

## HENRIETTA

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Cover art by James Wiggs

To Professor Raymond Denigri

From the back cover:

Meet Charles Killpatrick... knight in worn Chemise Lacoste, mystic, lover, tennis shark, philosopher, gambler, renaissance man for whom an iced Dos XX, a good book, a close match, a fast horse and a scrupulous bookie comprise the good life.

Broker in SoCal with a real estate market in full bloom, life for Charles is as smooth as the purr of his BMW, Blackie. A man whose life, like his tennis service, crowds the line, Charles is in the habit of taking what life serves. Deep in debt to a bookie whose husband is a debt collector with a pro-lineman physique, Charles is sanguine. Accused of cheating at tennis by his world famous sparring partner, he is placid. Bribed to act as shill in high-stakes racetrack grift, he is serene. But all that was before he met Henrietta.

Now all he can think of is her...the look of her, the feel of her, the sound of her mangled English...and for the first time in a very long time...the future. But his Frenchfry, Henrietta, is not all Charles has to worry about.

There is her special forces lover, Roadrunner, shadowing their every rendezvous. And now, just as Charles has begun to contemplate tomorrow he must entertain the possibility that, if Roadrunner has his way, he won't have one. True as only fiction can be, Henrietta is more than picaresque farce, more than diary of failed love, more than tour of pro tennis, more than morality play....

It's a window on a man's soul. And, for all his myriad faults, Charles Killpatrick is a man worth knowing. Bounder, romantic, ne'er do well, visionary, man of honor...when Charles joins battle with fate the score is love all, and the results unpredictable as the course of a 100 mph Penn spun off the racket of a pro.

Art

(A poem)

(To Theophile Gautier: 1811-1872)

Things pass,

Save those made well;

The bust outlasts The citadel.

Often the plowman's share,

Turning an ancient sod,

Will bare

The face of Caesar or a god.  
Rome and Apollo perished too,  
But the poet's sovereign songs,  
Constant and true,  
Survive the postured bronze.

Raymond Denegri

one

I guess you wind up where you are supposed to because of what you've done in the past. Sometimes you make a conscious decision and it leads to bad results for you. And sometimes you know you should have done something one way, and you didn't do it, and your life didn't turn out as well for you as it would have if you had done it. You often need the perspective of time to realize this.

You think of this girl, Kimberley, in Florida though. All she does is she goes to the dentist, and her dentist who has AIDS, and she doesn't know he has AIDS, because he isn't required to tell her he has AIDS, infects her with AIDS while he is working on her. How could Kimberley be blamed for the consequence of her decision? She couldn't but her decision led to her death all the same.

So what it is is a lot of times you basically make bad decisions because you don't have the right information. C.I.A., take note. Well, if I hadn't made so many bad decisions I wouldn't be where I am now: Hugo Weatherbee's, 8453 Via Barona, La Costa, California. Hugo has a two bedroom condominium. He has one bedroom. I the other. His bedroom is a lot bigger than mine, and he has a shower and a bathroom in his bedroom. My bathroom is down the hall slightly from my bedroom, and I don't have a shower. I have a bath. I hate baths. I have never relished soaking in my own gore.

Sometimes when Hugo is not there, or, sometimes in the morning after he has had a shower, I go in his room to take a shower. It's almost mysterious in there, because he always keeps his door shut. I keep the door to my bedroom shut as well. If you want to know the truth, neither one of us could qualify as the most open, giving guy of the century.

On one wall of his bedroom is this big huge picture of a leafy forest in autumn. On another wall is an almost life size photograph of Marilyn Monroe in shorts, high heels, and a midriff blouse. She's standing on one leg, and the other leg is bent at the knee, and the calf is horizontal to the ground.

