high quality nature close-ups, flowers, plants, bugs, drops of water. The images are stunning. He can't recall ever looking at photography books on acid, but he is blown away by the beauty. When Carl was outside the world was overwhelming and over stimulating. Now, focusing his attention on these individual photographs feels comforting. They are not moving or doing anything bazaar, they just seem stunningly beautiful and profound.

Carl spends more than an hour in the chair contentedly staring at all kinds of photographs. Kate walks by "So you like those?"

"Wow, these are incredible. I want to get a camera." He says.

She laughs. "That sounds like a great idea, but not today. Come with me I want to show you something." He gets up and follows her back out front. Rob and Auggie are talking and laughing when they come out. "Hey, Carl is back. How you doing man?" Rob says.

"I'm doing good, I've mellowed out quite a bit."

"Well come on over here, were just about the light a joint. That will help you mellow out some more." Says Auggie

"That's right. Smoking a little pot would be good. But not too much, just a couple tokes." Kate says helpfully.

"But first, check this out." She goes to the far end of the house and uncoils a garden hose, turns it on and drags it back to where Carl is standing. The water is flowing freely from the end. "Check out this water." She says.

Carl looks at her. What does she mean? It sounds silly. He looks at the water flowing from the end of the hose. "Touch it" she says. Carl puts his fingers in the water and its like and electric shock. He jerks away, and looks at her questioning. "Go ahead, it won't hurt you. He puts his hand in again. The cold water flows in a transparent wave over his skin. It is like a living thing. He moves his hand around, fascinated by the way the water glistens, the way it feels, the way it clings to his hand. "Wow" he says "It's all wet and alive."

"Of course it's wet, its water" says Rob. They all laugh.

"No really, it's incredible." Carl says. He is making the water flows down his arms. It slashes on his legs and feet, puddles forming on the cement. He is wiggling his toes in it laughing and squealing like a child.

"Let me try it" says Auggie, getting up. Now Rob is up. They come over and put their hands in it and start laughing. The hose is passed around and things start getting wild as Rob tries to stop the water from coming out with his hand and it squirts out the sides. They are all laughing and carrying on like five year olds, playing in the water in the warm sunshine.

Finally they settle down and Kate comes back out, turns off the water and coils the hose back on its rack. As she walks by Carl, setting with the guys and getting ready to smoke some weed she says "I think you're doing fine now"

The weed does mellow Carl out and he comes back inside. Jack is there and they start talking about astronomy and the possibility of intelligent life in the universe. Jack is straight, but the conversation becomes quite intense and Carl is amazed at how articulate and lucid he feels. His recall of facts seems enhanced. Carl has leveled off and he now feels in a hyper state of awareness. He is feeling the need to go outside and walk and asks Kate if that seems like a good idea. "That sounds great, I feel like taking a walk myself. Let's go, but first let me get a few things." She loads up a fanny pack with a bottle of water and some trail mix. They head out the door and up walk up toward the meadows.

For a few weeks each year the wild flowers at Point Reyes are in full boom. Thousand of acres of lush grassland explode in a dazzling display of color. As Carl and Kate walk up into the hills and meadows above the bay they are overwhelmed by the display of wild flowers carpeting the earth. Each flower is a world within itself, like the macro photography in the book. However, here there are literal billions of delicate and impossibly intricate flowers everywhere. It is impossible to walk without crushing them under your feet.

Carl and Kate find a spot to sit down with a long range view across the brightly colored meadows to the ocean for beyond. They are speechless. Carl turns to Kate, wide eyed. "It's so impossibly beautiful my heart can't take it." Carl says.

Kate smiles at him knowingly. "It is impossibly beautiful, but have no fear, your heart is strong and you can take it, and there is so much more. Go forth and experience the world." She says, spreading her arms in a dramatic gesture. With that she gets up and goes back to the house, leaving the pack with water and snacks for Carl. Carl gets up and starts to walk, reveling in the awesome beauty that surrounds him.

Carl comes to a spot with a commanding view. It is a remote part of the park only accessible by foot. He is alone. Carl sits down in the grass and reflects on his good fortune. He can't believe how amazingly well things are going. Every day he pinches himself to make sure this is really happening and he has only just arrived.

The nightmare of Kelseyville seems far away now. But Carl knows the trauma is still within him. He is hyper aware of everything around him, but is afraid to turn that enhanced perception within himself. He wants to move beyond those bad experiences, but they linger inside, welling up at inappropriate times, blocking his awareness.

Carl forces himself to turn his perception inward, to feel the anger, fear and sadness. As these feelings bubble to the surface and break into his perception he is afraid. He is afraid the pain and bad memories are more than he can bear, afraid that they will crush him, afraid that he doesn't have the strength to cope.

Carl thinks of Eddie McGuire and Roy Welch and he screams and curses at them, using every foul and vulgar word. Then falling to the ground he tares at the grass, yanking it out in fistfuls, tearing off the heads of his enemy, of his father who betrayed him, of all the wickedness of the world. Now the sadness wells up inside him and it gushes forth in great heaving sobs and he wails in pain and sorrow at the sky. Great waves of sadness, fear and abandonment wash over him clawing at his heart, threatening to rip it to shreds. He collapses, exhausted, sobbing and falls asleep.

Carl hears buzzing and opens his eyes. Green grass towers over him and there in front of his eyes is a tiny wild Iris. He looks at it, at the intricacy of its design and the brilliance of its color. It is stunningly beautiful. His eye shifts and behind the flower he sees another flower. He lifts his head. Spread out in front of him are millions of tiny, delicate and infinitely beautiful wild irises. Carl looks around, and everywhere he looks is beauty, awesome, profound, inspiring beauty and his heart soars. A thousand pounds have been lifted from him as he stands. He takes a step. He lifts his voice and screams "I am alive" and then he laughs at what a funny man he is, what a silly man to have missed all this beauty that was around him. He takes a long drink of water then grabs his pack. It is a long way back to the house and he is looking forward to the hike.

The Benefactor

Willard Kaidy pulls up to the gate control in his green 1967 Ford Falcon and pressed the button. A scratchy voice answers.

"Yes?"

"Hello, I'm Willard Kaidy and I'm here to see Tomas Chaney."

No response. He waits. He is wondering what to do. Should he press the button again? The gate opens. Willard drives through and up the brick drive. A beefy guard is waiting in front of a red brick mansion. The guard motions Willard to keep on going.

The mansion was originally built in the 1920' by the wealthy owner of an oil company but has been extensively remodeled and modernized. Willard drives a little further and another guard motions him around the side of the mansion where he parks in a turnout with several other cars and trucks. Willard gets out and locks the car with his key. One of the security guards is waiting about ten feet away saying nothing. The guard motions for him to follow and takes him to a side door of the mansion.

Willard waits in a small office. Standard office side-chairs line two walls and a secretarial desk stands empty by the door. His stomach rumbles. He is hungry. Suddenly the door opens and two security guards come in. One is carrying a wand device of some kind; Willard has never seen anything like it. "I'm sorry Mr. Kaidy, but we need to check you for security purposes. Is that okay with you?" The guard waits expressionless. "Well, yeah, I guess so." Willard says. He isn't too happy about it. He wouldn't bring a gun or anything like that to a meeting like this.

The two guards immediately go into action. One thoroughly frisks Willard and the other waves the wand device over his body. Willard feels invaded, but the search is quickly over. "Again I apologize for the inconvenience Mr. Kaidy. Mr. Chaney will be with you in a moment."

Willard sits back down and waits. He is here to ask for money. He has a new organization called the American Alliance of Youth. The objective of the group is to recruit students and young people to counter liberal and Marxist groups like the SDS.

The American Alliance of Youth emerged from an earlier group connected to Willard Kaidy known as Youth for Wallace, which supported segregationist Governor George Wallace in his bid for president as an American Independent Party Candidate in 1968. Wallace lost. Willard needs new funds to continue his fight against communists and Jews, and Chaney is a well known supporter of right wing causes.

The door opens and the security guard motions for Willard to follow. He takes him down a long corridor to another section of the mansion and through a huge lobby. They stop at a pair of tall double doors. The guard quietly knocks and then goes in. Willard follows. It is an elegantly furnished library. Books line shelves on all sides except where two large windows with leaded glass overlook a broad lawn. Willard recognizes Tomas Chaney from his photograph. Chaney is sitting behind a desk watching as the guard guides Willard to a chair across from his desk. One security guard moves to the side of Mr. Chaney, while the other one stands next to Willard. To the other side of Chaney are two young men in what appears to be tennis attire, sitting in wing back chairs.

"Thank you for coming Mr. Kaidy." Tomas Chaney says in a fragile voice. I understand you have a new organization. Why don't you tell us about it?"

"Well, thank you for seeing me Mr. Chaney. The name of my organization is the American Alliance of Youth. What I want to do is organize small groups of commandos who can take our fight directly to

the communists. Take it to the SDS, the nigger Panthers, and the Jew intellectuals on the college communes. We plan to organize counter protests, peaceful if possible, but willing to bust some heads if we get the opportunity. We're recruiting right now and have some good Christian warriors ready to fight. All we need is the resources to get them on the battle field. Not much, just gas in the car and food in the belly that's all these young solders need." Willard is just getting warmed up and he leans forward in his chair.

"Now I know that you've been a supporter of the John Birch Society for a long time Mr. Chaney and they have done some good work exposing the conspiracy of internationalists, Jew bankers, communists, and corrupt politicians who are trying to take over the world. Unfortunately, we are losing this war. The communist directed hippie movement and the niggerfication of America is happening right before our eyes. Now I know you can only do so much Mr. Chaney and the international Jew conspiracy owns the press and will crucify anyone who speaks god's truth. Its better that you not expose yourself to their slander, but it's critical that we keep our righteous crusade on the path to victory and I am here to ask your help as a devoted warrior." Willard pauses to catch his breath. He is not done, but before he can start again Mr. Chaney speaks.

"Willard, you know that I've been a supporter of the cause for many years and I still support it. But you're the one on the front lines, taking the battle to the enemy. You're the hero Willard, the true patriot, not me. I'm just a businessman trying to meet payroll. If it weren't for people like you, well the communists would have taken over this country long ago and I'd be driving a truck. Not that there's anything wrong with good honest hard work mind you. Hell, I think I'd be happier today if Id just stayed out there on the line, digging wells." Chaney stops to cough, then continues.

"Willard, I can't officially indorse what you're doing." Chaney says.

"Oh no Mr. Chaney, I'm not asking for that. I know you'd like to, but that would just be playing into the hands of the Jew media." Willard is scrambling to explain. Chaney holds up his hand and Willard stops talking.

"That's right Willard and unfortunately I have to turn you down today. I can't support anything your doing. Do you understand? I disavow any participation in your organization." Willard Kaidy is shocked and disappointed. He is ready to argue when he sees Chaney motioning for his security guard to bring a brief case to Willard. The guard hands Willard the case. "I'm sorry I can't help you, but I wish you luck." Chaney says.

Willard starts to open the case, but the security guard puts his hand on top. "Not here" he says.

Willard decides to play along. For whatever reason, this is the way he want to do business. "Okay Mr. Chaney, thank you for your time. I hope you will keep an eye on what we are doing and maybe someday when all these communists have been rooted out and hung from the highest tree you can find a way to support our cause."

"I hope your right, Willard. Good luck." Chaney doesn't get up to shake his hand and Willard doesn't attempt to approach. The security guard leads him to the door.

Willard gets in his car, putting the brief case on the passenger seat beside him. The guards direct him to the front gate which opens just as he is approaching. He stops and waits. It's a blind curve to the left. Willard turns onto the road and drives past the other mansions. An expansive green golf course is on his right. Finally he finds a safe turn out and pulls over. A middle aged man is just about to make a putt on

the perfectly manicured putting green on the other side of a rustic split rail fence. Willard has other interests.

He reaches over and pops the locks on the brief case and opens the top. It is filled with money, tens of thousand of dollars in cash. Willard is in business.

Donald and Mathew Chaney go into Donald's office. Mathew plops down on the leather couch and Donald sits in the executive chair behind his desk. There is a quietly knock at the door.

"Come in Juanita." Donald says.

"Would you like something sir?" She asks.

"Yeah, I'll have some mineral water. How about you Mathew?"

"That sounds good"

Juanita disappears and Donald leans back in his chair.

Mathew looks iterated. "Where in the hell does Dad pick up these people? That guy is nuts."

"Well Dad seems a bit round the bend with these conspiracies himself, don't you think? Though I have a feeling he may not be as crazy as he appears. You know how Dad is. You never really know what is going on in that mind of his. This is just part of some bigger plan that he has."

"Well I don't like it. I don't want to get mixed up with those kind of people. I don't get the point. Dad's involvement with the John Birchers has been nothing but a public-relations nightmare. I don't see how any good can come of it."

Mathew responds. "The country is in chaos. It's a danger and an opportunity."

"Opportunity? The hippies are taking over. The whole country has gone mad." Mathew sniffs derisively.

"I don't think so. These left wing radicals have made some gains and gotten allot of media but this could end up working to our advantage. I think dad understands that. The backlash is just beginning. Most Americans are appalled by these people. And mark my word; the Democratic Party is going to pay a big price."

"Well they certainly destroyed the Vietnam effort."

"I could care less about Vietnam. Let Johnson and the Democrats take the blame for that debacle. The goal is to grab hold of the backlash. The workers have always been part of the Democratic base and now they are all disgusted with what the liberals have become. If the conservatives can capitalize on that, well then you would really be talking about a major shift in power."

There is a knock at the door.

"Come in Juanita."

Juanita comes in with a tray holding two drinks. She quickly and efficiently places them on coasters near each of the men and turns to leave.

"Just a minute Juanita" Donald says.

She turns "Yes sir?"

"Juanita, did you voted for John Kennedy when he ran for president?"

Juanita looks surprised and nervous. She isn't sure what to say. She knows that all the Chaney's are strong conservatives.

"It's all right Juanita; I don't hold it against you. I am just curious what you found appealing about him."

"I am a Catholic sir." She says softly.

"Of course you are, and I admire your religious devotion Juanita. But as a Catholic, what do you think of all these hippies and war protestors?"

"I don't like them sir. They're disgusting people." She says forthrightly, then looks worried that she may have over-stepped her bounds.

"I agree with you Juanita, they are horrible people and I appreciate your being so honest with me. That will be all, thank you."

Juanita nods her head, turns and hurries out of the room and quietly closes the door behind her. She didn't enjoy that little encounter one bit.

"So?" Says Mathew. "What was the point of that?"

People like Juanita, and like this nut that Dad has hooked up with, they don't know or care about economic issues, capital gains, estate taxes. They care about social issues. Religion for example is the single biggest influence on millions of people's lives. Like Juanita. The most important factor in her vote was that John Kennedy was a Catholic. Those people hate the Hippies. If we can make the Democrats and the Liberals the Hippie party and the Republicans the down home Religious party we can win their vote."

"Well that sounds pretty far fetched Donald. What we want on economic issues is not what they want. Allot of those religious Christians are Union workers. It's the Democrats who are fighting their battles. It's not in their interest to cut our taxes. They're not stupid, why would they vote against their own interests?"

"Because they hate hippies, communists, and atheists, that's why. And when it comes to economics, they may be stupider than you think. Look at this idiot Dad brought us. Look how many votes George Wallace got. There is a backlash happening and we need to encourage and exploit it."

"Well I certainly don't want to be associated with these people. I don't want my name dragged in the mud. Their nuts, communists are not coming out of the woodwork Donald."

"Of course not, but behind the scenes we can make a huge difference. A little money can go a long way with these people. Look at all the money we give to the Republican Party so that bunch of corrupt politicians will represent our interests. That has become hugely expensive. Those guys are a bottomless pit. I think that we can really make a difference here. The long term return on investment could be outstanding."

"Fine, if you think it's worth doing, but nothing public, all under the table, no more public involvement with the John Birch Society. That was a disaster. As far as the public is concerned we are mainstream Republicans." Mathew says emphatically.

"Absolutely, all under the table." Donald takes a sip of his drink and then adds, "And besides, I agree with Juanita, hippies are disgusting people." They both laugh.

Rose

Kate has been talking non-stop for a week about her old friend Rose who is coming to visit. Kate drives to town and comes back in the afternoon with Rose.

Carl is in the kitchen when Kate and Rose breeze in the door excitedly talking and laughing.

"Oh, hi Carl, this is my good friend Rose."

"Hi Rose." Carl says as he awkwardly performs the customary short hug greeting. Rose smells like Patchouli. She greets him with a broad smile.

"Nice to meet you Carl, Kate has been telling me about you." Kate and Rose laugh. Carl self consciously laughs along with them though he is not sure why.

Rose is twenty-five, the same age as Kate, but she has lived and traveled all over the world. She has already had more adventure in than most people experience in a lifetime. Recently back from India, Rose looks like a cross between a gypsy and an Indian princess. She is wearing a long skirt, intricate Indian blouse, and colorful scarves wrapped around her shoulders and waist. Pounds of jewelry dangle from her wrists, arms, neck, ears and ankles. She jangles when she walks. Carl has never met anyone like Rose. He finds her beautiful, mysterious and intimidating.

Rose's family is Creole, originally from New Orleans. Creole is a broad mixture of French, Black, Spanish, American Indian and who knows. The Creoles are natives of the city of New Orleans, where art, music and culture have existed in a vacuum for generations, mostly removed from much of the narrow-minded bigotry of the south. Rose's family somehow ended up in Ann Arbor Michigan where her father was a High School teacher.

Rose has a light milk chocolate complexion that usually passes for some flavor of white. Of course, in New Orleans anyone would instantly recognize her as a Creole. Rose is medium height with a thin but muscular body. Her hair is short, dark brown and a little on the wild side. She has a wide smile with perfect teeth and twinkling eyes. Carl immediately finds her island girl looks and slim body tantalizing.

Kate and Rose grew up together in Ann Arbor Michigan. They met in High School, and have been good friends ever since. While Kate continued on to college, Rose traveled the world.

Rose and Kate immediately get crazy in the kitchen, cooking up a variety of Indian inspired dishes with California hippie flare. Fragrant, pungent and tantalizing odors fill the house. Carl helps out, following Kate's orders, but for the most part staying out of the conversation as Rose and Kate talk about old friends and Rose's adventures. Carl is amazed by her stories.

Rose has traveled to almost every continent, nearly killed by pirates while sailing at the mouth of the Amazon River, hung out with Salvador Dali and a bunch of crazed artists in France, and nearly died of thirst while lost in the Australian desert. She has traveled all over the US as well and just came back from Europe and an eight month trip to India a month ago. She has been in New York City for the past few weeks. Her plan is to go back to school and get a nursing degree. Apparently nurses are in demand everywhere, especially third-world countries. She sees it as a way to help pay for her adventures and do good things for local people at the same time.

Rose primarily travels on private aircraft and sailboats. All for free. Her primary method of getting rides on planes is to go to airport lounges set aside for the pilots of private aircraft. This is where businessmen and pilots hang out as they wait for their planes to be refueled, to plan their next trip, or just to have lunch. She primarily hitches rides with businessmen who fly private airplanes for business.

These flights are often long and boring, and the company of an articulate, charming and attractive young woman is seen as an unusual and welcome opportunity. You don't become a successful businessman without learning to recognize a good opportunity when you see one. In addition, one of the biggest dangers of flying solo on long trips is falling asleep. Having a passenger actually improves safety. Rose has even learned to help with the controls and navigation. She speaks just enough aviation lingo to intrigue the pilots. She has even traveled cross country on luxurious corporate jets on their way to pick up clients at other locations. And always for free. Rose claims the businessmen have always been perfect gentlemen, but it's implied that Rose has also developed deeper relationships with some of her flying acquaintances. Her friendship with some of these wealthy benefactors has benefited Rose in numerous ways.

Rose has also learned to crew on sailboats. Large yachts are apparently always looking for experienced crew. Some will even pay a small wage for cooking and other services. Carl is absolutely amazed at the number of exotic places Rose has traveled, Tahiti, Hawaii, the Cook Island and a bunch of other places he has never even heard of. Some of these adventures have been dangerous, but most have been idyllic. Rose seems to have a knack for finding adventure and supportive relationships wherever she goes. By any standard, Rose is an amazing and worldly woman.

Carl sits by Rose during dinner and they chat pleasantly. She fascinates him, but her age, sophistication and worldliness make her seem completely out of his league. He is just a eighteen year old kid fresh from Kansas. However, Rose is open and friendly and she makes Carl feel generally at ease as she listens to his ideas and laughs at his clever quips.

A little later as Carl is helping Kate clean up the kitchen Kate says "Isn't Rose great?"

"Yeah, she is really amazing."

"She's planning to take nursing classes at the College of Marin this fall. They have a good nursing program there."

"Great, you're planning to go there as well."

"That's right. She may move into town in the fall, but she is interested in possibly spending the summer here."

"Really, that would be great. I like here allot Kate; she would make a wonderful addition to the household. But is anybody is leaving? How about Rob?"

"Yeah, that could be a possibility." She says, and then moves off to wipe down the table.

That night Jack plays the piano and Carl sings a few songs with his guitar. Carl is still a shy, but his singing is open and dynamic, even if his guitar playing is a little ragged. Everybody in the house has heard him practicing his songs, but it's the first time for Rose. She always has had a weak spot for musicians and Carl's sweet, high and earnest voice touches her.

Kate is not so subtly pushing Rose to hook up with Carl and spend the summer at the house. Rose has doubts and is in no hurry to make any moves. She loves the Tomales house, but is thinking of getting her own place in Fairfax or one of the other towns closer to where she will be going to school in the fall. Plus, Rose is in no hurry for a new relationship. She just spent time with a boyfriend in New York, a relationship that is ending and she feels like being alone for a while. Carl is cute and charming, but he seems so young. Besides, he just isn't her type. Rose usually hooks up with older men, stronger men, successful men.

A few idyllic days drift by. Rose is having fun visiting with Kate and Jack. Everyone in the house is friendly and Carl has been a delight. She has to admit, she is attracted to Carl. She considers it a puppy love kind of thing. They engage in a lot of kidding and horse play. She finds herself giggling with abandon. In some ways Carl is so shy, but in other ways so clever and confident. She doesn't feel pressured by him. He makes her laugh.

Kate's constant urgings are also starting to have an influence. She whispers little suggestive comments about Carl as he is engaged in some amusing little antic. Rose thinks Kate would be interested in Carl herself if she wasn't with Jack. Rose finds herself unconsciously flirting with him. She feels like she is back in High School or something. The atmosphere is charged with silly sexual infatuation. Whatever, she is just going with the flow and enjoying herself. It's all great fun, and what a beautiful place to hang out.

The next morning, Jack and Kate decide to take Rose for a sail and ask Carl to come. After breakfast they all head down the narrow path to the cove. Carl takes Jack out first in the canoe so he can start rigging the boat. Then he comes back to pick up Kate and Rose.

They are soon underway. It is a gorgeous, calm, sunny day on the bay as they reach across the wide part of the bay toward Hog Island. A light breeze pulls them lazily along. Sunshine sparkles off the water, as Maxfield Parish clouds float above. They chat and laugh, then lean back and quietly laze in the warm sun, reveling in the beauty of the day. Carl feels uninhibited as he flirts with Rose. They sit close together, as all four move to one side of the boat to counter balance the wind. The way they touch is casual but feels significant to Carl. At one point, Rose peels an Orange and offers Carl some slices. As he watches, she takes a juicy bite in a way that seems incredibly sensual. He is staring at her when she turns her head and looks at him with a coy smile, juice drips down her chin. Carl is smitten and Rose seems to enjoy it.

Jack and Carl have become good friends, but they also enjoy friendly competition. Jack is a science and chemistry major. Carl likes reading science fiction and has read all Isaac Asimov's science fact books for laymen. They have fun trying to one-up each other with tidbits of science trivia. As a science major, Jack usually has the upper hand, but he is often amused and surprised at the wide ranging knowledge Carl is able to pull out of his hat.

Clearly visible and shining high in the daytime sky is a nearly full moon.

"Wow, check out the moon." Kate says.

"Beautiful" responds Rose.

"Okay Carl, so tell me, how far away is the moon" Professor Jack asks.

"Let's see, I think it's around three hundred thousand miles?" Carl guesses.

"Close but no cookie. 238 thousand miles, but it varies some." Jack lectures. "Okay and the diameter of the moon?" Jack asks.

"I give up" Carl says

"2,160 miles." Jack answers. "Which is how big compared to the earth?" He looks at Carl expectantly.

"Oh, I think I know that. I think it's one eighth the size, right?"

"That's right! One eighth" Jack says officially.

Kate and Rose chuckle and roll their eyes at the little competition. Jack is showing off, but Carl seems to be game.

"All right Jack, I got one for you." Carl says

"The moon is not really a moon. By that I mean it's not a satellite of the earth, so what is it?" Carl asks.

"What?" Jack says while giving Carl his famous incredulous look. "Not a satellite? What are you talking about?"

"Well, like Europa is a moon and satellite of Jupiter. But the celestial object we're looking at right up there is not really a moon or satellite of the earth. Not like Europa." Carl says confidently. "So what is it?"

"What, you're out of your mind, man. The moon is a moon. That's where the name moon came from."

"Well, you're right, that is where the name came from, but it's not a satellite of the earth." Carl insists awkwardly.

Kate and Rose are looking skeptical as well.

"That sounds kind of out-there Carl. What do you mean?" Kate asks

"Yeah, I got'-a hear this one." Jack says with self-assured skepticism.

"So you're giving up?" Carl says with a smile. "Okay, Europa is a moon and a satellite of Jupiter. Meaning that Europa orbits Jupiter, and Jupiter is the primary force that determines Europa's path through space. Just like a communications satellite's path through space is primarily determined by the earth. But the relationship between the Earth and the Moon is different. The moon is so big, relative to the size of the earth, that the primary gravitational force that determines its path through space is the sun, not the earth. Earth actually places a secondary influence on the moon.

Proof of that is, if you plot the path of the moon through space it looks like a wave. The moon never goes backward on its path around the sun. But the path of Europa would look like a curlicue. It goes backward on itself because it is primarily going around Jupiter. It's a satellite.

They all look at each other surprised.

"Really?" Says Jack as he switches to his inquisitive look.

Kate and Rose laugh.

"I think he may have you on this one Jack." Kate says teasing.

"I don't know. I've never heard that one before, but he could be right. I've just never thought about it like that." He is still skeptical and not ready to admit defeat.

"Yeah, but you still never answered my question. If the moon is not a satellite of the earth what is it?" Carl asks pointedly.

Jack is on the hot seat but is determined not to get stumped again. He thinks about this for a second.

"Well, I guess that would make it a planet?" He looks at Carl questioning.

"Right! It's a planet. The Earth and the Moon are really a binary planet system. That's why I kept saying that the Moon is not a moon. It's another planet."

"Wow, that's pretty cool." Jack says.

Everybody laughs. "Good try Mr. Wizard." Kate says kidding Jack.

Everybody is laughing and kidding Jack and congratulating Carl. Finally Rose chimes in.

"So, does either of you know-it-all's know the phases of the moon?" Rose asks.

Kate jumps in "Let's see, full moon, half moon, crescent moon, half moon again, and full moon."

"You missed one, or two really. What is the phase of the moon right now? Jack?"

"I know that. Damn, I can't remember." He says in frustration.

"Carl?" She says, unconsciously looking at him with a little flirtatious smile.

"Well" he says looking into her eyes. "I know there is some waxing and a waning involved. Waxing is when it's getting harder, and waning is when it's getting softer."

"No!" she says giggling, then in mock seriously. "It's waxing when it is getting bigger, and waning when it is getting smaller."

"That's what I said." Carl protests.

"No it isn't." She says in play anger.

"But you still haven't told me what faze the moon is in right now." She points up at the moon. The moon is not quite full.

"I give up" Carl says.

"It's called a gibbous moon." Rose says as they all turn to admire the beauty of the nearly full daytime moon.

"Gibbous moon, that's right, I knew that. Damn." Says Jack.

"Gibbous moon" Carl says wistfully. "I like that." Carl and Rose turn to stare briefly into each other's eyes, a flutter in their hearts. She has to admit, she likes this kid.

They drag the boat onto a sandy beach, lay out blankets and have a picnic in the sun. Latter, they explore a grove of giant fir trees behind the beach. In the cool darkness of the trees they find a small stream surrounded by ferns and moss covered logs. They explore along the edge of the gurgling stream and find a small, crystal clear pool. Under a log is a bright orange salamander. He is surprisingly large and lethargic. None of them has ever seen anything like it. They pick him up, but he barely moves to get away. Finally after marveling at his brilliant orange and green stripes, they carefully place him back in the shallow pool. He slowly crawls back under a mossy log.

They decide to hike up the hill for a view of the bay. At the top of a knoll, they lay down a blanket in the tall grass, a sparkling Tomales Bay is stretched out in both directions. It's a wondrous sight. Jack and Kate walk off together to find their own private spot so they can enjoy a little sex in the sun.

Carl and Rose lay on the blanket enjoying the view. Carl is wondering how to make his move on Rose. He is feeling shy again, still thinking she is way out of his league. But Carl is sure he has been getting at least some flirtatious vibes. He leans over a little closer and puts his hand on her leg and says "I have really enjoyed being with you today."

"It's been a beautiful day." She says with a relaxed smile, but she doesn't make any move to acknowledge his not so subtle advance. He knows she is resisting, but he senses her interest and desire.

There is a ravine to one side with a small group of fragrant bay laurel trees.

Directly in front of them is the same beautiful daytime moon they saw while on the boat.

On top of this hill it seems even closer. Carl stands up and stretches, then walks to a spindly bay tree nearby. The tree is only about twice as tall as him, but he steps up on a low branch, only two or three feet above the ground and addresses the moon in a theatrical voice.

"Oh Gibbous Moon, please shine your wondrous light upon my needy soul. I have climbed here to the top of this mountain, to the top of this high tree, just to be closer to you, to see your radiant light, to gaze upon your beautiful face"

"For I love you, Gibbous Moon. I love you like the earth loves the mountains, like the ocean loves the shore, like time loves eternity, but I could love you even more Gibbous Moon.

Rose is watching, amused and flattered. "Forgive me Gibbous Moon for I'm helplessly in love with you. But, how can I dare to dream that you will ever love me, that you will shine your wondrous love upon me, upon my merely mortal soul? For you Gibbous Moon already have the love and the devotion of the ocean who has given you command of his mighty tides, and the night which lets you pierce its lonely heart of darkness, and the day who lets you shine even against the brightness of the sun. What treasures can I give you in comparison Gibbous Moon? For I am just a man and all I have is my eternal love and devotion. A mere mortal, standing here at your feet, trying to catch your fair eternal light, a slave to your ancient primal love and beauty."

