

T.L. HUGHES

SEARCHING

FOR

PARADISE

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Searching For Paradise

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*I think back
Through all my life
To all the friends I've known
Different faces
Distant places
All Circles*

*The good times we had
We'll have them once again
We left each other's company
To live our lives in vain*

*Why to lose the friends we had
For others just the same
Man rolls his dice
To sacrifice
Those Circles*

For Collette

CHAPTER 1

It was a cool air summer night and palm tree silhouettes tripped the moonlit sidewalks. We were riding the line of chance as we packed up Lucas Coppens's '64 Ford Fairlane and prepared to leave Huntington Beach, the people, the beaches, the whole West Coast behind us forever.

Culminating in dirt roads and desire, I found my life at a crossroads. Like any twenty-five-year-old blue-collar kid from the East Coast drawn by the rich songs of The Beach Boys and The Mamas and The Papas and all else that was California in the sixties and the seventies, I had gone there for the girls, the beaches, and, of course, to be in the movies. But now, I had to leave.

I thought back now to the very first time I had ever heard "California Dreamin'" by The Mamas and The Papas, my being in that quintessential moment in Lowell. I remembered thinking then that I had to find a way to get to California. Even though I had never been there before, all I could imagine as I heard that aching flute solo was beautiful beaches, cool and clean, unlike the blowing bitter wind of our New England coast, and beautiful women everywhere; their fine lines and soft words forever surrounding me in endless reverie.

It had been three hard years of conflict and struggle though.

Of my slumming Hollywood Boulevard working meager no-pay production jobs in my spare time and going to dive motels on The Strip to pick up still no-name directors with British accents while they opened up their trash in the backseat of my red Mercury Comet, I worked the clutch and the three-on-the-tree shift on the Comet's steering column while I chauffeured them around from La Cienega to Sunset, back to La Cienega, and finally back to the studio. One loser left all of his food trash all over my backseat as I scurried him between production sets. I finally had had enough.

And my starving all of the time, raiding abandoned friends' apartments who had since given up and moved back to Ohio or the Northeast, searching their empty refrigerators for meat but satisfied with the bread and the condiments, only to get through another few days

before that meager production assistant check had arrived. I had so gotten used to condiments sometimes being our main course, like packing ketchup sandwiches for our lunch while we worked for free for the students at the American Film Institute, that when we were lucky enough to find meat, it almost made me hurl at first. It was funny how a whole loaf of white bread and a large bottle of ketchup could hold us over for three days. When you hurled, the Ohioans referred to it as “horking.”

The only rewards were short-lived, like sucking down those two Budweiser tall cans after our long day working at the Scientology building, helping more rich kids do their student films so they could get a good grade for their parents. But I couldn’t do it anymore. I remember this one Scientologist guy with two big Dalmatian dogs hanging around the hotel lobby set trying to talk us into his religion, but as hungry as I was, I didn’t seem to care any about Scientology. I had read *The Martian Chronicles*, and even thought to myself after his empty lecture that everybody knows there isn’t anyone living on Mars . . . It was just a good story.

I had even tried to sell reclaimed energy, just so I could make some money to break back into Hollywood again. It was 1984, and nobody was really serious about conserving energy though. I always believed that the world would eventually dry up; oil was a finite resource, just like gold and chocolate and coffee, but as soon as the fuel prices in America came back down again, no one really cared about reclaimed energy. Supply and demand; cheap and expensive; that is what they taught us in school. I felt really sorry for myself; down on my luck, completely out of it, the flame was flickering. I looked at my life as one big riddle that still wasn’t solved. It was always raining in California, and although I still wanted to chase my show biz dreams, I needed to do it elsewhere now.

So after borrowing about a thousand dollars off of my sister Ciara in Massachusetts and moving in with Declan Brady and Lucas Coppens in Huntington Beach and working an office job for a few months to try to save back up my cash reserves, we all began crafting a great expedition.

All three of us had the same and different mind-set. We snuck out at midnight in late August, Lucas, Declan, and me, northbound to San Luis Obispo, stealing away inside an hour where half the world was asleep and the other half was using up all of its energy.