His sink is a miracle of detritus. There were a couple of cans of Edge Gel shaving cream with the tops off both of them and the top of the cans were rusty. There was a box of Q-tips. There were used safety razors. There were stacks and stacks of old pari-mutuel tickets that I knew he wasn't saving for tax purposes. They were just there along with the rest of the detritus. There were two spiral notebooks. One recorded the date he went jogging and however long it took him to jog or run however long he ran. There were thousands of entries. Then the other notebook told the date he played someone a tennis

match, the name of the someone, and the set scores. Hugo's a tennis pro. Then there were coin wrappers all over the place. And for toothpaste he had one of those tubes of toothpaste that has colored stripes in it. What a child. The man is nearly fifty, and he has stripes in his toothpaste.

I checked his room a few times for Playboy or other girl magazines or pornography. Nothing. And you can bet your last dollar, honey chile, that I searched that room. I would have made a good detective.

I'm sure he probably searched my room as well. If he did all he found were my books, including *Death of Arthur* by Malory. And I was reading a lot about Lawrence of Arabia at the time, and I had books from the library about Lawrence, including the one by Lowell Thomas. And propped up against the wall on top of the bureau that held my clothes I had the Lucky Strike advertisement, mounted on cardboard, of famous athletes of the '40's with Luckys in their hands, including our friend Jasper Kyle, who gave me the advertisement.

Also in Hugo's room he had piles of Racing Forms all over the place. The whole house had piles of Racing Forms. You'd open a closet and the closet to eye level would be filled with Racing Forms.

They were stacked at one end of the couch that Hugo sat on or lay down on to watch his dammed television shows, including Regis and Cathy Lee in the morning. And they were all over another couch that we didn't use at all. It was as if a gigantic beast with diarrhea had come through the house and shat out Racing Forms everywhere.

The carpet of the house is like mouse hides have been sewn together. That is the texture. That is the color. And the mouse hide carpet and the rest of the house have not been cleaned in over two years. It was cleaned two years ago because someone else inhabited the house. Not Weatherbee. I'd rented his condo for him while he was living on the other side of La Costa with his mother.

Sleeping in the place is like sleeping in a grain elevator. You wake up with a swollen head and eyes shut even after you have opened them. Then begins a long artillery attack of sneezing. This happened only to me. Weatherbee, long ago, had inured himself to squalor and filth. The decor: As I say, a carpet of mouse hides sewn together. And this was mainly where two years of dust resided. The living room was a dining room living room combination. No one ever ate at the dining room table.

The day that I came to live with Hugo, he threw a brown blanket—a brown blanket corrugated with electric circuits—over the table so that I could use the dining room table as a work desk. That was probably one of the more decent things the man ever did in his life.

There was a phone with a long extension cord over by the dining room table on a side table. (Hugo had his own phone in his room. And he thought the phone was tapped.) There was a nice bright hanging globe light over the dining room table, so it was fine to see there at night. And there were windows next to the table with a southern exposure so it was nice and bright during the day.

The kitchen was right next to the dining room. There on the tile sink lay Hugo's potato peeler with potato peelings still on it or carrot peelings. In one of the cabinets he had his supply of Happy Jack Mashed Potatoes.

In the freezer of the refrigerator was food I guarantee you had been there for years and would remain frozen there for more years. There was some Zacky's frozen chickens that didn't do anybody any good that Zacky's chickens were grown in California. And that woman, Mrs. Zacky, who did the commercials on radio most likely would have committed suicide if she had known about them. She pulls up next to this trucker in a gas station, and he has this truck load of chickens, and she says to him, "Where are your chickens from?" And the guy says, "All the way from New Orleans." And she says, "We grow them right here in California."

Well, maybe the guy just didn't piss on himself right then and there, like he'd made the trip for nothing. And old lady Zacky is pretty coy too. She doesn't tell the trucker she's married to Zacky the chicken entrepreneur. Well, I'd like to show Mrs. Zacky Hugo's chickens. As far as freshness is concerned, they might as well have been flown in from Saturn tied to the back of a buzzard.

Anyhow, for four hundred dollars a month I got a bedroom and all the entertainment Hugo could provide me.

"Jasper's on the phone."

I took the phone from Hugo in the living room.

