

# **Slackville Road**

**Lazy Dudes, a Dummy, and an Armored Car**

**a novella by**

**Vago Damitio**

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## **Dedication**

*I dedicate this book to Uncle Larry and Steppy Bobo. Not the drunken Uncle Larry who used to go fishing and bought me my first gallon of vodka from Safeway, but to my favorite Uncle Larry who loved me, supported me and was always a great friend even when she was drunken and away fishing. Steppy Bobo, you know who you are dude and so does everyone who knows you. You are one cool motherfucker.*

## **Disclaimer**

*The characters, places, and some of the events in Slackville Road are based on real people, places, and situations. Real people have had their names changed or been fused into characters based on multiple real people. The real people in real life are people who would never think to do anything illegal or immoral - those parts are obviously all made up by the author. Two Dog Tom and Hopalong Tom are real people telling real stories. If you go to the bumfires on Fairhaven Beach, you can learn a lot from those guys.*

## **Books by Vago Damitio**

[Rough Living: Tips and Tales of a Vagabond](#)

[Liminal Travel: How to Travel on Almost Nothing](#)

[Not My Morocco](#)

The Expat Guide to Morocco – Out of Print

Smooth Living: Beyond the Life of a Vagabond – Coming in 2013

[Slackville Road](#)

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**Table of Contents**

**Dedication**

**Disclaimer**

**Books by Vago Damitio**

**Before We Begin: Slackville Road - The Cover Story**

**Chapter 1: Slackville Road:**

**Chapter 2: Ricky the Rapper**

**Chapter 3: The Rape of Karen**

**Chapter 4: Jack the Ripper**

**Chapter 5: The Old School Bums**

**Chapter 6: The Life of Riley**

**Chapter 7: Harriet the Spy**

**Chapter 8: A Plan So Stupid it Just Might Work**

**Chapter 9: Karen Van**

**Chapter 10: The End of My Resistance**

**Chapter 11: The Sinking of the Lusitania**

**Chapter 12: Shit the Bed**

**Chapter 13: The Setup**

**Chapter 14: The Heist**

**Chapter 15: The Aftermath**

**Epilogue**

**About the Author**

## Before We Begin: The Cover Story

In 2003, I fulfilled one of my lifetime goals by writing and publishing a book. You've probably heard of [Rough Living: Tips and Tales of a Vagobond](#) (If not, you should probably check it out). It wasn't the huge success I'd been hoping for. It was picked up by a small independent publishing house who decided to sell it as an e-book and a print-on-demand (POD). I didn't get the advance I'd dreamed of and my royalties for the year amounted to \$500. I have no idea how much they made, but I felt cheated and I pulled my book from their list as soon as the contract was completed. Their ebook version had already been copied and uploaded to so many places that it was impossible for me to know how many copies had been distributed. People loved it, even if they didn't want to pay for it. That was my first book.

I'd developed a story about the perfect armored car robbery while all of this was going on. It lacked characters and a plot but I knew I could fill that in. I was dreaming of becoming the next Tom Robbins or Jack Kerouac and so I filled in details from my quirky journals. Not my best idea.

One of the first readers told me "It's interesting, like reading someone's journal." That's because it was. I was chasing after Kerouac's writing – the difference was his writing was edited and cohesive. Mine wasn't. I changed the names and characters and blended the girl of my dreams with women I had actually slept with to create the love interest in *Slackville Road*, Karen. She was an amalgamation of my girlfriend at the time, the girl of my dreams (who kept rejecting me), and a dozen girls I was fortunate enough to sleep with during the time I lived in my van. My girlfriend at the time asked that I remove her from the original cover. Next, I used a stock cover from Lulu.com. After that, I used a picture of myself hitching. Finally, I settled on a painting I'd done of The Triple Nickel (a bar I used to frequent in Portland, Oregon.)

Nine years after cobbling *Slackville Road* together - it's time to do a proper edit. Great editing makes great writing. I wish I'd discovered that earlier. I've written four novels since *Slackville Road*. This one always bugged me because in my gut, I knew it could be good.

## Chapter 1: Slackville Road:

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***Go to Jail. Go directly to Jail. Do Not Pass Go. Do not collect \$200.***

*Instructions on the Community Chest Card in the game of Monopoly (1931)*

*~Charles Brace Darrow*

This time the hand was closed as it smashed into his face. He faded out for a moment, but the splash of water that trailed after the fist brought him back to consciousness.

“Where's the money, Jack?” The hard face of the detective was no more than an inch from his own. He figured he could get a hold of the guy's nose with his teeth, but threw the idea away. He just wasn't that kind of brutal. He wasn't brutal at all, actually.

Besides, with his hands cuffed behind the chair and four other detectives in the room, all he could hope for would be getting the living shit kicked out of him – and maybe permanently disfiguring the dickwad in front of him. It wasn't worth it though.

Jack was lots of things, but he wasn't a lot more things than he was. He wasn't brutal, he wasn't brave, he wasn't a tough guy, and he wasn't stupid.

“Where's the money?”

That was the million dollar question. Literally, the million dollar question. The funny part was while all the cops, his friends, the media – everyone – while they all focused on that question, they were missing out on the more important things he could have told them.

Everyone thought they knew what happened. Everyone had seen the trial. Everyone read the newspaper reports, the blogger speculations, and everyone had an opinion about where the money was. Everyone thought they'd figured out why he did it. The truth they sought was where he stashed the money.

The best part was he couldn't tell them even if they broke him. Only Ricky knew where the money was. Jack could have told them about love, he could have told them about betrayal, he might have even been able to tell them about redemption – but they didn't ask. They just asked where the money was. It was enough to make him laugh again, which always made the detectives lose their cool. This time was no different.

Still, he couldn't help laughing. Getting beat up by a bunch of cops wasn't close to the worst thing that ever happened to Jack Corgan.

## Chapter 2: Ricky the Rapper

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Ricky Thibideaux was my best friend since he kicked my ass when we were both fourteen. I'd never really been the big man I wanted to be on the playground, so when a skinny kid in ripped up clothes rode a beat up Schwinn into our neighborhood and started talking in a funny Southern accent, I thought it was my chance to prove my manhood with the BMX crowd.

Ten minutes later they'd deserted me with a bloody nose. The only one willing to help me stop the blood was the same gawky Louisiana kid who bloodied it in the first place. I learned two lessons that day. Don't be a dick to strangers and most people will desert you when you are down. Not Ricky.

Ricky's still tall, dark, gangly, and white. He wears oversize home-boy fashions and he likes to rap even though he isn't any good at it. Here's a truth none of us kids on the playground could have guessed. Ricky had just ridden that beat up Schwinn a couple of thousand miles when I decided to taunt him. He left Louisiana when his old man beat him one too many times. One day he just said... 'fuck this'. He got on his bike and rode it all the way across the country to Bellingham, Washington where a punk kid hit him with some words that stung enough to make him mad. So he stung him back.

Are you wondering what I said? I called him a cracker. Little did I know that the man he hated more than anyone described himself as a cracker. Yup, Ricky was the son of a cracker and if you called him one today, I bet he would bloody your nose too.

Not really having any further he could go on his bike, since he'd ridden from the South-East of the USA to the North-west corner, Ricky found a job washing dishes and became a sort of Arthur Fonzarelli in 'the Ham', which is what we all called Bellingham. He lived above an old lady's garage and did yard work for her in exchange for rent. Washing dishes and doing handyman work, that was Ricky's life. He earned a GED when he was 16, managed to stay in Bellingham despite being a runaway, and became a local fixture in the coffee shops and at the bum beach fires where he'd share his weed and burst into bad gangsta rap as soon as the hippie drummers found a likely beat.

If you asked a hundred people what job they would take if they wanted to go nowhere in life, chances are at least ten of them would say dishwasher. Nobody gives respect to professional dishwashers. Think of them and you think of bad haircuts, poor hygiene, and no ambition. Men who are generally unable or unwilling to take any other job. After all, there's little worse than scraping leftovers from someone else's plate. Most dishwashers are either kids, illegal aliens, or just unable to do anything more challenging.

Ricky was the exception. He claimed dish washing allowed him to be himself. "I can think about what I want while I'm working and I never take my work home with me," he told me when I asked why he didn't try to find something that paid better. He kept himself clean, free, and paid for. He made a little extra doing handyman jobs and selling bags of weed on the side. If you went to the restaurant he worked in you could order biscuits and gravy and a quarter of Matanuska Thunderfuck brought down from the hydroponic greenhouses of Alaska.

Everyone liked Ricky. Well, everyone but the guys he cuckolded. Ricky had a knack for bedding down taken women, but, like he said, they were always willing. Lots of guys didn't like him for that, but he was one of the good guys. He always shared his tobacco. He never judged people by how they looked. In fact, he had become a gutterpunk guru to the lost guys in their twenties who sat with us around the bum fires.

Lost guys looking for something that enabled them to live their lives the way they wanted while justifying it to the world. They were grabbing the ideology of the 60's to explain their own indifference to the world of responsibility that called to them. They had plenty of time to think and smoke and develop a philosophy on living life. They just didn't have the time to find jobs or work.

Despite the fact Ricky worked nearly every day of his life, they hung on his words.

Over time, most of them would find jobs and wander away from the fire, but there were always new guys looking for answers and Ricky was always there to provide them. I'm not sure when it happened, but at some point, I think he started listening to himself and that might be where trouble began for both of us.

"You wanna smoke some weed?" he asked me.

My answer was the same as it always was. We meandered down to the little industrial beach where the bum fires took place every night. The beach was beautiful even though it was covered with broken glass, pottery, lumps of rusted metal, and debris from a million boats going to or returning from Alaska.

Ricky fired up a joint, took a puff, and passed it to me. That was the moment he took his left turn into a world neither of us had ever been in.

"Fuck this. I'm tired of share-cropping."

I was confused but he went on. "Working for the man, whose working for the man, whose working for the man, whose working for the god-damn man that takes 90% of the money me and those other niggers are earning for him. Share-cropping."

The bum fire was about the same as usual that night and I can't say I remember much besides that little snippet, but I think that was the turning point.

Something had changed in Ricky. Honestly, I'm not sure what caused it. Maybe it was the neighborhood he lived in. Ricky's neighborhood had always been poor. He'd lived there since he got to Bellingham. That same little apartment above the old lady's garage. There were little pockets of retirees like her, but mostly the neighborhood was filled with poor immigrants and people struggling to get by. The only question people in his neighborhood ever asked had always been "Can it get any worse?" and of course it always had.

Then, something began to change. Gentrification.

First, the warehouse down the street got converted into expensive condos. That was fine until the yuppies who bought them started moving in.

Next door to it was a halfway house where work release prisoners and parolees had stayed when they were returned to the real world. Six or eight men, and the occasional woman decorated with tattoos who manned the halfway house's porch on a constant 24-hour vigil. The people changed, but there was always someone there. Smoking a cigarette. The dirt lot in front of both buildings was littered with rusty car parts, cigarette butts, empty 40-oz bottles of malt liquor, and T-Bird wine bottles filled with a yellow substance that was too frothy to be fortified wine.