I’d miss Huntington Beach, I thought, even those crazy oil derricks pumping midnight oil everywhere about our existence, the soft monotone of their grinding mechanisms, their heads dipping with indifference, accepting their blue-collar roles, seemingly not caring, not wanting to ask why as they sucked the fuel out of the ground below the quaking beds in which we slept.

It was really funny though that one of the oil derricks, the one in our backyard rental cottage lot, the digger that Luke had mounted to ride before, so quickly did come to a grinding halt like some sort of premonition. After pumping for who knows, maybe years endlessly, this giant grasshopper machine just stopped dead in the night as if it too was trying to tell us something, that maybe something had changed. It left the still backyard in the beach night eerie. The background hum we had become accustomed to for so long was gone. Like the grandfather clock in my grandmother’s kitchen that ticked endlessly throughout my

childhood, the one that had suddenly stopped dead on the day of my thirteenth birthday, the oil derrick had also stopped. Declan ran in from the back porch with a few others to tell everyone who was huddled in our empty kitchen for the going away party what had happened.

“She’s stopped! The oil digger in the back lot has stopped! I think she wants to come with us!” he exclaimed laughing with animated wide eyes and the big white Declan Brady mouth filled with Brady teeth that all the Brady family seemed to have.

We had said our good-byes to the handful of misfit orphan friends, because in California in the eighties, even people with parents were orphans, all of them friends that we had collected over the past few years. We drove the Ford down to the end of Sixth Street and took a right on Pacific Coast Highway, heading north away from the pier and her ever-fainting lights, out past the concrete county of Los Angeles and into the darkness ahead of us.

We drove all night. After a good while, the three of us had been reduced to twenty-minute driving shifts, twenty minutes being all we could take before the road turned blurry and the divider bumps, bursts of reality within someone’s foolish dreaming, woke each of us up behind the wheel, and we resigned to pass the wheel over to the next driver. It was crazy dangerous to drive this way, we all knew it, but we were being pushed by some foolish, reckless desire to find ourselves, to somehow find a way to get to where we were supposed to be.

Up, through, and beyond Santa Barbara, we managed to pull off California 101 and into Pismo Beach around four o’clock, maybe five o’clock in the morning; the night was still dark.

Right off the 101, the old Ford climbed up to a house on a hill that overlooked the highway and the rolling sand dunes of Pismo Beach. It was a planned first stop, as thought out as a notebook plan of zigzag stops across the whole North American continent could only be. We just hadn’t planned on being so doggone tired and having such a tough time staying awake in order to get there on our maiden leg; after all, it was only our first four hours of liberation.

Pismo was my “friend” stop. The dots we had placed across the map were the respective contacts we had collected amongst the three of us, most of whom had some place in our past, be it a high school or college acquaintance or a family member or somebody else’s relative. This was the plan so we wouldn’t have to outlay tons of cash on our trip across the great continent.

Zane, now living in beautiful pink-sanded-reflections-of-sunset Pismo Beach, was originally from my old neighborhood, Christian Hill, in Lowell. We went to high school together, and both lived at Paradise Beach in New Hampshire for many summers, first at the MacNamaras’ green, two-story boarding house and then renting our own place, “The Penthouse,” with a few others. It was at “The Penthouse” that Zane had put a few holes in the drywall while suffering through the pain of an apparent heartache. That was before any of us knew what it was. The pain manifested itself with karate chops; he put them right through the moaning drywall between his bedroom and mine, the result being an irregular window in the partition wall. I remember being seventeen and driving in the maddening rain in the October nights with Zane in an old Buick that was sicker than we were as we headed from Paradise west into Nashua to take those karate lessons. And then back at Paradise Beach,

he'd be throwing a twenty-five-pound plate into a green army backpack and running down the beach with it at the crack of the next beautiful dawn. One day, Zane and his girlfriend Maureen all up and moved to California. We had all graduated high school by then, and he wanted to move on. I guess they had both listened to all of those same songs from The Beach Boys and The Mamas and The Papas like I had.

