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# Brigham City

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BRIGHAM CITY

By

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## The Galaxie

I'd saved money to pay for my LDS mission since baptism. It's the only thing I knew I'd do with my life other than die.

Days before my Farewell Party, the family got a letter. The Utah Department of Corrections scheduled my uncle Wes for parole a few weeks after my leave date. Wes was almost three years into a five-to-ten and I wasn't about to wait another two to see him. I told my parents I wasn't going, not right away.

Next morning my mother and stepfather woke me up. It was still dark out. The bedroom light flicked on and I stayed in my bed. Randall said they'd talked and decided I wasn't welcome to live under their roof, considering my decision. There was more to it than that, lots of we and us type language. Patricia stood behind him, wouldn't look my way, and ran a bobby pin under her fingernails.

It took me ten minutes to drag the last of my toolboxes down Randy's driveway. Most were these oversized industrial affairs with the names of companies stenciled on them, welding and construction outfits Wes had worked for over the years. I let them squeal and dig little white trenches into the cement. Last few trips, I took the long way to make sure the trails didn't overlap.

I lifted the last box into the bed of my little Toyota and surveyed Randy's driveway, thought about all my time spent scrubbing oil spots with muriatic acid and old shirts. I'd memorized every crack, each bobble the bull float left behind. My truck was full after all the tools and I needed a way to get the rest of my things out of the house in one shot. I climbed in the cab and called Bradford, my father. After I got his voicemail twice I made for his place, up in Tenth Ward.

I didn't expect Bradford to put me up. But, it was his day off. He liked to do some morning drinking and see how much yard work he could nail down before lunch. If I caught him at the right time he'd be nostalgic and guilty, maybe let me stay.

I found Bradford in the back yard on his John Deere riding lawnmower. He'd tangled himself in a swing set I'd never seen before. Over on the porch was a red Igloo cooler. I sat on it. Bradford had the mower in reverse but a swing's chain wrapped around the baggers and wouldn't let him go any further. He got it in forward gear and tried to turn out of the tangle until the chains tightened and the mower's front end lifted off the ground. I waved until he saw me. Bradford left the machine running and made for the porch. Before he hit the stairs the weight of the mower pulled the swing set up on two legs. It balanced there.

"How many have you had already?" I nudged a few empties with my toe.

"Deere's only got room for two," he said. The cup holder in each fender was the reason he bought it. "Get me another."

"Just get off?" I handed him an Olympia.

"Days this and last week," he said.

"You got up this early to drink?"

"Why you here, Clarence?"

"I need to borrow the Little Guy," I said. The Little Guy was this six-foot flatbed trailer he bought to moonlight as a repo man.

"For?"

"Mom kicked me out."

"For?"

“I told her I wasn’t going on a mission.”

“Are you?”

“I just need to get my stuff out of her house. Randy got to her.” The swing set toppled and crashed into the mower. It’s top bar wedged between the steering wheel and the hood. Bradford didn’t turn around. Instead, he finished the Oly.

“Are you going on a mission?” he said.

“It’s just postponed.”

“You can’t stay here, boy,” he said. Bradford lived alone in a five bedroom Rambler. My room used to be in the basement.

“I know that.”

“Tina and her kids come over,” he said. “When I’m on days.”

“Wes gets out in a couple weeks,” I said.

“Heard that from your mother,” he said. Bradford got another Oly out of the cooler. He slicked it back and forth across his forehead. “I’ll shoot you straight,” he said. “You’re probably better off. Never did me any good.” He’d served his own mission somewhere down in Mexico, said he was going to retire there, marry a señorita and live on the beach. Build a boat. I didn’t believe him.

“I’m still going,” I said. I meant it.

“Sure,” he said. “Let’s hitch you up.”

\*

After we hooked up the trailer, I stopped and bought a red lighter and cigarettes. I smoked Camels because Wes smoked Camels. It was my first in over a year and I got greedy, finished it quick. The buzz made it hard to concentrate on the road. I white-

knuckled it around a corner, took it too sharp and the Little Guy bounced up over the curb. I felt like an amateur.

I parked at the gutter in front of Patty's, leaned against my fender and bent an edge of rust back and forth until it broke away from the wheel well. The sun wasn't high enough to spill over the mountaintops and the neighborhood appeared purple. The houses looked the same, split levels built in the 80's—the same two-car driveways, same railings, same fake shutters. American flags on the porches, Caravans and Windstars. Every so often one of them had the garage on the north side. Next door, Brother Anderson paced his parking strip with a dandelion weeder clipped to the built-in belt of his Dickey's jumpsuit. He knelt down and pretended to weed, got his stares in.

My parents had piled most of my things in the middle of the lawn. Car parts, clothes, sheets, pillows, fishing rods, books, even my underwear. The sprinklers chugged. A pair of church slacks ran from the top of the pile down to the grass. All that water and no sun, they looked like oil slicks.

I'd learned from Wes that in a situation like that, it's best not to do anything, just hang around and make yourself visible. One time, it took two days of loitering on my grandma Gunger's lawn before she let him back in the house.

I lit another cigarette. Soon as Brother Anderson saw, he went inside. I hadn't finished when Randy cracked the front door and looked out with a phone cradled against his chest. He shut the door. I kept up with the tobacco until Randy came out again. He held a long metal sprinkler key in one hand and a black Hefty bag in the other. He squatted down next to the walk and shut the water off. Once he got to the pile he made a show of snapping the bag around to open it up, made those dull popping sounds. Randy

hunted through the mess and came up with a box, hoisted it above his head for me to see before putting it in the bag. It had “important” marked across the front in my mother’s pretty cursive. He tied the bag a few times, put it back on the pile, and got the sprinklers on before heading back in. I didn’t have to open the box. I knew it contained my scriptures.

\*

I drove to the Galaxie Motel. There were two other laundromats in town, proper ones, but the Galaxie was the only place I’d ever been where you could pay to do laundry. Wes used to go there to sober up. He’d check out on a table and sleep things off, said he liked the noise and the clean smell, made him feel better. It was the first place in town I used to hit whenever he turned up missing.

The Galaxie’s parking lot bled onto the grounds of Shady’s gas station. The laundromat, sandwiched in the back of the lot, shared a wet wall with Shady’s busted up automatic car wash and the other end with the motel’s maintenance building.

Every parking stall had a PT Cruiser in it. It looked like a Chrysler brochure. I parked my truck and trailer with the passenger side tires up on the sidewalk that ran in front of the laundromat. A painted rock propped the front door open and I could smell detergent. Inside, the bank of dryers had cracked glass fronts held together with brown packing tape. The only dryer that wasn’t broken droned with thirty minutes left. I piled my things in the others and got them going. I couldn’t fit everything in the machines and spread the rest along the hood and roof of my truck, hung my church pants along the bedside. After, I smoked on my tailgate. They weren’t giving me a buzz anymore.

The sun broke over the mountains and it got Utah-hot right away.

A person left the maintenance building. He made for the laundromat and hesitated

in the doorway.

“I don’t think you can park here,” he said. “Not like that.” He looked to be my age, give or take, and wore a sweater several sizes too big that read “World’s Best Grandma” in fat round letters. He went at his ear with a cotton swab.

“Sorry,” I said. I didn’t mean it and didn’t want to talk, not to someone that looked like him.

“No, I’m sorry,” he said. “In my head I was thinking you’re stupid. But you probably didn’t know.”

I couldn’t tell if that was genuine or insulting.

“You ever try these?” he said.

“I’ll move it,” I said.

“These.” He pulled a swab out of his ear and held it up.

“Q-Tips?”

“They’re great,” he said. “I found out about them the other day and I haven’t been able to stop.”

“Are you not from around here?” He was high on something. Had to be.

“I am,” he said. He tossed the swab, pulled another from his pocket and got into the other ear.

“Brigham City?”

“Not really,” he said. “Around.” He cocked his head into his hand and closed his eyes, dug deep. “It’s like one of those,” he made a back and forth motion with his other fist, “dildos. It’s like a dildo for your ear.” I couldn’t deny him that, but he made me nervous. He wasn’t a grandma. The Galaxie could be a narcotics palace at times.

His eyes were still closed when I slipped inside the laundromat. I figured my absence would end our conversation. He followed me.

“I’m Hyrum,” he said. He held out his hand, left the swab in his ear. I didn’t shake it.

“Clare,” I said.

“That’s a girl’s name.”

“Clarence.”

“I’m sorry,” he said. “That was rude. Those all yours?” Hyrum waved at the dryers.

I pulled the rest of my change out of my pants.

“That’s lots of stuff,” he said.

The machines kicked off in sequence. Nothing was dry. I only had enough money to start one of them. I searched my truck for quarters. Hyrum didn’t say anything. I brought my ashtray inside and poked through the pennies.

“No, no, don’t waste your money,” Hyrum said.

“My stuff’s still wet.”

“They usually take three or four spins,” he said. “Pretty worn out. I got the key.” He walked out the door and motioned for me to follow. I did. Hyrum stood in the entrance to the maintenance building. He leaned inside and produced a set of tube keys.

“How did you get those?” I wasn’t going to steal and piss off some motel manager, get into trouble with the law over a few dollars. Wes always said if you’re going to get into mischief, make sure it’s worth it.

“I sort of work here,” he said. Hyrum stood in front of a washing machine and

tried keys until the chrome coin deposit slid out. He got a fistful of quarters and thrust them my way.

“I can’t,” I said.

“Stop that,” he said. “Take them.”

“It’s a theft,” I said. “I can’t.”

“From who?” he said. “The manager pays me under the table. Says I can have whatever the machines bring in. Take them.”

“Thank you,” I said. I cupped my hands and Hyrum filled them.

“Don’t thank me,” he said. “Trade you one of these for a smoke though.” He held up a cotton swab.

Hyrum and I spent the next few hours drinking warm orange Shasta; he had the keys to the vending machine too. We serpentine through the rows of PT’s and commented on the abundance of pin stripes and aftermarket lights. One of them had stuffed Mickey Mouses arranged along the dash and deck lid and three matching vinyl stickers in the windows. Hyrum twanged the Styrofoam Mickey head on the antenna as we passed. It turned out he had worked at the Galaxie for almost a year, ever since he left his family’s farm up north a ways.

“It was like a paradise,” Hyrum said. “Grew most our food and nurtured the land. We were prosperous. Didn’t have pop though.” He held up his Shasta.

“Why’d you leave?” I said. I wouldn’t have stayed north either. Towns that way were known for fundamentalists.

“I had to,” he said. “You?”

“It’s stupid.” I couldn’t decide how honest to be with him. That, and I wanted

more of his information.

“Stupid because you don’t want to talk about it or because it really is?”

“Both,” I said.

“Well?”

“I told my parents I wasn’t going on a mission,” I said.

“Mormon’s don’t smoke.”

“I’m not a very good Mormon.”

“Me neither,” he said. “Not anymore.”

We circled back to my truck. I reached over and felt my church pants. Still damp.

“So why no mission? It’s a privilege to serve the Lord.”

“I’m not really sure,” I said.

“Listen,” he said. “I’m trying to conversate with you but I can’t when you dodge and only say what you think I want to hear. Hold this.” Hyrum held his Shasta my way. I took it and he rolled up his sleeves. “We’re friends now. Cut your shit.” His directness reminded me of Wes.

“My uncle gets out of prison in a couple weeks,” I said. “Didn’t want to wait another two years to see him.”

“There you go,” he said. Hyrum jerked his arm like he was pitching softball. He took his Shasta back and killed it. “So you’re holding off for a couple weeks. They still made you leave?”

“I don’t know how long I’m waiting until I go,” I said.

“Well that part’s stupid,” he said. “Why him? Why your uncle?”

“Families are forever,” I said.

“Sometimes they aren’t,” he said.

I let it sit.

Hyrum seemed comfortable with silence. I welcomed it. We sat on my tailgate and didn’t speak for what seemed like over an hour. He obviously had something running around his brain as well.

“Where you going to bunk up?” Hyrum said.

“I was thinking this place,” I said. “It’s cheap, yeah?”

“Can’t,” he said. “It’s full.”

“This place?”

“For a few days,” he said. “A car club bought the place up weeks ago.” That explained the PT Cruisers. I’d forgotten about Peach Days—the car show, the parade and carnival, the fruit stands.

“No idea then,” I said.

“You can stay at my place,” he said.

“You don’t have to do that. I have a grandma.”

“You love your neighbor like thyself, right? Come on.”

“Where is it?” I said. Hyrum pointed to the maintenance building.