When the yuppies came, that got cleared away. You'd think it would have been a positive change, but it changed the whole flavor of the neighborhood. I think Ricky started looking at their cars, their clothes, their money. If I had to put my finger on it, that's what I would really blame for the change that came over him. Gentrification in his face.

Ricky's little apartment was like the hippie houses I spent time in as a kid. A smell of old sweat but sweet like incense. All of it infused with the sound of Snoop Dog, Dre, and Ricky the Rapper.

### Chapter 3: The Rape of Karen

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I've learned lessons in prison. Maybe they're not what you expect. There is one commodity that isn't scarce in prison (or in the real world either). I'm not talking about hate, drugs, violence, religion, or any of the other things that probably crossed your mind. I'm talking about blame.

The rarest thing in prison is a guy who takes responsibility for his own actions. In here, there's so much blame flying around that if it were shit we'd all be drowned. There's so much of it and it's so deep that it's hard to sort it all out but if you have lots of time and not much else to do, it's a better way to spend your time than jerking off in your rack or finding trouble with the gangs. The breakdown, from most recent to furthest back goes something like this. Mind you, these aren't my comments, but they reflect what I've heard since I got to this juncture in my life. These are the words of my fellow inmates and they are seeped in prison's most plentiful commodity – blame.

This is what I call the prisoners hierarchy of blame:

'The judge had it in for me,' says the thief.

'The jury was almost all women,' says the rapist (accused of course because no one ever admits *that* crime)

“The cops were watching me day and night, if they gave that much attention to anyone they would get caught doing something,” says the extortionist.

“The system is designed to put blacks/latinos/asians/poor whites/bikers/etc behind bars” which is certainly true but doesn't change the fact blame is flying and responsibility is nowhere to be found. From there it gets more personal.

“My boss/the company/employer screwed me over,” says the rip off man or assaulter.

“My wife/girlfriend/woman was driving me insane,” says the beater, thief, or anyone that has a woman to blame.

“My parents/dad/mom screwed me up when I was a kid...” says the guy who has been listening to the psychiatrist.

“It was the drugs/alcohol/sex” says the 12-stepper

“It was that town,” says the guy who can't think of anyone specific to blame.

“God hates me,” says the narcissist.

“It was him,” says the bipolar/schizophrenic looking in the mirror.

“It was me. I did it and I'd do it again,” says the sociopath.

“Damn. I had a choice. I did that,” says the enlightened man.

“Om,” says the Hindu or the Buddhist. “Amen” says the Christian. “Al-hamdillilah,” says the Muslim.

Me? Don't worry, I'm far from enlightened. I had a choice and I could have done different, but the truth is, I'm glad I didn't. Maybe that makes me a sociopath, but you'll have to read on to make that determination. I wish it hadn't of had to come to that, but it did. I did what I thought was best and I stand by it. You can probably blame my parents for that. You can certainly blame my culture, the awful American piggy-consumerist culture that seems to take joy in rubbing what you don't have in your face. You could blame my upbringing and if you want, you could blame God, but to be honest, I'm thankful to him/it/whatever God might be if he/it/whatever had a hand in all of this. You could blame Ricky, but I don't think that's fair. I made my own decision, he didn't force me to do anything.

The truth is, if you want to blame someone for me being in prison, you don't have to look very far. She comes to visit me every week. Karen is definitely to blame.

Karen should be behind bars. She's a danger to herself and others. The girl is a serial heart-raper. My heart is the regular victim, though I'm sure there have been plenty of others. I know that, but I try not to think about it because it makes everything hurt even worse.

She's easy enough to describe.

She thinks of herself as short but at five foot five, she's bigger than most women but for some reason she seems to think she's a midget. Short black hair in a bob cut, though when I first met her it flowed down past her perfect ass in a luxurious black cascade that wafted scents of mango and tiger balm when the breeze caught it. Aqueous almond brown eyes that almost look like she has Asian ancestry. When she smiles, she has a big gap between her front teeth surrounded by those truculent red lips I try not to dream about.

Karen. The love of my life. The scourge of my life, my tormentor. The woman I both loved and hated above all others. Eventually I wanted nothing to do with her but each time she appeared I fell back to worshipping her like Moses in front of a flaming sword. I blame the drug, the drug called Karen. There's nothing I wouldn't have done for her. Everything I did, I did it for her. I'm like a tragic Bryan Adams song.

When I met Karen, everything in my life that wasn't her, became unimportant. I was at Stuart's Coffehouse doing a crossword and I needed an eleven letter word that ended in 'N' meaning 'an insidious admiration.' I was stumped.

Then, a smiling voice whispered "Infatuation" into my ear. It was a strange beginning to a strange relationship.

I looked up and I saw that wonderful gap between her two front teeth for the first time. In some cultures the gap is supposed to imply a huge sexual appetite. It did. I wanted to touch her. To hold her. To kiss her. She kept her distance. She always did. Well, not always.

Our first meal together was potato burritos from Casa Que Pasa with a couple of Boundary Bay Scotch Ales to wash them down. I love burritos. Something about the feeling of holding them. Comfort food. We went back to my place. I was riding on a cloud. That was when she blew me off and asked if she could sleep on the couch. I was stuck – already I liked this girl and already I wanted to throw her out of my life. Within hours of meeting her, she'd managed to take me to insane heights of joy and to bring me crashing down to the rocky wastes where I lay in my bed wondering if she wanted me to take her with force.

I'm sure she didn't and even if she had, I'm really not that kind of guy. Eventually, I went to sleep, but my hard-on for her never went away.

## Chapter 4: Jack the Ripper

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As you might have guessed by the fact that I'm sitting in prison getting the shit kicked out of me by angry detectives searching for a missing \$1 million dollars - (Actually it's \$1.3 million, but they keep calling it \$1 million) - I'm a thief.

I've always been a thief. As a kid I used to steal candy and big league chewing gum. As a teen, I was stuffing my jacket with cologne and sometimes breaking into empty vacation houses or stealing stereos out of cars. I want to make something clear though – it was never about the stuff I was stealing.

It was about the thrill. I loved the thrill of knowing I might get caught. It was better than sex and it got me laid more than once. Here's the trick I used to use to get uptight teenage girls to fall for me – all those 'pick-up artists' can mark this one down for later use.

Get a date with some nice Christian girl or a 'good' brainy girl who is leads a sheltered life. Ideally a real straight lace girl who has never done anything wrong. Make an excuse to go to some store and as you walk through the aisles, slip something into her bag. Don't be secret about it, be kind of bold and obvious – and here's the thing – she has to know or else you might as well not do it. Now, you might think a nice girl would never accept that kind of behavior. That maybe she would take it right out and put it on the shelf – that's their first reaction. But then, you grab their hand. You move really close and you say something like “Hey. Don'tT I think that guy might have seen you take that. Just leave it or he's going to get suspicious.” It doesn't matter if there is someone there or not, and the fact that she didn't take anything (you did, but you put it in her bag) doesn't matter either.

Now you're close, she's nervous. Give her a quick kiss (probably her first) and then say, “Just play it cool.” That's it. You walk out of the store and go wherever she can get out of those incredibly wet panties. She's yours.

The thrill of possibly getting caught is what does it. It's that adrenaline rush. I bet it's the same if you jump out of a plane with a girl and I've got biker friends that tell me a thrill ride is the best way to break in a new mama. So, that's why I rip shit off...well, except for the one that got me in here, but that's a story we'll get to. For now, let's get back to Bellingham...

I don't want you to think I didn't work. I had jobs. I had lots of jobs but I always ended up leaving them over something. The last one was working as a neighborhood organizer for the Democrats. My job was to go into poor neighborhoods and sign people up to vote based on their desire for less crime, less homelessness, the need for treatment, and help for drug problems. Those and worse. Everyone recognized the problems but nobody had any time to fix them so the Democrats signed up new party members by promising to fix things for them. Most people were working two, three, or four jobs so they could keep a roof over their heads. Everybody was working with a dream of getting out of their neighborhood and moving somewhere better. What kind of a dream is that? A Jefferson's dream.

People were working too hard to do anything to solve their own problems. My job was to sign them up, but I wanted them to blow shit up and get really radical. It wasn't going to happen though. They were too scared, too cowed, too nervous to rebel. The poor had been domesticated. I hadn't. So, once again, I quit my responsible yet low paying activist job to pursue a higher ideal. In other words, I was lost again. Besides, voter canvassing was barely covering my rent. I was working long hours and getting paid less than the people I was signing up.

I was through having a job. Again.

The first few days of not going to work are always great. More like a vacation than a sudden lack of occupation. I would feel like I was on the verge of something great. My worries were thrown out

with alarm clock and schedule. I was invincible. And then, as always, I began to run out of money. I started worrying about paying rent. I needed to get another job. Shit.

Not knowing what else to do, I bought a small bottle of whiskey for \$4 from the package store and went down to the beach to see what the bums were doing. Nobody was there but Ricky, which happened often enough. Him and me, the auxiliary bums...the bums had other business to attend to, but not us.

“You know that guy Mario that used to cook at my restaurant?” Ricky always called it his restaurant even though he was just the dishwasher.

“Sure,” I remembered him. He was a big fat guy who had worked there. I never really talked to the guy but remembered there had been something kind of angry about him. Typical of kitchen help, I figured, and typical of cooks, every time I saw him he was wearing those bitchen black and white checked cooks pants and a white apron.

“Did I ever tell you why he got fired?” Ricky was already laughing as he got ready to tell me the story..

“No, I didn’t know he got fired.”

He was laughing and grinning that big Cajun smile. “Mario had that old pick-up that he drove around all the time, right? One day he got pulled over by Sheriff Bomar. He’s that big cop that comes into the restaurant all the time. Well, apparently he was on a quota system or having a bad day or something because he not only wrote Mario a speeding ticket for going two miles over the limit, but then he starts doing an inspection on the pick-up. He ended up writing this big fucking laundry list of fix its. Turned out it was going to cost Mario about \$4500 to fix his \$500 truck. He was totally screwed, right? So, without telling anyone, he made plans to go to Alaska and bail on the tickets. He sold the truck to somebody he knew in Eastern Washington, booked a ferry ticket to Skagway, and left.”

“I thought you said he got fired?”

Ricky took another hit of weed and laughed as he continued. “He did. The day before Mario was supposed to leave. We were prepping breakfast and who walked in but Sheriff Bomar. Ordered a bagel with peanut butter. At first Mario thought Bomar was coming in to stop him from skipping town. Bomar though, he had no idea that Mario was even there, he just wanted a bagel. Mario, he was hiding in the walk-in where the bagels are and he asked me if the Sheriff was looking for him. When I told him the guy just wanted a bagel, he came out of the walk in and said ‘Watch this cop eat my shit!’ He took the bagel, dropped his drawers, and ran it right through the crack of his ass. The whole kitchen staff was watching. After that, he toasted it, slapped some peanut butter on it, and took it to Bomar himself. One of the bus boys told a waitress and she told the manager about it, and then he got fired. He didn’t care though, he already had his ferry ticket to Alaska for the next day anyway.”

Ricky was still laughing. “Sheriff Bomar is the only cop I always smile at. I just can’t fucking help it. Nobody puts a smile on my face any quicker..”

“What happened to Mario?” I asked.

“Who cares?” Ricky answered. “That guy was a fucking douchebag anyway.”