CHAPTER 2

Zane and Maureen had been expecting us. I had called ahead from a phone booth just north of Santa Barbara, and they both were wide awake and waiting for us with big hugs. We rolled in late and threw our things down and crashed right in their living room.

“Spending all this time in Los Angeles?” Zane said, “You’ll never catch me down that way unless I’m driving through on my way to Mexico . . . and Lowell? I’m not ever going back again!”

He seemed content to just stay right there on the beautiful golden Central Coast and maybe live in a trailer someday and hunt wild boar with his crossbow in the beautiful oak tree hills that covered the grade around San Luis Obispo. Zane wanted to live off of the grid just like a hermit and never have to pay taxes again.

But for me, I felt that I needed more than that. Life was still one big riddle that needed to be solved. Notoriety, happiness, security, love, comfort, faith, it was all connected somehow. I was determined to figure it out before it was all over. Perhaps Zane already had figured it out.

Declan, Lucas, and I were driving cross-country until the road ran out, and then we were going to jump on a plane with a one-way ticket to London and then maybe backpack across the whole European continent until we found our dream jobs working in the entertainment industry somewhere along that path; a music video production job in England would be great.

When we all awoke at Zane’s the following morning, Zane and I talked about New England and all of the vivid memories that went with it. Aidan Maloney, God rest his kindred soul, lived at the MacNamara boarding house with us on the New Hampshire coast back during those high school summers. Aidan “Lones” (as we called him), Robert Hillyard, and I shared a little room off of the front porch of the MacNamara main house when we were all about fourteen in 1973. Lones was an arcade hand for the summer at the Paradise Beach Casino; Hillyard was a busboy, and I was a dishwasher. Zane was sixteen then and lived in

another room in the back of the MacNamara house where he had his own door and no under-age eleven o'clock curfew to fear. But Lones loved going out with Zane and the older guys and used to sneak back into our off-porch closet room through an open outside window every night around one o'clock in the morning. I remember one night Mrs. MacNamara busting into that little room after curfew and throwing that light switch on right in the nick of time to catch Aidan crawling through that side window after he had been out all night drinking with Zane and the older kids.

"Aidan Maloney! I'm calling your mother in the morning and sending you home!" she screamed.

"No, please, Mrs. MacNamara, please don't send me home! Please, please, Mrs. MacNamara!" Lones begged her.

Zane and I remembered Robert Hillyard (who is now a priest). Robert Hillyard, sitting in that rocking chair at the MacNamara house at eight o'clock the next morning just eating his plain toast with butter in the corner of the front porch, rocking away, just like he had never been woken up the night before.

"Beautiful morning, isn't it, Mrs. MacNamara?" Robert asked her as she passed through on her way to her yard.

"Not if your name is Aidan Maloney!" she snapped back at him.

I had seen my first concert with Zane. It was Roy Buchanan playing that sweet blues sound at the Paradise Beach Casino the summer after we graduated high school in 1976. I had never heard someone make sounds like that from a guitar, sounds that truly touched the soul. How come I had never heard of this guy before? And he was doing it all as drunk as a fool. He walked to the end of the stage that night at Paradise Beach and fell off it just like he had walked over the edge of a cliff, and the show was over, and that was it. Roy Buchanan, plastered, lay on the floor, and the show was cut short. There was no catcher in the rye for Roy that night. Crazy, mad, and beautiful life; it was everywhere.

How I wanted to play that sweet sound just like Roy Buchanan, or Jeff Beck, or Keith Richards of The Rolling Stones. I wanted to be that good but didn't want to put the time in with guitar lessons, and could never get past the first few weeks of calloused fingers. That was too much time, so that was that.

Unbeknownst to me and the world back then, but Roy would cut another thing short a few years later in 1988—his life. He hung himself in jail after getting arrested for driving under the influence in Pennsylvania. All that sweet talent only with us mere mortals for such a short time and then gone forever. But everyone doubted that he killed himself. His captors did it to him, they said.