"Charles! Charles!" Jasper was always screaming because he couldn't hear well.

"Jasper! Jasper!" I screamed back at him. I sort of liked the screaming.

"Let's meet down at the deli for breakfast!" he screamed.

"When?"

"I'm leaving the house right now! Bring Hugo!"

"He wants to meet at the deli," I said to Hugo.

"When?" Hugo said.

"Now," I said.

"That means he could be there now or in an hour from now," Hugo said.

"What difference does it make?" I said.

"We'll go down there, get something to drink, and look at the sports page while we wait for him."

"You're right," said Hugo. "I'll see you there."

He went down the stairs and climbed into his gray Mercury Cougar two door that was fairly new that used to be his dad's but his dad died last year and his mom didn't drive, so Hugo had it now. His car was parked in the driveway to the garage, because the garage was so filled with things—furniture, tennis trophies, old tennis magazines, more Racing Forms, clothes racks with clothes on them that winos would have been circumspect about

accepting—Hugo should have been the curator for the Smithsonian—there was no room for a good sized rat, so there was no room for his car, so he had to park the car outside.

I parked my car across the drive in guest parking. I had Blackie, my 1972 Mercedes 280 S.E. 4.5 sedan. Blackie was badly in need of a paint job. I used to look out the apartment window and see his discolored roof. The trunk was discolored, the hood was discolored, and the paint on the door panels was flaking. The leather on the front seat was starting to tear. Only one window would slide down, the left back one. By spitting out the window I could have easily gotten into a head on. But don't worry, honey chile, I got pretty good at it.

I backed up Blackie, went out Via Barona to Xana, Xana to Unicornio, Unicornio to Alga, right on Alga—as soon as you turned on Alga you saw the great blue expanse of the ocean—and down the hill to El Camino and down El Camino about a mile and a half to the Grand Central Deli in the La Costa Plaza.

Hugo and I found a booth. I slipped out, went over to the news racks in front of the drug store across the street and bought U.S.A. Today, came back and gave Hugo the sports page so he could look at the lines.

A little while later in came Jasper. He was wearing tennis shoes, green cords that I called his frog leg pants, a white tennis shirt and a long sleeve pink sweater. He slid in next to Hugo.

"I'm sorry I'm late. Just as I left the house I got a call. Charles, good to see you." He leaned over and grabbed my hand. "What shall we have to eat? Charles? Hugo? Charles, what do you want? Do you want to split an omelette then Hugo can get what he wants?"

Hugo said, "That sounds fine to me."

I said, "What kind of omelette do you want?" We went through this ritual thousands of times. It never varied.

But Jasper seemed to like it. He didn't like it if you changed the ritual.

"Let's get the Grand Central Deli omelette," he said with great enthusiasm.

"Do you want Ortega peppers on it?" I said.

"No! No! No Ortega chili peppers!" He screwed up his face. He seemed to be in great consternation I brought up putting Ortega peppers in the omelette, but I brought up Ortegass almost every time we ordered the omelette. Sometimes he even got seriously angry when I told the waitress to put Ortegass in the omelette, saying, "You have to make a joke about everything. You can't let one thing go by that isn't a joke. You know I don't like Ortegass. You keep doing that and some asshole in the kitchen is going to put Ortegass in the omelette. Why do you do it!" Then Hugo would try to calm him down. Other people in the restaurant would be looking our way. But this time he let it go by.

The waitress came over and stood with her pad, ready to write the order.

Jasper said, "Go 'head, Hugo."

Hugo said, "I'll take a diet coke, pancakes, and bacon."

Jasper said, “We want to split an omelette. Two plates. We’ll take the Grand Central Deli omelette. Make it nice and moist. Plenty of cheese and mushrooms. No Ortega chili peppers.” (Here he looked at me with a look that was in between laughter and collusion.) “Home fries. And we’ll split an English muffin. Bring us ice tea to drink. Plenty of sliced lemons.”