The maintenance room was mostly just a shed. Next to the door was a workbench lit up with a sodium lamp. It gave the room that yellow, forty-watt streetlight glow. The walls were covered with water-warped posters of girls with bleached and ratted hair. They all held Makita drills and Snap-On wrenches. It felt like a real shop. A wooden roll-up garage door dominated the back wall. Rags hung between the hinge joints, stuffed in to keep the weather out. A flat-fendered Jeep with a snowplow sat on blocks and took up

most of the floor space. In the center of the room was a drain the size of a trailer tire. A pair of cut up garden hoses propped open the unbolted grate and snaked over to fittings on the boiler. In the corner, on a cinderblock and plywood frame, was Hyrum's bed—a bare mattress and stack of quilts nearly as tall as me. No pillows.

“Got all those from the laundromat,” Hyrum said. He seemed proud of it. The boiler made the air wet and I pitied him. Me with most of everything I owned spinning in cracked pay-dryers. At least Hyrum had a job.

“I'll get us some beer from Shady's,” Hyrum said. “What do you like?”

I didn't have a preference. “Olympia?” I said.

“Well, there's that,” he said. “You can put your stuff anywhere.” Hyrum left.

I was not going to spend the night in the Galaxie Motel boiler room. Not with someone I'd just met, especially wearing clothes like that, no matter our supposed friendship. I convinced myself he was an escaped polygamist. Other than that, I didn't know much of anything about him. I stood outside. A man wearing hospital scrubs ripped into short-shorts sat on a rolling stool in front of one of the PT Cruisers. He polished the car's headlights. Eventually, he caught me watching him.

“Oxidation's a bitch,” he said. He waved his towel and got back to work. I went to my truck and tugged out the first toolbox.

Hyrum came back with a thirty pack and helped me haul the rest of my tools into the maintenance room. We stacked everything next to the workbench and celebrated the job with a beer. I had to choke it down. In preparation for my mission I'd adhered to the Word of Wisdom, abstained from alcohol and tobacco. Even though the beer was low point, I felt it right away. I sat down on the Little Guy. Hyrum said we should have

another and another and eventually we lost the sunlight. We drank and counted clicks from the bug zapper over at Shady's.

"You ever had a hoagie?" Hyrum said.

"I've had a sandwich."

"They have these ones at 7-Eleven that really, you know, are really good."

I couldn't remember the last time I'd been drunk and thought it best not to say anything.

"Let's go," he said. "It's up Main a ways."

"I'll sit tight," I said. "Stay and smoke."

"You're out of cigarettes."

I held up my last. Hyrum reached over and snapped it. He pinched and rolled it until the tobacco emptied into my lap. "Come on," he said. "You can buy more at Sev."

Hyrum stood. He dropped two beers in the kangaroo pouch of his sweatshirt. He hauled me off the trailer, spun me around, and put a can in each of my back pockets.

Then, we went.

Our end of Brigham City was abandoned. Up the road, downtown, carnival lights reflected off the Tabernacle's white spire. After walking a few blocks, we came into the next day's parade territory. People had roped off sections between the giant sycamores, laid down blankets, set up rows of chairs. They'd scrawled names across the path in sidewalk chalk—Zundell, Hendrickson, Jensen, Jeppsen, Sorenson, Young.

"What's going on?" Hyrum said.

"Peach Days," I said.

"What's that?"

“Peach Days? The parade?” That look on his face. I didn’t understand his ignorance. “Why do you think that car club booked the Galaxie?”

“Never thought about it, I guess.” He nudged the nearest plastic chair with the back of his hand. “I figured they were traveling together.”

“It’s Peach Days,” I said. “The parade’s tomorrow. Car show, carnival, all that. Scuba Burgers? Peaches? You’ve really never heard of Peach Days?” He’d said that he was from around.

“So why the chairs?”

“To get a good spot. You set up chairs, blankets, whatever,” I said. “So you can see everything.”

“Sounds like covetousness,” he said. It did. I wondered if my parents had been down to stake something out, if Bradford planned on showing up with Tina and her kids. I scuffed at one of the names with the sole of my shoe until it smeared.

“It’s one of the biggest in the state,” I said.

Hyrum picked up two chairs and walked up the street a bit. He rearranged the chairs, gathered up a blanket and made his way back. He spread the blanket where the chairs had been. “Yeah?” he said.

We worked in silence. I fumbled through unknitting a nylon rope slung between two trees and hoped for a genius spot to restring it. Hyrum ran chairs up and down the block, swapped blankets, erased names. I threw the rope around my shoulder and helped. We became methodical, left no spot unaltered.

“If only we had some chalk,” he said. “We could rewrite some names.”

I had four or five folded up camping chairs across my chest like firewood. “Make

up names,” I said, “so long as it’s Scandinavian.” I propped a chair open and kept walking.

“What are you doing?” Hyrum said.

“What do you mean what am I doing?”

“Keep the sets together,” he said. “Don’t split the groups up, that’s inconsiderate.”

“Are you for real right now?” Hyrum had this blank bovine look. He was. I arranged the rest of the chairs in a group. His logic did make sense, in a way. We kept at it.

I made it to the corner and uncoiled the rope, tied one end to a fire hydrant. Once I got it secure I searched for somewhere to attach the other end. I decided upon the stop sign and went to ask Hyrum’s opinion. He wasn’t nearby. Hyrum was across the street, talking to someone. I made sure it wasn’t a cop and continued the job. The stop sign seemed genius enough. I fixed up the rope.

When I reached Hyrum the other man went silent. He wore a sports jacket and snap-up track pants.

“I put the rope between the hydrant and sign,” I said. “Look.”

“Clare,” Hyrum said. “This is Buckets. Buckets?” Hyrum motioned my way.

“Clare’s my friend. He’s okay. He’s not going on a mission.”

“Is that your real name?” I said.

“He’s staying at my place,” Hyrum said.

Buckets fidgeted with a gum wrapper. He’d twisted it into the shape of a hard candy.

“You don’t have to worry,” Hyrum said. “Everything’s cool.”

“Goddammit man,” Buckets said. “If this is some bullshit.” He kept twisting. “I don’t know.”

“Come on,” Hyrum said. “We’re friends. Clare, show him. Give him a beer.”

I offered both to Buckets. He looked at them but didn’t accept.

“Behind the dog groomers,” he said. Buckets crossed the street back the way we’d come. Hyrum followed. I couldn’t tell what I’d missed, if their problem was my fault.

I caught up with them behind the building. Hyrum inspected something in Bucket’s palm. He had what looked like a sticky piece of coal sitting on tinfoil.

“Is that some kind of resin?” I said. I had a high school bout with pot, knew it was possible to scrape a pipe, but I’d never seen it done before.

“Not exactly,” Buckets said.

“Did you clean your pipe or something?” I said.

“No,” he said. “Light?”

Hyrum tapped my shoulder. “Clare?”

I gave Buckets my lighter. “Where’s your pipe?”

“We don’t need one,” Hyrum said.

“Is this some new way to smoke?” I said.

“Not really,” Hyrum said.

“Is this guy serious?” Buckets said.

“Pay attention,” Hyrum said.

Hyrum held the lighter underneath the foil. Buckets got his face just above it and inhaled. Then they switched.

Hyrum exhaled. “Your turn,” he said.

It hurt worse than cigarettes and tasted like burnt tires. Buckets and Hyrum repeated their turns. It came back to me. "I don't think I did it right," I said.

"You did fine," Hyrum said. "Performed admirably."

Second go was worse. I got my hands on my knees and leaned against the wall. My guts roiled.

"It's toast," Buckets said. He balled up the foil and flicked it like a coin.

"Thank you again, friend," Hyrum said. "Are you sure you don't want a beer?"

"You know I don't drink," Buckets said.

"Another time. I'll see you soon," Hyrum said. "Take care of yourself, brother."

He hugged Buckets.

\*

We made our way back to the Galaxie. Halfway through the first block, I got sick, puked across two blankets.

"We just switched those," Hyrum said. He bent and gathered up sycamore leaves.

"I need to go home," I said. "My bishop doesn't know about my mission."

Hyrum was on his knees, scraping leaves across the blankets, wiping up my mess.

"I have to call him before Randy does."

"I appreciate that, but you're not in any state to make a telephone call," Hyrum said.

"I think I'm feeling better," I said. "Lots."

Then, I got sick again. It wasn't much. Heaves.

Hyrum seeing-eye-dogged me back to the Galaxie, mostly carried me, held me back at intersections, kept me inside the crosswalks. He got me on his bed.

I rubbed my arms. My palms stuck to the skin.

“I have to call my Bishop,” I said. “And my Stake President.”

“Calm it,” Hyrum said.

“That wasn’t weed,” I said.

“And?” he said. “What can you do about it now?”

“You have to take me home,” I said.

“You can’t do anything except wait it out.”

“Did you know?” I said. “What it was?”

“Of course I knew,” he said. “But getting upset is just going to make it worse. I can see you’re not having a good time. So, don’t rile yourself up. Lay down. Here, this is the best blanket.” He pulled a Los Angeles Raiders fleece from the stack.

“Was that a plan?”

“A plan what?”

“Buckets.”

“Buckets? No, we were going to 7-Eleven, remember? It was good to see him though. I hope he takes care of himself.”

“Take me to Gunger’s.”

“Is that a restaurant?”

“My Gunger’s,” I said. “My grandma’s. Please.”

“I don’t have car.”

“Take my truck.”

“I don’t have a license,” he said.

“Jesus Christ, you hillbilly.”

Hyrum draped the Raiders blanket around me. “If you promise not to take the Lord’s name in vain like that again, I’ll take you,” he said. “I can tell you’re serious.”

“It’s in Eighth Ward.”

Hyrum informed me his only experience with a stick shift was on a Depression-era tractor. Our ride across town was all stalls, grinding gears, and me thrusting against the headrest to counter the whiplash. I can’t say how long it took. I do know that Hyrum hit every stop sign.

\*

“You’re lucky those coneflowers already looked sorry,” Gunger said. “Best not have damaged my mums though or I’ll have to wop you.”

I awoke to her squatting over me. She wore a floppy dirt stained sun hat and had a bucket of weeds perched on her kneecaps. I was partly on the grass, mostly in one of her flowerbeds next to the porch.

My head felt like a burnt up transmission. My teeth ached. “Fuck,” I said. Gunger popped me in the temple with her knuckle. Everything got bright.

“Watch your mouth, bonehead.”

“I need to explain something.”

“I figured you’d come around,” she said. “Your mother called yesterday and filled me in.”

“I know you’re putting Wes up soon.”

“It’s fine,” she said. “You should have come here first, dummy.”

I sat up. I dry heaved.

“First day out and you’re a train wreck. I hope you didn’t drive that here

yourself.” She angled her forehead toward the street. My truck and the Little Guy were parked facing the wrong way. They straddled the parking strip, driver’s tires up on the sidewalk.

“Where’s your belongings?” she said.

“My friend’s place.”

“Come on,” she said. “Go in and wash. Parade starts in an hour.”

\* \* \*

## Hook and Sinker

I sat in the glass house and tore thin strips off the edge of my uncle Wes's letter. He was supposed to be paroled at ten-thirty. It was nearly noon. The Utah Department of Corrections bumped things around without telling family members. Court hearings, visitation hours, and evidently release dates. It's to make everyone involved feel like prisoners. Those are Wes's words, I realize that, but it doesn't make them not true.

There wasn't enough seating. People camped out on the tile in between the rows of bolted down chairs. I lucked out with a seat in the far corner. Most everyone held a pair of men's underwear. A man in a dark green suit held silk Bugs Bunny boxers. The old lady next to me, she wrung a pair of bright red briefs.

“I always forget they have to wear state underpants out,” she said.

“Me too,” I said. Really, I'd known about the underwear thing since before I could drive. “I'm Clarence.” I held my hand out, figured manners would lighten things up.

“Sheila.” She waved her fingers, kept her hands in fists. On the inside of her wrist she had a pink tissue tucked into her watchband. “Friend or relative?”

“My uncle,” I said.

“My son,” she said. “This is just going to be a vacation for him though. He gets out long enough to see his kids. They live with me.”

“They're lucky,” I said. “I live with my grandma too.” I'd moved in a few months prior, just before I turned nineteen. My gratitude was fresh.

“He'll be back though,” she said. “He always goes back.”

I picked at a sticker in the corner of the window behind me. It read “Lvl. II Bullet Resistant.” I got it off and stuck it to the letter.

“Careful,” she said. “Might make you stay.”

The glass house was this building made of tinted blue-green panes held together with flat and riveted pieces of stainless steel. It sat in front of a stone building with an engraving of scales the size of an Oldsmobile. You could see them from every corner of the room. Wes had been in and out of county jail ever since I could remember, usually short stays, less than a year. He'd only been to prison twice. This last tour was his first real drug charge. Everything before was stuff like petty larceny or dirty piss tests. He got paroled three years into a ten-year sentence. When he wrote to tell the family, no one wanted to collect him. They'd picked him up enough over the years, said he could find his own ride. It was my first time in the glass house alone.

