

1 ~ Blood

VIOLENCE CRACKLED IN THE SMOKE filled pub, igniting the atmosphere as it danced gleefully from person to person. The Butcher's Arms, nicotine yellow over everything, stank as cheap and menacing as a whore's offering.

Teddy Blake, legendary amongst London's gangster elite, sipped his glass of Bushmills, eyeballing his firm dotted around the room. Shifting looks exchanged in anticipation of the bloody carnage that everyone knew was going to take place.

Boysie, although only twelve, was as familiar with the vibe of premeditated violence as he was with the sweet-sour smell of a pub. He'd heard talk around the manor that his dad and Charlie Thompson, the boss of another firm, were now at odds. He loved his dad more than anything and although he had never shown fear, there was something different about tonight. Boysie knew his dad wouldn't let him stay, but he thought he'd try it on anyway.

"Can I have another cider, please, Dad?"

Teddy smiled lovingly at his son and handed him twenty quid. "It's almost time, and I don't want you here for this one."

Worry suddenly edged his young face. "But--"

"--Take a cab home and I'll see you in the mornin'. Alright, boy?"

He locked eyes with his dad and wanted to say more, but knew it was a waste of time. He nodded and left.

The pub door closed behind Boysie and he stood on the sidewalk, immune to the bitter London cold. He scanned the street; yellow smudges from occasional streetlamps tried to push back the dark. Here, Victorian warehouses, angry in their desolation, stood like decaying monoliths, specters from a bygone age. A lot of England was like that back in the early nineties; an era that had refused to go quietly into the night. But change is inevitable and corporate gangsters were fast moving in. For now, this was neutral ground for both firms and few, including the Ol' Bill, braved the waterfront or this pub, particularly at night. Two sets of headlights turned onto the deserted street. Boysie watched the Rolls Royce Silver Spurs pull up; black, shiny and new. Seven hard bastards cautiously got out, scanning the area. These were not your hoodie brigade, garden variety

of thug. These were the real deal. Dressed to the nines. Bulges under their coats. They blocked the sidewalk as their boss emerged from the second Roller; Charlie Thompson, a nasty piece of work. His impeccable Savile Row, all midnight blue and grey chalk stripes, framed by the fawn cashmere overcoat that was draped across his heavy shoulders. Old Spice drifted on the night air.

Charlie looked at Boysie. His aging creased forehead gaining another red, grooved furrow, “Aren’t you Teddy Blake’s boy?”

“Yeah,” he smirked, locking eyes with him.

“Do you who I am?”

“You’re a Charlie Ronce, aren’t you?”

“Oy, ya little sod!” snapped one of Charlie’s thugs, taking a menacing step toward him.

Charlie Thompson waved him away. “Is that what your dad said, I’m a ponce?”

“Ask him yourself.”

Charlie nodded, contemplating him. “You’ve got balls, son. I’ll say that for you.”

Boysie held his stare.

Charlie moved toward the red pub door. One of his soldiers opened it; inside, everything came to an abrupt halt. They entered and the door banged shut.

Boysie sprinted down the alley to the back of the pub and tried to peer in, but the condensation was too thick on the unwashed window. Didn’t matter because a moment later the back door burst open, pouring out angry, cursing soldiers from both firms, hostile in their intent. Hiding behind a stack of old tea chests marked with the familiar East India Tea Company logo, he caught his breath as tempers flared. Teddy jabbed a hard finger into Charlie’s chest, accusing him of a double cross on some bank job or other. The latter just smirked, not resisting, not denying, not afraid. That confused Boysie. Everyone around the manor was scared of his dad. Confusion became clarity when Charlie’s soldiers melted into the darkness and Teddy’s own pulled out their shooters, aiming at his back; double cross. Fear slows time and with snickering complicity, trapped Boysie’s voice for a moment that would always seem like an eternity.

Some of Teddy Blake's men were frozen with stupid, fixed grins. Most with faces set hard. The only thing that penetrated the back alley stink of betrayal, was the taunting chuckle of his mortal enemy, Charlie Thompson.

"Dad, behind you!"

