

## **A Forgotten Memory**

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A radio played softly in the distance, two voices intertwined with the music under a heavy grey sky.

“What do you think ever happened to Don McLean?” He asked.

“I think he’s dead.” She smirked.

He walked over and turned the music down; he picked up a glass of iced tea on the stereo and continued. “What usually happens is they take too many drugs and end up working in a Burger King somewhere in the Oregon wilderness.”

“Yeah, I suppose,” she said looking between the thin curtains behind her and out to the ocean beyond.

“I really like this song,” he started singing along with the music.

“Great,” she said to the cold glass of the window as her eyes trailed to the quiet street below. She cracked the window open and let the rush of ocean air in. She smiled as it struck her face. “It’s a nice day out.”

“Yeah.” He rattled the ice in his glass. She turned from the window and faced him.

“Why did you come here?”

Kyle set his glass down on the floor and fidgeted with his nails; he twisted the dull gold ring on his finger eyeing her carefully. He walked to the window and peered out.

“The ocean always reminds me of you, reminds me of how it used to be.”

“But it’s not like that anymore.”

“No, it’s not.”

She got up and went to the kitchen, she stood in the doorway.

“This is a nice place, Maria, too bad we didn’t live here when we were married.”

“Kyle, if you don’t have anything to say to me, then please leave I have lots of things I need to do.” She walked into the kitchen.

“I saw him today,” he yelled to her.

“Who?”

“Gary.”

The sound of silverware falling to the floor echoed through the small apartment. She came out of the kitchen.

“Who?!”

“I spoke with Gary today.”

A loud car struggled on the street, she ran and looked out the window.

“He was over near Golden Gate park, I met him and we talked.”

“You met him?...But we haven’t seen him since that night...”

“Yeah, I know, but I felt we owed him something.”

He went to the kitchen and to the refrigerator; he came back with a beer and sat in a ragged chair across from her. He took a deep drink of the beer. She continued to look out the window at the ocean; a thick haze covered the horizon which washed out the sun. Large, portly grey birds strutted along an oily beach.

“There were times when we were really happy,” he said to her back. “Times when we loved each other.”

She turned and glared at him. “I can’t believe you. You promised you wouldn’t ever speak with him again, lying bastard.”

“Hey, I’m sorry. Besides, it was almost nine years ago, let go of it.”

“No, I will not let go of it.”

He sighed loudly and finished off his beer, he reached into his shirt pocket and pulled out a crumpled photograph. She turned and sat on the couch. “What’s that?”

“He gave this to me, look at it.”

She unfolded the photo. It was one of her, Kyle, Gary and her friend Cindy. The four of them were standing in front of Gary’s red Buick, Gary had a twisted smile on his face and his arm around Cindy.

“It was all so long ago, I can’t believe he’s still around.”

“He surprised the hell out of me, I never thought I’d see him again.”

“But you did, why?”

He finished his beer and sat next to her. “I don’t really want to talk about it now.”

“You brought it up.”

“Forget about it.”

“You come over here and tell me about a man I haven’t seen for the better part of nine years, telling me all about him and now you don’t want to talk about it anymore?”

“That’s right.”

She closed her eyes and held herself. He got up and paced the room. He looked at a picture of him and Maria one summer at the Cliff House; he traced his finger around the edge of her face.

“I’m sorry...I didn’t mean to remind you...it’s just that, he’s back.”

She glared at him. “What do you mean, back?”

“He wants to see you...us.”

A loud car went by on the street below. She jumped and looked out the window.

“Is he coming over here?”

“No. I agreed we’d meet him. At the Legion of Honor in Lincoln Park...about now.”

She stood up. “You’re telling me this now? When did you see him?”

“Last week.”

“Dammit,” she walked past him.

“I didn’t know how to break it to you.”

“Don’t bother trying to protect me, she paced back and forth. “Are we going?”

Kyle fidgeted with his nails, digging some loose dirt from under them. She glared at him.