It was close to one when the stone building's doors opened. They were made of the same bullet-proof glass and slid like a supermarket's. A line of men crept out. The path between the buildings was lined on both sides with two rows of chain link fence topped with razor wire. In the middle was a set of gates. The guards running the line stopped at the first one. Maybe eight men stood in the sunlight, shielding their eyes. They all carried cardboard document boxes without lids. The supermarket doors shut and opened again. The rest of the men were still inside. The first gate buzzed and a door in the chain link rolled open. The guards waved the first man in. He had to wait in the little no-man's-land until the first gate closed behind him. After, the second gate sounded and opened. Two guards on the other side led him into the glass house. Everyone stood up. I didn't. In his letter, Wes said that he'd be at the back. Prison orders guys by number, not name like county.

Wes was last in line. I waded through the sobs and hugs over to the closer wall so I could watch him. The men in front of Wes, when they waited at the head of the line, spoke to the guards. Laughed. Gestured. Wes didn't. He held his box with one hand cocked up to his shoulder, like a waiter, that million mile stare.

Once he got inside, I stayed put, let him look. His ponytail flopped back and forth while he scanned.

“Clare!” he said. I didn't move. Wes used his box to plow through all the huggers.

“Sorry it took so long,” he said. “They had us in the gym for hours, got another strip search in. Had to get one last look at my asshole.” He yelled the last bit, shoved the box into my chest. I caught it and he threw his arm around my neck.

“You got fat,” I said.

“Let's get the fuck out of here,” he said.

Wes set his box on the roof of my shitty little Toyota truck and reached over the bed to the sliding window.

“Fixed the locks,” I said. It was his truck before he went in. He used to have me climb in through the back window to open his door. Inside, Wes sat with the box perched on his knees.

“Did you give them your smokes?” he said.

Utah prisons don't allow tobacco on campus. To get in the parking lot, I had to hand over my driver's license and answer a bunch of questions at a guard post. When the guy asked if I had any tobacco in the vehicle, I said no. I lifted the center console between Wes and me. Underneath, the seat's brown vinyl was torn. I pushed the raw seat

foam aside and pulled out a pack of cigarettes. Wes smoked Camels, so I smoked Camels.

“Good boy,” Wes said. He pulled one out of the pack and got it between his lips, took a drag before lighting it. He passed the cigarette my way and pulled out a plastic jar of Folgers Instant. White stuff tumbled around inside. Wes popped the cap and dug his fingers in the grains. “Laundry detergent,” he said. “Have to wash personal affects in your cell.”

“Wash what?”

“I had some nice socks for a while there,” he said. “Send stuff like that to laundry and it doesn't come back.” He crunched around inside, pulled out little flower sculptures, daisies. “For mom,” he said. “You mash up bread with water and the ground up insides of colored pencils. Let them get hard like ceramic.”

“I know,” I said. “She has the roses you made last time up on the mantle.” For Wes, getting out was like coming home from some trip. He had souvenirs for the whole family, things he'd made and traded cigarettes for. Back home, I had a chess set he carved from soap.

Wes dug out something white and black. “For you,” he said.

It was a handkerchief with ink drawings. The black parts shone red in the light and the darkest parts were crusty where the cotton didn't want to bend with that much ballpoint. Motorcycles and dripping things, spider webs, skulls, and chains.

“Tombstones have years on them,” he said. “Each year I was locked up.” He'd missed a few. I didn't say anything.

I put my truck in gear and lurched toward the guard post. I went slow, hoped Wes would finish his smoke before we got there. While we waited to get my license back, Wes twisted up the butt, folded it over, and flicked it at the shack's wall. I had both hands on the wheel, gripped it so tight I could feel my pulse in my palms. The guard didn't see. Wes laughed and put his foot up on my dash.

Brigham City, home, was eighty miles north on I-15. The freeway never strayed a few miles from the Wasatch Mountains, hugged them the whole way up. It was the middle of August and they'd gone brown.

"West Jordan," I said. It was a game we had, naming temples and tabernacles as we drove.

"Doesn't count," he said. "You can barely see it out there."

"Stupid game anyway," I said.

"Let's get to Woodruff," Wes said. Woodruff is this place he always wanted to go and fish. He thought we'd been there together but we hadn't.

"We should," I said.

"Trout are on."

"I still haven't been there."

"Bullshit you haven't," he said. "Remember that time, remember that one time we each had a couple poles in the water and the fish cop came?"

"That was at Strawberry," I said.

"You sure?"

"My citation said Strawberry Reservoir," I said. "I remember. I was grounded for months." He lit us cigarettes, took a few drags off mine and put it between my lips.

After Salt Lake, the freeway bottlenecked from six lanes down to four.

“Bountiful,” Wes said. The temple was tucked up on the mountainside, surrounded by the only patch of green. We could barely see the white stone poking through the foliage.

“You have my Ugly Stiks?” Whenever he got locked up, I inherited whatever tools and fishing poles he hadn't lost or pawned.

“I got five in Gunger's shed.” Gunger was my grandma, Wes's mom. He was going to stay with us until he got working again. We'd never lived together, not for real, just a few weeks here and there, after rehab. The thought of helping him get straight, being that one he could lean on thrilled me.

“We'll hit my PO soon as we get to town,” he said. “Get me a fishing license, leave today.”

Further north we got, the freeway finally went down to two lanes and we crossed into Box Elder County. Until then, suburbs sprawled off both sides of the road. Up north, the left side was mostly farm country, room to think.

“You going to tell me what really happened?” I said. The night he was arrested, Brigham cops found him passed out in my truck. He was in the middle of the road with the engine running, foot on the brake. That's all the police told us and Wes never added anything to the story. In his letters, he always said he didn't have room to explain.

“I told you what happened. Had mercy in the car.” The balloons they found, full of heroin, Wes called them his bags of mercy. Only when he wasn't locked up though. In jail or prison he called them fucking dope bags.

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In Brigham, Wes made me take the back roads to his Parole Officer's building.

"I don't want to see town," he said. "Not yet." Wes was in there less than twenty minutes. He had me stay in the truck.

After, we hit the grocery store and I bought fishing licenses, a carton of cigarettes, and four tins of chew.

"It's for the trip," he said. "Let's get those poles."

A line of vehicles filled the curb in front of Gunger's house, a turn of the century job my great-great-something grandpa built when that part of town was mostly peach orchards. I took my truck up the drive and into the carport.

"Someone die?" Wes said.

"No one told me anything," I said. I pulled a travel size thing of mouthwash and a bottle of cologne from my center console. Wes was the only one that knew I smoked.

"That's cute," he said.

"Fuck you."

"You ready, princess?"

"Give me a minute," I said.

Wes sprayed himself, took a swig of the mouthwash, swallowed it, and went in.

I stood in the carport with Wes' box and gargled. Out on the curb, my dad's work truck was parked facing the wrong direction with the tailgate flopped down. He and Wes went to school together. Wes introduced him to my mom. The truck was still caked with the previous winter's road salt. In front of that was my uncle Nathan's truck. He bought it new from the Chevy dealership right after he graduated high school. Somehow it still got him around. The front tires had raised white lettering that didn't match the rears. In front

of that was my stepdad's mini van. The back window had peeling white vinyl stickers—“Families Are Forever” and a row of stick figures below that to represent my parents and siblings. Randall, my stepdad, scraped off my figure after I moved in with Gunger.

Through the carport, the side door let into the kitchen. I got the handle and water droplets ran down the other side of the window. They were cooking. I opened the door and wiggled through with the box. Wes and Gunger stood in the middle of the kitchen. She had him in one of her embraces that could last an hour if she wanted. Wes leaned into her, let his arms dangle at his sides. He eyeballed the table behind her. Glass baking dishes covered with tin foil were stacked into leaning little towers. Funeral potatoes, casseroles, and a roast. Three pies sat on dish towels. Green Jell-O would be in the fridge. Behind it all stood a wall of two-liter Mountain Dew and Diet Coke.

A wave of hot hit me from behind. Little kids ran by, hollering. My little brother chased two of my cousins with a wooden spoon. My mom, Patricia, swung out two sheets of rolls from the oven.

“Out of the way,” she said.

I made it to the living room and fell into the couch next to my uncle Nathan with his orange-lens Oakleys. He always wore them, even to church.

“Didn't expect you here,” I said.

“Well,” he pulled on his Mountain Dew, “I am.”

“You guys plan this thing all along?”

“Just Gunger,” he said.

“Where's Lisa?”

“She's sick,” he said. When Lisa was sick, it meant his wife was home and too hopped up on pain pills to get out of bed. Nathan arched his eyebrows to point across the room. “Look,” he said.

My dad, Bradford, only spoke to Randy when he was drunk, liked to talk football even though Randy was a baseball guy, liked to ask him questions about famous games, things Randy had no way of answering. Gunger kept a rocking horse in the corner of the room. Randy was on it, side saddle, his head arched back up to see Bradford. Bradford had a palm on the wall, left Randy no way out.

“Seriously,” Bradford said. “You need to buck the fuck up, old man.” Bradford's other tactic was to talk shop. He, Randy, and Wes all worked construction for a plant out west that made space shuttle parts. Randy lasted and ended up with a desk job.

“Soon enough,” Randy said.

“Alan's a dick,” Bradford said. “Doesn't know his ass from his elbow.” Randy toyed with the rocking horse's fur, didn't respond.

“Inappropriate,” Nathan said.

Wes came in, yanked the box off my lap and sat on the coffee table. “Kids,” he said. “Kids, get your cute butts in here.” Nathan's four daughters and both sons shot in, so did my twin brothers and both sisters. Gunger and Patricia followed. My little brother still had that spoon, poked Nathan's oldest boy Trekker with it. “Sit down,” Wes said, “I've got presents for you.” They hunched on the carpet. Wes pulled out a manila envelope.

“You made it,” Nathan said.

“For good this time,” Wes said.

“We'll see,” Patricia said. My mom never got excited about anything.

Nathan toasted Wes's way with his cup.

“Packers lost Sunday,” Bradford said.

“Eat shit,” Wes said. “Whoop—sorry kids. That wasn't very nice. Got to lose my potty mouth.” He put his fingertips to his mouth, lowered his head and fluttered his lashes. They ate it up with giggles.

“Inappropriate,” Nathan said.

“Okay,” Wes said. “Trekker, Clare said you were Nephi last Halloween?”

Trekker got to his knees, looked like he was about to lose his head with the nodding.

“My good friend Tomcat drew these.” From the folder Wes pulled a drawing of a young man with a dripping sword and over-sized armor. “He just killed Laman,” Wes said. The edges had spiderwebs in them and Nephi's name in an Old English script. It looked like a homemade tattoo. Trekker took the drawing with both hands. His eyes were so wide he looked wired. Little things got him going.

“Thank you, uncle Wes.” Trekker's voice vibrated.

Wes had Book of Mormon character drawings for all of them, each kid's favorite. For the girls, all six, he had sculpted tulips, said the colors matched their birthdays, whatever that meant.

My sisters planned to show the drawings off in Sunday School.

“Here, I'll hold on to those,” Randy said. He collected the drawings, folded them into his suit jacket.

“Randy,” Wes said. “Grow up.”

Bradford pulled Wes up and hugged him from behind. “Glad I bought out of this family,” he said. He got both hands on Wes's belly and shook. “Just wanted to see how fat you got. Glad you made it safe.” Bradford went for the door.

“Stay for dinner,” Gunger said. Wes echoed.

“Got a job to do,” Bradford said.

“At least take a plate?” Gunger said.

“Thanks, but no thanks, he said. “Duty calls.”

Bradford left. Everyone knew he didn't have a job.

Wes went to the mantle. He took the picture of his father and put it face down. I never knew my grandpa, he died before I was born. I caught Gunger pretending not to notice.

“Who's hungry?” she said.

“Hell yes, I'm ready for some real food,” Wes said. “Feel like I've ate nothing but cardboard for years.” The kids lost it again, ate it up hook and sinker. We all did.

We crammed into the kitchen. It was the glass house all over again. Wes took a roll and smelled it, took down half with one bite. He moaned with his mouth open.

“You wait for the prayer,” Gunger said. She took the other half and put it on top of the fridge. “Nathan,” she said. “Come bless the food.”

Nathan leaned against the door frame. He took his cap off and folded his arms. His sunglasses stayed. Everyone else did the same. The kids bowed their heads so low their foreheads nearly touched their arms.

“Dear Heavenly Father,” Nathan said. “We are gathered here today to welcome home Wesley. Thank you, Lord, for keeping him safe while he was away. Please give

him the power and foresight to help him through his transition. Please bless this food, that it will nourish and strengthen our bodies. In the name of thy son, Jesus Christ, amen.”