Teddy Blake spun around and locked eyes with Boysie. In that one fateful moment, that final embrace, they both understood it was over. He knew his dad would go out fighting and, quicker than anyone expected, Teddy pulled out a gun, managing to squeeze one off into Charlie's fat torso. A second muzzle flash seared the darkness and for a split second, Teddy Blake wavered at the entrance to eternity. He turned and looked into the smirking eyes of his trusted lieutenant, Chalky White. His five white knuckles gripped the .45 as a thin wisp of smoke drifted carelessly out of the barrel. The smell of it taunted Boysie's senses and reminded him of Guy Fawkes Night; betrayal on no grander a scale. Chalky fired again. So did Teddy's men. Boysie could only watch helplessly as his dad danced the Spandau ballet; pumped full of death. Gunshots echoing off into history. The acrid choke of cordite mixed with the metallic smell of blood, as unmistakable as the stench from a slaughterhouse. Teddy Blake lay in his own piss and blood as his traitorous soldiers, except for one, ran away.

"Dad! Dad!" Boysie collapsed in a miserable heap onto his father's body.

Chalky White knew there was no coming back from this, so he took aim.

Charlie Thompson opened his suit coat, revealing the bulletproof jacket and shook his head. "Leave it."

"But he's seen us. He knows who I am," hissed Chalky White.

Boysie, his father's blood all over him, screamed at him in despair, "You bastard!"

Chalky smirked and moved the gun as if to shoot him. BANG! Surprise bulged his eyes. Blood seeped out of the hole just above his heart. His knees buckled and he sank to the cold, hard, concrete. It was his dying time but instead of fear, he felt a compulsion to laugh. The blood that was forcing its way up his throat killed that, too.

"I don't top kids. No matter who they are," growled Charlie, slipping the gun back into his shoulder holster.

Chalky White shivered a coupled of times, his eyes glazed over and death claimed its prize.

Boysie looked up at Charlie Thompson, his massive frame in silhouette. For the second time that night, they locked eyes. "I'm gonna kill you!" he spat venomously.

"Whenever you're ready, Boysie, come see me."

2 ~ A Beautiful Day

BOYSIE DROPPED DOWN FROM 4TH TO 3RD and hit the gas. Celeste, his 1972 E-Type Jag, took the curve on Mulholland Drive, like a shark effortlessly doubling back on its helpless prey. He smiled as the bright California sun reflected off the new British Racing Green paint. His crew of expert restorers had just completed the frame off restoration of the 2+2 convertible coupe and the powerful V-12 hummed contentedly.

“Time for a pint,” he said, stroking her new, supple, tan, leather interior. She continued to purr as he guided her down off Coldwater Canyon, making a quick right onto Beverly Glenn. At Sunset Boulevard, the light smiled green and he made the right, driving past the warm pink of the Beverly Hills Hotel.

Boysie left the twists and turns of Sunset, drifted down onto the Pacific Coast Highway and cruised the last few miles to Ocean Avenue, turning into the parking lot opposite the Royal Arms.

After the murder of his dad, he had started to follow in his criminal footsteps. For the next three years he went on a spree of stealing, fighting and general mayhem, leaving school when he was fifteen. It was then that his mum, a devout Catholic, and a long time family friend, Father Murphy, intervened. The priest convinced him to start boxing and learn a trade. He did the first but declined the latter and within 3 years, ended up an Amateur Boxing Association champion.

He and Father Murphy had grown very close, so when the priest was given the parish of Santa Monica, Boysie, then eighteen, decided to also relocate to Los Angeles for a fresh start. His dad had left a fortune, with the lion’s share of it going to him. The rest was split between his mum and older brother, Harry. With some of the money, Boysie purchased the pub, an exact replica of a London Tudor. Now, fifteen years later, it brings in a very healthy profit. The interior is exactly as one might find in the UK; dark brown wood, hardwood floors, pictures of the Royal family, British beer, dartboard and a pool table.

The Sex Pistols, “Anarchy In The UK,” rocked the jukebox as Boysie made his way to the bar, nodding at the regulars greeting him. His mum, Toni, her face now clearly

showing signs of her sixty years, along with Summer and Autumn, twenty-two year old identical twins, were serving pints to the punters.

They said in unison, “Hi, Boysie.”

“Ladies. Mum.”

Toni placed the ice-cold pint of Newcastle Brown Ale on the dark wooden bar. He took a sip; the bitter, nutty flavor washing across his tongue.

“The new Jag running alright?” she asked, her New York accent strong as ever.

“Celeste and yes, she’s running like a charm.”

“You look tired.”

“Bit knackered. Had another bad dream.”