“Let’s go.”

She passed him and went into the bedroom. He looked again at the photograph of him and Maria. He ripped it from the wall and crumpled it in his hand.

She drove to the park; Kyle looked out the window at the sunless grey scenery as it went by, he tried not to think about the meeting with Gary. If there was one thing on his mind that he was not set on doing it was digging up the past, he kicked himself a few times for ever mentioning Gary’s presence to her. He wanted to be away from what happened years ago, detached so that he might never think on it again--he wished this to be the last time he would ever see Gary.

She pulled the car into the parking lot behind an empty fountain; they got out and walked through the brisk air. He put his arm around her.

“Things will be okay. We can work it out.”

“Yeah.”

He released her and put his hands into his pockets. They waited sitting on the stairs in front of one of a pair of stone sphinxes, she gazed at him a couple of times, then turned herself away. He crossed his arms and stared off; in the distance a loud car struggled up the hill, Kyle quickly stood up hoping to catch a glimpse of the car on the road--maybe it was Gary in his brilliant red 1955 Buick Special hardtop--as the car rounded the blind curve, he relaxed and sat down.

“He’s changed, you know,” Kyle said to Maria and the sphinx behind her. “A lot different than he was.”

“I’m sure...”

He had the sudden urge to smoke but had no cigarettes. He had the urge to leave, but had no means from which to go.

“It doesn’t look like he’s going to show, maybe we could get something to eat.”

“I’m not hungry.”

“Get something to drink?”

“I’m not thirsty.”

“Go do something fun??”

“Knock it off,” she half-smiled and Kyle felt ecstatic. He stood and pulled her up to him, she seemed content to be with him, he thought, her brown hair dangling in front of her green eyes made him feel closer to her than he had in years; he wanted the feeling to last as long as it could.

A loud car came up the hill, Maria looked at him, his expression faded as the sound increased.

An oxidized red Buick rounded the turn and stopped; the exhaust was loud and trails of bluish grey smoke billowed out from under it. The passenger door was thrust open, Gary leaned out.

“Get in.”

Maria got in first. As Kyle shut the door he was immediately assaulted with an odor he could not stand. It was the smell of death, decaying flesh, he thought, and although he had never smelled it before, he imagined that this was what it would smell like. He wrinkled his face and rolled down the window.

“Rock and roll.”

Gary let the brake out and screeched the tires taking a corner with great speed. A long silence passed; Maria squirmed on the rotted upholstery and Kyle held close to the open window. It was then, unlike before when he saw him in the park, that he noticed Gary’s incredible thinness, he seemed to have wasted away even more.

“You look very nice, Maria. You’ve been keeping yourself all these years.”

“Ten years.” Kyle said.

“Why’d you come here?”

A signal ahead changed to red, he put the accelerator down and ran the light in a flood of beeping horns. “I reached the age when I realized, hey, I haven’t been keeping in touch with my friends. When I heard you and Kyle here got married, I figured I’d come and congratulate you personally.”

“And you waited this long?”

Gary ran his fingers through his thin silver hair. “Yeah, I waited this long.”

“We’re separated now...”

“Imagine that. Funny how life is sometimes.”

He turned the Buick onto the Great Highway which ran along the Pacific coastline, the traffic was light. Maria looked at the car, the memories of her youth were still evident in the pallid fabric of the back seat, she felt sad, the weight bearing hard on her heart.

“I know you guys think I’m crazy for coming back after all these years but...” He pressed the accelerator, the engine roared. Kyle noticed the increasing speed.

“Where are we going?”

“I don’t know, I thought we could ride around until we settled things.”

“What things?”

“Well, Cindy...for one...” He glared and evilly smiled at Maria.

“What do you mean, Cindy?”

“I mean Cindy.”