Wes played the patriarch and dished up plates for the kids. There wasn't enough room for everyone in the kitchen. I followed Nathan back to the couch. He had a separate plate just for rolls.

“He's going to do it this time,” I said.

“Hope so,” Nathan said. “He's too old for that kind of thing.”

“He's got it,” I said. “Have faith.”

“Good hell,” Nathan said. “What now?” He faced the window. A man strolled toward the house. Two more were on the sidewalk. One of them was a guy everyone in town called the high-stepper. He marched up and down main street with an enormous fountain drink all day. He looked like he was perpetually on a stair climber. I didn't recognize the other one. Few seconds later, the door rapped. Before the knocking stopped Gunger had it open. She must've seen him through the kitchen window.

“Go,” she said. “He's not here.”

“Ma,” Wes said. “It's just Tom.”

Gunger shut the door most of the way and leaned back. “I know who it is, Wesley. He's not welcome here.” She opened the door again. “Wes isn't home,” she said.

I stood up.

“Nope,” Nathan said. He motioned with his roll for me to sit.

I went to the kitchen. Wes saw me, jerked his head toward the side door. He held his thumb to his ear and his pinkie by his mouth. I let myself out. No one seemed to notice. I waited until I heard the front door shut. Tom made his way to the sidewalk.

“Tom,” I said. He didn't see me right away. I waved my hands. Tom didn't know me. I made Wes's telephone sign, waved it front of me then put it to the side of my head. It took three repetitions. Finally, Tom seemed to understand. The three of them walked off, the last one like he was stuck in mud. Back inside, we ate until we couldn't move. Everyone acted like Tom never happened. The kids put themselves in sugar comas from all the soda and passed out in front of the television. When the family left, Wes stood by the door and hugged every one of them. He thanked them for coming, said was grateful and really appreciated it, and what a surprise.

\*

After the party, after Gunger went to bed, Wes and I sat in the carport and smoked.

“You know the high-stepper?” I said.

“Jesus,” Wes said. “His name's Gene. Don't call him that.”

“But you know him?”

“Yeah. We go way back,” he said. “Fucked himself up back in high school. Damaged his brains. Cops found him naked in Pioneer Park, stuck up a pine tree. It's how your dad got to be running back.”

“That's why he walks that way?”

“You tell Tom I'd get a hold of him?”

“I said you'd call him.”

“Good boy,” he said. “Tomorrow's going to be fun. Trout are on.”

Wes woke me up the next morning at four. We stopped at Shifty's Gas Station for worms and coffee. I'd never been to Woodruff, couldn't believe it was really going to

happen. The previous trips we took, Wes drove. I ran the map and it was my job to navigate. But, he ignored my directions. We always ended up at some other reservoir or lake. That sort of thing wouldn't happen with me driving.

After twenty minutes on the freeway, I spotted Ogden temple.

“Ogden,” I said.

“Hey, take this next exit,” Wes said. “Got to make a pit stop.”

“We got everything,” I said. I rustled the plastic bag between us. It had the tobacco and worms and sandwiches. Poles were in the truck bed.

“I know,” he said. “Right here.”

I followed his directions.

“Need to piss?”

“Yeah, have to pee,” he said.

Bottom of the off-ramp, Wes pointed away from the gas station, said to go that way. He told me left, I went left. He told me straight and right, I obeyed.

“Up there,” he said. “Pull in that driveway.”

I braked, stayed in the middle of the road. It was barely five. The house was dark. Entire street was dark.

“What are we doing?” I said.

“I just have to run inside for a bit.”

Wes was out before I could get the truck going. He didn't go to the front door. Instead, he hopped a fence and disappeared around back. I idled there, in the middle of the road, and waited.

\* \* \*

## Woodruff

My uncle Wes took me birthday fishing after another bout in county. I suppose it could have been in rehab. Either way, it wasn't serious enough to lose his job hanging angle iron. I was in junior high, end of ninth grade. Wes wanted to hit Woodruff, a reservoir he wouldn't let up about.

Our trip was secret. My stepfather Randy worked with a guy whose boy earned his Eagle Scout before he turned fifteen; my birthday crept up it and became apparent I wouldn't do the same so Randy got me under his home-grown house arrest until I outdid the coworker in merit badges. One weekend, I wove thirty-two baskets.

With Randy it wasn't just about scouts. I was nearly a year late in receiving the priesthood. Randy said I had to get the Eagle under my belt to demonstrate I was ready for the responsibilities of spiritual ordinances. He left it on me to duck my Bishop's interviews. My mother Patricia always made an excuse though, covered for me, scheduled another. She'd just done so when she let me in on Wes's plan.

"If you're not back for your Bishop's interview," she said, "it'll be your last trip."

"I understand."

"Don't make me regret this." Patty had scars on her upper lip that quivered whenever she delivered that line.

Friday morning, after Randy left for work, Wes's yellow Toyota truck bounced over the curb and parked on the lawn. He left it running, climbed in the bed and waved both arms, belted the happy birthday tune.

The interior of Wes's truck smelled like stale bread. He liked to show off his

speakers by cranking Mötley Crüe and pouring beer on the subwoofers.

“Passed Randy on my way over,” Wes said. “Dick shaft drives slower than a blind lady.”

“Did he see you?” I craned to look out the back window, waited for Randy’s car to tear around the corner.

“What’s it matter?” he said. ”You’re running the maps.” Wes flopped a stack of creased and yellowed triple A’s in my lap. I cracked open the one for Northern Utah. Red grease pencil ran a loop around Woodruff Reservoir.

“Know where I got those?”

“From grandpa,” I said. He died before I was born, massive heart attack, alone on some fishing trip. Took ten days to find him. “Will you listen this time?”

“Bud, I always do,” he said.

“Last time we ended up at Strawberry.”

“Teensy wrong turn.”

“Strawberry’s a hundred miles the other way,” I said. “Two counties down.”

“Just navigate,” he said.

“Take the Old Highway.”

Wes made a show, repeated “Old Highway,” hunched over the wheel and tilted his head to look over his sunglasses. “Up at Woodruff,” he said. “Dad taught me to catch fish with my hands.”

“You put them to sleep with their stomachs,” I said. “Rub them.”

“Taught my friends how to do it,” he said. “Teach you too.”

“You said that last time.”

“Up at Woodruff,” he said, “we also hid a bong in a hollowed out cottonwood. Six-footer. Took two people to run the bitch.”

I’d never heard that part. I didn’t know what to do with the information. Normally Wes stayed silent about any sort of drugs.

“You ever smoke pot?”

“Never,” I said. It was truth.

“Good. Don’t,” he said. “It’s fun as all hell. But don’t.”

We got south a ways and I told him to take the North Ogden Pass. He didn’t, said the freeway was faster by an hour. I held my thumbnail along the map’s distance scale, did some calculating.

“That’s eighty miles more,” I said.

“You want to fish or drive around all day?” he said.

I wedged the maps between the windshield and dashboard. Wes let down his window and smoked. He did this thing where he inhaled, cupped the cigarette inward, and exhaled on the cherry. The glow lit up his palm. Wes didn’t take orders or listen to reason. I fell asleep to the drone of his All Terrains.

I awoke on the Evanston off-ramp and checked the map. Wes’s route took us through Wyoming. He parked in front of Cowboy Jim’s Liquor Barn.

“We need sundries,” he said.

I waited in the cab and examined the map, planned out my co-pilot dialogue.

Wes waddled back with three cases of beer and a carton of cigarettes tucked into his armpit. He dropped the beer in the truck bed.

“Can’t get Fat Tire in Utah,” he said. “We’ll pick up some more on our way back

through and sell it when we get home. It's high point, too."

"Who's all that for?"

"Jesus, princess." He started the truck. "For us."

"Hang a Roger out of the parking lot," I said.

Wes drove left.

"I said right."

"Little detour," he said. "Let's just see what's this way."

Evanston's Front Street grew into a highway. I understood his plan and let it happen. I should have felt stupid for thinking we'd really hit Woodruff but didn't. We crossed the wrong state line back into Utah and I stuffed the maps into the glove box.

Wes steered with a knee and packed his cigarettes.

"How old are you now? Fourteen?" he said.

"Fifteen."

Wes chewed on it for a few miles, readjusted his ball cap over and over. "Well," he said, "it's about time you learned to smoke." Wes tore the cellophane with his teeth. He lit one and held it in the space between us. "Take it." Bishop Zundell was a plumber. I could lie to him and he'd believe.

By the time we stopped in the Uinta Ranger Station to buy a day pass, I could inhale without Wes thumping my back to stop the coughing; it still hurt. Inside the station, we hunched over a waist-high counter and studied the topographical map pressed beneath scratched Plexiglas.

Wes tapped his finger against a blue spot. "Whitney Reservoir," he said.

"That's where we're going?"

Wes turned to look at the Forest Ranger stapling blue business cards to a stack of pamphlets. He didn't seem to notice us. "Near enough," Wes said. "Up the river a ways the trout will be on."

It took an hour of washboard roads before we saw the lake.

"Whitney Reservoir," Wes said. "Ten thousand feet above sea level." We circled Whitney. Mountains fishbowed in the lake. Wes pointed out different peaks, gave their names and elevations. Even in May snow clung to every ridge and crest. Second lap around, Wes found a trail hugging one of the rivers and crept up it. The smell of pine and big mountain sagebrush came in powerful and overwhelming, dominated the cab, cleaned out my lungs.

"Not supposed to fish upriver," Wes said. "Just the lake."

"But we're going to."

"We're catching today, not fishing."

Wes weaseled his truck under a stand of quakies.

"Can we set up here?" I said. I couldn't see a numbered post like the designated camping spots around the lake.

"You see anyone stopping us?"

"Someone might see our tire tracks."

Wes yanked the e-brake, popped his cap up and twisted it back down.

"Isn't that a clue or something?" I said. "For someone to find us?"

"You think you're in a James Bond movie?" he said. "This isn't a heist, bud. We're just fishing."

I climbed out of the truck.

“There’s no heat on our tail, Clare.” I shut the door. “No fuzz. No coppers.”

Wes set up camp. Wes gave me a shovel and told me to dig an eddy into the riverbank. To keep the beer cold, he said. I finished and watched him ready the poles. Wes brought six spinning outfits. I couldn’t follow the way he made those knots, flitted the nylon line into loops. Overgrown and corded tendons rippled the silver welding scars that doiled his hands. He readied different length leaders with snelled Eagle Claws and canned corn, attached three to each snap swivel.

“We get fifteen hooks out this way,” he said.

“Eighteen,” I said.

“What eighteen?”

“Six times three is eighteen,” I said. “Eighteen hooks.”

Wes brought a leader to his teeth and bit the excess line. He spat the piece at me. “Had about enough of your smart shit, professor.”

“Don’t teach you math in jail?” I didn’t move, couldn’t, afraid I’d crossed some sort of forbidden threshold.

He belly laughed. “Well, look at you,” Wes said. “Dishing shit.”

Wes cast the poles because he read the river better. I anchored them to the bank, piled river rocks around the handles. After, I clamped a bell on each rod. We built a fire and parked ourselves in the dirt, waited for dings.

“I wasn’t trying to be an ass earlier,” he said. “But we don’t got anything to worry about, if that soothes you any.”

“I get it.”

“Fish cops can’t do anything anyway,” he said. “They’re the type of guys who

flunked out of ninth grade thirty years go. Do you know what ninth grade was like thirty years ago?”

I didn't. A bell jangled.

“Mine,” Wes said. He lunged, knocked me on my back, scrambled over me. I made it riverside and he already had a fish in hand. “Cutthroat,” he said. Scarlet blazed across the fish's gills and along its belly.

“Why's it so bright?” I said.

“Spawning colors,” he said. “It's why the trout are on.”

After the first I couldn't keep up with how many fish we bagged. We hit our limits within the hour but Wes said to keep going, had to land one with three on the line before we could eat.

When it happened, Wes made me reel it in. He photographed me with a disposable cardboard camera, three cutthroat, all fingerlings.

We cleaned the fish, used the antique and antler handled filleting knives Wes inherited from his dad, stored the guts in a bucket.

“Tomorrow's bait,” Wes said.

Wes split the cutthroats, hung them on sticks and roasted them over the fire. I tore up the beer case's flat panels for plates while he recast the poles. He came back and stood over the fire, held three bottles in each hand, necks between the crooks of his fingers, palms up. River water dripped and sizzled in the flames. “Ready for your first beer?”

I wasn't. I felt guilty bad about the Camels earlier and didn't need any more to hide from my bishop. The beer was dark, yeasty. I glugged. I finished.

“I'm sorry about earlier,” I said.

“For what?”

“The James Bond stuff. I was worried for you is all.”

