ABSTRACT

THE LAKE ME SAGA

by William Comparetto

The Lake Me Saga, a circuitous, non-linear caper involving two bored friends who decide to have a naval battle with a canoe and a small sailing skiff on a small Midwestern lake to protest summer’s end, while two mobsters, who are equally as bored, decide to wager on the battle’s outcome.
THE LAKE ME SAGA

A Thesis

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The Morning of the Naval Battle

Ed Groat paddled his canoe in slow, thoughtful strokes across the glassy surface of Lake Me.

He had a coonskin cap on, and a leather outfit made out of, what he claimed; ‘deerskin.’

“I shot that somebitch when I was seventeen,” Ed said. He claimed he had felled the deer with a compound bow, and while the deer was still writhing, he claimed he heaved a Chinese kitchen knife into the deer's neck.

“Poor somebitch was in some pain,” he said.

On the other side of the lake, dressed in a Sioux Indian headdress was Henge. He was manning the rudder of a small sailing skiff, a Snipe. A thirteen foot or so single mast boat Henge had bought to dock at Lake Me, and sloop around every so often.

“Get the lead out, bubba,” he said one evening. “I love sailing, getting my body in shape.” He said. “And when you’re out there on that thing, just you and nature bubba,” he said, “It sounds like the color orange, and the water whispers secrets in your ear.”

Henge and Ed Groat were having a re-enactment of sorts on Lake Me. A naval battle that never actually happened, a sort of cowboy and Indian archetypical posture dance.

Truth was, Ed and Henge were bored. It was just before the beginning of the fall semester, and the freshmen were moving into their dorms, wearing shorts and flip flops, filling sad tired roles, and saying ‘like’ every third or fourth word.

“Yeah Sam,” Ed said, “I think you and me should have a naval battle on Lake Me,” he said. “Put some action in the somebitch,” he said.

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As Ed paddled his canoe, he looked around Lake Me. Not a somebitch in sight, he thought to himself. With his left hand he flipped the coonskin tail off his right shoulder. He noticed that he had been paddling one sided, and the striped tail flopped onto his shoulder, and began tickling his ear.
“Somebitch.” Ed said. Ed shook his head, and chuckled quietly to the inner bow of his fiberglass canoe. It was a nice, serene day on Lake Me, but he and Henge were bored, so they were going to have a naval battle.

Across Lake Me, near the pedal boat rental Kiosk, Henge, dressed in his Sioux Indian war bonnet, was rigging his thirteen foot Snipe with a hand pump water cannon on the starboard gunwale and bulkhead. Henge wanted to show Ed Groat on this bored day on Lake Me that he indeed was the real naval power, but show him without really harming him.

A gentle breeze wisped across the rental area, and across the water to the limp sail of the Snipe, and Henge steadied the spar.

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The whole thing started the way a lot of things that shouldn’t start end up starting; with boredom. The late summer cicadas sung their sad waning grind up high in the boughs of all the deciduous trees, and the humid air clung to everything over at Ed Groat’s place.

They were drinking lemonade out of mason jars. The jars, filled with irregular chunks of ice and yellow sugary liquid sweated. The ice was from a block of ice Ed had frozen in an old milk jug. He hacked the block into chucks small enough to fit inside the mason jar using a ball peen hammer.

“Somebitches charge way too much for ice, Jack,” Ed said.

“Really?” said Henge. He never really thought too much about the ice market.

“Yeah buddy,” Ed said. “Somebitches mark it up about fifteen to one,” he said. It was a plausible number. Henge nodded and brought the jar to his face and took a drink.

There was an old fiberglass canoe upside down across a couple of saw horses in Ed Groat’s dilapidated back yard.

“What’s with the canoe?” Henge said.

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“It’s a canoe, Jack,” Ed said. He furrowed his brow. Maybe offering him lemonade was a mistake.
“Yeah,” Henge said, “I got that,” he said, “but what do you do with it?” He said, “I mean, are you into boating?” Henge took another sip.

“Yeah Sam, all the time,” Ed said, “me and my old man used to canoe on that somebitch all the time,” he said. By ‘somebitch,’ Ed had been referring to the Ohio River. Henge made note of that.

In college, during his sophomore year at Yale, Henge had been involved with the sailing club, an involvement which had placed him in charge of the club account. An unfortunate event concerning a misuse of funds, a cargo container of lysergic acid diethylamide, an ice cream truck, the City of New Haven, and a Queens Mafioso named Pete Limpelli led to the premature end of both Henge’s sailing and Yale careers.

“I used to do a bit of boating myself bubba,” Henge began.

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“’Sat so Luke?” Ed said.

The rest of the evening dissolved into a pissing contest of one-upmanship and lemonade in sweaty mason jars. The mosquitoes attacked vengefully, as if delivered from God, to punish, for bragging. Slapping at their exposed calves on Ed Groat’s back porch, they mutually decided it was time to go in, “to head home,” Henge said.

“Alright Sam,” Ed said.

The line was drawn. They had discussed sites for the impending naval battle. The River, it was decided, was too turbulent, and a lot of motorboaters would be inconsiderate – burning their loud engines – chuffing out blue fumes and making dangerous wakes.

They needed a placid body of water – preferably a lake.

“What about Lake Me?” Henge said.

Lake Me was on the campus of Milton University, a small college seated in the small college town of Sorbonne, Ohio.

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Milton University was renowned for resting firmly on its ivy laurels. At least that’s what the brochures would have you believe. Citing statistics of test scores and rankings. Picturing diverse students with perfect teeth next to red brick ivy covered buildings. Sweatshirts. Autumn leaves.

Milton University was a place every prospective undergraduate in at least a five mile radius wanted to go to.

Sorbonne, on the other hand, was a strange, choking town. Sorbonne, aside from Milton, was a vacuous crossroads of U.S. 27 and a couple of state routes, and hugged the Indiana border.

Sorbonnians, or Sorbonnites, as they sometimes referred to themselves, were mostly working class folks, a generation or two removed from the family farm, and by and large resented the mammoth Milton, with its ivy donned walls and undergraduate students who drove BMWs and Mercedes.

All Henge and Ed Groat wanted to do in Sorbonne, was have a naval battle on Lake Me, a man made reservoir in the middle of Bachelor Park.

Bachelor Park was on the eastern edge of Sorbonne, which was called “West Side” ironically. West Side Sorbonne, on the eastern edge of town got the name “West Side” because many years ago, a farmer named Old Man Maglachie sold produce from a stand on his property, on the eastern edge of Sorbonne, which he dubbed: “The Greatest Produce Stand In the West,” since, at that time, Ohio was still considered western and largely untamed. Old Man Maglachie, being a man ahead of his time, only sold organic produce. Sorbonnians, had they only known, might have thought that was a little eccentric.

So when Old Man Maglachie passed on, he had willed his farmland to the town of Sorbonne, and the name “West Side” residually stuck, muddled in Sorbonnian lore.

Most of “West Side” became Bachelor Park, and a good chunk of Bachelor Park became Lake Me.

Up until that point, there had never been a naval battle in Sorbonne.

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“Minchia,” Pete Limpelli said. It wasn’t a novel statement, Pete said ‘minchia’ all the time. But Pete was upset that the naval battle on Lake Me wasn’t being televised.
Pete had gotten wind of the battle from Carmine Calamari, who had spoken with a friend of Bill’s, who knew Ed Groat.

Pete wanted action. He wanted numbers. Carmine knew about lake things, and knew about contests and wagering on contests. Pete knew this, and Carmine knew that Pete knew this.

One thing which neither Pete nor Carmine knew, was that Henge and Ed Groat were good friends. That this was supposed to be a reenactment of a battle which never, but should have taken place.

“Somebitches should’ve had this battle,” Ed said. “Woulda changed history.”

***

The naval battle was sure to be a summer blow out. That’s what Henge and Ed Groat figured, anyway.

“Summer’s like a leaky canoe,” Ed said on the banks of Lake Me. “Somebitch needs to be fiberglassed over,” he said. “Sealed up.”

Ed looked into his coffee mug the morning of the battle. Nothing but a brown residue, and a pungent burnt smell. Ed had drank all the coffee he had brewed for the morning. Seeping the grounds with eggshells in his speckled blue percolator.

“I let that somebitch stew for about an hour and a half,” he said.

The resultant product was a thick black brew, three times its potency per volumetric measure. Ed Groat brewed a super coffee.

What Ed had forgot to do that morning, however, was have a few laughs. Ed was a shared partner in the exclusive Some Coffee and a Few Laughs™ friends network. Ed, being a non silent partner, was required to have at least one laugh per unit of coffee. The accepted unit was one cup. Ed had drank six cups of coffee that morning, and had only chuckled when he thought about a somebitch yuppie he scared four months ago, back in early May. Things were different in May.

The major problem was, Ed was not living in the moment.

Ed’s powerful coffee demanded a greater share of laughs per volume, as the caffeine content, thus potency of the coffee was that much greater. Laughs corresponded with caffeine.

Ed was in a serious, pensive mood that morning.
He had been thinking about closing out the summer.
Ed had been thinking about cleaning up his yard, to get the Hyde Park neighborhood commission off his back.
Ed had been thinking about the fact that he was wearing a deerskin unitard, and a coonskin cap on his head.
Ed thought about the fact that he was about to engage in a naval battle on Lake Me in a canoe, with Henge who would be wearing a Sioux headdress and piloting a thirteen foot snipe.
“Somebitch,” was all Ed Groat could say on that morning.
He shook his head.
The coonskin tail waggled across his nose, and he sneezed.
Ragweed season, the season Ed loathed, was approaching.

***

Henge woke up that morning. He was used to waking up more like one in the afternoon, and then listening to some NPR, and doing a few yoga positions he had read about sometime. So this morning, the morning of the fateful naval battle on Lake Me, Henge replicated his early afternoon ritual.

“The downward dog, bubba,” he would say, “and the cobra.”

Henge always believed that the secret to a productive and happy life was a limber spine. He would bend and flex on a ratty runner rug his uncle supposedly had purchased from a Navajo Indian reservation.

“Keeps the energy flowing,” Henge said. “Flows like a beam of photons up to the top of the head,” he said.

“It’s the kundalini rising,” he said.

After some yoga stretches, and a bowl of hummus, Henge prepped his feet. He rubbed down the soles of his feet with a tincture of olive oil and rosemary.

He couldn’t really explain why he did that.

After the foot rub, he went into his old roommate’s closet and retrieved the Sioux headdress he had purchased from a reservation somewhere on the northern border of Arizona and New Mexico.

This headdress, Henge believed, would give him special power from the Great Spirit.
The Great Spirit, Henge said, was not to be confused with Spiritual.
Henge lit an incense punk, with a presidential match book that had George W. Bush on
the cover, and blew out the match, and as an acrid snake of smoke climbed to the ceiling, Henge
said a prayer.

“Please Bubba,” Henge said in his prayer, “let me win this naval battle,” he said.
Silently, as the incense billowed in its straight line, Henge breathed, and lowered his
eyelids to half mast.

***

Ed Groat loaded up his fiberglass canoe on top of his 1986 Dodge Ram pickup. Silver
grey with primer and rust, a hackneyed rack on the roof of the cap Ed had made himself out of
two by fours and the frame from an old Sears Roebuck weight set.
By day, Ed Groat was a bricklayer.
Laying bricks made Ed’s hands calloused and thick. He flung the knotted rope over the
top of the upside down canoe, and pulled it taut, looping it under his homemade frame.

“Somebitches,” Ed said as he strained to fast the knot. He threaded one side, and then the
other, looping the nylon and twine rope under and over in a crisscross pattern.

His deerskin unitard began to chafe. The humid late summer air refused to give up. Ed’s
thick, calloused fingers swelled like charred bratwursts.

This naval battle was going to be a task, Ed thought to himself.
He looked at the ram hood ornament. Grey and chalky with its knurled swooping horns,
and expressionless, bulging eyes. “What you think, Sam,” Ed said to his ram ornament. “Is this
worth it?”

Ed imagined the ram thinking of something to say, but deciding not to say it.

“Somebitch.”

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Ed Groat and Henge stood there, that fateful morning, on the banks of Lake Me. Fog
hung across the surface, and frogs made noise. It was not really a glamorous bank, mostly
hillsides carved by bulldozers and filled with aggregate gravel and pulverized red bricks – refuse
from Milton University building projects.

Ed had unloaded his canoe from the top of his Dodge pickup truck, untying the knotted scraggly rope and flinging it into the capped bed.

“Rope is a very important substance Lou,” he said to Henge, but only because Henge was standing next to him.

Henge grabbed the aft portion of the canoe as Ed grabbed the fore, and they heaved it off the makeshift roof rack and shouldered it over to the bank.

Together, they launched the canoe, and as the bow of the fiberglass hull scraped against the aggregate bank of Lake Me it made a sad grinding sound.

Ed, with his deerskin unitard, coonskin cap, and concrete splattered work boots, boarded his craft with paddle in hand.

“Thanks Jack,” Ed said to Henge.

They both paused there, Henge with his Sioux headdress, and Ed in coonskin cap. They narrowed their eyes to each other. They didn’t really hate each other, but they knew they needed to battle. Summer was coming to a close, and they didn’t have anything better to do.

Henge fought tears. “See you bubba,” he said.

“Yeah,” Ed said, “see ya,” he said. He paddled softly, steadying his fiberglass canoe. “See ya Jack.”

Henge turned his back to Ed Groat. He knew that from this point forward, talking with Ed would only be construed as fraternization, and wearing the Sioux headdress, he knew the dangers of fraternization. He walked over to the dock where his thirteen foot snipe was moored in slip thirty seven.

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Henge boarded his thirteen footer, steadying himself and the skiff with a hand on the wooden dock. He sat down and checked some of the rope riggings. The cleat hitch kept everything to the dock. The mainsail and head sail were furled up and battened down.

The dingy looked like a patio table with umbrella all hunkered down for the winter.

Henge took a folding sailor’s knife off of his belt, and opened the marlin spike. With it, he began to work on opening a shackle that didn’t really need opening. Henge was killing time.
Realizing this, he closed the marlin spike and opened the Phillips head screwdriver. The clacking feel and sound of the knife comforted Henge.

Henge needed to fasten his hand pump water cannon to the starboard bulkhead. A friend of Henge’s had specially fitted the hand pump cannon with a swiveling clamp apparatus, for safety, and artillery purposes.

He had kept his water cannon a secret. He had kept the cannon under a canvas tarp on the deck back by the stern of the craft.

Pushing the headdress out of the way, he began tightening the swivel to the gun.

The sun lay heavy and low out of the east.

“Bubba,” Henge said to himself. He shook his head. It was already eighty-five degrees. Beads of sweat formed on his forehead just under the beaded front band of the headdress. The pattern on the headband told a story about killing a bear, but Henge didn’t know that.

Like countless men throughout history, Henge, on the morning of the naval battle, pondered the absurdity of life and the absurdity of war.

“Fuckin’ A,” he said. He started humming the Edwin Starr song. “War, huh, good God, what is it good for?” Forgetting the rest of the lyrics, he hummed, and repeated the tune for about fifteen minutes.

As he tightened the hex nuts on the stove bolts, fastening the cannon to the top of the starboard gunwale, he ran the intake hose down the outside and below the water line.

“Hey chief!” someone said from the dock. “What ya up to?” It was a Milton upperclassman. He had some Greek letters on his T-shirt.

Without saying a word, like a stoic Sioux Chief, Henge pumped the cannon at the undergraduate.

“Fucking psycho!” the undergraduate said as the fetid water from Lake Me hit his face. He ran off.

Henge touched his own cheek with his left hand. He felt the sad jowls of his face, and squinted toward the sun.

“Well bubba,” he said to himself, “it’s time.”

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Meanwhile on the northern shore of Lake Me, sitting on an overturned five gallon bucket wearing a porkpie hat, and sepia toned aviator shades was Pete Limpelli.

Pete was gnawing on a tea tree oil toothpick he had picked up at Wild Oats. At the suggestions of his cardiologist, urologist, dentist, periodontist, ophthalmologist, and podiatrist, Pete was trying to maintain a health conscious diet.

“Minchia Billy,” he’d say, “I’m eating all organic food now,” he’d say, “and drinking fair trade coffee.”

While at The Oats, as Pete began calling it, he noticed a display of tea tree oil toothpicks, and decided to buy a pack. They came in clear plastic boxes, not unlike Tic Tac boxes, with a removable lid on the top, and plastic hinged opening and closing flap.

Pete liked them for their convenience factor. He could pull one out, and trace the ghosts of his receding gum line, and slip the box into the breast pocket of whatever short sleeve button down fifties style bowling shirt he happened to be wearing.

The reel on his fishing rod was an Ambassadeur Big Game Reel. A gold plated piece of hardware on a standard spool reel mechanism.

*Click click.*

Pete loved the sound and the action of the reel. It reminded him of a Smith and Wesson 357 magnum he once owned. He would take that gun out twice a week to the firing range in Woodhaven, grease off fifty or so face-waggling rounds, and then take great care in cleaning and oiling the gun.

“It’s a fuckin’ machine Jackie,” he would tell a friend from behind the bar at *The Winged Tip Shoe* in Woodside. Pete reamed the barrel and gently rubbed a rag doused with machine oil all over the gun. He didn’t have a steady girlfriend, just some action here and there.

He’d click the hammer. Double action. He’d point the gun at a picture of Elvis on the far wall by the jukebox.

“Minchia,” he’d say. “Who’s king now, fucko.”

Pete sat there, on an overturned five gallon bucket, fishing on the shore of Lake Me. He wasn’t there to fish, really, Pete was more interested in the outcome of the naval battle between Ed Groat and Henge.

Under his five gallon bucket, Pete had a pineapple grenade and a twenty five caliber Raven disposable handgun.
Pete had a lot riding on this naval battle, and he click clicked his gold Ambassadeur Big Game Reel just like he used to with his Smith and Wesson, before he had to melt it down with a plasma torch.

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Ed licked the water with his paddle, making shallow, thoughtful strokes, whittling thin curls of lake water behind him. The green mottled fiberglass hull carved a gently rippling “V” across the western edge of Lake Me. Near the duck feeding area.

He didn’t really want to battle. Not today, at least. Today would have been a good day for some camping, Ed thought. Maybe some cherry cobbler hobo pies. Ed had a set of long handled hobo pie irons, cast iron, the kind you shove right in the coals.

Just ahead, Ed saw a churning school of something below the surface.

“Somebitch,” Ed said to the writhing water. “Carp.”

It looked like someone had chummed the water. It looked, Ed thought, like a Vietnamese carp farm he had once read about in National Geographic, where the farmers mixed a vat of slough grains and ground offal and tripe, and cook it in great steaming heaps. The farmers, in their little weir-fenced water farms, take a long boat dugout or a johnboat or a raft, and with a great mound of this meal, they chum the water. Carp swarm and brawl and clamor for little bits of the junk.

“I wonder who did that,” Ed said.

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Carmine Calamari, notorious oddsmaker, bookie, loanshark, and late night snacker arrived at Lake Me a full twenty-four hours before the scheduled naval battle. He had heard about it through a friend of a friend of what he referred to as a ‘friend of ours,’ who had heard it from a ‘friend of Bill’s.’

Carmine disguised himself as a bum.

He had gone to a thriftstore in the Detroit metro area a week before the event to pick out some essential items.
He found a trench coat. The label said London Fog, and it was full of holes. A few of the holes were sewn up, and a couple were patched. It was marked at a bargain barrel for twenty-five cents.

He bought a few mason jars, and some hodge podge of silverware and dishes. He found an old Coleman camp stove still in working order. Also, for no apparent reason, he bought a Tony Bennett vinyl album, and a *Mike Tyson’s Punch Out* Nintendo cartridge.

Confessing that he loved Tony Bennett, Carmine told the acne scarred cashier that he just had to have that particular album.

“Minchia,” Carmine told the cashier. ‘Minchia’ had no signitive meaning to the cashier. There was no signified object to which the signifier pointed for the cashier. To the cashier, ‘minchia’ lacked definition, and was completely devoid of context. ‘Minchia,’ to the cashier was nothing more than a base utterance.


Once, while doing some guest work in Chicago, Carmine befriended the staff of Boom Boom Records on Lincoln Avenue. He would spend all his free time trying to become hip. Carmine secretly wanted to be a music snob.

The cashier rang up Carmine’s purchases without a word.

The next order of business was to get an old conversion van. One that Carmine could live in for a few days, and one that would make it all the way to Sorbonne, Ohio.

Ligsy Ligdato over in Roseville might have one, or Skinny Joe Maldone on Gratiot. Or hell, even Mark Wershe on the Southside, near Grosse Isle.

Carmine needed to set up camp around Lake Me. Carmine needed to make sure the odds were in his favor.

***

Really, Pete Limpelli enjoyed going to the grocery these days. After Dr. Mangiapane gave him a few AMA articles about the side effects of eating food doused with pesticides, antibiotics, chemical fertilizers, and growth hormones, Pete went organic.
“Minchia, doc,” Pete said. He was sitting on the exam table. In a backless nightgown. “I gotta start eating right.” Pete shook his head. He gnawed on his toothpick, and squinted from behind his sepia toned glasses.

Several of Pete’s friends had already bit the dust from cancer and heart disease. Old Ray Iantuanno, cancer; multiple myeloma. Joe “the Zooof” Zafalo, cancer; prostate. ‘Fat’ Manny Albamante, heart attack. Those were some of the guys whose faces ran through Pete’s head while sitting there in his backless nightgown.

“I hope so Pete,” Dr. Mangiapane said.

That evening, just after Jeopardy, and before the ten o’clock bookmaking rush, Pete closed up The Winged Tip Shoe social club for about an hour so he could run over to the Wild Oats.

“Check them out,” Dr. Mangiapane had told Pete. “They have great figs.”

Pete rolled up in his Lincoln Town Car, and parked right next to a Denali. The motor was running and nobody was in the front. Pete saw some kids inside watching Sponge Bob Square Pants on the flip down LCD screen in the back. It was an episode Pete saw with Carmine Calamari, when Carmine was visiting from Detroit to take care of a couple of loose ends.

Pete stood there, looking at the screen through the tinted side windows of the Denali watching Sponge Bob, with a wide earnest grin on his face, with his sepia toned glasses and a little stab of toothpick sticking out from his mouth until the kids started crying.

Pete hustled into the store. The automatic door flew open, and the cool breeze from the air conditioning hit Pete as he grabbed a small European style double basket cart. He threw a couple of baskets in the cart, and wheeled it to the produce section.

Pomegranate was good. Packed with antioxidants. Cancer fighters. Pete nodded, and smirked as he threw three in a plastic bag, and weighed them on the scale. One and a quarter pounds, exactly.

“Minchia,” Pete said. He glanced at the price. “$3.59 a pound,” he said. He saw some dried figs, and picked up a prepackaged set.

He wheeled on.

Over by the deli section, there were tubs and trays of food ready to eat. Salads of all type. Sandwiches with labels that said ‘spicy organic turkey and chicken’, or ‘wheatgrass and lentil on
sourdough.’ There was a big tray of what looked like green sausages. Pete got closer, and saw that they were stuffed grape leaves.

“How much for the stuffed grape leaves?” Pete asked the guy with dreadlocks behind the counter.

“The Dolmas?”

“Yeah,” Pete said. He remembered now, dolmas.

When Pete was a teenager he dated a Greek girl from the neighborhood named Effie Tsatsakannis. Her father, Demitrios, hated Pete because he was Sicilian, and Greeks and Sicilians are supposed to hate each other if they aren’t having sex. Effie’s grandma and mom used to make dolmas all the time. Effie’s father wanted her to break it off with Pete and marry a Greek boy.

“Like your mama,” he said to Effie.

Pete ended up pistol whipping Effie’s dad one night, and then Effie broke it off with him.

Pete shook his head. He adjusted his pants. The rayon slacks he refused to stop wearing, with the strap over button, always crept down, and the fly never stayed up completely. He felt the heavy warm cylinder of his Colt Python wedged in his waist. He had his button down short sleeve bowling shirt pulled down over the top of his belt line.

It was over to the seafood section. Pete wanted some calamari. He always loved octopus and squid, with a little marinara.

That’s when he saw the sushi stand.

The Yakuza had been glomming up turf for the past decade or so. A fruitstand here, a trucking company there.

“What the fuck is this?” Pete asked the Japanese man behind the counter.

The Japanese man furrowed his eyebrows at Pete, and began spraying the prep area with a hose.

Pete wheeled on. Now it was time for some organic dental supplies. In one of the articles, Pete Limpelli had read that fluoride was cancerous, and that you actually didn’t need it after you were eighteen. Pete was over eighteen, and he didn’t want cancer. He found some Tom’s unflouridated. He also found a nice organic mouthwash, and a box of tea tree oil toothpicks.

He took the soggy, broken toothpick out of his mouth and tossed it in the trash.
Over the loudspeaker someone announced that the owner of a blue Denali needed to pay attention. “Please come to the customer service desk,” the loudspeaker said.

Pete’s gold Rolex said five till nine. He needed to get back to *The Winged Tip Shoe*.

***

The van Carmine Calamari wanted was a 1990 Dodge Ram.

“Engineered Ram tough,” Carmine said to Mark Wershe, a Southside chopshop owner and operator. Carmine made a fist.

“Yeah,” Mark said, “they’re tough alright.”

Carmine liked this particular one because it was blue, and had a silver stripe detailing the back half of the machine, in between little brown rust craters. The inside was carpeted a matted blue, with four captain seats, and a fold down bed for the back bench. It stunk of farts and old Fritos. There were screen windows on the side, and curtains you could pull down. The doors opened up to form a nice stoop.

“Minchia,” Carmine said, “I’ll take it.”

Carmine pulled out a wad of money from under his holey, patched London Fog overcoat. The wad was held together with a money clip. Carmine pulled off the clip, and flipped over a two dollar bill.

“For luck,” Carmine would always tell his friends. Everyone ribbed him for it.

Carmine pulled out six soiled one hundred dollar bills.

“Thanks,” Mark Wershe said. Mark knew he could have shipped it, in pieces for a total of about $1500 in parts, but this was Carmine Calamari.

“What you gonna do with it?” Mark asked.

Carmine threateningly pointed his finger at Mark's face. “Nothin’,” he said. “I gotta take care of something.”

“Where’s the closest Goodwill,” Carmine said.

“There’s one in Southgate,” Mark said, “and there’s a Salvation Army in Taylor on Telegraph.”

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Henge tacked out to the open water of Lake Me, and unfurled his sail. It was a modest sail, being the sail of a thirteen foot Snipe, but was sufficient for the size of the craft. The sail was made of a thin canvas, and had a giant red letter ‘H’ painted on it.

A gentle breeze began blowing, and Henge’s Sioux Indian headdress feathers flitted. Henge juggled the jib to catch the wind coming out of the northwest. Wind, around Lake Me, always seemed to come out of the northwest. With the tiller in his left hand, he tried to rudder his way toward the wind, so he could grab, and go somewhere.

The breeze stopped just before he stayed the course.

Henge fought, and billowed the jib, and jiggled the tiller, and with a sigh under his headdress, he decided it was time to eat a lunch he had packed.

Henge pulled out a large doctor’s bag. A black one with ‘D’ shaped handles, and an engraved golden plate by the opening which said ‘Dr. Goombanatz.’ Henge opened it, and took out a Tupperware container, and a rectangle of soy milk. He popped the top of the soy milk, and brought it to his face and sloppily slugged down several gulps.

“Ah,” Henge said to the still water of Lake Me, “bubba,” he said.

He wiped his mouth with his arm, and opened the Tupperware. A slab of organic chicken drowned in lentil soup. Henge took out a plastic spork and a knife.

No one used sporks anymore, Henge thought. They’re practical. Not wasteful.

Resting his back on the starboard mounted water cannon, Henge thought about summer evenings.

The naval battle was technically on, but Henge didn’t see Ed Groat or his canoe anywhere.

He did, however, notice a fat bum sitting on a dilapidated lawn chair outside a blue van on the lakeshore. The bum was wearing an overcoat, even though it was close to ninety degrees outside. The bum, Henge noticed, kept glancing up at him, then going back to pretending to read a folded over newspaper.

***

The swarm of carp in front of Ed Groat’s canoe made him wish he had brought his fishing tackle.
“Them somebitches make a great soup base,” he said to Lake Me. Lake Me was always listening. “You can fry them somebitches and make sammiches with cheese, and Swiss chard.”

Back in his yard in Hyde Park, Ed Groat had a vegetable garden full of Swiss chard, tomatoes, bok choy, radishes, rhubarb, corn, lima beans, strawberries, kale, and cucumbers. He would fertilize the garden every fall and winter with ashes from his wood burning stove and with dog feces he had collected from his front yard.

“Somebitch grows well,” he said.

Ed realized that in talking to himself to Lake Me, he had become discursive, and tangential. There was a giant school of carp writhing like an orgy in front of him. Somebody had made that happen. Somebody had chummed the water with something.

***

On the way up to Sorbonne, Pete Limpelli picked up a container of refrigerated nightcrawlers, two tomatoes, a loaf of semolina, a jar of artichoke hearts – which in his mind he insisted were symbolic – and a fresh box of tea tree oil toothpicks.

“Bap bah, bop bah,” Pete sung to the big band jazz on the radio of his Lincoln Town Car. He saw signs. This stretch of 27 is cleaned by Lambda Omega Omicron. Sorbonne, 10 miles. This stretch cleaned by Alpha Alpha. It said: You Drink, You Drive, You Lose. Pete ran a toothpick in the gap between his maxillary incisors. There were pockets, all around his teeth where food would collect, along with coffee residue, and anger.

“Minchia,” Pete said. He looked in the rearview mirror, and saw a red streak running down his yellow front tooth.

Pete had been avoiding getting a full gingival excision, and complete prophylaxis, both mandibular and maxillary, distally and proximally. Pete was already trying to adjust to his organic food kick.

Up on Lake Me, he had the whole thing planned. Pete had laid money on Ed Groat, the canoeist, and wearer of the deerskin unitard, to defeat Henge, the sailboater, and Sioux Indian headdress wearer.

What was supposed to be a friendly cure for the boring end of summer, ended up as a
high stakes bet between Pete Limpelli and Carmine Calamari.

“Fifteen grand,” he told Carmine.

“Minchia,” Carmine said, “I’ll take that action.”

Word had somehow gotten out, and the whole idea was too good to pass up. Carmine and Pete were in a slump too. Football season wasn’t on yet, and baseball season was dragging.

The wager was high stakes, yet still friendly, however, Pete was going to make sure everything went in his favor.

“Fifteen grand,” Pete said to himself at the Winged Tip Shoe, “minchia.”

***

Carmine Calamari had chummed the water. After he purchased his 1990 Dodge conversion van from Mark Wershe, Carmine went over to Labke’s Coney Island on Seven Mile, and loaded up three five gallon buckets filled with food scraps.

Hamburger bits. Hot dog ends. Glops of chili. French fries, soggy with lukewarm ketchup. All packed into three five gallon buckets, with the lids sealed tight, and the whole pile bungee corded in the back, as Carmine wheeled the whole heap down from Detroit to Sorbonne, Ohio.

Carmine knew that Pete Limpelli, who was betting on Ed Groat, would be trying influence the contest, probably by using explosive devices and cheap disposable handguns. What Carmine also knew, was that Pete loved to fish.