She nodded slowly, but offered no words of comfort. Harry, as usual, was propping up the bar, sipping on a glass of white wine.

Boysie’s iPhone buzzed. “Yeah?”

“Are you coming in?” asked Jose, his foreman.

“Hadn’t planned on it. Why?”

“That dude didn’t pick up his car.”

“Did you call him?”

“Sí. Left him three messages.”

“No worries. I’ll give him a bell later.”

“Okay, Boss.” Boysie hung up and took another sip.

Crystal Sorensen, Harry’s sometime girlfriend, put down her pint and opened the middle buttons on her dress, exposing her belly-button ring on which dangled a little, golden heart. She turned to Boysie. “Look, I’ve got a new, cute, little heart.”

“It’ll make up for the one you don’t have,” he replied.

Those in earshot giggled.

“I guess you read my article, then?”

“Yeah, right before I flushed it.”

“That’s not nice.”

“I don’t think he agrees with you,” grinned Boysie.

“Who, him?” frowned Crystal, indicating Harry.

“No, him.”

He pointed to the front door through which a red faced, snarling and very pissed off Father Murphy was entering.

Crystal choked out, “Oh no.”

Father Murphy roared, “Crystal!”

She ignored him and entered the relative sanctuary of the Loo.

“That woman should be burned at the stake.”

“She’s allowed to voice her opinion,” offered Boysie.

“Not when it jeopardizes the Innocents.”

“No one’s innocent.”

“Ah, away wi’cha,” replied the priest and focused on the waiting pint of Guinness.

As was his habit, he stared at it for a long time. No one ever asked him why. Didn’t seem important. Boysie smiled as he waited for the familiar, gravely, Irish lilt to sing forth. Nothing. Not even a murmur. Only the continual sound of the priest breathing out of his bulbous nose that had as much hair growing on it, as out of it, evidenced by the upside-down forest that continually glistened in his nostrils. He blessed the pint, picked it up and drank it down in one, wiping the creamy white froth from his beard and smearing it on his frock coat. He turned his piercing blue, watery eyes on Boysie and said, “I need to have a word.”

“Can it wait?”

Father Murphy looked at Toni. “Glass of ancestral mist, if ya please?”

She poured the priest two fingers of his favorite, Bushmills, sixteen year malt.

Boysie finished his pint. “What, exactly, beside the article, did Crys--”

“—Sshh. Ya cannot say her name in me presence.”

“In any event, what else did she do?”

“Consorted with the enemy.”

“She became a Protestant?”

“You’re a blasphemous bastard, Boysie Blake.”

Boysie headed across Ocean Avenue and onto the grassy area that runs along the top of the eroded cliffs. They, in turn, overlook the beach that’s framed by the ubiquitous traffic on Pacific Coast Highway and the tumble of white caps, forever reaching out from the glisten of Pacific blue. On this particular October afternoon, the wind was cutting in

from the sea, filled with the cold promise of an evening fog. He walked briskly along and ladies, dressed in their weekend best and fully armored with all their hooks, lures and snares, smiled at him. Always the polite East Ender, he smiled back but never removed his coal black Pradas, thus avoiding the much sought after eye contact. Boysie's dad had always been well dressed and he definitely followed in his footsteps. His love of hip, casual two-piece suits, hand-made Italian shoes, coupled with his chiseled good looks, fair hair and blue eyes made him a target for the lonely, and the not so.

Boysie crossed over the pedestrian walkway to the Georgian Hotel, a beautiful art deco building constructed in 1933, and was about to sprint up the steps, when he heard a faint '*meow*' coming from the alleyway that ran down the side of the hotel. About half way in, he found a tiny kitten hidden behind the dumpster, shivering and crying. He smiled and gently picked it up, cupping his hands around it to give it some warmth. From the other end of the alley, its mother, a large tabby that looked the worse for wear, anxiously appeared and bounded toward them. She was obviously the kitten's mum, one of several feral cats that Jimmy, the Concierge, had been regularly feeding with kitchen scraps. She stopped several feet in front of him and meowed nervously, her eyes darting from him to her kitten and back again.

"Sorry," said Boysie and gently placed the kitten on the ground, taking several steps back. Cautiously, she edged a little closer. He added, "I'll leave you to it then."

Quickly, the cat gently gripped the kitten in her mouth and trotted off, casting a wary glance back at him.

"That's her momma," said Jimmy, the Concierge as he emerged from the side door, a cigarette in hand.