“I’m a big boy,” he said. He killed a Fat Tire and popped another. “Appreciate it though. While we’re on it though, just in case, those fishing knives are yours, okay?”

“These?” I nudged the leather roll-up case with my boot.

“I can’t possess them,” he said.

“Why?”

“Same reason I can’t vote no more either. You got to remind felons they’re felons somehow.”

“I’m sorry,” I said. I meant it.

“Quit apologizing,” he said. “You’re not going to get anywhere saying sorry. No jobs in apologies except Hallmark.”

“Hallmark?”

“Greeting cards,” he said. “Ways to say sorry without actually saying the words. Is that what you’re going to do? Write birthday cards and shit?”

“I want to weld,” I said.

“No you don’t,” he said. “You keep your ass in school, bud, learn to work with your mind and not your body like me.” He took his cap off, rolled the bill tight and threw it at me. “Boy says wants to be a welder. Jesus.”

“It’d be nice to build stuff,” I said. “Useful.”

“Fucking kids these days don’t know anything. Bud, you’re goddamn smart, okay? Remember that. You’re smarter than a fucking iron monkey.”

“Thanks,” I said.

“Don’t thank me,” he said. “Just know it.”

We sat quiet after that, enjoyed our full bellies and let the fire hypnotize us. The moon crept in full and bright and threw tree shadows. Wes finished off the round of Fat Tires. I forced myself to go off and pee in the trees. Each time I looped over and refilled my beer bottle in the river.

“Still nursing that?” Wes said.

“Saving it,” I said. “It’s good.”

“That number two?”

“It’s almost gone,” I said. “I’ll get us some more.”

A pale green Jeep Cherokee crept down the trail.

“Fucking fish cop,” Wes said. “Toss the poles in the water. Now.” Wes walked toward the oncoming headlights. “Go,” he said.

I sprinted to the river and slid down the bank, kicked at the piles of rocks and yanked the first pole. The line tangled in a quakie branch. Behind me, a car door opened and shut.

“Stop by for dinner?” Wes said. I couldn’t see him or the game warden. The bank, too high, blocked my view. I froze with the pole, didn’t want to make any sort of noise.

“Evening,” the cop said.

“Overnight pass is on the dash,” Wes said.

“Doing some camping?”

“That’s what it looks like, doesn’t it?”

“Just camping?”

I thought of the filleting knives and fish next to the campfire. My mind went to

prison and jail and Wes locked up again because I hadn't put them away.

"Designated overnight areas are down around the rez," the warden said.

"The knives are mine," I said. I scrambled up the mud, yelled it again. My voice cracked.

"Young man?" the warden said. "Excuse me? Why don't you come up here where I can see you."

"The knives are mine," I said.

"Knives?" the cop said. Wes squeezed his temples with one hand, pinched shut his eyes.

"The fishing knives," I said. I pointed. The fire popped.

"You boys fishing up here?"

"We weren't," Wes said.

"I was," I said. Again, I pointed. "Poles are in the water."

\*

The game warden wrote me a citation for the extra poles. He never saw the leaders. Wes wanted to stay the night, tried to convince me, but I wouldn't have it. We packed everything and got on the road by midnight. He drove slower than usual.

"I broke the law," I said.

"Christ, you were fine about it before the fish pig came along," he said. "Got caught is all. Happens to all of us."

"Still," I said.

"Fuck them," he said.

"I can't tell Randy," I said. "I won't leave the house until my mission if I do."

“Don’t tell him.”

“I have to pay the ticket,” I said. “I have to tell him.”

“Don’t worry about the legal shit. I’ll pay it,” he said. “Why’s he make you so uptight?”

I filled Wes in on my Eagle, the merit badges, Randy barring me from the priesthood.

“Is that the truth?” Wes said.

“I wove thirty-two baskets last weekend,” I said. I flicked the dome light, showed him the cuts around my fingernails from all the stray chaff.

Wes blew smoke rings. They took in the green dash lights and glowed.

“Teach me how to do that,” I said.

“I will,” he said. “Next Woodruff trip.”

Wes blew another ring, let it hover in front of his face for a moment, then snapped his fingers near the top. The wispy circle took on a heart shape.

“Teach you that too, when we get to Woodruff.”

\*

Later that month, during school, I got a note from the administration office. It said my father had pulled me out for the rest of the day. Down in the office, Wes sat in one of the green Scotchgard chairs. A copy of Parenting magazine perched above his crossed legs.

“Son,” he said. “I hope you didn’t eat, you’ll have spoiled our lunch date.”

I didn’t say anything, even after we got in his truck.

“Bud, have I got a surprise for you.”

“Lunch?” I knew it wasn’t food. I hoped anyway.

“Something like that,” he said. “How’d you fair with the bishop?”

“I lied,” I said. “They scheduled my Priesthood Ordination. It’s Sunday.”

“Hell,” he said. “I never made it that far. Congratulations.”

Wes drove to my house. Randy’s car sat in the driveway.

“Your mom’s out. Babies are gone,” he said. My siblings attended grade school.

It didn’t stop everyone from referring to them as the babies.

We made for the house. I slid my hand along Randy’s hood. My fingertips popped loose bits of flaking clear coat. Before we got to the front door a man slipped out. He wore spattered leather welding sleeves over threadbare Carhartt covies.

“Good to go,” he said.

“Appreciate it, Tomahawk.”

“Be in the truck,” Tomahawk said.

Wes held the door open, waved me in. “I work with Tom,” he said. “He’s a good dude.” He shut and deadbolted the door.

Our couches butted up against the walls, faux-western prints with armrests of oak veneer and plastic gold piping the lit up against the viridian carpet. The coffee table, also oak and gold, sat on one of them, tableside down. On top of that, Ensign magazines leaned in haphazard stacks. Randy hunkered in the middle of the cleared space, strapped and bound with an orange extension cord.

Randy gasped around a striped dress socks stuffed in his mouth. Both his shoes were off and one foot was bare. His nostril whistled. Grease rubbed off the cord and smeared his charcoal suit.

“Hit him,” Wes said.

“Wes,” I said.

“Old Randy and I had a talk before I picked you up,” he said. “Things’ll be different around here. Have some goddamn fun for once. Scouts and church, they’re your call now.”

I stepped closer to Randy. He’d been crying, I could tell. Sweat glistened through his thinning and ashy brown hair. His eyelids had that puffed pink slimy look.

“It’s like dogs, Clare. You don’t have to *hurt* hurt him,” Wes said. He poked his fist at the air. “Just, you know, hit him.”

I knelt down and folded my arms. I bowed my head. “Dear Heavenly Father,” I said.

“Christ, bud,” Wes said. I didn’t open my eyes.

“Thank you for your blessings,” I said. “Lord, please give me the strength to know what’s right. And, to do it too, to judge whether or not my actions are worthy.” I paused, heard Wes crumple into the free couch. “In the name of thy son, Jesus Christ, amen.”

Randy’s nose still whistled.

“How adorable,” Wes said.

I stood up, pulled the sock out of Randy’s mouth. Saliva roped down and swung.

“Clarence,” Randy said, “Clarence.”

“Uh-uh,” Wes said. “Remember our deal.” I imagined Wes wagging his index behind me.

Randy’s nose, that sound.

I listened for the Holy Ghost, for that feeling to know I was on the right path,

clinging to the iron rod, doing the right thing. I wanted to hit Randy. I took that as God's answer.

That feeling, the pain, the sound, the way my knuckles felt against Randy's cheekbone, it shocked me, it really did. I will never forget the great fear I felt in that instant, the way my skin flushed electric and hot, the sound of my heartbeat in my ears; I didn't feel that way during my baptism, not after I was confirmed a full member in front of the ward during Sacrament Meeting, didn't feel it was I was ordained a Deacon of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. It was more real than any encounter I was supposed to have had with the Holy Ghost. I felt close to God.

Wes clapped. Once.

I hit Randy again. Twice.

\*

Randy never said anything to Patricia or the police, which I commended because he never said anything to me either. Whatever happened between him and Wes before I showed up, it worked. Randy and I stopped talking altogether. Next Sunday after our episode, the ward flopped times and Sacrament Meeting started at ten instead of one. No one bothered to get me out of bed. I missed my Priesthood Ordination. After that I slept through Church.

Fourth Sunday I didn't show, the doorbell woke me. Through the window I saw three guys from the neighborhood, wearing suits. We used to be decent enough church friends but I hadn't seen much of them after they started attending priesthood meetings. They were a grade ahead of me and went to the high school so I didn't see them during the week either. I opened the door.

“Come to church, we miss you!” They said it all at once, like they’d practiced it during the walk over. They shouldered their way inside and rummaged through my closet, my dresser drawers.

“Where’s your church clothes?” one of them said.

“You need to leave,” I said. “I’m sleeping.” A wad of clothing thumped into my chest.

“We’ll be in the hallway while you get ready,” one said. The others gave practiced missionary smiles and nodded. “We’re not leaving.” They spoke the truth.

They flanked me on the walk back to the church as if they were afraid I’d run away, all compliments and saying I looked sharp. The Priesthood leader Brother Anderson, my next-door neighbor, met us in the foyer.

“Clarence,” he said. “I’m glad I caught you here. We missed your priesthood blessing.”

“I can’t yet,” I said. “I need to speak to Bishop Zundell first.”

“Oh hush,” Brother Anderson said. “Sit.”

They dragged over a floral print reading chair from the sitting area. It didn’t match the orange 70’s cut pile carpet. I sat. Brother Anderson stood behind me and placed his hands upon my head. The others stood in a circle and held their hands in front of their belts, reverently.

“Clarence Bradford Nelson,” Brother Anderson said. “Dear Heavenly Father, I perform this blessing with the Authority of the Melchizedek priesthood, from the office of Elders Quorum President.”

I couldn’t get my mind off Randy, of him kneeling in front of me.

“I hereby ordain you, a worthy brethren, to the office of Priest, a member of the Aaronic Priesthood. I bestow upon you the all rights, powers, and authority of that office. In the name of thy son, Jesus Christ, amen.”

The brethren congratulated me, gave vigorous pumping two-handed handshakes and rubbed the small of my back, practiced and insincere gestures. I felt railroaded.

I made for the restroom down the hallway.

“Uh-uh,” Brother Anderson said. “Priesthood Meeting.” They crowded me down another corridor. Inside the classroom, two rows of metal folding chairs bowed around a chalkboard and an upright piano. Brother Lawson stood holding a teacher’s manual. Randy sat on the back row, alone.

“Take a seat, take a seat,” Brother Lawson said. “We’re about to sing hymn two-nine-four.”

I slid in next to Randy. He didn’t take his eyes off the hymnbook. I reached over and held half. I could feel individual fibers in the worn green cover. Randy held on with his remaining hand, moved it my way a bit. I scanned the page. Hymn 294, “Love at Home,” needed to be sung at a tempo of 88-108. The mood marker indicated we sing “fervently.”

I waited through the first measure. When Randy got to “When there’s love at home,” I harmonized. Fervently.

\* \* \*

## The Viaduct

I started working for my father after his fifth DUI. Bradford repossessed Fannie Mae houses and needed someone to drive his work truck, a dually with a utility bed and toolboxes, he'd nicknamed Pandora. It was the summer after my first year of college at the Brigham City extension, I had unemployment insurance, and he agreed to pay me under the table. I saved my government money for fall's tuition.

The repossessing was his side business. During the week, he worked rotating twelves at the steel mill. He put in three shifts of days and I picked him up on Thursday morning. We drove twenty miles to the site without talking.

Our job was in The Viaduct, a west Ogden neighborhood. Rail yards surrounded it on three sides. Most of the houses on Darling Street seemed abandoned. A few of them had cars in the driveway, but that didn't mean anything. They looked to have been built in the 40's, brick jobs with big porches. Bradford held up a paper and said we were looking for 2662. When I was little, he cut off his first two fingers at the mill. He pointed with the nubs.

"That's a palindrome," I said.

"A what?"

"A palindrome. Numbers are the same forward as back."

"The fuck does that have to do with anything?"

"Even addresses are on your side," I said. "Watch for it."

"None of these have address numbers," he said. "Stop the truck."

"We're in the middle of the street," I said.

“Park it,” he said. “Go check the garbage cans for an address.” I put the truck in park and climbed out. Bradford did this heaving sort of sidle across the bench seat, pulled on the wheel to get across. “Hit that one first, it looks the worst,” he said.

I jogged up the empty driveways, read the cans, and Bradford idled down the street with me until I found 2662. I guided him in as he backed the flatbed trailer up the driveway. The flatbed, a twenty-two foot homemade job with collapsible sidewalls that we called Sasquatch, was wider than the drive and made me nervous. Bradford took pride in backing up trailers, it was the real reason he wanted me out of the driver’s seat. I held a fist up, signaled him to stop. He kept going, tucked Sasquatch in a gnat’s ass away from the porch.