A brilliant red Buick was screaming through the turns on a highway that snaked its way from San Mateo on its way to San Francisco, Gary had the gas pedal to the floor and his three passengers gazed anxiously out the window. A thin, dark-haired with traces of silver, Gary

pulled the wheel in and out of the coastal highway turns. He tightened his grip. Maria was sitting next to him--Kyle and Cindy in the back, all the windows were down and a chilled late summer breeze whisked through the car. Seventeen year-old Kyle straightened himself and leaned over the front seat.

“Where are we headed?”

Maria turned to face him and looked at Gary. “Where are we going?”

“The old armory by the ocean above Skyline.”

“Battery Davis? This time of night?” Kyle sat back in his seat.

“Unless you’re afraid,” Gary rasped.

“No, no, fine.”

Lights flooded the sandy landscape at a base of a hill, beyond it was dark. Gary got out and unlatched a gate that blocked a road. The Buick continued up the hill and around, it pulled and stopped inside; they parked on top of a half-buried base for a gun turret.

“Let’s go,” Gary jumped out and the others followed. He walked between some stout bushes and down a dune, the ocean roared in the distance. Kyle felt the salty mist of the night’s fog in his face, he swallowed hard and mimicked Gary’s steps. Cindy and Maria followed.

“Going down?” Gary turned on his flashlight and walked along the edge of a cliff that led straight down to a small beach and the ocean. “Now nobody slip, it’s about five hundred or so feet down.”

They followed. Kyle found himself wondering where Gary was taking them but was afraid to ask. He felt that he knew what he was doing.

“Hey, slow down!” Cindy yelled. She slipped but regained her balance with Maria’s help, a cascade of sand crashed on the beach below.

“Watch yourself,” Gary yelled from some distance. It was dark and Gary’s flashlight was far away, there was no moon and a heavy fog surrounded, it was hard to discern where the exact footfalls should be. Cindy tried to keep up but her dress wouldn’t let her. Sand was filling her shoes.

A light bobbed along and turned away from the cliff back towards the armory, three followed the light; a shoe was lost and dangled off the edge of the cliff hanging onto a small plant growing out of the side of the sand.

“Wait up,” Cindy called out and reached for her shoe, her fingers barely touched it, she had to stretch herself out over the edge. She stood and put the shoe to her heel, she balanced on one leg.

Three figured entered the old armory, the light did little to cut the pitch blackness of the chambers. Gary smiled.

“My plan is to...”

Screams echoed throughout the armory. Kyle ran to the cliffs, he heard something heavy strike the side of the cliff and come to rest at the bottom.

“Cindy! Cindy!”

Kyle hit his head against the window of the car, Maria looked at Gary, his knuckles were white on the red wheel; he was biting his lip, blood trickled down his chin. She tugged at the fabric of the seat. Kyle slammed his head on the glass almost breaking it, he sat back.

“So, what are we going to do?”

“You think of something, Kyle, my man.”

“Why the hell didn’t we go back and try to find her? Instead, we relied on you to take care of things.”

“Her neck was broken, already dead when I found her later on. Yeah, I took care of things, because you guys couldn’t.”

She glared at him. “What’s that supposed to mean?”

“Just what it means, you guys never gave a damn about Cindy or me, you weren’t concerned at all, you just forgot about it and went on with your lives while I did all the work. I saved both your asses!”

“Gary...” Kyle leaned over.

“I took care of her, yes I did, took care of things real good, kept her death a secret and all (I made up a great story) everybody bought it...now it’s time for us to repay you, for all your wonderful help these last years.”

“But...but...”

“No need for thanks. I know you wouldn’t mean it anyway. It was such a good plan, having me take care of her body and vanish, I did it so well, never saw me again,” he glared at

Maria. “And I thought we were in love, kid. Nope, should’ve known, do somebody a grand favor and they screw you over.”

“It was your idea,” Maria pleaded, “to bury her and all, concoct the story say she packed up and ran away from her family, great, you did all that. We had nothing to do with it!”