Carl glances to see Rose watching him with a wide smile.

"All I can do Gibbous Moon, all I can ever hope, is that some day, you will shine your mystical powers down upon my needy soul, shower me with your magical affections, grace me with your wondrous gifts of love, and take pity upon my poor, mortal soul. Oh, please Gibbous Moon, won't you show me a sign, just a little sign that you care for me. For if you don't I fear that I must wait, lonely and forsaken, here in this tree for the rest of my life."

Carl pauses for a moment, as if waiting for an answer. Again, he glances at Rose who is laughing at his dramatic performance. "Well, go ahead and think about it for a while Gibbous Moon. I'm going to get down now and hang out over here on this blanket, because it does get kind-of hard standing up in this tree after a while. But that doesn't mean I don't still love you Gibbous Moon, I will always love you Gibbous Moon."

Carl jumps down from the tree and walks toward the blanket. Rose leans back on her elbows, watching him with a mysterious smile. He stops just before the blanket and calls up one more. "Here I am Gibbous Moon. I'll be right here if you need me." Carl tumbles down onto the blanket and lies back on one elbow facing Rose. She immediately comes to him, kissing him passionately on the lips, then pushes him away so that he falls over on his back.

"You are too damn cute." She says shaking her head. Rose comes to him again and kisses him with passion and abandon as he lies on his back. Her kisses are soft, sweet and sensual.

Carl is trying to be cool and controlled, but he loves the way her body feels, thin like his, firm and warm, her scent stirs him and drives his desire. She likes the way he feels as well. He touches her breast and runs his hands over her smooth body, gently exploring the folds of her deep warm places. She does the same, feeling the firmness of his cock through his pants.

"It looks like we have another waxing gibbous on our hands." She says.

He pulls at her shirt, drawn to the smoothness of her skin. "I'm not ready for anything major right now." she says, but then pulls her shirt open and comes to him. "You do feel good." she says with a wicked little smile. They continue to discover one another.

When John and Kate suddenly appear, Kate's eyebrows rise to see them cuddled together. "Oh, I see you've been playing too." Kate says.

"Just getting acquainted." Rose replies.

They take their time heading back. When they finally stumble in the door, they find Rob has several friends visiting and Auggie is fixing one of his spectacular vegetarian dinners. It's a warm evening and they are eating early, so the table is set outside. It already feels like a party.

Carl and Rose are affectionate but reserved during dinner. After dinner and dishes, Rose comes to sit with Carl who is relaxing in a big bamboo chair in the corner.

Rose likes the way Carl feels. She likes his smell. She likes his sexy eyes and open smile. It's been a few weeks since she has had sex and she has to admit she's horny. This young guy, this boy-toy, turns her on. It looks like easy, uncomplicated, good sex. But, if there is one thing Rose knows, sex is always at least a little bit complicated.

Spending the summer with Carl at the Tomales house sounds great, but Rose plans to move on in the fall and she doesn't want to hurt Carl. The kid is obviously ga-ga over her and she likes that. It seems like the older men she has been with always holding back. They have already had their hearts broken. But Carl is young. He is completely open and uninhabited. Again, it's like puppy love and Rose has to admit it's an infectious feeling.

When she mentions her reservations about hurting Carl to Kate, Kate just laughs. "I'm sure Carl is more than willing to take his chances to get you in his bed," she says. In any case, Rose has already made up her mind.

Rose takes Carl's hand and smiles up at him. She stays that way for a few moments, looking into his face, then whispers "Would you like for me to stay with you tonight?"

"If you do, I'll know Gibbous Moon has answered by prayers." Carl replies softly.

"I'll come to your room in a little while."

Rose gives Carl a soft kiss, gets up, and heads out to John and Kate's room where she has been staying. As soon as the door closes behind her Carl jumps up and goes to his room. It is a mess. Carl starts rushing around, throwing his clothes in a pile in the closet, stuffing boxes of tools and other car stuff under the bed. He rushes to remake the bed. The sheets and blankets are new and still pretty clean. He runs to the bathroom for a quick shower, teeth brushing and is back in the room in fifteen minutes. A candle is lit and curtains drawn. Carl decides on gym shorts, no underwear, and a T-shirt. He crawls up on the bed, assumes a casual pose and attempts to act as if he is reading.

Soon there is a light knock at the door. Rose comes in. She is carrying a colorful bag from India containing a few necessities. "Hi" she whispers with a warm smile. "Hi" Carl whispers back. She crawls up on the bed and tumbles into his arms. They are both full of youthful desire. The feel of their bodies together at last takes their breath away. Carl is overwhelmed with lust, but is trying to be cool. Rose is an older, exotic, worldly woman and he doesn't want to blow it. He is nervous and self-conscious, but he thinks he is hiding it well.

They kiss for a while and then take off their clothes. He touches her naked body. She holds his hard cock firmly around the shaft. Just the feel of her hand on his cock makes him want to cum. Carl tries with all his might to remember the precise steps for changing the oil in the Alpha. She watches him as he concentrates on screwing in the oil filter without stripping the threads.

She has seen this control technique before. "You're really horny aren't you?" She asks with her hand still on his cock.

"Yeah, but it's Okay. Just give me a few minutes to get myself under control and I'll be alright."

"So, what are you thinking about?" she says with a curious smile.

No one has ever asked him that before. He isn't sure he should tell her. He hesitates.

"Come on, I'm curious" she says.

"Changing the oil in my car." Carl replies sheepishly. Rose starts to giggle and they both laugh out loud.

"Look, just let it go. I want you to cum as soon as you want." She says softly.

"Can you count in tenths of a second?" Carl asks.

"Yes I can." She replies.

She starts kissing him passionately and then on her way down to his cock she says, "Cum for me, I want to feel you cum right now. He watches her put his cock between her beautiful, succulent lips and 5.3 seconds later he cums in her warm mouth.

She holds him there for a long time, and then wipes her face with a towel that is hiding in her bag. She cuddles up to him. "Was it good? Do you feel better now?" "I'm sorry, I would have been alright if..." "Don't worry about it." She says, kissing him on the lips, then taking his hand and putting it on her breast, "The night is young." She assures him. "But you didn't answer me. Was it good? Do you feel better?"

"It was very good, and I feel a lot better."

"Great, let's go have some coffee and dessert."

She scrambles off the bed and he meekly follows. He can't believe what a pathetic asshole he is, what a fucking lame performance that was. What the fuck was he thinking? He told her, he admitted, that he was thinking about changing the oil on his car? What a fucking moron. Carl presumes it is over.

They put on their clothes and go back out to the living room. Sure enough, Kate is making fresh coffee and they walk in just as it finishes brewing.

Kate looks a little surprised. "Hi, how is it going?" she asks.

"Just getting warmed up." Rose says secretively and gives Carl a sexy wink.

"Cool" Kate says with wicked grin.

Carl is still feeling embarrassed, but Rose just helped him save face in front of Kate. He appreciates that, even if he still suspects he has blown it.

"We want some coffee, got enough?"

"Absolutely" Kate says.

They sit together on the couch and have coffee and talk to an interesting couple named Redwood and Savitre. They have just purchased a large parcel of land up the coast near Point Arena. It sounds like a beautiful place and they invite Carl and Rose to visit sometime. He is a PhD in Mathematics and she teaches Ti-Chi. The four of them hit it off. Carl talks to Redwood about astronomy, G. Spencer Brown and the concept of infinite series in mathematics. Rose talks to Savitre about her travels in Tibet and the Dali Lama. Savitre is determined to meet the Dali Lama someday. Carl is having such a good time he forgets his pathetic performance in the bedroom.

A few hours later Rose whispers into Carl's ear, "Let's go to bed." They say good night and head to Carl's room. Carl closes the door as Rose walks to the bed. She steps onto the single step that leads to the high bed, turns around to face him, slips the straps of her dress off her shoulders and lets it fall to her ankles. She stands naked, posed with one leg slightly, arms stretched out holding the edge of the bed. She is luscious and she is waiting for him.

Carl watches in an agony of delightful expectation, then comes to her and places his hands on her hips as she looks down and moves her hands under his shirt. Rose is giving him the full treatment and she enjoys it. She prides herself in the art of sex and seduction. Long ago she noticed a look Lauren Bacall gave Humphrey Bogart in Key Largo. It's a look she has used many times with great effect. In fact, she doesn't even think about it now, it just happens when the time is right.

Her head is slightly lowered as she looks upward into his eyes, a tiny knowing smile, a look that melts Carl's heart. They savor the moment.

Rose pulls the T-shirt up over Carl's head. He slips off his shorts as she pulls herself up onto the bed. He is right behind her and they tumble into each other's arms.

Both of their bodies are tan and thin and smooth. They marvel at how similar they are and how perfectly they fit. Exploring each other with soft hands they take their time, Carl feels focused and undistracted.

They pause while Carl crawls down to the end of the bed and lights candles. Rose pulls a couple towels and a large tube of lotion out of her bag. She pulls back the covers and lays a large towel on the bed. "Come lay down on your stomach."

Carl does as he is told. Rose kneels beside him, squeezing white coconut paste into her hand and working it between her warm palms until it liquefies. With a gentile motion, she rubs the fragrant oil into his back. It smells like coconuts, a scent that Carl will always associate with this sensual moment.

Firmly, expertly, she massages his back and shoulders. He closes his eyes and revels in her touch. She gets more oil and moves down to his calves and thighs, running her slippery fingers over his smooth ass, kneading, squeezing, and massaging him. She moves beside him as she rubs his back, leaning over to let her naked breasts touch his slippery back. "Roll over" she whispers. As he rolls over she starts with his legs, rubbing and kneading up to his thighs. She massages the inside of his thighs and runs her warm hands across his stomach. As she move closer Carl's cock becomes hard, so she gently glides her warm hand over it, then holds it firmly in her grip as it swells, gripping it with the slippery oil. Carl takes a deep breath and moans in response. Rose lays her warm body on top of his and kisses him, as her slippery hands move up over his stomach and chest. Placing her hands behind his neck Rose firmly massages, squeezing his tight muscles to the edge of pain. Carl sees stars. He is almost in a trance as she gently kisses his lips, her warm wet tongue touching his.

Rose moves down and takes him into her mouth. Carl swoons and moans. Using her hands and lips she strokes him, pulling him up and back. Carl opens his eyes and watches. She is on her knees, holding him with both hands, his cock in her mouth, her ass in air. He runs his hands along her smooth brown body and she responds by moving closer so he can see and touch every part of her.

She is more beautiful than he ever imagined, her arched back and tiny waist, small firm breasts with chocolate nipples, and perfectly smooth round ass. It's the ass of a thousand dreams. He glides his hands over her, exploring, admiring, sliding down the crack between the dark folds and into the wet pink fruit of her pussy. He feels her respond, spreading her legs wider as he gently touches her swollen clit with his wet fingers. He looks down to watch her sucking his cock. He leans up and pulls her to him. They kiss.

For Carl, kissing has always been a prelude to sex, but in this moment kissing is the most sensual of acts, her swollen wet lips and eager tongue, her breasts and body against his. He could stay this way forever. "You are so beautiful Rose. I want you so much." He whispers they hold each other. "Teach me how to please you. How can I please you?" he asks. "You already please me. You already have the magic in your touch. We will learn together." she whispers.

Rose moves down and again takes his cock in her hands and mouth, sucking and kissing, looking up at him for his approval. "Oh yes, that is so good. I love to watch you." With that she gives him a little smile, holding his bulging manhood against her beautiful face, posing for his pleasure. She rolls to her

side and with a hand on her knee spreads her legs as he lies back down. He can see all of her stretched out and open before him and he revels in the exquisite carnal ecstasy of the sight.

Putting one arm under her, Carl pulls her to him and buries his face in the ripe fruit of her pussy. He is driven with lust, kissing and licking, drinking in the scent of her sweet musk. She moans and moves her hips in response, whispering "Suck my clit. Touch it with your tongue." Carl moves his mouth forward, then gently sucks and licks. His tongue finds her swelling clitoris and as he touches it he can feel it becoming firmer. Rose gasps and makes a little high pitched sound of pleasure. "Yes, yes, like that." She grabs his hair and pulls him back then pushes him back down, her hips moving to meet him. "Oh, god, that is so good. You got it, you got it. Gently, then firmly, that's it."

Carl's hand is massaging her thigh and the cheek of her ass. She reaches around and guides his fingers to folds of her ass. "Gentle now." She says. "Just on the outside." She presses his fingers in a rhythmic motion. "Oh god." she swoons.

Carl spreads her open and moves his wet mouth to her, tickling with his tongue, making her wet and slippery, then moves back to her swollen clit. He rhythmically massages her, gently pressing and pushing with his fingers. One finger sometimes slips just inside, wiggling and tickling. She screams and moans moving her hips. He can tell she is close to orgasm, so he backs off.

Rose brings her legs together, his whole hand slides over the deep crevasse of her ass cheeks, with just the tips of his fingers still touching and tickling down into the folds. They lay on their sides, the swollen mound of her pussy and clit bulging from between her legs, as his she holds his horizontal member inside her mouth. Carl lightly licks and sucks, she humps to and from his face. She holds the swollen head of his cock perfectly still in her mouth while squeezing the hard shaft. They stay this way for a long time, in prolonged arousal.

Finally she spreads her legs and grabs him by the hair, holding him back making him look at her, knowing how much he wants her. "Do you want to make me cum now?" She asks.

"Oh yes, I want to feel you cum in my mouth. Let me make you cum." He says.

"Yes, yes, make me cum now, I want to cum."

Rose releases him and he takes her swollen mound into his mouth, letting his tongue work its magic as his fingers touch her slightly harder, delving slightly deeper. She dives back down to his cock, her body rhythmically moving in unison with his. She gasps and stops. For an instant she is fully open and relaxed. Carl pauses, prolonging her ecstasy, then dips his fingers deeper and presses her clit with his tongue as she cums. He can feel her convulsions, pulsating, hard and deep. She moans and gasps, quivering, until it slowly subsides. He holds her there motionless, barely touching her clit with his tongue until the last convulsion dies. Rose collapses onto the bed.

Carl gently releases her and comes on top and she willingly greets him into her arms. "Fuck me now." She whispers in his ear, as her lips meet his. His cock finds her, and she pulls him deep inside. He fucks her, pounding and thrusting, sweating, devouring. She wants to feel him hard and deep, to take it with lust and abandon. On and on he gives her his cock, sometimes slowing to lean above her waiting for her to pull him down and ask him for more. She pushes him away and quickly turns over,

"Take me this way now." she says. He slides inside and she swoons. "Oh god, I can feel you so good like this." She arches her back as he ponds her again from behind, watching his cock between that gorgeous ass. Gradually he slows down.

She pushes him aside and he rolls off her onto his back. "Now it's my turn she says." as she crawls on top. She leans forward and comes to him with sweet wet passionate kisses as she slowly moves, sliding him in and out. They stay this way for a long time, quietly kissing and cuddling, slowly fucking. Finally she sits up and leans back, grabbing his knees, her arms behind her. Rose raises her pelvis up and down and looks at him with a wicked smile. He watches the gorgeous woman he has dreamed of, he has lusted for, fucking him, showing him her pussy with his hard cock sliding in and out. "Do you like to watch me fucking you?" she asks, as if she doesn't already know the answer.

"You look so fucking hot like that."

"So you like me? You like to see my pussy."

"I love to see you, to touch you, to suck you."

"Oh god you sucked me off so fucking good' She says with a growl in her voice as she comes down hard on his cock in time with her words.

"I love to please you he says."

"Now I want to make you cum. Are you ready?" she says

"Only if you're ready, I'll fuck you as long as you want. We can stay this way until next week if you like."

She laughs "You foolish boy. I'm don't want to wait that long. I want to feel you cuming inside me now." She says.

"Let's try this." She slowly raises up, and as his hard cock slides out of her it makes a wet plops onto his stomach. They laugh. She turns around, straddling him, facing the other direction. She puts his cock back inside her then leans forward, looking back to see his response. He can see her beautiful ass and pussy now, his cock inside her, her arching back and impossibly tiny waist. There are two dimples just below the small of her back. Something about these dimples, the shape of her back, the way it comes down and becomes her ass. Something about those dimples totally turns him on. She starts fucking him now, rocking forward and back. Watching him watching her, knowing he knows she is watching him, and he knows she knows she knows he is watching her. "You like?" she asks.

"Oh yeah, you look so good, so fucking good"

"Now I want you to cum in me," she says still rhythmically rocking.

"Are you sure you want it." He teases.

"Oh yes, I want it. Shoot you're cum in me. I want it now. Right now. Give it to me now."

7.4 seconds later Carl explodes inside Rose as she watches with glee. She stops moving as he cums. She can feel him pulsating inside her. "What a hard cumer you are" she says.

As soon as the pulsations start to subside she quickly slides off, turns and takes his cock into her mouth. He grabs at her head afraid she will over stimulate him, but she carefully holds the head of his engorged cock inside her mouth while firmly squeezing his shaft. She can taste his last sweet drops of his cum.

Rose stays that way for a long time, his cock cradled in the warmth of her mouth. When Carl has completely relaxed, Rose lets him go, grabs a towel and wipes him off gently with one end, her face with the other and then her pussy. She moves up beside him, pulling up the warm covers and they drift asleep in each other's arms.

Early the next morning they wake up, sleepy and groggy. They cuddle and kiss. "Check this." out Carl says. He gets up on his knees in the cold morning air and opens the curtains. Light floods in as he

jumps back under the warm blankets. At first the light is blinding but quickly their eyes adjust and there before them is a stunning, panoramic view of the Tomales bay, with the coastal mountains in the distance, the water perfectly still. The fog clouds are just burning off and float in a defused light, patches of blue peaking through. The bed is right next to the window, literally inches away.

"It's stunning." She says.

"I spend hours here, reading and watching. I never get tired of it."

They spoon together, her in front and him behind marveling at the beauty of the world. The warmth of her body, the smoothness of her skin and the memories of the hot sex they had last night stirs Carl. His cock is hard again. She feels it against her and reaches around without saying a word and slips it inside her. They stay this way for a long time slowly fucking, feeling each other breath, watching the pelicans fly in flocks over the bay, skimming along the top of the water. She arches her back and Carl leans away so he can see those cute dimples he loves so much and his hard cock between her ass. She takes his index finger and with her finger on top licks it, then guides him to her clit. She shows him how to touch her, gently, softly, then firmly and back again. Soon he learns to do it himself and she lays back feeling his delicious cock inside her, gently, deeply, fucking her from behind, his fingers deftly touching her clit. She cums with a moaning, pulsating orgasm. Now she feels Carl letting himself go, shooting inside her just as the last pulsations of her own orgasm subside. He stays inside her for a long time, even after he has become soft, enjoying the wet warmth of her, smelling her neck and hearing her breath. They fall back into a deep sleep.

Carl and Rose don't get up until well after noon. While Carl is in the shower Rose is standing in the Kitchen drinking coffee with Kate. "So, how did it go last night?" Kate asks with a sideways glance.

"Dreamy. He is so tender and loving. Beautiful cock, great fuck, the boy is definitely talented." she says with a wistful smile and a deep sigh. Rose takes a sip of her coffee, holding the big mug with two hands, leaning against the counter.

"I knew he'd be good." Kate says, proud of herself for hooking them up. She wants Kate to stay. This is working out just right.

Rose continues, as she holds the warm mug close to her face, savoring the smell of fresh coffee. "All my life, I've been with so many older men. But with Carl I feel like I'm in High School, all kind of giddy and infatuated. It feels so, uncomplicated. Thanks for inviting me to stay. I would like to be with him. I need a change."

"Oh, I'm so glad. This is a great life here Rose, and I am looking forward to spending some time with you. It's going to be fun." She says, then comes over and gives Rose a hug.

"You smell like sex." Kate chuckles.

"Yeah" Rose says with a dreamy smile as she takes another sip of her coffee. She has been traveling for a long time. It seems like forever since she has had a place that felt like home. She loves the Tomales house and is feeling very good about Carl and herself. Rose knows how to live-in and enjoy the moment, and this moment is good, very good indeed.

Paul & Rose

Rose's relationships have almost always been with older men. They have been a great source of opportunity, adventure and learning for Rose. She likes successful men, but she only sleeps with the ones she honestly finds attractive. She likes dynamic men, and she would have to admit she likes the money and the opportunities they have brought her.

Rose just arrived from New York where she was visited her friend and lover Paul. Rose hooked up with Paul four years ago on a plane ride. He was flying his private plane from Phoenix to New York with a stop in Washington DC. He was glad to have the company. Paul and Rose hit it off right away. He was smart, witty, and good looking in a preppy sort of way. She was exotic, charming and beautiful. Rose resisted Paul's advances the first night they stayed in Washington. But the next night, after an afternoon of sightseeing and a pleasant dinner, they ended up sharing a room. Rose has been seeing Paul between adventures ever since.

Paul is a very successful businessman. When Rose visits Paul he always puts her up in a high-class hotel in Manhattan near the park. They go to fine restaurants, good plays and do side trips to quaint little bed and breakfasts around New England. He also buys her stylish clothes, the kind of clothes she needs for the up-scale places they tend to frequent. It's all great fun, but somehow it always seems about him, his needs and his ego.

The problem is Paul loves Rose. She genuinely interests him, her adventurousness, her concern about the poor in the third world countries where she has traveled, and the way she cares about his ideas more than his accomplishments. He likes to hear her stories and secretly wishes he had the courage to fly one way to Bangkok Thailand with no plans and no idea where the winds might take him. Paul tells her about how he once wanted to be a writer. About the stories he wrote in College. He has an idea for a novel and she is genuinely interested and encourages him to get back into writing. Maybe he will, he thinks to himself. She is so different from anyone he has ever met and he finds himself thinking about her at the oddest times and counting the days until she again comes back to visit.

But behind it all, is the high speed, high pressure world he lives in. He has a fancy house in the suburbs and a fancy wife to match, and Rose. Rose has never dared to hope that Paul would leave it all behind just for her. Well, maybe a few times.

Paul is a good lover, strong and active, sexy and sensitive. But Rose feels the distance, the distraction holding him back from true sexual abandonment. Paul loves Rose. He relishes sex with her. But they both know it's a love that will never pass the test of time.

When Rose and Paul are together this time she can sense a sadness. Paul knows she won't be calling him the next time she passes through New York. They have a great month together, though he is often called away for business. Rose never has trouble entertaining herself in Manhattan.

One day Paul looks at Rose and it hits him. He is afraid of losing her, afraid of losing that part of himself. Sometimes he has thoughts about just chucking it all. He thinks about how he and Rose could take his money and run away to some remote beach in Thailand or Bali and never come back. He knows it will never happen, but he loves the dream.

Sometimes Paul thinks about a Joni Mitchell song called "The Arraignment". Now the lyrics of that song haunt him.

You could have been more

Than a name on the door
On the thirty-third floor in the air
More than a credit card
Swimming pool in the backyard
While you still have the time
You could get away and find
A better life, you know the grind Is so ungrateful
Racing cars, whisky bars
No one cares who you really are
You're the keeper of the cards
Yes I know it gets hard
Keeping the wheels turning
And the wife she keeps the keys
She is so pleased to be
A part of the arrangement

"You have plenty of money." he says to himself. "It could last a lifetime with some discretion. Maybe I will start writing again, like I loved to do in College. I always did want to be a writer."

Paul thinks about the problems he is having at one of his divisions. There are always problems at the divisions. No matter how much you give, it's never enough. And the pay off, the hot cars, the nights on the town the fancy dinners, the "whisky bars," they all seem boring to him now. He just paid thousands of dollars for a wrist watch. He knew it was a rip-off, but he didn't care. It gave him a little thrill. But what surprised him was how fast that ridiculously expensive watch lost its luster. It seems like the toys just get more and more expensive and the payoff just gets smaller and smaller.

And all those supposed friends that his wife Jen loves to see at parties? The truth is they bore the hell out of him. To them he is just the job that he does, the image.

Paul looks at his expensive watch. He has an important meeting in a couple hours, he can't miss that. It's time to wrap this up.

"You fool, you still love your wife" he says to himself. How could he even think of leaving her, for what reason? He thinks of Jen, her perfect hair and immaculate skin. He thinks of her obsession with decorating the house, the travertine floors and antique furniture. It is a beautiful place, a show place. She has no complaints, as long as he keeps bringing home the money.

He looks at Rose and she looks back at him with an open smile and wonders "what is he thinking about? Probably some problem at work."

When Rose tells Paul she wants to go back to school to become a nurse, he thinks it is a great idea. He rambles on and on encouraging her to find something she wants to do. "You're going to want to settle down one of these days Rose." He says. "God knows I love you as the free spirit you are, but you're a woman and your time will come."

When Rose leaves, as usual Paul slips her a check. Later when she looks at it she is surprised to see that it's for ten thousand dollars. One the bottom he has written, "For school."

Later, as Paul walks to the elevator of his office building, he can't get that Joni Mitchell song out of his mind. "You could have been more."

As the elevator door closes he feels like he is locked in a coffin. "You could have been more." He steps of the elevator and greets his secretary with a smile and goes to his office and closed the door. He feels old and tired as he sits down in his plush executive chair and swivels to look out the window at a spectacular view of the New York skyline. He feels as if it's years in the future, as if he is lying by himself in some lonely room. He closes his eyes. "You could have been more. You could have been more. You could have been more."

Carl & Rose

The next month is a blur of great sex, fun parties, sailing on the bay, exhilarating hikes and days at the beach. Rose cautions Carl that she plans to stay only for the summer. That he should not get too attached. These little talks are directed as much at herself as they are at him. Her feelings for Carl surprise her. None of this seems to effect Carl. He is madly in love with Rose and he makes no pretence whatsoever at holding back. Maybe it's because has never had a heart broken, like Rose. And maybe, this unrestrained love is why Rose is so surprisingly enamored by him. However, Rose is a woman of the world and she knows how to be cautious with her emotions, how to hold back just enough so she won't be crushed when it comes to an inevitable end.

Sometimes Carl and Rose take the Alpha up to Mt. Vision to watch the sunset. The road up the mountain is tight and windy, well paved, with banked turns. It is usually deserted on weekdays when the tourists aren't around. Carl powers the Alpha up through the turns, engine wailing, tires squealing, Rose screaming with delight. Carl thinks, anyone else would be scared shitless but Rose is fearless.

At the top of the mountain they park at a favorite little turn out, take a blanket and walk down a tiny path, around the corner to a private spot with a commanding view. Drakes Bay curves in a sandy arc to the rocky black outline of the Point Reyes peninsula, the wide Pacific Ocean starches out to infinity and beyond. Rose has on a long, full, white cotton skirt and no underwear. With Carl sitting on the blanket, Rose comes on top and they make love while sitting up and watching the sun set. With a sky of bright oranges and pale blues, the sun setting over an endless blue and gold ocean, a light blue dome of the sky fading to stars above and darkness behind, and the first bright stars and planets sparkling like cut diamonds, Carl touches Rose in that special way she has taught him until she cums in a great panting orgasm and to her delight he joins her. Then they cuddle and drift to sleep, side-by-side in the fading light.

One day they stop for lunch while hiking the Bear Valley Trail to Arch Rock and Wildcat Beach. Rose asks Carl how he got that little scar above his left eyebrow. Carl is surprised and taken back by the question. "Oh, well, that's a long story."

Rose senses this is something Carl is reluctant to talk about. Carl takes another slice of cheese and nibbles on it as he leans against a driftwood log. Wildcat Beach is beautiful and deserted. It is a sunny day, but a little bit windy.

Finally Carl responds. "Well, I haven't really talked about it much, but I had a pretty rough time back in Kansas before I came to California." Carl proceeds to tell Rose the whole story of how he was run out of Wellsville. He is surprised at himself for being so forthcoming about what a coward he felt was. "So, that's the story. I guess you could say I ran away from my problems. It may seem like I was kind of a wimp, but it wasn't that easy to stand up to that kind of violence. I have to admit, I was really scared."

Rose is left a little teary eyed by his story and is surprised when he calls himself a wimp. "What do mean, you did the right thing. You tried to let the people know how wrong this all was. But it would have been crazy to continue living there under those circumstances. On the contrary, it took more courage to move on. And look at where you are now. I don't think there is any doubt you made the right decision to leave."

Carl looks around himself at the beautiful beach. He thinks about all the great things that had happened since he came to California. He especially thinks about his love for Rose.

Carl laughs at himself for still feeling guilt and embarrassment over what happened. "I guess you're right. Look at this beautiful beach. This definitely beats the hell out of Wellsville." Carl gives Rose a kiss on the lips. "Thank you, your right, it was the right decision to leave. Wellsville sucks."

"No shit" Rose says, and they both laugh.

Call it a motherly instinct. Call it the sympathy vote, but the story touches Rose and her heart aches to think of Carl being terrorized and brutalized like that. She leans over and kisses him on that small scar above his left eyebrow. "That's all far, away now and I love this little scar. It makes you look like a gangster and that kind of turns me on" she says, moving to kiss his lips.

Carl and Rose love to sail. Even on windy days, especially on windy days. The cove is fairly calm when they untie from the mooring, but when they come around the point, the full force of the wind ripping down the length of the bay and hits them. The boat heels over and they are off and running. It is a seaworthy and sturdy little boat, but it is a boat that can easily go over in a strong breeze and the water in the bay is cold. It feels like real danger and it is. They eat it up. Both of them sit on the high side of the boat, hanging by their toes, hiking out as far as possible. With Carl on the tiller and Rose on the jib, they rip back and forth across the bay. After a while they switch positions and Rose takes the tiller. She is already an experienced sailor and Carl loves her confidence and adventurous nature. Eventually they find a quiet cove and beach the boat. They stroll on the beach collecting shells then hike up the hill to enjoy the view.

At a spot not far from where Carl proclaimed his undying love for Gibbous Moon, they find a private spot to make love. Gibbous Moon looks down from the heavens and can see Carl's naked butt, well tanned with no tan line, bouncing up and down, as Rose spreads her legs and wraps her arms around him, making high pitched cat like sounds of desire and ecstasy.