She brought out a pitcher of ice tea and plenty of sliced lemons. She poured the iced teas and left the pitcher on the table. She had been through this routine before.

“Charles, what do you hear from Ripley?” Jasper said.

Ripley was Jasper’s doubles partner in the old days. Ripley had been the pro at the L.A. Country Club. He and Jasper both owned condominiums on the bluff above the ocean at a place called Sea Bluff in Leucadia, about three miles from where we were having breakfast. There were five tennis courts over there. Ripley was about seventy. Jasper sixty-eight. Ripley also had a home in Palm Springs. And that’s where he was now. Ripley and I were very good friends. He phoned us all though, me, Hugo, and Jasper. Ripley had married a woman who had a couple of million, Victoria. Of course, Jasper was worth a couple of million, maybe more. Hugo and I were bust outs. Of course, Hugo owned his own condo and everything. But Hugo’s mom financed him in many of his endeavors.

I was on my own. There is no scale in the realm of human imagination that could have compared me to J.P. Morgan.

“Ben’s fine,” I said.

“Is he playing tennis?”

“He’s playing. But he’s frustrated because he’s not moving that well. When he gets to the ball though he drills it.”

Jasper said, “He can get so damned mad.”

“And you can’t?” I said.

His eyes opened wide in mock disbelief.

The omelette and an extra plate for me and Hugo’s breakfast arrived.

“Ah,” Jasper said, looking at it, “nice and moist.” He carefully divided it, giving me half, half the home fries, and half the English muffin with a patty of butter.

Hugo was pouring syrup on his pancakes—I noticed that some was getting on the bacon as well—and I started looking around for all the condiments: salt, pepper, Tabasco, and ketchup.

We finished breakfast. Hugo had to go see his mom, Florence, who was in a rest home.

Jasper looked at me. The bill came. Jasper took care of it. Hugo and I were broke. He left a decent tip.

“Charles,” he said, “you want to play some tennis?”

“Why not?” I said.

“You got your racket with you?”

“Yes.”

“I’ll meet you over at Sea Bluff then.”

“I’ll see you there.”

We all went out the door of the Grand Central Deli and got in our cars. Jasper drove a big green Lincoln Town Car and he drove pretty fast. I got in old Blackie and drove past the La Costa Drug that Mr. and Mrs. Ganz owned and past Rancho La Costa Properties, took a right on La Costa Avenue, waited for the light by the Arco Station there, run by old Walt, and then drove west on La Costa Avenue past the big swamp, the bird sanctuary, the bird hotel I called it, over the bridge that went over I-5, through the part of Leucadia that has all those nice streets that have the trees on them like Sheridan, then over the bridge that went over the railroad tracks of Amtrak, stopped at the light on 101 where you are right next to the ocean now, the beach real rocky with millions of rocks and small waves breaking on the shore, turned left and drove past the taco shop and Handy Man and that two storied motel where all the Mexicans live with all the kids playing around and the beat up cars parked in the courtyard, past an apartment house where there was an art store and a big courtyard with a tree with a nice green umbrella of green leaves on its branches, past the gas station that the Indians from India owned and then right into Sea Bluff.

As you drive in the tennis courts are on the left and there’s a place to park in front of them. I pulled in, turned a U in front of the guard gate to the Sea Bluff development, and parked in front of the tennis courts. Jasper’s car, besides mine, was the only one there.

He was sitting in his car. He had his red baseball cap on. I tapped on the window. He got out and got a new container of Penn’s and his racket out of the trunk, which also housed twenty or so more new containers of Penns, another five rackets, and his golf clubs.

He used the Fox racket, which wasn’t being made anymore. For me, it was a bit unwieldy racket. I’d tried it. I couldn’t play with it. He loved it. And he had magnificent touch with it. I used a Prince Graphite with chrome twist gut. Jasper walked around sort of splay footed. He didn’t change clothes, just wore what he’d been wearing in the Deli. I was wearing cotton tennis shorts, a white t-shirt, and Jack Purcell tennis shoes. Jasper wore glasses.