“Did he tell you about the Ferry?” I asked, since he’d said Mario had split without anyone knowing.

“Nah, the bums saw him sneaking on it the next morning. They always keep track of who’s coming and going.”

“How come?”

“What else do they have to do?”

## Chapter 5: The Old School Bums

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To understand what happened and ultimately to figure out where the money is, you have to meet the bums. That's the reason the cops will never find Ricky or the money. They can never condescend to learn lessons from the warriors who choose to live outside the system. The truth is, there are lots of bums in the world and America is filled with homeless people, crazies, and street people – but when I talk about the bums, our bums, I'm talking about old school bums.

In the 30s they would have been called hoboes. In the 1840s they would have been called mountain men or frontiersmen. In the 1600s they would have been called vagabonds. These are guys that cook in tin cans, carry satchels on sticks, and have been known to hop a freight or live in cardboard boxes. These guys aren't some sad sacks that can't find jobs – they are guys that don't want jobs and live like warriors on the frontier of a country that demands you conform to the system. In times past, they would have moved past the borders of civilization and wandered in the wilds. The problem is the wilds no longer exist, or if they do, they aren't so accessible as they once were.

Our bums live in a land of plenty. They've found the big rock candy mountain, but it's not without it's trials and tribulations and they aren't some kind of nobler than thou creatures who live a romantic existence. The bums were guys who made the choice to live outside of the system and in some cases that was because they were noble, but in equal parts, probably means they really were a little crazy. Since our teens, Ricky and I had been apprentices and protégées to two of the greatest bums that ever lived. The Toms.

Two Dog Tom and Hopalong Tom – hereafter referred to as Two Dog or Hopalong – or collectively referred to as The Toms.

They were patient teachers but The Toms were both disgusted at the fact that Ricky and I kept working at our jobs.

“What are you wasting your time as some wage slave for? Come live in the jungle and fornicate with the Gods,” Two Dog repeated the same thing every time one of us complained about work. Two Dog was fat and jolly and his laugh was gritted like sandpaper while carrying disdain for all the world. He had two dogs that he kept on rope leashes tied nearby wherever he was– Odin and Riley. He'd always had two dogs named Odin and Riley. If one died or disappeared, he had a new dog with the same name. “Continuity,” he would claim with those blue eyes sparkling mischievously, “Life has to have continuity.”

“I think we should burn the houses all down,” Hopalong would say if we mentioned rent. “One a day, all through the winter. God bless ye merry bonfires. It'd be a warm winter.” Where Two Dog was fat and jolly, Hopalong was small, wiry, and skinny. He was gimpy with one leg having no feeling – what had happened depended on what he said happened. A motorcycle accident, a Vietcong bullet, a roller skating accident in 1979, an encounter with a bear....hundreds of stories. All of them just as true as the other.

These were our teachers about everything that really mattered in life. Sure, they would eat our food, come to us when they needed to pay for a doctor, or sleep in our apartments on the coldest of nights – but that was just part of the way they lived. The system was there, and you were a fool if you didn't use it to your advantage.

“The first thing they did was have me fill out some paperwork,” Two Dog told us as he explained once again about the time he applied for food stamps. “One form after another and then I had to wait an hour so they could tell me to come back two days later with my birth certificate, my social security card, and a statement from my landlord. Ha ha ha ha. I don't have a fucking landlord!”

He went on with his story. “When I told the lady that I didn't have a house, she asked me

‘Why are you here?’ ‘ Oh, she was a good one. She was like some sort of Zen monk. She was asking me the meaning of life and why I'm there...she was a good looking gal and asking bums questions like that. I thought I might have a shot even without the papers when I started talking with her.” I knew better than to point out that she might have just been asking him why he was applying – it was his story. He could spin it any way he wanted.

He stopped then, looking around the bum fire at each of us. He was waiting for someone to cue him. Most of us had heard the story before, but there was a new guy. A high school kid that had finally come of age to sit around the bum fires with us. “Did you get them?”

“Of course not,” Two Dog roared. “They don't give food stamps to people like me. I'm a threat to their way of thinking. That lady, she might have given them to me. She went back to find out, but then her supervisor came out – he was one of those bureaucrats in a suit. “If you'd like to get food stamps, you're going to need to get a job or show that you aren't able to get one,” he told me. A job!”

“I laughed in his face. 'If I had a job, I wouldn't need food stamps!' and would you believe he just smiled at me and nodded his head as if he had just taught me something. The system isn't designed to help those who need it, boys. It's a trap and I'm telling you right now, you only get what you pay for. That was when I turned my back on the system. I'm not going to beg from someone like that.”

Two Dog wanted us to get food stamps though, precisely because he couldn't. “You ditch diggers have all that stuff though. The system is there and you're a fool if you aren't using it because it's using you. Be sure of that, it's grinding you up in the neo-sausage fuck you factory and then it's going to cover you with mustard and feed you to some capitalist for dinner.”

“That's true, but you can use the system if you're smart about it,” Hopalong was warming up. It was his turn at the fire. “You gotta be careful though, because they'll come after you if they see that you've got it figured out.” Hopalong had a scrubby black beard peppered with grey and long unkempt hair that he kept tied back in a ponytail. “I remember back in 1962 when I first made my time machine...”

Hopalong claimed to have invented a time machine in his Berkeley apartment back in 1962. Whenever someone would ask him what happened to it, he would just say that it was hidden nearby so that he could go on a time traveling crime spree...

“I've got to be pretty careful about it though because the men in black are always watching for the temporal signature it puts out.” He squinted at us around the fire through his one eye. The black eye patch probably would have earned him the nickname “Patchy” or “Patches” if his gimp leg hadn't of come first. I'd asked him once why he didn't use the time machine to go back and save his leg or his eye. “It don't work like that,” he said and that was that.

“How does it work?” I asked him, curious what he'd say.

“Well, it's just like a Kirby vacuum cleaner that you hold on to and it sucks you along the time stream. If you reverse the flow it brings you forward. Sure would be nice if those god damn men in black would leave me alone. I miss my time travelin.” Then he went into a yarn about buying stock short back in the 80's and making a killing before the men in black caught on and seized it all...

The Toms both lived on junked boats that they'd salvaged and floated in Fairhaven Harbor. I couldn't figure out how the hell they got away with it, but there it was. Hopalong loved to tell us how he was going to go back in time and fix up his credit so he could get a loan to restore his leaky old sail boat, Lusitania. “The system is all about credit,” he said,” and the only way to fix it is with a time machine.”

We'd heard all the stories before. They got better when you knew where they were going and could wait for the inevitable changes. Hopalong was going to get a great credit rating, fix his boat, and then sail it across the Pacific to the Philippines where he would set up a business on the Loboc River. He was going to repair it on credit and insure it with more credit. Then he was gonna sink it

and have a separate corporation he'd start with more credit salvage it. Then he'd sell it to himself for a song and the boat would be all his with no need to pay back the loans he'd got on credit. There was no extradition from the Philippines and the Loboc River, according to Hopalong was paradise found.

“I’m gonna live my days sailing up and down the river boys, giving people rides in exchange for food, gas, and water. I might stop in a village once in a while to visit a chief and marry his daughter. People love the guys who play water taxi. It’s a good life.”

“I’m even gonna start watching the telly,” he said. “I always spent my money on airplanes and short wave radios before but from now on I’m gonna spend other people's money on boats and women. You gotta love credit. I just gotta find that radio tube.”

There was no point in telling a simple story or having a simple dream. That only put you in the position of wondering why you didn't have what you wanted or having to put your money where your mouth was. That radio tube was the other thing (besides his fear of the men in black) that kept Tom from traveling the streams of time on his Kirby time machine. Temporal crime sprees and time traveling credit fraud - the world can be thankful he couldn't find that tube.

It always suited me to sit with the bums. I should have learned more from them. Dreams are best kept at a distance. The bums don’t make you talk if you don’t want to. No pressure to talk. Nobody screaming 'Where's the money?' in your face. You could just sit and think drifting in your own thoughts. When the detectives grilled me, I would just imagine myself listening to the bums around the bumfire.

## Chapter 6: The Life of Riley

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I asked Two-Dog about his dogs once. I knew his whole spiel about how killing homeless people had become a rite of passage for shithead American youth, but what I really wanted to know was why he gave them those names. Riley and Odin – not just for the two dogs he had now, but for the others he'd had since the time I'd known him.

At the point I asked, he had recently gotten a new Odin, a young German Shepherd mixed mutt that licked everything within reach of it.

“It's hard to tell with this pup, but Odin is a fierce one-eyed God. The ruler of land and sea and everything in between. Fuck with Odin and you fuck with your own existence. Look at that crazy old time-traveling fart over there and you can get an idea of what Odin looks like, except more grand, more magnificent. He's the fucking God of poetry, magic, victory, and death. Wanders the earth like some beggar but under the ratty old clothes is the fiercest mother fucker to ever walk the streets.”

I looked over to where Hopalong was hanging up some clothes to dry on the beach. He limped along squinting into the sun reflecting off of Fairhaven Harbor laying his clothes on big exposed rocks.

“He was thrown out of heaven by the other Gods because his poetry was too beautiful and his message of freedom led all of their women to drag him into their beds. Then while he was gone, his own wife, Frigg, melted all of his statues and took another lover. She's the reason people who are too polite to say fuck say Friggin, instead. Frigging women.” The puppy was jumping to the end of the rope and yipping to get to us. Tom unleashed the dog and held it in his lap. It struggled to get away for a while but then settled to his caresses.

As for that one? He pointed to Riley. A snarly dirty white dog that looked more wolf than dog. Riley was old and didn't like anyone except for Two-Dog. The pup escaped from Tom's grasp and ran to where Riley was snarling spittle. I thought he might grab the pup in his jaws and shake it to death, but instead, Riley lay down with a wolfy grin and allowed the pup to scamper around it, lunging in for fake attacks. Okay, so Riley didn't like anyone but Two-Dog and Odin the pup.

“Love. Love of Life. That's the story of Riley. He was this irresponsible fuckup in Ireland who went around like a Roman God. He got drunk and whored and laid around in the countryside. Not working. Just kicking back. The love of life was what he preached and if you didn't have it, then you have no reason to be doing what you're doing. I'm leading the life of Riley. People should elect me. I can be the mayor! I am here because I have to be here. Other people are here because they have drug or mental problems. I have no mental problems except for this fetish of digging through dumpsters and megalomania. I believe in what I do. Other people are taught not to believe anything unless it comes from the TV or some authority. I say usurp that authority, get naked, throw off your fucking...light sabres. Come live in the wilderness with me. I'm living like Riley. When Stagecoaches would go by he'd ride out and take all of their money. He did it so humorously that everybody laughed while he was taking it. And he would say ‘Come with me! Come live with me! You don't need this!’ The life of fucking Riley. Not frigging Riley, fucking Riley.” He laughed again. Riley was wagging his tail. “He robbed the rich for thirty years and then of course, they had him up on the gallows. Everybody in the country knew him, so they came from all over and showed up to see him hanged. And on the gallows, he was laughing, and everybody watching was laughing. He was so fat and jolly that he made jokes that the gallows would collapse on top of him. Even the hangman was laughing. And they kept laughing even after no more sound came from his swinging, smiling face.”

