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THE TRAILER AND THE BUNKER

GIACOMO RANIERI

Phil had always been adverse to helping out around the house, but the memories from last fall changed his tune: juicy fresh tomatoes, pesto made from home grown basil and garlic, cute little onions that were sweet enough to eat raw. Most of all, the little strawberries barely the size of his thumbnail and red as theater curtains. Phil liked to chop them up, dump them into a glass of chocolate milk, and devour it all like a starving puppy.

He stomped his feet as he walked into the front yard and towards a fenced in garden. Phil's dad promised a freshly baked pie would be out of the oven by the time he had tilled the soil.

Phil didn't do much hard work at all really, but his imagination kept him moving. The loose soil, which held the corpses of last year's plants, was easy to dig up even with a dull shovel. Phil was a twelve-year-old bushwhacker; a real adventurer, but the kind that doesn't take it seriously. He inspected interesting new plants, watched clouds, and took breaks under big shady trees when it was too hot.

He loaded up a wheelbarrow with sun tanned roots that looked like spaghetti and dried stalks from last year's tomatoes. A few hours past and Phil's shovel hit hard ground beneath the loose soil. With unnecessary determination he dug deeper, excited for the fall taste of new tomatoes. He wanted their roots to soak up as much water as they could. He was happy to dig out the clay and rocks if it meant happier plants.

Tong! The shovel's blade struck something and its handle sprung out of Phil's grip. Whatever he hit, it wasn't dirt. Phil had found something. Confusion turned to intrigue as Phil started digging with his hands.

Dirt, dirt and more dirt. A pebble here and there, but no boulder or anything. No, he didn't just strike a boulder. That sound the shovel made echoed so full and loud it had to be hollow. Phil's finger scraped against it. He brushed more dirt out of the way revealing a metal plate. He knocked on it and heard an echo. It had to be a container of some kind, like a bunker. Maybe it was for food? Or a place to hide during a tornado. But then why was it out in the garden instead of under the house.

Looking a little closer Phil saw a scratched on symbol. It looked like a mandala or a pagan circle or something. Phil didn't know much about symbols like this. He stood up, sweat dripping off his face, burning from the sunlight and looked through the large sliding patio doors of the dining room. Of course no one was in there. He turned and peaked towards the large living room window. A large fern had been placed in front of the window and he could barely see his dad reading quietly in his armchair.

With a smile, Phil began throwing dirt on top of the bunker. Once he was done he walked inside. He had flipped the dirt more or less. Down the garden plot, over near where they had put the garlic last year, he hadn't flipped anything. But that didn't matter, Phil had something important on his plate.

In the mudroom Phil brushed dirt off his trousers.

"Do that out front Phillip," his dad said from the armchair in front of the TV.

"Sorry Dad," Phil walked briskly into the living room, having already cleaned himself off.

Phil tried to ask a casual question, but his voice came out like a squeaking bike break. "Is the pie done?"

Phil's dad looked at him questioningly, his son had never hidden anything from him before. There was a moment of silence as they looked quizzically into each other's eyes. Phil's dad turned a page of his noir mystery novel titled 'The Shut in Chemist: A Modern Sorcerer.' "I can't put the pie in till the oven reaches temp," he said. "You finish?" he turned his focus back to the book.

"Ya, except for the garlic plot."

Phil's face was tense and red from working outside. Working hard always appeased Phil's father. Phil remembered him saying once: 'you can't worry after a hard day's work.'

"That's fine," he said squinting at something in his novel, "We planted garlic in the fall, just leave the plot be and they'll sprout in a couple days." Phil nodded, grabbed a glass of lemonade and went upstairs to his room. He had a thinking couch in his room. Last fall one of Phil's friends visited from the west coast, a skater kid named Ty. He had stood on Phil's carpet one day and turned in circles.

“You need something,” he had said, “like a desk, or a TV. No wait, a couch, you need a couch.”

Phil had been skeptical at first, but eventually Ty talked him into it. They found it downstairs. Phil’s mom told him it was the only thing in the house when they moved in, besides the fridge and the oven. It was awesome. Phil actually found he could read easier for school laying down on it. He tried to keep his steps light as he approached the couch. Lying down, he closed his eyes and heard his dad yell from downstairs. That armchair was right beneath the couch and his dad practically lived on it. Phil sighed, got up and started dragging the couch across the carpet.