We walked towards the gate of court one. There wasn’t even a bird around.

There was a little silver flat square that you had to insert into a slot on the lock on the gate to get into the court. You put this metal thing into the lock and you rotated it counter clockwise and the gate was supposed to open. Jasper handed me all his keys and the metal gate opener on his key ring. He was horrible opening the gate. So was I. He knew it. “Open the goddamned gate!” he screamed.

“Why don’t you?”

“Now, don’t give me any shit. Just open the fucking gate.”

I put the little metal thing in the slot, and I rotated it with firmness and resolution while he peered at the procedure with great curiosity.

Sure as hell it opened right away. In the past, he and I had stood there for a fucking half hour while I tried every fucking rotation trick in the world.

“There you go,” he said, looking at me and smiling.

Hugo was perfect at opening the gate. It always opened right away for him. Not for me. Not for Jasper.

We went in the first court. Court number one. He gave me the plastic container of Penns, brand new and yellow.

I opened them and put the tin top in the trash container there, one of those where the door releases on pressure and comes back again when you let it go.

He walked to the south side of the court. I to the north.

I hit a ball to him. He hit it back effortlessly, not putting any pace on it at all. We hit about fifteen shots on one ball. He hit it right to me. I hit it right back to him. I started to increase the pace on my side. I started to drill the ball into him. I undercut the ball tremendously, the ball staying very low when it hit. He always hit it back the same way, effortlessly, almost as if he were handing a waiter a tip. The ball came over the net high, landed in front of me so it was easy to hit and it had no pace on it at all. He hit pillows, and all the time there was this wicked little smile on his face.

“All right, Charles, let’s start,” he said.

“Okay,” I said. “How many games are you going to give me?”

“Four and serve.”

“How much?” I said.

“Twenty a set and the loser of the first set has the right to double.”

“I’ll go for ten a set.”

“Ten!”

“Ten.”

“All right, fucking ten! You serve.” He walked back to the base line. He waved his racket at me. “Good luck to you, Charles.” He smiled. He almost laughed.

I am thinking to myself, “You won’t be laughing long you sonofabitch.”

I took a few practice serves. I always took four practice serves whether I needed them or not. Like when showering I always rinsed off by turning around three times under the shower head in honor of the trinity and the number 3. In practice serves I always took four.

I looked at him. He was favoring the forehand serve. I never serve to his forehand. He had one of the most underrated forehands in the world. He could really nail the forehand. So, automatic, I hit every serve to his backhand. I was good enough to do that. I’d never let him hit a forehand in a million years.

I threw up the yellow ball captured in a gray sky. It went right down the service line to his backhand. He returned beautifully to my backhand, driving me very deep indeed. I

got it. I made a fairly good defensive shot to the center of the court. He hit this perfect little dropper back. I couldn't get it. No chance. I looked at him. He smiled. Then he actually laughed.

Love-15. I served to his backhand again. He pounded the serve deep to my backhand. I belted it back to his backhand. He drove it down the middle of the court. Now, finally, I had a chance to make a shot on him. I gave him a neat little drop shot on the forehand side. I couldn't believe how fast he still was. He got it and returned it out of play. Thirty-love. He looked at me and laughed. "Be nice, Charles. I don't know how I got that ball. It was just sheer luck. You hit a beautiful dropper."

I looked at him. If I'd had a gun, I would have shot him. The sweat was starting to break out of my head. I served him wide to his backhand again. He got it. I backhanded him again. He backhanded me back. I backhanded him again, deep in the corner. He backhanded me again deep in the corner. I dropped shot him perfect.

He could not get it. He didn't even try. He waved his racket at me. "Beauty, Charles! Great dropper!"

Fifteen-thirty.

Next serve I made a mistake and gave him a forehand. I didn't mean it. The serve just got away from me a little. He knocked it clean across the forehand court so hard I didn't even have a play on it. I just stood there flat footed it came back so fast and way out of my reach.