"How many cats are there?"

"Five or six."

"And how many kittens?"

"About the same."

"Before this gets outta hand and we become a pettin' zoo, I'd like you to call the vet and have them all checked out, and spayed and neutered."

"Okay."

“I also want them given shots and medication. The mum looked kind’a ragged out. Flea bitten.”

“They wild, Boysie.”

“Yeah, but as we feed ‘em, or rather you do, we’re sort’a obligated to look after ‘em a bit better. Don’t you think?”

Jimmy shrugged. “Sure.”

Boysie handed him one of his credit cards. “Use this and please make sure it’s done today.”

“Okay,” replied Jimmy and took the card.

Inside the hotel lobby, Boysie stepped into the elevator and pressed the access code for the Penthouse. The heavy brass doors closed silently and a moment later, he stepped out into his loft that took up the entire top floor. He had moved in after buying the hotel four years earlier at the height of the Great Recession. Polished hardwood floors framed Persian rugs on which sat antique furniture. Paintings in gilt frames, intermingled with Warhols and taking up almost an entire wall, one of his favorites from his friend and famed British artist, Swarez. On the wall above his iMac, a framed black and white movie poster of his personal hero, Michael Caine, in ‘Get Carter.’

Boysie took a long, hot shower and settled down on his balcony that looked out to sea. A sip of Beaulieu bourbon mixed perfectly with the flavor of his Cuban cigar. He relaxed as Jussi Bjorling’s, “Au fond du temple saint,” quietly drifted out of the stereo. Boysie loved this time of day; the sun beginning its evening romance with the horizon, turning the sky glorious amber with smudges of red, tinting the gathering clouds pink. The tranquility was interrupted by the incessant vibrating of his iPhone, prompting him to look at the received text from Father Murphy, ‘*Pier.*’

The priest was staring out to sea when Boysie joined him. For a long moment, neither spoke. Eventually, Father Murphy said quietly out the corner of his mouth, “Michael fell out with Bergman an’ Martinez. He told me that Bergman threatened him.”

Boysie looked at him. “And why am I only hearing of this now?”

“‘Cause it only happened yesterday and when they find out he sold me that land for a dollar, it’s going to get a little anxious.”

“Who for?”

“Them, of course.”

“I see. A dollar?” The priest shrugged and peered at him out of the corner of his eyes.

“So what do you want from me?” asked Boysie.

“Nuttin’. I’m just telling ya what’s going on, is all.”

“Is he still their partner?”

“In principle, aye.”

“I know I’m gonna regret this but I do have to ask, why would he sell you land for a buck that’s worth at least seven million times more?”

A smile crept over Father Murphy’s wrinkled face. “You’ll have to ask him.”

“And what do you plan to do with it?”

“I’m not sure. But I’ll think’a something.”

“Wouldn’t have anything to do with a rehab unit, would it?” asked Boysie nonchalantly.

“Aye, it might.”

“Now I’m beginning to see.”

“What are they going to do, huh? The Homeless have a right to lay their heads on clean sheets as much as anyone.”

Two women ambled past them, the breeze flowing their hair back off their faces, flushing their cheeks. Smiling, they glanced at Boysie.

“Ladies.”

One of them opened her mouth to reply, but Father Murphy activated his first. “Pay attention.”

“You can’t put a shelter and rehab unit in between two five star hotels. It’s not on.”

The priest glared at Boysie. “And why the hell not?”

“Isn’t it obvious?”

“Just because those people can afford to stay there, doesn’t make ‘em any better than a person that can’t.”

“I didn’t say that. But those people, are the ones that help fund your food program.”

“Ah! Blood money.”

“All money has blood on it.”

“That’s ‘cause those people are all guilty of doing something, somewhere.”

Boysie shook his head in disbelief. “Does the word ‘hypocrite’ mean anything to you?”

“Exactly. You’re right. That’s exactly what they are. Fuckin’ hypocrites.”

A passing couple looked incredulously at the priest.

Boysie asked, “Do you want me to talk to Bergman?”

“No. I’m just making conversation ‘cause I have nuttin’ better to do.”

“Humor. Not one of your strong points.”

“Ah, away wi’cha. I’ll see you later at the pub.”

“Can’t wait.”