As the couch legs ruffled up the carpet Phil began to realize how much he liked his privacy. Even now, trying to avoid interaction with anyone downstairs, he was proud of his first lie. Well, it wasn’t really a lie, but it was something to worry about. A secret, a nagging demon loose inside the once prim comfort of his conscience. Somehow it made him feel cooler.

If he dug up that bunker by himself without anyone seeing he could have whatever was inside it and not have to share. He giggled, so sure of his decision. He was going to sneak out there at night and dig up the bunker, that’s probably what his parents would do.

Then Phil heard his dad calling from downstairs, “Phillip, Craighton’s here.” Craighton was one of Phil’s most invasive friends. Everyone called him Cron for short. Most people liked him because he was usually in a good mood, but he was starting to get on Phil’s nerves.

Phil had just found a place for the couch at the end of his bed. He sighed and finished his lemonade because he knew Cron would ask for some, “Alright, send him up.”

Cron knocked. “Come in man,” Phil said.

Cron walked in smiling and excited about something. “Hey dude, where’s your mom at?” Cron had a crush on Phil’s mom. It was one of the things that annoyed Phil about him.

“She’s gone on another vacation, something to do with dolphins.” Phil didn’t even know where she was this time, but she wouldn’t be back for months.

“That sucks man,” Cron was still smiling. He came over and sat a little too close to Phil on the couch.

“What?!” Phil held up his arms to push Cron away, but Cron pulled something colorful out of his pocket. He held it up with shinning eyes and an expectant look. It was a glass pipe, for pot.

“Really?” Phil said with a sarcastic look.

“I bought it from the neighbors, you know the ones in that trailer?”

“Why are you talking to them?”

Cron ignored him and pointed the mouthpiece of the pipe at Phil's face.

"I'm good," Phil said, holding up his hands like Cron was a cop accusing him of stealing.

Cron waved it at him again, "Come on man, this is the first time I've tried it."

"Well I don't want to." Phil said, scooting away from him.

"Alright," Cron said. He lifted the pipe up to his mouth. He looked spiteful and annoyed, like a grade schooler about to throw a tantrum. He was smoking it. Cron was actually smoking it. Cron held in some smoke, looked right at Phil and puffed his cheeks out dramatically.

Phil shoved him. "Go blow it out the window you idiot." The sounds of chirping birds were coming out the open window reminded him summer was coming. Cron's face turned red as he stood up and put the pipe down on the couch. He stumbled towards the window and started coughing. He stopped and held his chest. Some drool came out of his mouth and fell on the carpet. Phil stood up and the pipe rolled over spilling ash all over the upholstery. Phil felt his muscles tense as he walked swiftly across the room, "God damn it Cron." He shoved Cron to the ground. "Get out man, I don't want to get in trouble with you smoking in my house."

"You're dad's chill. It's fine Phil, really. It's just weed." Cron started pushing himself up as Phil trudged over to the couch.

"Well I don't care, I don't want to start smoking." Phil grabbed the pipe and held it out to Cron.

"What's going on up there?" The sound of his dad's voice was coming up from the kitchen, right at the base of the stairs.

"Nothing dad, Cron's just grabbing his stuff."

Cron scrunched up his brow and put the pipe in his pocket. "I was just trying to share with you dude, I thought you would like some."

"Go home Cron." Cron walked out instantly, without a word. Phil could hear him stomping all the way out the door.

Phil started waving his arms trying to move the smoke out towards the window. The strange new smell upset him. He didn't know what to think of Cron being a druggie kid. It was like he hadn't even listened in class. Phil found it hard to ignore the faceless old academic narrators screaming at them about how drugs get everyone arrested and ruin lives. Cron didn't skip those days in class. Did he?

The sound of steps echoed in the hall. Phil's dad was coming up to check on him. Phil quickly ran over to the door and locked it. The handle wiggled. "What's going on Phil? Cron just

stormed out. Did you guys get in a fight?"

"I don't know dad, I don't really want to talk about it."

Phil's dad didn't skip a beat. "What's wrong? You've never not talked to me before."

Phil could feel a sharp pain in his chest. His vision blurred a little bit and he felt uneasy. He didn't answer his dad as he started brushing the ash off his couch onto his hand.