That was the message of The Toms. Turn your back on the world that doesn't appreciate you and live the good life. Either you overthrow your masters or else you just walk away and ignore them.

Live the life of Riley and Odin the Wanderer.

“Hey Hoppy?” Two-Dog bellowed over at Hopalong as he wandered back down the beach towards us. “Why don't you get a job?”

The two worked in tandem sometimes and it seemed like Hopalong picked up where Two-Dog left off. “Why in the world would I want to be part of the prison system? You know? Make something for somebody to do so they can stay warm and eat. Make them do that to get here. It's something they want to do. I'm not lazy, I just don't want to be a dumb shit workman and get paid shit for doing something I hate. I'd rather be drying my clothes on rocks and picking exotic mushrooms and being the barter system. I'd rather be pirating all the goods I can get my hands on. Like the old days. I've seen it.”

Work? Employment? That wasn't part of living the god-like lives they led.

Nobody knew the past better than a time-traveler. “Life was simple a hundred years ago. Kick back. People have lost their souls. In the old days there were pilgrims and holy men and raving monks. Spiritual warriors that lived outside and braved the weather. A lot of people have houses now, but very few have homes. You could have the biggest house and be just rotting inside your soul. What I'm saying is a home is not a house. And having all your reality around you and its all wealth and opulence but that doesn't mean you have anything. Your soul might be rotten. So its spiritual health inside the body which keeps us alive. Natural. People weren't meant to work or do for anybody else unless they felt like it. As in ‘that's a good thing to do’ not ‘ I gotta get up and go dig this ditch for this fucker who I don't even like’ I'd rather feast on his flesh for breakfast. Go to school, go to work, and then die! You boys need to quit your jobs. Throw off your shackles. Join thefreedom fighters.”

## Chapter 7: Harriet the Spy

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Before all this happened, I had a dream where Ricky and I were robbing a warehouse. I climbed up a tall ladder to a third story loft and was tossed a little black box down to him. A policeman came in and Ricky ran out. The cop arrested me and told me it was because I was parked illegally. Then he let me go. In the dream, I was incredibly confused. We should pay attention to our dreams – but sometimes they don't make sense until life teaches you the lessons you need.

Things were changing fast for Ricky. I wasn't sure what was happening but as a friend, you just have to be there through the confusion and eventually, everything will start to make sense. Friendship requires patience. It's why I don't have many friends.

I was confused when Ricky bought the mannequin. It was \$20 in the Lone Wolf junk shop. It was an old one from the 50's and it was stained but incredibly lifelike.

“What are you going to do with that?” I asked him.

“She's a spy,” he said. “Harriet the Spy.” And aside from a vague Judy Blume reference, he didn't tell me anything else. We took it home, dressed it in some women's clothes we found in his landlady's basement and took it – or should I say her - to bars with us. Ricky kept introducing her as Greta.

“I thought she was Harriet?”

“Shhh...she's a spy. Her name has to remain secret.”

Ricky kept her on the dance floor for at least an hour and then when someone offered \$40 for her he got completely outraged. “Do I look like a pimp?” he demanded.

And that was that. I didn't see Harriet again until one afternoon when Ricky and I cracked open a couple of beers in his apartment. There was a heaviness to the air and I knew something was coming. Finally Ricky took a deep breath and began.

“I quit my job yesterday,” he told me. “There's too many rich fucking yuppies coming in lately. They all look at me like I'm some sort of lowlife and it's been getting to me home-boy. I see them here, I see them there, I see them fucking everywhere.” The Doctor Seuss inflection came unconsciously.

“I want more from life, Jack. I want to play chess and ride bikes and hang out with women and not have to wash some yuppies dirty fucking plates. You were right to quit your job. I'm with you. Fuck being ditch diggers for the rest of our lives.”

“You don't want to live like I do, Ricky.” I told him. “Get your job back. I'm fucking miserable and I'm sick of having no money. I'm unemployable and Karen doesn't want me because of it. You don't want to live like me Ricky. Get your job back. I don't know where I'm going or what I'm doing.”

He started laughing. “You're pathetic Jack. Karen, Karen, Karen...get over it. I don't want to live like you. I want some fucking money and then I want to disappear from this Dick Cheney owned fucking country. I think the only reason Karen doesn't want you is because you've got no money. If you had a way to do the things she wants to do, I think you two would live happily ever after. Cash is King. No money, no honey.”

“Come on man. That's not fair.”

“It is what it is,” he told me. “I'll tell you one thing tough, I'm just gonna end up dying in the gutter next to Hopalong and his time traveling vacuum cleaner bro. That definitely isn't the answer.”

He took a swig of his beer and held it in his mouth. Swished it around before swallowing and paused as if he were thinking. Then “Listen homey, if you aren't into this it's cool, you just gotta

keep it to yourself. Okay? I think this will solve all of our problems and I think it's something you're going to want to do, but if not, just forget about it and go get the job I quit yesterday or something...okay?"

"What the fuck are you talking about, man?"

He took a deep breath "Dude, I hated my job, the economy sucks, I don't have any money, and I feel as if something has to change before I explode like planes smacking into towers."

He knew I could relate.

"Don't you feel like your getting too old to do what you do, I mean I'm only thirty and I want to tackle something with that fire that I already feel is dwindling within me." He made a sweeping gesture indicating his apartment as we both looked to our futures and saw...well we saw nothing great.

Rather than face the emptiness the future held for me or hear what his proposal was I dove back into ranting. "I can make everything I need. I can grow food. I'm just not allowed to exist that way. I'm not allowed to exist. I always have to pay some outside source for my very existence. I'm sick of paying. I can't even make enough to pay for life's simple pleasures. I'm ready to chuck it all and turn to a life of crime but even that's hard because no one keeps enough cash on hand to make it worth my while. I'm ready to chuck it all and take a chance. You know, like Chief Joseph said 'Fuck it, it's a good day to die.'"

Ricky laughed. "Chief Joseph never said that. It's good though. I mean I'm just dying to live Jack. Living just to die. I've got to do something before it's too late and it might already be unless we do something drastic." He pushed his hands back through his hair. I saw gray as he did it!

He finished his can of beer and cracked open another one looking at me with his black eyes. Waited for an answer. He handed me a beer as I drank the last of mine. What the hell? It couldn't hurt to hear him out, even though I seriously doubted that he had a real answer. It was probably drugs. I didn't want to have anything to do with the drug business

"Okay. Tell me, what's your big plan?" I was sure it was about drugs.

He looked at me and took a deep breath. "We're going to rob an armored car."

I started laughing and grabbed his hand."You've lost your fucking mind son."

Ricky was laughing too. I still didn't think he was serious. "Hell yeah Jack, my mind is officially gone."

## Chapter 8: A Plan So Stupid it Just Might Work

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Ricky had been thinking about it for a long time. At first, I didn't think it was possible he was serious. Over the years we'd been friends, we'd watched a lot of movies together and quite a few of them had to do with armored car robberies. That wasn't just a coincidence.

"I know you don't want to kill anybody and neither do I." This was his introduction and suddenly, I was getting worried. He went on. "The thing is if it comes down to us or them, it has to be them. You know what I mean? I mean, I think I've got this thing figured out so that we can handle everything, but if something goes wrong, I'm not going to hesitate to kill and you can't either. Can you deal with that?"

"Whoa, whoa, whoa. Ricky, are you fucking serious?"

"I'm serious as a heart-attack," he told me. Then he went on as I thought about what he was saying. If I was going to risk spending the rest of my life in prison, I needed to be willing to risk taking another life. It was simple as that. It all came down to one simple question. Was I willing to risk freedom to possibly achieve everything I wanted?

"You're serious about this? I need to know that we won't kill anyone unless we have to. Can you give me your word on that?" It was like I was watching one of those movies again. Starring me – I knew this was going to end badly, but I went on anyway – just like they do in the films.

"I know this isn't a game," Ricky said. "Still, think of it as a game. If we have to kill to do it, we lose. I don't want to kill anybody, Jack. The thing is though, if we aren't willing to take the risk – we've already lost anyway."

"It's time for a change. That's it. I don't see any other way forward. Can you do this with me Jack?"

I knew what he meant. I didn't feel like I had anything left to lose. I felt like this was the big moment my life had been leading up to. This was a moment of magnitude. This moment had duration. I was no simple meat machine. This was my moment.

"Tell me your plan, Ricky."

He had it all planned out. He'd covered every detail with the exception of where we went when we succeeded. That part was up to me. He had his getaway location planned out, but I had to come up with my own. Neither of us would know where the other went to, just in case one of us got caught. Ricky was one smart motherfucking dishwasher. Crazy, but smart. Smarter than me, that's for sure.

"This is a simple plan Jack. The guys that drive the truck, always eat at my restaurant – my old restaurant. They like their job and they like to talk about how safe the truck is. They love talking about that god-damn truck and its high-tech safeguards."

"And they told you how to rob it?" I asked with more sarcasm than I felt.

"No, don't be stupid." Ricky ignored the sarcasm or was so caught up in his own enthusiasm that he missed it. "They like to talk about their macho para-military career. See the funny thing is you would think that they would have more money in the truck at the end of the day, but that's not always true. On some days they leave with a million bucks or more. It's the days they service the ATM's at grocery stores, the mall, and fast food joints. It has to be done on a regular schedule and while they alternate the days usually, they do it just before a holiday weekend begins. They want to make sure people can consume as much as they want. That truck is going to leave with all that cash just before the next big holiday weekend. It'll leave early and these guys are going to be sleepy and complacent. Are you following me so far?"

I nodded. It was fascinating. I still couldn't see it as real though. "How many guys in the truck?"

"Just the two guys. There's a third guy that meets them at the drop off and pick up sites. He's on foot. We don't need to worry about him. One rides in front and one rides in back. Look, here's the deal man. I need you for this. I know you and I trust you completely. Only you. There's no one else I can do this with, so if you won't do it, I can't either."

"Jack, it's a lot of fucking money and anyone besides you might get overcome by the money. You know how it is in the films. People get around that much money and they lose control. But with you in this, I don't have to worry about betrayal. I know that – and that means I can focus completely on the job. See what I mean?"

"What do you want me to do Ricky? What's my part? I can't commit to this yet. I don't think I can do it at all to be honest, but I want to hear more." I couldn't help myself. I knew I should tell him he was crazy and to go get his dish washing job back, but already my adrenaline was flowing. This was the single most exciting thing that had ever happened to me. Just his asking me to be a part of it.

I already knew I was going to do it. We were going to do it. It was already too late.

"We need to know as soon as they leave and what direction they head. They're trained to spot anyone following them but if we know what direction they go in to begin with we can pick them up on the road and we'll have a good idea where they're heading. So that's the first thing. This is where it gets tricky. Have you ever met my room-mate?"

Ricky had never had a room-mate as long as I'd known him. "What room-mate? You have a room-mate?" Ricky pointed towards the alcove where the couch was.

"She's back there, behind that trunk over there. She's been watching this whole thing to see if she can trust you." I got up and walked into the alcove. Behind the trunk was the mannequin, laid out as if taking a nap. She was made of latex, cloth, and hard rubber. Harriet the spy had returned. I had forgotten all about her. I was confused.

