

Some Lost Bliss: Tracing the Dark Night of the Soul in Jack Kerouac's *Visions of Gerard*,

The Dharma Bums, Desolation Angels, and Big Sur

and

An excerpt from the novel

Mayor of Hollywood

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Abstract

The research and creative portions of this thesis develop from the various responses individuals experience in the wake of a loss. The research into the evolution of faith in author Jack Kerouac's 'Duluoz Legend' and the central storyline of the novel *Mayor of Hollywood* spring from the same well: the crossroads between death and faith. The research piece concerns itself with Kerouac's exploration of the spiritual interior in the wake of the death of his protagonist's older brother, developing a personal faith that blends Buddhism and Catholicism unfettered by formal religious practice, mirroring instead an older path of Catholic mysticism. *Mayor of Hollywood* explores the opposite side of the religious coin: the protagonist, Lucy Cassidy, has little compelling interest in her own spiritual existence but must address the practicalities of her partner's formal practice of Catholicism, including dietary restrictions, regular worship, moral strictures, and the religious formalization of the guilt process. At the same time, Lucy and Mark must resolve several deaths that have occurred, substituting the secular path of crime detection for the more spiritual quest to reunite with God. Linked by the shared topic of death, the two halves of the thesis address faith as a whole, exploring the interior and exterior spiritual life.

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I, Mary-Beth Brophy, hereby certify that this thesis, which is approximately 80,000 words in length, has been written by me, that it is the record of work carried out by me and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree.

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FOREWORD

This thesis addresses two different points on the literary spectrum—crime fiction and the role of the dark night of the soul—a form of Catholic mysticism—in the novels of Jack Kerouac, and some groundwork is necessary to address the place at which these apparently discrete topics intersect. To that end, it may be helpful to briefly explore both the areas where Kerouac’s spiritual writing and crime fiction overlap generally and the ways in which my research and creative pieces deal with the quest for understanding in the wake of death, albeit from two different perspectives.

Previous scholarship has addressed the connections between crime fiction and religion. In *Crime Fiction, 1800-2000: Detection, Death, Diversity*, Stephen Knight traces English-language crime fiction back to *The Newgate Calendar*, collections of crime stories originally published by the chaplain of London’s Newgate Prison¹. In many of these early stories, crimes were solved by divine intervention or confessions induced by Christian guilt². Martin Priestman highlights a similar spiritual focus in Daniel Defoe’s *Captain Singleton* and *Moll Flanders*, which were published around the same time as early Newgate stories. In both novels, the emphasis is on repentance and spiritual awakening, rather than capture and punishment³. In ‘The Guilty Vicarage,’ W.H. Auden suggests that all crime is, in essence, an offense against God⁴ and identifies G.K. Chesterton’s Father Brown as one of the three best fictional detectives in his estimation. As Priestman did with Defoe, Auden argues that Chesterton’s Father Brown emphasizes the importance of the murderer saving his own soul through confession and repentance over societal punishment. Further, Auden identifies Father Brown as an example to the murderers he hunts: ‘a man who is also tempted to murder, but is able by faith to resist temptation’⁵.

In his introduction to Howard Haycraft’s *Murder for Pleasure: The Life and Times of the Detective Story*, C. Day Lewis, writing as Nicholas Blake, takes the connection between religion and crime fiction one step further, suggesting that detective novels may one day usurp religion as a means of expiating societal guilt⁶. Lewis goes on to compare the structure of the detective novel to religious ritual, with murder replacing sin, the criminal standing in as high priest, and the detective filling the role of the divine entity. The dénouement of the detective novel becomes a sort of day of judgement, when all is revealed and ‘the goats are separated from the sheep’⁷. Most recently, in his lecture series on faith in contemporary detective fiction, Peter C. Erb suggests that the murders in crime fiction represent Christian original sin, traceable to Cain’s slaying of Abel in the Bible⁸. Erb calls this first Biblical murder ‘the fulfilment

¹ S. Knight, *Crime Fiction, 1800-2000: Detection, Death, Diversity* (New York: 2004), pp. 117-154.

² Knight, pp. 190-194.

³ M. Priestman (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Crime Fiction* (Cambridge: 2003), p. 10.

⁴ W. Auden, *The Dyer’s Hand* (New York: 1989), p.149.

⁵ Auden, p. 156.

⁶ H. Haycraft, *Murder for Pleasure: The Life and Times of the Detective Story* (London: 1942), pp. xx-xxi.

⁷ Haycraft, p. xxi.

⁸ P. Erb, *Murders, Manners, Mystery: Reflections on Faith in Contemporary Detective Fiction* (London: 2007), p. 46.

of original sin since it marks the destruction of what was in the beginning the original human life, namely life in community⁹. Certainly, the link between religion and crime fiction has not been lost on authors in the genre, many of whom link religion to their detective protagonists, including G.K. Chesterton, Umberto Eco, Gail Frazer, Andrew Greeley, Edith Pargeter, Maureen Jennings, Lawrence Sanders, Faye Kellerman, and P.D. James¹⁰.

Moving beyond the larger links between crime fiction and religion, it is necessary to draw specific connections between the Catholic mysticism in Kerouac's novels and contemporary crime fiction—and, more specifically, *Mayor of Hollywood*¹¹. To that end, it is helpful to link the concepts of mystical exploration and secular criminal detection, and to explore the role of drugs and alcohol, the influence of the dead, and the isolation of the protagonist in both Kerouac's novels and crime fiction.

Theologian Paul Tillich writes that faith requires separation from the object of one's faith. Without that separation, he argues, one would have certainty¹². Following a parallel secular theme, Auden suggests that murder is necessary to a strong detective story because it is the only crime in which society has an interest that "abolishes" the victim¹³, or separates him or her from the novel's primary investigator. If the victim were present, little detection would be needed; one need only ask the victim what happened. While the needs of a murder investigation can be replicated to an extent if the victim is merely missing or incapacitated, a significant percentage of crime fiction, including *Mayor of Hollywood*, tends to incorporate murder. Similarly, since the mystical journey requires that the mystic believes in the possibility of uniting with the object of his or her faith, the acceptance of some sort of life after death is helpful, if not entirely necessary. Certainly Kerouac's writing embraces the Catholic concept of heaven, a place his protagonist's brother glimpses briefly before dying¹⁴.

In this way, both crime fiction and Kerouac's spiritual writing can be seen as parallel attempts to bridge the gulf that death places between the protagonist and what Tillich calls the object of one's faith or ultimate concern¹⁵. For the detective in crime fiction, that object is the resolution of the mystery surrounding the central murder. For the mystic, the object is the bridging of the gulf between him or herself and the divine: a gulf that can otherwise only be crossed after death. In describing the intensity of his need to investigate crimes, Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes makes a comparison that could equally apply to crime fiction detectives and mystics: "My mind is like a racing engine, tearing itself to pieces because it is not connected up with the

⁹ Erb, p. 46.

¹⁰ Chesterton's Father Brown, Eco's William of Baskerville, Frazer's Dame Frevisse, Greeley's Father Ryan, and Pargeter's Brother Cadfael are all members of religious communities. Jennings' William Murdoch faces prejudice as a Catholic member of the predominantly Protestant Canadian Constabulary in Victorian Toronto; Sanders' Matt Scudder tithes to Christian churches in atonement for accidentally shooting a young girl; Kellerman's Peter Decker must reconcile his work as a homicide detective with a conversion to orthodox Judaism; and James' Adam Dalgliesh is the son of an Anglican minister.

¹¹ *Mayor of Hollywood* is the title of the novel excerpted in the creative portion of this thesis.

¹² P. Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* (New York: 2001), p. 116.

¹³ Auden, p. 149.

¹⁴ J. Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard* (New York: 1991), p. 53.

¹⁵ Tillich, p. 2.

work for which it was built”¹⁶. That intensity of feeling finds expression in Kerouac’s novel *Big Sur*, in which the protagonist’s inability to sustain his mystical journey brings him to near complete psychological collapse. As his spiritual quest falters, his mind begins to ‘tear’ at itself.

Given the general parallels that can be identified between crime fiction and the mystical journey that forms the focus of Kerouac’s novels, it is not surprising that more specific comparisons can be drawn. One recurring theme in Kerouac’s writing is the dual role of mind-altering substances: to facilitate the spiritual experience and to blunt the intensity of the emotions generated. Similarly, certain forms of crime fiction—particularly American hardboiled detective novels of the interwar era and contemporary writers, like Ian Rankin and Lawrence Sanders, who draw heavily from the hardboiled subgenre—use mind-altering substances both as a means for obtaining the truth and as a tool for preventing mental collapse under the weight of a life spent detecting crime.

William James suggests that alcohol is a natural partner in the mystical quest because it ‘stimulates the mystical faculties in human nature’ and enables the mind to open itself to new experiences¹⁷. In *The Dharma Bums*, Kerouac’s protagonist Ray Smith begins the novel sharing wine and spiritual conversation with a fellow traveller¹⁸. Later, Smith argues the merits of wine in the quest for spiritual enlightenment with his friend Japhy Ryder¹⁹. In the opening pages of *Big Sur*, Jack Duluoz²⁰ reveals that he has used ayahuasca, mescaline and peyote in the years since the events described in *Desolation Angels* to trigger mystical visions²¹. As Duluoz begins to collapse under the weight of his mystical journey, he uses wine to mask the unpleasant thoughts and emotions generated by his spiritual explorations: retreating to his girlfriend’s house and drinking until his chair collapses beneath him²².

While Sherlock Holmes uses both cocaine and morphine between cases, apparently to alleviate boredom, references to this in Doyle’s stories are sporadic, and it is in the early works of the hardboiled tradition that alcohol assumes a similar role to that employed by Kerouac. Of the hardboiled writers, Dashiell Hammett’s use of alcohol produces the clearest comparison. In his early novels, alcohol serves as a tool for acquiring information that will aid in solving the case, and the unnamed Continental Agency detective of *Red Harvest* and *The Dain Curse* regularly plies his sources with liquor. This correlation between inebriation and truth-telling reaches its pinnacle in *The Maltese Falcon*, where nearly every clue Sam Spade unearths is obtained while alcohol is being consumed. Gutman, the ‘fat man’ behind the quest for the Maltese Falcon, vocalizes the connection between inebriation and truth repeatedly during his

¹⁶ A. Doyle, *Sherlock Holmes: the Complete Novels and Stories, Volume 1* (New York, 2003), p. 326.

¹⁷ W. James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York, 2008), p. 271.

¹⁸ J. Kerouac, *The Dharma Bums* (London, 2006), pp. 7-8.

¹⁹ *The Dharma Bums*, pp. 158-160.

²⁰ Ray Smith and Jack Duluoz are the same protagonist. Kerouac included all four books explored in this thesis—*Visions of Gerard*, *The Dharma Bums*, *Desolation Angels*, and *Big Sur*—in the list of his ‘Duluoz Legend’ novels sent to his agent Sterling Lord. It was Kerouac’s intention to ultimately republish all of his ‘Duluoz Legend’ novels with a consistent set of character names. A. Charters (ed.), *Jack Kerouac, Selected Letters 1957-1969*, p. 326.

²¹ J. Kerouac, *Big Sur* (New York, 1992), p. 7.

²² *Big Sur*, pp. 157-173.

negotiations with Spade, suggesting that men who don't drink freely are liars²³ and raising his whiskey glass in a toast to 'plain speaking and clear understanding'²⁴.

However, in Hammett's final novel, *The Thin Man*, protagonist Nick Charles has retired from private detection and actively resists investigating the disappearance of Clyde Wynant. In this last book, the protagonist appears to find the sharing of truths painful and drinks heavily when he can no longer prevent others from giving him clues about Wynant. Early in the novel, he urges his wife to drink and sleep when she tries to discuss the case with him²⁵. As the novel progresses, Charles is unable to extricate himself from the investigation and resorts to drinking almost continually. Ultimately, despite his own best efforts, Charles determines that Wynant is dead. Even now that the case is resolved, he appears unable to tell the story without the buffer of inebriation, telling his wife Nora, 'I'd have to have a drink before I could do any talking'²⁶. Although his investigation is secular rather than spiritual, Nick Charles turns to alcohol to inoculate himself from the truths he has learned. In *Big Sur*, Kerouac's Duluoz follows a similar path, embarking on numerous major drinking binges throughout the novel: during the opening pages as a means of forestalling his spiritual retreat²⁷ and throughout the middle of the novel to alleviate the pain he suffers after abandoning his secluded cabin²⁸.

A second link between crime fiction and Kerouac's spiritual novels is the influence of the dead on the living. When a murder forms the impetus of a detective story, the victim exerts a strong influence over the detective, whether that victim was beloved or despised. Even ratiocinative detectives like C. Auguste Dupin, Sherlock Holmes, and Hercule Poirot—who engage more often with environmental clues than the personal history of the victim—must endlessly circle the deceased since without him or her there is no crime and no surrounding mystery. Auden suggests that this is because murder is the only crime for which society must stand in for the victim, since the dead lack the power to forgive the criminal or demand atonement²⁹. Even in hardboiled novels that begin with a crime other than murder, a death is often vital to securing the detective's involvement in the case. Hammett's *The Maltese Falcon* is nearly half finished before Sam Spade knows what Brigid O'Shaughnessy and Joe Cairo want him to find; it is the death of his partner, Miles Archer, that guarantees Spade's continued engagement in the mystery. In Raymond Chandler's *The Big Sleep*, Philip Marlowe's original case resolves itself in a few chapters when Marlowe finds the original blackmailer dead³⁰. His clients, the Sternwood family, quickly demonstrate that they neither need nor deserve his protection. It is the ongoing murders that motivate Marlowe, who demands killer Carmen Sternwood's psychiatric commitment as ultimate payment for his largely unsolicited services³¹.

²³ D. Hammett, *Hammett: Complete Novels* (New York, 1999), p. 481.

²⁴ Hammett, p. 485.

²⁵ Hammett, pp. 790-791.

²⁶ Hammett, p. 939.

²⁷ *Big Sur*, pp. 3-8.

²⁸ *Big Sur*, pp. 86-173.

²⁹ Auden, p. 149.

³⁰ R. Chandler, *The Big Sleep* (New York, 1992), p. 36.

³¹ Chandler, pp. 228-230.

While there are no murders in the Kerouac novels explored in this thesis, a death described in the first line of the first novel, *Visions of Gerard*—that of nine-year-old Gerard Duluoz—exerts a powerful influence over Kerouac’s ‘Duluoz Legend.’ As is discussed in more detail in chapter one of this thesis, Gerard represents the protagonist Jack Duluoz’ link to God and heaven, and his death triggers Jack Duluoz/Ray Smith’s dark night of the soul: the mystical journey explored in *The Dharma Bums*, *Desolation Angels*, and *Big Sur*. Further, the collapse of Duluoz’ dark night of the soul finds expression in the dismantling of Gerard’s perceived divinity, as the image of the saintly older brother is usurped by the demonic child Elliot, whom Duluoz symbolically buries at the conclusion of *Big Sur*. This resolution of Gerard’s ‘legend’ is addressed more fully in chapter four of this thesis. Without Gerard, Duluoz/Smith would have neither the prior experience of the presence of the divine nor the loss of that presence necessary for a dark night of the soul experience.

The final link between crime fiction and Kerouac’s spiritual novels to be addressed here is the theme of isolation. While Peter Messant suggests that the ‘collective agency’ of the police procedural has supplanted the individual detective in contemporary crime fiction³², true detective teams, like P.D. James’ Special Investigations Squad and Ed McBain’s 87th Precinct, comprise a relatively small segment of crime fiction, which is still dominated by relatively solitary detectives. Even those who operate within the system, like Ian Rankin’s John Rebus or Kathy Reichs’ Tempe Brennan, generally experience some form of isolation from their colleagues. Ratiocinative detectives of the Golden Age typically found themselves set apart by their exceptional deductive skills, while hardboiled private investigators often rejected police departments they perceived as either corrupt or inept. Dennis Porter links the concept of the ‘private eye’ to other solitary archetypes, like the frontier explorer or the cowboy, suggesting that the very term ‘private eye’ conjures the idea of an ‘eye that trusts no other’³³. At the conclusion of *The Big Sleep*, Raymond Chandler suggests, through his protagonist Philip Marlowe, that the very act of investigating the crimes of others isolates the detective, even after the case has been resolved. ‘Me, I was part of the nastiness now’ laments Marlowe³⁴. He knows that the dead are beyond suffering and that his client lacks the moral capacity to experience any pain or guilt. As the lone witness to the damage wrought by the Sternwood family, Marlowe must carry the burden alone.

Similarly, Kerouac’s Jack Duluoz experiences both physical and psychological isolation as a consequence of his dark night of the soul. As will be discussed in more detail in the introduction to the research portion of the thesis, the dark night of the soul is comprised of two parts: the night of sense and the night of spirit. Duluoz begins his night of sense with a summer-long solitary retreat to a fire watch post during the first half of *Desolation Angels*. Later, in *Big Sur*, Duluoz begins his night of spirit with a shorter retreat to a cabin in Raton Canyon. However, even when Duluoz is in the company of others, his isolation persists because none of his peers are likewise experiencing a dark night of the soul. Even his *The Dharma Bums* friend, Japhy Ryder,

³² P. Messant (ed.), *Criminal Proceedings: The Contemporary American Crime Novel* (Chicago, 1997), p. 12.

³³ Priestman (ed.), p. 95.

³⁴ Chandler, p. 230.

cannot join him on his mystical quest. While Duluoz/Smith heads to his fire watch retreat, Ryder boards a boat to study Buddhism in a Japanese monastery³⁵. The fact that Ryder's spiritual quest takes him into a community of monks while Duluoz/Smith's journey takes him to a remote mountain cabin enhances his sense of isolation.