Before going inside we did a walk around. The lawn was a foot tall and I could see orange caps from syringes in the bushes next to the porch. The wall next to the driveway bowed, ready to come down. We pushed on it to see if something would happen but nothing did. At the center of the bulge, the bricks had spaces between them, and someone had sprayed pink insulation foam in the gaps.

There was a shopping cart tipped over on the porch and last time we’d seen that there were bums in the house. They wouldn’t leave and we had to call the sheriff. We ended up drinking most of the day away in Pandora while they got the squatters out.

Bradford opened the door a few inches and yelled to see if anyone was home. I could smell rotten food. The evicted like to unplug the refrigerator. Sometimes they’d trash the place, steal copper out of the walls, knock holes in the Sheetrock. They always left their garbage.

“Get your phone out, in case,” he said. I followed Bradford from room to room with a hand between his shoulder blades. I dialed 911 and had a thumb on send. The door moldings were missing from whoever pried them off, the police or dealers, looking for drugs. There's a two-inch gap between the doorframe and the drywall stud that's perfect for hiding stuff. There were magazines and broken toys in every room, even in the tub. In one of the bedrooms, most of the trash was pushed into one corner. Inside the closet, two-by-fours were nailed to the back wall, like a ladder. There was a hole in the ceiling. It looked like it had been punched out with a screwdriver. “Go see what’s up,” he said.

“You think anyone’s up there?”

“Don’t know,” he said, “go check.” He kicked at some hamburger wrappers below the bottom rung. “Give me your phone.”

I climbed the ladder and hesitated at the top. I imagined some meth head with a knife or a gun sitting in a pile of insulation, waiting for me.

“Jesus Clarence, daylight’s burning.”

“I stood up as best as I could on the ladder, got into the hole up to my shoulders. It was hot and smelled like sawdust.

“Well?”

“I don’t see anyone,” I said. It was dark and I felt vulnerable and didn’t want to be there. I figured if someone was hiding they were more afraid of us than we were of them. I let it be.

#

We worked at a manic pace. What was left of the furniture wasn’t decent enough for the Deseret Industries, the Mormon Goodwill, so we junked it. We ran with cabinets

and broken chairs, threw shit into the flatbed from the porch if it was light enough. The mattresses required both of us to carry, but we kept up the jog, tripped up whoever had to run backward. The couch had a sleeper sofa and was too big to fit through the front door. I don't know how they got it in originally. I broke it up with a sledge and ran the soft pieces to the trailer, saved the metal for scrap. Bradford laid out ratty tarps in the middle of each room and piled garbage on them. When he left a room, I took up the tarp's corners and hauled the bundled out on my back.

The debris was out by noon. We unloaded tools and cleaning supplies from Pandora. Everything was salvaged from repos. The brooms were broken in half and we swept hunched over. Bradford kept a bunch of spray bottles in a basket on the truck's back seat. When we found glass cleaner, we poured it in one of the bottles of blue stuff. Anything else we mixed indiscriminately. Every bottle smelled like bleach.

I mowed down the lawn while Bradford got to cleaning inside. When I first started with repos I used to take my shoes off, feel the grass between my toes, until I mowed over a crack pipe. I went slow after that, but I hit another next pass. From then on, I settled for shirtless. The sun baked the dust and sweat into streaks across my chest. I could feel booze and whatever else leaching through my pores and it felt good. I thought about my motorcycle, about which exhaust pipes I should buy. Eventually I got to thinking about the bank loan I tried to get before I bought it. I had a few thousand dollars against my credit score. I was still under Bradford's health insurance. Somehow he was able to cash checks from his insurance and pocket the money instead of paying off some medical bills I had. I found out about it when I applied for a loan. I was denied and forced to arrange payments with a collection agency for thirty-four dollars a month. I never said

anything to Bradford about it. I still got the bike—luckily I had a savings account for the LDS mission I never served. Just enough.

After the lawn I winterized the house. The real estate agent didn't expect to sell it soon and wanted it taken care of, just in case. We had a little pancake air compressor in Pandora and a generator to run it. Luckily, the house still had the lights on and the electrical outlet in the laundry room worked. I threaded a hose between the compressor and the washing machine's water hookup. The idea is to pump the house's water lines full of air so water can't freeze and bust something come winter. I needed sixty pounds of pressure before I could bleed off faucets. The compressor's tank ran out of air in under a minute and its motor kicked on again. The gauge didn't read anything. Normally there's enough of something in the lines to at least build pressure. I went to check for a leak, see if one of the sinks or tub was on.

Bradford was in the kitchen, on his knees, sweeping with a broom missing half the stick. I went to the sink.

"Check it out," he said. I turned to face him and he threw something at my feet. It was a rattrap the size of my boot. I picked it up, pried the bar back, let it snap. Bradford jumped.

"I had a lab in Biology," I said, "last semester."

"Grab the dustpan," he said. I squatted down and held the pan next to his pile.

"We dissected mice. Live ones."

"The fuck you do that for?" He stopped sweeping.

"You get to see everything that way, the lungs going, the heart. We knocked them out first."

“Don’t you have books for that?”

“The professor had a camera mounted above his mouse so we could follow along. Once he got to the heart he made everyone stop and watch. He snipped it out while it was still beating.”

“Indiana Jones.”

“He dropped it in a fish tank. Yeah, like Indy. The heart did this little submarine thing, like a squid.” I made like a squid with my hand and propelled it through the air between us.

“That oven’s going to be a bitch to clean,” he said. “Did you see the oven?”

“There’s these things called auto-rhythmic cells that keep it beating,” I said. “The aquarium had oxygen and stuff in there to keep it going. It bumped around for the rest of class.”

“For fuck’s sake, cut your shit, Clare.” I couldn’t decide if it was the biology or the cut off body parts that got to him. He blinked a lot. “See if Pandora’s got oven cleaner.”

On my way to the truck I heard the compressor’s motor kick on. I’d forgotten about it. I went to the laundry room. The gauge read one-hundred-ten pounds and I shut the compressor off. One hundred and ten pounds of pressure per square inch, on every inch of God knows how many feet of pipe in that old ass house was bad news. Something was going to burst, somewhere. I listened for a leak, air or water shooting out of pipes. Bradford was still in the kitchen so I made for the bathroom and shut the door behind me. I sat on the edge of the tub and listened. Nothing seemed to be leaking. I opened the tub’s faucet and water shot out with enough force to scrub a clean streak in all that mildew.

It took several trips between the air compressor and all the various water fixtures. The goal was to pressurize the line with enough air that when I opened a faucet, what was left of the water got pushed out. Once the system pressurized for the first time, it was supposed to fill up again, quick. 2662's plumbing didn't. There must have been something wrong somewhere, but eventually it pressurized and after wasting time checking for leaks, I decided not to worry about it. Eventually nothing but air howled out of the faucets. After the kitchen and the bathrooms, I couldn't find the water heater. I asked Bradford if he'd seen it.

"No, why? What's wrong with it?"

"Nothing, I just can't find it. Need to empty it still."

"Might be in the basement," he said. "I'll check. Where's my oven cleaner?" I didn't know there was a basement. I went back to Pandora for the oven cleaner.

"Clare! Jesus fuck goddammit, Clare!"

Bradford's voice was muffled but somehow very loud. Inside 2662, I couldn't tell where it came from. I stood in the kitchen and called for him.

"Hallway closet," he said. His voice came out of the floor vent below the kitchen sink. I headed into the hallway and opened the closet. There were stairs that went down and ended in a sort of reflection off something. When I got down there, Bradford stood knee-deep in rust colored water. Floating and rotting potatoes bumped against his legs. He faced away from me, hands linked behind his head like he was getting arrested.

"You didn't shut the main off," he said. After the compressor busted the valve off the water heater, the main line kept trying to fill it up. With the valve gone, the basement

flooded. Pieces of Sheetrock and most of a fake Christmas tree floated around in the corner. “I should have rolled off your mother and shot you on the curtain.”

“What do we do?” I said. Bradford didn’t turn around, just nudged the potatoes with his leg.

“You go buy a fucking sump is what we do.”

#

I unhooked Sasquatch and drove to Home Depot. After the overpass, the only way into the Viaduct, I took a detour to check on the Ogden Temple. It was under renovation, trying to get away from that 70's office-building look. They'd removed the golden statue of Moroni from the steeple. I sped the rest of the way and once I parked I sat in the lot and smoked two cigarettes. First day of work with Bradford I lit one up and he went ape shit, stuffed my pack into a paint can and threw it in the flatbed, said I was going to fucking kill myself with that shit.

Inside the store, it took me three different associates to find a sump. The cheapest one was a hundred and forty dollars. I bought it with my credit card and smoked two more in the parking lot before heading back to 2662. When I pulled in the driveway, the house looked like an inmate scrubbed up to see the judge. The lawn was clipped, but mostly dead. The garbage was gone and you could see the foundation built with stones. All the windows were open. Bradford was on the lawn with a thirty pack of Olympia.

“You get the sump?”

I set the pump on Pandora’s hood. “Where’d you get beer?”

“Gas station around the corner,” he said.

I left the pump on the truck and sat down next to him. He was barefoot and handed me a beer, told me it was cold. I took it. His socks lay in front of him with a pile of empties.

“How much was the pump?”

“Two-hundred dollars,” I said.

“Pricey bitch.”

“I’ll take it back when we’re done, if they’ll let me.”

“Company property now.”

“I had to use a credit card,” I said. “I don’t have money for that.”

“You might fuck up again,” he said. “Besides, I’m paying you under the table. I’m eating your taxes. We’re square.” He drained his beer and threw the can at his pile and opened two more. He handed me one.

“We’re not square,” I said, “you owe me more than the pump.”

“The fuck are you talking about, boy?”

“I tried to get a motorcycle loan, couldn’t, you didn’t pay for my wisdom teeth, you fucked my credit up.”

“How’d you end up with a bike then?”

“Mission money.” I finished my can and grabbed another. We sat. We drank.

Bradford pulled bits of grass with his halfsie fingers, made a pile. “Tell me you love me,” he said.

“What? No, fuck no.”

“Boy, tell me you love me,” he said. “I’ll pay the bills. Tell me you love me.”

“Doesn’t matter,” I said. “I already paid them.”

“Then what are you whining about? Tell me you love me.”

“Fuck you, you spent it on your girlfriend.”

“Clare, tell me you love me.”

He wore me down. I told him. It didn't change anything.

#

Even with the beer, it got hot sitting on the lawn like that. We figured the basement would be cooler and decided to take care of things down there. I hooked the pump to a salvaged garden hose that I ran out a basement window to the yard. Bradford found a card table under the stairs and spread a tarp across it like a tablecloth. He used a drywall saw to hack out the worst of the Sheetrock and piled it on the tarp. I sucked up water with a ten gallon Shop-Vac, carried it up the stairs and dumped it on the lawn. We carried on our conversation in one-liners, whenever the vacuum was off and I wasn't lugging eighty pounds of sloshing liquid.

“We'll say there were holes here,” he said. “We'll charge the agent extra to patch them.”

“Fix the ones in the closet, charge them for that too,” I said.

“We'll make new holes and fix those,” he said.

“Charge them for the beer, while you're at it.” We were too much on the same team and I didn't know how to act so I let it roll. We gathered the tarp's corners and tied it off. The bundle looked like a half deflated blue beach ball. It took both of us to heave the wet mass up the stairs. White stuff leaked out the tarp's holes and chalked us up. I dropped my end at the top of the stairs.

“This job is wrecking my buzz,” I said. I got my hands on my knees, ready to vomit.

“Don’t puke, he said. “I just cleaned the toilets and there’s no water to flush.” He rolled the tarp out to Sasquatch on his own.

I crouched on the porch with my head between my legs.

“Where’s your cigarettes?” he said.

I told him they were in my pack, in Pandora. He came back with one lit in his mouth and we shared it on the steps. He didn’t say anything. Bradford got himself another Oly and we got back to it, cleaned the rest of the afternoon without speaking.

#

We took the Old Highway home. Enough beer had worn off to where I could handle the trailer without any trouble. It was mostly farm country, anyway. A few miles in, Bradford poured another into his coffee mug and said we could hold off on running Sasquatch to the landfill until morning. Our windows were down and I could smell the alfalfa bales. The sun slanted in and made everything golden.

Bradford pulled a tape out of the glove box and put it in the stereo. Whitney Houston. During junior high and high school, I saw Bradford once a year on Christmas Eve. I drove him around while he drank rum and coffee from a thermos and we listened to Whitney Houston's holiday album.

“Windows are all shut?”

“You checked everything after I did,” I said.

“Both doors locked?”

“Key's in the lockbox.”

“Shut the sump off?”