If Gibbous Moon is jealous she doesn't show it. After all, she has the love of the ocean, and of the night and day to satisfy her needs, and can't be bothered coming down from the heavens just to fuck some horny young man, no matter how sincere his love and devotion. No, Gibbous Moon is in fact glad to see Rose taking the responsibility of quenching Carl Lee's desires, and from where Gibbous Moon is standing it looks as if Rose is doing quite a good job of it.

((At this point you are probably be saying to yourself, "God damn, Carl and Rose are fucking again? Those two sure have a lot of sex." And you would be correct, they do have a lot of sex. That is the point. If you put two healthy and attractive young lovers together in a beautiful paradise, don't burden them with heavy responsibility or cultural and religious hang ups, and the odds are they will have frequent and fantastic sex.

Great sex is not just an act of human affirmation, it is and act of political defiance. In fact, one thing that defines a straight, conservative, uptight, war mongering culture is its hatred of good sex. Just good look at those fat-ass, pasty faced, pig politicians, preachers, priests and other patrolman. You can see they haven't had a good fuck in decades, if ever. They, and the religions and philosophies they cling to, despise sex, declare it evil, vile and filthy. Those who enjoy sex are fornicators, sluts, whores and heretics. They believe sexual energy should be suppressed and channeled into more productive endeavors like religion, war, and product advertising. They love to point out the evils of sex, pregnancy, disease and abortion, but never talk about the life affirming joy of sex.

What kind of fucked up philosophy worships a virgin as the mother of the son of god? Didn't Mary and Joseph ever fuck? Didn't Mary ever give Joseph a nice little blow job at the end of a hard days work,

when he was really horny and needed a little tender loving care? God made her bear his child but he couldn't spare her a few orgasms? Why are priests and nuns forced to be celibate? Sex is only allowed for procreation? And forget about birth control, we all know where that leads.

But not just right wing Christians, fundamentalist Islam wins the prize as the most sexually fucked up religion. What kind of sick, perverted, hateful, and despicable religion would force women to hide themselves from head to toe in a burka? Is it god's will to stone people to death for adultery, throw acid in the faces of young girls who want to go to school, or mutilate a woman's clitoris?

Ball slapping, pussy sucking, cum swallowing, screaming, mutually orgasmic sex is one of the most profound, liberating and politically significant acts possible. Fuck the up-tight religious fanatics and their politically conservative brethren. Sex and romance is good. Go do it.))

Rose Chooses the Risk

Rose had been loved before, or at least desired in ways men liked to call love. She knew the difference, though it had taken years to learn it. Desire had a heat that could make even intelligent men stupid. Love was quieter and much more dangerous. Desire wanted an evening, a hotel room, a story to remember in old age. Love wanted explanation. Love wanted promises. Love started asking what came next.

Paul had loved her in the way a married man could love something that did not threaten the architecture of his life. He loved her in borrowed rooms, between meetings, in restaurants where the waiters knew not to ask questions. He loved her with money, good wine, theater tickets, expensive dresses, and that tired, haunted look men get when they know they are not brave enough to become the person they once imagined. Rose had not despised him for that. She had been fond of him, even tender. But she had learned that a man could adore you and still leave you exactly where he found you.

Carl was different, and that made him more dangerous.

He had no architecture. No wife, no office, no children, no reputation worth defending. He loved like someone running downhill with his arms out, trusting the world not to break his fall. It frightened her. Men with nothing to lose could be careless. Boys could mistake hunger for devotion. But Carl was not only hungry. That was the problem. He listened.

When she talked about India, he did not merely wait for the exotic parts. When she talked about nursing, he asked what kind of work she wanted to do. When she talked about New Orleans, about passing and not passing, about being looked at differently depending on the room and the light and the assumptions of strangers, he did not try to solve it or turn it into a clever speech. He just watched her carefully, as if every word mattered.

That was harder to resist than beauty. Harder than his body, his sweetness, his eager hands. Rose had known good looking men. She had known skillful men. She had known men with airplanes and sailboats and credit cards and houses with gates. But Carl gave her something she had not expected from anyone, certainly not from an eighteen year old boy from Kansas. He gave her the feeling that she was not an ornament in his adventure. She was a country he wanted to learn.

Still, she told herself to be careful.

She would sit on the edge of his bed in the morning, looking out at Tomales Bay while Carl slept with one arm thrown across the sheets, his face softened by dreams. In sleep, he looked younger. Almost too young. The bruises had faded, but she could still see the place where the world had entered him violently and left a mark. He thought California had saved him. He thought love might finish the job.

Rose knew better. Nothing finished the job.

She had seen too much of the world to believe in clean rescue. Beauty did not erase damage. Sex did not cure loneliness. A house full of laughter could still be surrounded by history, and history always found the door. But maybe love did not have to cure anything. Maybe it only had to stand beside the wound without turning away.

That thought troubled her.

It meant she was already more involved than she had planned.

Kate noticed, of course. Kate noticed everything.

"You're staring at him again," she said one morning in the kitchen.

Rose turned from the window. Carl was outside with Jack, arguing over something on the boat, both of them waving their arms as if civilization depended on rope.

“I am not.”

Kate smiled. “Sure.”

“He’s too young.”

“Yes.”

“He’s going to get hurt.”

“Yes.”

“So am I.”

“Probably.”

Rose shook her head and laughed, but it came out softer than she intended.

Kate poured coffee into two mugs. “That never stopped you before.”

Rose took the mug and looked back out the window. Carl had dropped something into the canoe and was now swearing while Jack laughed at him.

“No,” she said. “But this feels different.”

Kate did not tease her then.

Rose hated that most of all.

PART FIVE: BERKELEY

Peace Movement History

Carl and Rose are coming from the cove where they have been working on the boat when Kate greets them at the door. "Hey, there is a big war protest in Berkeley tomorrow. Do you guys want to go? John and I are driving in tomorrow morning. It should be fun, as long as it doesn't get too crazy."

"I haven't done very many protests." Says Rose.

"I went to a couple at KU, but they were pretty mellow, not that many people showed up." Carl says.

"Well you can bet there will be a lot of people at this one. This is Berkeley. This is the real thing."

Kate says.

"Yeah, I would love to go." Carl says, and then turns to Rose. "What do you think? Want to go?"

"Yeah, that sounds fun. Besides I am sick of this stupid war. I want to do my part to end it."

"All right, that's the spirit." Says Kate. "Plus, you will get a chance to meet my friend Drew. He's very active in the peace movement."

They leave early the next morning. During the drive Kate tells Carl and Rose the history of the peace movement in Berkeley.

"It all started in May 1960 when a group of Berkeley students organized a demonstration against the House Un-American Activities Committee which was meeting at San Francisco city hall. As usual the Committee was looking for more of those elusive "communists". They had been claiming that commies were lurking in every corner since the Joseph McCarthy hysteria. Of course, anyone whose political views were slightly left of center was a suspect. But the mood in the country had changed by 1960 and this group of students refused to go back to the McCarthyism of the fifties without a fight.

The students were waiting outside to get into the hearing when police suddenly turned on them with fire hoses and began to dragging them out of the building. The event might have just been forgotten, but the Committee decided to make a film depicting the students as part of a vast communist conspiracy. This trumped up anti-communist message may have played well in Omaha, but for the educated students who had watched the disgraceful McCarthy hearings, it was just another flagrantly absurd piece of political propaganda.

When the film was subsequently shown around the country it had the effect of recruiting even more left leaning students to the University at Berkeley. When they saw how willing the students were to confront the oppressive committee, it seemed like Berkeley was the place for political activists to be.

It's important to know that the whole vast "communist conspiracy" thing is a complete fraud. Sure, the Soviets have spies in the US, but it's absurd to think that the labor movement, the civil rights movement, the peace movement, the media and the universities were all inspired and run by some secret communist conspiracy. It's all a transparent ruse to demonize the political left. Not one shred of credible evidence has ever been produced to prove any such conspiracy exists.

By the early sixties the university system was already a huge industry. Government and corporations were depending on it to turn out highly trained and knowledgeable workers. In fact the whole university system was designed like a knowledge factory and Berkeley was the most prestigious university in the whole California system.

An organization called SLATE was created by left leaning students to run candidates in the student elections. These were the idealistic days of Martin Luther King and John Kennedy and more than any other cause the civil rights movement became the foundation of the movement.

But 'social issues' was not the business that the University was in. They discounted the importance of the civil rights movement to the students and the support that student organizations had on campus. They wanted to limit the discussion of issues like civil rights and keep them off the campus.

By now a lot of the more politically active students were looking for a way to legitimize left leaning issues, so they started a protest campaign against businesses in the Bay Area that discriminated in hiring. They primarily targeted the hotel industry in San Francisco which was notoriously discriminatory against blacks.

They set up a picket line around the Sheraton Palace hotel and then even marched through the lobby. The Sheraton is one of the most elegant and prestigious hotels in the country.

Well, all hell broke loose and finally the police came. The students were dragged out and arrested. Still, it was a huge and costly disruption to the hotel and bad publicity as well.

However, negotiations between student leaders and the hotel resulted in an agreement with the whole local hotel industry. They agreed to stop discriminatory practices and even agreed to hire minorities in management. It was an unbelievable victory for the students and showed that the movement could really have an effect.

"Are you guys getting board yet?" says Kate. "If you want you can just take a nap until we get to Berkeley. You don't really need to know the history of the anti-war movement if you don't mind being an ignoramus."

"No, go ahead. We're stuck in this car and can't escape, so what other choice do we have? Go ahead, ramble on." Rose says.

So the students won, but the business community was pissed. They saw the student movement as a threat. So they started putting pressure on the University to reign in the students.

In 1963 the University decides to ban tables in the commons area that students used to recruit support among other students. These recruiting Tables have been traditionally allowed and now they are being banned them from University property. But, it turns out that not only are liberal students banned from setting up tables, all student organizations are banned. In other words the University is banning all political action on campus. The students considered this an attempt to limit their freedom of speech and everybody is angry, left, right and between.

So the students defie the order and set up tables anyway. Next thing you know an administrator comes out and gives citations to four of students working the tables. They are facing suspension. Five hundred students gather in protest that afternoon.

The next morning, the tables are back. This time an administration official comes and confronts one of the table workers, the student refuses to identify himself. The administrator says if he won't prove he is a student then he is trespassing and the administrator has him arrested.

By now hundreds of students are gathered around and everybody is mad about the student's arrest. When the police load him into a police car and attempt to leave hundreds of angry students surround them. It is a stalemate, the police car is trapped and it begins one of the most bazaar and unique events in American democracy.

Soon A microphone is rigged up and the students are taking turns standing on top of the police car and voicing their opinions. The students are all careful to take off their shoes and not damage the police car. As the cops stand by, and the arrested student sits in the back seat, hundreds of students take turns giving three minutes speeches. Even some of the fraternity guys who came to jeer the proceeding were

brought up to speak. It is a huge protest, but no one from the administration shows up to explain their position. There are as many as six-thousand people, mostly students. They spend an amazing thirty-two hours in this stalemate. The arrested student is still in the back seat of the trapped police car.

Meanwhile, negotiations with the administration produce an agreement, to set up a committee to renegotiate the regulations. It looks like a victory for the students, so everybody goes home.

For the student community this whole issue has now become a serious commitment to the principal of free speech. Plus, it ends up being a huge social happening. Everybody is talking about it and popular support is overwhelming.

During the negotiations the university blocks every attempt to change the policy. The main student leader is Mario Savio, an articulate, charismatic philosophy major. He soon becomes widely admired by everybody on campus.

The administration is totally evasive and ineffective. What's worse, they start resorting to character assassination, describing the students as a bearded, unwashed, lunatic, fringe. This was a blatant mischaracterization and may have played well to the media and the country at large, but it did not set well with the students. What's amazing about this characterization is when you view film footage of the events, the students look like they just stepped off the set of the Ozzie and Harriet show. They are all totally clean-cut and middle class. But this is just the beginning of a tactic that the political right will use from now on. They never want to talk about the issues, they prefer to demonize and lie about the opposition. The media picks one scruffy guy out of the crowd and makes him the representative. They claim we are all immoral, which by their standards may be true, but in a good way." They all laugh.

Anyway, these are affluent and privileged kids from all across America. Only the most elite students can get into Berkeley and yet they start to see themselves as an oppressed class. Soon they have daily gatherings with musicians like Joan Baez and other popular speakers. It all becomes a deeply meaningful experience, an issue that thousands of students identify with all over the country.

Finally the administration agrees to let tables to be set up on campus, but not for the advocacy of any supposed outside issues. This would exclude civil rights, Vietnam or any of the other pressing social issues of interest to students. It was a totally unacceptable decision to the students. But then, just as the decision is still being debated, the university expels the original students who were cited. By now these students have become minor celebrities and this creates a whole new sense of outrage within the student body.

It is at this point that Mario Savio delivered his now famous speech. It was inspiring, it was profound and it was the beginning of a massive protest. The students took over Sproul Hall."

"I know that speech." Carl says.

"Cool. You probably already know all this stuff." Says Kate

"I've read about some of it." Carl says.

Rose jumps in. "Well I don't know about it. I've heard about it a little bit, but I think it's interesting. Go on."

"Yeah, it's good Kate, keep talking." Carl adds.

"Well anyway, the protest at Sproul Hall is just a peaceful sit in demonstration, but it turns into a total party atmosphere. Again, when you look at the images of the students they were amazingly clean-cut and middle class. The solidarity among the students, both inside and outside the hall is amazing. Finally the police come, and the students are dragged out and arrested, but it turns out that this new

escalation is a tremendous inspiration for further resistance. The whole University is in chaos. It creates a massive collapse of authority. The administration is not only despised by the students, but the faculty and the outside community is disgusted with their handling of the situation as well.

So, as a last desperate attempt to regain some credibility, the administration organizes an event at the Greek Theatre. Thousands show up. The administration starts off by demanding that the students give them fifty minutes of complete silence, which the students do. However the condescending speeches of administration speakers are an insult. The students are not impressed. When the fifty minutes is up, Mario Savio, the widely recognized student leader, walks on stage to offer the student's position. As he steps to the podium the campus police grabbed him from behind and dragged him off the stage. The students are outraged, there is pandemonium. It is a complete political disaster for the administration.

At this point, the university faculty finally rebels against the administration and come down soundly on the side of the students. The students win, the tables are allowed. All looks well.

So, several thousand students gather at a peaceful victory celebration the next day. The cops allow the students to come onto the campus, but they won't allow them to leave. Suddenly, helicopters fly over the crowd and sprayed the students with teargas and nausea gas. People are screaming, choking, vomiting, and trying to run away, but the cops won't let anybody out. It is a blatant and violent payback attack on the students and it is the end of any respect for authority at the university. A whole generation of student activists is born.

As far as how this all played to the outside world, the media was careful to portray the students as an unwashed, lunatic, fringe. In fact the student protestors were mostly clean-cut and upper middle class and generally supported by the vast majority of the student body. They said the students were alienated and cynical. But the truth is the exact opposite. It was an idealistic commitment to the American principals of freedom, democracy and fair play that motivated the students. These were the lessons they learned all through school and now they were shocked to see the lies, distortions and vicious tactics of an America they once respected. The knowledge factories were finding out that when it comes to people, it's not so easy to stamp out a complacent and obedient product like a part in a machine. But, it was soon to become even worse.

Of course, all this is over what was really a very simple principal of freedom of speech, but to the government and the business community it was a matter of authority and a backlash of outrage was rising. Gradually the political issue switches to the war in Vietnam, but now the government is beginning to push back.

There is another dark cloud hanging over all of this, the prospect of the nuclear annihilation of the whole world. By now the US and the Soviets have thousands of nuclear missiles aimed at each other. The Cuban missile crises of 1962, was the most dangerous moment in history. The world came within a hair's breath of total destruction. If it wasn't for the leadership of Kennedy, who faced down the Soviets and restrained the US military who wanted to initiate a preemptive nuclear attack on Russia, none of us would probably be alive today. Not only is humanity and civilization at stake, but environmental disaster as well. This sword of Damocles has a profound effect on the psyche of the world and its youth.

Then along comes Vietnam. For any reasonably well read person it is completely obvious that the Vietnam War is a disaster. Thousands of young Americans are dying and many more thousands of Vietnamese are being slaughtered. The Gulf of Tonkin incident, which was the excuse for entering the war, is most likely a fraud. The puppet regime the US is supporting is a disgrace. And, the supposed

"Domino Theory" is absurd. The Domino Theory in particular is just another paranoid fantasy perpetrated by the anti-communist conspiracy conservatives to justify America's flagrant aggression. Anyone with any understanding of the local history of Vietnam knows it is ridiculous. The Vietnamese have been fighting the Chinese for centuries. Ho Che Min is a national hero from World War Two. There is no credible evidence that this is anything more than a determined attempt by the Vietnamese to get all foreigners the fuck out of their country.

Of no small significance, the students themselves are all subject to being involuntarily drafted into the military and sent to fight in Vietnam. Everybody knows someone who has been killed, maimed or terrorized by their involvement in the war. The Vietnam War has quickly become the issue of the day.

To protest the war, a group of students decides to march on the Oakland induction center. As they approached the border of the city they are turned away by the Oakland police. The next day, an even larger march is organized, but it is again turned away by the police. This time the police let the Hells Angels attack the protestors. The Hells Angels had decided that the protestors are all traitors. Their leader Sonny Barger later gives a bazaar and incoherent announcement and then volunteers the Hells Angels for service as a special forces unit in Vietnam. Apparently the Army isn't interested.

A month later an even bigger march finally makes it into Oakland. But all these attempts to close the induction center are mostly ineffective and the destruction of property ends up alienating the local community. It's all pretty much a waste of time except for the publicity.

However, the consensus supporting the war in the US is gradually being broken. How much the demonstrations have contributed to this change of heart is debatable. However, what is becoming obvious is the wide spread antipathy of the American public to the protestors.

When Ronald Reagan ran for governor in 1966, he made a point of pandering to the general outrage against the student protestors. He cited ridiculous descriptions of the students to prove how immoral and despicable they were. Again it is easy, but effective character assassination designed to take advantage of the beginning of the cultural backlash. Of course, millions of young people are not impressed.

By now Hippie culture is flourishing. Drugs are becoming common place. Turn on, tune in and drop out is the popular mantra. The hippie movement is bigger than either the anti war or civil rights movement. It is a major rejection of the entire traditional structure of American society. Young people are dropping out of the main stream and experimenting with a variety of alternative life styles. Even though many of the hippies are not that political, it's the protest movement that is the foundation of the anti-establishment backlash. War, racism and corruption in America are so blatantly obvious and unfair that it starts a widespread questioning of the entire culture.

The establishment and the older generation are baffled. Why would the youth of America want to reject all the great things that American society has to offer, that their parents have worked so hard to create? Many if not most of the young rebels come from middle and upper middle class families. US culture is reveling in its materialism, but the hippies didn't seem to care about wealth and power. They are looking for personal experience and enlightenment. They wanted more than a house in the suburbs. Many have lived that life and have seen the cracks in the facade, especially for women and minorities, or for anyone else who happens to be too different.

Initially there is a separation between the political left and the counter culture. Inevitably they ended up bonding together. It's a natural affinity. Some of the hippies are naive to think that music and love will change the world and stop the war, but the political activists are equally naive to think that America

is ready for armed revolution. But, it is obvious they are both becoming alienated from the rest of main stream American culture.

As veterans come back from the war with horrendous stories and ready to rebel, the movement escalates to a more aggressive phase. By October 1967 the peace movement is changing from protest to resistance. There is a feeling that the current strategy is not working, as the war continues to escalate. The movement is determined to make the government pay a price if they continued the war.

This time the protestors intended to shut down the Oakland induction center. They are ready for a fight. The police are ready as well. The protestors fragment as the police break their ranks and chase them through the streets. The bus loads of recruits continued to come and the protestors are powerless to stop them.

A week later the demonstrators come back, bigger and stronger this time. The riot happens as planned. Wearing motorcycle helmets and hard hats the students surge against the police and push them back. It is bloody and violent. The students give Nazi Salutes, mocking the police. Finally they succeeded in closing down the draft induction center, even if temporarily. The message is clear, 'if you continue this war the price you will pay will be chaos in the streets'. The protestors are emboldened, but the reality is they will never really have the power to violently confront the system. They are only glue in the keyhole. The confrontations may seem like a victory, but the peace movement is leaving the rest of the country behind.

Everything changes after the unexpected and bold attack by Viet Cong called the Tet Offensive, in January 1968. It now becomes obvious to almost everyone that the government's rosy depiction of the war was a lie. The Vietnam War is a growing disaster. When American generals ask Johnson to commit a million more men, J Edgar Hoover tells him that he cannot guarantee the internal security of the country. If he tries to draft that many more men, there is bound to be open rebellion in the streets. As much as the establishment denies it, the war resistance movement has become a major factor.

1968 is a turning point in America. The impact of the Tet Offensive ended the political career of Lyndon Johnson. By winning the California primary Robert Kennedy was almost assuredly going to be the next president. He was widely supported by young America and his establishment and Democratic Party connections and credentials would give him a huge advantage in the general election. With his position against the war it seems that the youth movement is bound to have a lasting effect on both the culture and the politics of America. Those dreams start to collapse with the assassination of Martin Luther King on April 4th. Rioting erupts across America, as a non-violent solution to the country's racial problems seems to have turned into a nightmare. The new generation's main stream political aspirations are further shattered with Robert Kennedy's assassinating only two months later.

The Democratic convention in Chicago turns into a blood bath as Mayor Daley's police brutalize protestors who are determined to ridicule the political process by nominating a pig for president. Hubert Humphrey, who supports the war loses the left and is soundly defeated by Richard Nixon. The Democrats are a basket case at this point.

1968 is also a turning point for civil rights movement. There has been rioting over the last few years and now the resistance is starting to become even more confrontational. The Black Panthers in Oakland decide it is time to pick up guns and declare Black Power. The Panthers are just a small time organization with virtually no budget, but they receive tons of international media attention. Their original concern is police violence in Oakland.

They are completely crazy. They followed the police around with car loads of guys with guns. At that time, it is legal to carry a gun if it's not concealed or loaded. The Panthers say straight out that "Niggers with guns" is meant to put the fear in the white middle class. They certainly succeed and it also got a huge amount of media attention.

They even march on the California capital in Sacramento to oppose a bill making it illegal to carry guns in public. Finally they attempted to carry guns inside the capital building and were arrested for conspiracy.

Predictably, a shootout ends with a dead cop and Huey Newton arrested and charged with murder. Of course Huey Newton claims he shot the cop in self-defense, which is probably true. It's no secret that the police are out to get the Panthers.

The white radical left is fascinated by the Panthers. The Panthers capture their imagination, because they are confronting the power structure in a way no one has ever dreamed.

Martin Luther king is assassinated, and two days later Bobby Hutton is killed and Eldridge cleaver is injured in another shoot out. For the Panthers the guns, which got them so much media become their nemesis. The police are out to get them wherever they go, and in the end they do.

Unfortunately, the Panthers have influenced the hard core resistance into believing that violent confrontation is the only approach that can work. They are convinced that revolution is imminent."

Carl jumps in. "The reality is that the rest of America is nowhere near supporting a revolution. In fact, America has a growing hard core resistance to the movement."

"It's a misconception that's easy to understand. There are various types of resistance movements forming all over the world. It seemed like revolution is in the air everywhere, from Prague Spring in the east, to the anti war movement in the west. It looks like it is all coming apart. The world is in chaos, undergoing tremendous political and cultural change."

"That's right; I just came back from Paris." Rose says. "The students are fighting a conservative and repressive government that has had the same President since 1959. What is amazing is the demand for change in both soviet controlled Europe and in Western Europe. Much of it is inspired by what is happening right here in America and Berkeley."

Kate continues. "Unfortunately, there is a huge backlash developing. The establishment is not going to just sit back and watch a rag tag bunch of College kids take over the world. The more militant the demonstrators get the more militant the response. The peace movement is fracturing. The more moderate political leaders and workers are all dropping out.

What we have is polarization on many different levels. First, there is the original, and now fairly moderate liberal political movement for civil rights and against the war. Now the Weathermen and the Black Panthers have become radically violent and confrontational. Plus the Hippies who are all about personal growth and development, but seem to be fairly ineffective politically.

In opposition we have the government which is more than willing to meet violence with violence, but ultimately is influenced by public opinion, hopefully. In addition there are the right wing and Christian backlash groups whose primary effect is to radicalize the general population by demonizing the left. And finally, the wealthy elite who intend to protect their interest by using the radical right to influence the public and the government to reign in the rebellious population.

Welcome to 1969. It's a crazy time to be alive."

Rose jumps in. "I would like to bring up another factor, all the purely social change that is happening. The best example is the women's movement.

Women are forming a sisterhood with other women all over this country. In the existing society even the men in the Peace Movement resisted putting women in important rolls. Now women are demanding equal jobs, equal pay, daycare and personal respect. The long term effect of the women's movement could be tremendous, because it brings the revolution home, into the kitchen and the bedroom. The Cultural Revolution is multi faceted and makes changes in all dimensions of life.

Beyond Women's Rights, we have gay rights and the environment. Even the changes happening in music and art are profound and significant.

The war is horrible and it's genocidal in scope. But the long term effect of the Cultural Revolution may in the end be even more profound."

"You are so cool" Carl says and tries to give Rose a kiss.

"Get back you chauvinist pig."

Carl cringes in pretend terror. "Okay, I give up. You can get on top." Rose slaps him and they all laugh.

Berkeley

They cross the San Rafael, Richmond Bridge and take the College Avenue Exit. As they go down College Avenue toward the University the world changes. Long hairs and freaks are everywhere. This is Berkeley, 1969.

The peace rally is at Peoples Park. Kate tells them this park was just built by the community on University property, but that is all she knows about it. The rally is in the park and that is where they are supposed to meet her friend Drew.

As they get closer the streets are jammed. They head down a side street to park. As they walk to the rally Carl is struck by the variety of people, from hip well dressed college students, to down-and-out street people. Some have a hard edged biker look and many are tie-dyed flower children. It is a wonderfully crazy scene.

There are three or four hundred people at the rally, which is at one end of the park. A flat bed truck is set up on the street as a stage and a long haired guy is speaking. Some of the audience is near the stage, but many of the people are spread throughout the park, lying on the grass, talking in groups, playing guitar and eating.

They gradually make their way through the crowd to the stage where Kate sees her friend.

"Hi Drew."

"Hi Kate. Its great to see you." Drew says, as they hug each other. Drew greets Jack. "Good to see you man"

Kate introduces Carl and Rose.

"Welcome to People's Park. This place didn't exist three weeks ago." Drew says.

"Yeah, I was wondering what was going on. When did all this happen?" Kate asks.

"It's an interesting story. A year ago this was a bunch of run down houses. The University bought it, condemned the houses and tore them down. They eventually want to build dorms or a soccer field or something. Anyway, the lot has been vacant for months, just a muddy, junk strewn, eyesore. The neighbors kept bitching at the university to clean it up.

So finally this guy who owns a dress shop around the corner comes up with the idea of making a Peoples Park. He gets a small group of people together and a couple hundred bucks and they lays down some sod in one corner. The next thing you know the free press picks it up and the hundreds of people are down here turning this mud hole into a park. They got the environmental design students working out the landscaping plans, people donating materials and equipment, the whole community helping. It was amazing, you should have seen it. There were sorority girls carrying big old muddy rolls of sod, hippies digging trenches, grand mothers planting flowers. It was chaos and funny as hell to watch, but sure enough, they created this beautiful park." He spreads his arms out "What do you think?"

They look out over the once vacant lot and had to admit, it's a beautiful park. There is a wide lawn bordered by trees, a curving sidewalk, a playground with a swing set and a sandbox. It's a typical park and at the moment it is packed with people enjoying a beautiful day.

Jack ruins the peace and love moment by asking, "Yeah, but you said the university owns the property. I bet they aren't too thrilled about all this."

Drew laughs. "Well, no, they're not. Frankly, I and most of the political types thought it was a stupid idea, just another one of those hippie utopian things. We thought we should be concentrating on stopping

the war, building a People's Park seems irrelevant. But now, even I have to admit, it's an amazing concept and it has totally captured the imagination of the entire community. Even the straight people support it, though there has been some complaints about late night partying and sex." Drew smiles.

"Oh god, don't tell me these awful hippies are having sex again!" Kate says in shock. Everyone laughs.

"Yes, indeed they are, and the university hasn't quite decided what to do about it. Apparently some of the people in the community and students from the environmental design department are trying to negotiate a deal. The university doesn't have any immediate plans to build so they could easily make some kind of compromise, at least temporarily, if they wanted, but I don't think it's going to happen."

Drew says

"So what are they going to do?" Jack asks.

Drew shrugs his shoulders. "I don't know. But if they try to take it back they are going to have one hell of a fight on their hands. Unfortunately, I think that may be exactly what they want."

Drew is working with the people organizing the speakers and entertainment, so the four of them leave him to his job and find a spot on the lawn to watch. The speakers have three minutes to make a speech. This is broken up by musicians playing acoustic guitars and singing songs. Some of the musicians were good, but most of the speakers were not. To Carl they all seem to be saying the same catch phrases of the movement over and over. It gets boring.

A little later Drew joins them. "How are we doing, can you hear the speeches?" He asks, listening to check out the sound.

"Yeah, the sound is Okay, but I thought you would have some better speakers." Kate says.

"Sorry, everybody was busy." Drew shrugs.

"I could do better than that." Carl says.

Everybody turns to look at him with surprise. "Seriously, I could do better." He says defensively.

Kate jumps in. "Drew, let Carl speak."

Drew is surprised. "Well, it's not that easy. We have people lined up. There is a list, I'm not sure." Drew waffles.

"Oh, bullshit Drew. Take him up there and let him speak if he wants. I'm telling you, he can do better than the people we've seen so far." Kate says.

Drew laughs, then shrugs and says "Okay, let's go."

Now Carl is the one surprised. He hadn't expected this, but he is the one who opened his big mouth. It's a dare now. "Okay, let's go." Carl says as he gets up.

They are all laughing and yelling encouragement as Carl and Drew walk toward the stage. Rose is especially blown away. This is a side of Carl she has never seen, and for Carl it's a side he has never seen either. Suddenly he is scarred shitless.

Drew talks to a few people as Carl stands and waits, knees shaking. They don't seem too thrilled with the change in line up, but a few minutes later Drew comes over and says, "You're next, right after this guy." Drew can see Carl is holding back a panic attack. He hopes this isn't a screw up, he doesn't know a thing about this guy. To late now, Carl is next.