Ultimately then, crime fiction and Kerouac's exploration of the dark night of the soul represent parallel attempts to bridge the gulf between life and death. My novel, *Mayor of Hollywood*, is primarily crime fiction; however, it does link the spiritual and secular through its protagonist, Lucy Cassidy, and her lover Mark Adamson. While attempting to solve a double-murder, Lucy is confronted with Mark's Catholicism and its impact both on their relationship and his feelings about his career in law enforcement. Additionally, mind-altering substances, the influence of the dead, and isolation of the protagonist all play roles in the novel in varying measures. In the first half of the novel—the portion presented for this thesis—Mark's partner, Leo Freed, abuses prescription drugs and alcohol to blunt the grief caused by his wife's death. Later in the novel, in juxtaposition to Hammett's use of alcohol as a tool for solving crimes, drugs are revealed as a key tool used to facilitate the crime itself: both enabling the killer to control the victims and manipulate witnesses. Lucy's investigation is also influenced by the victim Ken Greene, whom she knew from her days as a teen actress. In the second half of the novel, the death of a friend secures her ongoing engagement with the murder, despite looming career problems brought on by the appearance of doctored photographs in the media. Finally, Lucy experiences several forms of isolation throughout the novel: her lack of religious faith alienates her at times from Mark; her celebrity status limits her ability to interact with the world in general, particularly after the doctored photos are released; and her decision to pursue an academic career sets her apart from her entertainment industry acquaintances. So while she is certainly not a lone investigator in the tradition of Sam Spade or Philip Marlowe, neither is she ever entirely free of barriers between herself and her friends and family.

So ultimately, *Mayor of Hollywood* explores the opposite side of the religious coin from the interior spiritual journey highlighted in Kerouac's novels. Lucy Cassidy has little compelling interest in her own spiritual existence but must address the practicalities of Mark Adamson's Catholicism, including dietary restrictions, regular worship, moral strictures, and the religious formalization of the guilt process. At the same time, Lucy and Mark must resolve the deaths that have occurred, substituting the secular path of crime detection for the more spiritual quest to reunite with God. Brought together around the shared topic of death, the two halves of this thesis address the various ways that crime fiction and Kerouac's novels explore attempts to bridge the gulf between the living and the dead, and the seeker and the truth, created by death.

³⁵ *The Dharma Bums*, p. 127.

INTRODUCTION

Concepts of faith permeate the writings of ‘Beat’¹ author Jack Kerouac. Visualizing the majority of his novels as part of a single cohesive work he referred to as the ‘Duluoz Legend’, Kerouac traced the evolution of his protagonist Jack Duluoz across eleven novels, beginning with *Visions of Gerard* and concluding with *Big Sur*. *Satori in Paris* functioned as a sort of epilogue to the series. It was Kerouac’s intention, as expressed to his agent, Sterling Lord, to ultimately republish all the novels as a single body of work with a consistent set of character names², presumably renaming Sal Paradise of *On the Road* and Ray Smith of *The Dharma Bums* as Jack Duluoz.

The religious themes in Kerouac’s novels have been addressed by a number of scholars. In a general commentary about Beat authors, Stephen Prothero calls Beat protagonists ‘wandering (and writing) *bhikkus* who scour the earth in a never fully satisfied attempt to find a place to rest’³. Alan Miller touches on a similar concept in his discussion of religious themes in *The Dharma Bums*, noting that protagonist Ray Smith’s religion ‘emphasizes the solitary nature of the journey toward enlightenment’⁴. John Lardas examines the influence of Oswald Spengler’s *The Decline of the West* on the ‘Beats’ in *The Bop Apocalypse: The Religious Visions of Kerouac, Ginsberg, and Burroughs*⁵. Benedict Giomo explores the role of Buddhism in Kerouac’s writing in his book *Kerouac, the Word and the Way: Prose Artist as Spiritual Quester*⁶, and James Terrence Fisher places Kerouac within the tradition of Catholic writers in *The Catholic Counterculture in America: 1933-1962*⁷. However, analysis of Kerouac’s writings as part of a unified spiritual progression is comparatively recent. Isaac Gewirtz gives a comprehensive timeline of Kerouac’s written progression through Catholicism, atheism and Buddhism in his book, *Beatific Soul: Jack Kerouac on the Road*⁸, which focuses on analysing the collection of Kerouac’s personal papers acquired by the New York Public Library in 2001. Gewirtz’ chapter, ‘The Buddhist-Christian’, lays the groundwork for an exploration of Kerouac’s blended ‘Beat’ faith, which incorporates both Buddhism and Catholicism.

Kerouac sought continually to blur the lines between himself and the ‘Legend of Duluoz’, often attributing his own novels to Jack Duluoz within the pages of his books, and occasionally naming himself—Jack Kerouac—as the protagonist, as he did in *Satori in Paris*. This merging of life and fiction has made scholarship of Kerouac’s

¹ Discussions of the ‘Beats’ generally focus on Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, and William S. Burroughs, occasionally incorporating John Clellon Holmes, Gregory Corso, and other American writers of the period.

² *Jack Kerouac, Selected Letters 1957-1969*, p. 326.

³ S. Prothero, ‘On the Holy Road: The Beat Movement as Spiritual Protest’, *Harvard Theological Review* 94.2 (1991), p. 211.

⁴ A. Miller, ‘Ritual Aspects of Narrative: An Analysis of Jack Kerouac’s the Dharma Bums’, *Journal of Ritual Studies* 9.1 (1995), p. 48.

⁵ J. Lardas, *The Bop Apocalypse: The Religious Visions of Kerouac, Ginsberg, and Burroughs* (Urbana and Chicago, 2000).

⁶ B. Giomo, *Kerouac, the Word and the Way: Prose Artist as Spiritual Quester* (Carbondale and Edwardsville, Illinois, 2002).

⁷ J. Fisher, *The Catholic Counterculture in America, 1933-1962* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 1999).

⁸ I. Gewirtz, *Beatific Soul: Jack Kerouac on the Road* (London, 2007), pp. 149-169.

prose a complex matter. Neither truly fiction nor autobiography, the books are perhaps best described using Kerouac's own term: legend.

Four 'Legend' novels—*Visions of Gerard*, *The Dharma Bums*, *Desolation Angels* and *Big Sur*—focus specifically on Duluoz' spiritual journey from religious ideology absorbed during early childhood to an acute spiritual crisis in his mid-30s. While past scholarship has examined this journey as a shift from Catholicism to Buddhism and back to Catholicism, this monograph will examine the four novels as part of the evolution of a blended spirituality: Kerouac's 'Beat' faith. As a framework for this exploration, the Catholic concept of the 'dark night of the soul', as presented in the writings of 16th Century mystic St. John of the Cross, as well as Kerouac contemporary Thomas Merton, will be used.

Beat Faith

In 1940s Manhattan, 'Beat' was a slang term used within the drug world to refer to having been 'reduced to one's essentials'⁹. Kerouac was introduced to the term by friend Herbert Hunke¹⁰, and over time he expanded this definition of 'beat' in a number of directions. In John Clellon Holmes' 1952 novel, *Go*, Gene Pasternak—a fictional version of Kerouac—describes 'Beat' as 'a sort of revolution of the soul' and calls 'Beats' those who 'go along the street as if they were guilty of something, but didn't believe in guilt'¹¹. In a 1957 essay entitled 'About the Beat Generation,' Kerouac defined 'Beat' as 'down and out but full of intense conviction'¹² and suggested that the members of the Beat Generation represented a 'deeper religiousness, the desire to be ... "high," ecstatic, saved, as if the visions of the cloistered saints of Chartres and Clairvaux were back with us again'¹³. In his 1958 essay 'Lamb, No Lion,' Kerouac refined his definition of 'Beat' once more into a form that remained relatively consistent throughout the rest of his writing career, writing that 'Beat doesn't mean tired, or bushed, so much as it means *beato*, the Italian for beatific: to be in a state of beatitude, like St. Francis'¹⁴. In this way, he imbued 'Beat' with a double-meaning: encompassing its contemporary slang definition of being physically stripped of all but the essentials of life and the spiritual concept of beatitude, or blessedness.

In analyses of 'Beat' Generation religious themes, Kerouac's work is often grouped together with the writings of Allen Ginsberg and William S. Burroughs, suggesting a cohesive framework among the three, in which the concept of the divine is stretched to encompass perceptions of post-war America and the mind expansion brought on through drug use. In this religious paradigm, 'pure experience propels visions through and beyond the fog of symbols' inherent in formal spiritual doctrine¹⁵.

⁹ P. Maher, *Kerouac: His Life and Work* (Lanham, MD, 2004), pp. 135-136.

¹⁰ *Kerouac: His Life and Work*, p. 135.

¹¹ J. Holmes, *Go* (New York: 1997), p. 36.

¹² A. Charters (ed.), *The Portable Jack Kerouac* (New York, 2007), p. 559.

¹³ *The Portable Jack Kerouac*, p. 562.

¹⁴ *The Portable Jack Kerouac*, p. 562.

¹⁵ Lardas, p. 8.

In this way, although Kerouac was a Buddhist-Catholic, Ginsberg was a Buddhist, and Burroughs embraced no formal religion beyond a short flirtation with Scientology, all three men are perceived as following parallel spiritual paths toward enlightenment. Kerouac's writing certainly has much in common tonally with the work of Ginsberg and Burroughs. However, Lardas' suggestion in *The Bop Apocalypse* that 'the Beats did not put forth a coherent religious system of creeds and doctrines'¹⁶ does not hold true for Kerouac. Indeed, he set out to elucidate his religious doctrine time and again, in works such as *Visions of Gerard*, *The Dharma Bums*, and *Scripture of the Golden Eternity*, as well as in published articles and private journals, much of which was later published as *Some of the Dharma*. Kerouac's spirituality may have been a personal path, but it was a specific one, focused on resolving key issues of faith and divinity that recur throughout his writing.

Part of the difficulty inherent in examining 'Beat' faith in Kerouac's novels stems from the evolving distortions of the label 'Beat', which began during Kerouac's lifetime and continued after his death. Indeed, Lardas notes that:

Beat is still degraded and contested, referring alternately to a pre-hippie youth movement and to almost any artist who had anti-establishment credentials and lived in or around New York City or San Francisco in the late 1950s.¹⁷

Given this stretched understanding of what it meant to be 'Beat', it's understandable that Kerouac struggled to restore some sort of integrity to the term he had launched on the world, and at times he seemed to contradict himself. In the introduction to a collection of travel essays published in 1960, he stated, '[I] Am actually not 'beat' but strange solitary Catholic mystic...'¹⁸ However, at the time those comments were written, Kerouac was battling against being labelled as the avatar of the *beatnik* movement,¹⁹ a trend that was linked with a number of ideologies he found distasteful, most notably political liberalism. Given that the comment was included in the introduction to one of Kerouac's more commercially appealing books—a collection of essays about life on the road—his rejection of the label 'Beat' can be viewed as an attempt to clarify briefly a point with his likely audience using *their* understanding of 'Beat', not his. In fact, one need look no further than the 'Beatific' article Kerouac wrote for *Playboy* in 1959, around the same time he wrote the introduction to *Lonesome Traveler*, to see that he very much aligned himself spiritually with 'Beat'-ness, provided that the term was defined according to his intentions. Reacting to a decision by *Mademoiselle* to erase a crucifix he wore in a photo shoot, Kerouac said:

¹⁶ Lardas, p. 6.

¹⁷ Lardas, p. 19.

¹⁸ J. Kerouac, *Lonesome Traveler* (London, 2000), p. 9.

¹⁹ J. Kerouac, 'Beatific: On the Origin of the Beat Generation', in A. Charters (ed.), *The Portable Jack Kerouac* (New York, 2007), p. 571.

It is because I am Beat, that is, I believe in beatitude and that God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son to it...In fact who knows but that it isn't the solitude of the oneness of the essence of everything...that blazing bliss, *Mattivajrakaruna* the Transcendental Diamond Compassion! No, I want to speak *for* things, for the crucifix...for the Star of Israel...for the divinest man who ever lived who was a German (Bach)...for sweet Mohammed...for Buddha...for Lao-tse and Chuang-tse...for D.T. Suzuki...This is Beat²⁰.

In light of these comments, in which Kerouac explicitly links the term 'Beat' with both Catholicism and Buddhism, among other religions and philosophies, it seems clear that Kerouac *did* see his spirituality as inextricably linked with 'Beat', even during periods when he sought to distance himself from public distortions of the term. And while others might co-opt the word to encompass their own ecstatic spirituality or anti-establishment political leanings, Kerouac retained his personal understanding of 'Beat' faith, a concept he explored in depth in his faith novels.

Dark Night of the Soul

This thesis will focus on one of the Catholic components of Kerouac's depiction of 'Beat' faith in his writing—the dark night of the soul—although it is also possible to see a link to Buddhist philosophy. Certainly Kerouac's inherent negative capability²¹ allowed for this overlapping of two apparently distinct spiritual systems. For while a rigid interpretation of the first of the ten commandments would preclude the infusion of Catholicism with Buddhist ideas²², Kerouac did not view Catholicism and Buddhism as mutually exclusive. Further, in his study of mysticism, F.C. Happold suggests that individuals can experience mystical states even if they could not be considered religious 'Contemplatives' in the formal sense²³.

In his Buddhist-inspired verse, Kerouac incorporated a very succinct description of the Catholic dark night of the soul into verse 22 of his *Scripture of the Golden Eternity*, when he wrote:

...While looking for the light, you
may suddenly be devoured by the darkness

²⁰ 'Beatific: On the Origin of the Beat Generation', p. 566.

²¹ Poet John Keats' theory of negative capability refers to the capacity by some individuals to accept uncertainty and ideas that are not completely resolved.

²² 'The Old Testament,' *The New American Bible* (New York, 1992), p. 98.

²³ F. Happold, *Mysticism: A Study and an Anthology* (Baltimore, 1967, pp. 38-39).

and find the true light²⁴.

The phrase ‘dark night of the soul’ refers to a poem and related writings by 16th Century Spanish mystic St. John of the Cross, a co-founder, with St. Teresa of Avila, of a reformed order of Carmelite friars and nuns. While the phrase is frequently used to describe any extended crisis of Catholic faith, it actually refers more specifically to the experience of a devout believer who, having previously felt the divine light of the presence of God, is plunged into spiritual darkness. It is not a traditional crisis of faith in that the sufferer never questions the existence of God. He or she believes that God exists and remains devoted to him, but no longer feels God’s direct presence. The experience is thought to purify the soul and ready it for a reunion with God in heaven.

I propose that the ‘Duluoz Legend’ novels chronicle a spiritual journey similar to the ‘dark night of the soul’: a journey that ultimately overwhelms the eponymous protagonist Jack Duluoz. That Duluoz’s experience brings him ultimately to spiritual collapse does not lessen the impact of Kerouac’s writings on the subject. Rather, it guides us to a deeper appreciation of the voyage of spiritual discovery that Kerouac began within the pages of *Visions of Gerard*: a journey that ultimately caused his protagonist to be devoured by the darkness, never to recapture the true light.

Connecting the writings of a 16th Century Carmelite friar to a 20th Century writer from a Massachusetts mill town does not require as many steps as one might think. Allen Ginsberg mentioned John of the Cross in his landmark poem, ‘Howl’, and wrote a letter to his Aunt Hannah in 1958 in which he described ‘Beat’ and the ‘dark night of the soul’ as parallel experiences²⁵. For his part, Kerouac felt a strong kinship with St. John’s friend and mentor, St. Teresa of Avila, and kept one of her prayers on his wall during the final years of his life²⁶. Beyond that, Kerouac frequently referenced another Carmelite nun, St. Thérèse of Lisieux, in his writing. St. Thérèse, whose shower of roses is a recurring motif in Kerouac’s work, was known to suffer intermittently from the ‘dark night’ throughout her adult life.²⁷ These connections, Kerouac’s Catholic heritage, and his occasional description of himself as a Catholic mystic²⁸ make a compelling argument that he was very familiar with the ‘dark night of the soul’ experience.

In his book *Dark Night of the Soul*, St. John of the Cross describes three distinct phases in the dark night contemplative journey: the state of the beginner who has yet to enter the ‘dark night’; the ‘night of sense’, in which the passions of the soul are lulled to sleep; and the ‘night of spirit’, in which the soul is flooded by divine light. Chapter One of this monograph addresses the foundation of Kerouac’s ‘Beat’ faith as presented in *Visions of Gerard*. Chapter Two proceeds to the depiction of Jack Duluoz/Ray Smith²⁹

²⁴ J. Kerouac, *The Scripture of the Golden Eternity* (San Francisco, 1994), p. 32.

²⁵ B. Morgan (ed.), *The Letters of Allen Ginsberg* (Philadelphia, 2008), p. 188.

²⁶ P. Maher Jr., *Kerouac: His Life and Work* (Maryland, 2007), p. 462.

²⁷ V. Sackville-West, *The Eagle and the Dove: A Study in Contrasts* (London, 1943), p. 157.

²⁸ *Lonesome Traveler*, p. 9.

as a beginning contemplative. Chapter Three examines Duluoz' 'night of sense' experience in *Desolation Angels*. Finally, Chapter Four traces Duluoz' progression to the 'night of spirit', as well as his ultimate spiritual collapse. Read together, the four analysed novels trace a unified spiritual journey from the death of the protagonist's earliest spiritual mentor to the conclusion of his dark night of the soul.