The *American Graffiti* movie had put that dream of California in me too. Even though it had been released a few years before, I finally got to see it with Zane in that summer of '76 at the Paradise Beach movie theatre. I imagined myself someday cruising some beautiful California boulevard, chasing beautiful blondes like Suzanne Somers in a white T-Bird and the Beach Boys and The Mamas and The Papas singing everywhere.

After I graduated college in 1980, one night while the summer Massachusetts night

air blew through the screens in my bedroom on Eighteenth Street in Lowell, I had my first vision of her, my sweet Colette. The fireflies briefly lit the bushes running our concrete driveway while my thoughts looked past the open window into the blowing trees of a soft summer rainstorm. The lyrics of Led Zeppelin played aloud on my bedroom turntable and told me that I would find her there, out in California.

It wasn't until the following year in 1981 that the journey out west did come to pass, though. I was driving a truck for the *Lowell Sun*, my third three-month job since graduation, when my friends Richie Clark and Sal Caprissi approached me at a men's softball league party outside Charlie McIntyre's Pub and asked me if I wanted to move to Newport Beach with them.

"Newport Beach, Rhode Island?" I asked, "What do you want to go there for? Isn't that where all of the rich people live? Huge houses, rocky coast, shipbuilder descendants, tales of prohibition bootleggers and whalers from *Moby Dick*?"

"No, California!" Richie said with his eyes lighting up the August twilight. "You know, Beverly Hills! We're gonna be movie stars, Mike!" He screamed aloud and began singing the jingle from TV's "*The Beverly Hillbillies*." After this, he just let out one of his characteristic loud, infectious laughs, and Sal and I laughed with him. We planned to leave three weeks from that night.

But there was a hiccup. Richie had always been a lady's man, tall, good-looking; he even kept two girlfriends at both ends of the state, both of them named Sarah, so when they called he wouldn't mix them up. That was, until the day that he *did* mix them up. He thought he was talking to one of them instead of the other and really screwed things up and one of the Sarahs consequentially broke up with him. Because of this, Richie wanted to postpone the trip for a month or so and see if he could work things out with the Sarah's, but Sal and I thought differently.

Sal Caprissi and I, after already quitting our jobs, couldn't wait for poor Richie. We jumped into my red Mercury Comet with the "three gears on the tree" on the date that we had planned and headed west with Taboo. Taboo was Sal's sweet, amicable-as-long-as-you-knew-her pit bull. We drove for a week on the Auto Club highways of America until we finally got to the other side. California! We put up at Zane's near San Luis Obispo. We stayed with Zane for about a month but found no work in the sleepy sixties hot tub college town, so we packed up our stuff (and Taboo again) and headed south for Los Angeles.

Back then, poor Zane was probably glad to get rid of us, for he was out of work and only trying to be as hospitable as his own money could stretch in accommodating his two jobless friends. But that's what people did when you were friends; you'd let them overstay their welcome, maybe for months at a time, before finally booting them out.

One morning, with all of the stress that Zane was under, he drained the oil out of his new Honda and put brand-new oil in the transmission fluid reservoir and his car seized on him while going up Questa Grade. It was that very afternoon that Sal and I left.

Three years later, Declan, Lucas, and I were here at good old Zane's again. Colette had

left me just months before in Huntington Beach, and I needed to leave the beautiful coast through the same open door that I had come in from.

Zane and I reminisced some more about the Paradise Beach, New Hampshire, days. We talked about another Lowellian, Larry Bordeaux, who left Lowell for San Diego in the summer of 1979.

“Whatever happened to Larry? He seemed to disappear forever,” I said.

“Remember Larry tying himself to the chimney before he got into his sleeping bag those nights we used to sleep on that slanted third-story roof of The Penthouse in Paradise Beach?” Zane laughed. His heavy laugh started at his mouth and soon took over his whole face as he threw his head back. Passing his eyes, the laugh changed the color of his skin a warm red all the way back to his jet-black Native American hairline.