"Okay Carl, I'm no public speaker, but just take a deep breath. It's normal to be scared, and just take your time and tell us what you think. That's what we want to hear." Drew says as he pats him on the back.

Carl barely hears Drew. He is going over in his mind what he wants to say, and he does have something he wants to say. It is a message that was burning in his mind as he watched the other speakers and watched the crowd. He is determined.

The guy at the microphone is done and there is a smattering of applause. It's Carl's turn and Drew leads him on stage. There is no introduction.

Carl steps up, leans into the microphone and declares,

"You're a motley looking bunch of long hairs."

A couple of whoops rise up amid a faint murmur of laughter.

"I haven't seen this much hair since my aunt Mabel decided to shave her arm pits."

There is little laughter and scattered applause as he steps back. Carl looks over at Rose and laughs at his own joke. He steps up to the microphone.

"What happened to you people? You're supposed to be the clean-cut youth of the future of America. My mother warned me not to hang around with people like you and now look what happened to me."

He spreads his arms in resignation. Wide spread laughter and whoops. Some guy screams out "Yeah man."

"What happened to us? Here we are, the vaunted youth of America, the richest country in the world. We've had all the advantages of middle class America, good food, good schools, modern science, modern medicine. Most of our parents worked their asses off to give us a better life and send us to school, to give us all the breaks they never had. And here we are, a bunch of long haired protestors."

There is a smattering of applause.

"Many, if not most of us here today are College students. You know, a lot of people all over America and all over the world, they don't get an opportunity to go to college, to get a college education. And now, here we are a bunch of rabble rousing freaks protesting this war, and really more than just this war, the whole society."

"They say we're a bunch of spoiled, ungrateful, inconsiderate, lazy, hippies. They say that we have no appreciation for the sacrifices of our American ancestors. They say that we don't understand the lessons of the American dream, of freedom, or democracy, or justice. "

"Our parents, the authorities, the cops out here on the street and all those people all across America just don't get it, they just can't understand what happened to all those nice clean-cut kids they used to know. And now, here we are, just a bunch of scruffy looking long hair protestors."

"What's wrong with you people?" Carl screams.

That crowd is silent, they not sure what to think. Is he serious? Are they being insulted? Carl steps back and pauses to let this sink in. Then he starts up slowly.

"Well let me tell you America... Mom and Dad. Let me tell you what's wrong."

"We did what you told us. We did what we were supposed to do. We went to school and studied history and science and literature, and we learned our lessons well. We learned all about the declaration of Independence and about how 'All men are created equal.' And then we looked around us and saw racial discrimination and Jim Crow laws and the oppression of millions of American citizens for nothing more than the color of their skin."

"We learned about equality, but only for wealthy white men, not minorities, not women not the disabled. We learned about American history and the struggle for democracy, and then we saw the political corruption and money driven politics that pervades our government. We learned about capitalism

and free trade, but then we saw that trade isn't really free at all, because giant corporations monopolize the markets and make laws that gave them an unfair advantage, or tax breaks, or no bid government contracts because they know and pay off all the right people.”

“We learned that justice is supposed to be blind, but saw that you only get as much justice as you can afford. We learned that America stands for personal freedom, freedom of speech, freedom from oppression and freedom from tyranny, and then we find out that J. Edgar Hoover and his FBI spies, hound, infiltrate, jail, blacklist and sometimes even murder in their sleep anyone who dares speak out against the crimes and injustice all around us.”

“We learned that America is a place that is supposed to give everybody a fair change at life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, but if you have the audacity to speak out for the generations of the impoverished and downtrodden, against the injustices all around us, that you'll be labeled a Communist, an agent of a foreign government, a traitor.”

“We learned that America stands for freedom and democracy all over the world, and then find ourselves drafted against our wills into a pointless and immoral war of blatant aggression and genocide against an impoverished nation of peasants all in the name of some absurd, paranoid "domino theory."

“Love it or leave it they tell us. But the lessons we learned tell us that it's our responsibility to fight tyranny and injustice, it's our responsibility to improve America for our future and for our children's future.”

There is loud applause. A raw edged waver has crept into Carl's voice, a voice he never knew he had.

“If the Colleges and Universities are a business and you Mr. and Mrs. America are paying them to make us, the nation's youth, the future of this country into unquestioning, obedient, unfeeling, blind workers...well then believe me America, you are NOT getting what you bargained for. Because your sons and daughters have been taught to think and to see and to learn for themselves, and to speak out and communicate and tell it like it is when "the emperor has no clothes." And that is why we are here today, to tell you in no uncertain word that "the emperor has no clothes."

Wild applause erupts. He is visibly angry and shaken, but he continues slowly and deliberately, emphasizing and articulating each word, as he drives the last raspy words from his failing voice. Carl decides to end with part of the Mario Savio's speech which is recognized by most in the crowd.

"There is a time when the operation of the machine becomes so odious, makes you so sick at heart, that you can't take part; you can't even passively take part, and you've got to put your bodies upon the gears and upon the wheels, upon the levers, upon all the apparatus, and you've got to make it stop. And you've got to indicate to the people who run it, to the people who own it, that unless you're free, the machine will be prevented from working at all!" The crowd bursts into applause, cheers and uproar.

Carl steps back from the microphone and holds his fist into the air. He bows his head and then turns and walks off the stage. It was a rousing speech, a speech with content, the best speech of the day. Rose, Kate and Drew are waiting at the bottom of the steps to the stage.

Rose comes to Carl and hugs him. He says "let's get out of here" and he pulls her away. People are still cheering and chanting. A few people say "great speech, good job" as they pass. He guides Rose behind the stage, away from the crowd. They duck around the corner into an alley and Carl walks between two parked cars and leans, partially leaning against the front of a car. Rose steps between his legs and wraps her arms around his waist, laying her head on his chest. Carl rests his head against the

top of her head and closes his eyes. Giving the speech was exhilarating, but draining. He feels exhausted. It feels so comforting to have Rose in his arms, holding him.

After a few moments he notices Rose is crying. He lifts his head. He hears her sobbing, the high pitch of quiet crying.

"Rose, what's wrong." He says, confused, looking down at her. She looks up into his eyes, tears running down her face. She places both hand on the side of his face and starts gently kissing him all over. He can feel her wet tears. "What's wrong?" He asks again.

"I love you Carl. I love you so much. I have resisted but I give up. I love you. That was the most beautiful, heartfelt thing I have ever seen." She looks down and wipes her face with her wrist, then looks back up at him, looking at every feature of his face. "It's not just the speech. It's the way you're so good to me, and hold me, and listen to me, and care about me. It's the things you say and do, and I don't know why, but I love you. I cherish you. I'm crazy about you. I give up. I'm yours, take me." She kisses him on the lips and then puts he head back on his chest.

Now tears are in Carl's eyes. "Rose, I am so glad. I never dared to hope you would ever really love me. I love you too Rose." They stay that way for a long time, occasionally kissing and promising one another their love. Finally they walk back holding hands, like giddy tanagers, like puppy love, like flowers in the spring.

Kate and Drew watched Carl come off the stage and fall into Rose's arms. The next thing they know they have disappeared. "Hey I wanted to talk to him. That was good." Drew says to Kate, craning his neck to see where Carl went. "I told you." Kate says "But, frankly I had no idea he was that good."

"Who is he?" Drew asks.

"He is just a young guy from Kansas City. A friend of David Kroll's. He's only eighteen. Isn't that amazing?"

"And he is staying at the Tomales house?"

"Yes he is." Kate replies.

"Yeah, well the question is can he do it again? I need somebody like that."

"That's why I wanted you to meet him. But take it easy Drew. He's just a kid. He's smart and articulate but he's still pretty green. I don't want you getting him in trouble." She looks at him like a mother about to scolding a child.

"Hey, I barely even met him? Give me a break. He may not even be interested in the movement." Drew says.

"Don't worry, he'll be interested."

Carl and Rose work their way through the crowd back to the stage. Kate and Drew are talking. "Here they are." Kate says. "Where were you guys?"

"Just talking" Carl says. Carl and Rose look at each other all moony eyed.

Drew and Kate look at each other and roll their eyes.

Drew chimes up, "Would you guys like to come over to my place for a while. A bunch of activist will be there, it'll be a party."

"I don't think so." Carl says. "My voice is all fucked up and I'm feeling totally burnt out. I need to lie down for a while."

"No problem, you can go up to my room. I even have a private spare bed. You two can lie down for a while. Take a nap. Whatever." Drew continues, trying to make the sale. "How about you Kate, want to come?"

"Sure" She says. "Come on you guys, there will be a place you can mellow out at Drew's house. It's just a few blocks away and Tomales is at over an hour drive."

Carl and Rose look at each other and shrug. "Okay says Rose.

Drew lives in a big old two story house a few blocks off Telegraph Avenue. At least half a dozen students live in the house which is within easy walking distance to the University. It's a ramshackle place with a dirt front yard, tufts of crab grass and weeds around the edges. The front room contains only one large banquette table, the rest is open to accommodate meetings and parties. Several buildings in back are divided as rooms.

Up a narrow flight of stairs off the kitchen is a large attic. It occupies the whole top of the house with a low slanted roof and several gables with windows along the sides. Drew has a large bed in one corner, a sofa, chair and table, and even a full size refrigerator. Carl wonders how in the hell they got that regenerator up those stairs.

In an alcove created by a gable is a space Drew has set aside for guests. Carl and Rose decided to take a nap while Kate, Jack and Drew rummage around in the kitchen below making sandwiches.

Drew moved to the house after he was released from the Army on disability. He is a student at the University. Drew is a changed man, driven to seek revenge and justice for the crimes he has seen and the attempt on his life. He immediately became involved with the anti war movement and has become a important organizer and activist. However, the movement is rapidly changing and Drew is unsure of his place within it.

Later Carl and Rose join everybody downstairs. Kate has sandwiches waiting.

"You guys are welcome to stay if you like. You and Rose can stay in my room, and I have another room where Kate and Jack can stay." Drew says

"That sounds fun, but just for a day or two. What do you think?" Kate asks Carl and Rose. "That sounds good." they reply. They found the alcove in Drew's room comfortable and private.

That evening is a party and Carl and Rose get to meet Drew's house mates and many of the local activists. They are a fascinating group of people. They all compliment Carl on his speech and urge him to get involved. "We always need good motivators." they say. Carl is interested and Rose urges him to get involved, if that's what he wants. She thinks Carl has a gift and wants him to develop it. His public speaking ability is something that could be useful to him in other endeavors.

Carl and Drew became instant friends. Drew seems like an older brother. They spend hours talking about history and politics. Carl also gets to know some of the other political people. They are all involved with the movement. In fact, Drew has a whole enterprise going, with volunteers who organize and promote meetings and protests. It's a whole new scene and Carl was fascinated. Finally things wind down and they all go off to bed.

Early the next morning, the sound of someone clomping up the stair to Drew's attic awakens Carl and Rose. "Drew, wake up. The cops have taken over People's Park" he says.

"Oh, shit, it's started." Drew's responds.

They all quickly dress and head for the park on foot. Other people are headed in that direction as well. In the early morning hours around a hundred California Highway Patrol officers cordon off eight

blocks. Heavy equipment was brought in. As the community watches from the perimeter, they bulldoze the grass, the gardens, and the playground, then erect a cyclone fence around the park with "No trespassing" signs.

By noon several thousand people have gathered at a rally on campus. The president of the student body finally gets on stage and yells. "Let's go down there and take the park." Instantly the crowd is in motion and pours out onto Telegraph Avenue and heads for the park. The police are waiting.

As the windows of Bank of America are smashed and fire hydrants are opened, the police advance firing tear gas. Tear gas canisters and rocks are thrown back by the protestors.

Carl, Rose, Kate and Jack have been part of the protest up to now. Drew has left them and they can see him in the front lines screaming in fury and throwing rocks. The tear gas is starting to sting their eyes and throats. "I'm not ready this," yells Rose above the sirens, screaming and noise. "The cops always win. I want to go." They all instantly agree, but the going is slow. Others have the same idea and now the cops are everywhere, they aren't sure how to get out. Fear, anger and chaos reigns as people struggle to leave or join the fight.

A squadron of Special Units have appeared in blue jumpsuits and gas masks. They have flack jackets and shotguns. Looking like some kind of space alien from hell, they move forward in precise unison. The crowd is in disbelief.

"Watch out they have guns," the cry goes up. Normally the police don't use guns, but this time the authorities intend to send a message.

People are now trying to run but it's still too crowded. "Don't fall down," yells Jack. Shots are fired. There is screaming and pandemonium. The shots keep coming and Carl can feel spent buckshot reigning down on the crowd. They are far enough away to not be injured but he knows this is serious. These cops are shooting to kill.

They finally break out of the crowd as they round a corner, but Carl looks back to see a girl get shot in the back as she is running away. Reporters, passers by, and even students walking on campus unaware of what is going on are shot. Most are only injured but one student is blinded by a shot to the face, and the belly of a young visitor from San Jose who is watching from a roof top is torn apart by buckshot. He dies that night. At least a hundred protestors are shot.

Debating the issues of property rights is one thing, but shooting down people in the streets with shotguns is another. No one expected this type of unusual and excessive force from the police. The community is in shock and fury.

Governor Ronald Reagan sends in three thousand National Guardsmen and Berkeley is shut down. Gatherings of more than three people are prohibited.

Back at Drew's house it is like a war zone. Injured people are being treated. Angry activists who are ready to throw themselves against the police in suicidal assaults are held back by their friends. The four of them are trapped, at least for tonight. Drew eventually makes his way back to the house. He has been heavily tear-gassed and it takes him several hours to recover.

Carl, Rose, Kate and Jack hide out upstairs in Drew's room. Drew finally comes to join them.

"Drew, are you going to be Okay" Kate asks with concern. Drew's eyes are blood-shot and he looks exhausted.

"I'm fine." He says. He doesn't look fine.

"I just can't believe they reacted with that level of violence." He says. "There is no mistaking the message, the gloves are off." He shakes his head.

"It's interesting, because I think the university was willing to let the whole People's Park thing slide, especially because of the kind of broad based support it had in the community. No, this is not the university sending a message. It's a message from far higher up." Drew dabs at his swollen eyes with a wet towel.

"What do you mean?" asks Kate. "Who else would be involved?"

"Well, the university would never want this kind of bloodbath. There are too many supporters in both the faculty and the administration for that. This was probably ordered by Ronald Reagan, who may have even been pressured by Nixon. Who knows? We have already seen violent responses from the government at other protests, but for them to do this, and for something as innocuous and as hippie dippy as the People's Park is amazing. They understand now, the Cultural Revolution is as dangerous as the Political Revolution. It's the end. The establishment is ready to do whatever it takes to destroy us."

Drew leans back and covers his eyes with a wet cloth. The four of them look at each other, then silently get up and go to bed.

Carl Finds His Voice

Carl did not become a speaker all at once, though later people talked about it that way. They remembered the day at the park, the jokes, the turn, the sudden anger in his voice, and they made it sound like some hidden door had opened and a finished man had stepped through.

It did not feel that way to Carl.

For days afterward he kept hearing his own voice and not quite believing it belonged to him. The speech embarrassed him when he thought about it alone. Not because it had failed, but because it had worked. That was worse in some ways. Failure would have been simple. He could have laughed it off, said he was just some kid from Kansas who had gotten carried away. Success gave the thing weight. People had listened. Rose had cried. Drew had looked at him as if he had found a tool he had been looking for.

Carl distrusted tools.

He began reading differently after that. Before, books had been escape, ammunition, proof that he was not crazy. Now he read with the sound of a crowd somewhere in the back of his mind. He read Paine and Jefferson and Lincoln. He read King again. He read about abolitionists, labor wars, the Bonus Army, the Scottsboro boys, the Rosenbergs, the civil rights workers murdered in Mississippi. He looked for the place where moral language became dangerous, where a sentence could stop being an opinion and become a summons.

At Tomales House, the others teased him about it. He would sit at the long table with a notebook, chewing the end of a pen, while Wayne rolled a joint and Jack argued about the moon or entropy or whether dolphins had language. Rose would pass behind him and rest her hands on his shoulders.

“You’re writing another sermon,” she said one afternoon.

“It’s not a sermon.”

“What is it?”

“I don’t know yet.”

“That sounds like a sermon.”

He laughed, but he kept writing.

What he did not tell her was that every speech began in Kelseyville. No matter the subject, Vietnam, civil rights, the draft, the park, the police, it always came back to the same feeling. Walking down a school hallway with his face broken. Sitting in the Dairy Bell waiting for men he did not know to decide what he deserved. Lying on gravel while people watched. Hearing his mother ask why he could not just be normal.

He did not want to tell crowds about that. He could barely tell Rose. But it was the hidden engine. When he talked about freedom of speech, he meant the right to speak without being hit. When he talked about civil rights, he meant the right to be seen without being hunted. When he talked about the war, he meant the machinery that turned frightened men into killers and then called it duty. The ideas were large, but the wound was small and private and humiliating. That was why the words came out hot.

Drew saw it before Carl did.

“You’re not really arguing politics,” Drew told him one night in Berkeley, after a meeting in a church basement where Carl had spoken for five minutes and then sat down shaking.

“What am I arguing?”

“You’re arguing for the right to exist.”

Carl stared at him.

Drew lit a cigarette. His hands were steady, but his eyes were not. “That’s why they listen. Everybody in those rooms thinks somebody is trying to erase them. The draft board, the cops, their parents, the university, the Army, the FBI, the whole damn country. You make it personal without making it small.”

Carl looked away, uncomfortable with the praise. “I’m just talking.”

“No,” Drew said. “You’re translating fear.”

Carl carried that back to Tomales with him.

The next time he stood in front of a room, he was still scared. His hands still went cold. His mouth still dried out. But now he understood that fear was not the thing to defeat. It was the thing to use. He did not have to pretend he was brave. He only had to tell the truth in a way that made other people recognize their own trembling.

That was when he began to understand the danger of having a voice.

The Movement

The next morning as the four of them are having coffee, Drew pulls up a chair. "That was quite an experience yesterday." Drew says, taking a sip.

"I have to admit, I was scared." Say Rose.

"We were all scared." Jack responds. "You'd be crazy not to be scared."

"If that was the intent, they sure succeeded." Kate says.

Drew replies. "I think your right. It's too bad because I was hoping to talk you guys into getting involved a little bit more, at least for the summer. But after that I don't blame you for being reluctant. I think a lot of people are going to be having second thoughts now."

"It depends on the type of involvement." Says Carl.

"Yeah, I guess your right." Drew says

"That was just plying into their hands yesterday. The authorities knew there would be a riot and that's exactly what they wanted, and they were ready for it. Any sympathy for the Peoples Park will be lost in the media coverage of "rioting radicals" Carl says.

Drew nods his head. "You're probably right."

Carl continues "There is no way I will ever support violent resistance. It's not only futile, it's ineffective. Otherwise I would like to help."

Drew is pleasantly surprised. He thought that Carl was history after what happened yesterday. This kid may have more spunk than he thought. He has certainly surprised Drew so far. As far as the commitment to non violence, well we will see if that changes when Carl is not so green behind the ears.

"Let's try this." Drew says. "I will let you know about the meetings and rallies I have coming up and if you want to attend and say a few words, that would be great."

"Perfect." Carl Says. "But now, I think we are all ready to get back to the peace and quiet of Tomales Bay." Carl says as he looks at the others. "That's a little more excitement than we are used too." they all laugh.

Over the next few months Carl drives into Berkeley a couple of days each week. Sometimes Rose comes with him, but most of the time he comes alone.

Carl and Drew are becoming good friends and colleagues. They have been attending meetings for a broad variety of activist groups. It's surprising how many different groups there are, each with its own slightly different philosophy and interest. Drew is trying to keep them pumped up, unified and committed. It's not easy.

Drew and Carl work as a team, Drew does the general hob knobbing and organizing and Carl gives a speech to inspire them and impress on them the importance of working together and overlooking their differences. This is a message Carl believes in.

Carl never knows what he is going to say beforehand, but has developed a few different approaches. He often finds an historical analogy for something that is currently happening. Drew has been impressed by the reaction. People love Carl's thought provoking stories and entertaining approach. It seems casual and easy to Carl, as far as he is concerned he is just preaching to the choir. Everybody already believes in basically the same outcome, it's mostly the strategies and styles that differ.

PART SIX: FRACTURE

Deja

A few days later Carl is in Berkeley. He spoke to a group of High School Students that morning and has another meeting tonight. Right now he is hanging out and thinking about taking a walk up to Telegraph Avenue just to check things out, maybe have some coffee or go to the book store. Everybody is at class or out and the Berkeley house is deserted. On his way out; Carl stops in the kitchen to grab an orange. He is peering into the refrigerator when a cute, long haired blond girl walks in.

"Hi, I'm Deja." She says

"Hi Deja, I'm Carl." Carl says, looking up with the refrigerator door still open.

"I know who you are, I saw you at a rally. I loved your speech." She says with an interested smile.

"So you're working with Drew?"

"I'm just helping a little bit." Carl says.

"Drew and I are old friends. Wow, I just thought your speech was so right-on. How do you do that? Get up in front of all those people. I'd be scared shitless." She laughs.

"Well, it is kind-of scary at first, but then you get going and you kind of just get used to it. I don't know."

"Well you sure didn't look scared." She says. She steps closer now. She is stunningly cute. Carl is tantalized. He is also flattered by her compliments. Deja is just a little wisp of a thing, five foot one, a perfect, natural, platinum blond, with long hair and pale white skin. She looks Scandinavian or something. Where Rose is thin and muscular, Deja is soft and rounded. Her pale cheeks are fresh and pink. Deja has a thing for Angles and it fits because she looks like a cherub herself. The perky pink nipples of her plump little breasts are clearly visible through her thin white cotton blouse. Carl thanks god they did away with bras.

"So you know these guys?" Carl asks.

"Oh yeah, I come over all the time. Where are you going?"

"Nowhere really. I just thought I would go down to telegraph and see what was going on. Like to come?" Carl says. He is smiling and flirting a little bit now. She is cute.

"Yeah, that would be great. I'd like to get to know you better" she says with an interested smile. Now she is flirting. Deja comes around and stands right next to Carl, bending over to look in the refrigerator, not so subtly rubbing against him. "Got anything to drink?"

"I got some apple juice or some beer." He says.

"Beer? Really? The hippies in this house never have any beer." They laugh.

"That's because somebody always drinks it up." Carl jokes. "I got a private stash in the refrigerator. Would you like one?"

"Yeah, that sounds great." She watches him closely as he gets out two beers from a paper bag with his name on it.

"So where do you live?"

"I live out at Point Reyes, but I'm staying here for a few days with Drew, in a little room back in back of his room."

"Oh yeah, I know where you mean. I've been up in Drew's room lots of times." She says

"Are you guys dating or something?" Carl asks. He doesn't want to be hitting on one of Drew's girl friends. Besides, Carl is starting to feel guilty for flirting with Deja, after all he is madly in love with Rose.

"No, No, Were just old friends." She takes a long drink of her beer. "Thanks, that tastes great." She says, looking around. "So is Drew here?"

"No, I'm not sure when he is coming back." Carl says.

"No big deal. Want to smoke a joint to go with our beer?"

Carl thinks about it for a second, he wasn't planning to get blasted this early in the day, but one beer and a couple tokes wouldn't hurt. He nods his head.

"Well, sure. That sounds good." Carl relents.

"Cool. Let's go up to Drew's room, we can smoke up there." She says with a little flirtatious smile. Carl can feel a flutter in his stomach. She looks incredibly hot and she is sending all the right signals.

"Sounds good." He says.

They trudge up the stairs and tumble down on the couch. Deja pulls out an already rolled joint from her bag and a Zipo lighter. She lights it up and hands it to Carl. She is sitting close and watching him.

They take a few hits and then Carl says "That's enough for me."

"Yeah me too." They take a few long drinks from their beers and then she says. "You're sure cute. Why haven't I seen you before?" She moves closer to Carl staring up into his eyes.

"Uh, well I Just met Drew a few months ago..." Carl stammers.

She gives him a flirtatious smile and moves her face closer. Carl knows this is where he is supposed to kiss her. He hesitates for a moment and then his hard cock takes control. He leans over and they start kissing and hugging, instantly fondling each other. He has his hand under her shirt and on those beautiful plump tits and she is trying to unzip his pants, his cock straining for released. He decides to help. Soon woody has joined the party, just like he wanted. Her hand is on his cock and she is looking at it.

"I knew you'd have a nice cock." she says looking back up at him. "It's the hands. I can always tell by the hands. Come on, let's ball."

Carl doesn't put up any resistance. She leads him over to the little nook behind the curtain. They both instantly strip off their clothes and tumble onto the mattress. They are kissing hot and heave. Carl dips his fingers into her wet pussy and then starts using a few of the techniques that Rose taught him. Deja immediately responds.

"Oh god yeah, touch my clit. That's good. Let me taste that cock". She turns and goes down on him, making sure he has easy access to her pussy. Carl pulls her around for some pussy sucking. After about thirty seconds she is swooning. "God damn that's fucking good. Where did you learn to suck pussy like that? Don't answer. just suck." He moves back to her clit and she moves back to his cock.

Carl fingers her ass. She stops sucking his cock to scream, "Fuck yeah, god damn you're a good pussy sucker. I am going to fucking cream all over you fucking face." She pushes him away. "But not yet, not yet." She pulls away and turns around to get on top of him. "Fuck me first." She slips him inside and starts grinding on his cock. She likes it deep. Carl wonders how that little body can take it, but she can't seem to get enough. She is fucking him and whispering in his ear as he fondles her tits. "That was some good pussy sucking man, really fucking good. Anything you want me to do, I'll do it." She sets up.

"Let's see that pussy." Carl says. She leans back so he can see her. She has a perfectly blond pussy. Carl has never seen a pussy like that.

Just then they hear a voice. "Hello? Carl is that you?" It's Drew.

"Oh, hi, Drew. Carl calls. "Sorry, I didn't know when you were coming back." Carl says through the curtain.

Drew is laughing "No problem man. I'll give you guys a while to finish what you're doing. Take your time."

"Hi, Drew" Deja calls.

There is a pause. "Is that you Deja?" Drew answers in return.

"Yeah, it's me." She says happily.

Drew comes over and peeks around the corner, Deja is still on top of Carl, with his cock inside her.

"Hey, I thought you were coming over to hang out with me for a while?" Drew says to Deja who is still slowly grinding on Carl's cock.

"Yeah well I was, but I met Carl." Deja says. Drew laughs.

"I can see that." He chuckles. Carl is shocked.

"You said you weren't dating Drew." Carl whines.

"I'm not! We just ball sometimes. Besides I ball who ever I want. Nobody tells me who to be with." She stops and looks up at Drew.

"Hey, don't look at me. I don't care if you guys want to get it on."

They both are looking at Drew with a questioning look.

"Really, I don't care. I guess I may have to settle for sloppy seconds, but hey, really, go for it. She is a great fuck Carl, have fun."

"Uh..Thanks." Carl says.

"I'm sorry Drew." Says Deja. "I did come over to ball you. But Carl was looking so hot, and this guy really knows how to suck pussy." She says enthusiastically. Drew laughs uproariously.

"You're a man of many talents Carl." Drew says. "Well, I'll leave you guys alone." He turns to go.

Carl leans up on one elbow. "I'm sorry Drew, I didn't know." Carl calls behind him.

"Oh, quit worrying about him, I'll take care of that. Shut up and fuck me." Deja says, pushing him down and sticking her tongue in his mouth. Deja stays on top for a while then slides off and gets up on her hands and knees with her ass pointed at Carl. She looks back at Carl. Her cute white ass is in the air, her pink freshly fucked pussy and its little tuft of blond pubic hair waiting to get fucked.

"Come and get me cowboy." she says, giving her ass a wiggle. Carl burns with lust. He takes her from behind and it is good.

"Touch me now and make me cum." She whispers. Carl touches her in the same way that he touches Rose. Soon he feels her pussy pulsating and he quickly follows. Carl rolls off and fades to sleep.

He wakes up as Deja finishes dressing and is gathering her things. She bends down and gives him a wet kiss on the lips.

"Great fuck" she says with a happy smile. "You can ball me any time. I'll see you around."

"Yeah Deja, that was hot. I'll catch you later."

She disappears beyond the curtain. Carl dozes off. When he wakes up it is nearly dark. He misses Rose. He gets up, grabs a few things and goes into Drew's bathroom to take a shower. As he stands under the shower the guilt flows over him like the hot water. He can't believe that he fucked that girl

only a couple days after Rose said she loved him and he professed his never ending love to her. He is totally devoted to Rose with every inch of his body. Well, not every inch. His hard cock was obviously calling the shots today. The temptation of Deja was too much for him. He wanted to fuck her. He did fuck her. He enjoyed fucking her. But he still loves Rose. He swears to himself it will never happen again. But he wonders, will he be able to avoid the temptation of Deja the next time she comes around.

Carl gets dressed and packs up his things. He was planning to stay one more day, but now he wants to go home and be with Rose. He wants to be away from all the crazy shit going on here in Berserk-ley. He wants to wake up in his own bed with Rose and look out at his beloved bay.

As Carl is going out the front door Drew drives up. Drew sees he has his stuff.

"Hi man, how's it going? I see you're heading out."

"Yeah man, I'm going home." Carl says.

"That's cool. Come back whenever you want, I can always use you. You're a powerful force Carl, more powerful than you know." Drew can see Carl is upset. He guesses it is about Deja.

Carl says, "Yeah, will I will be back. I think what you're doing is important and I want to make a contribution. But, I miss home."

Drew puts his arm around Carl and walks with him toward the Alpha. "Look man, I bet I know why you're upset. It's about Deja isn't it?"

"Yeah, I'm really sorry about that Drew, I didn't know that you were seeing her." Carl wonders if he still would have fucked Deja even if he had known she was seeing Drew. He thinks that he probably would have.

"I don't care about that. I just care about you being happy man. I know you and Rose love each other, I don't want to see anything get in the way of that."

"I know. I really fucked up." Carl is looking a little teary eyed. Drew looks at him and kind of chuckles. Carl is so emotional, so serious sometimes, it amazes him.

"Look buddy, this kind of thing can just happen to a guy. Jesus Christ, what guy with blood running through his veins could turn down Deja. She's the fucking angle of sex. Give yourself a break. You'll know better next time and I'll talk to Deja. We have been friends for a while and nobody will ever know. I promise."

Carl has pulled it together and is nodding his head. "Yeah, I hope I learned my lesson."