CHAPTER I: *VISIONS OF GERARD*—UNIFYING KEROUAC’S BEAT FAITH

In *Visions of Gerard*, Kerouac distills his intense, at times desperate, quest for spiritual transcendence into a chronicle of the relationship between four-year-old Jack Duluoz and his dying elder brother Gerard. It is significant that Kerouac chose the word ‘Visions’ and not ‘Life’ or ‘Memories’ for the novel’s title. Kerouac’s own brother, François Gerard Kerouac, died of rheumatic fever when Kerouac was four years old and Gerard was nine¹. As Kerouac admitted in a letter to his sister Nin in 1945, his only true memory of his own brother was of being slapped across the face by the older boy². Kerouac appears to have viewed this memory, which stood in sharp contrast to family recollections of Gerard as a kind—even saintly—child, as proof of his own spiritual inferiority to the lost sibling. Similarly, Duluoz expresses his belief in the novel that he was for a short time in the presence of divinity on earth, permitted briefly ‘to bask in eternal bliss...like a Fallen Angel’ in the glow cast off by Gerard³.

Yet *Visions of Gerard* is much more than thinly veiled biography. Indeed, the depiction of Gerard in the novel deviates in many ways from the one included in a series of letters Kerouac wrote to his friend Neal Cassady in 1950⁴. In these early letters, which Kerouac describes as “a full confession of my life”⁵, Gerard is presented much more ambivalently than in the finished novel; he is described both as a ‘saint’⁶ and a terrifying, hateful creature who rose in the night ‘like a ghost from his bed of miseries’ to stare at Kerouac in his crib⁷. Stories of normal, boyish pranks recounted in the letters⁸ are dropped from the novel, leaving an impression of a perfect, larger than life brother. Rather than being a memoir, the novel is instead a gathering of the disparate threads of Kerouac’s personal faith, bringing his Catholic upbringing, his Buddhist studies, and his mythologized understanding of his elder brother to present a unified picture of Kerouac’s perception of divinity and the shadow it cast throughout his life. Far more than *On the Road* or *The Dharma Bums*, *Visions of Gerard* presents the ‘Beat’ faith Kerouac described in his essays: casting Gerard Duluoz as a boy both beatified and reduced to his essentials.

Theologian Paul Tillich defines faith as ‘the state of being ultimately concerned’ with the object of one’s faith and suggested that ‘it is also the promise of ultimate fulfilment which is accepted in the act of faith’⁹. Tillich’s definition of faith creates a valuable framework for examining Kerouac’s writing because it does not rely on a particular religion, although Tillich himself was Protestant. Kerouac’s ‘Beat’ faith can incorporate Buddhism, Catholicism, and family history without conflict. ‘The question of faith’, says Tillich, ‘is not Moses or Jesus or Mohammed; the question is: Who

¹ Kerouac, *His Life and Work*, p. 19.

² A. Charters (ed.), *Jack Kerouac: Selected Letters 1940-1956* (New York, 1996), p. 87.

³ J. Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard* (London, 1991), p. 67.

⁴ *Jack Kerouac: Selected Letters 1940-1956*, pp. 246-306.

⁵ *Jack Kerouac: Selected Letters 1940-1956*, p. 246.

⁶ *Jack Kerouac: Selected Letters 1940-1956*, p. 252.

⁷ *Jack Kerouac: Selected Letters 1940-1956*, p. 256.

⁸ *Jack Kerouac: Selected Letters 1940-1956*, pp. 255-256.

⁹ P. Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* (New York, 2001), pp. 1-2.

expresses most adequately one's ultimate concern?'¹⁰ This nondenominational understanding of faith typified Kerouac's treatment of spiritual matters in his work. Although the content of the belief system he expressed evolved over the course of the novels, Duluoz' 'ultimate concern' for the potential deification of his soul remained constant and intense—at times, unbearably so. For Kerouac's protagonist, the central problem was not whether to believe, for Duluoz simply can not do otherwise, but rather how to harness that belief in order to reduce psychic pain: the 'ultimate fulfilment' on which Duluoz rests his spiritual hopes.

Furthering the groundwork established by Tillich, the work of Dr. James Fowler, whose structuring of faith similarly does not require allegiance to a particular religion or spiritual system, is also useful in evaluating Kerouac's 'Beat' faith in *Visions of Gerard*. Fowler's six-stage evolution of faith¹¹ explicitly allows for the shifting and blending of specific religions within a unified progression of faith development—identifying the fifth stage—conjunctive—as having particular potential for this kind of personally-constructed faith, in which the individual incorporates aspects of complementary belief systems without necessarily abandoning his or her core faith. Specifically, Fowler states that 'Conjunctive faith, therefore, is ready for significant encounters with other traditions than its own, expecting that truth has disclosed and will disclose itself in those traditions in ways that may complement or correct its own'.¹² Taken in this context, the blending of Buddhist and Catholic concepts throughout *Visions of Gerard* is not contradictory, but rather indicative of Duluoz' conjunctive 'Beat' faith, which incorporate both.

The recounting, in *Visions of Gerard*, of life as it might have been, rather than as it truly occurred, was a cornerstone of Kerouac's writing style: one that caused regular friction with friends and lovers, and ongoing disputes with his publishers' lawyers. Such was his 'ultimate concern' with exploring the mind and the soul that he simply could not understand why others would obsess over matching factual accounts to the people he wrote about. If the accounts were emotionally honest, what did it matter if they had not literally occurred as written? In his discussion of faith, Tillich also makes this distinction when relating stories from the Christian Bible to verifiable historical accounts: 'The truth of faith cannot be made dependant on the historical truth of the stories and legends in which faith has expressed itself'.¹³

This distinction between historical truth and spiritual truth assists in the appreciation of Kerouac's writing. *Visions of Gerard* is no memoir; rather, it is an attempt to reconcile the family myth that grew around Gerard Kerouac's memory—steeped in Catholicism and parental mourning for a lost son—with Kerouac's personal need to create a personal representation of sainthood against which to measure himself and his spiritual progress. Historically, Catholic sainthood is conferred by the Vatican

¹⁰ Tillich, p. 76.

¹¹ The six stages of faith identified by Fowler are: infancy and undifferentiated, intuitive-projective, mythic-literal, synthetic-conventional, individuative-reflective, conjunctive, and universalizing. J.W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* (New York, 1995).

¹² Fowler, p. 186.

¹³ Tillich, p. 100.

following established guidelines¹⁴, not by an individual's family members. Yet Kerouac chooses to reinterpret sainthood as a state of elevated spirituality, in which the saint has a direct connection with God not possessed by the average person. Through Kerouac's writing, Gerard Duluo becomes simultaneously God and Buddha made word, if not flesh. Since Gerard's 'sainthood' does not rely on Vatican recognition, it also opens the door to the possibility that others, including Jack Duluo, might similarly be able to achieve sainthood. Kerouac doesn't completely abandon the need to external validation though. In the opening pages of the novel, the Catholic nuns of St. Louis de France record Gerard's dying words, drawn by his earlier 'revelations of heaven'¹⁵. He also hints that Gerard can perform miracles: a historical requirement for Catholic sainthood. During his long illnesses, birds that seem to 'know him personally' visit Gerard at his sickbed¹⁶. Kerouac's depiction of sainthood, then, is a modification, not a complete redefining of Catholic sainthood.

By the time Kerouac sat down to write *Visions of Gerard*, his sense of the divine had progressed from the tacit acceptance of Catholic dogma passed on by the nuns at Saint Louis de France Parochial School during his childhood through what Dr. Fowler refers to as the fourth stage of faith: the individuative-reflective stage. In this stage, the individual begins to reflect critically on the components of his faith and shifts allegiance from an external authority to one's own conscience¹⁷. A former altar boy¹⁸, Kerouac began a study of Buddhism in 1954, eventually writing a history of Gautama Buddha and an original sutra of his own: *The Scripture of the Golden Eternity*. While he greatly respected D.T. Suzuki and other Zen Buddhist scholars, he acknowledged no spiritual leader, nor did he align himself specifically with Zen. In *The Dharma Bums*, he expressed a preference for Mahayana Buddhism, and he reiterated this position in a 1968 interview for the *Paris Review*, referring to Zen as 'what's left of his [Buddha's] Buddhism, or Bodhi, after its passing into China and then into Japan... a gentle but goofy form of heresy'¹⁹. This willingness to diverge from contemporary mainstream Western interpretations of Buddhist philosophy brought him into conflict with many of his Buddhist peers after the publication of *The Dharma Bums*. Among Kerouac's critics was author Alan Watts, who referred to Kerouac as having 'Zen flesh but no Zen bones'²⁰.

Even during his most active Buddhist phase, which ended in 1957, Kerouac's writing continued to be infused with his Catholic heritage, and this spiritual hybrid influenced much of his writing from 1954 until his death in 1969. *Visions of Gerard*,

¹⁴ Pope Benedict VIII consolidated these guidelines in his work *De Servorum Dei beatificatione et de Beatorum canonizatione*, which, in turn, was incorporated into the *Code of Canon Law* in 1917. Among other guidelines, a candidate for Catholic sainthood must be credited by the Vatican with having worked miracles before and after death. J. Paul, 'Apostolic Constitution: Divinus Perfectionis Magister', www.vatican.va, (1983).

¹⁵ J. Kerouac, *Visions of Gerard* (New York: 1991), p. 1.

¹⁶ *Visions of Gerard*, p. 19.

¹⁷ Fowler, p. 179.

¹⁸ Kerouac, *His Life and Work*, p. 29.

¹⁹ P. Maher Jr. (ed.), *Empty Phantoms: Interviews and Encounters with Jack Kerouac* (New York, 2005), pp. 302-3.

²⁰ J. Kerouac, *The Dharma Bums* (New York and London, 2007), p. xvi.

written in 1956 and published in 1963, merges the concepts Kerouac idealized most from the overlapping spiritual systems into the person of Gerard. More importantly, the book illuminates Kerouac's growing spiritual crisis, which would eventually lead to the abandonment of his Buddhist studies and the mental breakdown documented in *Big Sur*. For while his pious brother embodies the spiritual ideal in *Visions of Gerard*, the author Kerouac imprisons his own fictionalized self in the body and mind of a toddler who can only comprehend a fraction of what Gerard attempts to show him. This mirrors his own spiritual development at the time; through his Buddhist studies, he had been exposed to concepts that were beyond his emotional capacity, even if he could understand them intellectually.

When evaluating *Visions of Gerard* within the larger context of Kerouac's faith novels, it is necessary to consider the time frame in which the book was written and published. Kerouac set down the first draft in January 1956, five months before taking up a post as fire lookout on Desolation Ridge, a seminal experience that inspired both *The Dharma Bums* and *Desolation Angels*, and set in motion a crisis of faith that culminated in the events highlighted in *Big Sur*. His novel *On the Road* was being considered for publication by Viking Press, although there was no formal contract yet in place.²¹ With encouragement from his new friend, Buddhist scholar and poet Gary Snyder, Kerouac had immersed himself in the study of Mahayana and Zen, although he had yet to put his newfound ideals to any real test. Kerouac was drawn particularly to the Four Noble Truths of Buddhism: life is suffering, the origin of life's suffering is craving or attachment, suffering can be driven into extinction, and following the Eightfold path²² leads to this extinction²³. He hoped 'The Diamond Sutra'²⁴ would teach him at last to transcend his human suffering, which was physical as well as spiritual²⁵. In addition to the effects of alcoholism, Kerouac suffered from chronic thrombophlebitis²⁶. He was also discharged from the Navy in 1943 with a diagnosis of dementia praecox, a label used interchangeably at the time with schizophrenia²⁷. Although Kerouac explained away the diagnosis in *The Town and the City* as deliberate resistance to the structure of military life, his drinking, frequent homelessness, and the shifts in mood evident in his published journals do not preclude the possibility that he suffered from some form of mental illness.

Owing to the time at which it was written, the original draft of *Visions of Gerard* apparently contained many more Buddhist references than the published version. By October 1958, however, his summer on Desolation Ridge had transformed Kerouac spiritually, and he wrote to Allen Ginsberg of his plans to:

²¹ Kerouac, *His Life and Work*, pp. 322-29.

²² The Eightfold path consists of right understanding, right mindedness, right speech, right action, right living, right effort, right attentiveness, and right concentration. D. Goddard (ed.), *A Buddhist Bible* (Thetford, Vermont, 1938), p. 33.

²³ Goddard (ed.), pp. 23-33.

²⁴ 'The Diamond Sutra' records a purported dialogue between Buddha and a student named Subhuti. It deals with the quest 'to attain perfect tranquillity of mind'. Goddard (ed.), p. 88.

²⁵ This reinterpretation of the Four Noble Truths is indicative of Kerouac's 'Beat' faith, not pure Buddhism. Protagonist Jack Duluoz sought an actual end to his physical and mental suffering, rather than a release of the cravings intended in the Buddhist interpretation of the Truths.

²⁶ Kerouac, *His Life and Work*, p. 140.

²⁷ *Empty Phantoms: Interviews and Encounters with Jack Kerouac*, p. 499.

...take out the Buddhist imagery and transfer Catholic since the story is about a little saint. There will be no theological difference ... The Holy Ghost is Dharmakaya (the body of truth). See?²⁸

These comments to Ginsberg demonstrate Kerouac's approach to faith, and, indeed, his writing. His 'ultimate concern' was with spiritual truth, and the language of a particular religion served merely as a tool for expressing that truth. 'The language of faith is the language of symbols',²⁹ and Kerouac readily interchanged Christian and Buddhist symbolism in his post- *On the Road* writing.

Kerouac's 'Beat' faith, whichever system of symbols he employed, centred on the latent divinity of man: the potential of the individual to become spiritually pure and unfettered. He described his conception of a 'beatified man' in an early journal years before *Visions of Gerard* was written:

There are then souls which become so advantaged, and so subtle, that they receive all Grace and Graces through the agency of one gracious being, as light converges in the prism, and to them it is therefore given to know Beatitude in the form of the Burden of Grievous Love.³⁰

This combination of grief, or sorrow, and spiritual elevation recurs throughout the 'Duluo Legend.' To Kerouac, the touch of divine light brings both enlightenment and profound suffering. In scripture, Kerouac found the beatified man in Jesus and Gautama Buddha. In his own writing, he had already explored the potential for divinity and self destruction in man with his treatment of Dean Moriarty in *On the Road*; however, it is through Gerard Duluo in *Visions of Gerard* that Kerouac explicitly presents a comparison between this divine ideal of man and his own perceived spiritual shortcomings. In this way, Gerard becomes the original 'Beat': both physically beaten down and beatified.

When viewed in the light of Kerouac's spiritual background and concerns, *Visions of Gerard* becomes a central myth in his blended 'Beat' faith, representing the divinity that Kerouac once touched but from which he had since become separated. For, as Tillich reminds us, 'Without a preceding experience of the ultimate no faith in the ultimate can exist'³¹. This sense of uniting with the divine and then being cut off is mirrored in the concept of the 'dark night of the soul', as described by the Christian mystic St. John of the Cross, who likened the experience to a mother nursing a child and

²⁸ Jack Kerouac, *Selected Letters 1057-1969*, p. 182.

²⁹ Tillich, p. 51.

³⁰ J. Kerouac, *Private Philologies/Riddles/and a Ten-Day Writing Log./May 1949 'On the Road.' May 22, 1949 - June 2, 1949* (New York), p. 40.

³¹ Tillich, p. 116.

then forcefully weaning it, ‘hiding her tender love’³². The novel reveals a similar parallel, as young Jack Duluoiz reflects that Gerard is not only preferred to him by God, but by their mother as well³³. Within this context, the mythology Kerouac creates for his brother in the novel represents his sense of what ultimate divinity entails, whether or not the story he tells correlates to actual events. While Gerard Kerouac may simply have been a sickly little boy who died in childhood and was remembered fondly, Gerard Duluoiz becomes a symbolic representation of Kerouac’s ‘ultimate concern’ and everything he seeks to be reconnected with via his blended ‘Beat’ mysticism. This sense of pained separation from the divine is vital to Kerouac’s ‘Beat’ faith and, in truth, to the concept of faith itself. The perception of having lost the connection with God that Kerouac represents throughout *Visions of Gerard* dovetails with Tillich’s notion:

There is no faith, we have seen, in the quiet vision of God. But there is infinite concern about the possibility of reaching such quiet vision. It presupposes the reunion of the separated; the drive toward the reunion of the separated is love³⁴.

Visions of Gerard, then, tells the symbolic story of narrator Jack Duluoiz’s early union with the divine and the forced separation that followed. It plays a vital role in the recounting of Duluoiz’s later crisis of faith in *Desolation Angels* and *Big Sur* because it establishes a context for the state of divinity to which Duluoiz aspires. The crisis arises, in part, because of Duluoiz’ inability to accept his separation from the state of grace³⁵ demonstrated by his brother as a natural aspect of his faith, viewing it instead as an obstacle that must be forcibly overcome before he can achieve personal peace. He simply cannot reconcile himself to the possibility that it might not be possible to achieve connection with the divine in his lifetime, even though his brother is the only living person he knows who accomplished that connection. This refusal to accept separation from God as a necessary state prevents Duluoiz from achieving any kind of inner tranquillity.

Kerouac opens the novel by alluding to a scene at Gerard’s death bed, in which the nuns from the local French-Canadian Catholic school come to record the boy’s dying words because of the ‘astonishing revelations of heaven delivered [by Gerard] in catechism class’³⁶. This is no ordinary nine-year-old, and Ti Jean, or ‘Little Jack’ finds himself in the presence of ‘Saintly Gerard’, who will be taken from him all too soon. Kerouac writes:

³² E. A. Peers (trans.), *Dark Night of the Soul* (Virginia, 2008), p. 20.

³³ *Visions of Gerard*, p. 72.

³⁴ Tillich, p. 130.

³⁵ Meissner defines grace as representing ‘the presence within man of the persons of the Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit’. W. W. Meissner, *Life and Faith: Psychological Perspectives on Religious Experience* (Washington, D.C., 1987), p. 9.

³⁶ *Visions of Gerard*, p. 1.

For the first four years of my life, while he lived, I was not Ti Jean Duluoz, I was Gerard, the world was his face, the flower of his face, the pale stooped disposition, the heartbreakingness and the holiness and his teachings of tenderness to me³⁷.