"Come downstairs in a bit Phillip, the pie should be done in less than an hour."

Phil could hear his dad's steps as he walked down to the kitchen. He was crouched on his carpet and picking up ash from in front of the couch. Then he noticed a little etched symbol on the wooden frame of the couch. It was faint, like someone had sanded it and put wood finish over it.

"Oh my God," Phil said aloud, it was the same symbol he had seen on the bunker. Phil dropped the ash back on the carpet and ran to the window. He looked over at the garden. The old tenant must have etched the symbol on the couch and the bunker. Phil breathed in deeply, the crisp dusk air invigorated him. He looked around the neighborhood and saw Cron's bedroom light on. His neighbor's house across the street was dark. It was a big white house with a short, white picket fence. Behind it Phil saw a woman smoking cigarettes in front of a trailer.

It was the only trailer in the neighborhood, tucked into the center of the block. Those must have been the people that sold Cron the pipe and the pot. For a moment Phil forgot about the bunker and the old tenant. He left his room and went down the stairs. He wanted to talk to the people in the trailer. As he tried to walk through the kitchen his dad stopped him.

"Phillip, Phillip wait, where are you going?"

"I'm going over to Cron's to talk to him." Phil walked towards the front door. His dad just stood there watching him. The door handle was cool and the outside air was warm. Phil could feel himself strut from the aftermath of the lie. He lied without even thinking. A newfound sense of power was walking out the door with him.

Once he crossed the street Phil could see the trailer behind his neighbor's house. He walked along the edge of the picket fence and kept an eye on the trailer. The woman was petting a dog tied up to an old rotted wooden pole.

As he rounded the corner of the fence Phil's empowerment dwindled. What if these people forced him to take drugs, what if they tried to convince Phil to steal his mother's jewelry or rob his house? He would just have to be careful about what he told them.

The trailer was missing siding panels and had cracked windows. Dirty curtains ruffled out a bedroom window, a broken grill leaned against a dog house. Phil spotted a tapestry in another

bedroom window. It had a big peace sign and swirling Rastafari colors. Just as he expected. Phil was about to meet some degenerate, lazy, drug addicts, the same kind of people he had been warned about his whole life. The woman patted the dog, an energetic pit bull. It was lifting its front paws in the air, trying to greet Phil.

“Hi,” the woman said cheerfully, “I’m Paula. Aren’t you Tom’s boy?” She had finished her cigarette and just seemed to be enjoying the sunset.

Phil nodded and shook her hand. Phil couldn’t quite find words to say. He had wanted to yell at whoever had sold his friend drugs. He wanted to hit them and scream at them for ruining Cron’s life, but this woman seemed so sweet. She reminded him of his grandmother. Her face had a good amount of wrinkles, but she didn’t look old old, just weathered somehow.

“You’re out a little late aren’t you?” she asked.

This couldn’t be the right woman, she was way too sweet to smoke pot. Blushing, Phil started to consider how he could run back home without making a scene. Then a guy, not quite twenty-one, came running out the front door, tripped over the steps and ran up to Paula.

His hand touched on Paula’s shoulder. “Hey mom, what do you put in the mac and cheese sauce again?”

“Plain yogurt,” she answered.

Paula’s son had a shadowy beard and lanky arms that flapped around like they didn’t belong to him. His shirt was ratty and tie-dyed, with a skull on the chest part. It was surrounded by dancing colored bears and burns that looked like they came from a campfire.

“Alright,” he made a move to go back inside, but stopped when he saw Phil. His face lit up in surprise and excitement, “Hey, you live across the street over there don’t you?” He gestured towards Phil’s house with his thumb.

Phil couldn’t look at him.

“Leave the boy alone Joseph, we were talking.”

“Sorry mom.” Joseph ran back inside and Paula turned her attention to Phil.

“Sit down,” she said. Phil sat next to her, his empowered feeling had gone away. The pit bull barked and Paula pat her hand against his back soothingly.

“What’s your name?” She asked.

“Phil, I just wanted to talk to someone about my friend,” Paula nodded. “Ya, he came over today with a pipe and a bunch of pot, he said something about getting it here and I...”

“What!?” Paula took her hand off the dog’s back and looked at Phil seriously. “Your friend

said he bought grass from someone here?”