"Just lighten up on yourself. Guys have been giving in to pussy on the side for a million years. It happens. Just don't tell Rose. Got it? Don't tell her. That will only make it worse. Even if she says she doesn't care, believe me, she cares. Just watch yourself. There are a lot of free spirited women around here and you're becoming a bit of a celebrity. If you want to be loyal to Rose you'll have to watch your step. I'm not sure I could do it, but hey man, give it a try." Drew laughs.

Carl nods his head "It ain't gon'a be easy that's for damn sure. That Deja has some kind of sweet fucking pussy, damn." They are both laughing.

"Ooooh yeah." Drew says.

Drew slaps him on the back "Go on home to your woman."

As Carl drives he thinks about what Drew said. Drew read him like a book. Carl was thinking about confessing to Rose. Now he sees that would be stupid. Just shut the fuck up, leave this behind him, and do the right thing from now on. He is feeling better, for a while.

Then a new emotion starts to creep in, jealousy. If he is fucking people on the side, maybe she is to. He could hardly blame her after what he just did. She has certainly been with other men before and Carl still feels insecure about his age and inexperience.

Carl is coming home a day early. What if he walks in the room and Augie is up on their bed fucking Rose what that giant schlong of his? What if she is loving it? Carl is going mad with jealousy. He knows it's crazy. He has no reason to think it is true, though maybe she does seem over friendly to Auggie, or maybe it's just Carl's imagination. And to add to, he has to admit the thought of it kind of turns-him-on. Carl knows he is out of his fucking mind. He keeps tells himself to stop thinking about this shit, it's just a mind fuck, a scenario based on his own guilt. But he can't help punishing himself for his own transgression.

Carl goes home to Rose. She isn't been fucking Auggie when he walks in. She welcomes him with open loving arms. He keeps his mouth shut and doesn't say anything to tip her off to his little tryst with Deja. And if Carl is more loving and affectionate than usual she doesn't seem to notice.

It's morning and they are setting up in bed, each with a book and a cup of coffee, sun shimmering on the bay outside their window. Rose is readying "This Is It" by Alan Watts, Carl has "The Medium is the Massage" by Marshall McLuhan.

"Are you happy?" Rose asks Carl.

"So happy I have to pinch myself to make sure I'm not dreaming" Carl replies.

"I'm happy to." she says. "This is a good book. I really do try to live my life to the fullest and appreciate the moment."

"You have already had an amazing life Rose. Not many people have done the things you've done or seen the things you've seen." Carl says.

"Yeah, I guess your right. In a way it just sort of happened. There have been a lot of hard times, scary times." says Rose, looking out the window as if she is looking into the past.

"I'm happy Rose, but I want to know so much more. Happiness is over rated. This is happiness right here Rose, right now. I couldn't be happier than I am at this very moment. But, here I am reading about media and communications. Tomorrow I will be back in Berkeley preaching against the war. I guess happiness isn't enough for me."

"I know exactly what you mean. Many of the eastern religions seek perfect happiness, nirvana, but I am a striver. That's why I love to travel. I'll settle down for a while and then the urge to go out into the world, to see and adventure just grabs me and I have to go.

Rose continues "All those happy little families in the suburbs, zoned out on Christianity. The answers aren't that easy and the world is both a beautiful and a horrible place. I need to know, to experience. Not all of it, of course, because some is just too terrible to endure, but I want to know as much as possible so I can play a part, so I can be aware and informed." Rose looks at Carl, questioning. Does he really understand what she is saying? "I'm not sure I will ever make a very good traditional housewife."

"I hope not. That would be a travesty. You're a free spirit Rose and I can live with that." Carl says. They cuddle a little closer together.

"Rose, these moments we have together in this beautiful place are precious to me. When I am in Berkeley I can't wait to get back to you. But just as you crave adventure, knowledge and understanding, so do I. I love the political work I'm doing. I never dreamed that I could do something like this, that I

could make a difference. I know some day we both will be moving on, and that does cause me fear and sadness. I don't want to loose you. But I am confident we can find a way to achieve both happiness and fulfillment together."

Rose turns to kiss Carl's neck, putting one of her warm and naked legs over his. Looking up into his face she says "I think we can do that Carl, I really do. But right now I just want one of your sweet coffee flavored kisses." They both slide down into the bed and as their lips meet. Carl pulls the covers up over their heads. For Rose and Carl, staying this way forever would be nirvana.

The Meeting

A week goes by before Carl gets back to Berkeley. Drew says nothing about his little encounter with Deja and they continue to make their rounds. It's almost like a real job and they are getting good at.

One day, Drew asks Carl to come with him. Drew insists on driving his old Chevy. "It's not far" he says. They drive for a while and the neighborhoods start looking really seedy. It's a poor area with an inner city industrial feel some place in the lowlands of Oakland. Finally Drew pulls up in front of a run-down, store front building. All the windows are covered with dusty paper. Two big black guys with giant afros, black leather jackets, black gloves and dark sun glasses are standing in front of a narrow doorway near the back. The streets are deserted.

Carl and Drew get out of the car. Carl looks at Drew, but Drew doesn't look at him. He just jumps out of the car and goes straight up to the two guys and tells them they are here for the meeting. The black guys don't say a word they just stare at him. Carl is getting nervous. One of them finally goes inside and a few minutes later comes back and motions for them to follow him.

They go in the door and climb up a very long flight of stairs. It's dark and musty and smells like piss. As they approach the top they hear loud talking and laughter. Turning the corner they enter a large room. It appears to take up the whole top of the building, with a dirt brown tile floor, florescent lighting and a low, water stained ceiling. A dozen or more big black guys just, like the ones down stairs, are all talking or laughing. Some appear angry, yelling 'mutha-fucka this, and mutha-fucka that. The guys they are yelling at are yelling right back and occasionally they all break out in uproarious laughter.

There are Black Panther posters covering the walls, a fierce looking panther cat showing its teeth, a clenched fist and lettering that says 'Black Power'. There are guns leaning against the wall and some of the Panthers are wearing side arms. Now Carl is sure he is nervous.

Carl and Drew are guided over to a muscular black guy who immediately recognizes Drew.

"Hey man, I'm glad you could make it." he says doing a reach around handshake with Drew.

"I appreciate you having us. This is my comrade Carl."

"Hi Man, glad to meet you, I'm Darin." He says to Carl, extending his hand.

Carl also does the reach around handshake and tries to squeeze his hand as firmly as possible without wincing. The guy is very big, very black and very scary looking.

"Hello, I'm Carl"

Darin seems friendly enough but everybody else is either ignoring or glaring at them. Drew is talking to Darin and Carl is starting to get an idea of what is going on.

The movement has already been working with the Black Panthers. But some of the Panthers are highly suspicious of the Peace movement, and some are openly hostile. Drew is trying to bridge the gap. These are the hard-core Panthers.

Carl has had limited experience with black people. No, that's an over statement. Carl has had NO experience with black people. This is the most black people he has ever seen in one place, at one time, other than from the safety of a speeding car with the windows rolled up and the doors locked. Drew wants him to speak to these guys? Carl is ready to piss in his pants.

Carl gets Drew aside for a moment. "What the fuck, why didn't you tell me this was where we were going?"

"I thought you would chicken out." Drew says.

"Fucking-A I would have chickened out. I don't know what to say to these guys."

"Hey, you're the one who does all preaching about racial equality. Well this is your chance to do something and stop just talking. Besides, they probably won't kill you even if you do sound like an idiot." He chuckles.

"That's comforting." Carl rolls his eyes.

The meeting starts. Everybody sits on brown folding metal chairs and the one who is talking stands up. The discussions all sound like heated arguments and there is a lot of interrupting. Everybody is loud and profane. Carl is racking his brain for something to say. Finally Darin gets up and talks about the idea of working with the peace movement. Some of the Panthers seem mildly open to it, but most are visibly disdainful, even angry. Darin introduces Drew. Carl hopes he will talk for a long time so he doesn't have to say much, but it seems like Drew is done in about five seconds. "And this is my comrade Carl. He has a few things to say."

Drew looks at Carl. Carl swallows hard and stands up. "Well of course there is a long history of whites working for black equality and I am sure you have all heard the stories about the freedom workers in the south." There is silence. Of course they have heard the stories. They are sick of the fucking stories about the freedom workers in the south. And, of course, the civil war, but Lincoln and the north had other motives for that. They know that as well, that's part of why they mistrust whites.

"But, I am from Kansas and Kansas has a whole history that is intertwined with the abolitionist movement. They are silently waiting to be impressed.

Carl starts telling the story of how the abolitionists moved to Kansas to block it from becoming a slave state. Many of the Panthers have heard something about this history, but not much. Carl, in his inimitable way, is able to bring the story to life.

Carl tells of the hardships his own family endured when they came to Kansas in covered wagons as part of a movement from the east that wanted to prevent slavery. How they fought a running guerilla war for five years with the slave owners of Missouri, just before the Civil War. How they inspired the Free Soil movement, the new Republican Party and the spectacle of "Bleeding Kansas." Carl goes on to describe the horrors of the destruction of Lawrence Kansas by the bloodthirsty Confederates. By now the group is fascinated.

Next he tells of the murderous rampage against pro-slavers by crazy John Brown, who hacked his enemies to pieces with long knives. Carl gets some "right-ons" from this story.

But it is the description of John Brown, as pictured in the famous portrait in the Kansas State Capital at Topeka, standing in a thunderstorm, long beard flowing, a bible in one hand and a gun in the other, that brings the house down. Carl is thoroughly enjoying himself because the audience is so emotionally involved and responsive. To his surprise they turn out to be a great audience.

In the end, Carl brings the story back around to the point that even today there are many whites who support Black liberation. They may have different reasons and different viewpoints. Some may even be kind of fucked up like John Brown. But a lot of people in the peace movement feel very strongly about the issue and it only makes sense for the Panthers and the peace movement to work together.

It is a very persuasive speech and many of the Panthers, but not all, admit he probably has a point. They are saying "right on." "yeah man." and "that's right." Drew is beaming, looking at Carl and thinking 'this guy is good'.

Carl and Drew are a hit. Drew is delighted. They get in the car and head back home. "That was unbelievable what you did back there man, un-fucking-believable. You got a real talent." Drew thinks, with Carl's political speaking talent and his organizational and behind the scenes strategies they could really do something. They could really make a difference.

Carl says "I enjoyed it, but don't ever do that again. I am glad I went, and no I probably wouldn't have gone, but still, don't do that to me again." Carl is looking at Drew seriously

"Hey man, point taken. I completely apologize. I didn't think it would be that heavy. The truth is when we walked in that room and I saw the guns I was fucking scared shitless." He laughs

"I almost pissed my pants man. I am serious." They both scream with laughter.

Both hold their fist in the air and screaming, "Power to the people mutha-fucker." They drive the rest of the way back talking and laughing. They are a team now and they played the toughest crowd possible.

Carl starts seeing Darin around the Berkeley house. They have become friends and Carl has gotten to know some of the other Black Panthers. They seem scary at first, that's their intent, but once you get to know them they are just a bunch rough house kids who are trying to make their way through a tough situation.

Carl realizes that Darin and many of the others come from the kind of poverty and turmoil that a middle class American like him could only imagine in his worst nightmare. Carl doesn't agree with some of their tactics and he often argues with Darin about it. However, he respects the difficult circumstances and the limited choices that confront them.

One weekend Drew and Darin come out to the Tomales for a visit. Darin seems to have a great time, though the vegetarian food is not to his liking. As Darin is leaving he seems to have a better understanding of Carl.

"You know Carl, I can see that if you live with beauty like this all around you, you're bound to have a different view of the world. I wish I could have more beauty around me. I'm tired of fighting. It seems like I have never known anything but struggle. I hope someday we can all share a common vision of hope and beauty. Unfortunately, all that ugliness and struggle is still waiting for me back in the city."

"That's why it's good to step back sometimes and get a little perspective. Come on back and visit again if you need a break. We'd love to have you." Carl says.

"Thanks man." Darin says as they shake hands.

Bad Morning

Carl trudges up the stairs to Drew's room and knocks on the wall to announce his arrival.

"Come on up." Drew calls.

Carl finds Drew lying on the couch with a pillow over his eyes. Drew sets up as Carl comes in. He looks like shit.

"Hey man, you aren't looking to good this morning." Calling it morning is being generous. It's pushing one o'clock in the afternoon.

"I've got a cold or something coming on, my head aches, the war is still raging and I'm just generally bummed out, so don't come in here with a bunch of cheery bullshit." Drew snarls.

"It's nice to see you too." Carl says cheerily. "It's a beautiful day, and there's a whole troop of Girl Scouts on their way up right now just to bring you some Girl Scout cookies. Which do you like, thin mint or peanut butter?"

"Fuck you" Drew says with a begrudged chuckle.

Drew does not have a cold coming on. He is experiencing a round of headaches, which have plagued him periodically since he got blown up in Vietnam. He is also severely depressed. All Drew's efforts to locate Mi, the girl he fell in love with in Vietnam, have failed. He has finally come to the realization that he will never see her again. In addition, every effort he has made to initiate an investigation into the atrocities he saw has gone nowhere. The military is treating him like a traitor and a trouble maker. No one believes him. No one wants to believe him.

On the coffee table is a newspaper with the headline, "President Nixon Visits Troops in Vietnam." It shows a picture of Nixon shaking hands with a GI and another shot of Nixon and President Thieu.

"What a crock of fucking shit." Drew says, nodding his head toward the newspaper. "Those two deserve each other. No one is more corrupt than Thieu. It's unbelievable the public buys this sham. Thieu is just a puppet. He wouldn't last five minutes without the US propping him up."

Carl picks up the paper "Glad to see Nixon is over there fighting. I imagine they handed him an M16 and choppered him into some hell hole right after this shot." They both shake their heads in disgust.

"It's not working" Drew says. "The movement is just not working. They are killing us, literally. King, Kennedy, the protestors in the street, the gloves are off."

"I think your right. Any chance of a soft landing died with King and Kennedy. They had the main stream clout to end the war and make this a peaceful transition to a new political and cultural environment, but with their deaths and the violent backlash of the establishment it's going to be difficult." Carl says.

"I hate Nixon and all those fuckers. It's personal for me. The person I once was died in Vietnam. I'm an enemy of the state now and I'm tired of playing nice." Drew is stone faced and angry.

"I understand where you're coming from Drew, but violent resistance is just what they want. That's the game they play best and you're bound to lose if you try to go that rout. Besides, it kills any chance of gaining main stream support from the general population. It just helps them to demonize us. All this Marxist revolution bullshit of the Weatherman is ridiculous. Nobody is going to buy that shit." Carl says

"Maybe, maybe not. All I know is what we are doing now is not working. Nixon is ignoring us. We're nothing but a mosquito on the ass of an elephant." Drew sniffs

"I'm not so sure about that either. They're certainly not going to admit it, but we are gradually turning the tide of public opinion. Besides, I am coming to believe the cultural changes will have an even longer term effect. Civil right, women's liberation, environment, the human potential movements, these are the things that will last and change society as a whole. People are turning-on to a million new things. Some day the Vietnam War will just be a bad memory, a fuck up, a bad decision." Carl says.

"That's bullshit, Carl. It's the war, and the political and economic power that matter. All this other hippie dippy shit just takes people's eye off the ball. We have to take control of the government and that's going to take force. The rich and powerful aren't going to just roll over and play dead. They intend to fight to protect what they've got and we're going to have to fight to take it."

"You may be right Drew, but you're not going to make that happen by planting a pipe bomb in toilet of the Federal Building. We have to organize politically and that kind of stupid and meaningless violence just makes it harder."

"Well your right about the pipe bomb. What these fuckers need is a real wake up call. We're not going to just roll over and take this shit." Drew spits out in anger. Drew stops himself before he says more.

They both sit silently for a while to cool down. Finally Drew says, "Look Carl, I know you're in love and have a whole different perspective on things. I value that. But I'm still at war. I admit it, I'm consumed by hate and the memory of Vietnam. I can't just sit back and play nice, pretend self actualization. After what I have been through, all that seems like an impossible dream. No, I'm stuck here on the front lines, with no end to my tour of duty in sight, and no place to call home. I admire what you're doing Carl, and that's where you belong, not on the front lines." Drew says, turning to look into Carl's eyes.

Carl knows this has to be the end of the conversation. He knows that Drew is probably into some kind of violent shit, and Carl does not want to know about it. He disagrees, but he is certainly not going to actively oppose it. Violence is the game both sides are playing and unfortunately, they will both suffer the consequences. But a seed of doubt and concern has been planted in Carl's mind and he is now asking himself how much longer he wants to stay involved. Unlike Drew, Carl has a life.

Temptation

When Carl walks into the Berkeley house, standing in the doorway of the kitchen is Deja. Carl is instantly on guard.

"Hi Carl it's so nice to see you." Deja says.

"Hi Deja" He is thinking about just turning around and leaving.

"I just dropped by to see if Drew was around." She says as she walks up to Carl. No one else is around.

"I sure did enjoy being with you last time, but I talked to Drew and he said you were feeling kind of bad because you already have a girl friend." She is looking up into his face, her impossibly blue eyes staring into his, blond hair falling across her face and spilling down around her shoulders.

"Yeah, well I did feel kind of guilty about it." Carl says sheepishly.

She puts her hand on his shoulder, then runs it down his arm. "That is so sweet. You really love your girl friend don't you? Why can't I find somebody like you Carl?" She has moved to within a breath of him and he can smell the subtle scent of her musky perfume, the scent of her hair.

"You will Deja" Carl says, his hand has instinctively moved to her waist. He wants to touch her.

"I don't want to cause you any trouble. Everything that happens between us is our little secret. Let's go up to Draw's room and smoke a joint." She says seductively. Her body is pressed against his and she is still looking up at him with those impossibly beautiful eyes, her lips moist and red.

"No Deja, that's not a good idea." Carl says meekly as his hands hold her around the waist.

She presses her body against him now rubbing him with her breasts, with a harder edge she lowers her voice and says. "This is between you and me Carl. I want you again. I've been thinking about you and I want you to fuck me again. I want to do something special for you."

She puts her hand on his already hard cock, feeling it through his pants. Carl almost swoons. Every inch of him wants to rip her clothes off and ravage her. "You want me to Carl. See you already have a nice hard cock for me." She stretches up and puts her lips by his and says "I have something special I want to do for you. I want you to fuck me in the ass this time. I've been dreaming about feeling you fucking me in the ass when you make me cum. Come and fuck me Carl." She kisses him on the lips, and he kisses her back. He has given up. The world is gone and only his lust remains.

She takes him by the hand and leads him to the stairs. As they start to ascend Carl realizes what he is doing and stops. He knows what will happen if he goes up those stairs and he wants to go up. He wants to fuck Deja in the ass.

"No, stop Deja" he says in the middle of the stairs. "Oh god, I want to go up there and fuck you Deja, believe me. More than anything I want to fuck you, but I don't want to do it. Please Deja, you got to help me" She turns and comes to him. He is helpless to resist her physical advances but he continues to talk. "I want you Deja, but you have to help me please. If you continue to touch me, to ask me, I will give in. I just can't help myself. That's why you have to walk me back down these stairs. I love Rose. I want to be loyal to her because it would hurt her if she knew I was fucking somebody else. But I want to fuck you Deja, I can't help that. It's up to you Deja. I'm powerless.

Deja is looking at him, her head slightly tilted, a puzzled expression. "Wow, you really do love her don't you? That is so sweet. Damn, I really want to fuck you. I have been thinking about you. Damned if I don't feel jealous about you and your girl friend. What's her name, Rose?"

"Deja, you don't know how powerful your sexuality is. Men can't resist that, I can't resist it. You have to take some responsibility, use it in a good way. Not just for other people, but for yourself. You're a free spirit now Deja, but some day soon you'll want someone of your own. You won't want some hot babe fucking your old man. Help me out here, kick me in the ass and throw me down these stairs because my dick is hard as a rock and I want to fuck you so god damn bad." Carl sits down on the stairs and Deja sits beside him.

She laughs and then looks kind of sad. "Your right I do want someone, I am tired of sleeping around, though it has been fun. I only fuck the guys that turn me on." She says defensively. She looks at him, tears in her eyes. "The truth is, I have been thinking about you. I thought that maybe we could get together. I was upset when Drew told me about your girl friend."

"Yeah, well I wasn't exactly forthcoming with that information, and you weren't exactly all that interested. That's what courtship is about Deja. It's a chance to find out about somebody before you jump in bed with them. You know all about sex Deja, god knows that. But you need to learn about love. For you own sake as much as others."

She is softly crying as they sit down on the stairs together side-by-side. She leans her head against Carl's shoulder and he waits for her as she cries. Finally she lifts her head, pulls herself together, wiping away her tears with some Kleenex from her bag.

"Thank you Carl. This isn't all about you. Its' something I have been coming to realize myself for a while. You're an inspiration to me. Have you got a brother?" she asks.

Carl puts his arms around her "You're a beautiful woman. The right guy is out there. Get a little more selective." He says in a brotherly way. She nods her head.

"Great, so can we go on up now? I'm really looking forward to fucking you in the ass." Carl says seriously.

She looks at him shocked. They both break out in laughter.

"No way ass hole" she says and punches him on the shoulder. "You just blew your fucking chance pal."

Later, Carl feels proud of himself, but not too proud. He knows that it could easily have gone the other way if Deja hadn't relented, if she hadn't shown pity on him, If they had made it to the top of those stairs, he would almost certainly, and with relish, have fucked her brains out. Carl knows the weakness is still there. But still, he feels a weight lifted from his shoulders. Also, the idea that Rose is fucking Auggie on the side seems ridiculous now. He knows she has more self-control than that, even if she would like a taste of that big honker. His jealousy subsides as he comes to terms with his own irresponsibility. He has to admit though, the thought of Rose riding that giant cock Auggie's does still kind of turn him on.

Darin at Tomales

Darin never liked Tomales House.

He smiled when he was there. He drank the coffee, smoked the dope, accepted the food, talked when talked to. He could even be charming if he decided charm would cost less than contempt. But Carl noticed the way Darin looked at the place, the naked people on the deck, the garden, the guitars, the long dinners, the ridiculous arguments about sailing and science and whether basil should be added before or after the tomatoes. Darin looked at it all as if it were evidence.

Evidence of what, Carl was not sure.

Waste, maybe. Privilege. Escape. The revolution delayed by good weather.

One afternoon Darin stood at the edge of the patio, staring out over the bay while everyone else lingered after lunch. Wayne was asleep in the sun. Kate and Rose were laughing in the kitchen. Jack had gone down to check the boat. Carl came out with two cups of coffee and handed one to Darin.

Darin took it without looking at him.

"Beautiful, isn't it?" Carl said.

"That's one word for it."

Carl waited.

Darin sipped the coffee. "You people have quite a setup here."

"You people?"

Darin smiled faintly. "Relax. I'm not making an indictment."

"That sounded exactly like an indictment."

"Maybe I'm out of practice."

Carl leaned against the low wall. Below them, the bay was bright and still, a long silver wound in the afternoon light.

Darin said, "The thing about places like this is they make people forget what is happening."

"I don't forget."

"No?"

"No."

Darin turned to him. "Then what do you do with it?"

Carl did not answer right away. He could hear Rose inside, her laugh rising above Kate's. He thought of Berkeley, the gas, the crowd running, the sound of shots. He thought of Kelseyville, gravel under his face. He thought of Drew's eyes when Vietnam came too close to the surface.

"I try not to become what I hate," Carl said.

Darin laughed softly. "That's a very pretty answer."

"It's also true."

"Truth is cheap when nobody is shooting at you."

Carl looked at him. "People have shot at me."

"No," Darin said. "People have scared you. People have hurt you. That is not the same thing."

Carl felt his face go hot.

Darin saw it and seemed pleased, not because he wanted to fight, but because he had found the bruise.

“I’m not saying you’re a coward,” Darin said. “I’m saying you still think history cares about your soul. It doesn’t. They do not stop because you remain pure. They stop when they are made afraid.”

“And who is they?”

Darin’s smile vanished. “You know who they are.”

“That’s the problem. Everybody always knows who they are.”

For a moment Darin’s eyes hardened. Then he looked back over the water.

“You’re good with rooms,” he said. “I’ll give you that. You can make people feel brave for an hour. But sooner or later they have to leave the room. Then what?”

Carl had no answer he trusted.

Darin finished the coffee and set the cup on the wall.

“Drew thinks you’re useful,” he said. “Maybe he’s right.”

Carl watched him walk back through the house.

That was the first time Carl understood that Darin did not merely disagree with him. Darin judged him. Worse than that, Darin had already placed him in a category. Soft. Gifted, maybe. Sincere. But soft. A boy who wanted revolution to have clean hands.

Carl told himself it did not matter.

But later, when Drew spoke of Darin with admiration and unease mixed together, Carl remembered the look in Darin’s eyes and felt a small warning move through him.

Fall Out

Carl notices Darin's car as he parks on the street in front of the Berkeley house. When he goes inside two Panthers are standing in the doorway by the stairs leading up the Drew's room.

"Hey man, how-ya hanging." They say as Carl comes over.

"Doing good, doing good, what's happening?" Carl says as they shake hands.

Carl trudges up the stairs to Drew's attic. As he approaches the top he can clearly hear Drew and Darin talking.

"We got the dynamite. It's time to make those fucking pigs bleed." Says Darin.

"But we don't want to kill anybody if we can help it. Not yet. We just want to send a message. That's what the others are doing." Drew says.

Darin responds "Okay but I want..."

Carl walks into the room, and Drew holds up his hand to stop Darin.

"Oh, Hi Carl." Drew says quickly. "What's going on." He is trying to recover and act like nothing is going on. The look of shock on Carl's flushed face makes it obvious he heard what they were saying. For a moment they just stand there. Nobody knows what to say.

Finally Drew says.

"Look Carl, you're not supposed to be here. I'm sorry but this is a private meeting. You should probably go."

Carl pauses for a moment, then turns to leave. Suddenly Darin jumps in front of him, blocking the way.

"Wait a minute. Not so fast. He heard what we were talking about."

"No he didn't. You didn't hear a thing, did you Carl?" Drew asks.

Carl backs away from Darin, who is glaring at him. He is frightened. This is something he did not expect and does not want to be involved with. At the same time, he is furious.

"I didn't hear a thing and I don't want to be involved. You're both out of your fucking mind. This is stupid. It's futile. It's moronic. You and I have talked about this Drew. It's a bad strategy." Carl says.

Darin jumps in. "That's easy for you to say, you're not the one being hunted down and murdered by the fucking pigs every day. We're sick of this bullshit and we're fighting back. I can't afford to let you ruin our plans, to betray my people. You're with us or against us." Darin says. The implication is clear, Carl isn't just walking out of here.

"Wait, a minute." Drew steps up to Darin. "Carl is one of us. He believes in the cause. It's just another point of view. He's not a traitor. He won't tell anybody about what he's heard. I personally take responsibility for him. Let's just settle down. This is no crisis." Drew pushes Carl toward a chair. "Let's just finish our meeting later. I'll talk with Carl. It's Okay"

Darin isn't moving. He doesn't trust Carl. He has been friendly with Carl, but this is war. His brother's lives are at stake.

Drew is scrambling to defuse the situation, he is afraid Darin might kill Carl.

"Listen Carl, you didn't hear anything. You are not going to say anything to anybody, your girl friend, Kate, nobody. Am I right?" Drew says as he looks straight into Carl's eyes." For Carl the seriousness of the situation is sinking in.

"Absolutely, I don't know a thing. I didn't hear a thing. I don't want to be involved." He looks at Darin. "I understand where you're coming from, man. I will never say a thing. I was never here."

Drew looks at Darin "There you go. Everything is cool"

"You have no idea where I'm coming from white boy, and everything is not cool. But I am going to let this slide, for now." He steps over to the chair where Carl is sitting and towering over him he says, "If I ever hear a thing about you talking to anybody or disrupting our operations, you're dead. Do you understand?" Darin glares.

"I got it. I'm not involved." Carl says, his voice quivering.

Darin turns and stomps out of the room and down the stairs. Drew and Carl listen as there is a crash and yelling "Why the fuck did you let him come up there?" Darin is yelling. More crashing, "I thought he was cool." They can hear them stomping and arguing out the front door.

Both Carl and Drew remain silent and motionless as they hear Darin's car start and with a screech, pull away.

"Fuck, man" Drew says with a deep breath. "I thought you were a goner. You need to learn when to keep you fucking mouth shut man." Drew shakes his head.

"That always has been a problem of mine." Carl responds.

"Well that and some bad timing just about got your ass killed. Those guys are serious. You better lay low. I'll talk to him some more, I think you're all right."

Drew flops onto the couch exhausted. Carl is silent.

"This is what you want to be involved in?" Carl asks irritated.

"It's a bad world Carl. We're in a war and it's going to take action to win. If your not part of the solution your part of the problem." Drew says.

"I'm part of the problem? You're becoming just like them. You're losing your fucking soul man." Carl just stares at him shaking his head.

"Thank you for saving me. I will honor my word. I don't want to be involved in any of this. I think the more important and long lasting effects will be social, not political. Politically, I think we have shot ourselves in the foot."

Carl stands and Drew stands to meet him. They both know this means Carl's involvement with Drew and the political movement is over. "Good luck Drew. I really mean that." Carl says, tears in his eyes. They hug each other.

"You're like a brother to me Carl, I think your making the right decision to get out now. Things are falling apart. I wish I could leave, but I can't." Drew says.

"Come and live with us out at Tomales. It'll change your perspective, I promise." Carl says.

Drew doesn't say anything. He just walks with Carl to the stairs. They hug one more time and Carl turns and goes without another word.

After the Dynamite

Carl did not remember walking down the stairs. One moment he was in the room with Drew and Darin, the word dynamite still hanging in the air like a smell. The next he was outside, standing beside the Alfa with his hands on the door and no idea how long he had been there.

His first thought was stupidly practical. Drive away.

His second was Rose.

He wanted to tell her. He wanted her voice, her intelligence, her hand on his wrist pulling him back into the ordinary world. But Drew had looked at him with such desperate seriousness. Not fear for himself. Fear for Carl. That was what made it worse. Drew was in trouble. Not the kind of trouble they joked about after a rally, not cops and tear gas and a night in jail. This was deeper. This was men in rooms speaking quietly about explosives and targets and messages.

Carl got in the car and started it, then turned it off again.

He sat there listening to the engine tick as it cooled.