Carmine had been camping around the shore of Lake Me for almost a whole week. He whiled the time by reading racing forms, and skipping flat stones across the glassy brown surface of the lake.

Anticipating Ed Groat and Henge’s somniferous lifestyles, Carmine woke up around 9:30 that morning, just as Ed and Henge arrived on Lake Me’s shore.

With some binoculars, and with the three five gallon buckets of fermenting food remnants hustled under his holey, second hand London Fog, Carmine sauntered out to the wooden flotilla dock on the south side of the lake.
The flotilla shimmied and swayed under the weight of Carmine, his overcoat, and the three five gallon buckets full of food scraps. At the end of the dock, Carmine pried off the lid with a rusty screwdriver he had purchased at the Goodwill on Telegraph Road.

The buckets belched a sour miasma of carbon dioxide and ethanol.

“Minchia,” Carmine said.

He poured the buckets, one by one, into Lake Me.

***

After finishing his slab of organic chicken, and his lentil soup, Henge decided to test the range of his water cannon.

He began cranking the lever, and as the pump primed and began shooting water, he experimented with the trajectory.

Henge aimed the arc about fifty yards away. The cannon, with its constant stream, splattered a white dancing circle where he aimed it.

“Bubba,” Henge said to Lake Me, “this thing’s powerful.”

The wind was still stagnant. Henge was half tempted to tie a cord to the doctor’s bag, and toss it over the stern as a sea anchor, and take a nap. But this was a naval battle. He was wearing a Sioux Indian headdress, and Ed Groat was in a canoe with a coonskin cap and a deerskin unitard, and would be trying to defeat him in a battle fought over boredom, and grief over the end of summer.

About a half mile up, on the northern shore, Pete Limpelli was clicking his Ambassadeur Big Game fishing reel on the saltwater rod he was fishing with. Pete felt that a saltwater rod and reel would give him an edge. Pete was waiting for Henge to pass by. To come within grenade, and cheap disposable handgun range.

***

As Ed Groat’s canoe glided nearer to the carp swarm, he saw teeming, soggy clumps of what used to be greasy spoon food.

“Somebitch,” Ed said. That was a great idea. Save up food scraps, and use them as fishing bait.
What Ed didn’t know, and what no one besides Carmine Calamari knew, was that there was an apocryphal giant catfish lurking at the bottom of Lake Me.

Lake Me - when it was constructed - needed, like many things in Sorbonne, a fabricated sense of legend.

Ray Lansky, the president of Milton University from 1962 to 1969 had hired a team of catfish noodlers in eastern Mississippi and southern Arkansas to find the largest catfish they could, in exchange for $1200 in cash, and guaranteed admission and free tuition to Milton for any of their offspring.

The project yielded five catfish weighing over three hundred pounds a piece, all of which were shipped to Lake Me via a special tanker truck, and set free. Today a documented three of those five are still routinely sighted. One, Goliath, painted with a red letter ‘X’ on its head, has been estimated to weigh in near eight hundred pounds.

Carmine had made a few calls to the local Sorbonne livery before he left Detroit.

“Minchia,” Carmine had said over the phone, “eight fuggin hundred.”

“That’s right,” the voice on the other end said, “Goliath the catfish,” he said. “Legend has it that old Goliath ate a sorority sister back in seventy six, but that’s prolly just myth.”

“Oh huh,” said Carmine. He was already jotting down notes on a notepad.

“Yes, old Goliath is mostly a peaceful critter. Mostly likes to be left alone, is all,” said the Sorbonnian.

Pete Limpelli was growing impatient. Sitting there on his overturned five gallon bucket for longer than he had hoped he would, his legs grew numb. Sniping someone with a grenade and a cheap disposable handgun was a lot of hurrying up and waiting.

“Minchia,” Pete said. He rubbed his thigh, and it felt like a block of Styrofoam.

Luckily, Pete had packed himself a thermos of Medaglia D’Oro. He put the thermos between the numb bricks of his thighs and unscrewed the cap with one hand. With his other hand, he kept a grip on the handle of his Ambassadeur Big Game fishing rod. He rested the lid on the grass, and poured himself a steaming cup. It was early.

Pete Limpelli needed Some Coffee and a Few Laughs™. He raised the stainless steel cup to his mouth, and took a sip on the opposite side of his toothpick.

Henge was no where in sight. The wind had died, so Henge’s sail sat limp.
What no one knew, except Carmine Calamari, was that Goliath, the eight hundred pound feral catfish, had been disturbed.

***

With his arms sprawled against the port bulkhead and up over the gunwale, and his left foot resting on the tiller, Henge rested his head over the side of the boat. His Sioux Indian headdress, and the end of the billowing feathery mane licked the surface of Lake Me.

His mouth gaped up to the sky, mawing up the last gulps of summer, as the thirteen foot Snipe sailboat lingered slowly somewhere in the eastern part of Lake Me.

With the sea anchor made from the ‘Dr. Goombanatz’ doctor bag, and after eating a meal of organic chicken, and some lentil soup, Henge confidently took a nap.

Somehow, he had forgotten that he was in the middle of a naval battle.

Just as Henge was dreaming about snowboarding in Burma, Goliath, the now agitated, and hungry eight hundred pound catfish skimmed the keel of his thirteen foot craft, causing the little dinghy to rise two feet out of the water, and fall back down with a splash.

Henge was jolted awake, and furiously groped around the deck.

The song ‘Helter Skelter’ began playing, incessantly, in his head.

“Bubba,” Henge said. This was battle. War. He pawed for the crank of the water cannon, grabbed it, and began cranking. A stream of water started spraying across the vacant surface.

With the headdress flipping and flopping, Henge scanned 360 degrees. He pulled in the sea anchor, and kept cranking water to nowhere.

***

Goliath had been disturbed by the swarming carp. Carmine Calamari knew this. Carmine, as a kid, had been a fan of Rube Goldberg cartoons.

Early in his career, Carmine began building devices for making wagers. With a long and involved process, an intention would travel through a series of everyday items, in a chain reaction, to eventually place fifty dollars on a horse. Carmine applied for several patents, but was denied.

“Fuckin’ minchias,” Carmine said. The patent examiners had categorically denied every single one of Carmine’s claims.
“They just like to keep the little guy down,” Pete Limpelli said to him over the phone.

On Lake Me, with the five gallon buckets of food scraps, the swarming carp, the calculated trajectory of Goliath, after he was disturbed, the interrupted trajectory of Goliath as he skimmed the keel of Henge’s boat, compounded with the temperature, humidity, and general mood, Carmine was, what he referred to as 99.897% sure that Goliath would head straight for Pete Limpelli’s area on the northern shore.

***

Pete Limpelli click clicked on his Ambassadeur Big Game reel. Pete had put a slice of prosciutto on a giant saltwater drumfish hook. The line was a 500 pound test deep sea marlin catcher, and the lead sinkers Pete used were also used to make blackjacks in Venezuela.

“Minchia,” Pete said. Pete was bored. His legs were still numb, and there was no sign of Henge, Ed Groat, or Carmine Calamari. Pete had left town for a couple of weeks to investigate, influence, and witness the outcome of the Lake Me naval battle.

Sure, he was having Some Coffee and a Few Laughs™, but the Winged Tip Shoe was back home, and fucking Lido Gastone was running the joint.

“Fucking minchia probably let bums in there, and they stole all the shoe glue,” Pete mused.

It was a battle started between Ed Groat, and Henge, largely as a means to stave off the boredom and doldrums which accompany the end of the summer.

It started with some posturing; some lighthearted ego thrusting. Then it became a wager among two other friends; himself and Carmine, and now was poised to be the strangest naval battle Lake Me had ever seen.

It was all supposed to be a naval battle that never had occurred, but should have.

Ed, jabbing at the hoard of carp with his paddle, squinted at the sun, and cursed his deerskin unitard.

“Somebitch,” Ed said. The squirming mass thwacked his paddle, and jostled the coonskin tail of his cap.

Henge, on the other side of the lake, had just been jolted by Goliath, the eight hundred pound catfish.
He was still scrambling around the small deck of his dingy as if it was Pearl Harbor. With his Sioux Indian headdress, he pumped the water cannon, and touched the jib, and the tiller, and pulled in sea anchors. Henge might have well been wearing a blindfold.

It was like the physical challenge from the old game show, *Double Dare.*

Or a musician who makes lead glasses sing.

Carmine was in the trees, near where Ed Groat was, and watching most of what was going on through his binoculars.

Through his binoculars, Carmine Calamari saw Pete Limpelli suddenly fly off his five gallon bucket, and skim across the northern shore of Lake Me. Ambassadeur Big Game reel and rod in his hand, his sepia toned glasses like two little windshields.

With his binoculars, Carmine saw Pete Limpelli’s mouth pucker around his toothpick in a little butthole of a grimace, a wincing defiance as he skimmed along at an estimated twenty four knots.

Carmine wished he had a parabolic microphone.

***

Shuddering in heaves of laughter, Carmine fell out of the tree in which he was perched. Luckily, the tattered overcoat he had purchased for a quarter at a Detroit area thrift store had saved him any serious injury.

Pete Limpelli eventually let go of his Ambassadeur Big Game rod and reel, and tumbled to a stop in the northern shallows. He muscled himself up with his numb legs, one knee at a time, and sloshed through the silt with his winged tip shoes. His polyester pants clung, and his short sleeve button down bowling shirt drooped. The sepia toned prescription glasses were speckled with water droplets, and his receded hair clung to his skull in shiny clumps.

“Minchia,” Pete said. With his toothpick in his mouth, he cursed Lake Me, and turned his back on it. He looked behind him, and called Lake Me a *cornutu,* and gave it the horns with his left hand.

He smirked and turned his back on Lake Me for good.

Summer was over.

Henge stopped pumping his cannon, and sat down, Indian style at the center hull, near the mast.
With his Indian headdress, he shook his head. He thought about saying ‘bubba,’ but didn’t. He threw out his ‘Dr. Goombanatz’ sea anchor, and decided it would be a good time to meditate. To accept the change of the season.

He crossed his arms in front of him.

Ed Groat scratched his left shoulder, feeding his right arm up through the V neck of the deerskin unitard.

He pulled out his hand, sniffed it, and wiped his brow under his coon skin cap.

Everyone on and around Lake Me knew it was over. Summer. The naval battle, reenacting a naval battle that never occurred, but should have. The wager.

Just then a Sorbonne municipal police car pulled up the gravelly embankment of the Lake Me landing area.

***

Two uniformed officers got out of the Sorbonne, Ohio police cruiser, and another one pulled up. This one was wailing its archaic whining siren, and flashing its outdated single red light on the roof.

“Cherry tops,” Henge and his pals used to call them. So did Ed Groat, for that matter.

The second cruiser parked, and those two officers got out. One was carrying a megaphone.

*This is the Sorbonne police,* the megaphone said, *you are all under arrest.*

“Minchia,” Pete Limpelli said to himself.

Carmine Calamari was on the other side of the lake, with his binoculars in hand. He heard a faint echo sound coming from the megaphone, and saw the squad cars, and thought there might be trouble.

“Those fucking mutts,” Carmine said under his binoculars.

Carmine ambled over to his 1990 Dodge Ram van, which he had nestled under some cut branches and bushes.

***
Rick Hollo, the Sorbonne chief of police, received word over the wire that some serious organized crime activity was slated to occur.

“Says here that a Pete Limpelli, a known New York area Mafioso is heading this way.” Rick said in the Sorbonne police station. Graves and Madison were throwing darts, and Schwartz was brewing coffee, and writing a haiku on the electric typewriter.

Rick was reading a GPS track the FBI, CIA, NSA, Homeland Security had provided from the XM Satellite radio Pete had installed in his Lincoln Town Car. Rick thanked God, often, for the Patriot Act.

He began polishing his nightstick with a rag and some lemon scented liquid Pledge.

He scrolled down on the computer screen. He minimized his government tracking page, and maximized his Myspace. He plugged in Pete Limpelli’s name, and it didn’t produce any results. Rick minimized Myspace, and pulled up the tracking page.

“Oh,” Rick said, “hold on a second boys.”

Graves and Madison paused their game, half way between cricket frames, and clenched their darts.

Schwartz, whose haiku was well into the fifth syllable of the second line, looked up from his typewriter.

“There’s a,” Rick paused, “if I’m reading this right, there’s a Carmen Callymara, from Detroit.”

Rick went on: “Says here, phone records indicate conversations relating to possible activity.”

The phone records were conversations recorded by ECHELON, a giant Big Brother surveillance network which monitors emails, phone conversations, habits, shoes worn at airports, long hair, body odor, and people who shop at organic food stores.

Graves and Madison resumed their game.

“Fuck,” Graves said. Madison had just closed out the bullseye, and won twenty dollars. Madison sat on the desk, and fed the twenty dollar bill into his nylon billfold.

“What are they up to chief?” Madison said.
“Says here,” Rick said. He scrolled down, and squinted at the screen. “Says here they’re up to,” he paused. “Gambling.”

***

“What sort of gambling, chief?” Graves said. Graves wanted his twenty back.
Rick Hollo scrolled around the computer. The government site. Myspace. He pretended, for a moment, to search while he secretly downloaded a Jefferson Starship song from the music selection.
He pulled up Wikipedia, and looked up ‘gambling.’
He went back over to the government site, and re-read the report.
“Wagering on a naval battle on Lake Me,” Rick whispered. He shook his head.
Rick Googled ‘naval battle on Lake Me,’ and clicked on the results.
“Ah hah,” Chief Rick Hollo said. “I knew it, I plumb knew it.” The way Rick Hollo said ‘plumb’ echoed of a slightly southern, slightly provincial twang, even though he was the police chief of Sorbonne, which was in Ohio, a northern state, and the seat of the renowned Milton University.
Rick Hollo clutched his nightstick. His chapped little hands made white ghosts on the freshly polished black mahogany wood.
“Schwartz,” Rick said, “how’s that coffee coming?”
Schwartz, whose haiku was now in the third line, second syllable, silently got out of his metal-legged plastic chair, and walked across the linoleum floor to the coffee maker.
The Black and Decker pot sputtered and groaned, spitting black gobs down from the grounds basket into the glass graduated pot.

***

The coffee maker wasn’t brewing coffee, per se, more like mud, or a brown mush of grounds and rusty water.
Schwartz frowned, and rubbed his read headed buzz cut. He slapped the top of the machine, causing the table it was standing on to jump and skitter on the linoleum floor.
“No Schwartz,” Rick Hollo said, “you gotta coax that machine,” he said, “treat it like a lady.” Rick rubbed his thumb along the tip of his black Pledged nightstick. He clicked a cool new person's profile. A "Layla" whose profile picture showed her wearing a white bikini.

The profile was set to ‘private.’

Hollo decided to yell at Graves. “Graves, goddamnit, get me some coffee.”

“What kind you want chief?”

“Get me some Starbucks, goddamnit.” Chief Rick Hollo said.

Schwartz shuffled back over to the electric typewriter, and read what he had written.

“What about that Lake Me incident?” Madison said.

Hollo took a deep breath, and tucked in his shirt.

“Well,” he said, “looks like they got a major wager going on with some fellows and a naval battle.”

“On Lake Me?” Madison said. Lake Me was a man made reservoir on the eastern edge of Sorbonne and the Milton University campus.

“Looks like,” Hollo said. “Schwartz,” Hollo said, “you were in the SEALs, weren't you?”

Schwartz stared at his haiku. That fourth syllable of the third line was often the toughest.

***

Madison patted a new little paunch he had been cultivating. A little oval blob. He rubbed it interestingly. He was proud of it, while a little unsure of what it meant.

“Where’s that going?” his wife, Sandy, said to him one night after sex. She poked it, and made a Pillsbury Doughboy sound.

Madison was twenty eight, and married with two kids. He had blonde hair, and a crew cut.

All of the Sorbonne PD had crew cuts. It was standard, along with grey button down shirts with wide butterfly collars, and a giant shield patch on the right sleeve, ironed, specifically, with a bisecting crease.

Rick Hollo clicked his Myspace page. Using some html he had learned at an adult enrichment course at Milton University, Rick Hollo pasted a picture of Eric Estrada on a friend’s comment page. Eric had his shirt off and was pointing. ‘You’re a Fag.’ The caption said.
The phone rang.
Schwartz stared at his haiku, still being cultivated on the platen of the electric typewriter.
Madison gazed, happily, at the area of his navel.
Chief Hollo picked up the receiver.
“Sorbonne Police Department.”
“Uh huh,” Rick Hollo said.
“Yeah.”
“No?”
“Those goddamn fuckers,” he said, “well stop by Kroger and pick up some Chock Full O’ Nuts.”
Rick hung up the phone.
Madison looked up from his belly. “What’s going on, chief?”
Rick eased back in his roller chair. “Some goddamn hippies superglued the locks over at Starbucks.”
Madison shook his head.
Rick Hollo lunged forward in his chair and pounded his fist on the computer desk.
“What the hell is this goddamn world coming to?” Rick said.
He image Googled a picture of Pete Limpelli.

***

The door of the Sorbonne Starbucks had been glued with Kiwi shoe glue, that's what the lab report showed anyway.
“What's the scoop?” Rick Hollo asked over the phone. It was a hard black plastic rotary phone Rick insisted on keeping in the office. He told everyone on the force that it was a good phone, and the phone his parents had in the house he grew up in.
“Why let go of the past?” Rick would tell his coworkers.
He leaned back in his roller chair, and put his black polished jump booted feet up on the desk. Corcoran, Korean surplus. Laced high and tight, and concealed under his blood striped Sorbonne Police Department uniform pants, the boots gave Rick Hollo considerable ethos.
“Shoe glue huh?”
“Kiwi brand?”
“Uh huh.”
“Thanks Lou,” Rick said. He hung up the phone. The heavy black receiver clunked on the cradle.
“That was Lou down at the lab,” Rick told the boys.
“Yeah?” said Graves.
“Yeah.” Rick put his hands behind his head. “Says the analysis shows the substance was almost certainly not superglue, but actually Kiwi brand shoe glue.”
Rick pulled up the ECHELON site on his computer. He entered Pete Limpelli’s name.
“The Winged Tip Shoe,” Rick said. “Hmm.” He rolled his index finger on the mouse. Scrolling down, he saw satellite images of a Kiwi shoe glue truck parked outside the Winged Tip Shoe. The photo was black and white, and aerial, and grainy. The photos were from over a year ago. He saw, in a time lapse series, a slender man wearing a pork pie hat, glasses, a bowling shirt, and polyester pants move his hands outside the Winged Tip Shoe. Zooming in, Rick Hollo saw a tiny toothpick sticking out of the man's mouth.
“Pete fucking Limpelli,” Rick said.
He scrolled down to another photo. This time Pete was shrugging, and it looked like he was frowning.
Another one showed him with his hands on his waist.
Another had his right foot up on a fire hydrant. He was resting an elbow on his knee.
Another showed Pete throwing a stickball to some kids.
This one showed Pete and the truck driver eating slices of pizza.
Another showed the truck driving away, and Pete walking back into the Winged Tip Shoe. The photos played out like a story board. A comic strip. A graphic novel. A crime story board, comic strip, or graphic novel.
“Pete Limpelli,” Rick said to the screen, “your ass is mine.”

***
Pete Limpelli and the Organic Crisis

After he went organic, Pete Limpelli decided to reexamine his mafia lifestyle.

“I still like gambling, and killing people,” Pete said to Carmine over the phone from the Winged Tip Shoe one afternoon in late spring. “But I don’t know about all these corporations glomming up the economy.”

Pete, as part of his organic food practice, would attend some of the seminars and presentations Wild Oats put on during busy weekend shopping times.

He learned about fair trade coffees, and profit sharing. About giant corporations. He learned about looking out for the little guy.

Sitting there, with his sepia toned glasses, and his toothpick, listening to a dreadlocked white kid speaking about organic honey and bee keeping, Pete thought back to his grandfather, Pietro Limpelli, telling him about the honored society.

“Petey,” Grandpa Limpelli would say with little Pete Limpelli on his lap, “for thousands of years, Sicilians have been bullied by stronger, more powerful invaders.”

Pete would squeeze his grandpa’s bicep. Pete wondered how his grandpa’s skin was so wrinkled and mottled with brown spots, and underneath all that was a hard lump of muscle, honed from years of working as a stone mason.

“The mafia,” grandpa would say, “started way up in the hills as a way to protect the people from the invaders.”

Pete had only seen big black cars, and fancy suits. Pete had only heard about murders, and shootouts. Pete, like any young boy, sensed raw power, just like he would visiting the zoo and watching the lions lounge around the caged savannah.

“Those people you see on the street, with the big cars, and the nice clothes, they’re not Mafiosi.” Pete’s grandpa would tell him.

Later, after his grandpa died, Pete had done some research. He read about the history of Sicily. The founding tribes. The conquest of the Greeks, Phoenicians, Romans, Ostrogoths, Vandals, Byzantines, Arabs, Normans, Anjou, Spain, and Germany.

Pete would secretly pour over books in the library. Smelling the musty pages and worn leather bindings. The clapped hush of the wooden tables and desks.
Pete Limpelli had a crush, for a little while, on an older librarian.

Around age seventeen, as part of a rite of passage for Big Joe Mazzano, Pete Limpelli made his bones. He forgot a lot of what he had heard from his grandpa, and about what he had read at the library.

Until he started attending the seminars at Wild Oats.

***

The dreadlocked white kid shook his fist, and said things like solidarity, and corporations, and fair trade. He screamed, and the small crowd near the restaurant area of Wild Oats nodded, and said right on to whatever he said.

A girl, wearing a full length skirt, which looked as if it had been manufactured from a curtain, or purchased at a Goodwill passed out some fliers. She couldn’t have been more than nineteen, and she stunk of hummus and patchouli, and had vivid blue eyes and nappy black hair.

The fliers told everyone, including Pete Limpelli, that they should superglue Starbucks locks, and drop caltrops in Wal-mart parking lots.

“Minchia,” Pete said. “I can really do something.”

Pete didn’t have superglue, but he had a lifetime supply of Kiwi shoe glue stashed in his social club, the *Winged Tip Shoe* in Queens.

So Pete made a point of packing the undercompartment in the trunk of his Town Car with tubes of shoe glue, to drive around, and be ready.

Pete would drive around early in the morning, before he went fishing, and squeeze globs of the foul, clear ooze into Starbucks locks, and hum big band jazz tunes.

Early that morning, on his way to Lake Me, as the streets of Sorbonne, Ohio hung silent and grey in the twilight, Pete Limpelli Kiwi shoe glued the locks on the door of the Sorbonne Starbucks.

***

Rick Hollo rummaged around in the drawer of the battleship grey colored desk. The heavy metal slides swayed smoothly while Rick gripped the top of the drawer with his left hand.

“I know that goddamn thing is in here somewhere,” Rick said.
“What’s that chief?” Madison said.

“That old megaphone I had stashed away in here.”

Rick Hollo had an old electronic megaphone, hard plastic, and hyperbolically shaped with red rimming and off white backing. It looked, Rick Hollo felt, like a 57 Chevy. There was a pistol grip with a knurled handle, and a CB mouthpiece attached to a springy black cord.

Rick bought it, hoping Lalapalooza would roll through Sorbonne sometime in the mid nineties.

“Never happened,” Rick told the boys one slow afternoon. He was rubbing his megaphone with a rag, and some saliva. “Yep,” he said, “I got this baby, three dozen canisters of pepper spray, five see-through shields, fifteen telescoping riot batons, 200 rounds of CS teargas, and 5000 rounds of nine millimeter rubber bullets.”

“They put the goddamn event in Indianapolis instead,” Rick said.

Unbeknownst to him, Rick had stashed the megaphone above the ceiling tiles in the Sorbonne, Ohio Police Station.

***

Madison opened his desk drawer, the middle one, and rummaged around himself. Rick Hollo was still trying to find the megaphone he had stashed, and Madison felt he should help, or at least try to find something to occupy his time. In the drawer Madison found a nail clipper, a small cardboard box of paper clips with the lid torn off, a Halloween eraser, a feather, two empty cans of Skoal, and a small pocket mirror.

Madison took out the mirror, and began looking at his face.

For a couple of days Madison had been noticing a large, reddish bump on the side of his jaw. It was more of a swell. A giant boil, or carbuncle, or something. Madison's brother was in medical school.

Thinking it was cancer, Madison called his brother in law, who happened to be in his second year of medical school out in Kansas City.

“Cho,” Madison had said over the phone, "I think I've got cancer."

He told Cho his symptoms, of which he had only two of the seven serious cancer warning signs, and Cho told him he had a carbuncle, or boil, or possibly an ingrown hair.
“Did you use someone else's razor lately?” Cho asked.

“No Cho, I haven't used anyone's razor.” Madison hated when his brother in law talked down to him.

Peering into the small circular pocket mirror on the desk in front of him, Madison palpated his bump. It was tender. He tried to squeeze it, hoping for a nice gusher or maybe a blackhead push up. Nothing.

Madison took a break, and looked out the window. Madison thought about birds ripping worms out of holes, and taking giant shits after being constipated for a day or two.

Looking back into the mirror, Madison massaged the bump area, and went in for a milking squeeze. If this didn't work, it must be cancer, Madison thought. The old milk and squeeze technique always worked in high school, and later in the army. Even on backne. In the army Madison would limber up his spine, and basically put his arm in a hammer lock reaching some hard to reach ‘volcanos’ as he called them, on his scapula.

Madison massaged, and squeezed. Gently at first, and then harder. Suddenly, a black thorn erupted from the bump. Madison took the thorn between his thumb and index finger, and scientifically rolled it.

Madison smelled the rolled thorn. Looking closer, he saw that the thorn was actually a clump of whiskers, banded together like a sheave of wheat. Or a fasces. Or a quiver of arrows.

He smelled it again, and squeezed the surrounding area. Good old puss patrol, thought Madison.

Standing on a chair, with his head above the ceiling tiles, Rick Hollo bellowed victoriously.

***

“Madison!” The megaphone said. The megaphone made a buzzing sound. “Madison, get your finger out of your nose!” The megaphone said.

Chief Rick Hollo was standing on a grey metal and vinyl padded chair in the Sorbonne Police Headquarters. He had found the megaphone in the ceiling tiles, with the batteries still full of juice, and now he was saying things to Madison.

Madison was sitting at his desk, excising an ingrown hair, and smelling his fingers.
At the sound of the megaphone and megaphone buzzer, Madison jumped, and clamped his hands to his head, covering his ears, and began wincing.

“But chief,” Madison said. With his ears covered, saying ‘but chief’ sounded like felt. It sounded muffled, and echoey. It reminded him of when he was in the first grade, eating lunch in the cafeteria, in the cacophonous din, Madison would cover his ears in an intermittent staccato, garbling the conversations to an incoherent chattering beat. Through the matrix of the beat, Madison would think about himself as a live action Heman figure, wielding a sword, and riding a giant cat who wore a saddle and armor.

“But chief!” The megaphone said.

“Chief come on,” Madison said.

“Chief come on!” The megaphone said.

“It hurts my ears,” Madison said.

“It hurts my ears!” The megaphone said.

Standing on the chair, Chief Hollo pushed the buzzer on the CB mouthpiece of the megaphone, resonating a horrible, sad klaxon throughout the office. Madison clutched his head, and winced and doubled over, and Hollo laughed maniacally, and pointed the megaphone toward Madison’s doubled over, clutched head.

Madison started crying.

Chief Rick Hollo stopped buzzing, and stopped laughing.

Rick Hollo was about to apologize, but luckily the phone rang.

***

It was Graves. He was calling from a payphone outside the bait and tackle commissary at Lake Me.

Chewing on some Gummi Worms, Graves told Chief Hollo about what he saw.

“Chief, there was a man in a Sioux Indian headdress in a small sailboat, and another guy wearing a deerskin unitard in a canoe.” Graves said into the receiver. He pulled a green and yellow banded worm out of the plastic container, and lowered it, head first, into his mouth.

“No,” Graves said.

“There’s more,” he said.
“There was a slender guy wearing a porkpie hat and sepia toned glasses with a toothpick in his mouth, fishing on the bank.” Graves said.

“Yeah, he was sitting on an overturned bucket.” Graves paused.

“Uh huh,” he said. He grabbed another worm. This one had red and orange stripes. The colors secretly reminded Graves of autumn, and he formed it into a loop and bit it mid section.

“Yeah chief, it looked pretty suspicious.”

“Well I drove around the whole lake.”

“Uh huh.”

Small wads of sugary gelatin stuck behind Graves’ bottom molars. The mandibular region. With his finger he picked at the wads, and nodded his head with the dark grey phone receiver on his chin.

“Uh huh.”

“Well chief, that wasn’t all.” Graves said.

Graves dug his slimy, saliva coated finger into the center of the worm pile, and pulled a rare green red worm out of the bottom corner of the plastic container. Graves pretended that the worm said to him ‘don’t eat me, please don’t eat me!’, and then lower the worm into his mouth, slowly dissolving the gelatin, dye, and sugar on his tongue. Graves pretended, for a moment, that his mouth was the pit of Sarlaac from Return of the Jedi.

With the worm in his mouth, Graves said “I saw a be fat guy by a fan.”

Graves swallowed his worm.

“I said,” He said, “I saw a big fat guy by a van.”

***

Carmine Calamari ambled over to the van – the 1990 Dodge Caravan – and pulled up the welcome mat and stoop, and closed the side doors. He pulled the cut branches off the side and the roof in fervent sweeping swaths. He thought about what marones those cops were, and he thought about the push of the whole wager.

The naval battle never happened on Lake Me. Carmine had spent a couple of weeks preparing an intricate Rube Goldberg chain reaction, all while disguising himself as a bum. Carmine hadn’t had a shower in four days, and there were spots of feces on his underwear.
With his holey trenchcoat, he muscled himself into the driver seat, and pulled the keys out of his pocket. Sliding the key into the ignition, the battery registered, and a radio broadcast of the *Rush Limbaugh Show* started blaring, but the starter wouldn’t ignite the engine.

***
Cheviot Machine and Screw

The water cannon was manufactured in the tiny Cheviot Machine and Screw shop on Glenmore, before Harrison, and after Gamble. The one in the basement of the storefront building, with the awning, with the apartments on the second and third floors for bachelors with hot plates, who liked to masturbate at pictures of glossy Ass Thumper magazines.

Len Wiedeshofer owned Cheviot Machine and Screw. He inherited it from his dad, and his uncle, both of whom had been dead since the late seventies. Len himself was in his early sixties. He wore jeans and a polo shirt to work every day. In the winter he would come in with his Cincinnati Reds silk bomber jacket, hang it up on the hook outside his office, and brew coffee.

He would pull out the work order docket for the day, and hand it over to his two employees, Sax Taxson, and big Ernie Shores.

Sax loved the universal milling machine, so he usually got all the orders with angle iron and flange shaping. Big Ernie was great with the horizontal miller, and he was an expert welder.

Len had spoken, informally, with Henge at Frisch’s a week and a half ago over a Big Boy dinner. Henge had the liver and cottage cheese, and the soup salad and fruit bar.

“Bubba,” Henge said to Len. “I was wondering if you could make me a water cannon,” he said.

On a napkin, Henge began scribbling a design for a cannon, able to be mounted on the bulkhead of his small snipe, manual with a vacuum pump mechanism, and accurate up to nearly fifty yards. Henge had heard somewhere that geniuses invented things on napkins.