Here, in the opening pages, are presented the seeds of the spiritual crisis that will haunt Duluoz throughout Kerouac's faith novels. For not only is he in the presence of divinity, he is entirely enveloped within it. And Kerouac acts quickly to assure the readers that these are more than the immature impressions of a preschool boy; no less an authority than the Catholic Church, as represented by the nuns of St. Louis, recognizes young Gerard as a local saint, worthy of having his dying declaration recorded for spiritual posterity. Certainly, Ti Jean is childish and vacillates between hero-worship of an elder brother and jealousy at what he perceives as Gerard's special treatment within the household; however, he argues that the adults in his community similarly revere Gerard, giving weight to Ti Jean's own perceptions. Ti Jean has thus, before attaining the age of five, loved and lost not just a brother but a spiritual leader.

Kerouac wastes little time in acquainting readers with his blended Buddhist-Catholic 'Beat' ideology, consolidated in the form of his sickly brother:

I see there in the eyes of Gerard the very diamond kindness and patient humility of the Brotherhood Ideal propounded from afar down the eternal corridors of Buddhahood and Compassionate Sanctity, in Nirmana (appearance) Kaya (form)—My own brother, a spot of sainthood in the endless globular Universes and Chillicosm^{38—39}

Of all the Buddhist scriptures Kerouac studied, none seems to have touched him as profoundly as the 'Diamond Sutra'. A core text of Mahayana Buddhism, which Kerouac embraced, the 'Diamond Sutra' depicts a dialogue in which Buddha challenges his disciple Subhuti to discard preconceptions that block the quest for enlightenment⁴⁰. This text appears to have resonated with Kerouac, who often rejected the constraints of established religious dogma in his own spiritual quest. In Gerard, he sees the 'selfless gifts of kindness and sympathy' advocated by the Buddha when he spoke directly to his brotherhood of followers in this sutra⁴¹. Indeed, in this passage Kerouac likens Gerard Duluoz to the Buddha himself, whose own eye encompassed 'enlightenment,'

³⁷ *Visions of Gerard*, p. 2.

³⁸ 'Chillicosm' likely refers to chiliocosms: worlds within the universe in the cosmology of Mahayana Buddhism.

³⁹ *Visions of Gerard*, p. 7.

⁴⁰ Wai-tao (trans.), 'The Diamond Sutra', in D. Goddard (ed.), *A Buddhist Bible* (Vermont, 1938), pp. 87-107.

⁴¹ Wai-tao, p. 91.

‘transcendental intelligence,’ ‘spiritual intuition,’ and ‘love and compassion’⁴². And yet, although the passage is otherwise heavily influenced by this Buddhist scripture, it is to Catholic sainthood, not the Buddhist enlightened state of ‘Anuttara-samyak-sambodhi’⁴³, that he appoints Gerard. The decision to insert ‘a spot of sainthood’ into an otherwise overwhelmingly Buddhist passage speaks volumes about Kerouac’s vision of a blended faith. While the ‘Diamond Sutra’ emphasises the need to discard conceptions about the differentiation between the self and others before attaining enlightenment, Kerouac deliberately pinpoints his brother as a distinct, individual saint within a larger reality.

Ti Jean Duluoz’ recollections of Gerard jump from moment to moment in the early pages of the novel, following no apparent linear path except that they all seem to occur within the final months of the boy’s life, mirroring the manner in which early childhood memories often accumulate in the mind. The scenes read like stories of a young Jesus: Gerard describes heaven⁴⁴; Gerard brings home a hungry neighbourhood boy to be fed⁴⁵; Gerard chastises his sister Nin for immodest behaviour⁴⁶. Each moment contains a lesson to be conveyed by the earnest Gerard to his eager familial audience. One such tale—about a mouse caught in a trap—takes on particular significance over the course of the ‘Duluoz Legend’ as Kerouac revisits the same example in *The Dharma Bums*, *Desolation Angels*, and *Big Sur*. Unless one chooses to take the stories as factual accounts and believe that Kerouac was visited again and again by a succession of doomed mice, the image becomes an analogy across several novels for what happens when pure faith meets an imperfect world, and, later, a symbol of Duluoz’ inability to live up to the example set for him by Gerard⁴⁷.

Gerard rescues the mouse from a trap outside the neighbourhood fish market and brings it home to be nursed back to health, railing against the ‘ignorance, grossness, mean petty thwarthings [*sic*]’ and other human shortcomings that caused his fellow human beings to capture mice in traps and then ignore their sufferings⁴⁸. To Kerouac, Gerard is vastly superior to the denizens of Lowell, Massachusetts, for his ability to empathize with the mouse’s pain while the others go about their daily lives, unable to see beyond their own limited experiences. This is a particularly interesting comment coming from Kerouac, whose prose work is written almost exclusively from the view of a first-person narrator, often too caught up in his own suffering to dwell on the difficulties of those around him⁴⁹. The passage suggests that Kerouac, as author, was aware that his lack of empathy for others was a significant shortcoming, one that blocked his path to spiritual enlightenment. Indeed, Kerouac acknowledges the difference between his own ability to enter the minds of others with Gerard’s genuine

⁴² Wai-tao, pp. 99-100.

⁴³ The ‘Diamond Sutra’ speaks explicitly of the process through which disciples may attain Anuttara-samyak-sambodhi, or ‘Highest Perfect Wisdom’. Wai-tao, p. 87.

⁴⁴ *Visions of Gerard*, p. 3.

⁴⁵ *Visions of Gerard*, pp. 4-5.

⁴⁶ *Visions of Gerard*, pp. 16-17.

⁴⁷ Although blameless in the account presented in *Visions of Gerard*, Kerouac makes Duluoz responsible for the deaths of the mice he encounters in future books.

⁴⁸ *Visions of Gerard*, p. 9.

⁴⁹ The exception to this is *The Town and the City*, Kerouac’s first published novel, which is told from the viewpoint of a third-person omniscient narrator.

empathy: ‘Yet not likely Gerard ever, if he’d have lived, would have fattened as I to come and groan about peoples and in plain print loud and foolish’⁵⁰. Kerouac sees his own writing as little more than bombast when compared to the purity of Gerard’s responses. It is an overly harsh assessment of Kerouac’s work, certainly, but an unusually astute observation of his personal shortcomings.

Gerard bandages the mouse’s wounds and envelops it in a warm, comfortable basket. But, as Kerouac has already cautioned, Gerard is a divine entity in an imperfect world, and his protected existence cannot last indefinitely. Once he has left for school, the family cat eats the mouse, leaving nothing but the tail for Gerard to find upon his return. When he sees what has been done, Gerard lectures the cat in a rare fit of rage, warning her, ‘We’ll never go to heaven if we go on eating each other and destroying each other like that all the time!—without thinking, without knowing!’⁵¹ Little Jack, watching horrified from nearby, believes Gerard resembles ‘Christ in the temple bashing the moneychanger tables everywhichaway and scourging them with his seldom whip’⁵².

To Kerouac, the encounter with the mouse illuminates a point he will drive home again and again throughout the novel: that divinity can never be fully understood in this world, and its acts will be thwarted by the brutal meanness of reality. The reader must not deny Gerard’s impending death, but rather cheer it on, since heaven is the only place where such a pure soul can truly flourish. One cannot help but read in these passages a prescient plea for the author himself. At the time he wrote *Visions of Gerard*, Kerouac was little more than a year away from the media storm that would envelop him after the publication of *On the Road* and subject him to more than a decade of brutal criticism for the unpardonable sin of not *being* Dean Moriarty⁵³.

The inability of pure divinity to survive in a harsh reality plays out again and again in the closing months of Gerard Duluoz’ life. For while Gerard can empathize with the pain suffered by his fellow creatures—perhaps because of the suffering he himself endures as a consequence of his illness—he cannot comprehend the rationale of those who inflict the suffering. He knows that he suffers, but he cannot reconcile himself to the idea that people can allow and even inflict suffering.

Unlike Gerard, Kerouac was all too capable of making use of others’ suffering, particularly in service of his writing. His affair with the Mexican addict Esperanza Villanueva, whom he immortalized in his novel *Tristessa*, was an example of this. Kerouac continued his relationship with the ailing Villanueva even as he wrote about her downward spiral, even making morphine runs for her when she was too ill to go out herself; in this way, he went beyond observing her suffering and helped to perpetuate it⁵⁴. He then wrote about appropriating her addiction as his own painful experience:

⁵⁰ *Visions of Gerard*, p. 10.

⁵¹ *Visions of Gerard*, p. 11.

⁵² *Visions of Gerard*, p. 11.

⁵³ Although Kerouac fictionalized himself in *On the Road* as the narrator, Sal Paradise, many contemporary readers assumed he was the wild, ecstatic Dean Moriarty and were disappointed to find this was not the case.

⁵⁴ T. Clark, *Jack Kerouac: A Biography* (London, 1997), p. 150.

... it's like winning an angel in hell and you are then entitled to go down with her to where it's worse or maybe there'll be some light, some, down there, maybe it's me's crazy—⁵⁵

To wrap oneself around a suffering soul for the opportunity essentially to hitchhike into her personal hell was certainly not an impulse to which Gerard Duluoaz would have succumbed.

Not long after Gerard's encounter with the mouse, Kerouac describes an ongoing miracle of sorts: visitations by hundreds of birds during the extended periods that Gerard is bedridden. Yet, while the mere presence of so many birds is unusual, the boy expresses disappointment that the animals will not allow him to touch them, and it is left to his mother to explain that children throw rocks at birds; such is the natural way of things. And just as a young Gautama Buddha struggled to understand the death and illness that flourished outside his palace walls⁵⁶, Gerard exclaims dismay at the disunity between boys and birds. 'Why? Why is everyone so mean? Didn't God see to it that we—of all people—*people*—would be kind—to each other, to animals?'⁵⁷ Why do people suffer? It is the very question that spurred Buddha to renounce his life of luxury and seek enlightenment. And Kerouac takes the opportunity to douse any hopes for a ready, finite answer, saying simply: 'God made no provisions for that winter'⁵⁸.

That the birds come so close, even alighting on the crumb pan within an arm's reach of the bed-ridden boy, but refuse to make direct contact with him reminds the reader of what is to come and reinforces the sense that divinity can never come to full fruition on earth. 'In heaven I'll have all the birds I want' says Gerard⁵⁹. And perhaps he will. But here, in Lowell, Massachusetts, the miracle of the birds will hover just short of completion. Gerard—and Little Jack, who plays beside the crumb pan—are permitted to see the miracle, but they cannot grasp it. Heaven remains tantalizingly close, yet forever out of reach in this world.

A key aspect of Kerouac's sense of the divine rested on his belief—or, rather, his need to believe—that the purified state required for entrance into heaven or elevation to enlightenment was attainable on earth. To that end, once he has provided multiple examples of Gerard's exceptional nature, he sends the boy to confession, reminding the reader that Gerard is, in fact, still human and not simply some manifestation of God on earth. This is one area in which Kerouac must return almost exclusively to his Catholic heritage, for Buddhism has little room for sin and guilt; life is simply a process of trying to improve spiritually. To Kerouac, man is 'a mass of sin, a veritable barrel of it'⁶⁰, and he rails at the world—and himself—proclaiming, 'You ooze

⁵⁵ J. Kerouac, *Tristessa* (New York, 1992), p. 66.

⁵⁶ J. Kerouac, *Wake Up* (London, 2008), p. 8.

⁵⁷ *Visions of Gerard*, p. 20.

⁵⁸ *Visions of Gerard*, p. 20.

⁵⁹ *Visions of Gerard*, p. 21.

⁶⁰ *Visions of Gerard*, p. 30.

mistakes thru your frail crevasses—You’ve bungled every opportunity to bless somebody’s brow⁶¹. It is this state of spiritual ‘bungling’ that he hopes to transcend through his faith, rising to the standard set by his elder brother because ‘Even Gerard was a sinner’⁶².

Gerard’s sins are ones of impulse and innocence: he pushed a schoolmate who upset his house of cards⁶³, he and a friend peeked at each other’s penises⁶⁴, and he told a white—practically translucent—lie about the timing of having learned his catechism⁶⁵. The sins are slight and entirely devoid of forethought, but Gerard, kneeling in the darkness of the church, frets over each infraction. And although he is tempted to excuse his actions, he reminds himself that, ‘My Jesus wouldnt [*sic*] have liked that watching from his cross’⁶⁶. Indeed, the passion of Christ looms over him, quite literally, as he looks up at a nearby crucifix, ‘where, with arms extended and hands nailed, Jesus sags to his footrest and bemoans the scene forever’⁶⁷. In Christ’s suffering, Gerard sees a mirror for the harm he inflicted on the boy he pushed: ‘Looking there at the foolish mistakes of past multitudes, plain as day to see, right on the wall’⁶⁸.

Gerard’s self-flagellation mirrors Kerouac’s own spiritual struggle; although his sins were greater, they tended also to be ones of impulse, rather than premeditation. Though evidence of Kerouac’s early misbehaviour exists primarily in his own words⁶⁹, there is ample documentation in his letters and post-*On the Road* interviews and public appearances to suggest that he tended to be overly candid in public—whether from nerves, drunkenness or mental illness—and that he was quick to heap abuse on others at the slightest hint that they did not appreciate his ideas or writing. The sins Gerard commits can be viewed as metaphors for the impulses Kerouac sought to curb in his own life. As Gerard pushes the boy who upset his house of cards, Kerouac frequently lashed out at those who criticized his work. And, despite his willingness to write about sexuality—much of which was edited out of his novels to avoid charges of obscenity⁷⁰—he was apparently very modest when not drunk and would not disrobe in public, even if others were doing so⁷¹. Taken in this context, seemingly innocent sexual play between small boys reflects a level of exposure that was apparently intolerable to

⁶¹ *Visions of Gerard*, p. 30.

⁶² *Visions of Gerard*, p. 31.

⁶³ *Visions of Gerard*, p. 33.

⁶⁴ *Visions of Gerard*, p. 34.

⁶⁵ *Visions of Gerard*, p. 37.

⁶⁶ *Visions of Gerard*, p. 34.

⁶⁷ *Visions of Gerard*, p. 34.

⁶⁸ *Visions of Gerard*, p. 34.

⁶⁹ Despite Kerouac’s at-times abusive behaviour, his friends were often intensely protective of him and his memory.

⁷⁰ In the same year that *On the Road* was published, Kerouac’s friend Lawrence Ferlinghetti was charged with criminal obscenity for publishing fellow ‘Beat’ author Allen Ginsberg’s poem, ‘Howl.’ Early publishers of William S. Burroughs’ *Naked Lunch* faced similar challenges, culminating in a landmark ruling by the Massachusetts Supreme Court in 1965. The potential for such legal entanglements caused Kerouac’s publishers to be cautious in the editing of his manuscripts. W.S. Burroughs, *Naked Lunch: The Restored Text* (New York, 2001), pp. 239-43.

⁷¹ *Empty Phantoms: Interviews and Encounters with Jack Kerouac*, pp. 29, 36.

the adult Kerouac⁷². The unguarded personal disclosures he often made in company and during interviews were similarly unacceptable to Kerouac, causing him to yearn for opportunities to remove himself from people entirely. And, in later years, he significantly curtailed his public appearances, bruised by the media's reaction to his candour.

Gerard's final sin is particularly relevant. He tells one of the nuns at school that he had studied his catechism when he had not because he knew it already. As Kerouac, through the priest-confessor, tells us, 'Ah, that's no sin'⁷³. And, indeed, it is no sin; rather, it is a metaphor for Kerouac's fiction: taking real events and refashioning them to create the best truth possible. Yet Kerouac understands that he is no Gerard, even if their sins are thematically similar. He flirts briefly with the idea that perhaps Gerard's only true superiority comes from having died before his transgressions could progress to the adult grossness that has Emil Duluoz later shouting at his younger son, 'Artist schmartist, ya cant be supported all ya life—'⁷⁴ But he cannot shake free of the conviction that Gerard lived in some elevated state of grace, perhaps bestowed on him by Jesus, that would have inspired others to treat him more charitably than they have treated Kerouac. Through Duluoz, he reflects, 'He left me his heart but not his tender countenance and sorrowful patience and kindly lights—.'⁷⁵ It is to those 'kindly lights' that Duluoz aspires, and he hopes that their attainment will earn him the tender love the world showered on Gerard.

Kerouac remains firmly in Catholic symbolism as he shifts the focus of the novel from Gerard's saintly behaviour to his protracted death. And yet, although the language is religiously singular, Gerard's experience transcends traditional Catholicism and embodies Kerouac's concept of 'Beat' faith. Gerard, who is called to heaven by the Virgin Mary shortly before he enters his final illness, is both beatific and down and out: only weeks from dying.

Shortly before Christmas, 1925, Gerard falls asleep in catechism class and dreams of being visited by Mary as he sits on a front stoop with little Jack. The Virgin Mother asks him where he has been, and in that moment Gerard forgets Jack entirely and cannot explain who he was with or what he was doing. Mary, it seems, fails to notice the younger Duluoz brother entirely, and Gerard ascends to heaven with her in a little cart pulled by two lambs.

This scene encapsulates Duluoz' larger spiritual problem, one that brings him to a crisis point in *Desolation Angels*. Gerard is the holy son, and, as such, he is Duluoz' only true connection with a heaven that seems not to know he exists. In fact, Ti Jean's spiritual imperfections act as a drag on Gerard, tethering him to the earth, and it is only when he turns his back on the younger boy that he is able to ascend. While Gerard is pulled up to heaven with Mary at his side, Little Jack is left to scabble after any way that he can.

⁷² According to Allen Ginsberg, Kerouac would become upset if Ginsberg raised the issue of homosexuality with him. B. Gifford and L. Lee, *Jack's Book: An Oral Biography of Jack Kerouac* (Edinburgh, 1999), pp. 212-16.