Father Murphy strolled off, muttering to himself. The wind pushed his black frock coat and mop of tangled white hair out behind him, giving him the appearance of Dracula. Boysie watched as his friend crossed Ocean Avenue, but the 1963 Chevy Impala low-rider and its occupants, three shaved head, tattooed, gang-bangers, caught his attention. He watched them as they watched Father Murphy. Suddenly the driver pulled a U-turn, gassing the Chevy past Boysie who pretended to be looking at the screaming gulls, surfing the wind. He punched the license plate into his iPhone and headed back to the Georgian. He walked in, slipped off his black, handmade, Michael Toschis and put the kettle on. While he waited for it to boil, he got on the Internet and using License Plate Search, entered the number. In a few seconds he had the Boyle Heights address and printed it out.

The piercing whistle called him to the kitchen. He poured the hot water over an Earl Grey tea bag; Twinings, of course, adding a splash of organic low-fat milk. While he waited for the tea to steep, he called Chris Bergman at his luxury hotel, the Bergman, situated just off Ocean Avenue.

“Mr. Bergman’s office,” offered his evidently very young secretary.

“*What a stereotype Bergman is,*” he thought to himself. “May I please speak to Chris?”

“Who’s calling?”

“Boysie.”

“No, not where you’re from. Who are you?”

“My name’s Boysie and he knows who I am.”

“I’m sorry, Mr. Boysie, I can’t put you through unless you give me more information,”
came her chilly response.

“You’re new, right?”

“Yes, but--”

“--What’s your name?”

“Janis.”

“Okay, Janis. You can either put me through, or force me to come down there. It’s
your choice.”

She breathed hard as annoyance flushed through her. “Just a moment please.”

Bergman barked down the line, “Boysie. How are you, buddy?”

“Michael sold the land to Father Murphy.”

Silence. Louder and more telling than any conversation. Bergman finally sucked in
some air. “When?”

“Doesn’t really matter, does it?”

“How much?”

“Not for sale.”

“Why the hell not?”

“Because it isn’t,” confirmed Boysie, again.

“Michael was having mental problems. We’ll contest the sale.”

“Chris, I understand that you’re upset but--”

“--I want that land.”

“We all want a lot of things. However, that particular piece of dirt is not--”

“--I knew this was gonna happen. I did. I knew he’d do something vengeful like this.
You better tell that crazy priest to--”

“--What?” Bergman stopped the verbal diarrhea. Boysie added, “I have the address of
your East L.A. friends.”

“What’re you talking about?”

“You’re testing my patience. Don’t.”

“Listen--”

“--You and your partners need to stop, before you force my hand. Know what I
mean?”

“I’ll pass on your advice.”

“You do that.”

Boysie hung up.

Outside the world continued its madness. In the relative serenity of the Georgian, he was soothed by the aria. He sipped his tea and nibbled on a McVitie’s chocolate biscuit.

Boysie steered Celeste off Third, her headlights illuminating Larchmont Boulevard. He loved this area. The Fichus tree lined main street with its head-in parking, reminded him of small town America. Cool boutiques, great little restaurants and Larchmont Village Wine & Cheese, a particular favorite. The entire neighborhood, known as Windsor Square, included Hancock Park and had been designed for strolling in quiet safety. Nosing the E-Type into a parking spot, he grabbed the bottle of 2005 Nadeau Petite Syrah, activated the alarm and headed for the intimate Girasole.

Sophie Devaru was sitting on the little bench outside of the Italian restaurant. Her long, dark hair tumbled over her shoulders as she crossed her legs, right foot flicking in the way that some women do when displaying irritation. This action always reminded him of a cat giving off its unmistakable warning – “I’m pissed and you better tread lightly.” He had met her at a party in the Hollywood Hills and although attracted to her, he was more intrigued by the haunting familiarity of her ice-blue eyes.

He smiled down at her, “‘Allo darlin’.” She glared her response. He felt the flush of annoyance tingle his skin, but kept himself in check, and sat next to her. “Are you alright?”

She gave him the kind of look that should have glaciated the blood in his veins. “Why did you bring me here?”

“What?”

“Here, to this place. Why?”

“I thought you’d like it.”

“You mean you like it?”

“Yeah, I do but--”

“--How long have we been seeing each other?”

“Three weeks.”

“And you’re already bringing me to a dump like this?”

He gritted his teeth, eyes narrowing. “A dump like this?”

“Why not Ago, Cellar Door or Asia De Cuba or somewhere where there’s life? Something happening. Going on. Christ, this area’s boring.”