I got on the breaks and had Pandora off to the shoulder for a U-turn, kept both hands on the wheel, waited for Bradford to speak.

“Unbelievable,” he said. He threw his coffee mug at the dash. Beer ran down the windshield. He got his mug and smashed it into the dash until the grained vinyl cracked and dried bits of yellow foam popped out in chunks. The mug seemed fine. “They teach you to tear apart mice but no common sense. If that sump's burned up you're buying another.”

“It won't be,” I said.

“After all that,” he said. Bradford opened the last Oly. “Jesus carpenter Christ on the cross.”

#

I chain smoked the whole way back to 2662. Bradford didn't say anything. We both knew it was better to have the cab smell like tobacco instead of beer in the event we got pulled over.

In the driveway, Bradford told me he was staying in Pandora and to hurry. Once I got to the kitchen, I couldn't hear the pump running. Down the hallway, a light was on in one of the bedrooms. The door was shut but it shone through between the doorframe and Sheetrock because of the missing moldings. It was the room with the punched-in attic hole in the closet. I went for Bradford.

“What do you mean someone's in there?”

“There's a light on in the back. The room that had the two-by-four ladder in the closet.”

“So you left the lights on too,” he said. “Surprise.”

“Dad,” I said, “someone's in there.”

“Let's check it out.” He stepped out and put on his tool belt. A plastic carrier from an old six-pack was zip tied to one of the D-rings.

We went quiet, again with my hand on Bradford's back. Down the hall we could hear voices. Bradford pulled a roofing hammer, the kind with a mini hatchet instead of a claw, from his belt. He pointed at me then the door, made a twisting motion with his hand. I threw the door inward and Bradford ran in.

Two kids screamed, bolted, huddled in a corner. In the middle of the room was a man on his ass next to a Coleman camp stove and some milk crates.

“The fuck are you doing here?” Bradford said.

“This is my house,” the man said. His eyes were so wide all I could see was white. He had on a button up shirt with screen-printed flames and a mismatched pair of tennis shoes. The kids had on basketball shorts that hung around their ankles.

“This is *my* house,” Bradford said, “goddamn bank house. Mine.”

“Please,” the man said. “My kids.”

“Dad,” I said, “they were probably in the attic the whole time.”

“No no no, we weren't.” The man had both hands up, waving. “We left when you pulled up, I swear. Please, my kids.”

“You take the moldings off the doors?” Bradford said. The man shook his head, whimpered. Snot ran over his lips.

“You kept kids in a house like that? You raised babies around drugs?”

The man closed his eyes, nodded.

Bradford kicked the man. His boot caught him in the clavicle.

The man flopped over and stayed. His children didn't move. "Please," he said, "please my kids." Aside from their initial yell, they didn't appear fazed. They'd seen this sort of thing before. I knew that look.

"Clarence, call the cops, boy."

"I don't have my phone," I said. "It's in Pandora."

"See my boy?" Bradford pointed at me and pulled the drywall saw out of his belt, put it in my hand. "This boy will cut out your heart while it's still beating."

I stepped closer and the man did a sort of rolling scoot job until he hit the wall. I squatted in front of him and tapped the tip of the saw against his forehead. Up close I could see the man's eyes, all pupils and white. He was wired. I was surprised he even knew his kids were in the same room.

It was quiet enough I could hear the whir of the sump coming in through the floor vent.

"Unbutton your shirt," I said. I could feel my pulse against the saw's busted wooden handle. A rivet dug into my palm. I was more scared than the man; he seemed used to that sort of situation. I wasn't really going to do anything. At least, I didn't think so.

\* \* \*

## Homemade Gatorade

Wes stole my grandma Gunger's car and disappeared. He'd been paroled for a touch over a year and only relapsed twice, even had a job welding up drivelines. Wes still couldn't get a driver's license though. When he didn't have a ride, Gunger took him to work. The first Friday she let my uncle take the car on his own he didn't come home after his shift. He had been at work, though—Gunger had his boss on speed dial.

Sunday night, I was smoking pot with Hyrum at the Galaxy Motel. Hyrum worked there and lived in the boiler room but we had to smoke in my truck. He had this thing against Bics and Zippos, only used matches or the cigarette lighter that popped out of my truck's dash. My dash lighter was this plastic knob with a grain that we wore down to a shine. Most of the white was gone out of the end's little cigarette picture. I ignored Gunger's call three times before I knew I had to answer. The fourth time she rang, Hyrum left me in the truck and went inside. Our conversation was one-way and brief, all sobs and prayers and expletives.

Inside the boiler room, Hyrum pinned women's underwear to a corkboard he had on the wall. The motel had a laundromat with a lost and found box. It's where he got most of his wardrobe, and the underwear. He had on pants that must have belonged to a painter. The waist and pockets were blue, everything else was spatters of white and beige. One leg had some yellow.

"I've got to go," I said. "Gunger needs her locks changed."

"Wes again?" he turned around and flourished at the board. He'd arranged them by color.

"He went missing," I said.

"I can help," he said, "with something. The locks." I'd lived with Wes and Gunger for the

last couple years. Hyrum was a regular at the house.

“No man, it's not your mess,” I said.

“Can I come anyway? It'll be too quiet here.” Hyrum grew up in a fundamentalist Latter Day Saint compound, wasn't good at being alone after all those brothers and sisters. It wasn't something I could deny him.

My uncle Nathan used to change Gunger's locks whenever Wes didn't come home or came home unexpected. I took over after I got my driver's license, kept a wood chisel and screwdrivers in my truck. She lived on the other end of Brigham City. It was a hassle to drive and get the dash lighter in the end of Hyrum's glass pipe, but we finished the bowl on the way.

I parked on the curb. Light shone through every window of Gunger's house. I followed Hyrum inside, let Gunger get him into a hug, sidestepped the affair, and went to the basement. It was a single room with homemade two-by-four shelves on every wall. Mason jars, canned goods, and five gallon buckets of rice under the stairs. Two-liter bottles of Diet Coke and Mountain Dew filled with water. Sacks of sugar. Wheat.

I moved some jars of string beans and pulled out boxes of doorknobs and deadbolts, had to get a set together that took the same key. Buying new kits got expensive so I hid old ones down there, rotated through when I needed. Gunger would never find them—she hated string beans.

I finished the back and side doors without hiccups but the front's new striker plate caught the latch wonky and wouldn't let it shut properly. I had to chisel out some material to set it deeper. Hyrum and Gunger sat behind me in a pair of pink velour wingback chairs. There was a reading lamp on the table between them and Gunger clicked it on and off while she talked. Next

to the lamp she had a framed copy of Del Parson's Jesus, the one where Christ has on that red robe and bright blue eyes. The painting looked like a flickering television.

“Clarence,” she said.

“Hang on.” I wasn't sober enough for whatever she had next, didn't want to deal, not yet.

“Clare, I need you to give me a blessing.”

“Gunger,” I said. I put my chisel down and turned to face her. “I can't.”

“This isn't about you, Clarence. I need this. I don't care where you stand with the church right now. A priesthood blessing is the only thing that will help.”

“No,” I said, “it's not something I can do. I never got the Melchizedek priesthood. Just the Aaronic. You know that.”

She didn't say anything, just wiped at her face. Mascara ran out through her crow's feet. On one side of her t-shirt the black had seeped into her collar's ribbing.

“I got it, Gunger,” Hyrum said. He leaned forward and put his hand on her lap, on top of hers, and patted.

Gunger wrapped her hands around his, closed her eyes, tilted her head back. “Oh, thank you,” she said. “Heavenly Father, thank you.” She rushed down the hallway, called over her shoulder, “my oil is in the bedroom.”

Hyrum bent over the side table and played with a little replica of an old cast iron stove.

“Hyrum,” I said. “The fuck?”

“What?”

“You don't have the Melchizedek.”

“So?”

“Even if you did,” I said, “your version wouldn't count.”

“Sometimes I forget I come from polygamist baby rapers.” He scratched his eyebrow with a miniature frying pan. “Dick move, Clare.”

“I didn't mean it like that.”

He pointed the little pan at me. “I can help her,” he said. “Let me.”

“We both just smoked,” I said. “Please don't.”

Gunger came back with her stainless steel vial of consecrated oil. “I got this,” Hyrum said. He pulled a wingback to the center of the room and motioned for her to sit. I took the vial from Gunger.

“Hyrum,” I said.

“Dude, give me the oil.” Hyrum held out both hands, cupped them.

“Please,” I said.

Hyrum went to the mantle, took down the foot and half tall Christus statue.

“My husband gave that to me the birthday before he died,” Gunger said.

“You told me,” Hyrum said. “It's special then, we'll use it.” He lobbed the statue my way. I caught it. The oil bounced off the carpet. Gunger squawked.

“Stop,” Hyrum said, loud. He picked up the oil and stood behind Gunger, put a few drops on his thumb then touched it to the crown of her head. He covered the spot with both hands.

“Gunger,” he said.

“Carol,” I said. “Carol Young.” I could hear Hyrum's teeth grind together. They popped like gravel under tires.

“Carol Young,” he said. “This blessing is performed with the authority of the

Melchizedek priesthood. Dear Heavenly Father, please help Gunger. She's going through a rough time. Verily, she really needs her car back. Verily, and her son. Please Lord, give her the same strength that thou gave Sariah and bring her son back like thou did with her.” He paused. Gunger's breath came in sticky shudders. “Her as in Sariah,” he said. “But with Gunger. Bring Wes back like you did Nephi. Please. In the name of thy son Jesus Christ, amen.”

Gunger still shuddered through her nose. Her eyes were closed, fresh black droplets shook on the edge of them and her folded arms had stretched into a self-embrace.

“Thank you, Hyrum, thank you” she said. “I can feel the spirit.” She let go of herself and hugged Hyrum over the seat back.

“Don't thank me,” he said. “Just glad I could help.”

I put the Christus back on the mantle.

“Will you find Wes?” she said.

“We'll try,” he said.

She hugged me too. When she was done, I pushed the new house keys into her fistful of tissues and she handed me the spare set to her car.

#

Instead of the interstate, I took the Old Highway out of town. We were headed to the Viaduct, a neighborhood twenty miles south, in Ogden. It's where I worked repossessing houses. It's where Hyrum and I went to get drugs. It's where Wes went, too. A few miles into the drive, orchards lined both sides of the road. I dropped my truck down a gear and the smell of peaches came in stronger than our Camels. It was nearly midnight. The road was ours. I tossed my cigarette and turned the radio down.

“That smell,” Hyrum said.

“You shouldn't have done that,” I said. “And we shouldn't be doing this fucked up.”

“Calm it,” he said.

“Hey, mister heroin dealer, I know I'm pie eyed, but have you seen my uncle? He's about this tall.” I leveled my hand over the center console, to show how tall.

“What's your fucking malfunction?”

“Mine? What's my problem? You just fake blessed Gunger.”

“It doesn't matter how you feel when you help someone, it's about them. Goddamn Clare, what would Jesus do? ”

“We're going to get our faces shot off,” I said.

“We are not,” he said. “Wrap it up.”

“I'm just scared.”

“I know.” Hyrum took cigarettes from my pack, handed me one. I pushed in the dash lighter.

I wove through Ogden and hit the overpass, drove up above the train tracks, all sodium lamps and piles of rusting equipment. The bridge was the only way in, rail yards surrounded the neighborhood on the better part of three sides. We hit the park first. I wove across the parking lot in a drunk figure eight to light up as much of the grounds as possible with my headlights.

“Needle Park,” I said.

“I thought that was in Salt Lake?”

“That's Diet Pepsi compared to this one.”

“See your uncle?”

“Wes used to take me here when I was younger, let me play on the swings. Left me here for hours once.”

“I don't see any swings.”

“We're looking for Gunger's car more than anything,” I said. “Not Wes.”

“Not even a slide,” he said. “ Or monkey-bars. What color is it?”

“Red, sort of,” I said.

I made for the corner of 1<sup>st</sup> and D Street, idled my way along. To our left was the only piece of the neighborhood that didn't end in tracks, a riparian area called the Hobo Jungle. It was mostly old furniture, tents, trees, and a river, somewhere. I could see a barrel fire through the foliage. Wes wouldn't be out there, no one went out there, not even people that lived in the Viaduct.

On 2<sup>nd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> I slowed down in front of houses that we knew dealt heroin, but they were both dark. Besides, we didn't see Gunger's car.

“A Street,” Hyrum said. “Let's pick up. I'm almost out.” Hyrum had a guy on A Street that sold him pot and hallucinogens, sometimes Oxies. He pulled a gallon sized freezer bag of quarters and singles from a crunchy white cargo pocket. The Galaxy paid him with the laundromat's take.

“I want to finish the grid first,” I said.

Down the block, the corner house had a bay window with a pile of swamp coolers below. We'd patrolled past it a time or two already.