"I forgot all about her. What are we going to do with that?"

"We don't want anyone to die? Right? But somebody has to ride their bicycle in front of that armored car so we can get it to stop. That's where Harriet's devotion to our cause comes in...she rides the bike to her death for God, Country, and Queen. She's the same size and shape as a real person and there's no way any human could hit her and not think it was real. Particularly if it's not full light yet."

"When these guys run down poor Harriet in the early morning hours, they're going to stop and see if she's okay right?" The driver will probably get out and the guy in the back will stay in. That's when we hit em. "

"So the driver gets out and we emerge from the bushes pumping rounds into the truck.. Knock out. " Ricky swung his fist and stood up as if he were a prize fighter. "And then we got em where we want em."

"So then we take the truck and go blow it open right?" I was still enjoying this...but it didn't seem real now that we had Harriet the Spy and assault rifles involved. Ricky had lost it.

"Uh-uh, no way. We have to act quick or the guy in the back starts to fuck things up. The armored car has a GPS trace inside that allows them to see if it stops moving or deviates from course. At this point we fire three armor piercing rounds through the back of the armored car with a .50 calibre rifle. Odds are we won't hit the guy in back but we're going to shake him up a bit. This is where I slap some silly putty on the side and tell him he has ten seconds to come out with his hands up or he'll get blown up. He will come out."

"What if he doesn't?" I had to know.

"Then we fire more rounds. In this case, he's more likely to get hurt...and so are we." Ricky sounded so confident about this. Poor dude had lost his mind.

"We'll shoot him with a tranquillizer when he comes out and put the money in the car and drive away. It's as simple as that." He was making the motion with his hands like he was slapping dirt or sand off of them.

"Yeah, there's just one problem," I said, finally realizing that Ricky had lost it and brought me into some absurd fantasy. I had to snap him out of it. "We don't have assault rifles, a .50-cal, or tranquillizer guns."

"Sure we do. Open the trunk." I opened the trunk expecting to see toy guns or nothing at all, but these didn't look like toys. Ricky had an arsenal.

Fuck. It was real again. Could it possibly be real? I still was sort of playing along."

So what's my part? And while we're at it...what's my cut?" I was glad I had watched enough movies to know the right words.

"You cover my ass and help me load the money. You get half." That sounded more than fair.

"What about your expenses?" I said looking down at his guns.

"I'm not worried about that. It's plenty of money." I can't explain exactly how I felt, but I can only emphasize how none of it felt real. It felt like I was playing a part on stage. There was this weird white haze around me, I can remember it when I think back to that day. It filled the room.

"What if we get caught?" I couldn't help asking.

"If we get caught, we go to prison, Jack. That's what happens when you get caught robbing an armored car. Are you in?"

"It sounds too simple Ricky" I needed reassurance.

"I know. That's' the beauty of it. It is simple" Ricky smiled and walked to his refrigerator. "Want a beer?"

"Okay," I said not sure whether it was the beer or the job I was accepting.

## Chapter 9: Karen Van

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One of the great things about Bellingham is that if you sit any place long enough, you'll run into everyone. Karen came driving up in her van. She had been renting a room from this incredibly bitchy girl who rented out the rooms in her house for enough to cover her rent. Smart sure, but bitchy and shallow. She was the kind of girl who put fake Native American artefacts all over her house and then get a boyfriend from the reservation just to make them look authentic. Karen hated her.

In any event, that was one of the things I loved about Karen. She wasn't one to sit around and wait to see what life would do to her. Instead, she had been walking down the street that morning and seen an old beat up green VW with this sign on it.

"This is Turtle. She runs well. She gets you where you want to go. She is a great home. She costs \$500 which is what I need to get a plane ticket."

She'd met the girl, given her the \$500, gone to the DMV to change over the title, and then...she drove down to Stuart's coffeehouse where I was enjoying a bottomless cup of coffee on a sunny day. As for the bitchy room-mate – Karen's words are probably the best way to describe that situation.

"I put my clothes, my books, and a pocket knife I'd gotten from my granddad in the van and left the rest of it there for her. She won't be getting rent from me this month and since rent is due in just a few days, it looks like bitchy-Pocohontas is going to actually have to pay her share this month."

If it had been a dream, she would have shown up and whispered to me 'I love you so much' and then we would have sped off on some hippy bus adventure together and there never would have been any need for an armored car robbery. Unfortunately, life doesn't work like that. Instead, I had just written a bad check to cover my rent and had about \$6 in my pocket to last until whenever some random ship came in. I kept hoping some lost relative would send me money for Christmas, but no matter how many times I checked, there was nothing new in my mailbox.

She didn't want to run off to explore the world together, but I was happy she wanted to show me her van. After, I'd inspected her cool but rather run-down new home, I invited her to sit with me for a cup of coffee. There we sat next to Stuart's listening to the dance class next door and watching ourselves in the reflections of the windows across the road. We could hear the dance instructor barking out orders like a drill instructor.

It was perfect. I could see her in the windows sitting across from me with that cup in her hand. My perfect beauty and in the reflected image I looked like some happy dude with a few days beard growth. Not tall, not fat, not short, not thin – brown hair, pleasant to look at but not so much so that anyone would ever look twice. My green wool sweater and messy hair were all that set me apart from everyone else. That and the fact that she was sitting there with me. I imagined some kid looking at us and thinking we were a happy hippy couple on our way to some adventure. How I wished that was true.

She invited me to dinner. We usually go Dutch but I didn't want to tell her I was broke so I figured I would see if I could milk a last meal from my debit card. As usual, I didn't consider the consequences if I couldn't. She wanted to get sushi in a new little boutique restaurant down town. I cringed but agreed. And then...then we had one of the better evenings I can remember. I forgot about everything as we laughed and joked together. At the end, she offered to pay but some stupid part of me insisted that I pay. She said we should go Dutch but I refused. Then, of course my debit card didn't work. It was a stupid move really. I knew that my account was overdrawn but I had hoped their credit card machine wouldn't know. It did. She paid and the guy gave us too much change.

I don't know if I would have told him or not, but she was so honest. Of course she told him. We

walked back to Stuarts. She didn't seem to mind the thing with my card but I had humiliated myself. If I had been able to get over myself, it probably would have been the perfect night, maybe the perfect life...

In any event, on the way back to her bus we passed by some sort of party in one of the old store fronts on Railroad Avenue.

"Let's crash it." She said. I was game. Anything to escape my own self-recrimination. I hoped it would be a wedding party but instead, we found a religious event where we were handed bad coffee and grilled cheese sandwiches without anyone caring we were gate crashers. In fact, the grilled cheese were forced on us even when we said that we'd just eaten. They seemed incredibly happy to have us there.

A big banner read "International Student Night" but no one seemed to be from anywhere but America that I could tell. They all seemed too old to be students. Leave it to the Christians to organize an "international student night" for a bunch of old American Christians. That was why they were so happy to see us, we were the closest thing to students at their party.

It was painful but we managed to escape before too long, both laughing and now really enjoying each others company. I suppose I have to tell you about why we weren't together. She was my one true love. She was soft, gentle, childlike, and had those beautiful luminous eyes.

There had been a time when we were dating and I remember one particularly wonderful night, when she read me bedtime stories and we shared the most beautiful and intense night of lovemaking. That's what it had been...love making. It was like no sex that I'd ever experienced. In our passion, we skipped the condom. Three weeks later she said she was going to go visit her parents. I didn't see her for three months. She'd gone to her parents, then she came back and was busy with work, then she was back to her parent's place in the town of Concrete. She always had an excuse. She was busy, she had to work, she had plans. I had no idea what I had done, but I had known as it happened that my seed had reached her egg. I didn't say anything to her about it, but I dreamt about it for those entire three months.

Then, on a windy March day, I came home to find her crying on my doorstep. I knew before she told me. I hoped she was there to tell me she was with child and ask me to marry her. I knew better though...it wasn't what she had envisioned for herself. She had already gotten an abortion and from that moment on, we sort of put all things romantic behind us. It just happened. We never actually broke up. It just sort of...stopped.

And then we'd have nights like that one with sushi and party crashing. "I'm going to Concrete tomorrow" she told me. It was like a bad flashback, but then she added "Do you want to come?"

Of course I did. Concrete sits on the edge of the Cascade Mountain Range. It's a farming town and has a huge water tower in the middle of the tiny town that says, without any irony at all "Concrete." She told me that Robert Deniro had made a movie there once and that was when they painted the name of the town on the sign. She said that Deniro had insisted on it.

Her relatives were funny people. I'd met some of them before in passing but they always acted as if they'd known me forever. To them, I was just another member of the family. Her dad told the same story about Deniro even after he'd asked if I knew it and Karen said that she'd already told me. He told us Deniro was an alcoholic and had attended AA meetings in the town but that someone had spread the word and the entire population had shown up. Nothing is anonymous in a small town.

Her brother had smashed his thumb with a hammer and to relieve the pressure from the blood vessel he had crushed he took a soldering iron and tried to burn a hole through his thumbnail. He was in more pain then ever, having stopped short of his goal. Finally, her father had convinced him to go through with it and was holding his hand on the a work bench in the garage while her mom heated up a needle to red hot with an acetylene torch. She held the needle in a pair of vice grips like a nurse preparing a scalpel. We gathered around like hungry kids at a feast and watched hoping for

blood to squirt out in a stream of gruesomeness. Her mom handed the vice grips to her dad and with a quick motion, he poked the needle through her brother's thumbnail. There was no squirting blood – I think we were all disappointed.

They were a comfortable family of foul mouthed farmers. Quite the opposite of Karen, but that made sense. She was like a sophisticate among them. They put me in a spare bedroom for the night and that was that. Nothing anonymous in a small family either. Breakfast was a weird hodgepodge of dirty jokes, banter, and huevos rancheros. I looked under the table at breakfast to see if they were all wearing big red shoes. Nope, they weren't secretly clowns masquerading as farmers.

Ricky's proposition and my love for her were weighing on me equally. Was he right? Was it just money that kept us apart? Should I bring up uncomfortable things from our dysfunctional past. The tension level rose in the car and before we got to Bellingham, I knew that we, I, would have to bring up our most painful memories.

She had once told me that she had gotten the abortion because she was sure that I would have abandoned her if I'd have found out that she was pregnant. I hadn't known what to say to that.

Finally, on that trip home from Concrete, my emotions burst through the dam holding them back. "How in the world can you you feel like I abandoned you? You were the one that left. I tried to get in touch with you. You wouldn't even see me." I was angry. Trying really hard to contain myself.

"Yeah, I guess I knew that you would have just told me to handle it." She was crying now. Just like that."You'd told me just a few days before that I was free to go if I ever wanted to."

"Are you serious? I only wanted you to know I wasn't trying to trap you, I supported you in whatever you decided! I wasn't trying to drive you away, I was trying to let you know that I love you. You know, if you love something set it free...and if it loves you it will return...but you never came back."

"I didn't know what to do...I didn't want to trap you either...I love...I love the way you live with no attachments and I didn't want you to think I was trying to end that by getting pregnant! I thought you would hate me. You said you never wanted to be tied down." She pulled the van over as the impact of her words hit me. It was me. I did it.