“Is that where you’d like to go?”

“Is that supposed to be funny?”

He smiled and stood up. “Then might I suggest you take yourself to whichever one tickles your fancy.”

“What?”

“Have a good night.”

He walked into Girasole and took a table, deliberately sitting with his back to the window. Sophie sat there, too humiliated to move. Too self-entitled to fully comprehend that he had just dumped her. She was, after all, a fast rising and well-known movie star. Normally he didn’t date actresses. Most were too deeply shallow and playing second fiddle to their ego didn’t fit well with him. She glared at his back and stomped off to her black BMW. Boysie ordered the insalata caprese and washed it down with a couple of glasses of wine, leaving the rest for the waiters.

It was late when he walked back down the deserted boulevard. A chilling breeze blew small pieces of trash in little whirly gigs across the sidewalk. Remnants of sautéed garlic drifted out of a closed Greek restaurant. Randomly, he thought about an old black and white photo he had once seen of Larchmont, depicting the Keystone Cops filming another of their crazy movies. He laughed to himself and didn’t hear the soft purr of the cherry bomb mufflers until the 1963 Chevy was almost on him. Boysie darted around the corner and the Chevy roared to life; tires squealing in protest, headlights blasting away the dark. He ran into the alley drawing a parallel line to the boulevard, and slid behind a dumpster that was leaking putrid fluid. He slowed his breathing and waited. Three rats eyed him curiously and went about their business. Three more rumbled into the alley and didn’t. High beams cutting the night for all to see. They slinked out, black gang tattoos, plaid shirts, Dickies and guns; a stereotypes wet dream.

The leader spat hostility. “Find that fool!”

The other two edged along the alley, while he waited by the idling Chevy.

Boysie didn't carry a gun, but he did a knife. In fact, two, and always clipped onto the inside of his pants. He reached down, took one out, opening it quietly and wrapped a battle-hardened fist around the handle, blade pointed down, cutting edge forward. Slipping off his shoes, he padded slowly up behind the leader who didn't hear him, but did feel the blade press against the side of his neck, just under his jaw.

"Easy," hissed Boysie with deadly intent and grabbed his gun away from him. The gang-banger froze. "Tell your Homies to put their guns down."

"Mira!" The other two, now halfway down the alley, turned and looked, squinting in the high beam glare. "This fool got me cold. Put your heaters down."

They glanced at the silhouette standing directly behind their boss and laid down their guns.

"Kick 'em away," Boysie growled. They didn't. He pressed the blade harder onto the gang-banger's neck, splitting skin, drawing blood.

"Do like this fool sez."

They kicked away their guns into the dark.

Boysie searched the leader's pockets and pulled out his wallet. He flipped it open and looked at the California driver's license, reading out loud, "Jose Coronel. 23709 Whittier Boulevard. East LA. There's a surprise."

"So what, cabrón?"

"So I'm only gonna ask you once. If you don't tell me, I'm gonna cut you to the bone. Nod if you understand."

He nodded.

"Who sent you?"

"No one, esse. We was gonna--"

Boysie drew the razor sharp edge across Jose's cheek. Skin split to bone. Blood burst out. Jose screamed. One of the other gang-bangers whipped out a blade lunging at Boysie who sidestepped and slammed his knee into his gut. The gang-banger doubled over, gasping for air, holding his stomach. The third was a much more experienced street fighter and dropped down, sweeping out one of Boysie's legs. He hit the black top hard and the gang-banger jumped on top of him, launching into an MMA style barrage. Boysie

covered up, avoiding most of the blows and ended the fight by kneeing him up into his balls. Jose reached under the driver's seat, pulled out another gat and unleashed a hail of gunfire where he thought his target to be. Only he wasn't. He was right next to him. He screamed as Boysie snapped his arm like a dry twig and slammed his face onto the car. He let him go and turned, expecting the first two gang-bangers to be on him again, only they lay in pools of their own slowly spreading death; victims of friendly fire. In a matter of moments, LAPD would come roaring into the alley. Guns drawn. Fingers twitchy.

3 ~ Michael

IT WAS FIVE AM WHEN Boysie was released from the Wilshire Division Precinct. Matt Sugarman, his attorney, knew the Captain, Mike Samuels. The cops kept the knives as evidence, telling him that the DA would want to interview his client after reviewing the facts.