“Yeah, Larry was afraid of sleepwalking off of the edge. He didn’t want a surprise three-story ride!” I told Declan, Lucas, and Zane’s girlfriend Maureen.

“It’s a good thing Roy Buchanan never slept on that roof with us!” Zane laughed.

We had nicknamed that apartment “The Penthouse” because it sat atop two stories of a shingled, dilapidated beach house with a rickety staircase going up on the outside. We had even bought red and black silk-screened T-shirts that advertised the party palace to all of Paradise Beach as we walked to and from our restaurant jobs. During that particular summer, I was seventeen and Zane was nineteen. Nothing was in our refrigerator back in those days save for a few bricks of processed cheese that had been stolen from the restaurant we both worked at . . . Cheese that kept us from starvation some of the days; we seemed to subsist on cheese and beer.

I remembered waking up on that Penthouse roof beside Larry one morning who was tied to the chimney in his sleeping bag. A rooftop of sleeping bags, we all watched that huge red ball of sunrise pushing up through the water of the deep Atlantic Ocean. Zane was tapping me on the shoulder and pointing to the sun’s magnificence, with no spoken words, just all of us watching it happen; the sun itself coming from an eleven in the morning London tea, or somewhere else out over that same curved horizon that once mesmerized the Native Americans.

Here in California, I had watched that same beautiful sun set so deeply over the Pacific on its way somewhere else. It was time to find out where it was coming from, that magnificent, warm ball of light.

That morning in Pismo Beach, Zane and Maureen took Declan, Lucas, and I to brunch at a roadside restaurant right off the 101 where a giant cowboy sculpted from a redwood stood at watch out in the parking lot looking westward. The wooden cowboy looked out toward the Pacific Ocean; consternation appeared in his face, as if he was frustrated that he had come all this way and run out of west. For him, there were people everywhere, college students, and no more open land. This was San Luis Obispo, where Cal Poly “Dollies” roamed the streets of yesterday’s hippy girls; where hot tubs and freethinking, hairy armpits clashed with upturned-collared Izod Lacrosse shirts and sweet daddy’s money.

“Tell Zane and Maureen your sleeping-in-the-refrigerator-box story,” Declan said at breakfast.

“All right then,” I obliged. “There was a late-night party in Covina a few months ago where our friend Henry and one of his ex-marine buddies had asked me to come along,” I began. “I fell asleep in the back of Henry’s friend’s Z28 before we even got to the stupid party, so Henry and the marine just locked the doors of the car to let me sleep. They went off to the party somewhere down the street on their own. Around one o’clock in the morning, I awoke in the back of the car to the sound of someone peeing all over the Z28 door! It startled me. And then, as I jumped up, the guy bolted!” I said. “This guy didn’t know someone was in the car he was peeing on, and I scared the crap out of him. I was so disoriented that I got out of the car in a stupor and automatically locked the stupid door behind me, leaving my dungaree jacket behind. I walked the streets up and down but couldn’t find the party my friends were at. I was freezing in the windy Covina night! Full of weary despair, I pulled an empty refrigerator box out of a flatbed truck in the alley and dragged it behind a garage to get warm, to find sweet sleep, because that is all I wanted to do. While I lay in the box with an opening for my face to look out, all of a sudden, another guy was peering in at me! He said that he had watched me from his window and asked if I wanted to get warm in his apartment until my friends came back. It was cold, and he kept insisting that I sleep on his couch inside. I hesitatingly accepted and lay there wide-eyed on his couch for a few hours as my observer paced the floor of his apartment. Wondering all sorts of crazy things that might happen to me, I abruptly jumped to my feet, and bolted out the door and back to the side of the car in the early-morning light.”

“Once the little creepy guy had seen me gone, he quickly found me again beside the car and was back to try to convince me to come back in,” I told them. “But it was all too freaky, and I was spooked now. I had seen too many scripts where this wasn’t going to be a good ending.”

“It was a few more hours before Henry and the ex-marine ever returned laughing and wondering why I hadn’t just stayed in the car. I told them about the guy first peeing on the car, then the empty box maneuver, and finally the little guy that had coaxed me upstairs.”