Darin had looked ready to hurt him. Carl knew that look. Eddie had worn it. Roy had worn it. John Harrison had worn it. Different politics, same narrowing of the eyes, same decision forming somewhere behind the face. You are either one of us or you are something to be removed.

That was what frightened him most.

He had come west believing he had escaped that kind of man. He had thought violence belonged to places like Kelseyville, to men afraid of long hair and foreign cars and girls who made their own choices. But now here it was again, dressed in the language of liberation. Darin did not want to put him in his place. Darin wanted to put him on the correct side of history. Somehow that felt even colder.

Carl leaned his head back against the seat.

He thought of Drew in Vietnam, though Drew had never told him everything. Enough had come through. A village. A girl. An explosion. Hospitals. Silence. Carl could feel the shape of it without knowing the details. Drew's anger had roots in real horror. That mattered. It mattered more than Carl wanted it to. Drew was not Eddie. Drew was not some drunk bully looking for a weaker body to punish. Drew had seen the machinery from inside. He had reason to hate it.

But reason was not permission.

Carl gripped the steering wheel until his hands hurt.

He could go to Kate. He could go to Rose. He could go to the police, though the thought made him almost laugh. Police had not saved him in Kelseyville. Police had shot people in Berkeley. Police had badges and files and questions. And if he told them, what exactly would he say? That he had heard one word? That men he knew were talking about something he was not supposed to hear? That one of them had been his friend?

Friend. The word landed heavily.

Drew had opened doors for him. Drew had trusted his voice. Drew had treated him like a man before Carl had fully believed he was one. And now Drew had pulled him close to something rotten, something that could not be explained away by outrage or grief.

Carl started the car again.

He would not tell Rose. Not yet. That decision made him feel cowardly and loyal at the same time, which seemed to be how the world worked now. Every choice carried its opposite inside it.

As he drove away, he looked once in the mirror.
The house was still behind him, ordinary in the afternoon light.
That was the terrible thing. Nothing looked different.

Out of Jail

Eddie McGuire was sentenced to one year in jail for assaulting an officer, hit and run, DWI, and reckless driving. However the sentence was reduced to six months and Eddie got out a month early for good behavior. The Complaint filed by Carl Lee is dropped when he leaves the state. With no witness the local prosecutor decides not to pursue them.

Eddie has moped around home for a month. He has no car and it will be three more months before he can legally drive. He lost his job and the remains of his Corvette were been sold to help pay his legal fees.

Eddie has only been to Wellsville on the weekend one time. He felt out of place. Roy Welch and the others were fairly friendly, but he knew they were talking about him behind his back. He was appalled to see more of the kids wearing long hair and hippie style clothes. Roy was even wearing bell bottom jeans for Christ sake. In only a few months' things had changed. Eddie feels older now, out of place.

But Eddie found a new calling in prison. He became a born again Christian. Well sort of. He's no holly roller but he sure knows whose side god is on. He also learned all about the communist conspiracy. With nothing else to do so he learned to read and obsesses about the hippie Jew conspiracy. He even found a radio station out of Olathe that talks full time about the Christian movement and the Communist liberal conspiracy. Eddie's older cell-mate knew all about it. He hates hippies as much Eddie. He even gave Eddie the name of a guy who is recruiting people to fight the hippies and communists on College campuses. He says this guy is actually paying people to get involved. Eddie decides to look him up as soon as he gets his drivers license. His name is Willard Kaidy and the organization is the American Alliance of Youth.

College Students

Carl talks to Rose about his falling out with Drew and about his misgivings with the direction of the political movement. To protect her, he is careful not to mention anything about Darin or the possibility of violence. Berkeley and all that political mess seems far away. The school year is about to start and both Carl and Rose will be taking classes at the College of Marin. Rose is studying Nursing and Carl is leaning towards science, music and general requirements. Ending his involvement in the movement was just as well, he needs all his time for school.

The College of Marin is just a Junior College, but an exceptionally good school. The quality of its teaching staff rivals many Universities. Nestled at the foot of Mount Tamalpais, Marin is one of the wealthiest and most naturally beautiful places in the country. Top quality professors want to live and work in Marin at this well funded school with its liberal and upscale student body. Carl and Rose fit right in.

Jack, Kate and Rob are all taking classes at the College. This allows the group to share rides. Rose and Carl buy a 1965 Malibu convertible, yellow with a black interior. This allows them to share rides with the others. After the first month they rent a small room in a house nestled in the hills above Fairfax. They stay there part time during the week but consider the Tomales house their home.

Rose dives into the difficult classes of the nursing program. Carl finds his classes easy, but he is happy to sail along and do the required work. They are just a couple of college students now and Carl lays back to enjoy the beauty of Marin and his beloved Rose. They also get a chance to play tourist in San Francisco and the rest of the Bay Area. It's an amazing place. Life is easy and peaceful, even as the war rages on.

Carl and Rose are a happy couple and their relationship is maturing. The puppy-love is still there but they are learning to make decisions together, to compromise and to get used to each other's idiosyncrasies. Carl likes to take naps and has sweaty feet. Rose has picked up a number of peculiar habits from her travels. She loves to wear strange and exotic clothes and recently got a nose ring. None of that bothers Carl much. He likes the way she looks.

However, one day Carl and Rose are having lunch at a cafe near the college. As they eat a young woman at the next table leaves. She has only eaten half her sandwich. Rose glances at her table, then unapologetically reaches over and snags the other half of her uneaten sandwich.

"What are you doing?" Carl whines.

"I'm taking this sandwich. Americans are so wasteful. Look at this perfectly good food, and they will just throw it away."

"But, we can pay for our own sandwiches." Carl responds defensively.

"That's not the point. One of these days when you see people starving in other countries, in this country, you will understand what I mean. I can't stand seeing the waste. It's arrogant." Rose defiantly takes a bite of the retrieved sandwich.

"But, she might have some kind of disease or something." Carl protests.

Rose just gives him that incredulous, tight lipped look he has seen before. "I'll take my chances" She replies.

Not only does Rose snag food from other peoples tables, which still embarrasses Carl no matter how much he tries to rationalize this behavior, she also scavenges food from dumpsters behind food stores.

Carl often finds a bag of blemished fruits and vegetables in the refrigerator. Rose gets these from two local grocery stores where they also shop.

Each day, throughout America, all produce with the slightest blemish is pulled from grocery store shelves. American consumers will not buy an apple with a brown spot on it, even if it is otherwise perfect. To Rose, this is all a horrible waste. In the third-world countries where she has lived this is be perfectly good food.

At first, when the employees find this beautiful young woman taking food from the dumpster, they were appalled and feel sorry for her. They figure she is poor and needs the food. The employees even start setting aside produce just for Rose. Soon though, as they get to know Rose, they realized this is her way of fighting, even if in a small way, the waste she sees all around her. She tells them stories about the places she had lived and the poor people she knows who would love to have this food. Soon, everyone at the stores knows Rose, and Carl is embarrassed when they offer her a bag of blemished produce as they shopped. Carl realizes that Rose is not intending to make a political statement by her actions. She is not intentionally trying to changes the people at the stores, but she is changing their outlook.

Sometimes it seems like Carl and Rose are so busy that they hardly ever get to see one another, and when they do they are tired. However, tired doesn't stop Carl from wanting sex, even if it does dampens the mood for Rose. In the end, they learn to compromise, especially Carl, because they love each other. It's part of growing up.

Time slips away. It's Christmas and Carl's mom comes to visit from Kansas. Rose is surprised how nervous Carl is about her visit. He wants her to have fun and admire what he is doing. He is making Rose nervous as well, but when Rose meets Carl's mom they hit it off immediately. They show her the sights of San Francisco and thrill her with the beauty of Point Reyes. Rose really likes his mom and sees much of her in Carl. She thinks that his close relationship with his mother speaks well of him as a mate.

As Carl's mom is leaving she says "I think you kids are a perfect pair, I hope the next time I visit it's for a wedding." Carl and Rose blush. That is not something they have discussed. Neither one of them mentions it, but his mom has succeeded in planting a seed.

Marriage is something Rose has resisted. She has turned down a few proposals already. But Rose is surprised at herself for thinking that she kind of wishes Carl would ask her to marry him, though she is still not sure how she would respond if he did. Of course she would never mention this to Carl. For Carl the thought of being turned down is too much to bear, and he is sure the answer would be not yet.

Even though the winter is cold and rainy, Tomales Bay is world of natural wonders. Great flocks of birds and ducks cover the bay and the house is rattled buy great winter storms blowing in from the Pacific Ocean. With the winter rains, come lush green meadows, which tumble like green velvet into the sea and soon there is the hint of spring as March approaches.

PART SEVEN: THE MACHINES

Kate Goes To New York

Kate is excited about a trip she is taking to New York. She has some old friends she wants to see. Jack seems concerned about the trip. There is some distance between them for a while, but just before she is leaves they seem to make up.

A week later, Kate returns bearing gifts. She brings Carl and the other guys in the house black T-shirts-shirts with the words "New York" written on them in cool gold lettering. Carl likes to wear his even though he has never been farther east than Chicago. For Rose, Kate brings a vegetarian cook book. Carl is not sure what that has to do with New York but Rose likes it anyway. Jack and Kate are thrilled to see each other. The house seemed lonely without Kate, but now things are back to normal.

Eddie McGuire meets Willard Kaidy

Eddie calls the phone number given to him by his cell mate. He speaks with Willard Kaidy himself. Kaidy seems like a good guy. They set up a meeting in Kansas City and Eddie drives down on a Wednesday.

The office is in a run down brick building in an older section of Kansas City Kansas. Eddie goes up a flight of stairs and finds the door down a dark and musty hallway. On the front of the door in white letters is the name of the organization, American Alliance of Youth. He steps in. It is just a single room dominated by a large wooden desk in the middle. Willard is behind the desk on the phone, turned sideways with his feet propped up on a metal waste-basket. He motions with one hand for Eddie to set down. Two armless wooden chairs sit in front of the desk. Eddie takes a seat.

"I'll send the payment today. Yes. Yes. That's right. Okay can do, bye." Willard hangs up the phone. He stands up and thrusts his hand across the desk. "Hi, I'm Willard Kaidy and you must be Eddie McGuire." Willard says enthusiastically.

Eddie stands up and awkwardly shakes his hand.

"Yeah. I'm Eddie McGuire, nice to meet you." They both set back down.

"Well, Eddie I hear good things about you. Jim says you're a straight up guy, a big supporter of the cause."

"That's right, I've been reading and listening to Patriot Radio out of Olathe and I hate communists and hippies." Eddie says.

"Well that's a good start, a real good start." Kaidy says.

Willard tells Eddie all about the idea behind the American Alliance of Youth, with a lot of side discussions of communist conspiracies, Jew conspiracies, liberal conspiracies and the niggerfication of America. Eddie throws in some comments about the great Satan conspiracy, the fluoride conspiracy and filthy hippies taking over the youth of America. Willard is impressed. Eddie has done his home work.

"I like you Eddie. I think you're the kind of man were looking for." Eddie is excited. "What you would be doing is going directly to College campuses, hooking up with our existing network of supporters and recruiting new young people to join our cause. When the hippies and communists come out to protest, you'll be their protesting right back. If they get in your face and want to fight, then you're free to kick their fucking ass."

Eddie really likes that part. Kicking ass is something he is good at, and kicking hippie ass is a job he was made for.

Willard continues. "Now Eddie, I know that you've had some trouble with the law, and that's too bad because if you were a filthy hippie the ACLU would have been there to get you off for nothing. But since you're just a working-man they sent you to jail. It's a god damn shame and I feel for you. But in this job, if you get arrested, we will be right behind you. We'll bail you out and provide all the legal services you need." Willard knows this is only partially true, but he doesn't want to bore Eddie with the details. "Of course we don't expect you to do anything illegal. You're just exercising your right to freedom of speech, just like the commie radicals are doing. I just want you to know we will be there for you if you need us." Willard says with conviction. Willard lets that sink in and Eddie nods his head. Sounds good to Eddie, he doesn't need any more legal problems that's for sure.

"What do you think? Are you interested?" Willard asks.

"Absolutely sir, I can do the job, I'm sure of that."

"Good, I know you can." He gets up and shakes Eddie's hand. Eddie rises to meet him. They sit back down.

"Okay Eddie, lets get on to some specifics. How would you like to take a trip to sunny California?" Willard asks with a straight face.

Eddie's eyebrows rise. "Sure." he says.

"I have some people who need your help, and as you know, Berkeley is the center of the hippie conspiracy universe. This is the heart of the beast Eddie. Do you think you can handle it?"

"Yes sir." Eddie immediately responds.

"Great, that's the kind of enthusiasm I like." Willard says. Willard thinks for a minute and then changes gears.

"Now Eddie, we're just a new organization and don't have a whole lot of money yet, but allot more money is coming in every day. I can't pay much to start, but let me tell you the opportunity here is unlimited. What I can do is give you a couple hundred bucks to pay for your gas to drive to California, and a couple hundred bucks a month to do the job. Now I know that's not much, but do a good job and I can guarantee more will be coming. Plus, I can hook you up with some of our people out there who should be able to provide a place for you to stay." Willard watches to see if Eddie bites.

Eddie thinks about this for a minute. "Wow, that's not much money. I used to draw down good pay when I had my distribution route. I'm not sure I can make it on that." Eddie says.

"It's just the beginning Eddie. Just hang in there for a couple months, show you can do the job and I'll have more. You're fighting the good cause here Eddie and you'll get to kick some hippie ass." Willard says.

Willard has Eddie pegged. Kicking hippie ass is the magic phrase. "I would sure like to give it a try Mr. Kaidy. How much would you give me now?" Eddie asks.

"Well Eddie, normally I would just give you the two hundred now and send you the rest in California, but I am willing to give you four hundred dollars right now." Willard reaches in his desk and pulls out four, crisp, one hundred dollar bills and fans them out on the desk right in front of Eddie. At this point it looks like allot of money to Eddie. "But only if you promise to leave for California first thing next week." Willard lets this sink in. Benjamin Franklin is staring up at Eddie asking him the question, "Is he a patriot or not?"

"Okay, I'll do it." Says Eddie.

Eddie leaves the office with the four crisp hundred dollar bills in his pocket and a whole new purpose in life. Who knows, maybe he will even run into that commie cock-sucker Carl Lee in California.

Explosion In New York

It is a quiet Friday morning in Greenwich Village New York on a typical tree lined street of century old red brick town houses. Suddenly an explosion rips open the front of one of the building, shattering the glass of the surrounding buildings and sending a column of smoke billowing into the air. Fire starts spreading rapidly within the ruins. Two young men run from a nearby building and start searching in the rubble. They find a young woman, completely naked and covered in dust. Another young woman wearing only jeans is also pulled out of the bricks as flames consume what little is left of the townhouse. Neighbors help the coughing and choking young women and bringing them coats to cover their nakedness. They appeared unhurt, so a neighbor lets them use her shower and gives them some old clothes. Later when she returns to check on them and they are gone. Neighbors also report seeing three men running and jumping over a back fence after the explosion.

Fire trucks arrive just as two more explosions weaken what is left of the structure. A few minutes later it completely collapses. After the fire is put out, the fire department brings in a crane to look for more victims. They soon discover the body of a young man who has been crushed to death.

Reporters swarm to the scene, asking the fire department questions about the cause the explosion. No one is sure yet, but a gas leak is considered a possibility. The explosion has blasted a hole right through the wall of an adjoining building and soon the bomb squad is called to help search of the wreckage. There is speculation about the possibility of dynamite.

In the following days, as more bodies are recovered, they are all identified as SDS members. SDS literature and two, twelve inch lead pipes, filled with dynamite are discovered four days later. The neighbors watch as a bomb removal truck is brought to the scene. Within a day they discover four cartons containing 57 sticks of dynamite, 30 blasting caps and several cheap alarm clocks with holes in the face for attaching wires.

The four dead SDS members are all from wealthy or upper middle class families. There is much media speculation about why some of the best and brightest children of this generation would become terrorists.

One of the dead is Diana Oughton, the daughter of James Oughton, an Illinois State Senator. She attended school at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, and once worked as a teacher at the Children's Community School.

To stop him, if stopping was still possible.

Drew After New York

The news from New York struck Drew with a force he did not expect. Not because he was innocent. He had not been innocent for a long time. Not because he was shocked that people were building bombs. He knew that already. He had sat in rooms where targets were discussed in voices as casual as weather. ROTC buildings. Draft boards. Police stations. Military offices. Symbols, they called them. Always symbols.

But a townhouse was not a symbol. A townhouse was wood, gas lines, neighbors, beds, dishes in the sink. A townhouse had stairways and laundry and somebody's mail on the table. The thought of people he might have known, people who had laughed at meetings and borrowed cars and eaten bad spaghetti after rallies, blown apart while making bombs in a basement, stripped the rhetoric from the thing.

The war brought home.

There it was. Home.

Drew sat on the edge of his bed with the newspaper folded in his lap. His leg ached badly that morning, the old grenade pain traveling up the bone like weather. For a while he did not move. He only stared at the wall and listened to the house below him waking, voices in the kitchen, somebody coughing, a door closing.

He thought of Mi. He thought of the little girl on the porch. He thought of the nurses in the clearing. He thought of what bodies looked like after ideology had finished naming them.

Then he thought of Darin.

Darin would call it sacrifice. Or mistake. Or premature action. Or the inevitable cost of revolutionary struggle. Darin always had language ready. That was one of the things Drew had once admired in him, the speed with which he could turn horror into necessity. Drew had done it too. Every soldier learned that trick or went mad.

But now the trick disgusted him.

He stood slowly and crossed to the small mirror above the dresser. His face looked older than it should have. Not wise. Just used up. He remembered Carl saying, with that earnest stubbornness of his, that violence was not only morally wrong but strategically stupid. Drew had laughed at him then, gently, not cruelly. The kid was still half in love with the idea that people could be persuaded by truth.

Maybe that was childish.

Maybe it was also the last sane thing anyone had said.

Drew picked up the phone and started calling numbers.

No one had seen Darin. Or if they had, they were not saying. The voices on the other end were guarded now, thinned by fear. New York had changed the air. Everybody knew it, even the ones pretending otherwise. The romance had taken a hit. The underground suddenly seemed less like a mythic river carrying history forward and more like a basement full of unstable men holding wires in trembling hands.

By noon Drew had decided he needed to find Darin himself.

Not to argue theory.

Not to posture.

To stop him, if stopping was still possible.

Eddie McGuire Comes To California

Eddie doesn't even tell his parents he is going to California. He figures he will call when he gets there. He doesn't want to hear his mom worrying or his dad bitching. It's none of their fucking business anyway and Eddie can't stand to see his mom worry.

The red, four door, 1962 Chevy Impala Eddie is driving makes the trip without a problem. He blows a tire in Utah, but has a decent spare and buys a used tire at a gas station. The mountains were beautiful. He even stops to fish, but the spring run off makes it unlikely he will catch anything. It doesn't matter, he likes fishing anyway.

Eddie sleeps in the car the whole way to save money. That's one of the advantages of traveling in a big old Chevy. When he gets to the busy freeways of the San Francisco Bay Area he is confused and makes a wrong turn. When he gets off the freeway to turn around he finds himself in the lowlands of Oakland. "I've never seen so many niggers in my life." He says to himself.

It's about five-thirty and the traffic is jammed when Eddie finally makes his way back onto the freeway. He heads down to Hayward where he is supposed to meet one of the leaders of the local American Alliance of Youth group. After some additional freeway confusion, he finds the house on a long street, with low, one story, plywood houses, with flat tar and gravel roofs. The front yard has a chain link fence and there are bars on all the windows. A newish truck and an older ford sedan are in the drive. As Eddie starts to go in the gate a big black dog comes barking and snarling to meet him. Eddie stands behind the fence as the dog snarls and bears his fangs. He isn't sure what to do next. It's hard to ring the doorbell with an attack dog in the front yard. After a couple minutes of furious barking the front door opens and a middle aged guy wearing a dirty white T-shirt, that barely covers his beer belly, comes out in his bare feet cursing and screaming at the dog.

"Yeah, what'a ya-want?" He yells from the door over the barking dog.

"I'm Eddie. I called you earlier. Willard Kaidy sent me." Eddie yells back.

The guy has to think about it. "Oh yeah, that's right. Hold on a second." He disappears back into the house and comes back out wearing house slippers. He grabs the dog by the collar yelling, "Shut the fuck up," and comes over to open the gate.

The dog is still snarling and growling as the fat guy holds him and Eddie is reluctant to go in.

"Don't worry, I got him," the guy promises as he struggles to hold the snarling dog. Eddie cautiously walks in. The dog lunges but the fat guy has a firm grip on his collar. "Go on in," yells the wild dog handler.

Eddie moves up the walk and into the house. The guy follows and then turns to push the growling and barking dog out the door and quickly closes it behind him. "That's Duke. He has a little bit of a temper around strangers, but he's one hell of a good guard dog." The guy says. Eddie can believe that.

"Hi, I'm Eddie McGuire." Eddie says offering his hand. The fat guy wipes his hand on the side of his shirt and shakes Eddie's hand. "I'm Tom Butler, damn nice to meet-ya. So Willard Kaidy sent you. Ain't that something. Go ahead, sit on down." He motions to a green couch and eddy sits down as Tom Butler goes around the corner to the kitchen. "Like a beer?" he calls.

"Sure, sounds good." Eddie says. And it did sound good after barely surviving that fucking crazed man eating dog.

It's a small front room with a mish-mash of shabby furniture. The worn carpet must have been tan at some point in history. Now it's a dingy, brownish gray. It smells like stale cigarettes, beer and cat piss. Leaning in the corner by a Naugahyde lounge chair is a double barrel shot gun, and slung over one corner of the chair is a holster with some kind of large caliber hand gun. There is nothing on the yellowing white walls.

Tom Butler returns with two Budweisers, hands one to Eddie and collapses in the lounge chair. He groans and takes a deep breath, like that was the most exercise he has had all day, then pops his beer, puts the tab in the hole and drinks half the beer in one guzzle.

Eddie joins him with the beer. When he looks up Tom Butler is looking at him suspiciously, with a little bit of beer dribbling down his fat double chin. "So Willard Kaidy sent you? I told him I was doing the best I could. I need more money if he wants me to recruit more guys. We're doing military training on the weekends and we'll be ready for those niggers when they come, I can tell-ya that for god damn sure. We'll blow there black asses all the way back to nigger town Oakland, that's what." He says his face turning red. Eddie doesn't know what to say.

"Look, he just sent me out here to help organize some counter demonstrations at the Berkeley Campus. He said that you would be able to help me, get me connected to some of the other people in the organization." Eddie says. Tom Butler looks confused. He has to let this sink in with another gulp of beer.

"Yeah, well were still getting organized. Training and getting organized. Those freaks at Berkeley, their pretty god damned scary when-ya actually go down there. There's fucking millions of em. We need to get organized before we do any counter demon-stratin, that's for sure. Kaidy cant just expect us to go in there until we get organized." Tom Butler says.

This is not what Eddie expected. First of all, he thought it was going to be some other young guys like him, who were ready to raise some shit and kick some ass. This fat old fucker couldn't fight his way out of his god dammed lounge chair unless it was to get another beer. Maybe some of the others are in better shape, but this guy is a huge disappointment.

"Well, Okay, when did you say the next meeting was?" Eddie asks.

"This Saturday, we're all meeting up at a place near Willits to do some training and shooting. It's a hell of a lot of fun." Tom Butler says.

"That's just in a couple of days. Kaidy said you could set me up with a place to stay."

"What? I don't have any place for you to stay. I guess you could stay in the garage for a few days if you want." Tom Butler doesn't look too happy about this. Eddie thinks about this as he drinks his beer.

"Look, how about if I just sleep in my car in the drive and you let me take a shower and use your bathroom for a few days, until after the meeting this weekend?" Eddie asks.

Tom Butler nods his head. He thinks he better offer some kind of hospitality or Kaidy might stop sending him money. Even though it's not as much money as he should be getting for all the organizing he is doing. "That sounds good. Help yourself."

Eddie goes out and buys some hamburgers for both of them. Afterward, Eddie takes a shower and goes to sleep in his car. Eddie considers Tom Butler a freeloading pig and intends on telling Willard all about it when he calls. The next day Eddie decides to check out Berkeley himself. Tom Butler gives him a few directions and he finds his way without ending up in East Oakland this time.

Eddie parks a few blocks from Telegraph Avenue and sets out to explore the area. Hippies are everywhere he looks. Most of them are young college kids like Carl Lee, but some are hard core. Eddie thinks the street people are filthy, disgusting bums. They sit on the street with grimy black feet, mangy dogs and sleazy looking women with their tits hanging out of cheap cotton clothes.

Vendors line the sidewalk. Some of the stuff is interesting but most of it is a bunch of cheap crap. There are tables with communist literature right out in the open. He can't believe the cops let them get away with this shit. They all look like a bunch of fucking pussys as far as Eddie is concerned. He and Roy Welch could start at one end of this street and kick everyone of these cock suckers asses right on down the line. All he needs is a few more guys with some fucking balls and he can raise some major shit. To Eddie McGuire everyone he sees is a barely human, an alien from a hostile planet. They are all communists, atheists, and Jews conspiring to destroy his country and take over the world. He is here to exterminate them.

The next day Eddie drives to San Francisco, but everywhere he looks are the same degenerate forces of evil. He understands now why Tom Butler hides in his house, behind bars, with an attack dog and loaded guns at the ready. The plague is all around him and it is not just infuriating, it is frightening.

Early Saturday morning Eddie follows Tom Butler to Willits for the weekend. It's a long way. They finally leave the freeway for a gravel road, then wind their way high into the coastal mountains. Tom Butler gets out and opens a combination lock at a gate. They follow a dirt path around a hill to a tiny cabin and an old wooden barn. Eddie counts seven other cars and trucks.

Tom Butler and Eddie pull up to a group of guys dressed in army camouflage, standing at the back of an open tailgate. They are looking at several guns laid out in the truck bed on a blanket. When Tom Butler and Eddie get out and the men stare at them suspiciously as they walk over.

"Who is this, Butler? You know outsiders aren't allowed without approval." The tall guy asks. One of the other men throws the side of the blanket over the guns.

Nonplused, Tom Butler says, "This is Eddie McGuire. Willard Kaidy sent him out here from Kansas City. He is on the American Alliance of Youth payroll." They all look surprised and impressed.

"Willard Kaidy sent you?" Says one

"Sure did." Says Eddie.

"I called Kaidy and checked it out." Says Tom Butler.

"Okay, well then I move that we officially allow Eddie, what was your name again?" The tall guy asks.

"Eddie McGuire"

"Eddie McGuire, to be allowed to attend these events. Everybody in favor?"

"I" they all say.

"And those against?" Nobody answers.

"You're officially welcome to attend future meetings of the California Chapter of the Christian militia." the tall guy says. The blanket is thrown back from the guns.

"I thought this was the American Alliance of Youth." Eddie says.

"Yeah, well that to." The tall guy says.

No doubt, it is a fine collection of guns.

They all take turns trying out each others guns. Shooting at tin cans and other crap lined up against a nearby hill. They have coolers filled with beer and a few of them are drinking Jack Daniel's. Guns and booze, it's a fun if frightening combination.

All together there are sixteen men, including Eddie and Tom Butler. They are mostly in their thirties and forties with one other guy around Eddie's age. They all know the talk, bitching and moaning about the niggers, hippies, Jews, liberals and communists. But later when Eddie tries to nail them down and organize some counter protests in Berkeley they all have second thoughts. They need more organization and training they say. They need more members and more guns. They needed more time and more money from Kaidy.

Eddie thinks they needed more balls and less bullshit. They are all fucking worthless as far as he can see. All they want to do is shoot guns, get drunk and play army. Non of them is willing to actually go into Berkeley and confront the niggers, hippies, Jews, liberals and communists that they say they hate so much. The guy who is Eddie's age is there with his dad. When his dad hears Eddie trying to talk him into going with him to kick some ass in Berkeley, he angrily jumps in. "No fucking way are you going down there. Who knows what those freaks might do. We aren't ready for that. Don't worry, our day will come." He promises.

Eddie drives back to Tom Butler's house the next day. He is discourage, home sick, hungry, horny, tired and broke, and he feels like kicking somebody's ass.

Call From New York

Its two days after Kate returns from her trip to New York. Carl is reading a book, curled up in a big overstuffed chair facing the fire. It's a cold and rainy day and they have a fire going in the fireplace. Rose is in the bedroom doing something and Kate is puttering around the kitchen, fixing some tea.

The phone rings and Kate picks it up. Carl can hear her on the phone.

"Hello? Oh hi, how's it going? No, no I haven't. What? What? No, oh my god, no. But I...I just saw them. Oh god no. Nobody has contacted me. I will. I'm not involved anymore and haven't been for a long time. I was just visiting. Okay I will. Thanks for the call, good by."

Kate gently hangs up the phone. There is silence. Then Carl hears Kate crying.

Carl gets up from the chair and walks to the kitchen. Kate is leaning with her head against the wall sobbing.

"Kate, what's wrong?" He says softly as he walks over to her.

She turns and holds him. She has her head against his chest and is moaning, whimpering, crying. Now Rose comes from the bedroom, she also heard Kate crying.

"What's going on?" she asks Carl, concerned.

"I'm not sure" he replies softly.

Kate just stays that way for a long time. Rose has come over and is gently holding her as well. Kate continues to sob. Finally, she starts to settle down a bit, takes a deep breath and looks up at them as they still hold her.

"A close friend, one of the people I just saw in New York, has been killed."

"Oh, I am so sorry to hear that Kate." Rose says. Now she has tears in her eyes.

"I was afraid something like this might happen. It's all crazy, completely insane." Now she is biting her lower lip and looking concerned. She glances at them but seems afraid to look them in the eye.

"What happened?" Carl asks.

"There was an explosion in the building where she was living. Both she and her husband were killed."

"Oh, that's horrible." says Rose. "I'm so sorry Kate." Rose puts her arm around Kate.

"I need to lie down for a while" Kate says with tears in her eyes. She goes out the door to her room.

About an hour later Carl is still reading in front of the fire. Kate quietly comes in the kitchen door and approaches Carl. Speaking low she says,

"Carl I need to talk to you about something, privately." She looks around.

"Well, let's go for a little walk. Some fresh air will do you good." Carl says.

They grab their jackets from the hooks near the door. "Kate and I are going for a walk Rose, be back in a little while." Carl calls.

"Great, see you later." She says cheerfully. She hopes Carl can console Kate. She is glad they have such a close relationship.