Len breathed, and eased back in the smoking section bench, and took the limp napkin as Henge handed it to him.

Straitening the napkin out, Len examined the sweeping scrawl of the design.

“Ah huh,” Len said. Len nodded his head, and furrowed his brow.

“I think we can make this,” Len said.

“That would be great, Len.”
The waitress asked if anyone wanted dessert. Henge opted for the cheesecake, and some coffee. Len, who claimed an Adkins type diet, said no, he was fine.

***

In his refrigerator, at Cheviot Machine and Screw, Len Wiedeshofer kept, at all times, at least one case of O’Douls, and a six pack of Coke.

The O’Douls, Len told his crew, was to be opened, poured out, refilled with Miller High Life, and recapped. Len had a bottle capping machine next to the Bridgeport horizontal milling machine, under a suspended fluorescent light.

Sax Taxson loved to pour the non-alcoholic O’Douls down the utility tub drain. He would painstakingly watch the foam from the fake beer volcano out of the drain, and mingle with the soap powder he and big Ernie used to clean their hands after the day was out.

Len was in recovery. Len’s wife Mabel thought he was going to AA meetings after work, coming home, smelling like smoke. Breath reeking of coffee and orange peels.

“So I says to Mabel,” Len said to Sax and big Ernie, “I says, Mabel, I told you I quit drinking, I got a sponsor Mabel, I said.”

Sax and big Ernie laughed, and Sax took a doctored O’Douls bottle out of the refrigerator. The big grey garbage can by the door outside the office had thirteen empty green O’Douls bottles on top of twenty four empty cans of Miller High Life.

***

Sax loved the feel of the bottle cap press. The rusty smooth handle, cast out of high grade iron, from an era gone by. The press reeked of nostalgia, a sort of home sickness, and as Sax recapped each of the innocuous, inconspicuous O’Douls bottles, with vile Miller High Life from twelve ounce cans, he felt powerful.

Pressing down with a heave of his small wiry frame, the cap would knurl over the lip of the green bottle with a satisfying mash. Sax loved to make his small arm swell with the lever, as he filled the bottles, and slowly changed the world for the worse.
This happened every other day, as Len’s drinking picked up, and Len’s wife Mabel would visit the shop more regularly. And all hell would break loose.

***

“Len!?” Mabel would yell, peering inside the door. She’d yell as kind of a warning. A heads up yell. An inquisitive yell. She would stare at the concrete floor, and listen for movement. As long as Len wasn’t sleeping with another woman, Mabel could control Len’s drinking.

One afternoon, in mid August, Mabel came inside the office, after calling out the obligatory warning and staring at the concrete floor for what she surmised was at least forty-five seconds, which, Mabel realized, was at least twenty seconds longer than comfortable.

Len was sitting at his desk, legs sprawled like a scarecrow, and empty bottles of O’Doul’s stood like little green Lite Brite pegs on the organizer calendar on the surface of his desk.

“Len!”

“Huh,” said Len. He looked up at his wife, his eyes crust covered slots. His mouth tasted like a nine volt battery.

“Len, Henge called the house,” Mabel said.

She said, “He wants to know when the,” she pulled a little piece of paper from her purse. “Water cannon is going to be ready, said he’d be over at the house this evening.”

The water cannon, being lathed by big Ernie, was still a good five hours from being finished. Sax had TIG welded the base yesterday morning with some spare plate, but the pump apparatus still needed to be constructed, and Len knew that was no laughing matter.

***

Len thought, through his foggy mid afternoon stupor, that building a pump was an extraordinarily complicated activity. He thought about valves, and impellors, and reservoirs, and cranks and levers. None of these thoughts, however, actually came out of his mouth.
There was really no way, in his condition, Len Wiedeshofer could build a pump by this evening. Henge was going to stop by the house, Mabel said. Henge was going to want answers. Solutions. Outcomes. Henge would want no water cannon left behind.

“Fuck,” Len said to his desk. He was staring at the surface of his desk, and his wife was standing right there, watching him be drunk in the afternoon at Cheviot Machine and Screw, and not sleeping around on her.

“Now Len,” Mabel said. She said: “You still have a few hours to sober up.”

Mabel walked out to the small table under the punch clock. There was a Mr. Coffee coffee maker, and some powdered creamer and a can of Kroger brand coffee. Mabel opened the can, spooned some grounds in a filter, and filled up the glass carafe with water from the utility basin.

Sax Taxon glanced up from the workbench vice. He was working on a steel machete for his own personal reasons, and had overheard some of the conversation between Len and Mabel.

Sax knew where they could find a pump.

***

What Sax had in mind was a magnum size penis pump. He didn't personally own one, but he knew a guy who ran a “backroom,” near Sorbonne actually.

“Len,” Sax said. Sax was tired of his creepy quiet image he had somehow acquired, and by making the offer, was trying to redefine himself as a guy with real and viable ideas. Sax would be known as a 'go to guy,' or a 'man with the plan.' In his bathroom, Sax had a copy of Dale Carnegie’s How to Win Friends and Influence People, which he would thumb through while forcing out a poop.

Mabel answered for Len, and told Sax that Len wasn't feeling well. Mabel told Sax that Len had the flu, or something, and that maybe everyone at Cheviot Machine and Screw was going to come down with it.

Sax put his hands in his pockets, because he found Mabel telling him that ‘Len had the flu’ amusing, and sad. Simultaneously.

“Ok,” Sax said.

Sax went on: "Tell Len I got a place to get a pump."
Meanwhile, big Ernie was busy on the lathe, turning a two foot long steel cylinder into the barrel of a water cannon. In his twenty three years as a machinist, fifteen of which with Cheviot Machine and Screw, Ernie Shores had never been asked to make a water cannon. Something about the idea of ‘water cannon’ struck a chord in big Ernie’s soul, penetrating his brown skin, sinking into his eyes under his safety goggles.

With the little toggle cranks in his fingers, big Ernie Shores guided the metal cutting chisel in a slow, steady, deliberate swath up the length of the steel barrel. The blueprints, which had been transcribed almost directly from Henge’s original napkin sketch told Ernie that the barrel should have a general attenuating taper from breech to muzzle of approximately fifteen degrees. From a length of two foot stock, fifteen degrees was a small, and by most standards – unnoticeable change. But big Ernie Shores was a craftsman, and with each tiny turn of the little toggle wheels, and each corresponding tiny adjustment in the blade positioning he knew he was making a masterpiece.

The metal, as it spun on the lathe spindle at a rate of 1800 revolutions per minute, shone a lazy strobe from the fluorescent tubes overhead. Tiny shards and shavings peeled off the stock, as Ernie expertly guided the tool point along the surface. Little flecks, not much more than a few hundred thousand atoms silently dropped to the bench, forming a small pile of silvery grey dust. On Fridays, Sax would run a magnet over all the machines as part of a weekly cleanup. With the shavings stuck to the magnet, Sax would run around the shop, holding the magnet to his chin, claiming he was Santa Claus.

Seeing that Len was incapacitated, and that the water cannon needed to be finished - more than likely - by that evening, Sax decided to take a rare opportunity for an alpha role around Cheviot Machine and Screw.
“How’s that barrel coming?” Sax asked big Ernie Shores. Sax hunched over the lathe, without safety glasses on, peering down on the spinning tapered cylinder, pretending to know what he was looking for in terms of imperfections, or lapses in true craftsmanship.

Without looking away from his work piece, big Ernie told him that it was coming along fine.

Sax pouted his bottom lip over his top, and nodded his head in understanding and approval. The barrel was coming along nicely. The water cannon might just be ready for Henge to pick it up later on this evening at the Wiedeshofer house.

The only thing Sax needed to do was to pick up the pump from the ‘backroom’ near Sorbonne, and figure some way to incorporate the mechanism into the cannon.

***

“Sax,” Mabel said, “Len wants to know if you can finish the water cannon by tonight.” She looked sullen. Remorseful. Her blue green eyes carried heavy black crescents, and the lines of her mouth showed creases from hard worry filled nights.

Sax wondered, for approximately two seconds, how good Mabel was in bed. How the creases of her mouth would fold and react with some personal movement.

A shiver went up Sax’s spine, and he told Mabel to tell Len: ‘sure,’ and ‘proly.’ “Prolly,” Sax told her to tell Len, “I gotta get the pump, and line up the mechanism, but prolly have it ready this evening.”

Mabel asked Sax to ask big Ernie Shores how the barrel was coming along.

“Mabel said Len wanted to know,” Sax said to big Ernie.

Ernie turned off the lathe, and the work piece slowed in the Jacobs chuck to a labored whine. He took off his safety glasses, and the American flag bandanna off his bald head, and wiped sweat off his face. “Almost there Mrs. Wiedeshofer.”

“Almost there,” Sax said. The Cheviot Machine and Screw shop was silent now, except for the Mr. Coffee machine sputtering and spitting out globs of Kroger brand coffee and city water in a urinating trickle by the punch clock.

Getting nervous at the silence, Sax adjusted his crotch, and put his left hand on the welding bench.
Sax Taxson

Sax had to run. Cheviot Machine and Screw was stifling in the mid August humidity. Those lazy hot days where the air sticks to your clothing Sax secretly hated. Sax was an autumn sort of guy, and was looking forward to the change of season coming up.

Sax liked to watch the leaves turn orange and red as they died.

With his 1977 Chevy Malibu, Sax boomed up U.S. 27 toward Sorbonne. The maroon body of the Malibu shimmied and swayed with the shocks and struts in the forward motion of the car, and the trunk lid bobbed up and down. Sax’s trunk lock was drilled out by some thieves last May, and he still had not repaired it.

On his way up to the ‘backroom’ to get the pump mechanism, Sax hit two squirrels, ran over a raccoon carcass and hit what he thought to be a Hungarian Vizsla. With each strike the trunk lid would chomp chomp chomp up and down as the motion of the car was slightly altered by the tires running over mammalian bodies.

Gripping the steering wheel with a white knuckled ten o’clock, two o’clock, Sax Taxson smiled wide over top his thin frame every time an animal was hit. For a brief moment, seeing himself in the rearview mirror, Sax thought of himself as a pumpkin king, and it was his duty to kill small furry things on the roads of the American countryside.

The ‘backroom’ was actually in Morton, a tiny crossroads town ten miles outside of Sorbonne, with two honky tonks, one general store, a taxidermy shop, and two porn shops.

***

Wheeling his car, which he had named Chomsky because of his affinity toward structuralist linguistics and analytic philosophy, Sax tuned the radio to an AM talk station. The radio in the ’77 Malibu named Chomsky was still a dial and pushbutton setup over a pull out ashtray. Sax found a station, and they were talking about guns.

_I love machine guns_, the AM radio on the dash said, _I have one in my closet._

“Me too,” thought Sax Taxson.
Sax Taxson had a large walk in closet, and an enormous basement filled with things. He actually owned the house he grew up in. Over on the west side, and he enjoyed collecting things. Antiques. Flea market junk. The inside of Sax Taxson’s house looked like a scrap yard filled with mid American kitsch. Sax had talked with executives at not only Cracker Barrel, but also Applebee’s and TGI Friday’s about purchasing some décor, but no one responded.

“Put some of that on eBay,” Len Wiedeshofer told him one afternoon at Cheviot Machine and Screw. “Somebody’ll buy it.”

Truth was, Sax didn’t really want to get rid of any of his stuff. He enjoyed it. It comforted him. Now wheeling up to Morton in Chomsky, Sax was going to get a penis pump. Not for him, but for a water cannon.

The whole thing seemed ludicrous to Sax. A water cannon. For a guy named Henge. What the hell would a guy named Henge want with a water cannon? Just then Sax saw a calico cat on US 27, and wheeled Chomsky toward it.

***

Just then, in his rear view mirror, Sax Taxson saw a state trooper car, replete with atavistic cherry top light, and wailing siren. In his rear view mirror Sax saw a trooper driving with his hat on, which if he remembered correctly from some cop shows he used to watch, was a procedural no no.

Thinking about no no’s and procedures, Sax felt a tinge of admiration for the trooper. Wearing his cowboy hat. Billowing up U.S. 27 in an outdated Crown Victoria. Wailing siren and flashing red light, it all seemed heroic, in some way.

Forgetting about the calico cat, Sax wheeled Chomsky onto the shoulder of 27 and waited. He fiddled with the radio. He brought his hands up to ten o’clock, two o’clock. He reached in the glove box, and fumbled through papers and forms. Sax knew he had proof of insurance. Somewhere.

With his hands at ten and two, and head strait and forward, looking as if he were pretending to drive, Sax merely blinked as the trooper approached the side of Chomsky.

“Can I see your license and proof of insurance?” He said. His cowboy hat cast a sad shadow over Sax’s left elbow.
“Yessir officer,” Sax Taxson said. He handed the trooper his license.

“And proof of insurance?”

“Uh well you see, um,” Sax said. “I just had it.” He said. “It was right here.” He pointed to the glove box.

The trooper immediately placed his right hand on top of his gun.

Sax looked at the trooper, under his sad cowboy brim and smiled like the pumpkin king. His gnarly teeth bristling in a sheepish bouquet.

“You have any idea why I pulled you over?”

“Uh.” Sax thought about his speed.

Was he speeding?

If he was, what was a plausible excuse?

Did the trooper have a run on him?

Did they know about the machine guns in his walk in closet?

“No sir,” Sax said. “I don’t.”

“We received a call that a car fitting this description hit a dog a mile south of here.”

Sax thought about that, and thought about how he and Chomsky had enjoyed hitting the Hungarian Vizsla, and tried to think of an acceptable denial of the entire situation.

Did they have the wrong car?

Not likely. This was a rare ’77 Malibu with after market trunk capabilities.

Could it be that it was a deer? No, not small enough.

Was there even a law against hitting dogs on the road? Sax wasn’t sure. The trooper had pulled him over with some probable cause in mind, the law demanded that. They were just far enough out of the city for strange things to occur between outsiders and indigenous law enforcement officers.

The suddenly, in a flash of insight while gripping the maroon leather wrapped steering wheel of Chomsky; the maroon ’77 Malibu, Sax Taxson realized the answer.

The semiotic device: “dog” didn’t really point to any actual object: “dog.”

***
The trooper, in his archaic patrol car, had an up to date computer system – linked to ECHELON, NSA, FBI, INTERPOL, and Homeland Security databases. It was a Macintosh laptop. A power book with one of those simpering apple logos, glowing pretentiously against the ancient dash of the Crown Vic. As the trooper typed in the license number and tag number, the chomped apple beaconed in a sad, hip rhythm, as it transferred data from the trooper’s fingertips to the screen, too a satellite with a touch of an ‘enter key’, and transferred data back with a satisfying white glow.

***
Meanwhile at Cheviot Machine and Screw

At Cheviot Machine and Screw, Mabel poured coffee into a Gilmore Lanes coffee mug, stirred in a stream of powdered soy based creamer, and added three cubes of sugar. She tasted it, added another cube of sugar, stirred, tasted, and brought it over to Len’s desk.

Len was sobering up. The water cannon needed to be ready by this evening. Big Ernie Shores was finishing up some burnishing on the metal lathe, and Sax Taxson was supposedly wheeling up to some specialty shop he knew about in Morton to get a special pump mechanism.

“Drink up honey,” Mabel said.

Len took the handle of the mug and slowly slurped up some of the milky brown coffee.

“Needs more sugar.”

Mabel took the mug, and went back to the small table under the time clock. She grabbed two more cubes, plunked them in, stirred, tasted. It tasted so sweet it was almost salty.

She brought it back, and Len had found an issue of the *Nandale Chronicle* on the floor by his desk. It was from Tuesday. He flipped to page nineteen, the obituaries. Len Wiedeshofer, like many of his west side cronies, found himself in the habit of what men in the bowling league and men who spent Saturday afternoons at the barbershop referred to as “death watch.” It was a discussion, usually beginning with the recounting of a recent death of a friend or loved one, or high school classmate.

It was a morbid turning toward one’s possibility of the absolute impossibility of oneself. The men in the barbershop didn’t necessarily articulate, in those words, what was being discussed, but with eyes over *Popular Mechanics* and copies of the *Nandale Chronicle* and *National Geographic*, but they knew they knew that’s what it was they were thinking. Gazing up at a menagerie of WWII model airplanes frozen timeless and lifeless in a pivotal struggle, men would eulogize the fallen with Adam’s apples stretched in a strained wistfulness, and talk about old times.

In the obituaries of Tuesday’s *Nandale Chronicle* Len Wiedeshofer saw a name he knew.

George I. Gestorben, 92, Cheviot.
He was a salesman.
He was a veteran.
Survived by children Sam Gestorben, Molly Farley; grandchildren Michael, Kevin, Steve, Amy, John, Lou. Preceded in death by wife Dorothy Gestorben.

Services were August 5 at St. Perpetua Catholic Church. Arrangements made by Schindler-Scorsese-Lanski Funeral Home. Memorials to the Finitude and Being One’s Ownmost Self Society.

“Fuck,” Len said. George I. Gestorben was Len’s little league coach. George at one time had confessed that his middle name was Ist, a name he desperately tried to keep a secret. His parents, George had figured, wanted to play a joke on him by giving him some strange and nonsensical middle name.

One thing Len remembered about George was that he was. He was real. He was authentic. George I. Gestorben was an authentic being.

Staring at the small forest of green O’Doul’s bottles on the surface of his desk, was Len. The bottles, which had been emptied and surreptitiously refilled with Miller High Life, and recapped, were completely consumed leaving Len Wiedeshofer toxically inebriated at two thirty seven in the afternoon.

Len Wiedeshofer knew he had been inauthentic for some time now, and he knew he wasn’t going to live forever.

***

With his head in the palm of his hand, Len Wiedeshofer crumbled in heaving sobs at his desk in his little office inside Cheviot Machine and Screw. He cupped his other palm to his face, and shook with gasps and wails, and knocked a few of the inauthentic green O’Doul’s bottles to the cement floor. They shattered with an unnerving crash, sending green shards and amorphous triangles skittering across the floor.
Mabel instinctively went immediately for the broom and dustpan in the closet by the Bridgeport milling machine.

“I’m a fraud,” Len said.
“I’m a fucking fraud.”
He said, “I’m a fucking fraud.”
Len knew he was being inauthentic. That his inauthenticity was, in effect, un-being. By not being authentic, Len Wiedeshofer was not really a being at all.

***

Len Wiedeshofer’s inauthenticity, becoming apparent upon reading the obituary of the late George Ist Gestorben, Len’s little league coach, was tearing Len into tiny fragmented shards. Len was like the green O’Doul’s bottles, shattered into unspecific triangular shapes. Out of the zippo pocket in his jeans, Len pulled a twenty four hour coin. He just kept it with him, and stopping getting new ones every time he came back to AA.

With the pushbroom, Mabel began sweeping up the remnants into a small green pile on the floor of Len’s office.

***

“I gotta come clean, Mabel,” Len Wieshofer told his wife.

She was hunched over the pile of green glass and metal shavings. Len stared at his wife’s ass. The crease of her polyester pants rode right up her butt, because she was wearing a thong. Len had told her to wear a thong a while ago. Said it would really turn him on. She protested, saying it felt like butt floss, and that it was uncomfortable. She claimed it conflicted with her Catholic sensibilities.

“Oh Len,” Mabel had said one Saturday morning in late March. They were getting dressed, to go out to a late March birthday party, and Len as he pulled on his pants, expressed interest in Mabel wearing thongs. Len had heard about thongs, about girls wearing thongs down at the college, and a lot of the looser types in the Smokin’ Monkey Lounge on Harrison Avenue.
“C’mon honey,” Len coaxed. He pulled up his pants, and pulled the belt taut. He was almost to the end of the holes. He slapped Mabel on the ass, and she jumped and smiled.

“Stop it,” she said.

Now, in Cheviot Machine and Screw, Len was clutching his brass twenty four hour coin. He had a water cannon to make. George Ist Gestorben was dead now, but he was, at least, an authentic being. Len realized his own inauthenticity. The O’Doul’s bottles on his desk, and the ones shattered on the floor and now in a pile swept up by his wife who was wearing thongs at his request.

Big Ernie Shores peeked his head in the door. His eyes danced around the office

“Hey Len,” he said. Big Ernie said, “Len I got that water cannon barrel finished.”

Len stared at the floor.

Big Ernie Shores had twenty two years clean and sober in NA.

***

The pathological hush of the concrete floored office tasted like the electrolyte oil pumped into the clear cutting chamber of a CNC machine. One of those stagnant, stale cabinets with Plexiglas doors, and an encased fluorescent light, and a robotic arm wielding a metal burr or blade or drill bit at 15,000 revolutions per minute. Big Ernie Shores hated those machines. He hated most technology, really.

Big Ernie, at his two bedroom bungalow in Westwood still had a 78 rpm record player, a 45, and a 33 which he used to listen to his extensive collection of vinyl jazz, blues, and early rock and roll. Big Ernie loved Raahsan Roland Kirk, the Five Discs, The Crows, and the Orioles

“None of that Beach Boys shit,” big Ernie would tell the guys at Cheviot Machine and Screw. Sax was into obscure musical instruments, and Len Wiedeshofer would drink cheap beer and listen to the corporate “oldies” station; Oldies 96.5.

“What’s wrong with the Beach Boys?” Len would say. Big Ernie would get a look in his eye, and Len would look away, because, really, Len wasn’t too invested in the idea.

“Len you want I should mount this for you?” big Ernie said. The water cannon, after all, was supposed to be picked up by Henge that evening.
Big Ernie looked at the floor, at the shattered pile of fake beer bottles, and looked up at Len. Old Len Wiedeshofer. Sitting there, the old white crumpled heap. Poor sucker, big Ernie thought. Len wasn’t a bad guy, and he was actually a good guy to work for. Always gave big Ernie time off any time he had to take his old mom to chemo treatments. Len sent the biggest live plant to the funeral. It still grows in the north window of his bungalow. Big Ernie waters it twice a week, that old hibiscus, living, pointing north. And any time he watered it, he thought of his old mom, and thought about old Len. Good people God had put in his life.

“Len, tell you what,” big Ernie said. He said it slowly and sincerely. “Lemme mount this for you on the frame Sax made,” big Ernie said, “and let’s you and me go to a meeting tonight.”

Mabel’s sad, tired face creased into a smile, and glistens of tears streaked down her cheeks.

***

Len rubbed his red, snot caked nose with his palm. Mabel, teary eyed and swooning with happy nudged Len’s coffee mug, and told him to take a sip.

“Take a sip honey,” Mabel said. “It’ll make you feel better,” she said.

Big Ernie Shores leaned on the door jamb. His big branches stretched up, forearm flat to the jamb. He loomed about six four, but there was something about his presence. He had a persona, big Ernie. In the program, big Ernie sponsored a lot of guys.

“Get ‘em in the door, and we do the rest,” he’d say at meetings. Big Ernie was old school recovery, which was a rare trait in the NA circles. Most NA people hugged, and sat around and glad handed and talked about drugs and money, and a lot of them didn’t even stop drinking. Big Ernie got sober at Oak, a perennial AA clubhouse, where ex-problem drinkers would sit around, and drink Some Coffee and (have) a Few Laughs™, and sip the bad coffee out of Styrofoam cups, and talk about sports, and go to meetings at jails and mental hospitals, and come back and wait for something else to do.

Big Ernie, the old dog, old rock dog and beer drunk walked into Oak one afternoon and hadn’t had a drink or used a drug since. He worked a rigorous program of recovery. He did inventory. He prayed. He made coffee, and cleaned ash trays. He worked with still suffering alcoholics and addicts.
Here, in mid August, in that musty old machine shop, big Ernie was carrying the message.

He was twelfth stepping Len W.

Around the rooms, as people in recovery called it, big Ernie Shores was known only as big Ernie S.

***
Sax Taxson and the Trooper

Sitting in Chomsky with his hands at two and ten, Sax Taxson thought about what would eventually go down as a precedent – known as the Sax Taxson - Noam Chomsky defense. The word or signifier 'dog' could never actually represent an object 'dog,' without being first subjectively aligned in a mental construct.

That was the loophole. Sax Taxson loved Noam Chomsky, Immanuel Kant, and especially Rene Descartes. Old Descartes, the old imp. Gosh, thought Sax, Descartes had it all together. Clear and distinct ideas. Matter as quantifiable. Mind over matter. Gosh.

Sax farted a long single note whine on the maroon vinyl seat of Chomsky, the’77 Malibu. With his left hand he wafted upward three or four times from between his legs to his face, and breathed in his own gas. Sax loved the smell of his own farts. For him the farts had not only signifier properties, but, in a purely subjective way, also provided a window to immediate signified. To Sax Taxson, farts were an instance of subject and object aligning seamlessly.

***

The trooper, in his outdated Crown Vic patrol car, and his up to date Macintosh laptop, found Sax Taxson.

It said: Sax Avery Taxson

It said: Male

It said: 46

It also said: Type O Negative

The Computer said: Three speeding tickets since 1990.

It said: Owner: 1977 Chevrolet Malibu, maroon, 2 door.

It said: College Graduate.

It said: Owner: Taxson Antique and Pawn: Cheviot, OH. Employee: Cheviot Machine and Screw, Cheviot, OH.

It said: Has flown overseas _17_ times. Has been to Uzbekistan, Turkey, Latvia, Nigeria, Japan, and Montreal. Bags have been searched _19_ Times. Questionable substances found and investigated. Certain
‘antiques’ resembling sedition devices. Also contained un-normal musical instruments. Has crossed Canadian border _5_ times since December 2005.

There were some pictures. A serialized satellite montage of Sax Taxson driving his 1977 Chevrolet Malibu. Up. Harrison. Avenue. There was a photo in a newspaper article written by Harry Gavone of the Nandale Chronicle. It was a story about high school wrestling, and the Wrestling Boosters at St. Luke’s purchased a new scoreboard and buzzer system. Taxson Antique and Pawn was the primary sponsor. There was a picture with Sax shaking hands with St. Luke’s principal; Father John Gregg. Fr. John was smiling. Tax, in a pullover sweater and collared shirt was grimacing in his alkaline way. The sharp, piercing, angry little features of his face came through vividly, even on the faded scanned newsprint.

***

“Uh huh,” the trooper said. He read the screen of his Macintosh. The screen reproducing data from a string of sources spanning several hundred thousand miles in terms of transmission – tiny binary bits storing ideas and theorized knowledge. It mostly read like a lab report. Clear and distinct ideas imposed upon observations. Skeptical of any connectedness or causality. The little ones and zeroes pixilated thought, and reproduced those pixilated thoughts into simple monochrome text – imbued with a sense of explication. A sense of knowing. Of understanding. Sax Taxson, this owner of a pawn shop, this Employee of Cheviot Machine and Screw, this type O – blood possessor, he was digitized, and known only as facsimile.

As part of modernity, Sax Taxson was a numeric representation of himself. A geometric conundrum. A biological mechanism. A compilation of matter.

As part of a postmodern condition, the understandings of Sax Taxson in the modern sense had become a weapon. A means to control. A vehicle for assertion and maintenance of power structure.

Sax Taxson, sitting wheel hard in his maroon ’77 Malibu with the broken trunk that would sway up and down in a chomping motion as he drove. The Malibu he had named Chomsky, after Noam Chomsky, a structural linguist and analytic philosopher that Sax Taxson, for reasons obscure to most, had some affinity toward.
Sax sat there, in that stale August miasma, breathing the remnants of a long and thoughtful fart. He thought about the water cannon, and the pump mechanism, and the fact that Morton was a strange and small town, and how there were more raccoons than dogs, and that he had to rely on the Noam Chomsky defense because of the Hungarian Vizsla he simply couldn’t resist hitting.

In his rearview mirror, Sax saw the trooper get out of his Crown Vic.

***

The trooper closed the door to the Crown Vic and walked up to the side of Chomsky, the old maroon ’77 Chevy Malibu.

Sax Taxson, elbow out the window, his long sleeve button down rolled up to just below the tricep, smiled his wide jagged smile up at the trooper.

“Mr. Taxson,” the trooper said to Sax. The trooper stopped, and walked around the gravel embankment to the front of Chomsky. There was some fur in the right front fender, and a small smear of blood.

“Mr. Taxson,” the trooper repeated. “You must have hit that dog.” He said, “There’s blood and fur on the fender, and I could have it taken down to the lab right now and prove that it did indeed come from a Hungarian Vizsla.”

Sax Taxson, the sly old fox, called the trooper’s bluff. There was no way, in a week’s time that a state trooper, running out of an ’80’s Crown Vic, could instigate a lab make up of some dog tissue. Besides, Sax had the Noam Chomsky defense.

Sax started right in on the trooper.

“Listen,” he said. “The word: ‘dog’ in no way relates to any object: ‘dog’, the relation is a mental one.” Sax said: “it’s a subjective mental construct.”

Sax eased back in the maroon pleather bench seat. He had him now, that dumb old trooper. He couldn’t possibly even know who Noam Chomsky was, let alone his philosophical arguments.

“Excuse me,” the trooper said. His mirrored lenses reflected Sax’s smile.

“I said,” Sax said, “the word dog doesn’t point to any object dog.”

The trooper laughed. He slapped his thighs, and spat.
“William of Ockham!” The trooper screamed. He pointed at Sax. “Right?”

“Uh no, I’m pretty sure that was Noam Chomsky.” Sax knew he was right. Who was this clown, this trooper?

“Ockham’s Razor,” the trooper said. He took off his shades. His pale blue eyes seared through Sax Taxson. “I used to be a philosophy professor at a Jesuit University,” the trooper said.

Who the hell was William of Ockham, thought Sax?

***
Len Wiedeshofer has a Little Problem

“The water cannon!” Len Wiedeshofer slapped his palm to his forehead. “I forgot,” he said.

Big Ernie Shores was planning on taking Len to a meeting that night. An AA meeting. Len, big Ernie figured, was in an opportune spot.

***

“A fuckin’ moon shot!” Big Ernie S.’s sponsor, Rick W. said to him on a stroll around the block near Oak. It was 1987. Big Ernie S. had been sober for three months, a small but important milestone. Rick W. was big Ernie S.’s first sponsor. A blonde haired, blue eyed heavy metal fan from Bangor Maine, Rick W. had moved to Cincinnati because his now deceased dog, Ruffles had told him it was a good idea.

“Back in the sixties,” Rick W. said to Ernie S. “Back in the sixties, all dem scientists and researchers and tax dollars went into getting a man on the moon.” He said.

He went on: “It took them thousands of man hours. The best minds in the world calculating and postulating and prognosticating.” Rick waved his arms in big sweeps. The late February trees were twiggy black brush strokes against the orange twilight of early evening. Big Ernie S. could make out the potent little buds on the tips of the trees if he looked hard enough. Little promises for new life. New beginnings. Fresh starts.

“And they measured the trajectory.” Rick W. said. “They measured the trajectory and they found the right moment to launch that somebitch,” he said.

“And they launched that somebitch, and they made it to the moon,” Rick said.

Rick W. reached into his Carhartt parka pocket, and fumbled under the pack of Marlboro Reds, and his Zippo, and his meeting schedule, and found a green marble. He pulled the marble out and said to big Ernie S., the big rock hound and boozer. The big black man with whom he had nothing in common other than a disease of the spirit. Rick W. opened his hand overtop big Ernie S.’s outstretched palm and dropped the warm little green ball.