“‘Where does he live? Let’s go rough him up,’ the ex-marine laughed, but I wouldn’t point out the place to them. I wouldn’t have it. I didn’t want anything bad to happen to the poor little guy; he probably meant me no harm,” I said to Zane and Maureen.

“Things that would happen only to you, my friend,” Zane laughed.

I looked over at Maureen’s pretty face, her sweet smile, her long, dark hair and her beautiful curvy body and thought at that moment of just how lucky Zane was.

We talked of all kinds of things before we left them: Tina Turner on the radio, the beautiful Aegean Sea, and the Greek Isles. Zane wanted to sell his earthly possessions and join us for a minute, but then what about hunting wild boar and his own vision of paradise? He had to stay in Pismo. We talked about random things like Vanessa Williams, pretty girls, and how many chin-ups we could do, but in the blink of an eye, we were back on the road, and

Zane and Maureen were gone. It was two forty in the afternoon, and we headed north out of Pismo. Lucas got out of the car one last time to adjust and readjust the bungee cord on the Fairlane, the bungee cord that held down Declan's surfboard on the top of the car, just to make sure the surfboard wouldn't vibrate too much on the ensuing drive up sweet rocky California Route 1 just south of Big Sur.

CHAPTER 3

The surfboard was a statement of sorts. Declan and Lucas wanted it to stay affixed to the Fairlane roof all of the way across the country. We had envisioned driving through Kansas with the surfboard on our car.

Declan fooled with the radio trying to get some music . . . anything. A weak “Tijuana Taxi” by Herb Albert and the Tijuana Brass came through momentarily but fell out to a mixture of airwave static and someone speaking in broken Spanish. I remembered as a teenager getting that same album as a birthday gift with Herb and his band standing in a huge field of yellow flowers on the cover. I wondered what had ever happened to that album now, for it was no longer with me. I thought about how my large album-filled apple crate that I had dragged out to California was now heading back east again to my parents’ house on a United Parcel Service delivery truck. But Herb Albert hadn’t been in that crate collection for many years; he was lost.

The California coast keeps going on, I thought, as we passed through Atascadero State Beach with waves hitting the shore endlessly, mostly unwatched. The waves pounded the hard sand to the left of us as shiny aluminum-roofed farmhouses sparkled on our right, glimmering like the shiny pop-can sweet ocean itself does in the hot, forever sailing sun. Behind the tin-roofed barns was a mountain curtain backdrop, with mountains all in a row, rising up from the two-lane highway we rode upon and stepping back into America.

“Tijuana Taxi” came back for a few more minutes and then statically mixed into a song from a group called Ambrosia, “Holdin’ on to Yesterday,” which caused me to reflect, once again, upon losing Colette. What a miserable wreck I still was three months after the breakup. Lucas told us that this song was about Billy Pilgrim, Kurt Vonnegut’s time-traveling eccentric in his novel *Slaughterhouse-Five*. Billy had been kidnapped by aliens and taken to the planet Tralfamadore. The Scientologists and Shirley MacLaine believed that aliens walked amongst us all.

Music had become a part of my being, my soul, for after all, I was a Beatles-generation

kid. Music was important to all of us who had grown up in those baby-booming times; it was woven into our days, reminiscent of all of the good times that we had. I was an imaginary rock star and dreamed often when my mood was down. But after losing Colette, it was those songs of love gone wrong that really brought me down.

As a kid, Declan had taken piano lessons from a nun when he attended Catholic school in Ohio. I, myself, had taken clarinet lessons for eight long years. Once a week, I took the bus to downtown Lowell to Bob Noonan's Music Studio on Central Street; the place was upstairs from the old Rialto Theatre. The Rialto had been converted into a bowling alley before those times. Bob Noonan was probably in his fifties back then but had the thickest gray hair I had ever seen on a human being. He used to use this crazy hair-thinning comb while I sat there practicing my clarinet trills. It was funny because I was already starting to lose my hair, yet Bob Noonan had too much of it.