That bay window shattered. A man, stripped to his waist, flopped through. Pieces of glass like little broken bells bounced off the tin coolers. It was Wes. He ran toward us. The chain link

fence that surrounded the yard caught him in the waist and he flip-somersaulted over the top bar. Hyrum didn't get out. I didn't get out either, didn't even hit my brakes. Wes got up, stumbled to my truck and clambered in the bed.

My truck never stopped moving. I turned the cargo light on and looked through the cab's rear window. It really was Wes. His hands were bound in this tightly clasped electrical tape prayer. Bits of glass stuck in his arms and shoulder, made crunching sounds against the truck bed as he rolled, propped himself up on his elbows and squinted into the light. His scalp was split open above his ear. The wet bone shining through his hair reflected the cargo light's yellow.

"They've got a gun," he said. "They're going to kill me." His voice was out of breath and came in through the driver's window, nearly behind me. My truck lurched and bounced, stalled without my foot on the gas.

"Get" he said.

Hyrum grabbed me with both hands and shook. "Go," he said. I clutched it, revved things up, let it out, and got.

I ran red lights and didn't signal turns. Wes thumped around in the back. It didn't make me slow down. Once I got to the Old Highway, Hyrum slid open the back window.

"Stop," Wes said. "Let me in." I didn't. Wes climbed in through the window as much as he could.

"Beer window's cutting my guts," he said. When he spoke, he did this wince that opened up his scalp even more. "Give me a smoke."

Hyrum put a Camel between Wes's lips and pushed in the dash lighter. By the time it popped, Wes was unconscious. Stuff dripped out of his mouth and pooled on my armrest.

“Fuck,” Hyrum said. He took the smoke from Wes's lips and put it between his.

“This is bad,” I said. “This is so bad.”

“We didn't even get to pick up,” he said.

#

Wes sprawled on Gunger's living room floor and shook beneath a blanket. His hand was in a bowl of vomit. He wouldn't stop moaning and I was afraid he'd wake up Gunger. I took off his shoes and found fresh tracks between his toes, which meant he shot up something before getting taped up. I couldn't remember how long it took for withdrawals to kick in. Wes got them no matter what, even if he used just the once. Hyrum and I sat in the pink chairs and watched.

“What's with the shaking?” he said.

“Detoxing, I guess.”

“Already?”

“I got to do something,” I said. “He's going to wake up Gunger.” In the kitchen I found a plastic jar of Postum that was nearly empty, threw what was left in the trash and peeled a banana, mashed it into the jar. I added tap water and poured in salt, sugar, and a bottle of Theraflu I had snuck out of Gunger's safe. I shook up the mix, grabbed a dishtowel, and made for the living room.

“Drink this,” I said. Wes didn't answer, just went on with his moaning act. I pulled the blanket off. He was awake.

“Drink,” I said, “it's Gatorade.” He looked at me, didn't do anything. Hyrum and I got him under the armpits and lifted him so his head was propped up against one of the chairs. I told him again to drink. Wes reached for the bottle with his puke hand. “Other one,” I said, “look.”

He put the hand in front of his face and I dropped the towel on it.

“How long did it take this time?” he said. Blanket fuzz stuck to his head gash.

“Hyrum,” I said. “Get me some Band-Aids.” He left for the bathroom. “Don't wake her up.” He turned around and bopped his forehead with the heel of his hand.

“How long did it take?” Wes said.

“Did what take?”

“Saw the Key Master boxes,” he said. “How long?”

“Twenty minutes,” I said. The locks thing was an old joke. The tools I kept in my truck were his hand-me-downs.

Wes pinched around the back of his mouth, pulled out a bit of tooth. “Huh,” he said.

“You need a hospital,” I said.

“Can't do the ER,” he said. “I'm on parole.” He drained the Postum jar.

Hyrum came back with a box of band-aids. They had Winnie-the-Pooh on them. I stuck them down as best I could, but the cut wouldn't close up any.

“It fucking hurts,” Wes said. “Stop damaging me.” He crawled under my chair as much as he could and snored. Then, he shit his pants, audibly.

“Fucking Christ,” Hyrum said.

“Shower,” I said. We dragged him to the bathroom and dropped him in the tub. His head tapped the porcelain on the way in and rang out a low note. We wrestled off his clothes and tossed them out the window. “Get them later,” I said.

Hyrum turned on the shower. “Cold or hot?”

“Doesn't matter.” I squirted a zigzag of shampoo across his body.

“Look at his hard-on,” Hyrum said. He pointed.

“One of those things they don't tell you about in the D.A.R.E. Program.” I scrubbed him some with the bath mat and shut the water off. He looked clean enough. We got him in some sweat pants and took him back out to the living room. It was the farthest point from Gunger's room, in case he started making noise again.

“Leave him,” I said. “Let's smoke.”

“Smoke smoke?”

“Tobacco,” I said.

“What does that tattoo on his ass say?”

“Exit only,” I said.

“We going to take him to the Emergency Room?”

“He breaks parole if we take him,” I said. “They'll drug test him for sure, he's got a history there.”

“Wait. Exit only? I get it.”

“He's doing fine,” I said. “He'll be good.”

Few hours later, Hyrum and I came in from watching the sun rise and found Gunger hunched over Wes. He had the blanket back over his head. Gunger repeated “Thank you, Heavenly Father, thank you.” She had on this threadbare blue bathrobe that belonged to my grandpa before he died. Even when she stood, it trailed behind her a foot or so.[it trailed behind her a foot or so when she walked]

“We found him,” Hyrum said.

“Where?” she said.

“Ogden,” I said.

“Where in Ogden?”

“I can't remember,” I said. It was obvious, didn't mean I wanted to say it out loud. She knew.

“He's hurt pretty bad,” Hyrum said.

Gunger pulled the blanket off.

“Other side,” Hyrum said.

She stayed in a squat and bird-hopped around, pulled on his shoulder, rolled him the other way. Band-aids stuck in his hair, floated a few inches above the wound. Gunger got her face close and pinched the open bits.

“Dammit, Ma,” Wes said. “I'm damaged, leave me alone.” He swatted.

She hit him. “Don't be a pantywaist,” she said. “Anywhere else, is this it?”

“Something's wrong in my mouth,” he said.

“Open up.” She got his face in her hands and looked over the tops of her glasses into his mouth. “Did you deserve this?”

Wes pulled his face out of her hands and covered his head with the blanket.

“Your blessing brought him back,” she said. “I knew it would.”

“I did too,” Hyrum said.

“Help me get him in the car,” she said. “Keep him wrapped in that blanket, or he'll act like a Nancy about it.”

“He wouldn't go to the hospital,” I said.

“We tried,” Hyrum said. “He shit himself.”

“He'll do that,” she said. “Doesn't mean I'm not taking him to a hospital. He needs stitching and I'm not going to do it.”

Hyrum and I lugged Wes out to the carport. We stared at the puddle of oil where Gunger's car normally sat.

“Don't let her take me.” Wes sounded like a child that didn't want to go to school. Gunger shuffled out, still in the robe.

“Clarence, do you know if he works today?” She slapped the refrigerator that stood next to the side door. “Godfrey hell all mighty,” she said, “where is my car?”

“Me and Hyrum still need to get it.”

“Lordy,” she said. “Put him in your truck.”

#

After they left, I rode Hyrum home on my motorcycle. I didn't like the [sour]looks people gave us, those nine-to-five types and their church clothes, but he loved that sort of thing. I made it back to Gunger's couch and slept away the rest of daylight. When I woke up, Wes sat on the coffee table in front of me. He jerked his head toward the side door and tapped his lips with his first two fingers.

“You're going to need to help me out,” he said. He talked like he had a mouth full of peanut butter and cocked his arm up for me to lift him. I helped him out to the carport, got him in a plastic chair. We went so slow the motion sensor light didn't come on.

“Well?” I said.

“Report?” Wes said.

I bounced my head, twisted the end of my cigarette to a point.

“Two busted molars,” he said. “Multiple lacerations. Fourteen staples.” He touched his head. Half his hair was shaved and the scalp was stained orange from whatever they'd used to sterilize. Even in the dark, I could see it. “McKay wouldn't give me anything for the pain though. Cocksucker.” Wes reached over and took the cigarette from my mouth and put it in his nostril. He pushed the other shut, and inhaled.

“Jesus,” I said.

“Said I can't smoke, either.” He exhaled through his mouth. “Not the first time I've been in this situation, believe it or not. Wisdom teeth. Got dry sockets. You ever had dry sockets?”

“Wes,” I said. “What happened?”

“Christ that was years ago,” he said. “High school.” He held my smoke out. I waved it back.

“At the Viaduct,” I said, “I thought you were done.”

“Fucking Maglight.”

“What do you mean, the flashlight?”

“It's what they got me with,” he said. “One of those long metal ones cops carry.”

“I know what they are,” I said. “Were they really going to kill you?”

“Wasn't my first ass kicking, Clare. Shit, you know that.” He took another drag, performed the operation with one hand. “First time taped to a bed though.”

He told me the story, at least part of it. Maybe none of it. I can never tell. With Wes, everything's filtered for the occasion. He got a call at work from some old friends who needed help lifting one of those diamond plate toolboxes out of a truck bed. Wes got off early, figuring he'd be home before Gunger noticed. Once he got down there, they didn't have the toolbox.

There wasn't even a truck. First the supposed friend brought him in and made him shoot dope, to knock him out, he said. He woke up taped to a bed without a mattress. It was one of those old-fashioned wire frame numbers with no box spring. Then, they beat him with the Maglight. They took his keys too, marched him to the Hobo Jungle, bloody and everything, and made him toss them. They told him they were going to kill him, just not then. He said he saw my truck go by once, didn't think it was really me. The second time, he saw the Toyota graphics that he and I had spray-painted on the bedside a few years earlier. Then, he jumped through the window and escaped. It took him three tries to break it.

“What did they want from you?” I said.

“Money. Dope. It's hard to say. Don't know if they knew. With people like that, probably cash.”

“Would they have killed you for real?”

“Sometimes you get in a mood where you want to kill something,” he said. “It happens.”

“Did the hospital tell your Parole Officer?”

“Listen, bud, there's something I need to talk to you about.”

“Does your PO know? Are you going back?”

“No. I said it was Doctor McKay.”

“The old bishop?”

“Bishop McKay. Yes,” he said. “He won't say anything. Why do you think Gunger took me to him instead of the ER?”

“I didn't know she took you there,” I said. “God, that lady.”

“You have to get that lady's car back for me,” he said. “It's at that house. In the back

yard.”

“I'm not going back there.”

“They have a problem with me,” he said. “Not you.”

“They were going to kill you,” I said.

“They wouldn't have really done it. You should take them some money though, just in case. Hold them over. I'll get you next Friday. Payday.”

“I'm not going.”

“The guy to talk to, his name is Germs.”

“You're not listening,” I said. “I can't. Won't.”

“Are you going to leave Gunger without a car?”

I twisted another cigarette.

“You'll do it,” he said. “It's fine.” He took the smoke again, and my lighter. “I need to get out of Brigham, Clare. Out of Utah.”

“You're not going anywhere,” I said. “You have a job.”

“Not anymore.”

“Gunger called your boss, said you were sick.”

“Bud, I need your motorcycle.”

I stood up, put my hand on the door. The old-new doorknob had scratches around the keyhole. I could feel them with my fingertips. The thing he asked was too much, even for Wes.

“Hear me out,” he said. He hopped to the fridge, pulled a half empty twelve pack box of Olympias out of the freezer. “Only been in there a bit,” he said. “Should be just right.” He opened one and put it in my hand, fell back in his chair.

“I'm not sitting,” I said.

“Down in Texas,” he said, “there's work.” Wes used to find money welding on oilrigs. “I can't fly down there. Altitude makes me sick. And I'm not about to take your truck, I know you need that. Just the bike.”

“Asshole,” I said. “You're such a fuckhead asshole.”

“Just for a while, just until I get some money. I got to get out.”

“You were covered in shit this morning,” I said. “Are you fucking kidding me?”

“Down there,” he said, “there's no Viaduct.”

“I've already helped you,” I said.

“This is it. Last time. Scout's honor.” He held up two fingers.

“It's three fingers,” I said.

I left him there in the carport.

Instead of collecting Hyrum, facing Germs, and finding Gunger's car, I rode my motorcycle, burned fuel. I found traffic on the interstate, split lanes, and banked so deep into the cloverleaf off-ramp that my foot pegs caught asphalt. They shot sparks. Gravel and bugs pelted my face with enough force that I couldn't tell if it was blood or bug guts streaking across my cheekbones. I knew it was the last time I'd get that careening mechanical sentimentality. I had to let him take the bike. Riding back on the Old Highway, the peaches came on strong. That smell.

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