Carl and Kate stroll down the path towards the landing. When they get to the bench that overlooks the bay, they set down side-by-side. Carl puts his arm around Kate.

"I'm so sorry Kate. Life is a fragile thing. You'll feel better with time. You just have to wait it out, give yourself a chance to heal." He says.

"Thanks Carl, but I have something else to talk to you about, something of even more concern." She lowers her head and takes a deep breath.

"The explosion that killed Diana and the others was a bomb, a bomb they were building." Carl's eyebrows rise in an expression of surprise, then concern.

"I was once much more involved with the movement than I have let you know. When I was in Ann Arbor I was in the SDS. It was primarily a political organization back in those days, but as time went on some of the members became convinced that violence was the only way to get the establishment's attention. Finally the group split apart and Diana and I went in different directions. I came to California and gave up the movement. Diana and her boy friend Bill Ayers became involved with the Weathermen." Kate looks wistfully over the hazy surface of the bay.

"Diana and I have been best friends since High School." Kate looks at Carl with tears in her eyes again. "She was a lovely girl, crazy about kids, so smart and kind. We just hit it off immediately." She looks back across the bay.

"Anyway, we have stayed in touch and I have been worried about her. So I went the New York to see her and some of our other friends. We got a chance to spend quite a bit of time together, even though she was paranoid and on the run the whole time. She didn't look good." Kate shakes her head. Then looks at Carl,

"But, that's not why I wanted to talk to you. I'm reluctant to get you involved but I have to ask you a question. Is Drew involved with any of these bombings?" she is closely watching for Carl's response. Carl doesn't want to mention what he knows, at least not yet.

"Well, I'm not sure, I hope not. It's possible." Carl says with a crooked frown.

"Shit, he better not be, god damn it." She is angry but calms down.

"Diana told me some stuff, some secret and dangerous stuff. I'm not sure I should tell you." She purses her lips, debating.

"Look you don't have to tell me anything. I'm not involved either."

"Yeah, but it may involve Drew." She is debating in her mind whether to tell Carl or not.

"Okay here it is. First she told me they were building a bomb to blow up an officer's dance at Fort Dix. Then she said somebody in the Bay Area was going to blow up an officer's dance at the Presidio in San Francisco. I don't know why the fuck she told me that shit. I have been tortured by it ever since I got back. Diana seemed totally brain washed and totally into the violent revolution thing. They are fucking nuts as far as I'm concerned. I wasn't even sure I should believe her. It could have been all bullshit as far as I knew." Kate stops to think for a minute.

Carl's mind is racing. Could Drew possibly be mixed up in this? What should he do with this information? It is totally third hand hearsay at this point, but he has a weird feeling that there is something to it. But Kate wasn't sure if she should believe Diana when she told her and look what happened, they got blown up. What should he say to Kate?

"Look Kate, I don't think Drew is involved in any of this stuff. Plus, if anybody was planning something they are probably having second thoughts now. Just try to forget about it. I am planning a trip into Berkeley tomorrow. I'll talk to Drew. He'll know what to do with the information. It's best that all of us just stay out of it." Carl was not really been planning to go to Berkeley, but he is now.

"Maybe your right." Kate says. "But Drew should know about it, just in case. Do you want me to call him?" she asks.

"No way, we don't want to be talking about this shit on the phone. I'll talk to him, but I am sure he is not involved in anything like that." Carl lies. He doesn't want her to know about Drew or what he heard that day he walked in on his meeting.

"Thanks Carl. I appreciate your support. This whole thing is way out of control. Everybody has gone crazy."

"Really, it's nuts and completely counterproductive." Carl says, shaking his head. Kate hugs Carl around the shoulder and kisses him on the cheek. Rose is a lucky woman, I'm so happy for both of you." She lets go of him and stands up.

"I feel a little better about it now. I just don't want anybody else to get hurt." she says. "But be careful. I don't want you getting involved."

Carl wishes he felt better. This is all a shock and he doesn't dare tell Kate or Rose. The person he needs to talk to is Drew. He only hopes none of it's true and Drew is not involved. Still, Carl has a bad feeling.

"Don't worry Kate, I'll just mention it to him. I won't even tell him where I heard it. Let's not mention this to Rose either; I don't want her to worry."

"Your right, she doesn't need to know. Thank you so much." she says and gives him another hug.

They stroll back up to the house and act as if nothing has happened. Later that night Carl mentions he needs to go into town tomorrow to run some errands. "No need for you to come if you don't want to." He says nonchalantly. As he predicted she says, "Nah, I'd rather not, unless you want me to. We could have lunch somewhere." She says.

"No need, I plan on having a hamburger for lunch. I'll be back before dinner." Carl says.

She knows that he sneaks out for a hamburger now and then. He is from Kansas after all and needs some bloody meat every now and then. "Go ahead, have your charred flesh, you Cannibal." She says in fake anger. Carl comes over to bite her neck as she screams in pretend pain.

The next day Carl takes his time about leaving. He has a pleasant breakfast, reads for a while, and takes a leisurely shower. No hurry, as far as he knows nothing imminent is happening. At around ten he says goodbye to Rose and heads out. When he gets to Inverness he calls to make sure Drew is around. Drew says he is going out, but will be back by the time Carl gets there. Carl acts like nothing is wrong and Drew is happy to hear he is dropping by.

Carl makes the drive to Berkeley and decides to cruise down Telegraph just for the hell of it. It's barely out of the way, except for the traffic. Plus, he just likes to check out the Berkeley scene.

Eddie McGuire is strolling down Telegraph cursing at the degenerate hippie trash under his breath. What is he doing here? The people who are supposed to be helping him are worthless. The job, the trip, the whole thing is bullshit. Eddie feels directionless. Now what? He feels like punching out a few people, just for the hell of it. This has all been a complete waste of time and he is ready to head back to Kansas.

Eddie's car is parked around the corner on a side street and he is heading that way when he catches a glimpse of a red sports car. It's a car just like the one Carl Lee used to drive. He does a double take. "Son of a bitch, that looks just like Carl Lee." The car has already gone past him by now, but it's moving slowly in the traffic. Eddie trots after it and has almost caught up. He can clearly see now, it defiantly is Carl Lee.

The traffic starts moving again and the Alpha pulls away. Eddie McGuire is running to catch up. He has no idea what he is going to do when he catches him, but he feels compelled to follow. Carl is several blocks ahead and Eddie slows down to catch his breath. He thinks that he has lost him, when suddenly he sees the Alpha turn the corner.

Eddie runs again to catch up. Unfortunately, the pointy toed cowboy boots that were so good for kicking Carl in the face as he lay bleeding on the ground, and the high heels that make Eddie feel taller than he is, are not so good when it comes to running. As Eddie turns the corner to follow Carl he slips on the slick leather soles and almost falls on his ass, but he catches himself at the last second. He can barely see the Alpha now, three or four blocks away. As he trots down the side street his feet are starting to hurt and he realizes that there is no way he is going to catch Carl on foot. Then, to his amazement, the Alpha's break lights go on and he watches as it pulls over to the side and parks.

As Eddie gets about a block away he can see Carl Lee standing by the Alpha talking to a couple of guys. One is white and the other is a big black nigger. Parked in front of the Alpha is a black, 1962 Chrysler Imperial. Eddie's uncle had one just like it and he recognizes it immediately.

Eddie is panting and completely out of breath from running all that way, so he steps behind a large tree a safe distance up the street and watches. He sees them talking for a couple of minutes and then the black guy gets in the Imperial and drives away. Carl and the other guy walk to the house and go inside.

Eddie has caught his breath by now and walks a little closer. It's a typical, raggedy, hippie house from what Eddie can see. He is wondering what to do. He stands behind a bush and watches. He has no idea if Carl Lee lives here or what. He decides that he should watch the place, but what if Carl Lee leaves. It would be better to have his car.

Eddie turns around, and runs all the way back to his car, a good ten blocks. His feet are killing him by the time he gets there. With a grimace, he pulls off his boots. He has two big blisters on the heels of both feet. He starts the Chevy.

Eddie is afraid that when he gets back that the Alpha will be gone, but when he turns the corner and heads down the street he sees that it is still in the same spot. Eddie pulls over and waits.

The Conversation

When Carl pulls up he sees Drew and Darin standing in the yard talking. He parks the Alpha on the street behind Darin's Chrysler and jumps out.

"Hi, how's it going?" Carl says

"Hey, it's good to see you man." Drew says as he comes over and gives Carl a bear hug. Darin walks over as well and they do a friendly reach around handshake.

"We just got here a few minutes ago." Drew says.

Darin says "Man, I wish I could hang around but I got to get going. Are you going to be around for a few days?"

"No I'm going back to Point Reyes this afternoon. I just wanted to stop by for a few minutes and say hi." Carl says

"Well it's good to see you. Everything is still good, right?" Darin says as he gives Carl another handshake.

"Absolutely man. Absolutely." Carl responds.

"Cool, Cool. Okay well then I'll catch you guys later." Darin gets in the big old Chrysler, fires it up with a rumble and allot of valve clatter and pulls away. Carl and Drew watch him go. They head for the house.

"It's great to see you, I miss you. I miss our conversations." They clomp through the house and up the stairs. For Carl it's like coming home, he's had a lot of good times in this house.

Carl plops down on the couch and Drew heads to the refrigerator. "Want something to drink? I'm dying of thirst."

"Yeah, I'll take a Coke." Carl responds.

Drew brings back two Cokes and sets down on the couch by Carl, hands him the Coke and puts his feet up on the table.

"How are Rose and Kate doing? I really miss you guys. I'm serious, we got to get together. Forget about all this political bullshit, were friends." Says Drew

"It's good to hear you say that man. You need to come out and stay with us for a while and forget about the movement. We'd love to have you." Carl turns in his seat towards Drew and takes a long sip of his Coke.

"Drew, I need to talk to you about something."

"Sure man, what's going on?"

"I'm sure you know about the guys who got blown up in New York. They were SDS."

"Yeah, well everybody knows that." Drew says with a shrug.

"Well, they were planning to bomb an officer's dance at Fort Dix. Hundreds could have been killed or injured." Carl says.

"Yeah, I did hear that and I think it sounds like a stupid thing to do. So what?" Drew says.

"I also hear that there are plans to blow up an event at the Presidio in San Francisco." Carl says.

Drew raises his eyebrows in surprise "Not that I know of. Where did you here that?"

"From one of the people who died in New York."

Drew looks shocked. "What? No. That's bullshit. I would know. That's not true." Drew says, but then pauses with a far-off look. At least he thinks he would know.

Things like that have been discussed, but they have always been rejected. Great pains have been taken to assure that nobody gets hurt, but there have been exceptions. The bombing at the Golden Gate Park police station was a mistake. It was supposed to have gone off in the night when nobody was around, but it went off in the morning and it killed a cop. But that was an accident.

"Are you sure?" Carl asks, skeptically.

"Absolutely, that's bullshit." Drew says, getting up and pacing the floor. "It's not going to happen."

Now Carl gets up and started pacing around. "How the hell did this shit get started? One of the women that got blown up was Kate's close friend. Kate is distraught over the whole thing. God damn it Drew, you're not involved in this I hope." Carl is angry and upset.

"No, I told you, its bullshit, it's not going to happen."

"I'll tell you what's bullshit man, and that's all this stupid fucking violence, all this pretend revolution crap. Innocent people are getting killed and for what? So that the vast majority of Americans learn to fear and hate us? I am totally pissed Drew, totally pissed that this shit is happening." Carl is livid and in Drew's face.

"Well it's not happening and if it does, well then fuck those pig mutha-fuckers. They fucking deserve it. They're killing people every day. They're killing our leaders, breaking down doors and murdering people in their sleep. Throwing good people in jail to rot away or be raped. Fuck em." Drew is back in Carl's face, but Carl is not backing down like Drew expected. Drew pushes Carl away, but he comes right back in his face.

"So you're becoming just like them? Murdering innocent people? People at random, in terrorist attacks? What the fuck is wrong with you? Not only is it stupid, it's wrong Drew, its fucking wrong god damn it."

Drew pushes Carl. Carl pushes Drew. Drew hits Carl in the face with a short right handed swing that mostly glances off, but now they are grabbing at each other, cursing. They stumble, fall, and crash through the table. Cokes, ashtrays, candles fly. Carl is no match for Drew but he is holding his own. He's had it with not defending himself and flails back at Drew. They roll across the floor kicking and end table. A lamp crashes to the floor. Drew grabs a large glass ash tray off the floor. Now he is on top of Carl and he raises his hand to smash it into Carl's face. Drew looks at Carl in rage, then catches himself and throws the ash tray across the room where it shatters against a wall.

Drew stumbles up and away, then stands with his hands on his knees to catch his breath. Carl sets up panting, elbows on his knees. They stay this way, speechless, gasping for air.

Finally Carl says "And now you want to kill me? Am I a traitor?"

Drew just shakes his head, panting "No man, you're not a traitor." He slowly stands up as Carl gets to his feet. They both walk together and clasp one another in a bear hug then pull away, and grab each other by the arm again, holding, pushing, pulling, feeling each other's life force and strength.

"I love you man, I just don't want to see you end up like those people in New York. I'm worried about you." Carl says.

"I know." Drew says as he hugs him again, pats him on the back, then turns and walks over to the refrigerator and takes out two more Cokes.

Drew walks back, kicks the broken table out of the way and collapses on the couch, Carl sets down beside him. Drew hands him a Coke, they both pop the top and take a couple of thirsty gulps.

"I'll take care of it." Drew says.

"Good." Carl replies.

They both take another slug of Coke and just set there for a while.

Finally Carl says "That table is fucking toast, man." They slowly look at each other, then break out laughing.

Follow

Eddie McGuire waits in his car for Carl Lee to appear from the house. Now he knows why he came to California, to kill Carl Lee. It's a miracle, a sign from god. Carl Lee is the anti-Christ and Eddie is the avenger, the warrior, the angel of death assigned to reap vengeance upon his evil, communistic, blood sucking soul. It's all crystal clear to now and Eddie intends to finish the job.

He gets out of the red Impala and goes to the trunk. He looks around to make sure no one is watching, then inserts the key and opens the lid. It's a cavernous trunk, filled with all Eddie's stuff, suitcase, unrolled sleeping bag and pillow, clothes and jackets strewn around. To one side, under a box of tools is a heavy black canvas bag. Eddie grabs it, slams the trunk closed and gets back in the car. He places the bag on the seat, unzips the top and fumbles around inside. The Colt 45 automatic, model 1911 is wrapped in a rag. It's a gun that's been in Eddie's family since his grandfather fought in World War I. Eddie's dad gave it to him in a solemn ceremony when he turned eighteen. It's a family heirloom and Eddie has shot it a thousand times. It's a formidable weapon.

Eddie carefully unwraps the gun, finds three, eight round clips, and snaps one of the clips into the grip. Looking around he lifts the gun up out of the bag just enough to jack a round into the chamber. He checks that the safety is on, puts it back in the bag and places the bag within easy reach, on the passenger side floor. He takes a deep breath of resolve and watches.

It's been about an hour and Eddie is hungry and thirsty. He hasn't had anything to eat or drink since breakfast at Denny's. All that running made him really thirsty. It's two or three o'clock by now, but Eddie doesn't dare leave. He thinks of his hunger and thirst as a badge of courage.

Suddenly Carl Lee appears. He walks straight to the Alpha, jumps in, fires it up and is off. Eddie scrambles to follow. They speed down the shady tree lined residential streets, take a right and then a left onto a crowded boulevard, and then onto the freeway. Eddie easily follows. His intention is to find out where Carl Lee lives, where he spends the night, if possible, a spot where he can catch Carl Lee alone. Eddie may be an avenging angel from god, but he still doesn't want to get caught if he can help it.

They go over a big bridge, past San Quentin prison and down Sir Francis Drake Boulevard through the quaint towns and neighborhoods of Marin.

Eddie is getting low on gas, but he figures Carl will stop soon. But Carl just keeps on going, out past Fairfax, up and over a windy hill and down a long rural valley. "Where the hell is he going god damn it?" Eddie says to himself. His gas gauge is showing near empty. Eddie hadn't figured on driving this far, but he can't stop for gas or he will lose Carl.

Eddie considers speeding up and ramming the small Alpha, forcing it off the road, but this is still a fairly populated area, someone would surely see. They start winding through a redwood forest. Not many people here, but Eddie is having a hard time keeping up with the Carl Lee and the Alpha. If he tries to run Carl off the road and Carl realized what is happening, Eddie would never be able to catch him. That Alpha would leave him in the dust on a road like this. All Eddie can do is keep following.

On, and on they go, past Olema, along the marshy shore of Tomales bay and through Inverness. About a mile past Inverness Eddie sputters to a stop, out of gas. As he coasts to the side of the road he sees Carl Lee and the Alpha disappear around a corner.

"Fuck, fuck, fuck." he screams as he slams his palms against the steering wheel. Eddie kicks the door open, jumps out and slams it with all his strength. The window does not shatter, but it's close. He

turns and starts walking back to Inverness, cursing under his breath. Hopefully that small gas station he saw in town will still be open.

Presidio

Drew watches from the window as Carl drives away. He doesn't notice the red Chevy in pursuit. He thinks about what Carl told him.

There is a bombing planned for tonight, something he couldn't tell Carl Lee. But the bombing is supposed to be late at night when no one is around. It will only show that the movement can do deadly damage if it wants to. That the establishment needs to know that there are limits, that a violent backlash is a very real possibility.

Drew is concerned. The bombing at the Golden Gate Park police station was a disaster. It went off in the morning when the station was crowded with people, killing one cop. Drew was stricken with guilt over the mistake. The bomb was supposed to go off at night, when nobody was around, not in the main building, but in a storage building in back. When Drew confronted Darin about it, he swore it was a mistake, but none of the Weathermen or Panther crew was very upset about it. They bragged about "offing the pig" and blowing the shit out of the cop station. They didn't seem to see, as Carl Lee pointed out, that this was a political disaster. They only made the cop a martyr and the police victims and heroes.

What disturbs Drew now is that they did discuss bombing the dance at the officers club. Drew vehemently opposed that plan and they finally agreed that the bombing would be at the same time as the dance, but at an empty administration building near buy. It would scare the shit out of the people at the dance, but not hurt anybody.

Drew wonders, would Darin actually bomb the dance. It's possible. Drew's relationship with Darin has been rocky lately. Darin and the hard core Weathermen think the country is ready for armed rebellion. They're idiots. It feels strange for Drew to consider himself 'the moderate'. As if involvement in bombing a military facility could ever be considered moderate. He hates to admit it, but it's Carl Lee who is responsible for his more reasoned approach.

The dance is tonight. Drew needs to find Darin and make sure there is no change of strategy, that the bomb is planted in another building away from the crowded dance. Killing innocent people, even army officers, is wrong. They need to convince these people, make them allies, not enemies. Hell, he was an Army officer himself until a few months ago.

Drew makes some calls but can't find Darin. He decides to go look for him and drives around to a few places, but no luck. It's getting late, the officers dance will be starting soon. Drew decides to go to San Francisco and see if he can find Darin.

Drew skirts the perimeter of the Presidio. He can't drive onto the compound itself because they take the license numbers of all cars. After the bombing, they would come right to him. Instead he drives down a couple of city streets bordering the Presidio that allow foot access. The Presidio is only a partially active base. Most of it is open to civilians and city residents who often access the beautiful park like area for walks and picnics.

Drew drives up the famously steep hill on Divisadero from the marina district. At the top he takes a right onto Broadway and rolls past some of the finest mansions in San Francisco, all with commanding views of the San Francisco Bay and the Golden Gate Bridge. At the end of Broadway he comes to the boundary of the Presidio and takes a left. A popular walking path that leads to a secluded part of the Presidio starts here. Just around the corner on Pacific he finds Darin's car. It's empty. Drew takes a parking space nearby and waits. About thirty minutes later, just as it's getting dark, Darin shows up.

Drew jumps out of his car and trots over to Darin. When Darin sees him he is shocked. "What the fuck are you doing here?" he says as he looks around.

"We need to talk." Drew says quietly.

"Get in." Darin says as he opens the door.

"What the hell is going on?" Darin says.

"Is the bomb set?" Drew asks.

"What the fuck do you think I'm doing here? We shouldn't be hanging around." He looks around nervously.

"Did you set it at the administration building or the officers club?" Drew asks, watching him closely.

"I did what I was supposed to do." Darin says.

"God damn it, are you out of your fucking minds. We can't blow up the officers club, it's insane." Drew is visibly shaking and upset.

"Who the fuck told you? Anyway, it's too late, the bomb is set. We decided to do the club." Darin is matter of fact.

"Decided? Who decided? I didn't decide to do the club, just the opposite."

"Well, who the fuck do you think you are? You think we do everything you say? Bull shit. We, the rest of us, decided to do the club. Fuck those pigs." Darin is hot.

"Don't you know about New York? I got word from somebody who already knew we were doing the club. Everybody and their fucking brother knows. We shouldn't even be doing this now."

"Who told you? Was it Carl? You were good to go when I saw you just a couple hours ago. I told that mutha-fucker to stay out of our shit. God damn it!" Darin is fuming.

"He was just passing on information he heard. How many more people know? This operation is out of fucking control." Drew shakes his head. "I'm going to retrieve the bomb." Drew says, looking around and reaching for the door handle.

"Are you out of your fucking mind, it's already set. It could go off any minute." Darin grabs him by the arm to hold him back. They struggle, but Drew is able to pull away and jump from the car. Darin jumps out to catch him, but Drew is across the street and trotting toward the Presidio.

"Fuck!" Darin says, and then looks around nervously. They are making a scene, exactly what you don't want to do when you're planting a bomb.

"Fuck it, I'm out of here." he says to himself under his breath. He gets back in the Imperial, fires it up and pulls away.

Drew knows where he is going. He has poured over the maps to help plan the operation. He takes a backlot path that cuts through a high stone wall and enters the Presidio. It's at half a mile or more down a gradual slope down through a high cypress forest to the Officers Club. He is walking as fast as he can with his injured leg. He hopes that he can make it in time.

Darin is almost to Van Ness when he pulls into a parking space in front of a long row of red brick apartment buildings. He has to think. He knows it will take Drew at least fifteen or twenty minutes to get the bomb and get back. That's going to be cutting it real close. He hopes Drew stops part way to defuse the bomb, but unless he has some tools that is not going to be easy.

Darin looks at his watch, then makes a U-turn and heads back up Pacific. When he gets about three blocks away from Drew's car he finds a space to park. He can barely see Drew's car through the deepening twilight. Darin waits.

Drew quickly makes his way down the path. When he gets to the area that contains the building with the Officers Club he works around to the back, hiding in the bushes. When the coast is clear, he quickly walks to the next hiding place. He is about fifty feet away from the back of the building, crouched down in some bushes. He scans the back, then sees it. A cardboard box is sitting on a wide window sill. He looks around, then heads straight for it, down a steep dirt slope, and without pause, walks right to the spot and grabs the box. As he turns a worker opens a back door. Drew freezes, but the worker who looks like a bus-boy doesn't even glance his way. The worker throws some trash into a bin and goes back inside. Drew is up and over the dirt slope and in the bushes in the blink of an eye.

He makes his way to the path, doing his best to stay out of sight. A couple of times Drew stops to wait for a car to pass, then off he trudges. The box doesn't seem that heavy at first, but it feels heavy now. He keeps shifting the weight from arm to arm. His leg is starting to hurt. This is more exercise than he is used to, plus he is going up hill. The hill seems steeper going up, but on he trudges, limping and gasping for air. He meets a jogger and tries to look nonchalant, but the jogger gives him a suspicious look.

Drew thinks about stopping to defuse the bomb, but he ran off without getting any tools. He will just have to make it back to the car and do it there, but his leg hurts more and more with each step and it's slowing him down. On he trudges.

Drew thinks he sees the end of the path. It's a good thing because he can't go much longer. He comes to the end and pauses before he crosses the street. No one is coming. He quickly limps across the street and fumbles with his keys as he goes to the passenger side of the old Chevy. The door is open. He puts the box on the passenger seat. As he goes around to the drivers side he stops at the trunk, opens it and grabs a small tool box. Drew crawls in the front seat and turns to start defusing the bomb.

Darin watches from a distance as Drew gets in the car. The Chevy explodes in flames. Pieces of metal and body parts scatter down the street.

Darin immediately starts the car, makes a U-turn and drives away. He is shaking. Tears cloud his eyes as he heads down the steep Divisadero hill toward Lombard. A quick left and soon he is crossing the Golden Gate Bridge. Darin is headed out of the City and the Bay Area. He plans to lay low for a while, but first he needs to see somebody about some unfinished business...Carl Lee.

PART EIGHT: COLLISION

Collision

After walking about half way, Eddie catches a ride to Inverness. The gas station is closed. Eddie looks in the window but it's dark. He's fucked.

As Eddie walks toward the street he notices a sign for a repair shop pointing toward the back, so he walks around the side of the building. In back is a gravel lot with a dozen cars parked around. A garage door in the building is open. He steps into the cool dimness and is greeted by the familiar smell of grease and gas. He doesn't see anybody. "Hello?" He calls.

"Hello." is the response, but he can't tell from where. A guy rolls out from under a car jacked up near the door on a man dolly.

"Howdy, what can I do for ya?" The mechanic says.

"Hi, glad to see your open." Eddie says.

"Well I'm not open but I'm still working." He chuckles.

Eddie laughs. "I'm sorry to bother you, but damned if I didn't run out of gas. I'm not from around here and I didn't realize how far it was between gas stations. Any chance I could get some gas from-ya? I'd be glad to buy the gas and pay for your time." Eddie says.

"I can probably fix you up. Where you from?" The mechanic asks as he gets up.

"Kansas." says Eddie.

"No kidding, I'm from Omaha."

"I've been there many a time. My aunt lives there."

"I'll be darned" says the mechanic.

The mechanic grabs an already filled can of gas. Eddie is not the first one to run out of gas around here, and they jump in an old dodge truck and head out to Eddie's car. Eddie follows him back and the mechanic unlocks one of the pumps so Eddie can buy some gas. As they are pumping gas Eddie asks. "I'm looking for an old friend of mine. He drives a little red sports car, an Alfa Romeo. He's kind-a tall and skinny. Ever seen him?"

"Oh yeah, I've talked to him before. That's a real nice car. He stops for gas sometimes."

"Do you know where he lives by chance?" Eddie asks. This could be a break.

"I sure don't. Here in Inverness I expect, could be up on the ridge." He says.

"Oh yeah, where is that?"

"There are houses spread all up these roads on the ridges. It's going to be pretty hard to find him if you don't know where he lives." The mechanic says.

Eddie pays for the gas, five candy bars, four bags of potato chips, and three cokes, and heads out to try to find Carl Lee. He drives out past where he ran out of gas, up a dozen side roads and almost all the way to the end of the Point, with no luck. It is well past dark when Eddie heads back through town. He pulls into the gas station again, for no particular reason, and just sits there.

Maybe God hasn't put him on this mission. How could God let him get so close and then just pull the plug? Eddie is tired and hungry. The candy bars and potato chips helped, but he could sure use a big fat cheeseburger about now. He starts the Chevy and is ready to pull out, but has to wait for an oncoming car. As the car passes he immediately recognizes it. It's that black, 1962, Chrysler Imperial he saw in Berkeley and sure enough, it's being driven by the same big nigger.

Eddie waits for him to pass, then pulls out behind him. This is his free ticket to Carl Lee, and he knows it. Hallelujah, it's another fucking miracle. He really has been chosen by god to kill Carl Lee.

Eddie follows Darin, staying as far back as possible. It's a dark windy road and difficult to keep a discreet distance without losing him, but the unique shape of the tail lights on the Imperial, which look just like rockets boosters glued to the top of the tail fins, makes him easy to identify. Still, Eddie completely misses it when Darin turns to the right onto a small side road. It is only when he glances to the right and sees those distinctive tail lights angling off on another road that he realizes he missed his turn. Eddie slams on the breaks and does a quick U-turn in the middle of the road. He races back, finds the road and soon catches up as the road turns to gravel. The gravel makes it easier. Even if he can't see the tail lights any more he can easily follow the dust. They are going through a dairy ranch and soon the road starts to slope downward.

Darin glides slowly down the paved drive and pulls up to the side of the house. He has been here before and remembers that the bay is to the left, in front of the house and a breezeway runs along the back to a door in the kitchen. Darin gets out and tucks a snub nose thirty eight in the front waist of his pants. He heads to the front of the house which is lined with windows. It's a breezy night and the air is cold and moist with the unmistakable scent of the ocean. As he comes around the corner he can see lights in several of the rooms, allowing him to see clearly through the windows that line the front of the house.

Just as Darin walks by the first room, Rose is leaning down to pick up some clothes from the floor. He just misses seeing her. There are two darkened bedrooms and then he sees the kitchen and living room. Carl is eating and reading at a table next to the window.

Eddie is approaching some trees and a drive, another drive turns to the right. He's not sure which drive Darin took, but this is obviously the end of the line so he pulls into a small turnout and switches off the car. Eddie grabs the 45 and gets out. He quietly shuts the door. It's dark and there are no street lights, but the moon is about three quarters full. His eyes gradually adjust and he sees the paved drives sloping off in both directions. He decides to give the drive on the left a try. It gets darker as he walks under the trees but he soon rounds a curve and sees lights from a house. Bingo, the Chrysler Imperial is parked in the driveway next to the Alpha.

Darin quickly walks to the door leading into the living room. Carl looks up with a start as Darin enters. It's too late, Darin is in the door. Fork still in hand, Carl looks at Darin, and then notices the gun in his belt.

"Where's Drew?" Carl asks.

"He's dead."

Carl stares at him in disbelief. This is his worst nightmare come true.

"What happened?"

"He found me after I set the bomb and thanks to you, he decided to try and stop it. I told him it was too late, it was set to blow any minute, but that do-good dumb-ass decides he has to save the pigs, so he went down to get it."

Darin takes a step closer now and pauses to look around. The large fireplace in the center of the room blocks his view of the rest of the kitchen and the hallway.

"It's a long way down the hill to the officers club and Drew has that bad leg. He just got in the car when it blew up. I was parked a couple blocks away, saw the whole thing. It blew up right in his face."

"I can't believe it." Carl shakes his head and covers his tearing eyes. "Drew is dead?"

"Not only is he dead, everybody's cover is completely blown. They will be looking at anyone who knew Drew, including you. I'm getting out of town tonight. You're my last stop. Who else is here?"