“I never got a damn thing from either of you, goes to show your true loyalty to your friends.” He pulled the Buick hard around a corner. “Now you must know the truth, you must go see her.”

“What?” Maria screeched. “Are you fucking crazy? Where are we going to see her?”

“She’s up at the armory, I buried her there.”

Kyle and Maria looked at each other. “Christ.”

“I know it’s hard to accept but we know we killed her and I guess you got over it pretty quick but I never did.” Gary laughed to himself.

“It was an accident.” Kyle whined.

“You should’ve seen her,” he laughed harder. “Lying there, it was hysterical, her body all mangled and all...I never reported it, did you?”

He glared at her. She looked to Kyle and to the seat.

“Didn’t think so.”

Gary focused his eyes on the hood of the car, slowed down and turned up a small service road that led up a hill, the ocean crashed in the distance. A bar blocked the road, Gary got out.

“Now, don’t either of you go anywhere.”

He went to the trunk and brought out a large pair of cutters, Kyle and Maria heard him laughing and a strange giggling that echoed his laughs. She tried listening harder, he shut the trunk. He snipped the chain of the lock and opened the gate; he threw the cutters in the bushes and got back in the car. Maria half-smiled at him. He eased the Buick up the hill. Kyle stared wide-eyed out the windshield.

“She’s here?”

“Yep, all these years.”

“My God.” Maria pressed her hands to her face. Kyle swallowed hard. Gary brought the car around the hill and stopped at the entrance, he smiled a thin smile and parked the car on the turret. He bounded out and opened the passenger door. He motioned for them to get out.

“Last stop.” He pulled a flashlight and a shovel out of the back seat. “Move,” he pointed at the opening; Kyle and Maria walked slowly towards it. He flicked on the flashlight and followed them.

“She’s here, everywhere.” They continued walking and were enveloped by the darkness. “You should have been here, that night, when I carried her lifeless body down this corridor to the third chamber on the left. She was so young, so innocent, she didn’t deserve to die, you did.” He pointed the light at Maria’s face. “You, you’ve killed everything. Anything that came within your sights you slaughtered. You killed Cindy, you killed me, and you killed our unborn child.”

She sobbed as she walked.

“Do you still think about it? Dream about it? Does Kyle know about it?” He glared at him. “Well, do you, man?”

Kyle shook his head.

“Fucked over everything. That poor poor child, he would be about nine or so now, reading, playing, laughing...instead his broken body lay in the bottom of a trash bag hauled out as garbage, not ever knowing what it would be like to do the simple things you and I do.” He smiled at Kyle.

“So what’s your story? Been trying to get into her pants since that night? Ever get any? Oh, excuse me, you guys were married. Oh, yes...tell me Kyle my boy, was it worth it? Did it feel good? Did she make you...”

“Shut up!” She screamed at the top of her voice. “Shut up, shut up, shut up!!!” She turned to strike him but he caught her.

“No, no, no, wrong move.” He clenched his fist and hit her in the middle of the face, she fell to the ground. Kyle moved towards him.

“Okay, boy, you want to make something out of this? C’mon.” He threw the shovel against the wall and set the flashlight at his feet; the beam shone on their wrestling figures. Maria scooted back as the two men fought, she sat against the wall and wrapped herself in her arms rocking back and forth.

Kyle was knocked to the ground and kicked at Gary’s ankle, there was a sharp snap and he fell. Kyle scrambled up. Gary winced and rolled on his back.

“What the hell?” He gazed down at Gary.

“I’m going to get you, my boy.” He tried to get up. A scream echoed through the length of the dark corridor, it was a scream that was very familiar to Kyle, it was Cindy’s scream. Kyle quivered with fear. Gary managed himself up and lunged at Kyle. The scream sounded again, Kyle threw Gary back and kicked him in the ribs, they cracked under the force.

“Cindy! Help!” Gary yelled down the corridor. Kyle looked back, a shuffling of feet echoed in the distance and they grew louder with every step. He picked up Maria and pulled her towards the exit away from the sound.