⁷³ *Visions of Gerard*, p. 38.

⁷⁴ *Visions of Gerard*, p. 49.

⁷⁵ *Visions of Gerard*, p. 49.

When Gerard awakens from the dream, he struggles to verbalize his understanding of what he has just seen. Here, Kerouac alludes to the shortcomings of a strictly Catholic ideology, as the young boy tries, with only partial success, to describe his experience within the limiting language of the catechism he has been learning. He thinks to himself: ‘The whole pitiful world is still there! and nobody knows it! the different appearances of the same emptiness everywhere!’⁷⁶ The front stoop in his dream, the catechism classroom, even heaven cannot be differentiated from one another because they are the same emptiness. Gerard’s words resonate more closely with the Buddhist concept of impermanence than Catholic heaven: ‘there is nothing but what is seen of the mind itself’⁷⁷. But lacking the exposure to Buddhist teaching possessed by the adult Jack Duluoz, Gerard must struggle without this possible Buddhist context to clarify what he has seen.

Far from bemoaning the thought that he was roughly awakened on the brink of entering heaven, Gerard instinctively accepts that ‘this life-and-death world and Nirvana are not to be separated’⁷⁸. And he wants to share this knowledge with everyone. After describing the key details of his dream, Gerard proclaims: “‘dont be afraid my good sister, we’re all in Heaven—but we dont know it”—“Oh,” he laughs, “*we dont know it!*”’⁷⁹ The nun is understandably shocked by this proclamation, but Gerard does not waver in his new awakening. Into the mouths of babes, Kerouac has inserted the final sentence of the Lankavatara Scripture: ‘But, if they only realised it, they are already in the Tathagata’s⁸⁰ Nirvana for, in Noble Wisdom, all things are in Nirvana from the beginning’⁸¹.

Having transcended the dual concepts of heaven and earth, Gerard removes any final barrier between himself and death, and he begins to deteriorate immediately, unable to leave the classroom, although the bell has rung, because of fever and aches in his withered legs. He is dismissed from classes for the day and forever, ‘For the last time coming home from school’⁸². By Christmas Eve, Gerard is bedridden with what the family knows will be his final illness. But while his family rages against the cruelty of providence in the other room, Gerard is accepting of his fate, and Kerouac reminds the reader not to mourn what is happening because ‘none of it is even there, it’s a mind movie’⁸³. This gentle reminder is enough. However, Kerouac does not seem to trust that his message has been received and makes his blended ideology explicit:

And who handed us down the knowledge here of the Diamond Light?
Messengers unnumberable [*sic*] from the Ethereal Awakened Diamond

⁷⁶ *Visions of Gerard*, p. 54.

⁷⁷ D. T. Suzuki (trans.), ‘Lankavatara Scripture’, in D. Goddard (ed.), *A Buddhist Bible* (Vermont, 1938), p. 355.

⁷⁸ ‘Lankavatara Scripture’, p. 352.

⁷⁹ *Visions of Gerard*, p. 54.

⁸⁰ Tathagata is the name Gautama Buddha used when referring to his enlightened self.

⁸¹ ‘Lankavatara Scripture’, p. 356.

⁸² *Visions of Gerard*, p. 55.

⁸³ *Visions of Gerard*, p. 57.

Light. And why?—because is, is—and was, was—and will be, will be—
t'will!⁸⁴

The preceding passage serves as an irrevocable statement on Kerouac's part about his blended faith. In his analysis of this passage, Benedict Giomo highlights the way that Kerouac chooses to:

blur elements of two belief systems, so that, in the final lines of the previous passage, Kerouac enlightens the reader with respect to an illimitable Buddhism (the Diamond Light) by fusing it with those eternal terms of the Glory Be⁸⁵.

It is worth noting that the words, 'And why?' are part of the dialectic structure of the 'Diamond Sutra,' as translated in *The Buddhist Bible*, which was Kerouac's source text⁸⁶. Gautama Buddha uses the phrase repeatedly while engaging in a Socratic-style discussion with his most advanced student, Subhuti⁸⁷. This suggests that Kerouac's intention was not simply to blend the ideas of Catholicism and Buddhism, but to actually merge two specific prayers that were very close to his heart.

As Gerard begins to suffer and die in earnest, Kerouac shifts his attention to a cornerstone of his 'Beat' faith: the relationship between suffering and divinity. Kerouac's acceptance of suffering in his life was equivocal. On the one hand, he was motivated to eradicate his physical and mental suffering, and his attraction to Buddhism was propelled by the desire to attain release from pain: 'Body forgotten, restful, peaceful'⁸⁸. On the other hand, he seemed unable to completely shake free from his Catholic upbringing, which suggested that pain was a vital part of divine evolution, and, if this was the case, he wanted at least to assure himself that the reward for suffering on earth would be of Biblical proportions. There are shades of Christ's Calvary in Kerouac's depiction of a long night during which Gerard is kept awake by intense pain in his legs and chest. For although the question of whether Jesus actually was stabbed in the torso with a lance and nailed, rather than tied, to the cross is an open one⁸⁹, Catholic children see graphic depictions of nailed feet and a gaping side wound in nearly every statue or painting of the crucifixion. Historically accurate or not, the traditional wounds of Jesus would have been an ingrained part of Kerouac's cultural heritage.

⁸⁴ *Visions of Gerard*, p. 57.

⁸⁵ B. Giomo, *Kerouac, the Word and the Way: Prose Artist as Spiritual Quester* (Carbondale and Edwardsville, 2002), p. 121.

⁸⁶ *Jack Kerouac: Selected Letters 1940-1956*, p. 415.

⁸⁷ Wai-tao, pp. 87-107.

⁸⁸ *Jack Kerouac: Selected Letters 1940-1956*, p. 462.

⁸⁹ G. Miller, 'Good Question -- Did the Christians Simply Invent The 'Pierced My Hands and Feet' Passage in Psalm 22?', www.christian-thinktank.com, (2000).

Taken in this context, Gerard's sleepless night blends aspects of Jesus' death and previous night in the Garden of Gethsemane⁹⁰, as well as a prayer from the Buddhist 'Surangama Sutra,' which, according to Giomo, is thought to have power to supernaturally 'transmit spiritual strength to someone who is falling through the cracks of extremity'.⁹¹ The Surangama prayer appears to be successful for 'Unceasing compassion flows from Gerard to the world even while he groans in the very middle of his extremity'.⁹²

In the morning, there is a respite from Gerard's pain, and the boys' mother fusses over her ailing son, repeatedly referring to him as her 'golden angel'⁹³. At this juncture in the narrative, it is worthwhile to reflect on Kerouac's purpose in creating what was certainly his most pervasively Catholic novel. For while Kerouac went through a short but intense phase during which he attempted to guide Allen Ginsberg and others to adopt Buddhism⁹⁴, he was never overtly proselytising in his Catholicism. In fact, he tended to use his Catholic background to end discussions, rather than open them, as demonstrated by a rather antagonistic response he gave to a fan in 1961. Apparently objecting to being lumped in the same category as 'Beat' niks, he closed his letter with the words, 'I am a conservative Catholic'⁹⁵. At no time did he appear to advocate that others adopt his Catholic faith, nor did he suggest that it was, in any way, the *only* or the *right* faith. So why would he write a book that often reads like a Bible story?

Part of the answer to that question can be found throughout *Visions of Gerard*, although Kerouac presents it most explicitly in the scene following Gerard's long, painful Gethsemane night. For, as Gerard's mother fusses over him in the wake of his suffering, Ti Jean frets in his crib, not over the pain his brother is enduring, but over the natural, understandable jealousy he feels. After bemoaning the special attention Gerard's sickness garners him, Ti Jean—or perhaps the adult Kerouac—laments that 'there's no doubt in my heart that my mother loves Gerard more than she loves me'⁹⁶.

The absence of love and acceptance were key components of Kerouac's personal pain. Prior to the publication of *On the Road*, he raged frequently about his inability to gain literary acceptance, primarily to his agent, Sterling Lord⁹⁷. Once *On the Road* had launched him into superstardom and virtually the entire contents of his writers' trunk were being published⁹⁸, Kerouac's sense of rejection shifted to the media, who he felt did not understand either his writing or his definition of 'Beat' as a spiritual concept. This form of preoccupation is addressed in *Dynamics of Faith* by Tillich, who saw anxiety about success as a surface corruption of a deeper issue of faith: 'an idolatrous

⁹⁰ 'The New Testament', *The New American Bible* (New York, 1992), pp. 39-40.

⁹¹ *Kerouac, the Word and the Way: Prose Artist as Spiritual Quester*, p. 123.

⁹² *Visions of Gerard*, p. 70.

⁹³ *Visions of Gerard*, p. 71.

⁹⁴ *Jack Kerouac: Selected Letters 1940-1956*, p. 415.

⁹⁵ *Jack Kerouac, Selected Letters 1957-1969*, p. 324.

⁹⁶ *Visions of Gerard*, p. 72.

⁹⁷ *Jack Kerouac: Selected Letters 1940-1956*, p. 466.

⁹⁸ Drafts of *Doctor Sax*, *Maggie Cassidy*, *The Subterraneans* and *Visions of Cody* (originally submitted as *Visions of Neal*) had already been rejected by publishing houses when *On the Road* was published.

form of anxiety about divine condemnation. Success is grace; lack of success, ultimate judgement⁹⁹.

Kerouac's personal relationships were similarly rocked by his insecurities, which are rendered all the more sad by the tenderness with which his friends remembered him. It is telling that one of Kerouac's most stable romantic relationships was with Joyce Johnson, a woman who, by her own admission, bore little resemblance to the exotic women Kerouac wrote about with such passion in his novels. 'If Jack ever ended up with anyone,' Johnson reflects in her memoir, *Minor Characters*, 'it would be someone like this Irene¹⁰⁰, I'd think, not someone like me'¹⁰¹.

Returning then to *Visions of Gerard*, Kerouac's elevation of Gerard to the saintly, beloved son represent attempts to both establish a human role model for Jack Duluoz in his spiritual quest and provide a context for Duluoz' ongoing sense that his ideas are rejected by friends and family. This perceived rejection takes the forefront in *The Dharma Bums*, when protagonist Ray Smith/Jack Duluoz fails repeatedly to convert others to his spiritual beliefs. In *Visions of Gerard*, this rejection is presented in a more simplified form. The boys' mother loves Gerard more because, in Ti Jean's eyes, he is more worthy of that love: the 'golden angel' soon to ascend directly into heaven. Taken in this light, Kerouac's choice to emphasize Catholicism here, to a much greater extent than he did in his other faith novels, suggests that he directly linked his spiritual state to his own worth, both within his family and within the larger community. This concept of an individual's spiritual superiority is rejected in Mahayana Buddhism¹⁰² and would not provide a strong a context for the novel's depiction of Gerard as an elevated being. Therefore, Catholicism, which incorporates a pantheon of explicitly defined saints and sinners, clearly setting the saints in a position above the common believer, provided a more ready spiritual environment for the novel's framework than Buddhism.

It is understandable, in the light of Gerard's impending death and Ti Jean's growing awareness of his own spiritual inferiority, to want to step away from the unfolding tragedy, and *Visions of Gerard* does just that, fleeing the Duluoz house for a while to follow the boys' father, Emil, who seeks out a card game in order to escape the death watch occurring at home, rolling home drunk at 10 a.m. the next morning.¹⁰³ But the reprieve cannot last forever, and the reader must return to witness Gerard's final days. Ti Jean finds his brother in bed, watching the family cat, so weak that he needs his little brother to bring the animal to him. Gerard has grown fragile in spirit as well as body, and he reflects on the delicacy of mankind in the hands of God. Pondering the cat, Gerard says:

⁹⁹ Tillich, p. 51.

¹⁰⁰ 'Irene' refers to Irene May/Aileen Lee: the woman on whom the character of Fox Mardou in *The Subterraneans* is based.

¹⁰¹ J. Johnson, *Minor Characters: A Beat Memoir* (New York, 1999), p. 228.

¹⁰² Wai-tao, pp. 102-103.

¹⁰³ *Visions of Gerard*, p. 102.

I could break his head by squeezing my hand—it's only a little thing with no strength—God put these little things on earth to see if we want to hurt them—those who dont do it who *can*, are for his heaven....¹⁰⁴

Gerard's potential place in heaven is clearly much on his mind, suggesting that Kerouac's faith left plenty of room for fear and uncertainty. If even a little saint like Gerard was in doubt about his spiritual future, the prospects for the adult Duluoz must have been frightening indeed. And Gerard, understanding this, speaks to Ti Jean—the other 'little' one in his care—more directly:

Always be careful not to hurt anyone—never get mad if you can help it—I gave you a slap in the face the other day but I didn't know it when I did it...¹⁰⁵

Ti Jean rushes to excuse Gerard's behavior, explaining that he had inadvertently destroyed the older boy's Erector Set¹⁰⁶ creation moments earlier and insisting that Gerard's 'remorse was greater than my disappointed regret...'¹⁰⁷ And although Gerard Duluoz asks for Ti Jean's forgiveness, the adult Duluoz suggests that his own sin was greater in that moment than his brother's slap:

tho [*sic*] I was too littly [*sic*] naïve to know what it meant *forgive*, and hadnt [*sic*] really forgiven him, holding back that reserve of selfly [*sic*] splendor [*sic*] for future pomp...¹⁰⁸

Perhaps as much to release the Ti Jean as Gerard from any lasting blame, Kerouac slides back into Buddhism. The moment, once it has passed, fails to carry the spiritual guilt inherent in Catholic ideas of sin. Gerard summarizes the incident by commenting that, "I hit you—but I didnt have to, now I know it, the junk is packed away, the thing I was building with my set" (he shrugs gallicly) "I dont [*sic*] remember it any more [*sic*]!"¹⁰⁹ But Ti Jean remembers, which makes him distinctly the lesser man by both Buddhist and Catholic standards.

While Gerard does not close his eyes and die in the very next moment, from Ti Jean's perspective, he may as well have, as the boy is ushered out of the room and kept

¹⁰⁴ *Visions of Gerard*, p. 104.

¹⁰⁵ *Visions of Gerard*, p. 104.

¹⁰⁶ An Erector Set is a popular American toy similar to the British Meccano toy.

¹⁰⁷ *Visions of Gerard*, p. 104.

¹⁰⁸ *Visions of Gerard*, p. 105.

¹⁰⁹ *Visions of Gerard*, p. 105.

mostly away from Gerard in his final days. The older boy receives Catholic last rites and is visited by the nuns, who record his final statement on a piece of paper that neither Jack nor his mother ever see again. And then Gerard dies quietly, away from the prying eyes of the reader. In his childish confusion, Ti Jean rushes down the street to joyously tell his father, ‘*Gerard est morte!*’¹¹⁰ In the immediate aftermath of his brother’s death, Jack has a moment, not of *satori* but of *kensho*¹¹¹: a brief, clear glimpse of reality, understanding for a moment that ‘Nirvana, Heaven, Our Salvation is *Here* and *Now...*’¹¹² But the moment begins to fade almost at once, and, by the time the undertakers arrive to prepare Gerard’s body for burial, Ti Jean’s vision begins to darken into ‘A fallen-angel world of shadows and glore [*sic*]’¹¹³.

Ti Jean’s *kensho* continues to unravel throughout Gerard’s wake and funeral, aided by the mourning adults and terrified children who file past his coffin. Little Jack, who only days earlier was so certain of Heaven on Earth, pleads for someone to ‘help me understand that I am God’ as he finds himself lost and alone in the ‘latrines of Samsara’¹¹⁴. Ti Jean tries to hold on to his new awareness, but it’s no use. As Gerard is lowered into the ground, Ti Jean’s mother and sister reject his fading optimism: “‘Ti Jean you dont understand, you’re too young to understand!’” they wail, seeing my rosy face, my questioning eyes’¹¹⁵. Duluoz’s spirituality descends into the darkness along with his brother, and Kerouac finishes the book with a tiny prayer in recognition of the dark night into which his faith has been sunk:

Sometime in the same
night that’s everywhere
the same right now
and forevermore
amen¹¹⁶

It is tempting, particularly in light of books like *The Dharma Bums* and *Some of the Dharma*, to speak of Kerouac’s ‘conversion’ to Buddhism, and later of his ‘return’ to Catholicism at the end of the experiences covered in *Big Sur*. In *Visions of Gerard*, however, we see a clearly blended faith that draws on elements of both belief systems, focused around Kerouac’s unwavering concept of ‘Beat’ as encompassing both the beatified and the beaten down man. We find ‘Beat’-ness in Gerard, who is both

¹¹⁰ *Visions of Gerard*, p. 110.

¹¹¹ *Satori*, a Japanese term for understanding, refers in Buddhism to the state of enlightenment, which is a lasting condition. Once one has become enlightened, that understanding is not lost. *Kensho* refers to a glimpse of the self’s true nature and the oneness of the person and the world. Unlike *satori*, *kensho* represents a brief experience, not lasting understanding. *Kensho* may be an isolated event or it may precede *satori*.

¹¹² *Visions of Gerard*, p. 110.

¹¹³ *Visions of Gerard*, p. 111.

¹¹⁴ In Buddhism, Samsara is the cycle of birth, decay and death that Buddha sought release from through enlightenment. *Visions of Gerard*, p. 118.

¹¹⁵ *Visions of Gerard*, p. 129.

¹¹⁶ *Visions of Gerard*, p. 130.

spiritually exalted and physically demoralized, as well as in his would-be student Ti Jean, who experiences his own moment of beatification upon Gerard's death, only to have it beaten down and driven from his understanding by those around him.