Phil nodded. “Ya.”

Paula stood up and started walking towards the front door of the trailer. “Wait a moment,” she said. Once the door shut Phil followed Paula, unsure of what was happening. He was surprised to find a rug draped over the steps of the door. It was soaked with rain water. The trailer was one big room made up of a kitchen and a living room. A small hallway opposite the kitchen probably led to a bedroom and a bathroom. There was a door on the kitchen wall that must have led to the bedroom with the Rastafarian tapestry, probably Josephs.

Joseph was standing at the stove stirring something in a big pot with a wooden spoon. “Would you like some mac and cheese?” he asked Paula as she walked in, “I put ground beef and chili powder in it.”

Paula stood an inch from Joseph and crossed her arms. “Joseph, did you sell a pipe and some weed to a boy in the neighborhood?”

Joseph turned white and brought his face up to meet his mothers. “Uhhh, I did, but not that one” he swung the wooden spoon at the front door and looked at Phil. His face turned white like Phil was going to hurt him, “Oh.”

Paula turned around. “Phil go back outside.”

Phil couldn’t hold back his anger. He had his attention set on Joseph. “What is wrong with you,” he yelled stepping forward. He shoved Joseph.

Paula held Phil back. “Phil, sit down, this is no way to act in someone else’s home.”

Phil walked over to an armchair and sat down, he kept his eyes on Joseph’s stupid hippie shirt.

Paula stepped between the armchair and Joseph. “Joe, Apologize to this young man.”

Joseph looked back and forth between Paula and Phil. “Ok, sorry dude.”

“Some people don’t like drugs in their house,” Paula said, “You shouldn’t be selling to kids.”

“Alright.”

“Go to your room or something.”

Joseph walked into the room that had the tapestry on the window and shut the door. Phil was looking around the living room. How did Cron even meet these people? What were they doing selling drugs in the first place? While Paula sat down on a couch on the other side of the living room Phil’s eyes wandered towards the coffee table. It was a messy table covered in beer cans and carvings. There was even a few video game controllers.

In the middle of the table a large symbol was carved into the wood. It was the same symbol Phil had found on the bunker and on his couch.

Paula breathed a sigh and leaned forward like she was about to say something, but Phil pointed to the symbol and asked, “who carved that in the table?”

Paula seemed taken aback. “Joseph, he draws it all the time.”

“What does it mean?”

“I don’t know.”

Without thinking Phil walked over to Joseph’s room and barged in.

Joseph jumped in surprise, “sorry, really dude, I’m sorry. I won’t sell to Cron anymore.”

“Good, you shouldn’t be selling to anyone, but I actually have something I want to talk to you about.”

“Ya, what is...?” Joseph looked up towards his bedroom door. Phil followed his line of sight. Paula was standing in the doorway looking a little confused.

Before she could say anything Phil grabbed the door. “I gotta talk to Joseph alone for a moment,” he said. Then he slammed the door in her face before she could say anything.

“Weird little guy,” Phil heard her whisper. Phil knew she was too sweet face to face. She yelled at the door. “Don’t you dare sell him anything Joe, or I’m gonna kick you out.”

“Don’t worry mom, I learned my lesson.”

“Like hell,” she said, walking away from the door.

Phil turned his attention to Joseph and sat down in the middle of the room. “Joseph,” he said seriously, “did you know the person who lived in my house before me?” Joseph’s eyes lit up. He sat down on the floor next to his bed and looked at Phil like he was the most interesting thing on the planet.

“When I was a kid I totally stalked the guy that used to live there. I didn’t see him for a long time. I just heard loud cracks and high pitched whistles, like someone was lighting fireworks. The blinds were always down and curiosity got the better of me. One night I snuck through the patio door and found that symbol painted on the living room floor. It covered nearly the whole floor. Bookshelves covered all the walls. They were packed with faded tattered books and he had a wooden stand filled with long walking sticks covered in decorations like paint, feathers, gems, and bones. A large hairy man was placing little trinkets in a spiral pattern on top of the symbol. He noticed me instantly and got ahold of me pretty quick. Carrying me by my collar he threw me out of the house. I never saw him again and he moved later that week, but when I was in there I saw a huge

metal dome in the corner. I never knew where he went or what he was doing, but I've been trying to figure it out for years."