I was crying too. She grabbed my hand and we sat on the side of the highway crying without being able to explain anything to each other in words. It was my fault. Fuck.

Right there, I should have made the decision to say no to Ricky. I should have told him that I was going to get a job, asked Karen to marry me, and that would have been that. The thing was, that memory of my debit card being refused wouldn't go away. If I wanted her, I needed to be able to take care of her. Otherwise, I was going to lose her all over again.

## Chapter 10: The End of My Resistance

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Over the next few days, she didn't answer or return my calls. It was the same thing all over again. I sold my tools, my TV, and my computer. I managed to get enough money to pay my rent. I was left with about \$200 and an empty apartment.

A big storm had arrived with gale force winds and plenty of rain. It was the kind of storm that isn't too uncommon in Bellingham, but that doesn't happen every winter either. Not a hundred year storm, but more of an every-other-year storm. It meant it was a good time to be indoors. I couldn't sit in my empty apartment so I decided to hit the bars.

Ricky's proposal floated in front of me with the proposal that I wanted to give Karen but couldn't. At this point, I know that I was going a little bit mad. I was avoiding Ricky and trying to contact Karen and both things made me feel more alone than I'd ever felt before. My loneliness led me from Boundary Bay Brewery to the 3B Tavern where I tried unsuccessfully to pick up every woman that would talk to me.

They could smell my desperation and none of them wanted anything to do with me. Women have a super sensitivity to desperation. I kept drinking and kept feeling more and more alone. The rock and roll bar next door was my next stop and it was in there that I met a couple of guys who were bingeing as much as I was. Already completely inebriated, I was elated to find such great drinking buddies and in my intoxication didn't notice their looks of conspiratorial significance.

One of the guys suggested we move along to yet another bar and I agreed. We were all looking for women. Or so I thought as we ran down allies to avoid the rain and laughed about how wet and drunk we were. The next bar had nothing but a few regulars sipping beers and that was when one of my new friends reached behind the bar and grabbed a bottle of booze. Turning to me and the other guy, he yelled "Run!"

We all laughed as we ran down alleyways drinking from that stolen bottle and finally, we reached their car. Sitting inside, we passed that bottle around until...well, until the world went black. I remember seeing the first light of the day and then...

The next thing I knew I was being shoved into a jail cell and told to shut up. I was freezing and soaking wet.

"Shut up," the guard said every time I asked a question. They threw me in the cell and tossed me a wool blanket. I shivered as I lay there trying to get some much needed sleep and escape the nasty remains of my drunk and the hangover. There's no place worse than that nasty point when you are still drunk and hungover at the same time. No place worse unless you are in a freezing drunk tank with no idea why you are there.

They finally pulled me out to take my mugshot and confirm my information. The charge, I was relieved to finally find out, was public drunkenness and not something more significant. That fact, buoyed my spirits considerably and as a result, since I was still pretty drunk, I kept telling other prisoners to smile as I saw the mug shot photographer's finger begin to press on the button.

I was reprimanded for having too much fun before finally being thrown back in the drunk tank. I was given a peanut butter and grape jelly sandwich and some watered down kool-aid before finally being released. I asked them where my wallet was and was informed there had been nothing at all in my pockets when they found me lying on the side walk that morning.

I figured the guys from the bar had rolled me when I passed out in their back seat. Or maybe someone had gone through my pockets as I lay on the side walk. There was no way to know.

My money was gone, my worthless debit card and driver's license were gone, my phone was gone, and I was being fined \$500 which they said I could either pay at the courthouse or contest. There was no way of contesting it. My resistance to Ricky's plan disappeared just like that – I

wonder what would have happened if Karen would have returned my calls?

## Chapter 11: The Sinking of the Lusitania

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My first destination after being released from jail was the bumfire beach. I didn't need to be pitied and the bums had all been through the same thing so I knew it would be no big deal to them. In fact, if they didn't ignore it, they would laugh about it. As I arrived, Hopalong, the little time traveling bum, was telling stories of how he lit his Berkeley apartment on fire with the time machine in the 1960's and lost everything he owned and loved.

But, like all good bum stories, it worked out alright because he woke up in Arkansas and was a farmer in 1888 for twelve years until he met Nikola Tesla and convinced him to make the part he needed to fix the time machine (it seemed slightly unreliable.) I was held in awe as he talked about why the vacuum was the simplest way to slide through the time stream. I can't begin to recreate the conversation but what I do remember was the part where he compared memories to a bucket full of marbles.

“You've got big ones, little ones, and ugly ones but the big ones are the ones your hand naturally gravitates too and of course, sometimes if one is exceptionally rough or smooth, then it stands out. We call those qualities magnitude in time travel parlance and it's easier to travel to places that have high magnitude.”

“Why Arkansas in 1888? What was special about that time.”

“Oh, that's cause there was a confluence of enterprising merchants and carpetbaggers with the aristocratic families of the deep south. Bill Clinton's great-grandmother was my girlfriend. I got her pregnant. I'm actually Bill's great-grandpa.”

“And what about now?”

“Well, you're all here ain't ya? That counts for something.” Somehow it made me feel important.

My clothes were still wet and as I sat there, I noticed that everyone else was wet too. The rain had stopped about the time I was getting picked up by the police but there was something amiss at the beach. If I hadn't of been so self absorbed in my own problems, I would have noticed right away.

“What happened here?” I asked. The beach was littered with debris from boats that had sank. Dinghies were smashed against the rocks. No sign of anyone. A mast stuck out of the water from where a boat had gone down. A tiny piece of a \$60,000 catamaran also poked out of its watery grave.

Two-Dog looked at me as if I had asked the stupidest question of them all.

“What happened?” he bellowed. “Mother Nature tried to kill us last night...that's what happened? You think we're just sitting here in our underwear for fun?” He gestured out to where the bow of Hopalong's boat pointed toward the sky. His own boat was still floating but noticeable lower in the water and with a fresh hole in the hull.

While I was figuring out my own drama hadn't been the most dramatic event of the night, Hopalong began to tell his story. I'd missed the beginning but it was easy enough to fill in the gaps.

“...I decided to stay in the water this time. Last time when the skiff sank, I got out and got hypothermia real bad. So this time I stayed in the water for a while. I saw Two Dog on his boat and decided to float on over there.”

“I don't care how many times the safety people say to kick your boots off when you're in the water but that's all fine and good if you got another pair of boots or a warm dry pair waiting for ya, it's a little harder when they're the only boots you got. So I floated on over to Two Dog's boat thinking I'd grab a hold of it. It wasn't easy getting there with fifteen-foot seas crashing all over. Two Dog saw me and threw me a life ring and just as he does his boat stands up straight in the air on a swell.”

“It kinda sucked me over that way.... Then it started coming down so I sort of shoved and kicked off of it to get out from under it. Then it starts to stand up again and I thought the hell with this. So I catch the ring and then it becomes real calm for a minute or two. The storm God letting me and Two Dog have a moment to talk. We agreed that we was both scared shitless and he says he’s gonna stay on the boat and I’m gonna head to shore....then his boat gets lifted up again and I’m trying to get to the shore and out of the way.”

I looked back and saw Two Dog standing near twenty feet above the water in his vertical boat. Cursing the weather and the Gods. Somehow I got to shore and thought I’d run to Gordon’s about a half mile away. Well there was no way I could make it there. I was shaking so bad I could barely stand and I went to the nearest apartment house I saw.”

I looked at Hopalong in his wet coat from the rescue mission. Gimp arm tucked up. Bearded face and patched eye. Maybe he was a time traveler. Hopalong had a knowing way about him at the same time that he gave up something like you get from an old pirate.

“So I go and I’m pounding on the door and no one’s answering and they were kind enough to call 911 for me. I just kept pounding their door then the window telling myself ‘I am not gonna die’ I saw the glass just curving in. I must of scared the hell out of em”

“I never saw a person though...so finally I said to hell with this and I went wondering around the corner and find a laundry room. It was adjacent to the apartment I’d been pounding on, so I pounded on the wall so they would know where I was. Then I’m looking in my pockets for quarters so I can put my clothes in the dryer and right then the firemen show up in their big coats. It was a stormy crazy night so they were ready “

“What’s the matter?” He asks me. “My boat sank and I’m freezing”, ‘Ain’t you the guy I picked up two weeks ago when that skiff sank?’ ‘Yeah,’ I said ‘We gotta quit meeting like this.’ So I let 911 pay for it instead of spending my quarters on that dryer. You know, you never know what the hell it’s all about until that moment when you know you might die and that’s the truth.”

Hopalong’s story did more to make me quit feeling sorry for myself than anything else could have. I wondered what kind of an idiot had originally named that sail boat Lusitania...obviously it meant she was destined to be sunk. That's the thing about destiny. There's nothing you can do about it.

## Chapter 12: Shit the Bed

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The time had come to give Ricky the green light. When I found him, he was sitting down at Stuart's looking forlorn and utterly depressed.

"Okay," I said. "Let's do it." It was almost Christmas and I figured those armored cars must be loaded with cash to feed the shopping frenzy.

Ricky immediately brightened up. "That's great! "I was just thinking that it was all stupid and I should go get my job back. You saved me, Jack."

And with that, we went into planning mode. Our first mission was to get potato burritos from Casa Que Pasa. That had nothing to do with the planning, but there's something comforting about a burrito and I think it's fair to say we both needed some cheering up. Maybe it's the way a burrito is wrapped up. All the ingredients rolled together and covered up with a white sheet. It seems like I've spent my whole life alone sometimes and I just wish that instead of being a solitary bean I could lose myself amidst the salsa, guacamole, lettuce, and cheese of life. Become a part of something bigger than I'm capable of by myself. Or maybe I just liked the way they tasted. Either way, from this point forward, we were two beans in the same burrito.

While we were sitting there enjoying our meal Big Billy walked in. Big Billy was the kind of guy I hated all my life. Big, dark haired, handsome, booming voice, muscular. A lady killer. The kind of guy that never even has to try with women, they just fell at his feet dreaming of looking up into his Tom Cruise face and begging him to kiss them. He was the kind of guy that had no idea how easy he had it and would carp and complain about his dilemma of figuring out how to cheat on all five of the beautiful women he was dating at once while he asked other guys why they weren't getting laid. We watched as he grabbed the phone from some little guy who was talking to his girlfriend on it while he and Big Billy waited in line to place their orders.

Not bothering to ask who was on the other end, Big Billy just started talking "You gotta shit the bed. Shit the bed baby. Get up and have a nice day. Shit the bed."

The little guy, obviously a friend or tag-along admirer of Big Billy, was none too happy and begged for the phone back.

"Come on Billy, that's my girl...." but Big Billy just ignored him.

"Shit the bed. Gotta have a great day. Shit the bed. C'mon, say it. Shit the bed!" He kept saying it until finally the girl either said it or hung up – at that point, he handed the phone back.

"Shit the bed, motherfucker," Ricky said it to me in the kind of conversational tone another person might have said "Great weather we're having here."

"Shit the bed," I said back with determination. It was going to be a great day after all.

A slightly older blonde woman walked in next. She was one of those ladies that refuses to believe she's getting older and so even though she's on the wrong side of forty, she dresses like she's in her twenties.