In this way, Kerouac's faith transcends both Buddhism and Catholicism, becoming a personal spirituality uniquely his own. This detachment from existing ideology is described by Fowler as conjunctive faith, involving a:

willingness to let reality speak its word, regardless of the impact of that word on the security or self-esteem of the knower...an intimacy in knowing that celebrates, reverences and attends to the 'wisdom' evolved in things as they are, before seeking to modify, control or order them to fit prior categories¹¹⁷.

In allowing his Catholicism to be permeated, but not usurped, by Buddhism, Kerouac gave his vision of reality the opportunity to speak its own truth, emerging as a new faith: a 'Beat' faith.

¹¹⁷ Fowler, p. 185.

CHAPTER II: *THE DHARMA BUMS*—RAY SMITH AS THE SPIRITUAL
BEGINNER

Released in October 1958,¹ *The Dharma Bums* was Kerouac's fourth published book² and is widely considered to be his most directly Buddhist novel³. The book was inspired by Kerouac's friendship with Zen poet Gary Snyder during 1955-56 and culminates in a brief depiction of narrator Ray Smith's summer as a fire watch on Desolation Peak: an experience Kerouac described in more detail in his subsequent novel *Desolation Angels*. Nine months before *The Dharma Bums* was published, Kerouac predicted that it would 'crash open [the] whole scene to [a] sudden Buddhism boom...[with] everybody going the way of the dharma'⁴. By that point, Kerouac had already begun to think in terms of a blended Buddhist-Christian faith⁵, and he likely did not intend to suggest that this potential shift towards Buddhist was necessarily permanent or excluded Christianity.

The Dharma Bums is certainly replete with Buddhist discussions and practices. However, if read within the context of the larger 'Duluoz Legend' and Kerouac's other spiritual writings, it is possible to perceive an alternate interpretation of the novel: one that suggests not only a blended Beat spirituality, but also a recognition on the part of the author that the novel is a portrait of a seeker who is very much at the beginning of his spiritual road. Although Smith hints at having attained enlightenment in the back yard of his mother's North Carolina home⁶, there is much to suggest that his experience is illusory and he is not yet prepared for such an achievement. Rather, Smith is what St. John of the Cross describes as a beginner meditating on the spiritual road⁷: one who has not yet had his mettle tested in a substantial way. This view of narrator Ray Smith as a beginner, rather than an adept, is crucial if the novel is to be viewed as a depiction of a man on the precipice of the spiritual journey undertaken in *Desolation Angels* and *Big Sur*.

Before *The Dharma Bums* can be related to the process described in 'dark night of the soul', it is necessary to establish that the book indeed depicts Kerouac's blended 'Beat' spirituality, and is, therefore, a legitimate part of his larger 'Beat' faith chronicle, rather than a Buddhist novel. Evidence of this can be found within the two scenes that bookend the work: Smith's conversation with the old man he encounters while hopping freight trains in the opening pages of the book and his departure from Desolation Peak in the closing pages.

In the first paragraphs of the book, even before he properly introduces himself, Smith describes a 'thin old little bum'⁸ who shares the boxcar the two men have

¹ Kerouac, *His Life and Work*, p. 370.

² *The Town and The City* was published in 1950, *On the Road* was published in 1957, and *The Subterraneans* was published in February of 1958.

³ The word 'dharma' refers to the teachings of Buddha.

⁴ *Jack Kerouac, Selected Letters 1957-1969*, p. 111.

⁵ Gewirtz, p. 165.

⁶ *The Dharma Bums*, p. 115.

⁷ *Dark Night of the Soul*, p. 20.

⁸ *The Dharma Bums*, p. 7.

illegally boarded. While Smith and the unnamed bum are sharing a meal, Smith mentions the Buddhist ‘Diamond Sutra’ and identifies himself as a religious wanderer: a dharma bum⁹.

What follows is a moment that is emblematic of Kerouac’s ‘Beat’ faith. The little ‘bum’ presents Smith with a prayer by the Catholic Carmelite nun, St. Thérèse¹⁰, predicting her return from heaven in a shower of roses. Smith does not see his acceptance of this prayer as conflicting with his status as a dharma bum. Rather, he comments that ‘the little bum in the gondola solidified all my beliefs’ with his sharing of St. Thérèse’s words¹¹. Once he has parted from the man, he incorporates the dharma and St. Thérèse seamlessly when he ponders the number of grains of sand on the beaches in the ‘ten thousand great chilicosms,’ or worlds, of Mahayana Buddhism and compares them to the ‘unnumberable number of roses that sweet Saint Teresa and that fine little old man are now this minute showering on your head’¹².

In the final scene of the novel, Kerouac once again brings Buddhism and Catholicism together as he descends from Desolation Peak after his solitary summer as a fire watch. Smith experiences a vision of the 9th century Buddhist poet Han Shan¹³, whose work Smith’s friend and Buddhist mentor Japhy Ryder has been translating¹⁴. The ‘unimaginable little Chinese bum’¹⁵ Han Shan quickly merges with Smith’s idealized memories of Ryder. Smith’s invocation of Han Shan and Ryder makes sense. Just as Han Shan rejected life in a Buddhism monastery in favour of a solitary life on Cold Mountain¹⁶, Smith has embraced his solitary fire watch post while Ryder leaves for study in a Tibetan monastery¹⁷. Moments later though, Smith turns his focus away from Buddhism and Han Shan, and professes his love for the Judeo-Christian God. ‘I said “God, I love you” and looked up to the sky and really meant it. “I have fallen in love with you, God”’¹⁸. Kerouac’s decision to bookend his novel with scenes that invoke both Catholicism and Buddhism suggests that a blended ‘Beat’ faith was an intrinsic part of his design for the novel.

Further support for the idea that Kerouac intended to present a blended ‘Beat’ faith in his writings can be found in his later comments about the Buddhist sutra, *The Scripture of the Golden Eternity*, which he wrote in 1956, purportedly at Gary Snyder’s urging:

He [Snyder] knew I was a Bodhi Sattva and had lived twelve million years in twelve million directions. You see, they really believe that, those

⁹ *The Dharma Bums*, p. 8.

¹⁰ St. Thérèse’s name is misspelled as ‘Teresa’ in the scene with the ‘gondola bum’. However, the context of the scene makes it clear that he is referring to St. Thérèse of Lisieux.

¹¹ *The Dharma Bums*, p. 8.

¹² *The Dharma Bums*, p. 10.

¹³ *The Dharma Bums*, pp. 202-3.

¹⁴ *The Dharma Bums*, p. 19.

¹⁵ *The Dharma Bums*, p. 203.

¹⁶ *The Dharma Bums*, p. 20.

¹⁷ *The Dharma Bums*, p. 127.

¹⁸ *The Dharma Bums*, pp. 202-4.

maniacs. I'm a Catholic all along. I was really kidding Gary Snyder. Boy, they're so gullible¹⁹.

The vehemence of Kerouac's comments must be taken in context. When he collaborated with Ann Charters on the initial bibliography of his published work in 1966²⁰, he had long since abandoned his active Buddhist studies, and his correspondence with Snyder had deteriorated into belligerent, drunken abuse of Snyder's spirituality²¹. However, even in his alcohol-induced letter to Snyder, Kerouac continued to blend Catholicism and Buddhism, as indeed he did in *The Scripture of the Golden Eternity* and *The Dharma Bums*. Isaac Gewirtz²² attributes Kerouac's blended faith to his inability to let go of the concept of a personal God:

This is why he so desperately sought solace in Mahayana Buddhism's Avalokitesvara, the bodhisattva of compassion ... the teachings and lore surrounding this bodhisattva helped kindle in Kerouac a new appreciation of Christianity, allowing him to see correspondences between the teachings of the Buddha and of Jesus²³.

Taken in context of *The Dharma Bums* and the novels that came before and after, there appears to be ample evidence that *The Dharma Bums* can and should be read as an extension of Kerouac's 'Beat' faith, rather than as a purely Buddhist novel.

Returning, then, to the dark night of the soul as described by St. John of the Cross, it is necessary to relate St. John's description of the spiritual beginner—one on the brink of starting the dark night of the soul journey—to the character of Ray Smith, who is, himself, an iteration of Jack Duluoz, the protagonist of the body of work Kerouac referred to as the 'Duluoz Legend'²⁴. In the first chapter of *Dark Night of the Soul*, St. John explains his intention to describe these spiritual beginners with reference to the seven 'capital,' or deadly, sins, 'indicating some of the many imperfections which they have'²⁵. In succeeding chapters, St. John identifies these imperfections as pride, avarice, luxury, wrath, gluttony, envy and sloth, and relates each to spiritual imperfections that can later be burned away by the dark night experience. These 'sins', as they are incorporated into the character of Ray Smith, will each be addressed in turn.

¹⁹ A. Charters (ed.), *A Bibliography of Works by Jack Kerouac (Jean Louis Lebris De Kerouac), 1939-1975 [Revised Edition]* (New York, 1975), p. 34.

²⁰ *The Portable Jack Kerouac*, pp. 617-18.

²¹ *Jack Kerouac, Selected Letters 1957-1969*, pp. 413-15.

²² Isaac Gewirtz is the curator of the New York Public Library's Berg Collection of English and American Literature, where the majority of Kerouac's journals, letters, early drafts and personal papers are housed.

²³ I. Gewirtz, *Beatific Soul: Jack Kerouac on the Road* (London, 2007), pp. 161-62.

²⁴ *Jack Kerouac, Selected Letters 1957-1969*, p. 240.

²⁵ *Dark Night of the Soul*, p. 21.

Pride

St. John describes the imperfection of pride as a condition in which the spiritual beginners

...come to have some degree of satisfaction with their works and with themselves. And hence there comes to them likewise a certain desire, which is somewhat vain, to speak of spiritual things in the presence of others, and sometimes even to teach such things rather than to learn them²⁶.

Evidence that Smith experiences ‘some degree of satisfaction’ in his spiritual practice comes in the opening pages. When he shares his dinner with the ‘gondola bum’, he immediately congratulates himself on practising charity in line with the teachings of the ‘Diamond Sutra.’ There are early signs too that Kerouac is aware of the flaws in Smith’s thinking. In this opening narration, he alludes to an older, more reflective Smith who is looking back on the events of the book from a future time:

I was very devout in those days and was practicing my religious devotions almost to perfection. Since then I’ve become a little hypocritical about my lip-service and a little tired and cynical. Because now I am grown so old and neutral...But then I really believed...that I was an oldtime bhikku in modern clothes wandering the world...in order to turn the wheel of the True Meaning, or Dharma, and gain merit for myself as a future Buddha (Awakener) and as a future Hero in Paradise^{27 28}.

One does not need to examine this passage too deeply to see the pride described by St. John. Smith’s assertion of near-perfection in his religious practice and the belief that he is destined for the rarefied future within his perception of Buddhahood is an obvious example of pride. Even his description of himself as a *bhikku*, or fully-ordained Buddhist monk, despite having undergone no formal training, suggests a prideful self-image.

²⁶ *Dark Night of the Soul*, p. 22.

²⁷ Smith’s depiction of himself as a ‘future Hero in Paradise’ is a further example of blended ‘Beat’ faith, since pure Buddhism has no such concept.

²⁸ *The Dharma Bums*, p. 8.

St. John also mentions the desire of spiritual beginners to talk about and teach their spiritual beliefs to others²⁹. *The Dharma Bums* is filled with such moments, as Smith attempts to discuss and debate his brand of Buddhism with nearly every significant character in the book. Although he acknowledges Ryder's extensive scholarship of Buddhist issues in comparison to his own studies, he dismisses the value of Japhy's research out of hand, saying, 'I warned him at once I didn't give a goddamn about the mythology and all the names and national flavours of Buddhism...' ³⁰ Smith goes on to disparage Ryder's adherence to Zen Buddhism, presenting his own approach as superior: 'I'm not a Zen Buddhist, I'm a serious Buddhist, I'm an oldfashioned [sic] dreamy Hinayana³¹ coward of later Mahayanism'³². In an analysis of *The Dharma Bums*, Alan Miller describes Smith's Hinayana way as one that 'emphasizes the solitary nature of the journey toward enlightenment'³³. Given their disparate destinations for the coming summer—Smith to a solitary mountain peak and Ryder to a Japanese monastery where he will study with others—it is possible to view Smith's emphasis on the Hinayana aspect of Mahayana Buddhism as an elevation of his own path over Ryder's.

Smith does not reserve his preaching for conversations with Ryder either. Throughout the novel, he expends a considerable amount of energy attempting to convert others to his particular brand of spirituality. Despite his awareness that his friend Alvah Goldbook is 'bugged by my little lectures on Samahdi ecstasy'³⁴, he continues to badger his friend to embrace not just Buddhism, but the particular form he advocates, which differs in many ways from that practised by Ryder. Here Kerouac touches on the inherent difficulty in communicating his 'Beat' spirituality. Smith challenges Goldbook on comments about God and the 'redeemer', seemingly disparaging his preference for a Judeo-Christian deity over the Buddhist acceptance of emptiness. Yet moments later, when they have argued themselves silent and gone to bed angry, Smith prays 'that God, or Tathagata, would give me enough time and enough sense and strength to be able to tell people what I knew'³⁵. That he sees no contradiction in disparaging God one minute and praying to him the next suggests that his sense of negative capability is not yet fully developed. He sees no conflict in blending Buddhism and Catholicism in his own mind, but continues to view them as mutually exclusive in others.

Smith experiences no better luck with his family when he visits them over the Christmas holiday. He passes some of his time reading the Bible,³⁶ but ultimately he cannot suppress the urge to attempt to teach his family about the emptiness of the world. They are, just as Goldbook was before them, not interested. Smith's brother-in-law responds to Smith's insistence that the orange in his hand is nothing more than a mental construct by saying, 'Well, if that's so, I still don't care'. His mother and sister are

²⁹ *Dark Night of the Soul*, p. 22.

³⁰ *The Dharma Bums*, p. 14.

³¹ In Mahayana Buddhism, Hinayana refers to a doctrine concerned with achieving Nirvana.

³² *The Dharma Bums*, p. 15.

³³ A. L. Miller, 'Ritual Aspects of Narrative: An Analysis of Jack Kerouac's the Dharma Bums', *Journal of Ritual Studies* 9.1 (1995), p. 48.

³⁴ *The Dharma Bums*, p. 30.

³⁵ *The Dharma Bums*, pp. 30-31.

³⁶ *The Dharma Bums*, p. 114.

equally blunt: ‘Why don’t you stick to the religion you were born with?’³⁷ Smith, however, persists in attempting to discuss his spiritual experiences with his family throughout the remainder of his visit.

The most tragic consequence of Smith’s spiritual pride, as St. John defines it, comes midway through the novel, when his friend Cody Pomeray asks him to look after his paranoid, suicidal girlfriend, Rosie Buchanan, for the evening. Buchanan is obviously very ill, insisting that they will all be arrested at any moment and that the Russians are somehow tied in with the larger conspiracy that will doom everyone³⁸. Russian conspiracies were a common fear in Cold War America. Indeed, after his one experience with LSD in 1961, Kerouac himself became convinced that the drug was brought to the US by the Russians as part of a plot to destabilize the nation³⁹.

Despite Buchanan’s confused, frightened state of mind, Smith attempts to preach his spirituality to her, growing frustrated when she cannot understand him. ‘But you’re getting all these silly convictions and conceptions out of nowhere,’ he tells her, ‘don’t you realize all this life is just a dream? Why don’t you just relax and enjoy God? God is you, you fool!’⁴⁰ When she proves incapable of ‘learning’ Smith’s ‘truth,’ he leaves her and goes to buy alcohol. Rosie’s pain is simply too much for him to bear sober and alone, and he needs the wine ‘as a prophylactic against too intense an experience of the Buddha’s First Noble Truth, that all life is suffering’⁴¹.

Rosie jumps from the roof to her death the next morning. Even in the face of this tragedy, Smith clings to his sense of righteousness and the idea that Rosie could have been saved if she had accepted his teaching. ‘And if she had only listened to me...’ he thinks, ‘Was I talking so dumb after all? Are my ideas about what to do so silly and stupid and childlike?’⁴² Indeed, Smith interprets Rosie’s death not to lack of appropriate care by her friends or even to the possible ingestion of mind-altering drugs. Rather, he sees it as a sign of the whole city’s deficiency: its inability to accept the spiritual truths he *knows* to be correct. As he packs to leave ‘that city of ignorance,’ he consoles himself with the egotistical idea that Rosie, now in heaven, must finally have received his message. “‘At least,’ I thought, ‘she’s in Heaven now, and she knows’”⁴³. His pride has led him to deny the validity of the experiences of others if they deviate from his own. This is not an uncommon condition for adepts of any religion, and the psychologist/philosopher William James introduced the penultimate section of his lecture on mysticism with the caution that ‘mystics have no right to claim that we ought to accept the deliverance of their peculiar experiences, if we are ourselves outsiders and feel no private call thereto’⁴⁴.

³⁷ *The Dharma Bums*, p. 122.

³⁸ *The Dharma Bums*, pp. 94-95.

³⁹ A. Charters, *Kerouac : A Biography* (London, 1974), p. 338.

⁴⁰ *The Dharma Bums*, pp. 94-95.

⁴¹ ‘Ritual Aspects of Narrative: An Analysis of Jack Kerouac’s the Dharma Bums’, p. 50.

⁴² *The Dharma Bums*, p. 96.

⁴³ *The Dharma Bums*, p. 96.

⁴⁴ W. James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (Oxfordshire, 2008), p. 298.

Avarice

In *Dark Night of the Soul*, St. John describes the spiritual avarice often present in beginners as a state in which

They will be found to be discontented with the spirituality which God gives them; and they are very disconsolate and querulous because they find not in spiritual things the consolation that they would desire⁴⁵.

St. John goes on to describe the way that spiritual avarice often presents itself in an obsession with the outward trappings of spiritual devotion, rather than focusing on what he calls the ‘inward poverty of spirit.’⁴⁶ In particular, he makes mention of an avaricious beginner’s need for spiritual symbols:

Furthermore, they burden themselves with images and rosaries which are very curious...And others you will see adorned with agnusdeis⁴⁷ and relics and tokens, like children with trinkets⁴⁸.