Looking at Paula Phil assumed she didn't believe him. This was an old story he probably told too much, but Phil knew part of it must be true. That old man had to have been the one who buried the bunker and etched the symbol on the couch.

"How big was that dome?"

Joseph looked skeptically at Phil, "ahhh, I don't know, maybe the size of a king bed. And it had a cylindrical hatch looking thing attached to it, like a mini skylight or something."

Phil stood up and pondered all this new information. It was a solitary man who was hiding strange decorative walking sticks and painting big symbols on the floor. Why would he be going through what Phil assumed was some kind of pagan ritual? Was he crazy, or involved in some kind of cult? And if he was, why would he need a bunker? Did it have sacrifices in it, or is he in there hiding away from society?

"What's so special about the dome?" Joseph asked, squinting his eyes.

"I guess it just seemed out of place." Phil knew he wasn't as convincing. Joseph stood up, his skeptical look intensified. Why was it harder to lie to this stranger? Something about lying to Joseph felt wrong. But why should it? He was a junky who sold drugs to Cron and didn't even seem that sorry about it. "I think I'm going to go."

"Tell me if you see anything out of the ordinary at your house. I really want to know what that guy was doing there."

"Ya sure, I gotta go home, my dad's probably worried." Phil walked out and said good night to Paula before she could offer any mac and cheese. While walking home he knew Joseph was watching him. His dad was back in his armchair rubbing his pie-filled stomach. Phil grabbed a piece of pie and went up to his room. If he waited then he could dig up the bunker around one in the morning. He was too anxious to wait any longer than that.

First, Phil stared at the carving on the couch. He spent more than an hour digging through the internet trying to find anything that resembled it. He assumed it was some kind of old alchemy symbol or something since Joseph had said the old tenant painted it on the floor. But nothing really caught his eye. Cron kept calling and texting him, trying to talk to Phil about their fight. Phil had lost interest in him. He really wasn't that cool of a friend anyway and if he started getting addicted to drugs then Phil didn't want anything to do with him.

Eventually, he got too antsy looking at all the symbols. He heard his dad's bedroom door shut and ended up laying down on his couch and staring at the ceiling repressing the desire to dig up the bunker right away. If his dad saw him digging up the garden in the dead of night he would have to tell him and Phil didn't want anyone to know about it. Since their fence was so low to the ground eight different houses had a clear view of his front yard, but he knew that if he didn't go now then he would never have another chance.

If Phil didn't dig tonight there was no way he would have another chance till the end of the summer. His neighborhood was right by a park and in the summer friends came over every day. The neighborhood was effectively a city plaza in the summer.

He couldn't take waiting any longer. Slipping out of bed in his socks, Phil shuffled over to the door. Nothing, his dad must have been reading. Phil waited to hear a single sound. A few times he heard the squeak of his dad's desk chair.

Phil looked out his bedroom window. He could see the trailer. No one was outside and the lights were off. Actually, no one was awake anywhere in the neighborhood, except one place. In his garden someone was digging and throwing the dirt in a pile far onto the garlic side. Phil raced downstairs as quietly as he could and went out to the garden with his dad's shovel. When he approached the garden he whispered at the digger. "Hey."

Joseph turned around stunned. He started stammering and backed out of the hole. "What are you doing Joseph?" Phil asked as he walked over and stood on the rim of the hole.

"I don't know, I was just,"

"You were trespassing and invading our garden. Why are you digging up our garden?"

"I just thought maybe there was something left behind from, you know the old tenant and,"

"What would make you think that?"

Joseph hopped excitedly and pointed to a metal pole next to him. It was a metal detector. "It doesn't matter, I was right."

Phil stared wide-eyed at it. "Get out of here Joseph, my dad will get mad."

"But I found something, maybe it's the dome that guy made?"

"That isn't your business, just go home and smoke your weed or whatever you do."

Joseph looked offended. "I'm sorry I trespassed man, but you don't have to be so aggressive. Just chill dude."

"Go home, don't talk to me like I'm your buddy OK." Phil didn't know what had come over him, it was like this secret had done work on his personality. He was a different person than he

was before he started lying. Joseph started walking away.

Phil ran after him and caught him just after he went through the fence gate. “Joseph, wait, I’m sorry.”