Big Ernie S. felt the slight weight of the marble. It was just a dumb kid’s marble, like something he had when he was a kid, and everything was new and fresh and open.
“And they brought this moon rock back,” Rick W. said. “It took all that goddamn work to get that, and now it’s up to you to keep it,” he said. "And if anybody. Anybody tries to take that somebitch away from you," his eyes drilled into big Ernie S's. Big Ernie, the big softspoken rock hound. The drunk. Rick W. pointed his finger at Ernie's chest. "You tell 'em to back," he pointed. "The fuck," he pointed. "Up."

***

Now it was big Ernie Shore’s turn to carry the message to Len Wiedeshofer, his boss at the machine shop. Somebody he had known for years.

***
Henge told Len about the Water Cannon at Frisch’s

The water cannon, powered by a vacuum pump from a magnum penis enlarger, was a custom built water toy.

Henge wanted it.

“Power bubba,” Henge said. “Powerful enough to change the tide in a small naval battle.”

Henge and Len Wiedeshofer were having a late Lunch in Frisch’s restaurant. Some reasonably priced fare for families, and working class heroes. Henge, eating his liver and cottage cheese, slurped forkfuls in his mouth and said “Uh huh,” and “Uhhh,” to everything Len said.

“So you think this cannon should be powerful enough to shoot fifty yards?”

“Uh huh.”

“How about a hundred yards?”

“Uhhh.”

“Do you find my wife attractive?”

“Uhhh... Uh huh.”

Len ordered a Brawny Lad, and a bowl of vegetable beef soup. His stomach had been bothering him lately. He had started noticing little brown splotches on his skin everywhere, and his skin, overall, had contracted a vague yellow hue.

***

The water cannon, was designed, on a napkin, to be a semi powerful, sub lethal weapon – the kind you would find suitable for a naval battle on a small Midwestern lake on the outskirts of a college town.

“No,” said Henge through breathy slurps of his macaroni salad from the Soup Salad and Fruit Bar. “Bubba, I don’t want this thing to kill.” He took a forkful of little tortellini drenched in
cream sauce and bleu cheese dressing. “No killing,” he said. He stabbed toward Len’s face with the forkful of bleu cheese soaked tortellini. “This battle is supposed to be peaceful.”

In mid August, the whole thing made sense. Henge, Ed Groat, boredom. It seemed, at the time, to be the next right thing to do. Some Coffee and a Few Laughs™ didn’t have the same kick it once did.

The waitress came over to the table. She set down another coffee carafe, and Henge, while chewing a mouthful of pickled beets – the purple red juice streaking down his beard – refilled his coffee mug.

“That shit’ll kill ya,” Len said.

Henge chewed and breathed. He chewed, and breathed, and picked up his coffee mug and swilled it down. He breathed. “Bubba,” he said. “Booze will kill ya faster.”

***

The cannon, the main weapon of Henge’s small sailboat, was sub lethal, and was to be powered by a hand pump mechanism. Henge liked the simplicity. Hand crafted and hand powered. Not dependant on oil or some energy subsidiary of oil. Raw man power. Though he preferred calling it, in some circles, human power, he would, however, within the safe proletarian confines of Frisch’s, refer to it as man power.


He chewed more.

And breathed.

He chewed and breathed and swallowed.

He swilled more coffee, and refilled his cup from the carafe.

“All you need,” Henge said, sweeping bits of Big Boy from his back molars with his tongue. A small dab of tartar sauce was on the left side of his chin. “All you need is a sandwich to power that puppy.”

***
The waitress came, and asked Henge and Len if they wanted anything else. Henge picked up the dessert menu from the condiment island, just behind the Heinz ketchup bottle, and said he needed a minute.

The hostess led two men to the booth behind them. It was a window booth, just like theirs, and they looked like painters. Speckled dingy shirts and pants. One of them had doused themselves in Aqua Velva.

Henge, looking at the dessert menu, suddenly thought of a poem. He slowly got up and grabbed a napkin from another table. He asked the hostess, as she was walking back to the hostess podium, if he could have a crayon.

“Blue, please,” Henge said.

She brought the blue crayon to the booth, and Henge thanked her and began writing his poem. Len watched her nineteen year old ass walk away.

On the napkin, Henge wrote in blue crayon:

\[
\textit{Stink of Aqua Velva}
\]
\[
\textit{and Smoke}
\]
\[
\textit{And Frisch's fries and}
\]
\[
\textit{Bigboy}
\]
\[
\textit{These beasts}
\]
\[
\textit{Eat and Stink}
\]
\[
\textit{and mate and make}
\]
\[
\textit{a little money}
\]
\[
\textit{and have kids and die}
\]
\[
\textit{and the kids they}
\]
\[
\textit{have stink and eat}
\]
and mate and make
money and die
And Frisch’s Soup
Salad and fruit
bar is still there.
It’s still reasonable

Henge wanted to show it to Len, but he thought that the water cannon was enough for Len to chew on right now.

***

Henge and Len quibbled, for a few moments, over the bill. The Soup Salad and Fruit Bar tipped Henge’s portion of the check to mostly his side.
The price of genius, Henge thought, was a voracious appetite.
Len and Henge walked out the metal framed glass doors into the August stifle. Someone was smoking outside, and the salty haze of cigarette smell hung over the front of the Frisch’s.
Henge and Len looked deep into each others’ eyes.
“Well bubba,” Henge said, “you think you can make it?”
Len squinted. His skin had a sallow, yellow hue, and the bags under his eyes told sad, laconic tales.
“Yeah,” Len said, “I think Cheviot Machine and Screw can make that.”

***
Pete Limpelli went to Cincinnati

Pete Limpelli made it to the Greater Cincinnati area a couple of weeks before the naval battle. At the first chatter, the first dropping of the glove by both Henge and Ed Groat, both Pete Limpelli, and Carmine Calamari were ready.

“Minchia,” Pete said to the manager of the Frisch’s restaurant. Pete had the fish sandwich, and had told the waitress to hold the tartar sauce.

“Please,” Pete said, “darling.” He squeezed her tattooed forearm with his spotty terrible hand.

She pulled her arm away.

“Please sweetheart,” Pete said. “No tartar sauce.” He said, “The doc wants me to watch what I eat.”

She said sure and huffed off, and Pete hummed big band tunes while he waited.

Then they walked in. The two of them. Pete slipped a set of ear buds out of his polyester pant pockets, and pulled a parabolic microphone out from under the table.

While taking light sips on his coffee, Pete Limpelli, holding the parabolic microphone under the table, and pretending to look at something outside in the parking lot, listened to the conversation.

Slurp

Power bubba,

Slurp

Powerful enough to change the tide in a small naval battle

So you think this cannon should be powerful enough to shoot fifty yards?

Uh huh.

How about a hundred yards?

Uhhh.

Do you find my wife attractive?

Uhhh... Uh huh.

No
No killing. This battle is supposed to be peaceful
That shit’ll kill ya
Bubba
Booze will kill ya faster
Man power bubba
It’s simple. It’s pure
Aw ooh meed
All you need
All you need is a sandwich to power that puppy
Blue, please
Well bubba, you think you can make it?
Yeah I think Cheviot Machine and Screw can make that.

Pete’s fish sandwich finally arrived.

Hungry, Pete bit in.
“Minchia,” Pete said. He slammed his hand down on the table, and demanded to see the manager.
“Get me the fuckin’ manager,” Pete demanded.
The manager, a thirty something paunchy redhead came over to Pete Limpelli’s booth. He had a headset on his face, and was wearing a short sleeve button down white shirt, tie, and a name tag that said Lou on it.
“Yessir,” Lou said. “We made a mistake.”
“Yeah,” Pete said. Pete had his fork from the Soup Salad and Fruit bar still, and he held it in his hand. “You fucking made a mistake.”
“Listen,” Lou said. “There’s no charge on this meal.”
Pete said to Lou, “You ever heard of Cheviot Machine and Screw?”
“Yeah,” Lou said, “it’s right down the block.”

***
The parking lot of Cheviot Machine and Screw was a narrow alley of grey, cracked and cobbled concrete. The lot butted up against the mottled red brick wall of the old building, with a faded hand painted billboard for Barq’s Root Beer. A faded six pack of soda, in glass bottles. The colors, more than likely a vivid array of blues, and browns and reds, now had smudged to a sun bleached pastel.

Pete Limpelli had never heard of Barq’s Root Beer.

In this red brick building, in the basement, Cheviot Machine and Screw would be manufacturing the water cannon, to affix to Henge’s sailboat, for the end of summer naval battle on Lake Me.

Pete, if his sonic spy equipments served him right, was hot on the trail of the manufacturer – of Len Wiedeshofer – the manufacturer of the cannon itself.

Cheviot, in this hot August afternoon, stunk of humid rust, and of times when things were better.

Pete Limpelli, in his Towne Car, wheeling over to spy, listening to big-band music on his dash radio understood the importance of a life founded on nostalgia.

Every weekend in The Winged Tip Shoe in Queens, Pete would host a “Rock N Roll” night, complete with dancing contests, and a viewing of The West Side Story.

Pete crept up in the Towne Car. Crept up to the brick wall of the building, on the parking lot – the old greyed asphalt pad – and put it in park. From the back seat he retrieved the sonic spy parabola and ear bud device.

***

Seeing the faded Barq’s billboard painted on the brick side of the building, suddenly, made Pete Limpelli thirsty for an egg cream soda, something from his childhood – a fountain drink pulled by a soda jerk – made with seltzer water, milk, and U-Bet brand chocolate syrup. Memories, something Pete Limpelli secretly savored, bubbled up like soda fizz.

Pete put the ear buds to the sonic eavesdropper into his long gnarly earlobes. There were small tufts of grey hair shooting out from the folds and crevices. Old ragged cartilage, leathered and worn. Pete Limpelli, over the years, had heard many things.
He turned down the Glen Miller on the radio in the Towne Car, and toyed with the frequency and volume knobs on the breech end of the pistol grip parabolic microphone.

***

The knobs made a whirring and whining sound like an old time radio being tuned in. Maybe a weather radio even. Some sort of archaic listening as communication device screaming and squelching to be heard, and somehow knowing and upset that it will only remain a one way communication. No discourse. No interlocution. Nope. Things that whine and sing and moan before they manifest, in the world of communication devices, are sure to be one-way motherfuckers.

Pete Limpelli didn’t really think about this. To Pete, this was merely a question of creative economics, as he and Carmine had placed a bet on a naval battle to occur between two bored friends on Lake Me in two weeks as a means to protest the closing of summer, and somehow survive the boring hot end of it.

To Pete, sitting his Lincoln Towne Car, in Cheviot, in the parking lot of Cheviot Machine and Screw, the parabolic listening device was just what was necessary. Passive communicative acts. Pete envisioned himself, briefly, as an undergraduate at Milton University. Up in the college town of Sorbonne. Sitting in the back row. Taking an eight o’clock class because he couldn’t find any other time offerings because the university thought it might be a good idea to combat binge drinking by offering more early classes. Pete thought of himself sitting there, passively, listening to the professor drone on. About water cannon.

***

Pete made out some faint garbles. Flimojshowahsheehooh uuffff.

“What the fuck was dat,” Pete mumbled. His toothpick, sitting limply on his lower lip, bobbed up and down with his words. He adjusted the knobs again, and this time he directed the parabola not to the wall in front of him, but to the steel door leading down to the basement confines of the machine shop.

Through the baffle of steel door, and concrete stair and hall, Pete Limpelli heard some words. Finally. A few words.
Water cannon

I dunno Len, looks kinda complex

Yeah

I can find us a pump though

Can ya?

Yeah

How ‘bout a cold one.

Creak. Clink.

Ca-splah.

Clink.

Beast? I told you to get Miller.

Sorry.

I told you to use petty cash.

Pete sat there in the front seat of his Lincoln Towne Car. His mouth, hanging wide open, toothpick dangling in disbelief.

“Who are these fucking jabonis?” Pete said. “Minchia.” He cupped his hand to his forehead. Someone, somewhere, up there, was surely watching all of this.

***

Pete pulled the ear buds out of his leathery ears. The buds, attached to thin cords, flung around pendulously and clacked against the gold frames of his sepia toned sunglasses. Out from under the front seat of the Lincoln Towne Car, Pete Limpelli pulled a cardboard box and a Styrofoam mold.

Sonitor Parabolic Listening Device™ the box said.

“Minchia,” Pete said.

He nestled the pistol grip parabola into the Styrofoam niche, and slid the Styrofoam mold into the cardboard. Pete shucked the box under the leather seat.

It was about two thirty in the afternoon, on an August weekday. Pete rolled up the electric window with a whirr whirr whirr sound, and turned the key in the ignition. He turned on the air conditioner full blast, and threw the car in reverse, and squealed the tires.
Leaving two curved black stripes on the cracked grey asphalt, Pete Limpelli squealed onto Harrison Avenue, not really sure where he was going.

***

Ripping down Harrison Avenue in his Lincoln Towne Car, Pete Limpelli cursed under his breath. He cursed, and gnawed on his tea tree oil toothpick, and listened to his big band music, and thought about the whole Lake Me wager. Carmine Calamari. He thought about the Winged Tip Shoe.

Pete, not knowing the Greater Cincinnati Area, wheeled all the way down Harrison, down the careening hills and turns, through housing projects, and sediment of once suburbs. The car, with its air shocks, and deft suspension carved effortlessly down to the Cincinnati Valley. Pete looked, as he drove, out his side window. Dilapidated houses clinging to hillsides. Homes, once proud investments of first generation Americans hung in semi ruin, with trash laden porches. Long staircases leading from the sidewalk cast in cracked grey concrete, and overgrown with neglect.

Pete Limpelli had no idea where he was going. He just needed to get his bearings straight. To cool off. To get straight. Pete had to reassess what it was he was doing here.

***

Through the bottoms of Fairmount, he saw a slice of Cincinnati history akin to the great industrial footprints of Maspeth and Long Island City in Queens, and Red Hook in Brooklyn. Hulking treacheries of warehouses and factories, with warped and mashed rail leading into dead end throughways, all rusted and dead, made Pete think of a time when he was a kid, riding his bike. Exploring his world. To Pete, those bleak outcroppings were once an invitation. An invitation to outwit the watchie on a construction site. An invitation to see America make things.

Most of them were gone now, the factories. They only remained, as they did here, along Harrison Avenue in Cincinnati. A molted shell of what once was.

Coming to the massive grey concrete bridge known as the Western Hills Viaduct, Pete wheeled down through the spaghetti ramps and interchanges, in a slow eastward direction.
He wasn’t sure whether to take the upper or lower deck of the Viaduct. The lower, he surmised, would give him a view similar to Roosevelt Avenue in Queens, under the #7 elevated. A shadowy journey of claustrophobic wheel clenching. A journey through *Middle Viaduct*, complete with orks, wizards, and trolls.

Pete decided to take the upper deck. Climbing up the concrete ramp, with art deco era concrete railing along the side, he hammered the gas pedal, strumming the engine, pulling all eight cylinders into a unified hum. Making the air shocks leap, ever so slightly, at the crest of the on ramp.

He soared across the Western Hills Viaduct. Glancing down to his left and right he could see the shiny circuitry of a well used rail yard. Not extinct like so many of their industrial era warehouse and factory cousins. Still squealing and glistening with daily use.

To his right, just off in the distance, Pete Limpelli could see the shimmering crown of downtown Cincinnati. Buildings clustered like a small close knit family. Weathering years of ups and downs, huddled together in a show of resilient promise amid a sea of rust. An art deco core interspersed with buildings from the fifties, sixties, seventies, eighties, nineties, and now, downtown Cincinnati held the promise of a small Manhattan. For a moment, Pete thought about crossing the 59th Street Bridge.

***

Though he didn’t know it, he was heading toward Clifton.

Clifton, that center of Cincinnati bohemia. Some people were very particular about the distinction of neighborhood boundaries, which, in a city of Cincinnati’s menial size, was a fairly big deal. Some people quibbled over whether certain parts and aspects of the area were called “Clifton Heights,” or “University Heights” or “Corryville,” or “Avondale,” or “Clifton Gaslight,” or even simply “The Gaslight.” These distinctions, very important to people from the area had some minor delineation as to socioeconomic status, and these distinct areas could cover less than a three block radius, which, in most American cities, is considered an implausible distinction. For most Cincinnatians *not* from the Clifton area, the distinction was largely unimportant, and merely warranted a simple keychain operated alarm system for their car, and a cellular telephone. All of which over the past decade had become standard equipment.
Pete Limpelli, the Queens Mafioso, really wasn’t too concerned with any of that. Even if he did know, exactly, where it was he was going.

Clifton was a little slice of Greenwich Village in a medium sized Midwestern town. Had he known that it was a close cousin to Greenwich Village, he would have made a turn. Or stopped his car. Or gotten on I-75 and gone somewhere else.

Had he known, Pete would have uttered some sort of homosexual joke. Or called all the inhabitants, regardless of skin color, socio economic status, or sexual orientation, “a bunch a fuggin’ freaks.”

But he was meandering across the Western Hills Viaduct, and swiftly approaching the crucial point where Harrison Avenue, that stalwart artery of the west side of Cincinnati, changed her name to McMillan.

***

Pete Limpelli sat at the light intersecting the grand concourse of Central Parkway, and the point at which Harrison Avenue became McMillan Street. It was one of many awkward crossroads the city had to offer. Little did he know he was heading toward Clifton, and little did he know he was now sitting, in his Lincoln Towne Car, atop the largest still born subway system in the history of man.

His engine whirred in staccato as it powered the air conditioner while idling at the light. The light went from red to green, and Pete eased the gas, and crossed the intersection, and made the daunting, curving left up Clifton hill.

***
The Clifton Expedition

Clifton hill, like many hills in Cincinnati, was buttressed by a grey concrete retaining wall, which snaked and wound in a sad cold ribbon, keeping the remnants of once dense forests, and the remnants of once proud houses from tumbling down.

Pete Limpelli’s Lincoln Towne Car made the great sweeping turns up the mountainside, and Pete now hummed to a Duke Ellington song on the radio.

“Bah ba dum da dum dumm,” Pete hummed. His tea tree oil toothpick jammed back by the gold crown in his lower molar. Pete, in his disgust, had gnawed the toothpick to a pulpy, frayed remnant that somehow stayed together like fasces around an ax.

Pete was taking the A train up McMillan to Clifton.

Walking down the hill, on the sidewalk, which was flush up against the grey concrete retaining wall, was someone with a blonde Statue of Liberty Mohawk, and a shirt with the sleeves torn off. The shirt said “Meat is Murder,” and Pete Limpelli chuckled to himself.

Meat was murder, he thought. Maybe, thought Pete, this guy, this punk rock kid would be somebody to talk to.

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The kid was sort of chubby. Sort of rotund. Pete wondered, for a New York minute, how that kid, that punk rock kid could be a vegetarian and fat. Pete had only really known three serious vegetarians and they were all skinny.

Pete slowed the car. He pulled to the curving curb of McMillan, and threw it in park. He threw on his blinkers, and touched the electric window passenger open.

“Hey kid!”

The kid stopped, and turned. He squinted and peered into the front seat of the Lincoln.

Pete saw a strange hairline around the kid’s Statue of Liberty Mohawk. It looked like a wig. Under the Mohawk was a jowly, round face and a nose like an Indian Chief. Over top the cut off shirt, Pete Limpelli saw a braided gold rope with a giant horn shaped maloccio dangling from it. The maloccio swayed as the punk kid rested his hands inside the window of the passenger door.
The kid, who now, up close, looked to be in his sixties, was out of breath.

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The kid, as he breathed heavily, stunk of garlic and hummus. Under the Mohawk hairline, Pete saw a few tufts of curly grey black hair pushing out. The kid’s arms, just under the triceps, hung like the jowls of his face. Hanging sweat soaked waddles.

Pete said, “Like your shirt kid.” Pete had been thinking about going totally vegetarian for some time now. Ever since the doctor told him he needed to start watching what he ate, and after he got turned on to organic foods, the next logical step was to discern the process of agribiz. The lectures Pete had heard at the “Oats” and at the “Joe’s” had been filtering in over the violence and death and hedonism of his life, and the goings on at the Winged Tip Shoe.

The kid, out of breath, didn’t say anything, only nodded, and wheezed. Sweat beading under the wig, Indian Chief nose curled as he squinted in the heat. His eyes were masked by rim horn sunglasses, the kind blues musicians traditionally wore during performances.

“Minchia kid,” Pete said. “You alright?”

The kid remained silent, and nodded, taking deep breaths through his nose and his open mouth.

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The kid knew what minchia meant, both connotatively and denotatively. Under his blonde Mohawk wig, under the grey curly tufts of honest hair sticking out, Carmine Calamari kept sucking air in through his big nose. The sweat on his hairy forearms evaporated in the blast of Pete’s Lincoln Towne Car air conditioner unit.

He didn’t want to blow his cover to Pete. Pete, after all, was with whom the wager over the naval battle concerned. It was Pete Limpelli, the Queens Mafioso who was wagering against him, a Detroit Outfitter, for an untold sum of money over a naval battle on a small Midwestern lake as a means for two friends to combat boredom, and generally protest the end of summer.
Pete Limpelli asked the kid about girls around here. “Minchia,” Pete said, “I’m fuggin’
horny.”

Carmine didn’t respond vocally, but pointed in a series of thrusts and grunts and nods,
which informed Pete that he should continue on McMillan.

“East?”

Carmine nodded under the stringy blonde spires of the wig.

“Then what?”

Carmine started punching the air, and began dancing on the sidewalk. His pot belly and
love waddles shimmied and shook, and the bushy plumes of his grey black armpit hair flashed
out from beneath the “Meat is Murder” cutoff shirt T-shirt. He played a few chords on air guitar.
He kick thrusted one of his giant Italian Flag embossed Doc Martin boots toward the Gaslight,
the more upscale section of Clifton to the north.

“Make a left?”

Carmine nodded. The wig was starting to pull away from his scalp a little, so he held his
left hand to his forehead.

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“Minchia,” Pete said. “You alright kid?”

Carmine Calamari looked at his knees beneath his cargo shorts. His Italian Flag
embossed Doc Martins came up to his mid shin, and the cargos touched to just above his knee

cap. His knees, knobby, were showing age. Sixty fucking years, was it? Marone, thought
Carmine. Still tanned a bronze hue, there were tiny patches of liver spotting going on. The hair
on his legs was still mostly black, unlike the salt and pepper locks popping out from under his
blonde wig, and the little brooms under his arms.

Looking at his knees, Carmine muffled his voice. He peered over his blues rim horn
sunglasses, and said in a deep voice “Yeah I’m okay.”

Pete Limpelli, through his sepia toned aviators, looked concerned. A frown creased his
leathery face, and his tea tree oil tooth pick pointed downward.

He said: “Kid, whydontcha get in,” Pete said.
In a sweep of his body and hands, Carmine Calamari shoveled into the passenger seat of Pete Limpelli’s Towne Car. In his cutoff T-shirt, cargo shorts, and Doc Marten boots, Carmine was under cover. He had been spying, for some time, on the lifestyle habits of Henge and Ed Groat, friends and now adversaries in an epic naval battle on Lake Me.

Carmine had arrived in Cincinnati a week ago, in much the same incognito way as Pete, but neither one knew that the other was coming. Carmine knew now, but Pete didn’t. Carmine had to play it cool. Deep breaths. Not too much. Try to keep the talking to a minimum.

“So, “ Pete said. “What about the girls.” He said. “Where’s the frickin dames?” Pete let out a foul laugh, with his toothpick hanging, and the rifts of his crows feet showing just beyond his sepia toned sunglass frames.

Carmine had been banging a couple of punk rock girls since he arrived in town. Met them at a tattoo place. Came in there, dressed like a sixty something mobster from Detroit. The slacks. The button down short sleeve. The T-shirt underneath. He came in there to ask for some directions to a house that Ed Groat had allegedly been doing some bricklaying work on. He pulled out a tiny golf pencil and a scrap of paper from his pocket, and had to remove a fad wad of twenties to find them. Just then, in the tattoo parlor, like three girls in the place started swooning all over him.

They couldn’t keep their hands off him. Felt him up. Grabbed his balls. For a minute, the old Detroit Outfitter thought he was getting mugged. One of the girls started undoing his belt, and tugged him by the two straps of belt to a “back room” in the tattoo parlor. A week, five girlfriends, two couches, three cartons of cigarettes, and two and a half “mosh pit melees” later, Carmine was sitting shotgun with his betting adversary, Pete Limpelli.

Carmine disguised his voice.

He forced a cough, and held the Statue of Liberty Mohawk wig with his left hand. The wig’s spikes, or spires, as they might be called in some circles, rubbed against the roof of Pete Limpelli’s Lincoln Towne Car, and curled over in swooping blonde hooks. All seven of them, except for the front two, which, because of the way his back hurt, and the subsequent way that he
sat in the electric leather seat, only scraped the front of the roof, and along the seam of the climate controlled, tinted windshield.

“Uh umm,” Carmine coughed. His rim horn blues sunglasses shook on the bridge of his big nose. His cargo shorts, caked in sweat and cum and reeking of cigarette smoke and punk rock squatter couches met the powerful air conditioner of the Towne Car with a faint lingering stench.

Pete Limpelli rolled down his window, touching one of the electronic controls with his gnarled left index finger. The little servo motor let out a smooth whine.


“Minchia!” Pete said. “We’ll do Short Vine!” He started humming a Tony Bennett song. Something about being beyond the sea, and she’s there waiting. Carmine knew the song well, in some distant memory of his personality.

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Pulling to the top of the big hill, at a red light at the six point intersection of Ravine, McMillan, and Cassatt, Carmine and Pete looked straight ahead. They were coming to the open maw of one of Cincinnati’s many urban enclaves. Cincinnati, a city of little hamlets and villages. Little sections of urban vibrancy two or three blocks long amid a network of concrete causeways, and winding hilly roads.

The McMillan Calhoun strip was a long standing parasite of storefronts, row houses, apartments, and fast food standing just across from the urban behemoth University of Cincinnati.

Pete kept humming Tony Bennett, and Carmine looked out on the scene. A cacophony of signs and people on sidewalks, emerging from seemingly nowhere, then, as Carmine remembered from his week long escapade – disappearing as suddenly as it appeared. As mystical as a desert oasis, little enclaves of city life pocket the landscape of this town.

Cincinnati was slightly different than Detroit was nowadays. Detroit, a once majestic grid of industry and life, was now a shelled out skeleton. A war zone. Detroit when Carmine was a kid was an urban playground. High class.
Carmine, from under his grim blonde wig said: “Some girls live around here.” He pointed to a couple of row houses. A few brownstones. Some mix matched two families. A couple of apartment dwellings above storefronts. He said: “But I think they’re all at work.”

The digital clock on the dash of Pete Limpelli’s Towne Car said 3:07. It was a weekday in August.

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Just then, walking along McMillan was a girl. She was strolling, a petite five foot something in tight blue jeans and spaghetti strap heels. She had red hair, up in a bun, with a couple of curly locks hanging down in front of her ears. Her lips were soured up in a pout, and painted red, and she had on big framed sepia toned sunglasses, different than Pete Limpelli’s – not the aviator frame, but just as out dated. They were the seventies disco era frames, too big for her structure, and they gave her an even more petite look.

Her hips rolled, in a languorous sway as she planted one heel after the next, clopping along the sidewalk. Her top was a tight fitting short sleeve shirt, and the outlines of her breasts showed through.

With a touch of his gnarled index finger, Pete Limpelli rolled down the passenger side window, and began whistling across Carmine Calamari’s face.

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“Pfweew!” Pete Limpelli’s whistle shrilled past Carmine’s rim horn sunglasses. The girl looked over, not changing her stride, hips rolling, and full lips pouting. She pulled a Kamel Red out of her thin strapped hand bag and lit it with a red Bic lighter.

Pete slowed the car to the languorous pace of the redhead, and asked her what she was up to.

She smiled, slightly, and said she was up to nothing, and returned the question to Pete. Carmine clutched the top of wig, and rubbed the leg of his cargo shorts.

This redhead was a Clifton girl. A rare and unique breed. Carmine knew that. For the past week he had been knee deep in rebellious punk rock girls, dad hating vegans, aspiring intellectual gold diggers, and serial monogamists. All Clifton girls. The week was one of the

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Carmine wanted to smack Pete. Across the arm, or maybe punch him in the shoulder. The deltoid. To distract himself, he pulled his Doc Marten boot a little bit away from his leg, and looked down at his calf tattoo. Four days old, still scabbing and covered in a thin film of Vaseline. Or was it KY Jelly? Carmine couldn’t remember. The whole week was a blur.

From the moment he was pulled to the back room of the tattoo parlor, Carmine Calamari was substantially changed. Girls with pink hair and ripped fishnet stockings began pulling his pants off, tearing at his shirts. They fed him Jose Cuervo and PCP laced joints. They dressed him. These pink haired dolls played dress up with an overweight sixty year old man. Throwing Doc Martins on his feet. Trying on studded collars. They whipped him with a riding crop.

From under the Statue of Liberty Mohawk wig, Carmine Calamari pieced together the trauma of the last few days.

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Carmine took a second to wipe a smudge of mascara from his cheek in the passenger side mirror.

The petite red head, sucked a long slow drag on her Kamel Red, and said maybe see you later.

“Might be a good thing,” Pete said. His tea tree oil toothpick was standing erect in his teeth. It waggled up and down as he spoke, and forcefully accentuated his smiles and laughs.

She nodded and exhaled into the Lincoln, and Pete and she smiled and said see you later, and Carmine smirked. They were still on McMillan, and had barely touched the potential of Clifton life.

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From behind his horn rimmed sunglasses, and from beneath his wig, Carmine Calamari spoke up.

“Let’s go east another block or two, and then make a left.” Carmine said.

“Up here?” Pete said. He pointed his terrible left index finger toward the turn.

Carmine nodded. They were going to traverse Short Vine, one of the city’s many happenstance corridors and ill planned thoroughfares. Vine street, once the main North South corridor, and traditional postal zone divider of East and West was hacked and misaligned in places, as hills and curves prevented construction, and as builders lacked foresight. Short Vine, as a street, was technically part of Vine Street, even though it was completely isolated from the main flow of Vine Street traffic.

Short Vine was a three or four block stretch densely packed with concert venues, punk rock bars, tattoo parlors, and sandwich shops. The stench of Metro bus diesel lingered with faint, yet ever present odor of vomit and lost childhood. Short Vine, like McMillan, was in a way a parasite strip, feeding off the teat of the urban institutional behemoth; University of Cincinnati.

“Take a left here,” Carmine said.

“But the sign says Jefferson,” Pete said.

“Yeah,” Carmine said, “We gotta do a little doo da doo.”

Pete glanced over at Carmine. Nobody said ‘doo da doo,’ except wise guys, and Pete, though not necessarily conscious that nobody said ‘doo da doo,’ except wise guys, subconsciously picked up on the phrase. It was a phrase colloquial to New York City, and also colloquial to the speech of Mafiosi in America.

Carmine went on, “You just gotta dogleg up Jefferson, and then over to Corry, then on to Short Vine.”

“What did you just say?” Pete said.

“I dunno,” Carmine said. He looked out the window.