During my weekly lessons at the music studio, I learned how to play "Flight of the Bumblebee," trilling those clarinet keys fairly well. I guess I was pretty good at it. At least my father thought so as he sat in the waiting room and listened to me sometimes. He thought I was so good that he would make me take the clarinet with us on our Sunday trips to see his aunt, Auntie Sister, where our whole family had to sit around and visit her in these big, huge, stale rooms of the nun convent. The convents always smelled of mothballs and bleach back then. I remember the big, scary mansion rooms of the Julie Country Day School, where Auntie Sister was mother superior. I'd have to break out the clarinet around midvisit and play for them all in a big, echoing room, with lots of nuns inviting themselves in to hear me as I sat there drilling the woodwind to "Flight of the Bumblebee." It nearly killed me. When I got into high school and told my father Frank that playing in the marching band wasn't really cool and asked him gingerly if I could quit the clarinet, he reluctantly said okay. It must have secretly killed him. I quit the band, and Bob Noonan, the clarinet teacher, died of a heart attack shortly after that. Poor Bob Noonan left all of that thick hair behind.

After quitting band, I began running track because running (from things) was something that I was always really good at. I wrote things too. It was around that time that I wrote this song, "Reincarnation of a Rock Star" after playing air guitar one day to The Stones in the parlor on Eighteenth Street.

*The days, he stays inside
He isn't trying to hide
His dreams are heavy screams, alive
They allow him to survive*

*His tools are vocal jewels, he sings
A harvest, running springs
A band silhouettes the stage
A lion on his cage*

*While lights go on
Fingers born, the frets are worn*

*The days, he stays inside
He isn't trying to hide
No social suicides
No more*

I loved dreaming. I could be a world-class surfer in my dreams. Right down the street from Bob Noonan's Music Studio was The Strand Theatre where I first saw the 1966 *Endless Summer* documentary with my friend Ray Champeaux. I was mesmerized watching these guys chase the summer around the world, surfing the oceans of our crazy earth. It made me realize that it could always be summer for me. And while these surfers chased the sun, the sun was always warm. I truly wanted to feel the warm sun forever as I surfed upon these oceans of life. How comfortable and crazy it all seemed to me now.

Our own surfboard was now knocking its bungee bondage as we passed the long, distant beaches on our left. I felt like I was James Thurber's Walter Mitty, living the life of a double agent, secretly leaving Colette or whatever else I was leaving in Los Angeles and slipping away to a top secret assignment somewhere in the East.

I was a singer in a rock-and-roll band. Back living in Huntington Beach, I occasionally sang with a group of Vietnamese guys that I worked with in the circuit board factory. Minh Nguyen and Bang Tran played the instruments, and I sang with them in their garage somewhere in Garden Grove. I knew the words to Billy Idol's "White Wedding," and I could sing it in perfect English, which was good enough for them at first. Declan tried to sing it one evening with me, and that's when these Vietnamese guys decided not to invite us back for practice. They decided that they would rather learn the English words themselves because Declan and I could hardly carry it; they were getting better, and we weren't. I always thought that I was a great singer, but isn't that the way that these things always go?

And so it had come to pass that all three of us, Lucas Coppens, Declan Brady, and I, looking for something more, had planned to collectively move on till we found it. We would go together or separately. It was planned that August 24th would be the day we all would quit our jobs, and we did. Declan quit his newspaper ad sales job at the *Daily Pilot* (he always referred to the paper as the Daily Planet). Lucas quit his job as a mechanical engineer with the government, and I left my temporary job at the circuit board factory. We were off across the zigzag country and on to Europe.

"No more conventional jobs! No more 8 to 5! No more break rooms filled with cigarette stench and coffee cups!" Declan yelled aloud as Lucas rolled down his own driver-side window in order to let out a shrill, seemingly everlasting, scream from the meandering roads that skirted the cliffs just to the south of Big Sur.

Declan finally gave up on the radio and pulled out a cassette tape from Lucas's amassed collection. Changing colors moved both above and below us; there was all of this turquoise

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