Celeste ate the 10 Freeway ravenously, passing the occasional vehicle as if they were late for the banquet. Soft fingers of turquoise and light pink behind grey, wispy, night clouds, began to herald the dawn in that California way. His iPhone buzzed and he looked at the ID: Mum.

“Allo--” is all he got out before she burst into tears.

“--Michael’s dead!”

“What?”

“He drowned, surfing.”

“When?”

“Yesterday.”

“I’ll be there as soon as I can.”

“Please, hurry.”

“Is Harry with you?”

“Yeah.”

Boysie walked into the pub and his teary eyed mum burst into hysterical tears, throwing her arms around him.

“Oh, Boysie, it’s terrible. How could this’ve happened?”

“Come on,” he said gently, “sit down.”

Toni sat meekly and blew her nose into a wad of tissue. “I don’t understand.” She blew her nose again.

“Did the police say how?”

“An accident.”

“No specifics?”

“Only that he was surfing alone at Sycamore Cove and was found by some other surfers.”

Harry said, "I called Father Murphy. He's on his way over."

Boysie looked at him. "How did you find out?"

"Charlie called from the station house. Do you want a cup of tea? I just made it."

"No, thanks." He turned to his mum, "Will you be okay if I leave for a while?" She nodded and tried to smile. "Alright. I'll call you later."

Boysie parked Celeste out front of the Santa Monica Precinct on Olympic. The Duty Sergeant rang Detective Charles Lawton. The cop lumbered his massive frame, with some effort, down the hallway. He wore his outlook on life in the way that some men wore a pair of dirty, beaten sneakers - begrudgingly. He had seen way too much and the burden of it had cut deep grooves across his forehead.

"Boysie," he growled in his base-baritone voice, offering his massive hand, clothes more Mickey Spillane than GQ.

"Allo, Charlie."

They shook hands and went into the detective's office. "How's she doing?" he asked.

"Not good. What happened?"

"The Ventura Sheriff's Department has logged it an accidental drowning."

"You know the primary?"

"There isn't one. Not when the Medical Examiner's ruled it that way."

"We both know he was a very experienced surfer."

"Yeah, but he was seventy-one."

"So what? He was tough as nails."

"No one's tough as nails against the ocean. Maybe there was a bad undertow, or he slipped and hit his head. Who knows?" shrugged the detective.

"Injuries?"

"Yeah, but consistent with being battered by high surf."

"And that's as far as you're gonna take it?"

"Come on, Boysie, I know he was your dad--"

"--Stepdad."

"But it was a tragic accident. Nothing more."

"You don't know that for sure."

“No, but this is California and surfers die all the time. It happens.”

Detective Lawton extracted the silver pen that he always kept in his jacket breast pocket and began tapping it on his fingers.

“You’re probably right, but it’s my mum and you know how she gets.”

“Yeah, I do. But it doesn’t change the fact that I don’t have time, or jurisdiction to investigate a non-crime, as ruled by the Coroner.” He stared evenly at the detective, causing him to shift uneasily in his chair. “It’s not that I don’t want to, Boysie, but there’s too much legitimate crime to deal with. I don’t have the man power.”

“Isn’t that an oxy-moron, legitimate crime?”

“I’m sorry, man, I really am, but it’s just another tragic accident. Nothing more.”

Boysie fell silent.

The detective cleared his throat. “I got a call from Captain Samuels, about last night.”

“And?”

“You okay?”

“It’s outta your jurisdiction. Don’t concern yourself.”

“How did you manage to pop two of ‘em?”

“I didn’t.”

Lawton smirked his disbelief. “Right. Anyway, the survivor won’t make bail.”

“Must be ‘cause it’s legitimate crime.”

The cop’s smirk faded into uneasy silence.

“You coming over the pub later?” asked Boysie.

“Yeah. I wanna give her my condolences.”

“She’ll appreciate that.” He stood up and shook the detectives hand, “Who found him?”

“A couple of kids.”

“You have their info?”

“No and I’ve got no pull with the Ventura Sheriff’s Department.”

“No worries.”

It was too early to see Bergman and fatigue was beginning to catch up with him. On his way back to the Georgian, he called Harry. “She okay?”

“I gave her an Ambien and she went to bed.”

“Have you looked in on her?”

“She is my mum too, you know,” he replied.

“Sorry.”

Back in his sanctuary, Boysie showered, shaved, had a glass of water with Emergen-C and went to bed, falling straight to sleep.