Making a left onto Jefferson, Pete Limpelli’s Lincoln Towne Car passed a shelled out traffic island, and an unused message kiosk. A kiosk that at one time was littered with small handbills for special drink nights at local bars. Flyers advertising ‘Roommates Wanted’ or ‘Dog Lost’ or ‘Tutor Available’ or ‘Used Mountain Bike with Street Tires, Good Condition.’ All sorts of flyers used to pock the kiosk, with their little flayed tear off strips with phone numbers or
email addresses on them. Now there was nothing. Only what looked to be a large wooden barrel on a post pocked with staples and sad little tufts of paper.

They wheeled up Corry Street, a little connector lined with a Walgreen’s, and a dilapidated burrito shop. Some guys wearing kilts smoked cigarettes on the sidewalk. They nodded to Carmine, and Carmine nodded back with a chin thrust.

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“Know those guys?”

“Yeah,” Carmine said, “Couple a band guys. They live in a house around here.”

The guys were in a band called Pontius Pilot Light. Mostly death metal covers, but lately, they’d been playing some Johnny Cash and some EMO stuff too. They were technically squatting in a third floor, partially finished attic apartment on Euclid Avenue, a block over. Most of their gigs involved the Mad Frog, Sudsy’s and a couple of hipster bars in North Side.

“Fuggin’ guy’s wearing a dress,” Pete said.

Carmine just stared out the windshield. He breathed, deep mouth breathed breaths with his mouth only open a little. A little surprised slot under his rim horn sunglasses. His gratuitous blonde wig was starting to itch.

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Carmine scratched at his hair, and as a couple of the spikes or spires from the wig curled against the roof of the car, the netting of the wig broke free from his scalp.

In a moment more brief than a New York minute, Carmine Calamari felt a sweeping rush of relief as the heat of August lifted off his salt and pepper grey locks in the blast of Pete’s big air conditioner. For a moment so short and pure and elated, Carmine smiled and exhaled deep under his rim horn shades. The area under his Meat is Murder cutoff T-shirt was stained with an inverted triangle of sweat, and the hair on his thighs, just below the cuff of his cargo shorts was pilled into painful little spheres.

Pete Limpelli looked over at Carmine, and said ‘minchia,’ and nearly drove the Lincoln Town Car onto the sidewalk outside of Walgreen’s on Corry Street.

“Carmine,” Pete said, “What the fuck?”
Carmine didn’t really know what to say. The past week, it was a ruinous blur of lust and shame, and things were foggy. Carmine, one might say, was on the precarious brink of a total breech of consciousness. An irrevocable psychological passage from one personality to another.

Veterans would leave for battle, and come back a changed person. Barking at walls. Carrying cheap handguns in their jacket pockets. Hiding behind a miasma of pot smoke and booze. Riding motorcycles.

Carmine Calamari was psychically very close to permanently and irrevocably going from Detroit Outfitter, to a strung out Clifton punk.

“How the fuck Carmine,” Pete said. He shook his leathery little face, and gnawed on his toothpick.

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“What the fuck Carmine,” Pete said. He pulled into a spot along Corry Street, just before Euclid, the old squatting avenue. An avenue filled with cavernous brownstone walkups and couches and basements and attics, and heroin and sadness.

Carmine scratched his sweaty salt and pepper locks, and breathed deeply. He really had no idea what he was doing. In Clifton. In a punk outfit. For the past week. In Pete Limpelli’s car. Wagering on a lake borne naval battle. Nothing made sense to him anymore.

He took off his rim horn sunglasses with his left hand and rubbed his eyes. The salt from his sweat stung his eyes, and tears began to form.

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“I don’t fucking know,” Carmine said.

With his head cradled in his hands, and the weight of a week of shallow sexual liaisons, drugs, homelessness, screeching punk rock music, bad cigarettes, and no showers came crashing down. His body shook in heaving sobs, and he kept telling Pete Limpelli that he didn’t fucking know.
“Whaddya mean you don’t fucking know?” Pete said. “Jesus,” Pete said, “Getta fuggin griag.”
“I don’t fucking know,” Carmine sobbed.
“I know,” Pete said, “Let’s get some coffee, maybe have a few laughs.” Pete said, “Where’s a good place around here?”
“I don’t fucking know.”
Pete put the Lincoln Towne Car in drive, and made a left onto Short Vine. Litter and gutted punk rock haunts lined the sad little strip. Bogarts, a medium sized concert venue was on the left. A dive bar called Sub Galley on the right. A Kinko’s. A liquor store called Staggerlee’s. Somewhere. Somewhere around here, Pete and Carmine could sit down and have some coffee.

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They came to a light. University Street. Pete thought, maybe a left there. Universities are leftward thinking places, and a coffee shop is a place where a lot of lefties hang out, so logically, thought Pete, a coffee shop should follow a left on a Street called University. Pete thought, and the light turned green.

Pete wheeled the Lincoln Towne Car down University. To the left of Short Vine. Carmine Calamari, wig now clutched in his hands stared catatonically out the passenger window.

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At the abrupt corner of Jefferson and University sat the shelled out remains of the Buzz. A coffee shop and CD o’rama, the sign said. The sign hung on the brick side of the building, like it was waiting to be reopened.

Over the past week, Carmine had been in the building twice. One night to get out of a late summer rain. Another to score on a dad hating goth girl, who had a mattress stashed in the old loft of the CD shop upstairs. Amid the bare wall shelves and floors covered in cigarette butts and old jewel cases, Carmine humped and grinded the goth chick on that smelly ripped mattress, and swore off the Ramones.
As he thought of the way her pelvis felt, and the stink of the mildew on the mattress, sitting there in Pete Limpelli’s Towne Car, Carmine couldn’t remember who the Ramones were.

The Buzz was once a prime hangout for the Clifton young and punk scene, it was now a flop house for squatters and drug addicts. Pete and Carmine couldn’t have Some Coffee and a Few Laughs™ there.

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With his lip quivering, and a fistful of blonde Statue of Liberty Mohawk wig, Carmine said there was another coffee shop on University Street.

“Highland,” Carmine said. His voice was raspy and sullen. “Highland is at the corner of University and Highland.”

“Where’s that?” Pete said.

“You gotta go back,” Carmine said. “Turn around,” he said.

Pete made the start and stop K-turn in the Lincoln Towne Car. Jamming the shifter on the column in forceful pushes and tugs, and jammed the brake, making the whole chassis lurch and lunge.

“Up fucking here?” Pete said. His sour little mouth was pursed around his toothpick, and behind his sepia toned glasses Carmine could see piercing eyes. The wrinkles and liver spots on Pete’s face looked like ridges on a volcano, all pointing toward his fuming lips.

“Yea, yeah,” Carmine said. He looked out his passenger window.

Pete jammed the gas on the Towne Car, and rocketed up the peak of the hill where University met Short Vine, and the air shocked car, the old boat went airborne for a clear and distinct two point seven three four nine seconds as Pete and Carmine sailed over to where Highland Coffee house was.

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Carmine clutched the wig, and scratched his head, and jammed his Italian flag embossed boots into the floor board of the passenger side of Pete Limpelli’s Lincoln Towne Car.

As they rammed down the stretch of University east of Short Vine, Carmine Calamari entertained a vicious menagerie of memories, hallucinations, and psychotic visions of the past
week of his life as a Clifton punk, and shimmering reminders of his old life. The life of a Detroit mobster.


Under the fury of Pete Limpelli’s driving, the Queens Mafioso fury, the white knuckled face of spite and death fury, Carmine transformed. Pressing his boots into the floor, his leather seat, fully adjustable and temperature controlled, became a cocoon. The Statue of Liberty Mohawk wig, clutched in his thick sausage fingers, became frayed blonde threads, as the cold sweat from his arms and chest evaporated in the shrill blast of the air conditioner.

They were going to Highland. To have Some Coffee and a Few Laughs™. To talk about the pending naval battle. To get their bearings in Cincinnati. To get a grip.

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“Over here?” Pete said. They were approaching the corner of University and Highland. An archaic shingle hung out over the dingy brick and cement of the building and sidewalk and generically said ‘Highland Coffee House’ and had a simple painting of a coffee mug, signifying the establishment’s mode of business. The sign did not, however, show a shoe, or a wine bottle, or a gun. The simple sign told patrons that coffee was plentiful, the signifier pointed to a caffeinated signified.

“Yeah,” Carmine said. He wiped his eyebrows with the stained tail of his ‘Meat is Murder’ shirt. “Fuggin’,” Carmine said, “Fuggin park anywhere along here.” Carmine’s original personality, the Detroit Outfitter, was coming back, in slow, shivering sweat fits on the leather seats of Pete Limpelli’s Lincoln Towne Car.

Pete pulled the car to the curb, and pulled the bumper up to the ‘No Parking’ sign just before the intersection.

Pete smirked at his own obedience to a sign signifying a law.
They both got out. Pete in his polyester button strap pants and his fifties style bowling shirt. Carmine in his tattered remnants of a punk rock week forgotten. They were two friends about to share Some Coffee and a Few Laughs™ in Clifton.

They needed to talk about the pending naval battle, and compare notes; not too many notes, considering they were gambling adversaries, but since they were cordial, and fellows of the same organization, both in a strange city, it seemed only fitting that they might want to sit down and have some coffee.

“You get a run on fuggin’ Ed Groat?” Pete said. They walked along the sidewalk to the corner, and turned southward down Highland. The entrance to the coffee house was on Highland. An old shotgun style establishment with a tall and heavy wooden door topped with heavy leaden glass that swung shut with a slam in the winter time. Chuffing out plumes of foul smoke from cheap cigarettes, and letting in slicing guillotines of frozen air, the doors were, like much of Cincinnati, stuck in a time long since gone. Pete liked the functional nostalgia of the place. Something intangible about the town and its contents struck a chord deep within his liverspotted psyche. Somewhere behind his sepia toned aviator frames and his frayed toothpick, Cincinnati spoke to him.

Pete reached for the knob of the big old door, and twisted. The knob wouldn’t budge and he said ‘minchia’ and twisted harder.

“What the fuck?” Pete said.

“Oh,” Carmine said, “I think it opens at four.”

Pete looked at his wristwatch. The wristwatch told him it was about twenty after three.

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“Minchia,” Pete said. “Whadda fuck you tell me to drive over here for?”

Carmine stared at his Doc Martin boots. He stared at a small dark grey oval of gum mashed and baked into the cement of the sidewalk. Peering deep into the sad flattened wad, Carmine Calamari saw tiny fissures beneath the grey stained mantle, revealing a sticky pink interior.

“What the fuck is the matter for you?” Pete said. He squished his face into his angry liver spotted volcano again, and he put his hand on his hips.
Carmine stared at the tiny rivers of pink under the cracked grey mantle. He thought about lava and magma, and the difference he learned about the two in the fourth grade. Staring at the gum magma, Carmine catatonically and repeatedly mouthed the words ‘I don’t fucking know,’ and slowly shook his head.

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“There’s gotta be another place we can hit up.” Pete said. “You know, a fucking diner or something. Some place we can fuckin’ have a sit down.”

Carmine, staring at the wad of ossified gum on the sidewalk, brought his eyes up the Pete’s sepia toned aviators. He squinted at the brightness of day as he saw a shimmering faint reflection of himself in the oblong lenses. A fat strung out old man wearing a Halloween costume.

‘redruM si teaM,’ Carmine’s shirt said in reflection of Pete Limpelli’s sunglasses. Jesus, Carmine thought, what the fuck happened? He came to spy on Ed Groat, and ended up losing a week of his life to the indigent habits of a squatter punk. Hazes of drugs and booze and dirty mattresses and mosh pits.

Just then, Carmine realized, Sitwell’s was open.

“Fuckin’,” Carmine said, “Fuckin’ I know this other joint that should be open.”

“Should be?”

“Yeah, this other fuggin’ joint should be open,” Carmine said. “Marone, whaddya want from me?”

“Fucking Stoojoole,” Pete said.

“Give me a fucking break, I had a fucked up week. Minchia.” He said. “Jesus.”

They walked back to where Pete’s Lincoln Towne Car was parked and piled in, slamming the sleek doors shut, and blasting the air conditioner. Pete clicked the lever two clacks down to Drive, and hammered the gas. He spun the wheel, and the power steering made the whole thing feel like oiled wax. They lurched out onto University.

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“Make a left here,” Carmine said. He slied his hand through his salt and pepper locks. A curly, greasy little mop, with an ever growing bald patch near the top, Carmine’s hair was wet with summer and pain.

“You fucking sure?” Pete said. “I mean you fucking know anything about this place?”
“Fuck off.” Carmine said. “Marone, fuggin’ drop it.” He said, “Make a left.”

They waited, in silence, for the light to change green for what seemed to be about two and a half minutes, as no cars passed, as the whole place on a mid day in late summer seemed dead. Vacant. It seemed like a neutron bomb had been detonated, and only structures and memories remained.

The light turned green and Pete Limpelli wheeled the smooth chassis of the Lincoln Towne Car onto Highland and slammed on the gas. The machine lurched in a fluid heave and Pete muscled the thing up two blocks to the red light at the intersection of Martin Luther King and Highland. He slammed on the brakes.

“Make another left,” Carmine said.
An ambulance sped by.

As the light turned from red to green Pete waited obediently for a fire truck and a police car.

The light turned yellow, and Pete jammed through.

“Get in the right lane.”

“Over here?” Pete said. The lane was going into a right turn only.

“Yeah,” Carmine said. “Right there.”

They meandered up the six lane ribbon of Martin Luther King and veered onto Jefferson.

“Left up there.” Carmine pointed to a traffic light ahead.

Ludlow Avenue. Pete wheeled the Towne Car down the Avenue of block apartment buildings, five floor walk ups, some frat houses, a couple of dive bars and mid priced restaurants for college students and new yuppies.

Carmine spotted four older teenagers dressed in white long johns and white ‘no foul protectors’ and wearing black derby hats and top hats. They had blackthorn canes and shillelaghs. Carmine told Pete to pull over.

“What for?” Pete said.
“Just pull the fuck over.” Carmine remembered the local toughs from a *Pontius Pilate and the Nail Drivers* show in a basement concert venue on Wheeler. They had come in, swinging their clubs, and speaking in garbled British tongues. One of them ended up taking home Carmine’s then girlfriend, Kat Von Schmidt, and they seemed pretty fucking arrogant.

“These fuckin’ gavones owe me fifteen hundred.” Carmine lied.

Pete looked at the group. “Minchia,” Pete said. He pulled the Towne Car over and parked it haphazardly along Ludlow Avenue.

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They got out of the car, and the group approached Pete and Carmine, and said indiscernible things in an affected British way.

Everything went quiet and sepia toned.

Pete kicked the one who seemed to be the leader in the knee cap with his winged tip shoe, and Carmine hit one of them across the face. Blood sprayed out of the kid’s nose and streaked the kid’s waffle textured long john top. One kid behind them started crying and limply swung his blackthorn cane at Pete.

Pete grabbed the cane from the kid and jammed it in his stomach, and he doubled over, heaving and gasping. The last one cursed, called them ‘fucking muppets’ or something, and spun around and ran.

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Pete kneed the kid who was doubled over and heaving in the face, and stomped, with the heel of his winged tip shoe, on the top of his head. The black derby dropped to the cement of the sidewalk, and rolled around in a circle until it fell flat.

“Where’s the fucking money?” Pete said.

Pete mounted the kid. Straddling his chest across the white long john top, Pete reached in his pocket and pulled out a small iron bar. A little piece of rebar he had cut down to the length equaling the width of his clenched fist. He palmed the bar and hit the kid across the jaw.

“Where’s the fucking money?”

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Pete hit him, and the sound of his packed fist smacking the kid in the jaw sounded like a
dull thud. The kid went limp. Pete, when he was a boy, used to go to the public library, secretly,
and read books on anatomy and psychology. He figured, it was the way and means to make it in
this cruel world – know the machinery of the human. He studied nerves, joints, muscles. He
learned about Freudian suggestion, about classical conditioning. Humans, Pete learned, were just
sophisticated animals. In *Gray’s Anatomy*, Pete had read about the mandibular branch of the
trigeminal nerve – one of the cranial nerves. The one on the chin.

Pete gently slapped the kid on the cheek, and whispered to him.

“*Wake up.*” Pete whispered.

The kid’s eyes opened, dazed and confused, and wondering. Wondering where he was,
and how he got there. Wondering who this snarley, sour little man was straddling his chest.

“Where’s the money?”
Pete hit him again, and the kid went limp.
Pete whispered sweet nothings in the kid’s ear and tap tapped him on the cheek.

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Carmine felt around one of the kid’s boots and found seven crumpled wadded up dollars.
He palmed it and put it in the front cargo pocket of his shorts, peeling the Velcro fastener with a
satisfying rip, and patting the flap shut. Now, he thought, he had some money for Sitwell’s. He
and Pete Limpelli could have a sit down. They could have *Some Coffee and a Few Laughs™*
and really start to get things sorted out.

Carmine waddled over to Pete, who was still mounted on top of the teenager. The kid
didn’t look so tough now with ketchup splattered all over his waffled long johns in jagged red
pyramids. Stupid punk. His white no foul protector, now smeared a fiendish pink, just looked
silly.

Pete, clutching a clump of the kid’s blonde hair asked where the money was. Pete had his
elbow close to his side, like a boxer. He knew about leverage. Punch power.

Carmine saw the tell tale slump in Pete’s shoulder as he wound up for another right, and
told him to stop.

Pete looked up at him. “All fifteen hundred?”

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“Yeah,” Carmine said. He patted his pocket. “I got all the money they owed me.”

Pete let the kid go, and got up. “Minchia,” Pete said. He looked at a small tear in the knee of his polyester pants. Where the hell could he find a replacement? Polyester pants had been out of department stores since the early eighties. With his winged tip shoe, Pete gave the kid a kick to the ribs, and walked over to the still running Lincoln Towne Car.

***

“Where’s this fucking place at?” Pete said. He slid into the driver’s seat. The polyester of his pants skimmed the leather seats, cooled by the powerful air conditioner. The car had been on the whole time, and as it idled, if you listened closely to the engine, and not the melee between Pete, and Carmine and the teenagers dressed in white long johns and black derby hats, you would have heard a sonorous hum and whirl in a slow and calming staccato, as the air conditioner tripped a small pulley wheel, and was powered intermittently by the idling engine.

No one, however, on that strange afternoon in mid August in the gaslight area of Clifton noticed. Few, if any, even noticed the melee. Most people who lived in the neighborhood were at work, or inside their small apartments watching Judge Judy over the hum of their outdated window unit air conditioners, or, as Pete and Carmine would soon find out, at Sitwell’s Coffee House.

***

“Just up the piece a couple blocks.” Carmine said to Pete as he slid into the passenger side. He slammed the door shut with a muffled, well oiled sheer, and eased back in the seat. With a touch of his chubby sausage fingers, he rolled down the window, cleared his throat and sinus cavity, and with a great arch of his thick neck and torso, spat twelve point seven five three nine feet. He chuckled to himself and touched the window closed.

“Just down here,” Carmine said. They stopped at a red light. The intersection of Clifton and Ludlow. To their left there was a giant bronze fountain of a female wood sprite dripping water out of her hands, and a street performer was directing a small pack of dachshunds re-enact a scene from Les Miserables.
A bearded lady was reciting parts of Rene Descartes’ *Discourse on Method*. She rattled on about clear and distinct ideation, and elaborated on something concerning the separation of form from matter. With that, she shaved half of her beard.

Pete and Carmine looked at her, and then looked at each other. Pete’s toothpick dangling. Carmine with his fat jowls hung in a frown.

The light turned green.

***

Pete jammed on the gas again, and the smooth ride lurched with power and luscious fossil fuel. They passed the intersection and came to a snail paced throng of cars, busses, homeless people. Street performers and sidewalk philosophers. On the prosaic corner of Telford and Ludlow, two men, dressed in suit, tie, jacket and vest were debating, noticeably. They exchanged upward index finger thrusts in an overly gesticulated manner, like two archaic men of honor dueling. On the opposite corner of Telford and Ludlow, a man was playing what looked to be a banjo, a didgeridoo, and a bagpipe all at once, and he was doing a rendition of a Bob Dylan song.

“Turn right here,” Carmine said.

Pete made a sharp right into the one way thoroughfare of Telford and raced down a flume of parked cars. Pete thought of Jackson Heights back in Queens for a New York minute. Someone yelled *Slow down!*, and Pete and Carmine looked around to see where the voice came from, but no one looked guilty. No one was showing ownership of the statement.

“Minchia,” Pete said. “I wish I knew what cocksucker said that.”

Carmine thought about it. Giving another relatively random person a vicious beating would be fun, but it was time to have a sit down. Sit down and have *Some Coffee and a Few Laughs™*, and discuss what had become known as ‘The Lake Me Situation.’

“Park anywhere you can find a spot,” Carmine said.

***

They came to a stop sign, obeyed it, and pushed through to the end of Telford. Like much of Cincinnati’s streets and thoroughfares, Telford denied the logical tenant of being somewhat
constant. Though the gaslight district, as with much of Clifton, was laid out in a patch of grid, making the immediate navigation of the area mostly easy, the continuity and tenure of Telford Street was a mere three city blocks. It dead ended into a junction with a street called Thrall, a mere one city block in length heading east and west between Telford and Middleton.

“Make a left here,” Carmine said.

There was no other direction to turn but left. Pete smirked at Carmine and turned.

Pete found a large swath of the western half of the block wide open. He eased the Towne Car to a comfortable perch in front of a red brick multiunit house, threw it in park, and crunched down on the emergency brake with his left foot.

They walked down worn sidewalks flanked with stoic green gas lamps, and large turn of the century suburb houses. Prototype suburbs. Back when suburbs were only for the extraordinarily wealthy. People who didn’t need to commute on horse and buggy every morning.

Naturally, Pete and Carmine found themselves casing a few houses. Looking at narrow driveways. Noting aftermarket fire escapes, put in to keep in line with emerging fire codes as the houses went from being wealthy nesting grounds to being rental property gold mines, catering to a wide array of graduate students, young professionals, and SSI beneficiaries.

They made it to the corner of Ludlow and Telford, where the two archaic men were arguing.

“You’re a parlor liberal!” The man with the brown tweed jacket with leather patches on the elbows said to the grey corduroy jacketed man.

The man with the grey corduroy pulled out a pipe and packed it with tobacco and calmly told the brown jacketed man that he was a carpet bagger and ‘indeed yearning to be a Whig’.

“Flimshaw!” The brown jacket responded.

A midget on stilts walked by, and three girls dressed in bib overalls and clownshoes sat at the small tables out in front of Sitwell’s, smoking clove flavored cigarettes. The air was choked with an acrid smell. Busses roared by. An ambulance wailed. A woman with hairy armpits streaked naked, and then disappeared into The Proud Rooster, a Ludlow Avenue greasy spoon across the street.

Pete and Carmine winced at the maddening scene. They came to the door, and the sign said ‘open.’ With a jingle from the bell, Carmine Calamari and Pete Limpelli walked into Sitwell’s.
Pete and Carmine burst through the door, and for a hanging moment, everyone in Sitwell’s Coffee House fell silent. Everyone stopped what they were doing, or not doing, and turned their heads and stared. A table of four people playing Mahjong, spinning their Mahjong bricks in a small clacking vortex, continued to spin, but still managed to look up and stare. A group of teenagers making out in a writhing booth in the back corner snuck glances between mouthing and pawing. A young man with long red hair looked up from a tome written in Greek he had been pretending to read over a bottomless cup for the past three hours.

All patrons in Sitwell’s seemed to be interested in distracting themselves in the process of distracting themselves from themselves by gawking at two unfamiliar faces traipsing into their environ.

A look at them would be shocking. Carmine, an overweight sixty year plus man, wearing tatters of a punk rock costume. And Pete, more true to his nature, in sepia toned aviators, bowling shirt, polyester pants and winged tip shoes – an obvious outsider. Someone some of the patrons might have seen while viewing a Scorsese film.

The patrons watched, as somehow the music – a dripping track from Future Bible Heroes – seemed to keep tempo with Carmine and Pete’s movements. It was as if they were in a movie, or they were a movie. Pete with his lanky bravado, and Carmine with his waddling swagger. These two knew something. These two were obviously hip.

Pete and Carmine found a small table, covered in tile and grout, and rimmed with a bead of oblong marbles.

Eavesdropping patrons near Pete and Carmine heard Pete say ‘Dis one looks nice,’ as they both pulled out their chairs and sat down.

The surface of the table was covered in a fine white powder. Carmine licked his pinky and dipped a swipe, and put it in his mouth.

“Sweet N Low,” Carmine said.
Pete didn’t care. He wasn’t into the drug trade. “Strictly old school,” Pete would say. No drugs. Not much into prostitution. Mostly gambling money laundered into legitimate establishments. Places such as the Winged Tip Shoe. Fine, upstanding, inconspicuous places. Following this thought, Pete thought aloud that “Sitwell’s might be nice.”

“How’s that?”

“I mean to buy, you know,” Pete said. “A front.”

Carmine, with his torn sleeveless ‘Meat is Murder’ T-shirt looked at the sandwich menu. Ham and swiss. Roast beef. Reubens. Monte Christo Delight.

Pete got up and looked at some of the art work on the wall. A giant white canvas with some splatters on it. ‘$1500’ a little card beneath it said.

“Minchia.”

Pete Limpelli could be an artist. What a perfect front. Art.

***

Pete viewed most of the art on the walls. Paintings, appearing as if they had been scrawled by a class of kindergarteners, listed for prices in the several hundred dollar range. What a racket.

Jeez, thought Pete, I’ve been trying too hard for so long.

Carmine looked intently at the menu. The big clock near the door turned and turned. Pete sat back down. He got up. He went to the bathroom. He found a chess set. Carmine and Pete played three chess games. Pete won two.

No one came to take their order.

***

Carmine went up to the bar, which extended the length of the coffee shop. Plates of food were served up with checks attached and bells ringing. The place was packed. Most tables filled. Only two seats left at the bar counter.

Pete and Carmine had been in the place for almost three hours, and no one had come by to take their order.
“Can I get a couple of coffees over here?” Carmine asked the air. The air didn’t respond directly, only offered a chattering din over a loud broadcast of Jesus and Mary Chain.

Carmine looked over at Pete. He was reading a book about a Green Beret. A coffee shop book. Along the front of the book, scrawled across the pages, it said ‘SITWELL’S’.

The door jangled, and Henge walked in. It was August, and he was wearing a long white canvas trench coat.

Carmine looked over to where Pete was still sitting. Pete had seen Henge walk in too, and he was now pretending to read the book, and pretending not to watch Henge. The sepia toned aviators helped keep it all low key.

***

Henge walked slowly to the back, and as he passed each table, and each tables’ patrons made their obligatory gaze, each patron bowed their head. Henge spread his white trench coat like a slow moving flasher, as he sauntered in a one-man glacial procession. He wanted to sit at a hard slate slabbed table in the back.

A waitress in a red apron came to their table. Pete ordered a Greek Hero, and Carmine got the Brie Mato sandwich. They, of course, ordered a bottomless coffee.

“I fuggin’ left the sonic ear in the Towne Car,” Pete said. He was talking about the parabolic listening device he had been using to spy on Henge and Len Wiedeshofer at the Frisch’s restaurant in Cheviot.

“Think I should get it?” Pete asked.

“Nah,” Carmine said. “Let’s just unwind. Have some coffee for right now.”

It was true. These two friends merely came in to Sitwell’s to have Some Coffee and a Few Laughs™. They just wanted to relax. Regroup. Get a grip. They wanted to talk about the Lake Me Situation.

***

“Isn’t Henge one of the principals in the naval battle?” Carmine said. He knew the answer. They both did. It was obvious. They were just being lazy. They wanted to let loose for a
few moments. Making an obvious statement in the face of an obvious observation somehow absolved them of any real responsibility. It was an old trick.

Pete and Carmine people watched for a few moments. A white haired man wearing a propeller beanie shuffled in and looked at all the faces of the people in the place. Carmine and Pete instinctively put their hands over their mouths and asked each other if they knew who this guy was. Neither one knew. This guy could be on contract. The guy found a table of young punk rock boys, and sat down.

Henge got up, and slowly drifted - floated - in his white trench coat, over to the bar area.

The clock on the wall said a quarter till nine in the evening. Suddenly, with a jingle, the petite red head Pete had been hitting on earlier appeared.

***

Pete went up to the petite red head and made small chatter while Carmine decided to tail Henge who had walked out the front door with a jingle of the bells. He paced him half a block back. Henge, with his giant white trench coat, ducked into Graeters, a local ice creamery, and Carmine hung outside.

A man on the sidewalk was playing *In-A-Gadda-Da-Vida* on a steam powered calliope; while a monkey attached to a retractable leash was wearing a baseball outfit, and went around to suburban tourists waiting for their art house show at the movie theater. The monkey worked the crowd. Middle aged housewives in tight skirts and heels with plastered on makeup squealed as the monkey touched their hosed legs, and cop looks straight up. Their husbands would give the monkey dollar bills, and the monkey would leave their wife alone.

For some reason the wives and husbands stayed, and continued feeding the monkey money with each pass, and the man on the calliope continued hammering out *In-A-Gadda-Da-Vida*.

***

The whole Lake Me Situation, at its root, was fueled by a bravado forged in a coffee induced stupor. A caffeinated maelstrom of bragging and boredom, the Lake Me naval battle started with two friends, drinking too much coffee, disgusted with the pending end of summer.
Two friends with too much time on their hands became compounded by two other friends with similar surpluses of time, and with an added surplus of violent tendencies and undocumented monies.

***

The petite red head, in time to a Depeche Mode track now blaring over the speaker system, sashayed past Henge. Her tiny hips rolled, and her proportioned bust and waist rolled in stride, as the red mop of her bun bobbed, silently, in the din.

“Minchia,” Pete said. “She’s here, just like she said she would be!” Pete chuckled and smacked the table and said ‘Bing.’ To the air he said ‘What a gal!’

Carmine frowned and tilted his crème colored coffee mug. He was almost out. Getting service around this place was tough. Almost too tough for the old Detroit Outfitter, but not quite. Some Coffee and a Few Laughs™ was a propellant and motivator not equaled by many things.

***

Carmine watched through the glass storefront window as Henge, in his white trench coat, ordered two scoops of raspberry chocolate chip ice cream and a lemon phosphate. Through the maniacal hum of the steam powered calliope, Carmine saw Henge silently migrate to a table where a man, whose back was to the window, was already sitting.

Henge smiled and sat down, and spooned dripping hunks of pinkish red ice cream into his mouth, and chomped on giant black shards of chocolate. Mawing though his beard, pawing with paper napkin, Henge ate with a tempo somehow matched by the steam calliope song, as his friend slowly nursed water out of a paper cup.

The friend turned his head, just enough for Carmine to see his profile. It was Ed Groat. Henge’s Lake Me naval battle adversary. The man whom Carmine intended to get a read on by coming down to Cincinnati, before he got waylaid into the seedy underworld of the Clifton punk scene. Old Ed Groat. The Cincinnati area bricklayer. The burner of ossified dog feces. The future wearer of the deer skin unitard. The canoe pilot.
Carmine casually walked into the ice cream parlor, and got in line. He looked back to the sidewalk where the calliope player was still mashing the keys, now a muffled din, as the tiny chuffs of steam coming out of the pipes became somehow more apparent. More real.

Carmine squinted as he struggled to read the ice cream menu above the service counter.