"That gal's name is Sarah," Ricky said. "She's sucked every cock in town."

"Not mine."

He laughed, "At least not that you know of."

"There's a funny story about her and that guy Mario that used to work at my restaurant," he said.

"You know how Mario was always looking to get laid but couldn't because he was such a creepy fat fucker? Well Sarah had been hanging out in the back alley for a couple of days offering to suck every guy off that came back for a smoke break. She asked for cigarettes, beer, money, you name it.

She just wanted to suck them dicks." Ricky was laughing.

"So anyway Mario had been away for a couple of days while she'd been back there. He comes back to work and is cooking one afternoon and goes back there for a smoke break. He comes back in all excited and tells me he's just met the girl of his dreams. All of us in the kitchen are wondering if he means the blow-job queen in the back but none of us says anything because we want to hear what he's going to say next."

I could see her face now. She looked like she had been through the ringer.

Ricky went on with his story. "He told us about how he went back there for a smoke and this gal wandered up and asks him if he can spare a dollar. He could be a pretty nice guy at times and gave it to her and she moved in to grab his dick at which point old Mario the romantic moves her hand away and started kissing her. Then he talks to her for a while, tells her to go around to the front and he's going to cook her a special burrito."

"Well, she couldn't resist that offer, so that's when he comes into the kitchen and tells us about his new love. None of us could bear to tell him it was like he was sucking all our dicks." Ricky was laughing and shaking his head. I was pretty creeped out but fascinated and waited for him to go on.

"So anyway, Mario is running up the alley and buying flowers for her and buying her drinks and dinner and saying how he's going to take her out for a special night when he gets off shift cause she's out there waiting for him. Love at first sight he says. We all sort of wanted to tell him at this point but how do you do that? You know... So anyway Mario gets off shift and they go out to some fancy place he's thinking of."

"I guess he was really trying to impress her because he left that old truck and took her in a taxi. They get there and he realizes he left his wallet at work. He asks Sarah if she's got any money and she says no, but she'll take care of the ride. 'Come back here and I'll pay you' she says to the cabbie who obviously recognized her. So the driver comes back and sits on one side of her with Mario on the other and she proceeds to suck his dick with poor Mario sitting there in horror but unable to say anything or believe what he's seeing."

"They get out and he tells her he's gotta use the head and has the same cabbie give him a ride back here. He comes in and tells me all this while the whole kitchen is laughing and at the end he actually asks 'Is there something I should know about her?' and at that point we had to tell him. I think he'll never trust another woman again." We were both laughing but it was so fucking tragic I wanted to cry. No wonder he went to Alaska.

The poor guy had only been looking for love.

## Chapter 13: The Setup

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Christmas was coming soon and we had a few details to work out before doing the job. We'd started referring to it as 'doing the job' or 'going to work'.

We'd decided that the weekend December 22nd was the best bet since Christmas fell on a Monday that year and the last minute shopping would be highest on the weekend before it. Maybe that was amateur thinking, that's what the guys in jail tell me. They say that the best time to do it would have been right after Thanksgiving or just before New Years. So, maybe we were too slow getting started or in too much of a rush.

The truth was, we both were in a rush. I didn't have money for January's rent, which, now that I think about it, is a stupid reason to commit a crime. I was also suffering emotional trauma from the hope I'd felt for a few days about Karen and I – and then the despair that followed when she disappeared.

We'd been riding our bicycles everywhere the past few weeks. It wasn't that we wanted to get in shape for the heist so much as we were scoping out all of Bellingham for the best possible spot to do the job. There were plenty of spots where we thought the car would be, but there were only two places that we knew it would go for sure. The bank it would pick up the money from in the morning and Bellis Fair Mall.

The route they took to or from Bellis Fair Mall from the bank would lead them down Cornwall Avenue. We were hoping that Bellis Fair was the first destination since it was where the bulk of the cash would be staying. We wanted to catch them before Bellis Fair. There was a chance, though, that they would go the other direction and not come down Cornwall until the truck was empty and they were on the way home.

That would mean we had to wait until the next holiday weekend. Something neither of us wanted to happen, but had to factor in since robbing an empty armored vehicle was an exercise in futility. The spot we picked was in a sparse commercial area where there were a few businesses and a few old 1940's craftsman style bungalows surrounding the wide expanse of Cornwall Park. There was a big grassy hill we could park behind and use as a staging and starting point for Harriet the Spy Bicyclist. It was early enough there wouldn't be people around – at least that was what we hoped.

Harriet was ready. The guns were ready. Our plan was ready. I'd put my getaway plan together on the fly – it wasn't great, but it would work – I hoped. The Alaska Ferry left at 9:00 am the morning of the job. I would take my share, buy a ticket, and then...go to Amtrak where I already had a ticket and catch the train to Vancouver, British Columbia. From there I would take the ferry over to Victoria, B.C. and wait for the heat to die down. It may not have been the best plan, but I figured they would be looking for someone heading out and while they searched the ferry for me, the train would get me to Canada and from there I could relax and let the drama unfold as it would.

I asked Ricky if he wanted to grab a beer and talk about our escape plans. He said no.

“Keep your escape to yourself, Jack. This is more of a bumfire occasion, I think anyway. Don't you?”

That suited me fine. It was Solstice. December 21st. Shortest day and longest night of the year. The weather was cold but clear and it was the kind of Pacific Northwest day that makes it clear why there is no place better in the world. I bought a pint of whiskey at the bottle shop and we walked down past the junked rail road cars and the Fairhaven boat works.

Two Dog's boat had sank after all, not a surprise given the big hole in her hull. The Toms had built a hut on the beach out of the scraps of debris washed up on the shore or salvaged from their former homes. They already had a big fire going and we sat there passing the whiskey.

The truck hadn't serviced the ATM's all week. The plan was just like Ricky had said, it was all

pretty simple but with The Toms there, neither of us wanted to go into details. It was now or never.

“We're going to have to wake up before four o'clock tomorrow morning if we want to be there before the job starts,” Ricky said.

“You two meat-heads working as slaves again?” Hopalong asked. “I thought you'd finally ended all of that. What kind of work are you doing?”

“It's a Christmas job,” I said. “Just something to earn a few bucks before the New Year.”

“Oh, I guess that's okay then,” Hopalong mumbled. “If you get a chance to find me a vacuum tube, I think I finally figured out how to make 'er work again.”

“You'll never see me work,” Two Dog bellowed which set Riley and Odin to howling. Two Dog howled with them and pretty soon we were all just standing there on the beach howling like madmen. Which, now that I think about it, we most certainly were.

## Chapter 14: The Heist

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I wish there were some way to slow down the film and put drama into the actual crime like they do in all the films. If I were some Hollywood screen writer, I would show the two guys that worked for the armored car getting up that morning or having a tender pre-Christmas dinner the night before with their families. I would write about Anna, the driver's wife and how she had a premonition and begged him not to go to work that day and about how Frank, the guy in the back had just learned that he had cancer and was suffering through the holidays wondering why he was 45-years-old and still alone.

I would have a sequence in the armored car company ready room and show Frank loading the bullets into his gun one at a time, wiping each one of them with a soft cloth. The driver, Nathan would be sort of jolly and carefree, slapping people on the backs and wishing everyone Merry Christmas. The Captain or Sergeant or whatever he is would give a briefing talking about just how much money they were to get from the bank, why it was necessary to be extra cautious, and how it was a day like any other day but with extra guards at the pick-up and drop-off locations to make sure everything went fine. I would show Frank fiddling with his gun and Nathan smiling a big jolly smile. I would build up the tension.

Then, I would cut to me and Ricky, loading things into an old spray painted black pick-up Ricky had gotten from somewhere that looked suspiciously like the truck Mario the cook had supposedly sold to a guy in Eastern Washington. Both of us dressed in dark clothes, both carrying odd things out in the early morning as dogs ran through the alley in front of his over the top of the garage apartment. Both of us with big plastic 7-11 mugs of coffee and I would try to communicate the nervous energy that filled the truck's cab as we went toward the Bellis Fair Mall.

I would perhaps add a little bit of drama by showing the truck tires spinning on wet grass as we tried to back it up and behind the hill to get it out of site from the road. Then I would cut back to the ready room and the guy announcing the route. Then back to us nervously arguing about the best way to send Harriet and second guessing whether or not we had guessed the wrong route. Then back to the ready room where the guys are now heading out. Then back to us, maybe have me looking at that big ticket from my trip to jail or fingering a love letter from Karen. Then back to the guys driving. Then back to us, Ricky looking at me suspiciously while he sucked on a cigarette.

The thing is....that would all be Hollywood bullshit. I can only write about what I know and leave the rest to the professional bullshit artists that turn this thing into a film later.

We left the bumfire without getting too drunk the night before. The Toms drank the lion's share of the whiskey and were arguing about the details of the night their boats sank in the storm. Two-Dog now insisted that he had jumped in and rescued Hopalong and Hopalong swore on his dear departed mother's grave that he'd stayed on his boat until she was completely submerged 'like any good Captain worth his salt' – they were master storytellers working in tandem. If someone asks me who should write the screenplay for this, I'm going to send them to The Toms.

I don't think Ricky or I slept well, but at 4:00 am we were both up and by 4:30 we were sitting on that hill both smoking and wandering if we had picked the right day. At 5:00 am I was starting to wonder if we'd picked the wrong day and at 5:15 am, Ricky hit me on the shoulder and said "Let's get her ready."

We each had pistols strapped on our hips and Ricky set up the .50-Cal on the hill as if he were getting ready to assassinate President Kennedy. The rifle had one of those tripods to add extra balance and support to the sniper. He'd bought it through mail order. The ammunition came from a local gun shop. All the magazines said it could go straight through an armored car, an engine block, or a row of five houses. We hoped it was true.

We both had ski masks to cover our faces and wore all black clothing. It was still dark and I

looked up at the star studded sky through the branches of a dead tree. There was no cold sweat, just cold. It was December and we were ten miles from Canada – leave the cold sweat for the film makers.

We strapped on the bicycle in those old lady clothes. There were so many things that could go wrong. The truck might not come, the truck might not hit the bicycle, the bicycle might swerve and crash into the bushes, there could be an extra guard following in a car. The money might not be there. The whole thing was idiotic. At 6:00 am, I was ready to call the whole thing off.

“Ricky...” I said.

“There it is.” It was too late. The truck was coming up Cornwall, no car following it. The night was dark but the street lights were bright enough there was no mistaking it. It was the truck. The armored truck.

It was time to send Harriet to her death. Ricky stood on the hill holding her like a father helping his daughter ride without training wheels for the first time.

“Are you ready, Homeboy?” Ricky grinned.

“Fuck.” That was all I could say.

He gave Harriet a shove and she rode straight and fast like she had been training with Lance Armstrong and taking his performance enhancing drugs. Ricky's timing was spot-on and she rode directly into the path of the oncoming armored truck. By the time the driver saw her, it was too late for both of them. The truck plowed right over her and at that point, I wondered if it was going to stop.

Later, in the testimony, he swore he was looking back out the side window to see what he'd hit which caused him to swerve into the other lane. An old VW bus had appeared from out of nowhere going the opposite direction and the two vehicles looked like they were going to collide head on but at the last minute, the bus veered towards where we were and rolled over into the ditch by the side of the road.