It is in this attachment to external tokens and symbols that Ray Smith’s spiritual avarice takes form. However, in order to see examples of this in *The Dharma Bums*, it is necessary to recognize the interconnectivity of the natural and religious worlds in Kerouac’s ‘Beat’ spirituality. Kerouac’s writings are riddled with a rejection of ‘civilized’ living in favour of nomadic travels under the stars. In many cases, his narrators will arrive at one house or another, only to choose to sleep out on the porch⁴⁹ or in the yard⁵⁰, rather than inside on an available bed. This rejection of communal living mirrors Kerouac’s rejection of organized religion within his writings; his protagonist continually emphasizes his separation from those who embrace all the tenants of a single faith, such as Catholicism or Zen Buddhism.

According to Gewirtz, Kerouac felt that ‘the natural world was an expression of the spiritual, and those who separated themselves from nature alienated themselves from

⁴⁵ *Dark Night of the Soul*, p. 25.

⁴⁶ *Dark Night of the Soul*, p. 25.

⁴⁷ Agnusdeis are wax medals stamped with an image of Jesus represented as a lamb. *Dark Night of the Soul*, p. 127.

⁴⁸ *Dark Night of the Soul*, p. 25.

⁴⁹ *The Dharma Bums*, p. 113.

⁵⁰ J. Kerouac, *Big Sur* (New York, 1996), p. 22.

their essential being'⁵¹. Gewirtz sees this theme integrated from Kerouac's earliest published novel, *The Town and The City*, in which the characters who forsake the town for the city find themselves plunged into spiritual crisis, 'struggling through the darkness toward the light of divine salvation'⁵². Giamo also links spiritual evolution in Kerouac's novels to nature, particularly in reference to 12th Century Zen artist Kakuan's 'Ten Cow-Herding Pictures', which depict the steps on the way to enlightenment. While Ryder shows Smith the pictures in the relative civilization of the Corte Madera cabin, Giamo maintains that Smith does not reach the steps himself until he is literally ascending into the natural world of Desolation Peak⁵³. Kerouac himself clearly saw the connection between nature and spirituality, and many of the spiritual revelations depicted in *The Dharma Bums* occur when Ray Smith is outdoors. Writing to his friend Lucien Carr in 1956 about the impending fire watch job on Desolation Peak, Kerouac expressed his confidence that natural solitude would aid his spiritual quest, commenting, 'If I dont [*sic*] get a vision on Desolation Peak my name aint [*sic*] Blake'⁵⁴.

Given Kerouac's correlations between nature and spirituality, the 'relics and tokens' St. John refers to in relation to spiritual avarice reveal themselves as the outer trappings of what Ray Smith perceives as natural living. Smith's preoccupation with the food, clothing and equipment associated with outdoor life seems odd and trivial unless this focus is connected with his spiritual view of living in nature. Smith's agnusdeis are his rucksack, his rain poncho and even his trail mix, as they mark him as a man connected with nature, and, therefore, with the divine. While Ryder's 'rucksack way' is evocative of Han-shan's cow-herding pictures⁵⁵, it is Smith's response to the trappings of the natural journey, rather than the journey itself, that marks his experience as spiritual avarice.

Shortly after leaving the 'gondola bum' at the start of the novel, Smith beds down for the night, shifting seamlessly among thoughts of Buddhism, St. Thérèse's shower of flowers, and a meticulous description of his evening meal over a wood fire—from the sharpening of the roasting sticks straight through to the washing of his dishes in the ocean. He describes the evening as 'one of the most pleasant nights of my life'⁵⁶. The implication is clear: the rituals of living outdoors feed the spiritual experience.

Later in the novel, Smith's obsession with the trappings of his natural life are described in even more detail, in a series of scenes that would be comical if they did not conclude in the death of Rosie Buchanan. After a camping trip with Ryder and several others, Smith determines that the travelling gear he has is no longer sufficient for his needs; rather, he wants to model his equipment after Ryder, with whom he is spiritually competitive throughout the novel. In the opening paragraph of the chapter, Smith makes his connection between the gear and his spiritual quest explicit:

⁵¹ Gewirtz, p. 151.

⁵² Gewirtz, p. 151.

⁵³ *Kerouac, the Word and the Way: Prose Artist as Spiritual Quester*, p. 144.

⁵⁴ Blake refers to poet and painter William Blake, an early literary influence on Kerouac who was also known for his unconventional spiritual views. *Jack Kerouac, Selected Letters 1940-1956*, p. 564.

⁵⁵ B. Giamo, 'Enlightened Attachment: Kerouac's Impermanent Buddhist Trek', *Religion and Literature* 35.2-3 (2003), p. 185.

⁵⁶ *The Dharma Bums*, pp. 10-11.

I wanted to get me a full pack complete with everything necessary to sleep, shelter, eat, cook, in fact a regular kitchen and bedroom right on my back, and go off somewhere and find perfect solitude and look into the perfect emptiness of my mind and be completely neutral from any and all ideas. I intended to pray, too, as my only activity, pray for all living creatures; I saw it as the only decent activity left in the world⁵⁷.

That Smith has already lived outdoors successfully with much less is completely forgotten. He has camped now with Ryder and covets the trappings Ryder has accumulated. Accordingly, he enlists Ryder to outfit him with the gear he has come to believe he needs, and Smith describes his purchases in meticulous detail. ‘Japhy and I found a lot of useful little things for bhikkus’⁵⁸, he says, as the two acquire enough camping gear to equip Smith, by his own admission, to survive the Apocalypse. There are signs that the future Smith narrating the story sees the beginner’s naiveté inherent in the scene. He purchases a screw-top bottle with the intention of using it to transport honey into the mountains. ‘But,’ he admits, ‘I later used it as a canteen for wine more than anything else, and later when I made some money as a canteen for whiskey’⁵⁹.

If there are any doubts that Smith’s accumulation of camping gear is spiritual avarice rather than simple overzealousness, they are dispelled in the following chapter. Proud of his purchases, he dons all his camping clothing and completely packs his new rucksack. Then he goes, not into the wilds where he could truly enjoy his new purchases, but into San Francisco so that he can show them off to his friends. The pack, with its contents, as his agnusdei, is meaningless unless he can display it publicly. When he arrives at Cody Pomeray’s house, he finds Rosie Buchanan with sliced-up wrists and Cody in need of someone to watch her while he goes to work. Despite Smith’s professed adherence to the ‘Diamond Sutra’ and its tenets of charity, he initially balks at Cody’s request, protesting that, ‘I was planning on having fun tonight’⁶⁰. Although he capitulates to Cody’s demand, his first thought is not of Rosie’s need, but rather of his pack and its contents: ‘I didn’t have a chance to show off my new pack in The Place’⁶¹. Once again, the future Smith appreciates the grave misplacement of his priorities. ‘Cody and I had no sense,’ he laments, ‘we should have known from her arms how far she wanted to go’⁶². That understanding comes too late. For the moment, Smith’s preoccupations with the trappings of his natural spiritual life, even in the midst of civilization, lead him to resent Rosie rather than feel compassion for her. He is ruled by his spiritual avarice.

⁵⁷ *The Dharma Bums*, p. 90.

⁵⁸ *The Dharma Bums*, p. 90.

⁵⁹ *The Dharma Bums*, p. 91.

⁶⁰ *The Dharma Bums*, p. 93.

⁶¹ *The Dharma Bums*, p. 93.

⁶² *The Dharma Bums*, p. 94.

Luxury

In describing the spiritual imperfection of luxury, St. John takes a certain amount of creative licence, primarily, it would seem, because the cardinal sin of luxury, or extravagance, which later became lust, is not an easy fit for his conception of an earnest spiritual seeker. Indeed, St. John acknowledges this difficulty when he notes his intention to describe ‘many imperfections which might be described as spiritual luxury, not because they are so, but because the imperfections proceed from spiritual things’⁶³. Spiritual luxury, then, arises when the seeker converts spiritual ideas and rituals into sensual experiences. These imperfections of luxury arise from one of three causes: the beginner taking pleasure in spiritual things, the devil attempting to tempt the beginner away from prayer, and the beginner suffering from a fear of impure thoughts and acts⁶⁴. In *The Dharma Bums*, Smith’s difficulties with spiritual luxury stem primarily from the third cause. Smith’s personalized ‘Beat’ spirituality means that he occasionally comes into conflict with the lifestyles of others, and he feels victimized when he is exposed to practices that violate his spiritual code. Rather than physically remove himself from sexual temptation, he remains like a voyeur—watching but not fully participating—and then blames others for his arousal and ensuing discomfort.

This sense of victimization is particularly evident in Smith’s reaction to Ryder’s interest in Tantric Buddhism and recreating ‘yabyum’, a symbol of a male deity united with his consort. Not long after their initial meeting, Ryder introduces Smith and Alvah Goldbook to ‘yabyum’ by having tantric sex in front of them with a young woman named Princess. While Goldbook is enthusiastic, Smith is taken aback. His spiritual convictions about sex are somewhat extreme considering his environment:

I’d also gone through an entire year of celibacy based on my feeling that lust was the direct cause of birth which was the direct cause of suffering and death and I had really no lie come to a point where I regarded lust as offensive and even cruel. ‘Pretty girls make graves,’ was my saying⁶⁵.

Kerouac was well aware that Smith’s position on sex was not widely held. Indeed, William S. Burroughs had told him explicitly that ‘A man who uses Buddhism or any other instrument to remove love from his being in order to avoid suffering, has committed, in my mind, a sacrilege comparable to castration’⁶⁶. Far from being offended by Burroughs’ comments, Kerouac recounted them to Ginsberg, referring to Burroughs’ letter in general as ‘magnificent’⁶⁷. However, were Smith and Ryder’s

⁶³ *Dark Night of the Soul*, p. 27.

⁶⁴ *Dark Night of the Soul*, pp. 27-8.

⁶⁵ *The Dharma Bums*, p. 27.

⁶⁶ *Jack Kerouac: Selected Letters 1940-1956*, pp. 438-39.

⁶⁷ *Jack Kerouac: Selected Letters 1940-1956*, p. 439.

respective positions merely a difference in ideology about the role of sex in spirituality, there would be no true difficulty. What shifts this experience into the realm of what St. John describes as spiritual luxury is Smith's fear of his own thoughts and actions. They rule him, and he seems to regard the very exposure to temptation as a precursor to inevitable defeat.

The extent of Smith's ultimate participation in Ryder's 'yabyum' is ambiguous. While he does not specifically acknowledge intercourse with Princess, he does participate in group sexual play with the girl, and later the two bathe together. His reaction to the events is likewise ambiguous for the time being. Even as he kisses Princess' body, he laments that 'All the peaceful celibacy of my Buddhism was going down the drain'⁶⁸. Yet, at the end of the evening, he voices his enthusiasm for repeat encounters with Ryder, Goldbook and Princess every Thursday night⁶⁹. Only later, once Ryder has left and Smith begins bickering with Goldbook during a bout of sleeplessness, does Smith's true aversion and shame resurface. Smith attempts to convince Goldbook, and possibly himself, that a far purer ecstasy can be attained through meditation than through sex. When Goldbook relates sex with Princess to a kind of satori, or enlightenment, Smith reacts disparagingly. 'It's a satori of your foolish flesh, you lecher', he says⁷⁰.

The argument prompts Goldbook to reflect his own observations of Smith's recent behaviour back to him, offering the reader a more objective sense of Smith's participation than the one he had fashioned for himself. 'Your Buddhism has made you mean Ray,' he says, 'and makes you even afraid to take your clothes off for a simply healthy orgy'. Smith responds, 'Well, I did finally, didn't I?' But Goldbook will not let him off the hook so easily, recalling the events in a way that stands in opposition to Smith's somewhat self-serving memory of the night. 'But you were coming on so hincty'⁷¹ about—Oh let's forget it'⁷².

In fact, Smith attempts to 'forget it' almost immediately, an act that solidifies the perception that Smith is fearful of his own impure thoughts and actions, as described in *Dark Night of the Soul*. Within a short time, Smith has completely rewritten his sense of the experience. While acknowledging that the events took place, he erases any spiritual impact they might have had on him: 'By the time I went to bed I wasn't taken in by no Princess or no desire for no Princess and nobody's disapproval and I felt glad and slept well'⁷³. This is in keeping with St. John's observations about interpersonal relationships built on spiritual luxury, noting that 'the remembrance of that friendship causes not the remembrance and love of God to grow, but occasions remorse of conscience'⁷⁴. In Smith's case, this remorse of conscience finds expression in the meanness and 'hincty' attitude Goldbook observes. In order to restore his spiritual equilibrium, Smith must essentially erase his memories of his own emotions.

⁶⁸ *The Dharma Bums*, p. 28.

⁶⁹ *The Dharma Bums*, p. 28.

⁷⁰ *The Dharma Bums*, pp. 30-31.

⁷¹ 'Hincty' is jazz-era slang for 'snobbish'.

⁷² *The Dharma Bums*, p. 31.

⁷³ *The Dharma Bums*, p. 32.

⁷⁴ *Dark Night of the Soul*, p. 29.

Wrath

In his relatively brief chapter on spiritual wrath, St. John describes three manifestations of the experience, one of which relates to the experiences of Smith in *The Dharma Bums*:

There are other of these spiritual persons, again, who... become irritated at the sins of others, and keep watch on those others with a sort of uneasy zeal. At times the impulse comes to them to reprove them angrily⁷⁵.

Smith's impatience with those who do not share, or will not accept, his spiritual teachings has already been documented in earlier sections of this chapter. He becomes so angry at Rosie Buchanan's rejection of his message that he storms out on the suicidal woman in search of wine and better company. And while he primarily keeps his judgements about Ryder and Princess' participation in the 'yabyum' evening to himself, he does lash out at Goldbook. In addition to calling Goldbook a lecher, Smith launches a vicious verbal attack moments later:

Balls, when I thought like you, Alvah, I was just as miserable and graspy [*sic*] as you are now. All you want to do is run out there and get laid and get beat up and get screwed up and get old and sick and banged around by samsara⁷⁶, you fucking eternal meat of comeback you, you'll deserve it too, I'll say⁷⁷.

Smith's dire predictions about Goldbook's fate display not only a mean-spirited desire to see his friend punished for failing to live up to Smith's ideals but also a fundamental misunderstanding about the samsara cycle of rebirth and suffering. Smith appears to view samsara as a punishment for impurity, which can be avoided by virtuous living⁷⁸. This misunderstanding, as much as the wrath he displays, marks him as a spiritual beginner.

⁷⁵ *Dark Night of the Soul*, p. 30.

⁷⁶ In Buddhism, 'samsara' refers to the ongoing cycle of birth, decay, and death. Dwight Goddard's *A Buddhist Bible* uses analogies of an elderly, diseased person and a decaying corpse to describe the ongoing process of samsara occurring in all living beings. Goddard, p. 28.

⁷⁷ *The Dharma Bums*, p. 31.

⁷⁸ Smith's linkage of decay and impure living appears to reflect Kerouac's own beliefs about the origins of physical suffering. Kerouac blamed his 1945 hospitalization for blood clots in his legs on Benzedrine abuse, even though the condition was more likely caused by an earlier football injury. P. Maher, Jr., p. 140.

Smith displays similar behaviour when he returns to spend Christmas with his family. As part of his daily excursions to meditate in the local woods, he takes along his brother-in-law's hunting dog, Bob, whom he views as a sort of meditating companion⁷⁹. Eventually, his brother-in-law objects to this practice on the grounds that the dog is too valuable to be allowed to roam the woods off his chain. This disturbs Smith's 'serenity', and he attempts to argue for the dog's freedom. 'How would you like to be tied to a chain and cry all day like the dog?' he asks⁸⁰. When his brother-in-law remains unmoved, Smith responds with a childlike, peevish wrath:

I got so mad I stomped off into the woods, it was a Sunday afternoon, and resolved to sit there without food till midnight and come back and pack my things in the night and leave⁸¹.

While Smith eventually reconsiders his decision to leave that night, he continues to nurse resentment towards his family and launches into a second attempt to 'teach' them his spirituality, which they again reject. Stung by this second rejection, he leaves his sister's house a few days later and returns to California. It appears lost on Smith that he is trapped in a cycle of the wrath described by St. John: leaving San Francisco as the 'city of ignorance' because Goldbook and Buchanan would not share his spiritual vision, only to repeat the same process with his family in North Carolina. There is, however, at least, some indication that he is beginning to develop an awareness of the limitations in his thinking. As he shoulders his pack to leave his family behind, he reflects on his recent conflicts with his family and concludes:

I was very rich now, a super myriad trillionaire in Samapatti⁸² transcendental graces, because of good humble karma, maybe because I had pitied the dog and forgiven men. But I knew now that I was a bliss heir, and that the final sin, the worst, is righteousness. So I would shut up and just hit the road and go see Japhy⁸³.

Smith's appreciation of the problems inherent in righteousness signal a positive spiritual step forward. However, his preceding remarks, in which he clearly places himself above his family for his humility, pity and forgiveness, suggest that the conversion is partial, even tenuous. Despite his conclusion that righteousness runs

⁷⁹ *The Dharma Bums*, p. 113.

⁸⁰ *The Dharma Bums*, p. 121.

⁸¹ *The Dharma Bums*, p. 212.

⁸² Samapatti is often used synonymously with Samadhi, and is a step on the path to enlightenment that is marked by inner tranquillity.

⁸³ *The Dharma Bums*, p. 125.

counter to spirituality, he chooses not to remain in North Carolina and practise his new lesson, but rather to flee once again to what he hopes will be more accepting pastures.