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The acne pocked kid behind the counter asked Carmine what he wanted, and Carmine, ever since he was a kid, liked butter pecan. That’s what he ordered. On a waffle cone. A waffle cone of butter pecan. Two scoops.

So here he was, lapping up butter pecan off a waffle cone, rolling it around in his hand. Angle this way, and that, and the charge was three dollars and sixty seven cents with tax. He looked in shock at the acme covered face, and with off white smears around his mouth, and with his left hand, he reached across to his right cargo pocket of his cargo shorts and pulled the Velcro fastener, and fished out an even four. Four wrinkled soggy dollar bills. He behaved like the ice cream cone was a cell phone. Like he was having a conversation of orgasmic proportions. With his ice cream cone. A waffle cone with two smeared spheres of butter pecan.

Turning around, Carmine saw that Henge and Ed Groat had already left. Carmine looked out at the ice cream parlor. At the packed tables and booths. At the big front windows, and to the cacophony of the sidewalk and street. To the circle of the calliope player and monkey, to the middle aged middle Americans.

Henge and Ed Groat were gone. And Carmine Calamari stood there in the lonely silence of the clamor with a half eaten ice cream cone.

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Carmine ambled out of the ice cream parlor and into the sticky August night air. The street performers were performing, and the middle aged suburbanites were milling clumsily.

Outside Sitwell’s miscreants and circus performers thronged. It was like the entrance of a beehive. The humming activity. The humid night. The luminous glow of halogen and gas and marquees.
With his ice cream cone in hand, Carmine Calamari walked back into Sitwell’s. It was more than packed now. Standing room only. Little clumps of four and five people would weave their way to the back, in vain, in search of an open table. They would turn around, single file, and weave their way back out to the entrance. Carmine stood there, watching, as seemingly generations of young and old filed in and out without taking a seat.

Regulars kept pawing their Mahjong tiles, pretending to read ancient tomes in obscure languages, and drawing pictures, while managing to sneak glances every time they heard the front door jingle.

Carmine squinted, and licked his cone, and couldn’t see Pete Limpelli at the table where they sat. It looked like a chess club was now occupying the space. Pete was gone. Probably with the petite red head.

Carmine was once again homeless in Clifton.

***

What to do now? Pete left him for the petite red head. Henge and Ed Groat left the ice cream parlor, probably to spin tales and brag over mason jars filled with ice coffee. They would laugh, more than likely, heaving bellows into the night, and Pete was probably scoring with the Clifton girl.

Carmine slurped on the remnants of the scoops of butter pecan, now licked and melted into amorphic humps. The waffle cone now a mushy stump. It was limp. The ice cream cone’s moment on this planet – the glorious and permutable compilation of the matter which made up the pecans, the ice cream, the waffle cone – the molecules and atoms arranged in that particular way, was finished forever. It would never, ever be exactly the way it once was. Never, ever again.

Carmine threw the remnants of the cone and ice cream into Ludlow Avenue, and ran down Telford.

With the vile calliope music chuffing further and further in the distance, Carmine ran down the middle of Telford – his gut and sixty year old frame waddling in a blind lost rage. A lost week. Somehow, Carmine had to make it back to Detroit. Get his bearings. Get ready for the naval battle. The naval battle to mark the end of summer.
Sax Taxson and the Trooper II

Sax stared at a faint crack in the windshield of Chomsky, the 1977 Chevy Malibu, and practiced his breathing. Being a font of superficial understanding of a myriad of subjects necessitated by deep synthesis, and a dedication of lifelong pursuit, Sax reverted to a passage he once had read in a Qigong book, and attempted to focus his chi. Something about diaphragmic breathing, and control of heart rate.

Picturing a diaphragm in his mind, Sax envisioned a large uterine rubber cup in his abdomen pushing out air and preventing him from losing this important battle of wills.

The trooper stared at the side of Sax’s head. Big ugly oblong thing. Sax looked like an alien. Teeth bristling out from his lips. The graceless shape of his mouth and nose. His haunting deep set eyes.

Sax, while breathing, pictured the trooper staring at him, and immediately had a vision of the trooper being a giant penis trying to penetrate his breathing shield.

***

A squad car whistled by on 27.

“Sorbonne Police,” the side of the car said. “To Protect and Serve,” the car said.

Chief Rick Hollo enjoyed prisoner transports to the county lock up. He would, if time permitted, make the transports himself. Glancing in the rear view mirror he would make jokes. Ham it up. Tease. Make fun. If the road was deserted, he might take a detour. Park the car. Take the transportee out for some exercise. Burnish some of the wax on his night stick. Break in some new shoes. Practice some Judo moves.

To Chief Rick Hollo, prisoner transports were one of the perks of the job. To Chief Rick Hollo, falling trees in woods with no one around don’t make sounds.

***

Out on a prisoner transport, Chief Rick Hollo would unpack a special “softener device.” The softener device was something he had made himself, in his detached garage, late one night while his wife was on the rag. The softener device consisted of a length of radiator hose, about
eighteen inches in length. Both ends were heat pinched, and looked like flat, malformed black spoons. Inside the length of radiator hose, Chief Rick Hollo had poured a column of sand. The softener device was not standard police issue. Chief Rick Hollo, as a police chief in a post 9-11 world, needed to employ special weapons from time to time. As a police chief in a post 9-11 world those times for special weapons were at his discretion.

***
Carmine Calamari Rides the Dog

Early the next morning, Carmine Calamari found himself in the Greyhound Terminal in downtown Cincinnati. A vicious transient clearing house trimmed in sadness and art deco glistening in a fluorescent hum, and a vile miasma of diesel fumes lingering among the haphazard aisles of vacuum formed plastic chairs, with vacuum formed pay TV armatures attached. A quarter bought you fifteen minutes of TV time. Fifteen minutes of distracting yourself from yourself – all by yourself.

Carmine had spent the night wandering the streets of Cincinnati as a punk – or at least dressed as a punk, but now recompensated as a Detroit mobster. It was sort of a small bout of nostalgia. Wandering around in his cut off ‘Meat is Murder’ shirt. Shuffling in his Doc Marten boots. Remembering ‘when’ over the past week. Ah yes, salad days were here again. It wasn’t really nostalgia. It was mostly shame, loneliness, guilt, boredom, desperation, worry, anxiety; and of course all bolstered with a smoldering yet indefinable hatred.

Carmine had four crumpled dollars still in his pocket. From a payphone he collect called Pinky Mortrudo in Romulus to wire him a bus ticket. Carmine was going home. Back to ‘Troit to get some things squared away.

***

Over the loud speaker Carmine heard a tinny and saddened voice announcing a bus bound for Dayton, Lima, Findlay, Toledo, Detroit, Flint, Saginaw, Bay City, and Sioux St. Marie.

Small trickles of travelers shuffled over to a cueing area labeled ‘Bay 16’. There was a family. A mom, and two little girls. One of the little girls was crying. There were some college aged kids laughing and pulling on little silver cylinders of Red Bull.

Carmine, in his cutoff shirt and stained cargos, quietly shuffled in too. Clutching his paper ticket, he squinted against the shafts of August morning light pouring in to the Greyhound Terminal windows. He stood there, shoulder to shoulder with other north bound folks; a broken denizen.

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The bus ride was an arduous sweaty endeavor. Carmine, who had not had a shower in nearly two weeks reeked of onions, garlic, cigarettes, sweat, blood, hard times, semen, piss, butter pecan ice cream, and dog feces. He sat at a window seat next to an elderly woman who was crocheting a scarf for the long Midwestern winter ahead.

Carmine pressed his face against the glass of the window. Impossible expanses of high corn with tiny patches of houses in the middle. Sad, forlorn barns sagging in decomposition, echoing ages of farm families long since deceased. Countless hogs smashed in the head with sledgehammers, and countless chickens beheaded with rusty hatchets. Carmine looked down at his cutoff “Meat is Murder” T-shirt.

Carmine fell asleep somewhere after Piqua. The Interstate 75 corridor was a bleak, brainless, boring stretch. Monotonous flat fields and suicidal prairies. Vicious cold water stands of little houses, barns and sheds. Faint little crossroads of straight rural stretches dotted with stop signs and alternating passing lanes.

With his head smeared on the window, Carmine woke up amid snores and a mild case of breathless apnea. Just out the window he saw a lunar landing museum. John Glenn or something. Carmine didn’t travel this stretch much. Mostly it was the I-94 corridor west to Chicago, or dipping down to I-80 to truck east. To New York, and all that business.

He looked to his right. The old lady who had been crocheting was gone, and a pierced goth girl was sitting in her spot, reading a Dan Brown novel.

Carmine started the conversation. “Look,” he said, “I really ain’t interested in talking to you.”

The goth girl uncrossed her pale legs, and shifted her short black skirt, then crossed her legs again. She held the Dan Brown novel at eye level and let out a big sigh. The steel barbs sticking out of her ear lobes and eye brows glinted in the toaster oven midday sun.
“Seriously,” Carmine said. “I’ve had enough for the past two weeks to last me five lifetimes.” He said; “E – fucking – nuff, already!” He turned toward the window and stared out at a field of cows gnawing on grass in a rare Ohio hillside pasture.

***

Henge and Ed Groat met for a late lunch at Sitwell's, about an hour after Henge woke up that afternoon. Over their late lunch, they spoke of the details of the Lake Me Naval Battle. The rules of engagement. Those pesky rules, they always tried to categorize a good time.

“First off,” said Henge, “No firearms.” He wrote what he said out loud onto a piece of parchment paper. It wasn't really parchment, just a sheet of water color paper he had painted the night before with skim milk and baked in the oven at 350 degrees for ten minutes. The sheet had become wrinkled and golden brown. With a long stemmed grill lighter, Henge charred the edges of the sheet. He took a scissor and made tiny nicks along the edge.

In slow deliberate strokes, Henge etched the rules of engagement for the Lake Me Naval Battle on the parchment with a Sharpie.

***

Henge made flourishes and marginalia with colored Sharpies. Article One. The ‘A’ in Article was super sized, and had an entwined vine springing forth from it, and birds swarming around it.

‘No firearms.’

“Article two,” Ed Groat said. “Coffee must be consumed before that somebitch starts.”

“Is that a rule?”

“Yeah, Jack,” Ed said. He said, “Can’t get that somebitch going without some serious morning motivation, Sam.”

With the Sharpie, Henge began scrawling Article Two. This time on the ‘A’ of Article he made slightly less vines, and a couple of ripe cucumbers. ‘Coffee must be consumed before that somebitch starts.’ Henge repeated Ed’s words as he carefully accented each letter, savoring each syllable as the parchment took the Sharpie ink.
“Article Seventeen,” Henge said. “The Tao Te Ching must be recited… or at least read sometime before the battle, and then discussed sometime after the battle.”

He carefully and thoughtfully penned Article Seventeen with a Sharpie. In the corner he drew a small stuffed bear, and a small jar of honey.

“That’s if everyone survives that somebitch,” Ed Groat said.

“The battle?”

“Yeah,” Ed said, “that naval battle.”

“True,” said Henge. “But,” he said, “This is supposed to be a non violent naval battle.”

He said, “No firearms, remember?”

“Yeah,” Ed said. “But people can still drown,” he said, “And you can get meningitis from some of that lake water.”

“Is that a fact?”

“I dunno,” Ed chuckled. “I just made that shit up.”

***

“So Jack,” Ed Groat said. “When we gonna have this naval battle?”

Henge sat back in the chair at Sitwell’s and stroked his grey beard in calm, even strokes.

“I think seven days should be sufficient.”

“Seven days?” Ed said, “A week?”

“Yeah bubba.” Henge leaned forward. “Seven is an important number.”

“It’s biblical Sam.”

“It’s everything, Bubba.”

***

Pete Limpelli made a few phone calls from his hotel room on Central Parkway. Back to Queens.

Into the phone, Pete would say things like; “Minchia, whatsamadda for you?”

Phone calls back to The Winged Tip Shoe always seemed to precipitate that sort of acrimonious discourse. Mooks always fucking things up. Clowns coming in there. Bodies
messing up the back room. Kiwi Shoe glue stuck on the floor. *The Winged Tip Shoe* was a perennial source of hypertension and distain.

With his sepia toned sunglasses, Pete would cradle the phone in his hand. Sitting on the side of the bed. Placing his index finger over his nose as he yelled. Looking, from time to time, in the mirror. Gripping his toothpick in his teeth with a grimace. Pete was staying in the Cincinnati for another week or so, he would tell the mook on the other end. He needed the mook on the other end to order five cases of Sambuca. Did you get that? Minchia.

The Lake Me Naval Battle was slated to happen a biblical week from now. Up in Sorbonne. To mark the end of summer.

***

Ed Groat and Henge signed the parchment. Ed took out an ice pick and pricked his finger, and asked Henge to do the same. Henge took out a small alcohol swab and cleaned his finger. He cleaned the ice pick, and pricked his finger.

They each put a dot of blood by their signature.

***

Carmine Calamari woke up again, just as the bus threw on its air brakes in the slanted parking bay. The Greyhound Terminal of Detroit. He peeled himself off the vile seat, and shuffled obediently out the door. Carmine was a person among people.

Through the kaleidoscope of fluorescent, linoleum, sadness, stink, and the undeniable echo of the Greyhound station, Carmine looked for Pinky. His face hung in listless jowls. His eyes underlined with black crescents. His shirt and cargo pants, soiled and foul.

Silently, Pinky Mortrudo got Carmine’s attention, and they silently walked out to where his car was parked.

Silently, a crestfallen Carmine opened the door of Pinky Mortrudo’s Lexus. Silently, they rode back to their ‘body shop’ in Romulus.

***
The days leading up to the naval battle were hot, and stale. The dog days of August. Drug store displays of oscillating fans and beach accoutrements were on clearance. Fifty percent off, the sign would say. Clearance. Summer. Everything must go.

Near the displays would be aisles and aisles of notebooks and pencils and pens and crayons. Back to school, the sign would say.

Pete Limpelli stopped by Walgreens to get some condoms. Ribbed, sweetheart, he decided to tell the girl stocking loose leaf paper.

“Aisle nine,” She said. She furrowed her eyebrow, and sneered as he sauntered away.

***

The trooper let loose a silent fart. It was a methane laced hardboiled egg fart, and as a slow moving August wind lilted along US 27, he cocked his hips slightly. The repositioning, the trooper surmised, was just enough change to direct the vile fart into the cab of the Chevy Malibu.

***

Sax Taxson gasped. With his controlled breathing, he had been envisioning his diaphragm a prophylactic. A defense. A castle. This trooper; a Hun, a barbarian. A giant prick with ears.

Sax was a womb. A most holy of holies. Sax was a fucking tabernacle. With his hands still at ten and two on the steering wheel of Chomsky, Sax screamed. His knuckles pressed white. The veins in his neck throbbed a foul blue. His teeth glistened a filmy yellow.

Sax lost the battle of wills. The unphysical struggle as outlined in The Book of Five Rings. The key to victory in any dispute. Sax punch the maroon steering wheel. Its thin metal structure reverberated down the steering column.

“Easy,” the trooper said. He had his right hand back on top of his gun.

***

“Easy Mr. Taxson,” The trooper said. The leather of the holster made a creaking sound. Sax always marveled at how law enforcement types uttered overly polite labels like ‘sir’ and ‘mister’ and ‘gentleman,’ often times effused with pseudo precise terms such as ‘subject’
and ‘perpetrator’ and ‘criminal element.’ Sax always looked down at law enforcement, viewing them as sheep – uninspired enough to not think beyond the constraints of insipid laws and regulations. Mindlessly clinging to man made boundaries. Carrying a semi automatic weapon. Wearing a ranger hat like a middle-aged drill instructor. Wielding deadly power beneath a low octane brain.

But this trooper was different. He had already thwarted Sax’s Noam Chomsky defense with a William of Ockham reference. He claimed to be a former philosophy professor from a Jesuit University. What the hell was he doing behind a badge, patrolling one of the more vacuous stretches of rural Ohio? Was he a tenured professor? Was the state of the Humanities that bad? Did Descartes and Lyotard really cast a spell?

Sax wanted to ask. He wanted to take the trooper out, for coffee, in a parallel universe. But Sax was trying to snake his way out of a moving violation of some sort. All because he had a penchant for hitting dogs.

***

“Relax,” said the trooper.

Sax Taxson slowly turned around and met the trooper’s eyes. The trooper peered an earnest heartfelt stare over top his mirrored aviator lenses. It was the meeting of eyes regaled in historicized masculine discourses. Warriors looking at each other, a sword length apart. Gladiators from behind grotesque helmets, beneath cruel aristocrats and wealthy. Medieval knights on horseback. Back when final causality was still an issue. Back when acorns became towering oak trees. Back before the advent of modernity, and form and essence were destroyed. Back when people were people.

The trooper felt a certain empathy for Sax. Obviously an autodidact, and obviously a victim of ‘what’s happening now’ analytic and scientific philosophical ideas. This poor, dumb little fuck, thought the trooper. Killing dogs with his maroon Malibu. This ugly middle-aged wash up of a human.

In a pang of sympathy, the trooper said, “I’m going to let you off with a warning,” and “Try to be more careful.”

Sax smiled with his jagged, misshapen teeth in a gaping, happy crescent, and said a sincere, “Thank you. Thank you officer.”
“Drive carefully,” said the trooper.

“Oh I will officer,” said Sax. “Boy oh boy I will.”

Sax Taxson looked out the driver side window and craned his neck down the straight ribbon of US 27. Shimmers of heat rose up, and a wall of corn six feet high buttressed each side. US 27, from that view, was a flume. US 27 became a flume of fun straight up to Morton, and then on to Sorbonne.

Sax was going to a ‘back room’ sex shop in Morton to buy a ‘magnum sized penis pump’ – the crucial mechanism in Henge’s water cannon. Sax couldn’t let his boss, Len Wiedeshofer down. Especially now that Len was trying to get sober.

The naval battle was in less than a week. Henge was slated to go over to Len’s place that evening to pick up the finished cannon.

Sax needed to pick up the pump, not waste too much time browsing, get back to Cheviot Machine and Screw, and incorporate the pump mechanism into the cannon Big Ernie Shores had machined on the lathe. It was a time crisis. A true test of his being under the duress of a chronological imperative.

Ed Groat left Sitwell’s, and made his way back to his Hyde Park house in his dilapidated pick up truck. It was time to shore up the canoe. Sand that somebitch down. Bolster the ribs. Stitch some canvas. Put some pitch and some Kiwi Shoe Glue all over that somebitch.

He pressed the gas pedal on the truck, and it sputtered down Ludlow Avenue, coughing black plumes, and rattling and roaring like a Mexican border town taxicab. The glove box was splayed open, and erupting with papers, receipts, old cigarette packs, broken cigarettes and little piles of brown tobacco shavings. There was some wire, a flashlight, and a Phillips head screwdriver, a mid seventies issue of Oui magazine, a rabbit pelt, a half used package of synphedrine, and two ribbed Trojan’s.

The radio didn’t work – well – all except for 700 WLW, so Ed Groat filled his driving moments with pompous talk shows, and endless sports reports filled with horrible metaphors.
Ed Groat hummed the old Johnny Carson theme song at the intersection of Ludlow and Clifton. It was an upbeat time – that sort of mild jingoistic mindset that any participants in war feel just before going to war. A sort of self righteousness. A sort of knowing that you are doing the right thing. A sort of happy feeling.

Ed knew he was doing the right thing. This ‘boredom’ business of late summer was just too much. And he also wanted it to be known that he in no way endorsed the coming of autumn. It was all a bunch of bullshit, and Ed Groat was going to do his part to show that.

Yeah, this naval battle was a just war.

***


Was he being authentic? Was he truly questioning what it meant to be, and was he basing his life choices on the most authentic challenge to his being? Was this pending naval battle on Lake Me an authentic challenge to his being? Or was the naval battle an inauthentic sentimental journey into the facticity and thrownness of his being. Hashing over nostalgia and good times. Would it be more authentic for Ed Groat, as himself in a third person sense, to embrace the end of summer, and relish in the boredom of the dog days? To simply forget about the Lake Me battle, and carry on with his being in the world?

Ed wasn’t sure, and for a flash, Ed wanted to call off the whole thing. To simply go back and dry out dog feces for his wood burning stove. Sure, he’d still shore up the canoe, but it would be for some other use – some other readiness-to-hand meaning. He couldn’t really forget about the whole thing – he had signed, in blood, the contract that Henge had drawn up. The integrity of his final causality – his personhood – was at stake.

The light turned green, and Ed mashed the gas pedal, and the clunky old pick up truck lurched through the intersection, as it carried Ed’s self toward his house.

***
Henge sat down at his portable electric typewriter, and decided to type out a haiku. He thought, for a few moments, about what the haiku should say – or what it should discuss, and then thought for a few more moments on the basic structure, and how the meaning might be altered by syllabic constraints.

Sitting in his old roommate’s old room, at the old night stand, Henge stroked his beard, and stared at the blank sheet in the platen. He was wearing a purple Nehru Kung fu outfit, and was wearing some Saucony running sneakers.

Shafts of dog day sunlight filled the room, and the houseplants silently converted the whole thing into food in their impossibly large green leaves. Henge was cooking sausage in the kitchen. The skillet quietly sputtered and popped, as Henge sat at the typewriter. A haiku couldn’t take that long, could it?

Henge began typing.

```
Uhhm, Lake Me, bubba
The end of summer makes us
Crazy for action
```

Henge looked at the haiku. He read it aloud. In the vacant roommate room during dog day summer time, his voice boomed and echoed off the plastered walls.

“Um, Lake Me, bubba?” He said.

“The end?” he breathed, “of summer make us.”

“Cwaaaaaazy for ak-shun!”

Henge was unsatisfied. The sausage was still sizzling. He got up and turned the grey links with a spatula so that the browned sides were turned up. He went back to the typewriter.

He sat down, and lightly rubbed his fingers across the tips of the keys.

Henge decided, cautiously, to write a tanka.

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Even though we don’t know where
We’ll end up, and if we’ll live.
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Satisfied, Henge spun the platen, and pulled out the tanka sheet. With a felt tipped pen, he titled it “The Lake Me Tanka,” and signed his name “Henge” at the bottom, with the date; August, 2006.

***

The ontical nature of the canoe, Ed Groat grasped. Though not necessarily in that word. ‘Ontical’. Ed Groat didn’t know what that meant necessarily or definitively. Though, he knew what it signified, he just had no idea of the word signifying it. Ed Groat knew that the canoe was an object. An inanimate object. The canoe was an inanimate object in the world. Ed Groat knew that.

As he wheeled his pick up truck down Ludlow to Jefferson and Vine and onto Martin Luther King Boulevard, he thought of his truck in the ontical sense, but also in an ontological sense. Though, again, Ed Groat was unaware of the signifier ‘ontological,’ but was keenly aware that this particular dilapidated pick up truck helped him. The truck helped him to be employed. It helped him to go and sign the Lake Me naval battle contract with Henge. The pick up truck was an object in the world that helped Ed Groat engage in Worldhood.

So was the canoe an ontical or ontological device?

***

Carmine Calamari took a shower at the garage in Romulus. Pinky and Carmine had a makeshift shower in the back room of the garage, a tile floored cinderblock room, with a hula hoop attached to a vinyl shower curtain. There was a hose screwed into the faucet of a polyethylene utility basin. Carmine, Pinky, Zufo Baruca, Lenny Ndrangheta, and Sammy the Plumber used the backroom of the garage to interrogate, and on very special days, dismember people.

Carmine hit the five holes with the yellow orange Dial bar. He scrubbed the scum from the bus trip. The filth from almost two weeks as a Clifton street punk. His armpits he lathered with a thick white foam, and scrubbed that implausible area on his chest more than he needed to.

As he scrubbed, he meditated, and thought about the Lake Me situation. About the wager. That’s why he went to Cincinnati in the first place. The whole trip was a bust. Getting mixed up
in a squatter punk scene. Sleeping with dad hating Goth girls on soiled mattresses in abandoned buildings. Then the vicious journey to get coffee with Pete Limpelli. Fucking crazy New Yorker. In his goddamn Towne Car. What was it all about? This trip? This naval battle wager?

Carmine slipped out of the hula hoop shower curtain enclosure, and padded heavy wet steps over to the utility basin. He turned off the faucet and picked up a Holiday Inn towel draped over the edge, and dried himself off.

In the tiny broken mirror leaning against the back of the basin, Carmine saw his jowly face hung in sad, defeated pouches. The gold malocchio dangled from his gold rope chain around his neck. It was supposed to ward off the evil eye. He pawed his face with the Holiday Inn towel. Then looked in the mirror, then back at the towel.

In the towel, Carmine Calamari saw the wet frowning imprint of his face.

***

Carmine Calamari mentally wrote a haiku while he toweled off.

The world’s laziest
Man can come up with the best
Haiku’s in the world

***

With the pump on the front passenger seat of Chomsky, buckled in, Sax Taxson roared back down US 27. It was three in the afternoon, and Henge was slated to pick up the finished water cannon at Len Wiedeshofer’s house around seven. Big Ernie Shores supposedly had the underlying structure and barrel of the weapon completed – an intimidating silver polished cylinder mounted on a heavy duty U bracket and swivel mechanism.

When mounted on a small water craft, the water cannon would more than likely be a formidable and impressive device.

***

Carmine got dressed, and made a few phone calls. Time was short. A little more than a week before the naval battle, and there was much to be done. He knew he had to go undercover,
Henge and Ed Groat had seen him in a punk rock outfit in Clifton. He didn’t want to wear the normal jogging suits and tank top T-shirts – so stereotypical of mobsters and outfitters. Detroit was a gritty town, run top down by slick runners and movers. Carmine was one of those – in his better moments. The whole existential detour in Cincinnati was a crisis of his being – it was mildly helpful – it provided contrast. That was one of the more important things in life, Carmine figured. Behind the tough exterior, Carmine Calamari was just a human being. The killings and the money and the thick gold ropes around his neck – that was just a job. At the end of the day, Carmine took off his shoes one foot at a time, brushed his teeth, and for brief moments before the mind slipped from waking to sleeping – just like everybody else – Carmine questioned being.

***

Pete, with his new girlfriend, the redhead, checked out the logistics of Lake Me, and of the town of Sorbonne. Things like roads, and access roads. Power lines. Sewer systems. High towers. The police force. What kind of personnel did they have? Were they ready to ‘play some ball,’ or were they just straight shooters? Could they be bought?

Indiana was near Sorbonne.

Chicago guys used corn fields in Indiana all the time to dump a body. A little lime. Some shovels. When in Rome, right?

Pete also needed some fishing tackle. For a front. A good cover, while he watched the naval battle. He was used to salt water fishing and crabbing. This Midwestern fresh water shit would be new to him.

***

For a few moments, Carmine Calamari thought about looking into the feasibility of using an Ekranoplan on Lake Me. He had remembered seeing footage of an Ekranoplan on a “great machines and mechanical beasts special” on a cable channel. The Russians developed them during the Cold War, as a high speed surface craft capable of Mach 1 speeds, and impervious to radar. These swift behemoths were dubbed “The Caspian Sea Monsters” as they were tested in the Caspian Sea.
Lake Me wasn’t that large though. Actually, the entirety of a Caspian Sea Monster would take up about a tenth the entirety of Lake Me’s surface area. To get up to Mach speeds, the Ekranoplan would have to blow through Sorbonne, and cruise half way to Richmond, Indiana.

The Ekranoplan was out. Carmine would have to resort to his crafty means of disguise and subversion to sway the outcome of the naval battle in his favor.

***

At Len Wiedeshofer’s place later that night, Henge and Len went into the master bathroom and filled up the bathtub.

“It’s cold bubba,” said Henge. He dabbed his hand in the off pink tub basin, and flung water droplets into the broiling maelstrom. He toweled off his middle and index fingers with a chenille scalloped shelled hand towel.

“Well, no shit,” said Len. “It’s scientific. Lake Me ain’t gonna be a Jacuzzi.”

They looked at each other, sitting Indian style on the floor of the master bathroom of Len Wiedeshofer’s house, and started laughing.

Len clutched the water cannon, and fell back against the pink, carpet lidded toilet, shuddering in laughs. Tears running down his red cheeks.

“Ain’t a Jacuzzi!” Henge repeated.

They laughed for another fourteen minutes and thirty eight seconds, until Mabel came in to see what was going on, and they sheepishly told her nothing was wrong. As she walked away, shaking her head, they collapsed on the floor, laughing for nearly a half hour more.

***

Ed Groat got a call from his cousin Seamus Melancholy from County Down, Ulster.

“Ed how’re ye?”

“Eh somebitch,” Ed said, “summer’s almost over, you know shits getting old and hot, and I really don’t wanna see it end, yanno?”

“Hey be grateful you have a fookin summer.”

“Yeah Jack you’re right Sam.”

“So what are plannin on doin?”

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“Me and this somebitch named Henge are gonna have a goddamn naval battle on a lake.” Ed pawed at some newspaper on his kitchen table. A circular for K-Mart offering forty percent off on summer apparel, and gardening tools. “Yeah, I’m gonna get my canoe all jacked up, and put that somebitch in the water and look out Joe, shits gonna get weird.”

“Sounds like.”

“Say Shame, can you send me over a goddamn set of them Uilleann pipes? I wanna cheer myself on in the canoe.”

“You don’t want any of them Uilleann pipes.” Seamus said. “You want some fookin Irish War Pipes.”

“War pipes.”

“Yeah, the Brits took ‘em away from us because it made us fight.”

“Somebitch.”

“Yeah, you couldn’t play them anyway. Who’s gonna row?”

“Somebitch, I dunno.” Ed said. “Nevermind Seamus.”

***

Standing at the counter of the Creamy Whipp, Ed Groat ordered a Heath Bar Wintry Mix. He wanted a large, and ordered extra whipped cream on that somebitch.

“Yes Jack, some extra jimmies too.”


“Super Sam,” Ed had his large Irish head completely inside the small window of the counter, and was peering around the interior of the Creamy Whipp. The big stainless steel machines. A bay of topping containers with large serving spoons in each. There was a hot dog carousel, rolling the slimy pink cylinders back and forth, and they sweat with a glistening greasy sheen. On the back wall was a display of small junky toys for sale. A generic line of yoyos that lit up by means of a mercury switch and a camera battery. A “Homeland Security” soldier complete with red and white plastic parachute.

“Ah, that’s great,” Ed said, taking the Heath Bar Wintry Mix from the fifteen year old blonde. He clutched the napkin and the long handled plastic spoon and shoved a heap of the concoction into his mouth. Smacking his lips with the white ice cream. Crunching down on the chunks of Heath.
“Four dollars and seventy six cents?”
“Damn,” Ed said.
Ed said: “Somebitch is good though. Yeah. Thanks sweetheart.”

***

Pete Limpelli buffed the side of his left winged tip shoe with a washcloth from the hotel he was staying at. The T.V. was on, the old kind of hotel T.V. on a heavy metal pole with a brown painted metal “X” for feet. The pole was pocked with small rust patches, and the “X”, if you looked close enough, was specked with years of sad grime and dust coughed up from the brown carpet.

The hotel was cheap, and Pete was in a second floor walkup, his door opening up to a long balconied hallway of the hotel overlooking a small hillside above I-75. He was sitting on one of the beds, and a rerun of Mr. Belvedere was on Star 64, a local Cincinnati syndicated station.