Now, the truck stopped. The driver jumped out of the armored vehicle and he ran around to the back of the truck while I started the pick-up and raced it to where they had come to a halt. Ricky was lying on the grassy knoll and pointing the rifle at the truck waiting for me to get there.

The driver was halfway to the VW by the time I reached him. I pointed the gun out the window.

“Get the fuck on the ground, motherfucker.” I don't know why the f-word is so suited for criminal demands, but it just works. Not that I was thinking of anything at all besides the adrenaline rushing through me.

Harriet lay where she had fallen. A noble soldier forgotten as soon as her purpose was fulfilled.

Shots rang out and a series of 3-inch holes appeared in the side of the armored truck. We didn't even have to do the silly putty trick. The guy in the back came out with his hands high.”

“Drop your weapon on the ground,” I screamed at him. “Get down. Now!” I was out of the truck. “Wait, come over here, next to him. Now, on the ground!”

He came without argument. “Now, face down motherfuckers. Hands behind your backs.”

Ricky was there now, throwing the rifle into the back of the pick-up. “Do it now assholes. Do it or die.” They both did as he said. The f-word sounded better from him. It really works. “If you fucking move, he's going to blow your fucking heads off.”

Ricky got in the pick-up and drove it to the back of the armored car. He jumped inside and started tossing bags and boxes into the back of the pick-up. I would guess it took him three minutes at the most. It was the longest three minutes of my life as I stood there pointing my pistol at those poor guys. We really should have used the tranquilizer guns but we'd decided there was too much that

could go wrong.

I heard the truck back up and the sound of Ricky throwing the bicycle and Harriet into the back with the money and the rifles. All of my attention was on those two security guards and it took everything in my power to ignore the VW that lay overturned in the ditch. Just laying there. Six minutes, that's how long it took for Ricky to get everything cleaned up. Six mother-fucking minutes.

The longest six-minutes of my life as I ignored that VW. It looked like Karen's. I couldn't look up to verify it so I walked around the two men lying on the ground so that they were between me and the van. It was Karen's. I was sure of it. Ricky was back with the truck. He picked up both men's guns and threw them in the back of the pick-up.

They landed on clear plastic bags of tightly wrapped bills. Everything had gone perfect. Ricky must have seen that it was Karen's van too.

"Let's go, man. We don't have time." The truck was there. It was time to go. He must have known it was her. I'm sure of it. I didn't say anything. "Dude, I'm leaving right now...get in the car...don't you motherfuckers think of moving a fucking muscle!" It was the first time I'd ever heard panic in his voice. "Get in the god-damn truck, Jack."

It had been so fucking easy.

"Go," I told him. "Get the fuck out of here." I turned and started towards the overturned van. It was Karen. I knew it was Karen.

"That bitch is fucking you again, man...you got to three...one...two..." I was still heading towards her van. "...three." I was sprinting to the upside down VW and heard the truck gun off. That was the last time I saw Ricky.

It was the stupidest thing I've ever done. I could have gotten away. I was clear. I was almost to the bus as she climbed out of the passenger door window which faced towards the sky. She was fine. The crash had knocked her unconscious for a few minutes but now, against all odds, she was fine. I tore the mask off my face as her head and arms emerged from the window.. She was okay! She was alive!

I forgot everything else as she saw me. "Jack!!!" she screamed it. At the time, I remember wondering why she was being so dramatic. All that shit going on and my brain said "Why is she screaming?"

I felt the arms go around my waist as the shoulder of the driver pounded into me. He'd been an all star line backer at the University of Washington and apparently, never forgot how to tackle the guy with the ball. I hit the ground hard. His fists hit me harder than his shoulder had. He'd been a golden gloves boxer too. Lucky me.

It was no contest. The police arrived a few minutes later, I was already unconscious. Ricky was gone. Karen was okay. I was apprehended. It was the stupidest thing I've ever done. I don't regret it for a second. It was my moment. It was my salvation.

## Chapter 15: The Aftermath

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The hardest thing about going to jail, going through the trial, and sitting behind bars isn't the endless questions about the money, Ricky, or why we did it. The hardest thing is the same thing that the hardest thing always is. It's Karen.

When they found out she was my girlfriend, they brought her in. I know, she wasn't my girlfriend – but that's what all the papers and lawyers called her. You see, they had a hard time believing that she was just there by coincidence. At first they tried to pin her as an accomplice and man was she pissed at me.

In fact, she was pissed at both me and Ricky and I'm happy to say that it was her that finally gave his name as my partner in crime. Not me. I didn't break. I stayed true and gave him as much time as I could to get away. The police couldn't find a scrap of evidence that merited holding Karen, but they questioned her mercilessly. It was three days before she said that it had probably been my best friend Ricky that was my accomplice. I'm proud she waited that long.

Usually, the press isn't told how much money gets stolen, but this time, those two guards from the armored car were loving their moment in the spotlight. The media ate up their stories of courage under fire. They showed the big holes from the .50-cal, and talked about how Nathan would have probably gone on to play in the NFL if it hadn't of been for a knee injury his senior year in college. Frank's cancer came out too and when those two guys were on the camera, they forgot everything they weren't supposed to talk about. They were heroes for catching me even though they'd let Ricky get away with more than a million dollars.

When the Feds went to Ricky's they found everything exactly like we'd left it. I don't think he went back there. I think he hit go, collected his money, and moved on to Park Place while I went directly to jail. They had no leads until they went down to the beach to question The Toms.

“I think I saw a truck like that get on the ferry to Alaska that morning,” Hopalong told the cameras. “If I were him though, I woulda used my time machine to go back to 1968, course, without that tube I need...hey, can I see that camera...?”

Two-Dog simply growled at the camera as he was leading his dogs away. “Get away from me with your foul technology.” The image was shown again and again and then went viral on Youtube, which was pretty funny when you thought about what he was saying.

The police made inquiries in Alaska and found the truck after two weeks. It was up in Juneau. The cook, Mario was driving it around and claimed his buddy had sent it up for him on the ferry. Apparently, he'd actually paid Ricky to send it up but he was pissed about the spray can paint job. Mario too was taken for questioning but had a rock solid alibi, he was cooking on the day of the robbery at his new restaurant 'The Hangar on the Wharf' – no one mentioned whether the cops who questioned him had bagels or not. Nobody bothered to ask if he missed Sarah. Hell, she might have gone to Alaska with him.

Further inquiries showed the truck had been shipped, not driven by anyone. Ricky hadn't been a passenger on the ferry after all. Nobody knew where the hell Ricky was. They all thought that I knew where he and the money were, but I didn't. That's when the cops started really beating me.

That's when the endless speculations and rumors began about why I did it, where Ricky was hiding with the money, and how Karen was involved. I think it was only then she decided to come see me. She came, she saw my face, and she saw what was happening. She was the first one to ask the right question.

“Why didn't you go with him?” It was amazing no one else had bothered. The way the guards told it, they had stopped me from getting in the truck, but the truth was, the truck was already gone when they stopped me. I chose not to go.

I said the only thing I could. "I love you."

That was the moment I won the prize I'd been after all along. From that moment on, she was mine and to tell the truth, she was all I ever really wanted anyway. I wouldn't be in prison forever and like I said, she was the reason I did it anyway. It was all Karen's fault.

## Epilogue

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### *Advance to Go (Collect \$200) - Charles Brace Darrow Instructions on the Community Chest Card in the game of Monopoly (1931)*

Jack Corgan was lots of things, but he wasn't a lot more things than he was. He wasn't brutal, he wasn't brave, he wasn't a tough guy, and he wasn't stupid. He was a man in love. He was a man with everything he'd ever wanted even though he sat day after day in a prison cell with everyone asking him the same questions.

“Where’s the money?” That was the million dollar question. Literally, the million dollar question. The funny part was that while all the cops, his friends, the media – everyone – while they all focused on that question, they were missing out on the more important things that he could have told them.

As for Ricky Thibideaux, they never found him. He went down in the books as a D.B. Cooper for the new millennium. When Jack learned they knew about Ricky, he made a deal with the prosecution. He agreed to tell everything he knew about his friend, about the robbery, and about where Ricky might have gone in return for a lighter sentence. It turned out Ricky had been smart to keep his getaway plans a secret.

Without the money and without Ricky, the trial was speedy. Jack's girlfriend testified tearfully about watching the guard beat him into unconsciousness as he tried to pull her from the wreck of her VW. She also got a human rights organization involved to look into the beatings Jack received from police after he was in custody. Jack cooperated completely.

All of that and the fact he didn't have the money led to a sentence of just five years on a felony conviction. The lawyers told him if he didn't have any problems, he'd probably get out after three years with good behaviour.

In the end, Jack Corgan was sure he was the luckiest man alive. As he walked out of the prison in Wenatchee after three years and two months, Karen was there to pick him up.

“I thought you might want to see this,” she told him as she handed him a postcard. On the picture side was a picture of a white sand beach that said 'Paradise in the Philippines'. Written on the other side was Karen's address and a note that said -

“Everyone loves the guys who work on the river. Can't wait to see you. Love, Greta.”

People love the guys that drive water taxis. It's great when you get everything you want.

## The End

## About the Author

Vago Damitio is the Commander in Chief of the [Micro Victory Army](#). He is a free vagabond radical having fun and pissing on the accepted and the expected. Vago is a writer, husband, father, traveler and a geeky entrepreneur. He loves food, travel, books, technology, and gardening. Ultimately, his goal is to have all those labels fall together into the perfect lifestyle with each one complementing the other.

Vago was born near Seattle, Washington and his home towns are Bellingham, Washington and Honolulu, Hawaii. Currently he is trapped in Morocco and waiting for a chance to escape. In the meantime, he is working on a secret plan to rule the world. For a more complete biography of Vago you can visit <http://www.vagobond.com/extraordinary-vagabond-vago-damitio/>

He's available to answer any questions you might have unless he has either died, disappeared or been abducted by aliens in which case, you are on your own. Vago can be contacted at [vago@vagobond.com](mailto:vago@vagobond.com) or on [Google+](#), which he is pretty sure is the ultimate social network.

You can find Vago's online travel magazine at <http://www.vagobond.com>

You can find Vago's personal website at <http://www.vagodamitio.com>

You can join the Micro Victory Army at <http://www.microvictoryarmy.com>

You can find his old articles at <http://www.chrisdamitio.com>

## Other Books by Vago Damitio

[Rough Living: Tips and Tales of a Vagabond](#)

[Liminal Travel: How to Travel on Almost Nothing](#)

[Not My Morocco – A Vagabond in Muslimland](#)

The Expat Guide to Morocco – Out of Print

Smooth Living: Beyond the Life of a Vagabond – Coming in 2013

[Slackville Road](#)

[The Princess and the Vagabond](#)

[The Hu Factor](#)

The Hu Man – Coming in 2014

The Hu Muses- TBA

[Meliptimous Taggle and Other Stories](#)

[Douchebags, Fags, and Hags: A Journey into the History, Culture, and Customs of the Sultanate of Baboob](#)

The Keys to the Riad – Coming in 2013

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