Joseph turned around, his brow scrunched up with confusion and frustration. “I get it, alright, I’ll leave you alone.”

“No, that’s not it, I’m just, I’ve been a jerk today really.” Phil meant it, he was starting to feel sick lying and treating people badly, especially Joseph. Even if he was a drug addict, it didn’t mean he deserved to be yelled at or pushed.

“It’s OK man, I understand. I can be rude sometimes. I should have asked you if I could search your yard. I just got excited talking about that strange guy today, no one has ever listened to me about him you know, and I well, I found something!” He hopped again and gripped his metal detector and shovel tighter. He looked at Phil expectantly like he was asking for permission to keep digging.

Phil felt a massive weight press on his conscience. He didn’t like lying and keeping secrets. It had gotten him grounded, and made him lose respect for himself. “I found it too. This morning, when I was flipping the soil.” Phil opened up the fence gate.

He looked up at Joseph whose face was bright like he was looking at a television screen. Phil felt better already and let himself grin. “Want to help me dig it up.” He held up his shovel.

They dug with gusto and purpose. Within two minutes they had reached the top of the bunker. The metal plate started curving downwards as they dug, it was definitely the dome from the old tenant’s house. It was round and about as big as an oven. They tried to keep their shovels quiet as they dug around the edges, but about a foot down the edge of the bunker Joseph hit some kind of protrusion. The bunker was perfectly round and strangely smooth, except for this thing.

Phil and Joseph dug vigorously with their hands until they uncovered the whole thing. It was a hollow cylinder, with a glass covering, welded to the shell of the bunker. Joseph pulled a flashlight out of his pocket and shone it towards the glass. Phil laid down on the dirt and peeped in. “It’s empty,” he said.

“What, like completely empty?”

“Ya, move the light around.” The beam from the flashlight jerked around the inside of the bunker. It was perfectly round, probably as big as a car, but empty. All Phil could see was the rounded walls on the inside of the bunker. “I don’t see anything. Maybe we could break the glass on this thing and I could fit my head in.

Joseph stepped up on top of the bunker and leaned on his shovel. He was staring at Phil. “Do the honors,” he said.

“What do you mean?” Phil asked him. Joseph made a swinging motion with his shovel and pointed at the glass covering on top of the cylinder. Phil lit up and flipped his shovel around. He held the pole, beneath the blade, and pointed the end of the handle at the glass. With a downward motion he smashed the wooden pole into the glass. It shattered. Both of them flinched and looked around. It had been pretty loud, but no one seemed to be up.

It broke right through only breaking part of the glass. As soon as it shattered a loud deep humming made them both jump. The bunker was shaking and a flash of light came out of the hole in the class. A glowing orb flew out into the night air, it looked like a mini sun, or an energy ball like a sorcerer would cast in a fantasy. Joseph and Phil watched in disbelief. It spun around for a minute and shrank quickly until it was the size of a marble. Then it stopped moving and hovered for a moment, more than twenty feet above their heads.

Then it burst and glowing billows of smoke spiraled down on top of them.

“Phillip?!” Phil and Joseph turned towards Phil’s house. Phil’s dad was leaning out his son’s bedroom window looking at them. “Are you alright Phillip?” He disappeared probably to come down and find out who Joseph was and what the light was. Phil was speechless and his mind was blank from surprise. Joseph dropped his metal detector and fell to his stomach. He was looking through the hole Phil had made with the shovel.

The flashlight was shining in. “There’s nothing in there.”

“What just happened?” Phil asked no one. Phil’s dad found came running over, his eyes went from scared to angry as he looked from Phil to Joseph. He sent Phil upstairs and Phil heard him ask Joseph what he was doing in their garden.

Once upstairs Phil watched the two of them. Joseph got yelled at and walked out the front gate. Then he walked back to the trailer in a bit of a sunken mood. He took a look back at Phil’s house before going inside.

Phil watched his dad bend down himself and look inside the bunker, then knock on the top of it. He scratched his head and Phil walked over to his couch. He was stunned and even more intrigued about the bunker now. All he could think about was the old hairy man that lived in his house before him. He thought about what he may have been doing and why. He wondered what he may have kept in Phil’s room and it made Phil’s skin crawl.

He must have kept a lot of secrets.