There was some downtime between the naval battle and now – now was just a waiting game. There wasn’t too much to do. Lie around the hotel room. Polish his shoes. Spread his weapons on the unused double bed. A Raven 25 APC. A blackjack. A little length of rebar cut to the width of his fist.

There was also a copy of CityBeat, and a brochure on alcoholism. “44 Questions,” the brochure said. Pete had only answered twelve, and then threw it on the bed.

The phone rang.

Pete picked up the receiver. “Yeah,” Pete said.
“Minchia,” he said, “fucking shut it off, and reboot.”
“I dunno,” he said. “Yeah,” he said, “I think it’s a Pentium two, I don’t fucking know, Jesus.”

Pete had a Pentium two computer in the back room of The Winged Tip Shoe in Woodside, Queens, for reasons he couldn’t really figure out. He hated computers, the alienation of the machine and man – they always seemed inauthentic. Mostly, Pete played solitaire, and looked at internet porn via his dialup modem. Bags Fontana, who was helping to run the Shoe while Pete was in Cincinnati covering the Lake Me Situation, called Pete because the computer had told him that he ‘Performed an illegal operation,’ and ‘needed to shut down.’
Naturally, Bags was alarmed, and needed to consult Pete.

“Nah,” Pete said, “the Feds didn’t do it.”

“Yeah Bags,” Pete said, “minchia, this shit happens all the time.”

“I think I got a virus.”

“Yeah.”

“Just reboot.”

“Okay. Talk to ya later.”

Pete hung up the phone, and picked up the washcloth and started polishing his other shoe.

Mr. Belvedere had already resolved its situational arch, and broke for commercial before the revisiting epilogue. Pete didn’t want to see that, feeling it anticlimactic, and put the shoe on the bed and went over to the window and pried open a corner of the heavy pink curtain.

Cars screamed on I-75 about two hundred and fifty feet below him. The sun started to drop into the Western sky in front of him. It was almost rush hour, and the world whirred on in its mindless hum. The Lake Me battle was six days away.

***

Ed Groat’s garden was a mottled spance surrounded by a thin fence of trees and vines, and a few rusted frames of old outdoor furniture and a couple of lawnmowers, and some old wooden slats once used as bean poles or ladders, or clapboards; wood faded and rotted and bleached by the sun over eons.

Narrow foot paths wove haphazardly between mounds of earthen beds - beds speckled with shards of eggshell and soot, and rinds from oranges and avocados. An occasional rusty nail, curved and terrible and marred by fire. The stark wet brown of horse manure sprinkled fresh and cultivated in. Ed would hack at the soft mounds with an ancient hoe, the handle worn smooth and dark – polished by sweat and years – a deep varnish – worn comfortable to the touch, he would hack at those mounds and the hoe would make a ‘shoosh’ sound in the soft earth, as soothing as a drizzle in spring.

It was late summer, and the naval battle was approaching, but Ed, being concerned mainly with the moment was doing some weeding, and enriching of his zucchini, tomato, and watermelon beds.

Without a word, Ed set down his hoe, and went to the edge by a rusted pushmower and a wispy sumac tree and unzipped his fly and urinated.

***

Pete put a quarter in the small black cash box by his bed and twisted the knob. He lay, supine, as the world under him quaked and shimmied. He squinted his eyes up at the plaster pocket ceiling, and reflected on the whole mysterious reconnoiter trip to Cincinnati. Staking out Frisch’s, and then Cheviot Machine and Screw, meandering up the abstruse corridors of Cincinnati to Clifton.

Finding Carmine Calamari, that sad Detroit mook – that crazy wiseguy dressed up as a squatter punk.

As the bed shook, Pete remembered a year ago, back when he somehow was implicated in the 30 Days of Death sequence. Pete had come a long way, baby.

But what about this Lake Me Situation?

***

Upstairs, buried under plies of canvas frames, beverage cans – soda and beer, baby food jars on their sides with flat glaciers of coagulated oil paints drooled in a chorus of frozen tongues to the mottled hardwood floor, was a trunk containing Ed Groat’s deerskin unitard and coonskin cap.

Ed remembered where he put it, somewhere in the recesses of his attic studio behind a vile forest of easels – which – in the faint light coming in from the dormer window – looked like a menagerie of miniature siege weapon replicas. Ballistas. Torsion driven catapults. Trebuchets. Haunting wooden frames in simple triangular configurations. Looming above the floor, poised. All covered in a thin film of dust – strung together with wisps of cobweb.

Ed was getting ready for a naval battle. A naval battle with Henge on Lake Me in Sorbonne, Ohio. A naval battle that would assuage, temporarily, the boredom of late summer,
and for a moment, make the principals forget that autumn was just around the corner. Battles had a way of doing that. Battle – war, conflict. It consumes. It helps one forget, for moments.

Tossing aside dusty cans, and prying baby food jars off the floor, Ed dug out that somebitch – the unitard and cap inside a blue, brass rimmed trunk.

***

Sax Taxson was a polymath and an unabashed autodidact. He loved reading chapters from books in bookstores – calling in to local radio talk shows, and editing wikipedia entries.

Sax also subscribed to *Popular Mechanics*, and had done some research surrounding fluid dynamics. Archimedean screws. Sump pumps. Bilge pumps. Impellors. Siphons. He knew a little about the Venturi Effect – about how fluid pressure increases as the aperture through which the fluid travels decreases.

Big Ernie Shores had finished the barrel of the cannon, which, according to the blueprints transcribed from Henge’s napkin design, included a gradual taper attenuating at the nozzle.

Screeching into the parking lot of Cheviot Machine and Screw, Sax grabbed the brown paper bag with the magnum penis pump off the front seat of Chomsky, and ambled down the cement stairwell of the machine shop. His gaunt, alkaline body loping down the stairs like an Ichabod. His hawk like face darting – his deep set eyes furrowed in pierced determination.

Sax pulled the pump out of the paper bag. He threw the bag in the large Rubbermaid trash can and held the pump above his head in his right hand like the Statue of Liberty. A translucent plastic cylinder about three inches in diameter, and nearly a foot and a half long, the top fountaining over into a slender rubber hose, and at the end of the hose, a pressure bulb.

“So that’s it?” Said Big Ernie.

“That’s it? What do you mean ‘that’s it,’” Said Sax. “This is the Black Rhino, the top of the line.” Sax rattled off some apocryphal numbers, in cubic centimeters, as to the fluid displacement capacity, and potential water hammer effect.

Big Ernie shook his head, and went back to finishing up some prototypes of a surgical instrument on the Bridgeport machine.

***
Ed Groat turned on the old Motorola black and white TV set downstairs and opened up a can of Dinty Moore beef stew. He used a teaspoon crusted with coffee residue to scoop out the cold brown stew and shove it in his mouth. Clicked the knob on the old Motorola over to channel 14, public broadcasting, and Bob Ross was painting a happy mountain, with some trees, and a bush, and the whole thing was reflected, bluntly, by a pristine lake.

“Lake Me,” Ed murmured at the black and white of Bob Ross’ afro. “Somebitch’s drawing Lake goddamn Me.” He said. He flung a brown glob at the screen and turned off the set.

***
Deborah Hunt

Up in Sorbonne, Chief Rick Hollo responded to a 911 call. It was standard. Police, fire, paramedic. It was a medic problem. Chief Hollo pulled into the Sorbonne UDF, and slid his special order non-police issue Japanese tonfa into his nightstick belt loop as he gently shucked the door of the squad car closed.

On the sidewalk loitering area between the gas pumps and the entrance of the UDF convenient store, behind the ice chest and before the propane exchange, Gus Oglesby, paramedic squad leader was hunched over a girl in her late twenties. The girl was all sprawled out – her right arm taped and blotted with a wad of gauze. Her eyes were open.

“What’s going on?” Hollo said. “Heroin?”

“Can’t tell Rick,” Oglesby said.

“What’s your name!?” Oglesby, all crouched over, peering into her eyes. She was pretty enough. Not super hot. At least not by Chief Rick Hollo’s ‘Sorbonne standards.’

Hollo loved those three A.M. calls to the tri-delt place. Or the Sigma house. Rick Hollo would love those runs. He had a special pager – so he could make those runs, from his house, at any time. He would wake up next to his wife, throw on a badge, and roll over to wherever the problem was. Some drunken issue. Greek society problems. Girls in their late teens and early twenties with fake tans and thongs and bleach blonde hair, completely ossified. Ah yes. Chief Rick Hollo had a special ‘holding tank’ down at the station.

The girl responded: “Duh Deborah.” Her face was pale, and her lower lip was blue. Her pupils, up close, were as small as BB holes, and they seemed to gaze to a place far from Sorbonne.

“She collapsed.” Oglesby said. “Said she walked with the uneasy gait of a ghost and just fell down.” Oglesby made a boom sound. Rick always enjoyed Oglesby’s boom sound. His trauma scene descriptions were always poetic too.

“Sweetheart, Deborah, honey,” Hollo chimed in. “What happened?”

“Um, uh,” Deborah said.

“How old are you?” Oglesby said.

“Ta twenty eight.”
“Saul, Reggie, get me the stretcher,” Oglesby said.

“Deborah, you do drugs?” Chief Rick Hollo asked. He put his hands on the buckle of his belt and gripped.

Deborah breathed slow, determined breaths. Slow, like she was relearning to breathe. Like she forgot. Slow, deliberate breaths. Sucking in the hot pate of August, and exhaling. In and out. It was all new to her.

“What happened sweetie,” Hollo said. “Heroin?” He said: “Crack?” He snuck a cursed curl of his smug upper lip into the shape of a half smile.

“No,” Deborah said. Saul and Reggie began hoisting her onto the wheeled stretcher. They plopped her limp body on the white sheet of the gurney, and strapped her in with mindless nylon straps. They sprang the chassis up to waist level, and with that Hollo put his hand on the stainless steel rail of the stretcher.

“What happened?”

“I donated.”

Rick had a live one here. Selling her body for some smack. Oh man oh man.


“Plasma.”

What the fuck? Is she that hard up for cash? Hell, thought Chief Rick Hollo. Fuck. He thought, she could come by the station. He thought, shit, I’d pay her. Shit, he thought, we all would. Screw the pizza fund.

He thought all of that, but it came out as “Why’d you donate plasma?”

“They pay forty dollars,” she said.

“So!?”

“I’m a grad student,” she said.

***

Ed Groat pulled the deerskin unitard out of the trunk and shook plumes of dust from its leather surface. The unitard was worn in the buttock, and had fringe under the arm and along the leggings.
“Somebitch,” Ed said. He coughed, and put his forearm across his mouth. “Old ass somebitch.” Nearly everything Ed Groat had in his Hyde Park house was old. Newspapers, stacked haphazardly up the stairwell. Furniture, looking as if it had been passed down through generations of families, and resold, repeatedly at a hideous array of flea markets, garage sales, church sales, fire sales – put out for trash night, picked up by roving bands of pick up truck driving scavengers, sanded, buffed, and again resold. Heinous piles of tools – rusted and flecked with wear – sat sentry in front of furniture and newspapers.

Beside the deerskin unitard was a coon skin cap Ed had received as a gift when he was seven. It was six sizes too big for him then, but his uncle Leonard knew when Ed was an adult, it would fit him perfectly – and Leonard knew, that Ed, like other members of the Groat family, was unable to throw anything away. So Leonard knew, that some day in the wide future, long after he had passed away, Ed would rediscover the coon skin cap he had given him, and wear it, and for a lilting moment, remember his dear old uncle Leonard.


***

As Reggie and Saul hoisted the stretcher into the hull of the ambulance, the stainless steel chassis accordioned up under the gurney, and the big castor wheels became precise guides inside a stainless steel track on the diamond plated floor of the ambulance.

They locked the wheels of the stretcher in place, and Saul and Reggie started to close the door.

“Wait a sec,” Chief Rick Hollo said.

Hollo pawed on the handrail on the inside of the ambulance door and ambled into the shiny belly of the vehicle. Fluorescent lights encased in square boxes on the low ceiling resonated a gaunt brightness on the white paneling of the ceiling and walls. The pallor of Deborah’s face against the florescent waggle – her chapped blue lips. Deep culled crescents under her eyes. Her eyes half mast and a crystal grey, Chief Rick Hollo breathed deep.

Rick Hollo peered deep into her greys and squeezed her hand, and told her we’ll get you out of this. “Together,” he said.
She tried to mouth words in response, in vain protest, in something, but Chief Rick Hollo, sleek as an otter, slid out the narrow space between the gurney and the side of the interior, and glided down to the diamond plated stoop of the back.

“Gus,” he said, bailing out of the ambulance, “I’ll give you guys an escort over to Sorbonne General.”

***

Henge made the necessary phone calls via his private, cordless, dialup phone. He needed to make sure he had a slip on Lake Me. He needed the appropriate trailer for his car, which he refused to call a car, but referred to it as an ‘automobile.’

“Bubba,” he said to the phone, “I need a slip.”

“Oh huh,” he said.

“Yeah.”

“Well,” he said. “I would like a slip for a thirteen footer.”

“Uh huh.”

“Henge.”

“Yes.”

“Hen – juh”


“No,” Henge said. “Eight-ch as in hotel.”

“Eeee as in elephant.”

“Ennn as in November.”

“Jeee as in gorgonzola.”

“Eeee as in elephant.”

Henge used a pastiche of NATO phonetics, but omitted certain letter distinctions he found to be offensive. For instance he had trouble with the word ‘golf,’ but found ‘gorgonzola’ to be evocative of a pleasant idea. The NATO phonetic ‘echo’ for the letter ‘e’ was pleasant enough, but the word ‘elephant’ evoked a deeply familiar mental image to Henge, and so, Henge supplanted the standard with elephant.

“Yeah.”
“Uh huh.” Henge, switched the phone from his right shoulder to his left, and opened his refrigerator and pulled out a half wheel of brie, went to the drawer, pulled out a paring knife, and peeled the skin from the cheese.

“It’s a Snipe,” Henge said.

“Thirteen footer.”

“Thir-teeen,” Henge said. He shoved a gooey hunk of brie into his mouth and sloppily gnashed the cheese and breathed in the staccato determination of a post hibernation brown bear.

“No,” Henge said. “I won’t be needing a fishing license.”

“Pleasure,” he said.

Henge thought about the question. Business? Well, it was a little bit business. This summer time business had really gotten to him. And Ed Groat was a sort of person always concerned with his business, and Henge didn’t really have a job, so yes, yes this was business. Sort of.

“Sort of,” Henge said.

He said, “A little of both.” He breathed and shoved another large sagging wad of brie in his mouth.

***

Before the Lake Me Situation could commence, Pete Limpelli and Carmine Calamari needed the official okay from the local head. The local overseer. The guy in charge of the particular territory. It was protocol. To not get the okay of the local guy in charge could lead to big problems. Even for guys like Pete and Carmine.

Things were carved up into territories. It was all based on a feudal system, which ultimately was bolstered by an inalienable sense of honor, in which all participants were accountable for their actions, both good and bad. Things were dealt with through a loosely bound, comprehensive discourse in which one local head would ask permission from another local head to conduct ‘activities’ in someone else’s back yard. Failure to do so could result in war, death, and torture – in keeping with the feudal tradition. These practices were held in high esteem, as members felt they were carrying a torch of truth and honor through a time wrought with the vapidity of modernity. The Mafiosi felt virtuous.
Now the local head in charge of the territory in which Lake Me sat was a guy named Bill Badalamente up in Youngstown.

Bill, to the untrained eye, looked like a normal blue collar guy from Youngstown. He wore, unironically, a bubble vest over a plaid shirt and a Cleveland Browns hat. He drove a beat up pick up truck, and every morning before he punched in as a foreman at the Blayco Steel Mill, he would make a store run to Giant Eagle, do some food shopping for the day, and as he shopped, would take a warm two liter of generic soda from the soda aisle, the ones that cost 89 cents, and he would take it over to the frozen food section and put it in the back behind the frozen peas. He would saunter around the store, rub his impossibly black, and permanent five o’clock shadow, and hum Electric Light Orchestra along with the Giant Eagle overhead sound system, and fill up a cart with Little Debbie snacks, microwave pizzas, and corn chips. Maybe some spring water. A couple bags of Fun Size Snicker’s Bars for the guys at the mill. He might pick up a bag of plastic toy soldiers from the toy aisle to arrange on his desk.

On his way to the checkout he would go back to the frozen food aisle, pull his two liter of generic soda out from behind the frozen peas, and once a week, grab the latest copy of the National Enquirer, and check out.

About three weeks before the naval battle, Pete Limpelli called Bill Badalamente from The Winged Tip Shoe in Woodside, Queens.

“Bill, yeah,” Pete said.
“Listen,” he said, “I need your okay for a little situation.”
“Well, you know Carmine out in Detroit?”
“Yeah.”
“Yeah still chubby as hell.”
“Yeah.”
“Listen, we got a situation on Lake Me.”
“It’s in Sorbonne.”

“You know Sorbonne.” Pete looked at a map he had tacked to the wall of his basement office at The Winged Tip Shoe. “About an hour north of Cincinnati.”

“You know, we’re just blowing off a little steam.”

“Yeah.”

“A little wager,” he said, “A few laughs.”

“Great Bill.”

“Sure,” he said, “Anytime Bill, we’ll fucking do Aqueduct,” he said: “Just let me know when.”

“Thanks a lot Bill.”

“Okay, talk to you later.”

Pete hung up the phone and looked at the map on his wall. The Lake Me Situation was okayed by Bill Badalamente in Youngstown. The whole thing was set. No one could touch them.

***

Sax attached the base, or breech of the metal barrel of the water cannon to the magnum penis pump with some JB Weld, a series of grommets, and a few discretely welded lap joints.

The air inside the basement shop of Cheviot Machine and Screw was stale, stinking of rust and metal shavings, ozone, and cigarette smoke and the whole mess hung in a humid miasma; gently moving around with the help of a large wire caged pedestal fan. Sax wiped his mouth in determination. He stuck his tongue out in concentration around the cannon in the heavy blacksmith vice on the metal work bench in the center of the shop. He flipped the bland grey mask over his face, and, while looking out the horrific little eye slot covered in a dense black sun glass, he touched the MIG wand to the metal of a lap joint.

Sparks showered from the cannon. As daunting and dramatic as creation itself, the barrel and the magnum pump were becoming one. Forged together as one of the more formidable non lethal weapons that could exist in a naval battle on a small Midwestern lake.

For a guy named Henge, thought Sax, as he followed the soft yellow line from behind his welding mask, drawing a bead the immediate consistency of toothpaste across two small plates of steel.

What does this Henge look like, thought Sax.
Was he a monolith?
A giant muscle head jerk?
Was Henge short for Hennegan?
Sax flipped up the mask, and pried the collet of the vice open. With some tongs, he
dipped the finished lap joint into a fifty five gallon drum filled with water, and a small colony of
triops Sax and Big Ernie Shores kept.

***

Chief Rick Hollo called Madison back at the station.
“Hey.”
“Listen I got us a new Betty.” Chief Rick Hollo loved to call good looking women
‘Betties.” Something he picked up stationed in Fort Riley Kansas as an MP back in the late
seventies and early eighties.
“A gal,” he said. “I got a female prisoner.”
“Yeah.”
“Uh.”
“Well, drugs I guess,” he said, “make something up.”
“I dunno.”
“Tell you what. Scratch that, she’s going to be our new cleaning lady.”
“Clean-ing.”
“Yeah.”
“She’s at Sorbonne General now.”
“She passed out.”
“She said she donated plasma.”
“Yeah could be. That’s what I was thinking.”
“Listen.”
“Listen.”
“Madison, listen.”
“Take some money out of the pizza fund and run down to the Goodwill and pick up some
nice clothes.”
“I dunno, see if you can find some Ugg Boots, and some short skirts.”
“And some thongs. See if you can find some thongs.”

“Yeah you know, the ones that go up the butt a little.” Chief Rick Hollo churned his right hand in his pocket.

“Alright Madison. And tell Graves to call me.”

***

Sax fashioned a crank mechanism out of an old Huffy bicycle pedal, a cam from a John Deer riding mower, a door hinge, and some lengths of steel strapping. When finished the thing looked like a gun on a turret, with a two handed crank at the butt end, and a swivel mount in the center. Running down the side of the cannon was an intake tube for water to be sucked up into the pump mechanism, focused with the force of the pump and venturi effects, and shot out the nozzle of the barrel.

Sax checked the blue prints, for variance and accuracy of mechanics. A few alterations from the original design, but that’s why Sax was considered a skilled laborer, and not merely a machine. Sax had ideas about things. Sax knew that he had saved the day with his penis pump connection – that Henge’s water cannon would not be finished by the seven o’clock deadline if Sax had not known, immediately, about the Backroom in Morton – halfway up to Sorbonne.

With the rotary phone on Len’s desk he dialed up Len’s house and told Mabel he was coming over. He asked her what she was wearing, and she said the same thing she was wearing earlier that afternoon.

“I’ll be over in ten minutes,” he said.

***

Chief Rick Hollo sat with Deborah, or Debbie, as he decided he would call her, in the triage area of the emergency room. Doctors and nurses walked by; most of them knew Rick. It was Sorbonne, Ohio, after all.

Nurse Kelly McGinty asked Rick if he wanted a cup of coffee.

Rick said, “sure,” said, “two sugars and three creams.” Rick didn’t even have to pause. He rattled it off – as a well rehearsed script. Coffee, like many other things in the modern world
had been broken down into clear and distinct units. Units capable of facilitating mastery and possession over nature. All that glib horseshit.

Kelly handed the Styrofoam cup to Rick, his hand squeezing the white sides into a misshapen oval. The meniscus of the opaque brown liquid shimmering in the hum of the overhead fluorescents. Rick moved his head down to the cup to take a melodramatic first slurp as he watched Kelly’s rear end walk away.

Another nurse came over to Debbie’s bed and checked her IV bag.

“I don’t know how I’m gonna pay for this,” Deborah said, to no one in particular.

***

“It’s all taken care of doll,” Chief Rick Hollo said.

Deborah, propped up in a chaise lounge position in the triage bed stared blankly at Rick Hollo. Him sitting there with his left leg folded over his right knee, slurping, gratuitously, his coffee from the Styrofoam cup. Forehead furrowed pensively – looking up at her. At ‘doll’. Was she a doll? She never really thought so. She did, however, get two chili peppers out of seven ratings on RateMyProfessor dot com.

The fluorescent lights of the triage area did wonders for Debbie’s pale complexion. The dark crescents under her eyes provided a delicious accent to the stark beauty of her bloodshot grey eyes. God, thought Rick Hollo, things are really going to pick up around the station.

“What do you study?” Rick asked. He leaned back in his chair.

“English, twentieth century mostly,” Deborah said to the drop ceiling. She turned, slowly, toward her right. To where Rick was sitting.

“I study twentieth century literature.”

Rick’s eyes went to the floor. He intently studied the puce green linoleum tiles. They looked as if they were from a Siberian clinic, he thought. He had once read a National Geographic article in the late eighties or early nineties about the bleak post communist conditions in the former Soviet Union. People cobbling together garden tools and gym equipment from rusting tank parts – starving, making wine in highrise hovels. Waiting in line for bread. Having critical operations in filthy puce floored operating rooms. Literature was it? What kind of literature? She said English. Does that mean from England? Twentieth century? Let’s
see, what happened in the twentieth century? Rick began counting, on his fingers, significant events he could place in the twentieth century.

“Twentieth century?”

“Yeah,” Debbie said, “Woolf, Atwood, Le Guin, Stein, Morrison, stuff like that.”

“Uh huh.”

***

Madison rolled the squad car over to the Goodwill on Spring street, and in his uniform, went shopping. Madison loved the power of the uniform. The long awestruck stares. The simpering smiles. The way people would laugh at the stupidest joke he would make. He grabbed one of the smallish Goodwill carts, and began pushing it around the women’s clothing aisle. The store smelled like must and cheap laundry detergent. There was a smattering of old ladies pawing over the blouses, and a couple of Appalachian families; a large orb of a mother, a skinny father, and an asteroid belt of children making noise, and asking for things. Madison tucked in his shirt, and thumbed his buckle. He smirked in thought as he remembered what Chief Rick Hollo had told him.

Was it Ugg boots? Or clogg boots or something? Madison rubbed the black stubble on his square chin.

Mini skirts?


***

Madison flipped open the face, and put the antenna to his coffee stained teeth and pulled out the antenna stem. He searched, through his directory, for Chief Rick Hollo’s cell phone number. Let’s see. He clicked the nine key pad, with alphabetic correlative distinctions, in an attempt to find the number he was looking for. He clicked the ‘two’ key, thinking that would be for ‘Chief’ in ‘Chief Rick Hollo.’
The first click came up with the letter ‘A,’ which produced the names Alison Starks, Arty Rodenbeck, and Astrix Galloway.

Madison clicked again, to the letter ‘B’ and came up with the names Billy Goombanatz!, Bob Doctorow, Bubbles (which included three asterisks after the name), and someone with the name ‘B.Z.’

With another click came up ‘Chief.’ Simply Chief. No ‘Chief Rick Hollo,’ or ‘Chief Rick,’ or ‘Chief Hollo.’ Simply ‘Chief.’

Madison pushed the talk button, and being mildly concerned with possible electromagnetic radiation emanating from the initial burst of call connection, waited until he felt the dulcet purr of the call ringing on the other end before he brought the device to the side of his face.

***

The phone rang. And rang. And rang, and then an automaton lady told Madison that the wireless customer was currently unavailable, and that if he wanted to he could leave a message at the tone, or press nine for more options. Madison wasn’t sure about more options really. He didn’t necessarily feel like sending a text message to his chief about sizes of blouses or Ugg boots.

He waited for the automaton to finish her long winded soliloquy, a policy, Madison was sure, which insured that cell phone customers would go over one minute, and breech into two or three minutes. Collusion, Madison thought. All the carriers had it, these long winded automatons talking about nothing, then if someone were to press a key, thinking it would prompt an immediate click over to the voice mail, they would be curtly told, in an automaton voice, that the key they had pushed was an invalid entry, and the automaton would start again from the beginning of the insipid missive. Madison mindlessly eyed one of the Appalachian families as he waited, with the phone to his ear, for the automaton to finish. Then the beep.

“Chief,” Madison said.

“Listen,” he said. “It’s me Madison.”

He said: “What size clothes did you want me to pick up?”

“I mean,” He said, “what size does our new cleaning lady or whatever wear?”

“Call me back.”
He clasped the phone shut, and put it in his pocket. He thought, for a strange moment, of calling Graves on his cell, to see if he was near chief, seeing that Graves and Rick had different wireless carriers, and that possibly Chief Rick Hollo was in a dropped call zone. Madison thought about it, but remembered that he didn’t really like talking to Graves recently because all Graves wanted to talk about of late was the movie Waterworld, and issues surrounding DVD collections of certain television shows.

Down at the station it was always: “Man, in Waterworld they fucking had this meat chopper fifty cal mounted on a short barge.”

And: “Fucking, that trimaran the Mariner had was incredible.”

And: “Costner is such a good actor.”

And what really grabbed it was when Graves put his feet up on the desk, put his arms behind his head and said: “Man, last night I froze the scene where Jeanne Tripplehorn’s character gets naked on the deck, and I fucking rubbed one out.”

Graves would also go on tirades about how season three, what he would call ‘the best season in situation comedy history’ of the series The Adventures of Pete and Pete was not released by Paramount. He would go on rants, and tell of how he would engage, during Sorbonne Police Department hours, in ‘flame wars’ on ‘Pete and Pete blogs.’

Madison wheeled his empty cart to the vinyl record aisle and found two Bread albums, and a Mamas and the Poppas LP.

***

Deborah’s IV line dripped languidly, and she slowly batted her crusty lashes, peering into the unnatural hum of the fluorescent lights, trying to make sense of the last twenty four hours. She had gone to the plasma center, to make a drop – a couple of hours of sitting in a chair and plowing through some of her reading list, and she got paid a cool fifty dollars. Not bad for a summer gig for a third year PhD student. She got the idea by reading a text in her 20th Century Women’s Literature and Pedagogy Space Rubric Place Rhetorical Analysis Seminar. She read, from the comfort of her futon, in her stipend funded one bedroom apartment, about alcohol and drug addicted women in New York and Los Angeles funding their habits through prostitution and plasma donation.
Seemed like a viable option. Summer was slow. Her modest grad student stipend occluded, gradually, to a faint trickle – enabling Deborah and her fellow English grad students, by the end of summer’s time, to only purchase Top Ramen, and Kroger Brand Coffee. Plasma, donated once a week provided fifty dollars of extra income.

***

Over the bland cacophony of the emergency triage area of Sorbonne General, Chief Rick Hollo heard the triple pulse chirp of his cell phone signifying a voice message. Why his phone didn’t ring, because of lack of service, yet was able to notify him of a new voice mail was a mystery to Rick.

Madison had his suspicions, that it was all part of a sweeping conspiracy to pad the minute usage of subscribers – a grand collusion between all the major cellular providers.

“They all do it,” Madison would say down at Sorbonne Police Headquarters. He’d say: “They’re all in it together, the whole stinkin’ bunch of ‘em.”

No one could really argue with Madison’s logic – they all experienced the going to voice mail – the laborious process of leaving a message – listening to the soothing vacuous voice of a female automaton – waiting, as the minutes rolled over into more minutes – to leave a mundane message.

Rick pulled out his phone, and the screen told him he had a new voice message. There was a digital picture of a letter and an envelope, a sort of postmodern Pavlovian bell designed to keep us coming back – to keep renewing ‘contracts.’

He pushed ‘Talk.’

The nice woman automaton told him he had ‘One new message, and fifteen old messages.’

He pressed ‘One.’

“Chief;” Madison said.

“Listen,” he said. “It’s me Madison.”

He said: “What size clothes did you want me to pick up?”

“I mean,” He said, “what size does our new cleaning lady or whatever wear?”

“Call me back.”
Rick pushed ‘End,’ instead of pressing ‘Three’ to directly dial Madison, an option which cost two dollars a pop.

Rick retrieved Madison’s name from his directory, and pressed ‘Talk.’

***

“What size you wear, Doll?” Chief Rick Hollo asked Deborah. He was half speaking into the phone as the cellular service connected with Madison’s cellular service.

Deborah squinted through her bloodshot eyes over at Rick. She looked back up at the fiberglass drop ceiling, and the endless fluorescent artifice. It was a lot like flying over Chicago at around fifteen thousand feet, Deborah surmised. Her eyes followed the stamped metal hanging track, and skimmed the pocked white of the tiles. The endless vapid grid – crisscrossing at right angles – for no reason other than efficiency. Chicago, Deborah pondered in a thought tangent, was the quintessence of modernity as city. A soulless throb from point A to B; Chicago – foisting the blueprint for future cities to follow. Cities governed by the pulse of money and not much else. The future Phoenixes and the ever emerging suburban sprawls. The straight and wide boomways lined with the most vacuous of strip mall chain stores, and mega marts.

“Hey sweetheart, you ok?”

“Yeah,” Deborah said.

“What’s your size honey?”

“Eight.”

“Eight,” said Rick into the cell phone.

“Okay,” Rick said. “Call me back,” he said.

***

Carmine Calamari made a list of the necessary arrangements of things needing to be done before he went back down to southwestern Ohio for the naval battle on Lake Me.