Carl is wary. "Nobody, just me. Everybody went over to Marshall for music." Carl lies. He hopes Rose doesn't come out of the bedroom.

Rose can hear Carl talking to somebody. They must have just come in because they are the only ones home tonight. Rose heads down the hall to see who just came in when she recognizes the sound of Darin's voice. It stops her short. That seems strange. Darin has never come out to the house by himself before, especially at night and she knows that Darin and Carl are on shaky terms. Something is not right. Rose creeps down the hallway and stops to listen.

Darin pulls the gun from his belt and points it at Carl.

"Drew said you told him we were planting to bomb the Officers Club for the party and not the offices. How the fuck did you know that?"

"Kate found out in New York." Carl answers with a quiver in his voice. His hands are raised and in the open.

"You're the one who got him killed. Why the fuck are you getting involved anyway? This isn't any of your god damned business, and I told you to keep the fuck out of it."

"I thought he should know. That's not what he wanted. The question is why the hell did you try to blow up all those people? That's not going to get us anywhere."

"Us? What do you mean us? You're just part of the fucking problem now, ass hole. It's easy for you, hiding out while my people are being oppressed and killed. This is war, man. As far as I'm concerned you're nothing but another one of the fucking pigs. A fucking traitor pigs, a fucking narc."

Rose has heard enough. She quickly goes back to the room and quietly closes the door. Rose climbs onto the bed and opens the window, moves a candle aside, then climbs out the window feet first and lowers herself to the ground. She can still hear them talking. Taking one step back she can see through the window. Darin is pointing a gun at Carl. Her heart leaps into her throat.

"You think I'm a traitor because I told Drew what was going on? Or, do you really think I'm a narc, talking to the cops?"

Darin gives a snide little laugh.

"No, you probably haven't been talking to the cops, but that doesn't mean you won't. You still know too much and you fucked up by getting involved. I warned you.

Eddie walks down the drive past the Chrysler and the Alpha. This is the place. He pulls the 45 from his belt, cocks it and clicks the safety off. The light in the breeze way is on and he can see the door that goes into the kitchen. As he approaches the door he hears voices inside. Stepping closer he clearly recognizes Carl's voice. He quietly tests the doorknob. It's not locked.

"Look, I'm not going to talk to anybody. I haven't been involved with the movement for over a year." Carl pleads.

"Maybe you will, maybe you won't. Frankly I don't give a shit." Darin says. This conversation is over as far as Darin is concerned. He is ready to blow this mutha-fucker away and get the fuck out of town.

At that moment the kitchen door flies open and Eddie McGuire rushes in aiming the 45 with both hands at Carl. Startled, Carl stares in disbelief. Where the fuck did Eddie McGuire come from? How many more people want to kill him tonight?

Darin hears the door and sees Carl's reaction, but can't see who came in because the fireplace is blocking his view.

Eddie sees Carl with his hands already raised and Carl looking back at Darin.

Instantly, they both realize that someone else is in the room. Darin and Eddie each take a step forward to peak around the edge of the fireplace. They see each other at the same time, point their guns then jump back behind the fireplace without firing.

Rose is hiding in the bushes watching through the window, helpless and terrified as Darin points a gun at Carl. Suddenly another guy with a gun runs in the door and points another, even bigger gun at Carl. Who hell is this?

For Darin and Eddie the reality of the situation quickly sinks in. Somebody with a gun is on the other side of this wall and they may be coming around, from either side, at any moment with their gun blazing. Carl can see both Darin and Eddie and realizes the dilemma as well. He also recognizes this could be his opportunity to escape. He positions himself to move.

Darin and Eddie see Carl poised to run and both point their guns at him thinking "lets just shoot this fucker now." But then, as if on queue, they point their guns back toward the wall in anticipation of imminent attack. Carl doesn't have a gun, he's not a threat, they can kill him later. The immediate issue is the guy with a gun on the other side of this wall. The problem is that you can walk around the Fireplace from either direction. They don't know which side the attack will come from. The game begins.

Eddie has no intention of letting this armed nigger live to testify against him and Darin has pretty much the same inclination. They both kind of wonder who the other guy is and why he also seems to have it out for Carl. But at this point who gives a fuck? They're just trying to stay alive.

They each try taking peeks around the side of the wall to see where the other one is, then jump back to safety as they see one another. They may not know each other, but they recognize a mortal threat. A truce is not an option. They each fake and parry a few times to size up the situation. Totally vulnerable, Carl watches for an opportunity to escape.

Holding his gun way out to the right, Darin quickly steps around the corner and fires a shot at Eddie with his 38. He misses by a mile and Eddie jumps back. Now Eddie tries coming around the other side but Darin is expecting him, they both fire shots, both missing, then jump back. The sound of the gun fire is deafening, especially the 45. Gun smoke hangs acrid in the air.

Eddie rushes around to his left and almost catches Darin by surprise. They both fire. Eddie is standing right in front of Carl and Darin's bullet screams past Carl's head and shatters a cabinet door. Carl ducks down, but stays poised to run. They fire again, both missing then ducking back to safety.

Eddie barely missed Darin that time. Darin is a big man and if Darin could get his hands on Eddie, he would be in trouble. But when it comes to guns, Eddie has been shooting all his life and Eddie's 45 automatic is not only more deadly than Darin's 38, it has more shots and is more accurate.

Carl can see Eddie getting mad. Darin looks scared. Eddie pauses for an instant then rushes to the right around the back side of the wall, ducking low and firing two times. Darin fires in return, but a bullet catches Darin in the hip and knocks him against the table. He fires again as he is going down but

Eddie is on top of him with another direct hit to the chest. With a startled look on his face, Darin falls forward, face down, with a thud, lifeless

Carl makes a break for the hallway. Eddie turns and fires. He misses and the bullet shatters another cabinet. He pulls the trigger again but is out of ammo. Eddie reaches in his pocket for another clip. In an instant he pops the spent clip out and snaps in a new clip with eight more rounds. He jacks a round into the chamber and runs to catch Carl.

Carl scrambles down the hall and into his room. Rose calls from window. "Carl, here, out the window." Carl leaps onto the bed and out the window head first, taking a hard tumble on the cement walkway. Instantly he is up, grabbing Rose's hand as they run for the path towards the bay.

Eddie makes his way into Carl's room and glances out the window just in time to see Carl and Rose running toward the path. Reversing direction, he heads back into the living room and fires another shot into Darin as he runs for the door.

A few feet down the path Carl and Rose plunge into darkness. The tall bushes and low hanging Bay trees create total blackness. The pitch dark slows Carl down, but he knows this path. He has been down it a hundred times and his feet are telling him where to go. Rose grabs the tail of Carl's shirt as they plunge on single file.

Now Eddie hits the darkness and is immediately tangled in thick bushes.

"God damn it" he curses.

Gaining his composure he gradually feels his way along. Eddie feels with his feet, hands out stretched and gradually makes headway. Soon the path opens and the ambient light from the moon and his gradually adjusting eyes allow him to see the path curving down toward the bay.

Carl and Rose have already reached the landing. It is a long twenty to thirty foot drop to the water from the flat area overlooking the bay, but off to the left are the rickety old steps that lead to the beach below, except there is no beach. The tide is in and the water is two or three feet deep.

No one use these steps. They're dangerous and falling apart, but it's the only way out. If they can get down to the water they may have a chance to escape.

Carl whispers to Rose. "Let's get the canoe and go to the boat. He won't be able to follow us there."

"Will the steps hold us?"

"I hope so. Just stay close to the cliff and watch out, they are really slippery and a couple steps are missing.

"I know. Let's go for it. I'll hold back a step or two." says Rose.

Carl starts down, touching the side of the cliff for balance. The steps are wet and slippery with dew and mold. It's harder than he thought. They slowly make their way down. Carl stretches over a missing step. He waits to help Rose, but then moves on, afraid that their combined weight on one step could cause it to collapse. This is taking too long. He is afraid McGuire will catch up and they will be caught defenseless and in the open.

The dark path delays Eddie, but now he clearly sees the path before him. He glances around to see if they may have taken a side path, but the bushes are thick and this seems to be the only way forward. He soon comes to the landing. He steps to the edge. It is a sheer cliff. He looks around. There doesn't seem to be anywhere to go but over the cliff or back up the path. He can hear the water lapping softly below. Then he hears something else, tiny rocks falling. The sound is coming from the left and he explores

closer. Now he sees the steps and below he hears the sound of the rocks that Carl and Rose are knocking loose as they hold onto the cliff for support. He has found them.

Eddie takes a few steps down and he can clearly see them. Carl looks up and sees Eddie's profile against the sky. They are still a half a dozen steps from the bottom.

"Watch out he's up there. Jump for it."

They Jump, just as a shot rings out, and hit the icy cold water with both feet. The shot missed its mark and they are running, trudging through the waist high water, trying to round the point.

Eddie is comes down the steps, trying to see to line himself up for another shot. He doesn't see the missing step and comes down hard on the step below. His right boot slides and his left foot buckles. He feels it snap as he falls, tumbling down head first. He hits his head, flips over the side, scrapes the cliff with his back and then falls through the air, hitting the water flat on his face. The pain and cold water paralyze him. He screams in shock, taking a breath of salt water. Eddie knows he is in trouble. Scrambling, he gets his feet under him. The water is shallow and he struggles to gain his balance and stand up, coughing, gasping, struggling for air. Now the pain in his foot hits him. He stumbles but keeps his balance. Gradually he catches his breath and looks around him. They are gone. Miraculously the gun is still in his hands. His dad taught him never to drop that ball.

Carl and Rose are around the corner and trudging through the water to find the beach in the cove.

"I see it" Carl Calls "I see the beach. And there is the boat." He points out in the water. The sail boat is tied peacefully to its mooring.

They come to a small narrow beach and behind some bushes, tied to a tree is the canoe. They scramble to untie the canoe and pull it down to the water. They didn't see McGuire fall and are expecting him to come up behind them at any moment. The canoe is in the water. Rose jumps in the front and immediately starts paddling furiously. Carl tumbles into the back and scrambles to paddle and steer. They are moving fast and it will only take a few moments to get to the boat. Suddenly a shot rings out and a red-hot pain grips the left side of Carl's neck, just below the jaw. He knows he has been shot.

With dogged determination Eddie McGuire has made his way around the point and to the beach. He limps badly, his ankle broken, blood running down his face, his shirt ripped, and his back bruised and bleeding. He is holding the 45 with both hands, this time taking careful aim. They are moving away fast. Another shot rings out as they disappear around the backside of the small boat floating in the cove. Eddie sits down in the wet sand. "Fuck" he yells.

Carl doesn't know how badly he is hurt, but he does know he is still paddling and the second shot missed. They make a sharp turn around the backside of the boat and Rose grabs on. For the first time she turns as Carl grabs onto the boat. She gasps.

"Oh no, god, your bleeding"

"Yeah." Carl gasps out of breath. They both just sit there, silent, gasping, looking at each other, holding on.

"Can you get in the boat?" She asks concerned.

"Yeah, my neck hurts but I think I'm all right."

They peek up over the side. They can barely see Eddie through the gloom, sitting on the beach.

"Let's go" she say.

"Okay, you go first." He holds tightly to the boat as she, crawls up and over the side. Carl is feeling light-headed but he quickly follows. They tumble to the floor, safely out of sight. She immediately crawls over. "Let's see your neck."

He turns his head and feels with his hands. "Don't touch it." She scolds. "I don't see a hole; I think he just grazed you." She says as she tries to see in the dark.

"I think your right. It's not even bleeding that much."

"Damn, that was close."

"No shit." Carl says. If the bullet had been one inch to the right it would have shattered Carl's spine and surely killed him.

Carl peeks up over the side. "I think we're safe. He can't get out here without swimming. And he would have a hell of a time getting up on the boat."

"I think your right."

"Who the hell is that?" Rose asks

"Eddie McGuire"

"Eddie McGuire? You mean Eddie McGuire from Kansans? Where the hell did he come from?"

"Just another one of my admirers." Carl smirks.

Rose lets out a little laugh. "Your fucking crazy, ya-know that?" Carl nods his head.

Carl looks again, glancing around.

"Keep your head down." Rose says.

Carl quickly sits down and looks at her with a crooked frown. "We're in trouble."

Eddie is shivering on the beach. He has got to kill them. They saw him blow away that nigger. Besides, God sent him all the way to California to kill Carl Lee. On the other hand, he is freezing and wondering if he can even make it back to his car. He obviously can't go back the way he came. There must be a path from here somewhere, but he can barely walk. Then he sees it, the canoe. It's floating away from the boat. At first he thought it was tied on, but now he can see it is definitely drifting.

"The canoe. I let it get away." Carl says.

Now they are both up, looking to check out the situation. Sure enough, the canoe is floating away from the boat. The question is; where will it float to? They watch. "Fuck, I think it may hit the point." Carl says.

"Damn, I think your right."

"Okay, well, we got to get out of here, and fast. There's not much wind here, but there will be past the point." Carl says.

"Let's go for it, grab the sails." Rose is already moving. They both scramble.

Having sailed together many times before, they know the drill. Carl drags out the bags, and Rose starts pulling the sails out. Carl is lowering the boom and retrieving the main halyard wire when a shot rings out. They dive for the floor.

"Son of a bitch. He knows what we are doing." Carl says.

"He just wants to slow us down. Carl looks up. That's a long fucking shot with a pistol, in the dark. We can't just hide here and wait for him to come and get us. Keep your head down as much as you can, but we got to get this boat moving."

"You're absolutely right. Fuck him." Rose says defiantly.

They both jump up and continue rigging the boat. It only takes a few more minutes and they are ready to raise the main sail. Now they have to unclip from the mooring. Carl crawls out onto the front of the boat and hangs his arms over the side. He pulls them forward to get some slack. Another shot rings out and a wooden rail by Carl's leg shatters. He is completely exposed. Furiously he struggles to unclip the boat with his cold and numb fingers. Another shot rings out. He pushes the clip and they are free.

Carl scrambles back inside and grabs a long handled paddle. The oars are at the house. He paddles on one side to get them facing down wind, while Rose pulls on the main halyard to raise the sail. They slowly come-about and the sail catches a light breath of air. Rose pulls up the jib as Carl rounds it off. They are moving, but very slowly.

Carl looks to see where McGuire is. He can clearly see the canoe, which is close to the point, but where is McGuire? Now he sees him. Eddie is swimming with the canoe back to shore.

Eddie is close to shore, painfully stumbling over rocks. The water is finally shallow enough to get in and he contorts his body to keep from tipping the thing over. He grabs a paddle and starts paddling.

"Nice of the dip-shits to leave me the paddles." He laughs.

The canoe quickly cuts through the water. Eddie McGuire is cursing with anticipation.

Rose has the jib up and Carl adjusts the direction of the small sail boat to try and catch as much wind as possible. They are closely watching Eddie. He is gaining on them fast. "You steer and I will paddle" Carl calls out. They switch positions. Carl paddles furiously and they speed up marginally, but the wind is starting picking up a bit. Past the point, out in the open water, in the middle of the bay where the wind gets funneled directly down from the ocean, the wind will be ripping. If they can make it past the point they will be free.

Eddie is exhausted and the sailboat is moving a little faster. If he can just get close enough he should be able to get a couple decent shots. Eddie decides to make one last all out effort. He digs in. The canoe scoots forward and the gap closes fast. Eddie is only about thirty feet from the sail boat when he stops paddling to take a shot. It will probably be his last chance.

Carl can see the wind line. Eddie has been paddling furiously and has almost caught them, but the wind is picking up and the wind line is dead ahead. Carl steers a little closer to the wind in anticipation, but he wouldn't want to be taken by surprise and go over. Suddenly the wind hits, the sail boat heels over, they scramble to the windward side as the boat takes off.

Eddie sees the sail boat heel over and start to rapidly pull away. He immediately starts shooting but he can barely see them behind the sail. He switched to a full clip on the beach and he fires all eight rounds. But the waves are higher now, slapping into the side of the canoe, rocking and rolling. One by one his shots ring out threateningly but aren't even close. He drops his arms. The sail boat is gone. He stares in disappointment and disgust. He's not sure, but he thinks he can hear them yelling back at him.

Eddie attempts to turn the canoe around and head back, but the distant shore is just a giant black shadow. He has no idea where he is. The cold winds buffet the small canoe. The middle of Tomales Bay in the middle of the night is no place for a canoe, especially with only one person. When Eddie tries to steer sideways to the wind to head toward shore, the wind immediately pushes the front of the canoe back around like a weather vane. Eddie finally gives up. He figures he will just float with the wind and eventually he will come to shore. Just as likely, he will get stranded in the muddy shallows at the far end of the bay. In any case, Eddie is spent. His broken ankle has swollen inside his boot. He has a mild

concussion from his fall and he is on the verge of hypothermia. Still, Eddie McGuire is young and strong and there is a reasonable chance he can survive.

When the gun fire stops, Carl and Rose realize they are out of range and safe. They can see Eddie McGuire drifting helplessly down wind. It's impossible for Eddie to make it back to the house now. He is in trouble out in the middle of the bay in this kind of wind and they know it.

"Fuck you." Carl screams out the back of the boat. "Fuck you, you muta-fucker"

Carl is enraged. "Let's go get that son of a bitch" Carl says to Rose.

"What?" she says. "What do you mean?"

"Let's run him down. He's up shit creek already, the dumb fuck, following us out here. Let's go get him." Carl says.

Rose is shocked. They barely escaped with their lives. Then a look of anger and determination crosses her face. She watches as Eddie drifts helplessly down wind.

"That fucking bastard. Your right, he's in trouble now, he'll never get back." She screams out the back of the boat. "You're going to Inverness now ass hole." They both laugh. Then she looks worried. "But what about the gun?"

"Fuck the gun. It's impossible to aim in this kind of shit. That fucker is going to chase us the rest of our lives. He must have come all the way from Kansas just to kill me. We got the upper hand now, let's get him."

"Yeah" She says, the idea is sinking in.

Rose is still at the tiller and without a word they both go into action. "Ready about, about" she yells. They both duck down as the boom crosses to the other side and they head in the other direction. Carl sets the sails and then retrieves a bag with some windbreakers and sailing gloves. They are both freezing cold and on the verge of hypothermia themselves.

They work their way back. "Let's keep it headed to wind a little bit longer so when we drop off we are on a fast, broad reach, when we hit him." says Rose.

"Absolutely, a little bit farther." They intently watch McGuire's position. He is sitting up in the canoe, watching. He knows they are coming now."

Eddie can see them approaching. At first, he didn't notice, but soon he realized that they were getting closer not farther away. Eddie is hypothermic. The canoe is sinking. He knows he is in trouble. The clip in the gun is empty but there is one round left in the other clip. His hands are so cold he has trouble pressing the clip release but he finally changes clips. Eddie looks up and sees them changing course. They are headed straight at him. "Fuck you" he yells. All he needs is one good shot to kill Carl Lee. As for what happens to himself after that, he really doesn't even care anymore.

"Does this looks about right?" she asks.

"Yeah, that looks great"

Carl lets out the main sail as she moves the tiller and they fall off the wind. They are headed straight at the canoe and Eddie McGuire, and they are coming fast.

Carl carefully adjusts and cleats the sails. He grabs the paddle and finds himself a spot toward the front with good footing. He ducks down and looks back at Rose. She is intently watching their position and then glances down at Carl. Their eyes meet.

"I love you." he says. "Keep your head down."

"Let's get this fucker." she replies, as she squats down in the boat. They both peek up over the edge to watch their position.

Running with the wind on a broad reach is surprisingly peaceful, even in heavy wind. The boat gracefully surfs the waves. The only sound is water swishing against the hull. They wait silently. The canoe is dead ahead.

"We're almost there. He will shoot just before we hit him." Carl calls back to Rose. Carl can see Eddie McGuire clearly now. He has the gun in both hands. They are seconds away.

"Duck." Carl yells as he concentrates, ready to fend off Eddie if he tries to jump aboard. A shot rings out a moment before impact. A metal cleat shatters. Rose slumps over the tiller as the sailboat hits the canoe.

Eddie drops the gun and leaps for the boat with his last bit of energy. He gets part way up, his torso on the deck, but is helplessly dragged back down by the water and the sinking canoe as it is silently sucked under the charging sail boat. Just in time, Eddie catches a side rail with both hands and dangles in the water.

Carl rushes up to where Eddie clings to the side. He raises the paddle to bash his fingers, then looks straight into Eddie's eyes. He is frozen by his gaze. There is no fear. Eddie has surrendered, he knows he is lost, that his world is gone, and he awaits his fate. Eddie's life flashes before his eyes, the voice of his dad, the laugh of his mother, a football game with his family on a summer afternoon. His fingers slip, and just as he lets go, Carl grabs him by the wrist with one hand. Carl sees Eddie look at his hand in surprise. Now he reflexively grabs Eddie's wrist with his other hand.

Eddie looks straight at Carl. He realizes Carl is trying to save him. But Eddie doesn't want to be saved by Carl. He doesn't want Carl Lee to have the satisfaction of saving his life. He can't stand the thought, the burden, the knowledge, that Carl Lee, his hated enemy, would save him after all his efforts to kill him. The hatred and the anger that have been so much a part of Eddie's life come boiling up one more time and he screams in rage "No!" as he yanks away from Carl's hands. The rushing water grabs Eddie and drags him down, back and away, into its icy primal grasp. Carl watches as Eddie McGuire disappears beneath the dark waves.

Carl turns and suddenly sees Rose leaning, unconscious against the tiller, blood gushing from her forehead. He scrambles back to her "Oh god no." he screams. "Rose. Rose." He takes her in his arms. She has been shot. Despair and horror grip him.

Carl tries to determine if she is breathing, when miraculously, she opens her eyes. Blood is running down her face. "Rose can you hear me." He is trying to see the wound, pulling her hair aside. He was sure she was dead. There is a deep gash.

"Carl." She says "What happened?" What..." she reaches up to her head. "Oh shit..." she says, looking up at him now, her eyes glazed but coherent. "Ouch, something hit my head."

Carl kisses her face, tears in his eyes. "Oh my god, I thought I lost you." He says. "I think you're alright." He looks again. It's definitely not a built wound; it looks like a deep cut. Carl takes the tiller and helps Rose back up onto the seat beside him. He rips off a piece of his shirt and presses it to her head. "Hold this tight against your head." He says. She leans against him and he changes course. He is heading to Marshall. It's close and he can call an ambulance from there.

Carl pulls the boat up to the dock at Marshall Tavern. He calls to a group of people standing on the landing and they rush down to help him with Rose. Carl needs some help himself. He is hypothermic

and has lost blood from the wound in his neck. They go to the bar which is filled with people. The sound of a live band shakes the walls. He finds Kate and Jack and quickly tells them the story. Jack rushes back to the house to stash all the drugs before the cops come. A nurse at the party looks them over. She is afraid that Rose may go into shock. Carl is in bad shape as well, cold and collapsing from the strain of the whole ordeal. An ambulance and the cops are called.

As they wait Carl whispers to Rose.

"Look, we are going to have to talk to the cops. Everything happened exactly as it actually happened, except we didn't run down Eddie McGuire. He capsized and drowned all on his own." Carl says.

"That is what happened. Anyway I have a concussion. I don't remember a thing, after we got on the boat." Rose is pale, but lucid.

"Also, those guys came to shoot each other. I had nothing to do with it. We are just innocent bystanders." Carl says

"I wasn't even in the room. All I saw was a gun."

She smiles at him, "Were going to be all right."

She reaches up and touches the scar on Carl's forehead as she holds a bandage against her own forehead. "Were going to have matching scars you know, thanks to Eddie McGuire." She says smiling at him, looking into his eyes.

The ambulance takes them to a hospital where they are stitched up and their wounds dressed. They give Rose some blood, get both of them warmed up and put them to bed. The next morning, the police are waiting when they wake up. They have been to the house and seen Darin's body. Darin and Eddie McGuire's cars have also been inspected. Inside Eddie's car they found extra shells for a forty-five. Two days later Eddie's body is recovered from the bay. Even after all that time in the water, gunpowder is still clearly detectable on his hands.

They were suspicious about Carl's involvement and question both of them intensely, but in the end they have little that they can pin on them. After a couple weeks it becomes clear, Carl and Rose will not be charged with anything. They were officially innocent victims. Carl is worried about the reaction of the other people in the house, but they are all supportive and sympathetic.

What Survival Leaves

For a long time neither of them said anything. There were people around them, voices, questions, footsteps, the ordinary machinery that arrives after terror and pretends it can measure what happened. Carl answered when he had to. Rose answered less. Her hand stayed in his as if letting go might return them to the moment before, to the room, the gun, the sound of Eddie's breath, the terrible narrowness of survival.

Later, when they were alone, Carl began shaking.

It came without warning. Not fear exactly. Fear had been clean compared to this. This was something after fear, something deeper in the body, as if every muscle had waited for permission to collapse. He sat on the edge of the bed, elbows on knees, hands clasped so tightly his knuckles whitened.

Rose sat beside him.

"I went back," he said.

She did not ask what he meant.

"I saw him in the water and I went back."

"You tried to save him."

Carl shook his head. "I don't know."

Rose watched him carefully.

"I keep telling myself that. That I went back to save him. Maybe part of me did. But there was another part." He swallowed. "There was another part that wanted to watch."

Rose's face changed, but she did not pull away.

Carl looked at the floor. "I hated him. God help me, Rose, I hated him so much. Not just for today. For Kansas. For Barbara. For every time I was afraid and ashamed and had to pretend I wasn't. When I saw him out there, I wanted it to be over. I wanted the world to take him."

Rose took this in with the stillness she had when something mattered.

"Then you turned back," she said.

"Too late."

"But you turned back."

Carl closed his eyes. "That doesn't make me good."

"No," Rose said softly. "It makes you alive."

He looked at her then, and the tenderness in her face nearly undid him.

"I don't want to carry him with me," Carl said.

"You will."

The answer was so plain that he almost laughed, but the sound broke in his throat.

Rose put her hand on the back of his neck. "We carry what happens. We carry what we do. We carry what we almost do. That's part of it."

"I thought leaving Kansas would end it."

"I know."

"I thought California would."

"I know."

"I thought you would."

Rose looked down, then back at him. "I can love you. I can't erase you."

He leaned into her then, not with desire, not with the old amazed hunger, but with the exhaustion of someone who had finally found a place where he did not have to make a speech. Rose held him. Outside, the world went on being beautiful in the cruel way it had, indifferent and generous at once. The water moved. The wind touched the trees. Somewhere a gull cried out, sharp and lonely over the bay.

Carl listened to Rose breathe.

For the first time he understood that survival was not the same as escape. Escape was motion. Survival was what came after, when the body stopped running and the soul had to decide what to do with the truth.

He had not become Eddie.

He had not become Darin.

But he had seen the path to both, and it had not been as far away as he wanted to believe.

Rose held him tighter, as if she knew.

Maybe she did.

Carl and Rose hide out in their room for a few days to recover, sleeping and making love. Kate goes out of her way to fix them some delicious dinners and tasty deserts. Carl tells her what happened with Drew and she feels guilty.

One fine day a couple of weeks later, after everything has settled down, Carl and Rose spend an afternoon at the beach. Rose has gone down to the water to collect shells and pieces of driftwood. Carl is lying on a blanket in the warm sand watching as she walks back, her smooth tan body, hair blowing in the ocean breeze, her beautiful smiling face. His heart aches with love and desire. She sees him watching her. Rose knows that she will never find a truer love, a more sensitive lover, a more conscious human being. She comes and lies beside him and they turn and look into each others eyes.

"Rose, I want you to know that I am totally committed too you for the rest of my life, if you will have me."

She smiles at him "I know you are, and I will have you. And I am for ever committed to you, and us, and the love we share."

Carl looks at her with a loving smile, "I know its kind of old fashioned, but Rose, will you marry me. I never really understood what that kind of commitment meant before, but I understand now and I would like to be your husband and I would like you to be my wife."

Rose looks up into his face with tears in her eyes. "I would love to marry you, in any old fashioned way you like." They kiss softly and lay together for the longest time, her head on his chest, the sound of the waves crashing on the shore, the warmth of the sun on their skin.

Morning on the Bay

In the morning, Tomales Bay looked untouched. That seemed impossible to Carl, and almost offensive. The water lay smooth under a pale sky. The hills rose green and silent. Pelicans skimmed low over the surface in their prehistoric formations, wing tips almost touching the silver skin of the bay. Nothing in the landscape admitted what had happened. No scar opened in the water. No dark mark remained where Eddie had gone under. The world had swallowed the violence and returned to beauty without apology.

Carl stood at the window with a blanket around his shoulders.

Rose came up behind him and slid her arms around his waist. For a while they watched the bay together.

“You’re thinking too much,” she said.

“I don’t know how not to.”

“I know.”

He placed his hands over hers.

“I used to think this place was outside the world,” he said.

Rose rested her cheek against his back. “No place is outside the world.”

“I know that now.”

Below the house, the garden caught the morning light. The path to the cove was still there. The boat was still there. The rooms still smelled faintly of coffee, smoke, salt, and old wood. It was all the same and not the same. Carl understood that paradise had never been protection. It had been a reprieve. Maybe that was enough. Maybe that was more than most people got.

“What do we do?” he asked.

Rose did not answer quickly. He loved that about her, the way she respected a question by letting it breathe.

“We live,” she said finally.

Carl smiled faintly. “That’s your plan?”

“That’s my entire plan.”

“It lacks detail.”

“I’ll add detail later.”

He turned in her arms and looked at her. Her face was tired, bruised by more than one kind of night, but her eyes were clear. Not innocent. Never innocent. That was why he trusted them.

“I love you,” he said.

“I know.”

“You’re supposed to say it back.”

“I love you too, foolish boy.”

He laughed then, and the laugh surprised him. It was small, but real.

Rose touched his face. “There he is.”

Carl looked past her, into the room, then back toward the water. He did not feel healed. He no longer trusted that word. But he felt present. That would have to do. The world was still full of men with guns, men with money, men with theories, men who needed someone else to blame for the emptiness inside them. There would be more violence. More lies. More speeches. More reasons to run.

But there was also Rose's hand in his. There was morning. There was the bay. There was the stubborn fact of breath.

For now, that was enough.

Don Detrich website and blog:

www.detrich.com

Other books by Don Detrich

Bitter Honey

Flawless Sin

Mendocino

New Light

Copper Springs

The Sky Report

Collision Point

The Turning Point of History