“Move!”

As they reached the car, they heard Gary moaning and laughing; echoes of Cindy’s voice rang in their ears. Kyle saw the key dangling in the ignition of the Buick; he thrust open the door and they slipped behind the wheel. Maria rolled down the window and peered down the tunnel. She saw Gary stumbling out. He was pointing at them.

“Get...get ‘em!”

Kyle turned the key and the car rumbled to life. It spit as he threw it into reverse and gunned it. He backed out to the road. He veered off the pavement and lodged the Buick in a hill of sand, the trunk flew open. He looked down the road, put the car into drive and floored the accelerator--the wheels spun and the Buick refused to move. Gary was limping down the hill towards them, he was dragging his leg and his arm was wrapped about him, he reached out for them. Maria cupped her hand over her mouth.

“Oh my God...!”

Kyle rocked the car and found traction, they took off; Gary stepped in front of them. The Buick clipped him with one of the large bumper bullets, his body sickly twisted around and fell into the sand, his silver hair blew in the chilled night wind.

Kyle slammed on the brakes and the trunk lid flew open. Maria gaped at him.

“What are you doing?!”

“He might be hurt. We...”

“Go! Go!”

He pressed the pedal and the lid slammed closed. Kyle turned the car hard onto the highway. He gunned it and sped as fast as he could towards the city.

A sign announcing the entrance into San Francisco went by in a blur. Maria curled up near the door.

“I can’t believe he still has this car, after all that happened.”

“Well, now we have it.” His eyes were frozen to the road.

A car passed almost hitting them. Kyle lost control but managed the car back onto the highway swerving viciously several times. A dull thump was heard in the trunk. Maria and Kyle stared at each other, neither breathing, Maria stared out the back window. Another thump. It sounded as if someone was pounding on the lid.

“Kyle.....Maria.....?” It was Cindy’s voice. “Let me out!”

Kyle screamed and the car swerved. Back and forth across the surface of the road. He almost hit another car, swerved and drove towards a light pole. He tried to turn the wheel but it wouldn’t budge; he slammed the brakes and hit the pole with the right front of the car. The fender folded and the hood was pushed over. A blood soaked chrome bullet from the bumper rolled down the embankment.

Time passed, he didn’t know how much. Maria lay still in the seat, shards of glass glistened on her body. He sat up and adjusted the skewed rear view mirror, he couldn’t see behind him, the trunk lid was open. He lightly smiled and helped Maria out. They walked, the still cold air enwrapped their huddled trembling bodies and chilled them to their souls. Kyle’s teeth chattered as he walked, carrying Maria’s unconscious body; he looked to the sky, the chill seemed to move almost on its own with some kind of purpose. It struck at his spine, moved up his back to his neck where it paused momentarily. Then, without any presage, the chill enwrapped his head--his hair froze.

Things went black for awhile, how long he did not know, but as he opened his eyes and gazed at Maria, he knew he was never going to see her the same again.

He awoke next to her; in her apartment by the ocean. A window was open and a cold wind was ripping through the place. He kissed her shoulder, her skin was cold; he climbed out of bed and stared down at her. The smell of rotting upholstery hung in the air.

“You and your goddamned past, all you ever cared about was yourself, you were the only one, I might as well have never lived.”

Her body lay twisted.

“You don’t believe, you never have! I know! Never believed in me, that maybe I could do something important on my own.”

He yelled. “I have!” He knelt and violently shook the bed. Maria’s head fell lazily towards him, her body remained stationary, a small pool of blood began flowing from the back of her neck.

“Just like Cindy...” he whispered.

He breathed deeply, put on his coat and walked outside. As he crossed the street her phone rang, he looked back once. He got into the oxidized red 1955 Buick Special; a small comforting voice whispered in his ear. He turned the key, the sound of the rotted exhaust pulsated off the buildings.