Let’s see, Carmine hummed to himself; pen in mouth. A pad of Post-it notes embossed with Romulus Paint and Body sat in front of him on the hackneyed wooden desk. Deep slices carved out of the surface, stained a deep blackish brown from years of smudge and oil the desk was solid. In front of the desk was a gooseneck fluorescent, putting a seizure inducing staccato,
and Carmine doodled a picture of Kat Schmidt, one of his former Clifton girlfriends. Carmine, truth be told still had feelings for Kat. Why the fuck she fucked that clownshoe in the long johns and the bowler hat, he’ll never know. It must have been his put upon British accent. Figures, thought Carmine, all the chicks love a Brit accent. His mobster charisma only went so far these days, what with the proliferation of films such as Goodfellas, and Casino, and The Don’s Analyst, and the later carbon copy: Analyze This, and later Analyze That, and of course, the long running, unoriginal recycling of all those themes in the HBO series: The Sopranos. Carmine, like a man of many great western films, knew his limitations.

His get up as a Clifton punk rocker did lend an air of hip counterculturalism to his already swaggeringly criminal personality. Carmine felt a kinship in those foul hovels, and on those gutter street corners.

On the pad, he doodled a picture of what he remembered of the shelled out interior of the defunct Buzz coffee shop, where he slept on a ratty, bedbug ridden Serta mattress, and ground pelvis with a couple of girls whom he was nearly old enough to grandfather.

A grinding sound coming from the garage interior brought him back to the pad, and why he had it in front of him. He needed a van, some old clothes, and a plan.

He tore off the top sheet from the pad, and began devising a plan that would ultimately sway the fate of the naval battle in his favor.

***

On the clean Post-it sheet, Carmine sketched, in elaborate arrows and dashes, a schematic of a potential naval battle mishap. Carmine Calamari was a master of Rube Goldberg type devices, and often thought of things in life as some sort of grand chain reaction. That’s how he rationalized his near complete personality split and concurrent existence as a squatter punk for a two week period. It was obviously part of some larger schematic. God the watchmaker, Carmine thought to himself.

On another Post-it sheet he drew a boat, and on another he drew another boat. He pasted them on the desk. He drew a series of dashes on a few Post-it Notes and slapped them on the desk. He drew a thin, angry looking man with large aviator glasses, a bowling shirt, and winged tip shoes on another note, and stuck it to the desk. Then he drew a rotund, faceless depiction of himself, and put a large question mark on it, and placed it on the desk.
“Now,” Carmine said. With his tongue curled over his upper lip, breathing nasally chuffs in concentration, Carmine imagined numbers of odds and probabilities swarming through his mind, and began feverishly rearranging the menagerie of Post-it notes on the desk.

***

Factoring in the principals of the battle, Ed Groat, and Henge; Carmine Calamari focused on the immediate implications. The paddling about in a canoe. The pious little pull of a sail from a small skiff. The environment. A small to medium sized Midwestern lake on the outskirts of an insular and extraordinarily self important college town, nearly an hour outside Cincinnati – one of the most provincial of all modern major cities of the world.

On a yellow legal pad Carmine scrawled the words “mid August” and “Midwest.” Also he drew a picture of a Detroit area Coney Island restaurant façade, and a large van.

Naked, except for the towel around his waist, Carmine farted on the vinyl upholstered seat of the old battle ship grey desk chair. Out in the cavernous garage portion of the Romulus body shop, Pinky Mortrudo was showing a young Mexican kid how to operate an air ratchet. Each painstaking phrase of instruction was punctuated with a pneumatic whine of the ratchet, intersperse with a pallet of curse words and grammatical crutches. The whole scene echoed in the high ceiling, five bay wide garage.

Carmine pouted his lower lip into a hyperbolic frown – a display of concern and thought as he squinted at the legal pad.

On the pad Carmine wrote: “locals?” – indicating to himself that he should make a few phone calls. Get the lay of the land. Maybe a Lake Me dockside worker? A Milton University employee? A professor?

One the pad he also wrote: “Van.” Carmine felt, for some nebulous reason, that he should have a dilapidated van. A van that he could use as a semi mobile headquarters. He could effectively blend in – be relatively inconspicuous. Be construed as a local – or some mid American transient. Immerse himself in the culture – if only ostensibly. Become Lake Me.

***
Chief Rick Hollo limply perused the new August issue of *Popular Mechanics*, licking his right thumb and rubbing it against his right index finger – forming a damp paste. He would squeeze the bottom right corner of each page, and knurl his thumb and finger together with a satisfying ‘thyppt’ sound. Rick loved reading about war technology – the newest array of weapons and bombs, and robotically guided death machines. Rick also enjoyed reading about the newest gas guzzling SUVs – the fewer miles per gallon, the better.

Rick would thumb to the back and look at the classifieds. Columns of some of the shadiest offers and opportunities known in the western hemisphere. Mail order brides from Russia, Ukraine, Thailand, and Belarus. Business opportunities. Learn computer hacking. Direct energy weapons. Have an idea? We will steal your invention. Rick had noticed, with much mirth, that over the past few years, the classifieds in the back had become less and less pandering to the independent adventurer type. The kooks who were looking to construct ‘alternative housing’ in ‘remote desert and mountainous regions.’ Few ads solicited that. It seemed as time went on, as if the classifieds had become more mainstream – or more specifically – catered to the acceptable fringe of mainstream culture. Catered to that grotesque testosterone golem of western culture. Somehow, in the western sense, it was more acceptable to get a bride from Kazakhstan, and take ‘performance enhancing pills’ than it was to hull a shelter out of the side of a hill and construct the load bearing walls with discarded tires.

As he crinkled the last few pages of the magazine, Rick thought of interesting questions to ask Debbie. What her turn-ons were. Maybe what kind of pet she had. What her favorite food was. Or alcoholic beverage.

He looked at her in the triage bed. Her gaunt pasty complexion – her eyes – at half mast – now darted languidly around the ceiling. What was she thinking? What was her favorite sexual position, thought Chief Rick Hollo.

***
Hubba Bubba Radio

Henge woke up around ten in the morning five days before the epic naval battle. He brewed some ‘fair trade,’ ‘organic’ coffee in his vintage stovetop percolator. During the summer, Henge was a DJ – or more correctly, a ‘handler’ or ‘operator’ for a Ham radio station in the basement of a Ludlow apartment building. The station was registered to, and operated by one of the Sitwell’s patrons; a middle aged man of nebulous income sources named Moyle Tookus.

Word around Sitwell’s was that Moyle had been a tenure tracked professor of game theory in a non descript western college, but somehow had a mental breakdown, and ended up working on an Alaskan king crab boat for a couple of seasons, until he lost his left hand in a crane mishap. With time on his hands, or hand, and a whirling maelstrom of unactualized thoughts, Moyle eventually gravitated toward the Cincinnati neighborhood of Clifton, and to the languid block of Ludlow between Whitfield and Clifton Avenues. Like a character in a Washington Irving tale, he soon whiled away hours discussing heady conspiratorial issues in Sitwell’s.

Operating with a hybrid array of East German surplus equipment, Fisher Price walkie talkie circuitry, a disemboweled Commodore 64, and a device called a ‘Ninja’ donated by a skateboarding anarchist, and bolted together with a steel shelving unit frame, Moyle’s Ham station fit nicely into an alcove of the boiler room of the apartment building. He even had a roller chair and a gooseneck microphone. On the roof, near a long abandoned pigeon coop, a twenty foot mast of an antenna towered over much the gaslight neighborhood.

Henge convinced Moyle that he should be allowed to host an hour long show called “Hubba Bubba.”

“What kind of stuff do you want to air?” Moyle asked one evening back in March.

“Uh, well, I was thinking I could read some haiku, or maybe read some of my notes I have been working on, and perhaps read some Hungarian recipes.”

Moyle gave Henge the green light, and gave Henge the much loathed eleven AM Wednesday time slot.

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Henge watched the blue crown of the gas burner cup the bottom of the percolator pot, and meditated on the blurs of hot brown organic coffee lapping the inside of the yellowed percolator bulb on the top. He went over his notes for the day’s Hubba Bubba radio show. On a few crumpled sheets of yellow legal paper, Henge had transcribed his basic blueprints for the water cannon, which he had originally drawn on a Frisch’s napkin for Len Wiedeshofer. Henge transcribed, from his semi photographic memory, the plans because he entertained the thought of applying for a patent.

The notes were mostly abstract schematics, with corresponding alpha numeration: “…this portion ‘A’ engages apparatus ‘B’ with said force of manual application ‘E’…” and so on. There were fine point ink drawings – sketched and labeled. Henge had placed the notes in a used manila envelope, along with a poem he had written on a scrap of brown paper bag. He read the poem:

Return to sender, she said.  
But I have a junta  
And a dacoity  
For all my peccadillos.

Henge, 2006

Henge decided that would be a good poem to start out the Hubba Bubba show – that it could really open up a train of thought, and a thematic thread. The coffee was bubbling violently, and rattling the percolator, so Henge turned off the burner, and slowly and deliberately retrieved a Milton University coffee mug from the dish cabinet to the right of his kitchen sink. Every movement, Henge thought, was a conversation with the Tao. Or the Great Spirit. Or the Force. Or the Big Self. Or the Leviathan. Or the Big Bubba.

He poured in the steaming black coffee, and put in some soy based creamer, and a pinch of Sugar in the Raw, and stirred it up with a small souvenir spoon from Montreal. Henge sat back down at the table in The Kitchen of Truth™ and took a mindful sip of organic, fair trade goodness. The digital clock on the microwave said it was 10:32, so he needed to leave in about ten minutes, and walk a block over to where the radio station was to ensure a seamless changeover.
Henge walked down the block to the apartment building in which the radio station was. There was an exterior basement stairwell with a door wide open, beckoning in any fresh air in the mid August pate. Down the cement stair was a row of washing machines and dryers against a rough stone wall – hewn a century ago at least – cobbled stones laden with prehistoric sea creature fossils.

A blonde girl in her mid twenties was loading a washer. Henge waved, and said “Hi Sandy,” and Sandy smiled and said hi back.

Ducking under a cacophony of copper pipes, sheet metal duct work, and vile tubes all octopussing out of a terrible looking cauldron of a boiler – long since silenced for the summer. Henge gingerly nodded at the mean looking boiler – giving deference and respect to the power of the machine. Just beyond the tentacles of the boiler was a small alcove between craggy walls of fossil stone and sloppy cement bonds, and sitting in the alcove was Sam Golden who ran a eight AM to eleven sports show called Runnin’ Home.

Henge made his presence aware to Sam, and on top of a milk crate against the wall near the alcove, and shuffled through the manila envelope, formulating, once again, the tack of his Hubba Bubba show. Henge wanted to definitely talk about the pending naval battle on Lake Me.

“...and I’m Sam Golden and this is Ruuuuuuuuuuuunnin’ Hooooooommmmmme!” Sam said. Sam motioned to Henge, and Henge took a seat in the warmed roller chair.

He did a perfunctory station identification, and then began the Hubba Bubba show.
“This is Henge,” he said, “and on this week’s Hubba Bubba, I’d like to start off with a poem I wrote a few weeks ago.” He read the poem, then started in reading his water cannon notes. Painstakingly and tediously, Henge read his sketched diagrams, as if they were some sort of L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poem, to a similarly silent audience. As his voice traveled through the sluice of Commodore 64 guts, Fischer Price walkie talkie transponders, Ninja frequency amplifier, and out the twenty foot steel pipe soaring over the roof, Henge thought about his demographic.

Moyle Tookus didn’t disclose his station numbers to any of his staff deejays, nor did he sell any advertising time. Most of the listening audience, Moyle figured, as a select set of Francophiles within a mile radius of Sitwell’s imagining themselves as distraught World War II Parisians, clinging to Edith Piaf phonographs, and some underground savior like a Ham radio station.

Henge knew this before he pitched the Hubba Bubba show to Moyle.

“I’d also like to talk about a very important thing,” Henge said into the gooseneck mic. “I wanted to talk a little bit about war. Specifically,” he said, “I’d like to talk about a small naval battle I am going to be involved in on Monday.”

Henge took a deep breath.

“Umm,” he said, “I am in a naval battle with a good friend of mine.”

“My friend’s name is Ed Groat, and I hope he’s out there listening.”

“This is supposed to be a non violent naval battle, and we are fighting because we are simultaneously bored with summer, and we don’t want summer to end. So it’s kind of a paradox.”

“Plus,” Henge said. “Ed has claimed that he is a better canoer than I am a sailor, and I just think that is apocryphal.”

Henge read a few samurai themed haikus by Basho. Some cherry blossoms, finitude of life. Honor, that sort of stuff.

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That morning, lying supine in his Central Parkway hotel bed, winged tip shoes pointing like duck feet toward opposite corners of the mottled plaster ceiling, Pete Limpelli woke to the
wanging hum of a radio frequency trying to find a home. The cheap television set scrolled an indeterminate flicker of Jerry Springer, and white noise interspersed with the sonorous pall of Henge’s radio voice.

_Uhh, I am going to be wearing a rare Sioux Indian headdress which has been blessed by a Nigerian taxi driver, and has been smudged with a bundle of smoldering sage._

Jerry would break in, talking about incest and weight loss, and trailer park culture.

The white noise would continue, and Henge’s voice would come back on.

_Um, uh, well, it’s interesting and cathartic, to think of the great naval battles that have taken place over the millennia – from the Phoenicians to the marauding ‘Sea People,’ to the Greeks and Romans, through the Spanish and British to present day America. Naval power has been the lynchpin and the benchmark of societal prowess, and the litmus test of a military reach._

“Minchia,” Pete said, pleading to the tufts of cobweb on the ceiling, “what the fuck is going on with this fuggin’ thing?”

He edged up on the bed on his elbows, and squinted through his sepia toned glasses. The TV waggled and flickered between Jerry, and this mysterious interloping transmission. Pete fed a quarter in the vibrating bed, jolting the slab of a mattress in a crack whore like convulsion.

Suddenly, through some electromagnetic confluence of the archaic TV set and the vibrating bed, the screen went to the off air color bars, and through the audio, Henge’s Hubba Bubba show played uninterrupted.

_So all you bubbas out there in Hubba Bubba land, there’s a naval battle happening locally between myself and Ed Groat. Up on Lake Me._

“Mother fuck!” Pete said. It was Henge. Fucking elusive Henge, right there on some sort of interference radio show. Maybe a CB or some fucking thing, thought Pete. Some of the clowns down in Jersey, being really into the trucking industry, used to fuck around with CBs. Where the fuck was it coming from? Was Henge nearby? He had to be.

_It’s your chance to witness history. The first recorded naval battle on Lake Me. Canoe versus Snipe. Pioneer versus Indian Chief. It has the makings of an epic._

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“Minchia!” Pete screamed into the paint flecked mirror above the slender bureau against the wall by the television.

“Epic proportions is fuggin’ right!”

Pete clawed the ancient, hard plastic resin telephone on the nightstand and roughly pawed it on the still vibrating bed. He set it down forcefully, and the bells inside the housing clanged, and continued to clang softly on the tumult of the mattress. From under the nightstand, Pete grabbed a charred, dog-eared Yellow Pages of the Greater Cincinnati area. He furled the reams of yellow newsprint in chorused heaves, clumps of thirty and fifty pages curling in a bundled unison – grinding soft papery gasps. Pete was flipping to the Bait and Tackle section from the back. Haphazardly, and sporadically, he went past Bait and Tackle, then went forward, and forgot what he was looking for specifically, and went ahead to Sporting Goods.

With his gnarled, terrible index finger, he traced down a column of sporting goods. Hockey. Badminton. Chinese Handball. Cornhole. What the fuck was cornhole?

Pete was looking for some fishing supplies. But not just any local fishing supplies. Pete wanted some high end saltwater gear, for reasons he couldn’t articulate, other than it felt right, and that it somehow seemingly provided him with an edge.

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“Listen Doll,” Chief Rick Hollo said to Deborah. “I have a little proposition for you. Though,” he said. “I don’t really like the word ‘proposition.’” He said: “It just sounds so damn dirty.”

Deborah just lay there, pallored face to the drop tile fluorescent ceiling, neck bared to the efficient complexity of modernity.

Chief Rick went on: “I have an idea that can make you and me and a bunch of the boys down at the station real happy.”

Deborah blinked, and thought about Rick’s words, which seemed to filter in at a disenchainting staccato. The words: idea, bunch, boys, happy, more than the other words blabbing out of Chief Rick’s smug little face, seemed to resonate at a meta-conscious level. Deborah thought about the gendering of gender, and the placing of gender space, and the idea of the postmodern gender space place. A whirling committee of some of her department mentors and
some women from the Women’s Studies program began whirling in the meta space between her eyes and her mind. They were cackling, horrid faces, telling her things such as ‘you’ll never make it!’ and ‘gender space place in your face!’

Deborah shuddered and twitched and refocused her eyes down at Chief Rick at her bedside. His terse little mouth pursed in a concerned pucker. His cheeks, showing stubble, drooped in melodramatic pouting concern. What was it he was after?

“What?” Deborah simply said.

“Well Deb, I want you to stay at the station for a little while, do some things around there.”

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Deborah thought about the idea of the proposition. Hanging around the Sorbonne Police Department station. She could muddle through her reading list. Maybe keep a pile of her piled high and deep books in some unused corner, or occupy a shelf or two. She could grade student papers.

It might not be that bad. But what were the terms? What was this pouty, simpering letch behind a badge wanting from her?

“It would just be nice to have a pretty face around is all,” Hollo said.

“You know,” he said, “take care of a few odds and ends.”

“Plus,” he said, “We have a cache of unused funds right now, and if the county auditor comes in and checks us out.” He paused. “We could lose all of it.”

Said: “Might as well pass some of those government dollars on to a nice gal like yourself.”

Deborah asked about the bookshelf, about maybe a desk. Her office mates were sloppy, and they were unabashed gossips. Always spreading rumors about so and so sleeping with so and so. Such and so professor is leaving because they butt heads with so and such. This person felt Nietzsche a hack, and said so in seminar, so they were just stupid. They would titter and snort and swill old coffee and new herbal tea, and whisper. It was like a clump of caked on cholesterol on the inside wall of a septic tank, and it made Deborah’s stomach lurch.

“You alright sweetheart?” Hollo said. “Nurse!”
With a faint waft of her right hand Deborah waved him off. She said: “I’m ok.” She said: “Just sick and tired is all.”

“I know what you mean,” Hollo said. He mustered a concerned furrow across his forehead. If only he comprehended the turmoil of graduate studies – the department politics – the catty nature of graduate students and committee members, he might not feel so cavalier in his proposal to Deb.

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“How much we talking here?” Deborah suddenly assumed a stark businesslike tone through her chapped lips. Her father was a corporate manager at a large electronics concern.

Chief Rick Hollo eased back in his chair, in a theatrical exhibition denoting great ponderance of weighty issues, and slowly cradled the back of his head with his hands.

“Well Deb,” Hollo said. “We have at our disposal, right now, about ten thousand in unclaimed funds.” He wielded the factuality of the statement with precision and confidence, only usually found in windy legal types, or on the blustery pitch of internet discussion boards.

Ten thousand was a lot of money. PhD stipends at Milton for the English department were a feeble fifteen, a laughable sum compared to some other more major, more prominent universities. Of course the PhD stipend was considerably better than the master’s level stipends, which tended to hover around eleven grand.

“Of course,” Hollo went on. “There are a couple of conditions.”

He kept his hands on the back of his head, and paused, waiting for Deborah to process the possibility, and for her to contemplate just what the conditions might be. During the pause Chief Rick also contemplated exactly what the conditions might be. Bullshitting was such a draining endeavor. He knew he wanted her to dress up around the station, and maybe help clean up. Rick really wanted to love her. Somehow, someway, love this frail graduate student. Keep her at the station.

“Well,” Deborah said. “I have a couple of conditions too.”

She narrowed her bloodshot eyes and slowly went through a litany of conditions she would need. The desk. The bookshelf. Space to grade horrible undergraduate papers. A hidden
condition, Deborah surmised, was that she would be free from the corrosive English department graduate student gossip.

Chief Rick stifled a smile. Could it be this easy? She was postulating a litany of requests that would be a snap to fill – but the mere postulation of the requests put her in a position of vulnerability. She was at the mercy of his compliance with the requests, though she perceived her requests to be bargaining chips. That they somehow gave her leverage. Hollo leaned forward in the vinyl upholstered bedside chair with a pained creak, and pretended to be interested in the rim of his Styrofoam coffee cup. For added effect, he slowly, pensively twirled bead of brown coffee along the inside edge, and watched as the fluorescents overhead made a traveling reflection like the bubble of a level.

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Pete Limpelli traced his crooked index finger down the smooth newsprint of the Yellow Pages. His finger made a comforting dull squeaking sound, as it quietly hissed down the column. Sporting goods. Fishing supplies maybe? He flipped to the “F” section, in search of “Fishing Supplies” A couple of entries. One in Mason, and one in Hyde Park. The area of ‘Hyde Park’ sounded more official – more familiar.

So Pete dialed, clutching the phone between his ear and his right shoulder, squinting through the sepia toned view out of his prescription glasses.

“Uh hey, hiya, listen,” Pete began.

“I’m in town, and I was looking to uh,” Pete paused. This wasn’t like Pete, this stumbling around, fumbling for words. Was he losing it? His touch?

“Yes,” Pete said, “I’ll hold,” he said. The Muzak the phone played was big band music, and Pete gathered his thoughts. What was that reel he would sometimes use out in Massapequa? The one in Paul Manta’s boathouse, on calm weekends? It had a thick spool and action so smooth…

“Yes,” Pete began again, “Listen, I was looking for a heavy duty saltwater jobbie.”

“Yes,” he cleared his throat. “A good friend of mine had one of these frickin’ heavy fuckin’ duty jobs that would click, and you could pull up a fuggin shark with that thing yanno?” Pete guffawed out the raspy, cloying laugh of a former pack a day smoker.
“Uh huh.” He rubbed the wrinkled skin under his chin.

“Yeah.”

“Ambassadeur huh, that sounds about right.”

With the complimentary nightstand pen and pad, Pete began scribbling down some notes.

“So where are you guys?”

“Uh huh.” Pete jotted down an address. “Hyde Park huh?”

“Listen,” Pete said, he glanced around the lonely television stand, the vibrating bed cash box, the rust stained sink outside of the bathroom beneath the scratched mirror. The empty round table with four chairs by the wide window overlooking the vapid throb of I-75. “I’m staying with a few friends in Clifton right now, what’s uh, what’s the best way to get over there.”

“Uh huh.”

“Okay MLK.”

“Yeah.”

“Okay, you guys open till seven?”

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“Great,” Pete said. He hung up the phone. Mentally, he sketched things out. 1. Get the salt water reel. 2. Make nice with the redhead vixen he one night stood with. 3. Never mind 2. 4. Head over to the local Wild Oats and get some more tea tree oil toothpicks, some Medaglia D’Oro, somewhere find a decent coffee maker and a thermos container.

He would also need to find a five gallon bucket, to carry all of his accoutrements, and to use as a ruse on the languid little shore of Lake Me.

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Where the Action Left Off

You are all under arrest, the megaphone said.

Pete Limpelli, sopping wet and drooping after being dragged along the surface of Lake Me at an estimated twenty four knots by Goliath, the cryptid 800 pound catfish looked up and squinted through his glasses. Arrest? What the fuck is all this? Hadn’t he okayed it will Bill Badalamente in Youngstown?

Henge cranked his water cannon, futilely, into the brown surface of the lake – not really knowing what else to do.

Ed Groat heard the faint megaphone klaxon, but shook his head, thinking it was some somebitches from the college messing around.

Carmine cleared out the old Dodge Ram van from under the canopy of branch cuttings he had made.

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The engine wouldn’t crank all the way, and the radio blared Rush Limbaugh loudly, echoing across the fetid brown surface of Lake Me. The scene in the lake looked like recess, when a playground monitor had blown her whistle, summoning transgressors to the principal’s office.

Carmine could see Pete slump his shoulders in that New York tough sort of way, admitting a reluctant defeat, but promising retaliation.

Carmine saw Henge, in his thirteen footer, replete with Sioux Indian headdress and cranking his water cannon such that his craft appeared to be urinating in fear at the sight of the Sorbonne Police.

Carmine popped the hood, and ambled over, and jiggled a wire to the starter motor, and retried the ignition. This time she fired up, cuffing a foul plume of blue grey smoke out her exhaust pipe, and Carmine gasses the thing out of the semi permanent forest hovel he had been
living in for the past few days, and piloted the van through underbrush and twigs to a small aggregate access road.

He had to get to a payphone, and he remembered seeing one in the parking lot on the opposite side of the lake near the pars course.

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The old van spun on the aggregate, spewing limp roostertails out from the back tires, and making a crackling sound as tiny rocks sprayed from their resting places. Carmine wrestled with the steering wheel under his tattered overcoat, and bounced up and down in the captain’s chair, as Rush Limbaugh continued to blare out of the dashmounted factory radio, and the two furrows of the narrow gravel access road jostled and jiggled from beyond the windshield, and treeline whispered and curved in a vibrating chide along the path’s edges.

The gravel access road ended with two cement filled metal posts marked in yellow reflective tape, and emptied into the parking lot by the pars course. Carmine caught his breath, and told himself, somehow to calm the fuck down. Sitting in the captain’s chair of a dilapidated 1990 Dodge Ram van he had purchased from a Detroit area chop shop, and wearing, this time, the costume of a homeless man, Carmine needed to get his bearings.

He slowly parked the van in a parking space near the payphone, moving back out, and straightening up the vehicle. Twice. Pushed down on the parking brake, and threw the column shifter in park.

He stepped down the high running board, and slowly closed the door, only it wouldn’t stay shut, so he opened it, and slowly tried to close it a little harder. It didn’t stay shut so he slammed it, and sheepishly put his head down and his hands in his pockets, and walked over to the payphone mounted inside a tiny canopy made out of four by fours and two by fours.

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Reaching into a compartment of his undergarments, Carmine pulled out a prepaid phone card, and dialed the one eight hundred number, then entered the card number, then waited through about forty seconds of advertisements telling him to shop at Sam’s Club more often, and
informing him he could save money on gas. He pulled out a slip of paper from the front pocket of his soiled trenchcoat, and dialed the number on the paper. It was a 330 area code.

“Bill,” Carmine said. “This is Carmine, uh listen.”
“Carmine.”
“Calamari.”
“Yeah from up in Detroit.”
“Yeah.”
“Listen, we got a little problem down here.”
“Me and Pete.”
“Limpelli.”
“Pete Limpelli.”
“Yeah from out east.”
“Yeah it’s a great lake, great wager.”
“Uh huh.”
Carmine’s palm began to make a sticky imprint on the phone receiver, and the metal conduit cord made a faint but disturbing grinding sound as it curled against itself.

“Yeah, the Lake Me Situation.”
“Pete said that you said it was covered.”
“Well we got a squad of cop cars out there now sayin everybody’s under arrest.”
“Uh huh.”
“Ok.”
“Yeah.”
Carmine read Bill Badalamente the number on the payphone. Bill said he was going to call him right back, that he needed to make a few phone calls.

“Ok Bill.”
“Yeah.”
“Talk to you in a minute.”
Carmine slowly hung up the phone, clutching it with both hands. Sweat was soaking through the undercoat of the London Fog jacket, and through the doubled over brim of the watch cap. He winced at the sky, starting to cloud over into a humid haze.
Some joggers, engaging in the pars course, ran out the path from the other side of the parking lot. There were three of them. All three were blonde and had high cheekbones. Two were wearing Milton University sweatshirts, and another had a shirt that said, plainly; “Northface,” in silkscreen. They jogged past and looked at Carmine, giving him an amused and skeptical glare.

Carmine, in his baggy London Fog overcoat, tattered watch cap, and other bum paraphernalia, instinctively began pretending to do some side bend stretches, immediately assuming a posture of innocence and participatory inclusion in the pars course experience.

Upon rising from one of his side bends, he pretended to suddenly notice one of the joggers, and brimmed a gratuitously large smile. One of the male joggers stared at him in a sort of Doppler manner, turning, then eventually craning his head and torso in hyperbolic interest at the sight of Carmine, this bum, pretending to partake in the pars course. The male jogger ran into a cement filled post, impacting the post with a slow, but groin specific thud, and the male jogger fell to the ground, writhing, and clasping his knees to his chest. The other two, a male and a female started laughing at him, but used the opportunity to catch their breath.

Carmine pretended to be interested in deep lunge stretches when the payphone rang.

He skittered up from a deep fencing lunge, and ambled over to the ringing payphone and picked up the receiver.

“Yeah.”
“Uhuh.”
“Looked like four of em. Sorbonne PD I think.”
“Uhuh.”

Bill Badalamente said to Carmine that he would call the Judge of Holden Count, the County in which Sorbonne was a city, a Judge on the collective ‘payroll’ – one who owed a favor or two here and there, and one who continually got re-elected.

“Mincia, Bill, how soon?”

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“Bill we need this now.”

Carmine reached under his overcoat and scratched an itch in an area physicians refer to as the intercostal nerve trunk, that sensitive track of skin skirting the underside of the rib cage. The spot where one gets ‘the wind knocked out of him.’ It’s also the spot where *Herpes zoster* erupts, as a red rainbow of a rash – a mutation of the dormant chicken pox virus, re-manifest in a disturbing ailment known as ‘shingles.’

‘Shingles’ is usually manifested during periods of intense stress in mid to late adulthood. Turns out, the breakneck time Carmine spent in Clifton as a gutter punk took its toll. And now, what with the added stressors of pretending to be a van dwelling bum along the fetid shores of Lake Me, compounded with the actuality of the much anticipated and hyped naval battle – the stress had mutated the dormant chicken pox virus into a festering rash along his intercostal.

“Bill,” Carmine scratched, “This looks heavy.”

Some more joggers slowly jogged by, noticing Carmine hunched inside the phone booth, wearing tattered trench coat, talking on the phone, and feverishly moving his hand inside the coat.

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Carmine, to the mirrored polish of the payphone cashbox, forced despondent frown. To the payphone he bayed a slow and deliberate ‘ming – key – uhhhh!’ and put his hand in his teeth and bit in a substantiated act of self loathing.

“Call em off Bill, Christ.”

“I could do these guys, but Christ, the fucking attention it would get.” Carmine saw his life, redone, in a Scorcese-esque montage, complete with sanguine musical accompaniment from a sixties or seventies era band. Probably the Sid Vicious remake of *My Way*. His childhood as a clever gizmo inventor. His Detroit prowess. His Rube Goldberg genius. His demise as a Clifton gutter punk, and his now disguise as a Lake Me bum.

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Carmine fervently itched at his intercostal trunk, and the late summer cicadas chided their horrific dirge – incessantly clacking and grinding in a sine wave hum from the tops of trees surrounding the small parking lot. He covered his mouth over the receiver of the phone, seeing some of the joggers were staring at him, slowly traversing the parking lot toward the other side of the pars course. He clutched the phone between his ear and his shoulder, listing, in the sort of confused posture a dog who misunderstands a command might take. With his other hand, he continued clawing inside his trenchcoat, at the persistent itch.

“Bill, can you get down here?”

“Or you got any guys closer to here?” He scratched, but imbued the stern timbre of a Great Lakes accent – painfully enunciating every syllable of every word, and the ending syllable of each word with a tinge more inflection. It was a regressive act of desperation.