Fifteen-forty.

I served again, pretty damned hard. He hit me a perfect backhand dropshot off the serve. I don't know how could do it, but he could do it all the time, and you could never see it coming. I started running like a madman towards the net. Bronco Nagurski would have been proud of me. I got it back over the net. But I couldn't make a very good shot on it because I had to do all I could just to get there. He had come in while I was running. He took my ball in the air off his forehand, and lobbed over my head deep in the backhand corner. I turned and ran as hard as I could after the ball, got it, and made a pretty good lob off my own backhand. He moved back from the net and followed my lob and hit a beautiful overhead to the forehand court with such a good angle that it was way out of play for me. Game.

We changed sides. He served me that little serve that just barely clears the net, and when it bounces, bounces very wide. He's got tremendous spin on that serve.

There are two ways to hit it. You can drop shot him off it. Or you can bang the hell out of it down the backhand line so that he can't get it. If you just plain hit it back to him, right away he owns you ten different ways. He can lob you or pass you on either side. You have to run like a monster to even get the ball. And if you start playing the serve in too close, he'll give you a regular hard serve down the service line, and he'll ace you.

I ran like a monster and got his dink, junk-spin serve, and banged it deep and hard down the line for a winner. He gave me the good sign with his palm flat that I had hit a fair shot and that it was inside the line.

Love-fifteen.

He served to the add court. He hit the ball wide to my backhand, came in right behind his serve, and volleyed off my return, 15-15.

Our games went on like that. In the course of a set he would show me every shot in the books: lobs, perfect drop shots, cross court forehands of tremendous velocity that didn't look as if he were hitting the ball especially hard; forehands down the line that would nail the outside of the line deep in the corner; backhands of great delicacy and backhands cross court with great pace; backhand drop shots; lunging volleys on returns that you wouldn't think anyone could get, and then he'd turn and look at me, "Oh, Charles, how did I do that? That was sheer luck." I would have believed him too, but I saw him do it all the time. It was routine. Still, you'd say to yourself, "How did he do it?"

Sometimes we had great rallies, because I could run and I was willing to run.

I'd get drop shots he hit that would surprise him.

But even with the four game spot he gave me, it was only once in awhile I won the set.

One afternoon with the four game spot, I beat him two sets. Twenty dollars the first set, and he pressed, so forty dollars the second set, then he was tired so he brought in Hugo for the third set. Hugo had been sitting on the bench. And I demanded and got the four game spot from Hugo after considerable screaming at them both. Jasper bet me the sixty, and I promptly beat Hugo. That kind of day happened once a year.

More often it was like this morning.

I didn't get a game the first set, so he beat me 6-4.

Second set I won the first game. So I had him 5-0. My mouth was watering. But I played too tight, and I never got another game, and he beat me 7-5. I paid him the twenty dollars. I hadn't pressed the second set.

"Charles, you had me 5-0! All you needed was one more game! And one game you had me 40-love. You definitely should have won the second set. I had to play great to beat you. At the same time that he seemed to be commiserating with me, he was in an ecstatic mood. I didn't say anything to him. I just looked at him.

"Look," I said, "why don't we come out here, we sit on the bench, and I just give you twenty bucks, and that way I don't have strained ligaments going after all those drop shots and lobs."

He looked at me mock seriously, and said, "But, Charles, you played great. You were moving like a rocket ship. No one can get my dropper like you. If you could play net, you would be tough."

"The net is for fish," I said. He laughed. And said it to himself as if meditating on it, "The net is for fish." He was right though. If I'd a net game, I would have been a much better player. But I couldn't volley to save my soul, and to play him from the backcourt was like getting into a banana eating contest with King Kong or Mighty Joe Young.

"What are you going to do right now?" he said intensely to me as we sat on the bench next to the courts. His face was about an inch from mine. He had all his teeth, but some of the ones in front grew crazy crooked. The only way I could have seen them more closely than I was was if I had had a microscope. He sprayed me a little as he asked that

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