Gluttony

Of all the spiritual imperfections attributed by St. John to the spiritual beginner, gluttony appears to be the one that affects Smith the least: an interesting observation given that, in the larger context of the ‘Duluoz Legend’, Jack Duluoz is continually impacted by gluttonous behaviour, including excessive drinking, sex, and drug use. In *Dark Night of the Soul*, St. John describes two sides to the expression of spiritual gluttony:

For many of these, lured by the sweetness and pleasure which they find in such [spiritual] exercises, strive more after spiritual sweetness than after spiritual purity and discretion ... Therefore ... the gluttony which they now have makes them continually go to extremes⁸⁴.

Early in the novel, Smith rejects the excesses St. John describes in the second part of the passage. In fact, this kind of excessive spirituality is what leads Smith to reject Zen Buddhism in one of his early conversations with Ryder. “‘It’s *mean*,’” I complained. [“]All those Zen masters throwing young kids in the mud because they can’t answer their silly word questions”⁸⁵. Indeed, with the exception of his partial rejection of ‘yabyum’, much of Smith’s spirituality emphasizes ‘spiritual sweetness’ over sacrifice or discomfort, and it is in this way that he embodies St. John’s assessment of gluttony.

Not long after the night of ‘yabyum’, Ryder takes Smith and another friend, Henry Morley, to climb Matterhorn Peak in Yosemite National Park. At the start of the hike, Smith seems to see the potential in such healthy activity. ‘I realized this (in spite of my swollen foot veins) would do me a lot of good’, he thinks, ‘and get me away from drinking and maybe make me appreciate perhaps a whole new way of living’⁸⁶. The spiritual implications of the climb are not lost on him either. He and Ryder discuss Buddhism periodically throughout the hike, and at one point Smith privately reflects that:

⁸⁴ *Dark Night of the Soul*, p. 31.

⁸⁵ *The Dharma Bums*, p. 15.

⁸⁶ *The Dharma Bums*, p. 49.

there was something inexpressibly broken in my heart as though I'd lived before and walked this trail, under similar circumstances with a fellow Bodhisattva, but maybe on a more important journey⁸⁷.

However, when they draw within minutes of the summit, Smith is overwhelmed, and the pleasant, meditative hike turns terrifying. Finally, he finds he cannot go on at all.

That Smith cannot complete the climb, while the more experienced Ryder does, is no particular humiliation. However, what is telling from the perspective of spiritual gluttony is the way that he rationalizes the experience in the moments that follow. Just as he had earlier rewritten the impact of the 'yabyum' night, he now revises his estimation of the climb to make his failure to reach the summit a virtue, rather than a sign of weakness or inexperience.

Now there's the karma of these three men here: Japhy Ryder gets his triumphant mountaintop and makes it, I almost make it and have to give up and huddle in a bloody cave, but the smartest of them all is that poet's poet [Morley] Iyin [*sic*] down there with his knees crossed to the sky chewing on a flower dreaming by a gurgling *plage*, goddamnit they'll never get me up here again⁸⁸.

This reordering of accomplishment to place pleasure over exertion is indicative of Smith's approach. Since the final climb was too hard for him, he must make it less triumphant and spiritually elevate the hiker who took the easiest route, thereby excusing himself from future uncomfortable strivings.

The other example in *The Dharma Bums* of Smith's elevation of spiritual sweetness comes shortly before Ryder leaves to study at a Japanese monastery. The two men are planning to attend a lecture at the Berkeley Buddhist Center, but Smith succumbs to an 'overwhelming urge to get drunk and feel good'⁸⁹. Ryder encourages him to choose the lecture over the wine, but Smith clings stubbornly to his urges, instead arguing that they are somehow spiritually beneficial. When Ryder argues with him, Smith even calls on the Kakuan cow-herding pictures in support of his case: 'Have you forgotten the last of the Bulls, where he gets drunk with the butchers?'⁹⁰ Kerouac, as the author, was certainly aware of the flaws in this argument, having once recounted in his journal that 'It's the easiest thing in the world for me to fall apart mentally and spiritually when drunk'⁹¹.

⁸⁷ *The Dharma Bums*, p. 54.

⁸⁸ *The Dharma Bums*, p. 73.

⁸⁹ *The Dharma Bums*, p. 158.

⁹⁰ *The Dharma Bums*, p. 159.

⁹¹ *Windblown World: The Journals of Jack Kerouac, 1947-1954*, p. 62.

What happens next is curious and so out of character for Ryder that it leaves the reader to wonder whether Smith is a reliable narrator on this point. Ryder returns from the lecture roaring drunk and completely won over to Smith's perspective on the value of alcohol as an enhancement to spiritual pursuits. It seems that he and the Buddhist monks drank saki throughout the meeting. 'You were right!' cries Ryder, 'It doesn't make any difference! We all got drunk and discussed prajna!⁹² It was great!'⁹³ William James' assessment of the role of alcohol in mystical states appears to support this analysis: 'Sobriety diminishes, discriminates and says no; drunkenness expands, unites and says yes'⁹⁴. However, the exchange between Smith and Ryder stands in marked contrast to Ryder's remarks just a few paragraphs earlier, when he suggests that Smith's drinking is blocking his spiritual progress and 'you'll have to be reborn a teetotalin [*sic*] bartender to atone for your karma'⁹⁵.

Whether or not Smith's recollections of the evening can be viewed as accurate or merely revisionist history, the fact remains that his choice of sweet drunkenness surpasses Ryder's in that he never even made it to the lecture, choosing instead to drink alone in the cottage. This suggests that his consumption of alcohol is not the spiritual enhancement he claims but rather an end in and of itself: a shortcut to the expansive state he has prioritized.

Envy

St. John's assessment of spiritual envy is relatively straight-forward:

For, with respect to envy, many of them are wont to experience movements of displeasure at the spiritual good of others, which cause them a certain sensible grief at being outstripped upon this road, so that they would prefer not to hear others praised ... for they would fain be preferred in everything⁹⁶.

Smith's sense of spiritual envy is portrayed throughout *The Dharma Bums* in his relationship with Ryder, whom he treats somewhat as an elder brother: alternately emulating and challenging him, much as Ti Jean both worships and envies Gerard in *Visions of Gerard*. When Smith shares a meal with the 'gondola bum' at the start of the novel, he sees himself as the perfect 'dharma bum.' Yet on his arrival in San Francisco, he meets Ryder, who already has a strong local reputation as both a Buddhist scholar and an outdoorsman, and, in fact, is credited with coining the very phrase, 'dharma

⁹² Prajna is wisdom based on direct realization of the four Noble Truths of Buddhism.

⁹³ *The Dharma Bums*, p. 160.

⁹⁴ James, p. 271.

⁹⁵ *The Dharma Bums*, p. 160.

⁹⁶ *Dark Night of the Soul*, p. 34.

bum', that Smith uses to describe himself. He is an Oriental scholar who has travelled to China and Japan, and also studied Native American lore and woodcraft⁹⁷. In short, he is a far more learned version of the Smith introduced on the train at the beginning of the novel.

While the two men become good friends, there is a certain tension in their relationship that exists throughout the book. Despite Smith's clear admiration for Ryder, he feels compelled at times to deprecate Ryder's accomplishments, either in direct arguments or in his own private thoughts. He questions the relevance of Ryder's studies in Zen and reduces Ryder's summit of Matterhorn Peak to the least spiritually beneficial, elevating instead the man who gave up (which, in turn, elevates his own failure to reach the summit). However, for the most part, he refrains from challenging the praise others have for Japhy, with one notable exception.

After the 'yabyum' session, Goldbook expresses his preference for Ryder's path over Smith's. 'Don't you think it's much more interesting just to be like Ryder', he asks, 'and have girls and studies and good times and really be doing something, than all this silly sitting under trees?'⁹⁸ Such is Smith's envy at seeing Ryder's spirituality preferred to his own that he not only argues against Goldbook's point, he also attempts to convince himself that Ryder would agree with Smith's assessment of Ryder's own flaws. "Nope," I said, and meant it, and I knew Japhy would agree with me. "All Japhy's doing is amusing himself in the void"⁹⁹. This statement does not fit at all with Ryder's explanation of the spiritual aspects of 'yabyum', even insisting that it is part of a holy ceremony in Tibetan temples performed in full view of chanting priests¹⁰⁰. Smith's suggestion that not even Ryder embraces Ryder's views seems to be little more than a childish attempt to attack Goldbook for not taking Smith's side.

Ultimately though, Smith's spiritual envy of Ryder is of a gentler sort than that described by St. John. Throughout the novel, he follows Ryder about, soaking up the experiences Ryder has to offer, even when, like 'yabyum', they make him uncomfortable. Indeed, his greatest frustrations in the novel come when he attempts to emulate Ryder, preaching to others as Ryder has preached to him, but not finding the same level of respect and acceptance that seems to come naturally to Ryder.

Sloth

The final spiritual imperfection St. John addresses before entering into a discussion of the 'dark night of the soul' itself is sloth, about which he writes:

⁹⁷ *The Dharma Bums*, p. 12.

⁹⁸ *The Dharma Bums*, p. 30.

⁹⁹ *The Dharma Bums*, p. 30.

¹⁰⁰ *The Dharma Bums*, p. 27.

... oftentimes they [beginners] think that wherein they find not their own will and pleasure is not the will of God; and that, on the other hand, when they themselves find satisfaction, God is satisfied¹⁰¹.

Much like envy before it, the appearance of sloth in *The Dharma Bums* takes a much subtler form than some of the other seven spiritual imperfections. Its most obvious manifestation comes when Smith flees San Francisco following Rosie Buchanan's suicide for solitude in the forest behind his mother's house. Although Smith does not explicitly include Ryder in the 'city of ignorance' he leaves behind, there is a definite contrast between the active nature of Ryder's spirituality, which includes mountain climbing and log splitting, and the behaviour Smith engages in at his sister's house: a routine that centres on long periods spent sitting quietly in the woods. During this time, Smith must repeatedly justify his inactivity.

Although Smith briefly reads the Bible during his visit¹⁰², his retreat is highly sedentary, and he avoids, for the most part, the intense study and physical exertion exemplified by Ryder. He even turns away from the simple, natural way of living he experienced with Ryder, enjoying the comfort and convenience of living in a house with modern plumbing and appliances. As St. John warns, he attempts to persuade himself that this pleasure in comfort has spiritual benefit: 'People have good hearts whether or not they live like Dharma Bums. Compassion is the heart of Buddhism'¹⁰³.

In this passage, Smith's spirituality displays flexibility that moulds itself around what feels most comfortable and rejects that which causes pain. Modern conveniences are comfortable and, therefore, must have spiritual merit. Kerouac reveals the flaws in his narrator's thinking on several occasions. Most relevant are two ambiguous experiences Smith has during a week that he has been left alone in the house. With little to do, he reads, meditates, plays basketball and composes poetry. At one point during the week, he reflects:

I wrote, on dull afternoons when neither Buddhism nor poetry nor wine nor solitude nor basketball would avail my lazy but earnest flesh,
'Nothin [*sic*] to do, O phoo! Practically blue'¹⁰⁴.

On some level, Smith appreciates that lack of purposeful activity is laziness, no matter what his intentions, and yet, he makes no move to change his approach. Buddhism, wine and basketball are all the same to him: a means to achieve pleasure. But during that week, none of these pursuits seems to be accomplishing their desired end, suggesting that Smith's 'meditating' is really little more than loafing.

¹⁰¹ *Dark Night of the Soul*, p. 34.

¹⁰² *The Dharma Bums*, p. 114.

¹⁰³ *The Dharma Bums*, p. 112.

¹⁰⁴ *The Dharma Bums*, p. 115.

Later in the week, despite his best efforts, Smith is confronted by the pain he fled San Francisco to avoid and has been keeping at bay with his drinking and solitude:

I felt tremendously depressed and threw myself right on the ground and cried ‘I’m gonna die!’ because there was nothing else to do in the cold loneliness of this harsh inhospitable earth¹⁰⁵.

Here at last is the opportunity for Smith to confront the spiritual questions raised by Rosie Buchanan’s death and his own growing discomfort. But rather than stay with the pain, he pushes it away. Smith’s sudden shift between pain and pleasure is so inexplicable that his reliability as a narrator again comes into question. From his total despair, he shifts smoothly and instantly to bliss without having addressed the roots of his pain:

the tender bliss of enlightenment was like milk in my eyelids and I was warm. And I realized that this was the truth Rosie knew now ... the truth that is realizable in a dead man’s bones and is beyond the Tree of Buddha as well as the Cross of Jesus¹⁰⁶.

The timing of this sudden release from pain is extremely self-serving, suggesting that Smith has persuaded himself, as St. John describes, that what feels sweetest to him is also most spiritually superior. Enlightenment—at least as Smith understands it—is infinitely more enjoyable than despair, and so he convinces himself that he need not accept the despair, but rather wish it away.

Further support for the idea that Smith’s ‘enlightenment’ is wishful thinking, rather than true spiritual elevation, can be found throughout the rest of his family visit. Enlightenment, in the Buddhist sense, is a stage of awareness that is rare and permanent. Once one becomes enlightened, one does not return to the unenlightened state. Yet, Smith demonstrates no true shift in his worldview, and, in fact, becomes petulant when his family fails to respond positively to his self-professed exulted state. He reacts, as he has before, with an urge to flee from the discomfort of their rejection:

‘...It means I’ve become a Buddha.’ I really felt that and believed it and exulted to think what I had to tell Japhy now when I got back to California. ‘At least *he*’ll listen,’ I pouted¹⁰⁷.

¹⁰⁵ *The Dharma Bums*, p. 115.

¹⁰⁶ *The Dharma Bums*, p. 115.

¹⁰⁷ *The Dharma Bums*, p. 123.

Smith's decision to choose the bliss over pain, coupled with his instinct to leave the place where his impression of himself as a Buddha is challenged, suggests that he is very much under the influence of the spiritual laziness described by St. John: the urge to choose what feels sweetest over what is most spiritually beneficial. Stephen Prothero suggests that this inclination to seek out peace is indicative of many beat authors, who, he says, present themselves as 'wandering (and writing) *bhikkus* who scour the earth in a never fully satisfied attempt to find a place to rest'¹⁰⁸. It is telling that the word Prothero selects is not 'truth', or even 'enlightenment', but 'rest'.

Smith's thoughts and actions throughout *The Dharma Bums* reinforce the sense that he is very much the spiritual beginner described by St. John in *Dark Night of the Soul*: deeply committed to his spiritual journey but held back by imperfections. He is ripe for a deeper experience like the 'dark night of the soul', which he will embark on—as Jack Duluoz—in *Desolation Angels* and *Big Sur*. Although Smith's description of his time on Desolation Peak—which contrasts strongly with the narrative in *Desolation Angels*—is primarily positive and gentle, there are hints of a more difficult struggle: one in keeping with the beginnings of a dark night of the soul. Despite his past experiences sleeping on beaches, in back yards and in rustic cabins, Smith's first impression of his fire watch cabin is one of dread: 'I gulped. It was too dark and dismal to like it'¹⁰⁹. Later, when his guide has left him alone and he has bunked down for his first night in the cabin, this sense of dread deepens and his customary urge to flee returns: "'Ugh, ow," I thought, "will I get to like this? And if I don't, how do I get to leave?"'¹¹⁰

In the end though, Smith does not leave, and his decision to stick it out through the discomfort—the first time he has made this choice throughout the novel—marks his readiness to leave the world of the spiritual beginner and begin what St. John describes as the life of the progressive. This decision to stay is the turning point in the narrative that stretches across *Visions of Gerard*, *The Dharma Bums*, *Desolation Angels* and *Big Sur*. By remaining on the mountain, despite the uncomfortable conditions, the loneliness and even the fear, Smith/Duluoz takes his first step into the 'dark night of the soul'.

¹⁰⁸ Prothero, p. 211.

¹⁰⁹ *The Dharma Bums*, p. 193.

¹¹⁰ *The Dharma Bums*, p. 194-95.

CHAPTER III: *DESOLATION ANGELS*—DULUOZ' NIGHT OF SENSE

Desolation Angels, which gives a detailed account of the 63 solitary days Kerouac spent in 1956 as a fire lookout on Desolation Peak in Washington State¹ and then traces his journeys after returning to civilization, serves as a pivotal point in the evolution of his faith novels. Although Gewirtz argues that Kerouac's perception of his writing as a spiritual discipline can be traced back as far as his first published novel, *The Town and the City*², the fire lookout position marks the first time that Kerouac deliberately sought an extended formal contemplative experience.

As Gewirtz notes in his book, *Beatific Soul: Jack Kerouac on the Road*, the interrelation of nature and divinity were established themes for Kerouac as early as 1944, when he began drafting *The Town and the City*. 'The opposition of town and city', says Gewirtz, 'was an opposition not only of virtue and vice, but of a closeness to and alienation from nature'³. Kerouac describes Galloway, the *town*, as a 'milltown [*sic*] in the middle of fields and forests'⁴, literally kept alive by the power of Massachusetts' Merrimac River. This bucolic view of life in an industrial mill town⁵ is naïve and suggests that protagonist Peter Martin fails to appreciate the necessary incorporation of disaster and evil into any divinely-created natural world⁶. Peter's shift from Galloway, 'a town rooted in earth'⁷, to New York City as a young adult represents a shift from the natural state of childhood to a more artificial, but also more spiritually mature, adulthood. Kerouac followed a similar path from Lowell, Massachusetts, to New York City, eventually abandoning the city for the less populated expanses of middle America. Having sought the divine on the open road for a number of years, Kerouac was finally ready, in 1956, to focus on that quest more precisely. He summarized his fictional counterpart Jack Duluoze's expectations for the retreat in the early pages of *Desolation Angels*:

When I get to the top of Desolation Peak and everybody leaves on mules and I'm alone I will come face to face with God or Tathagata and out once and for all what is the meaning of all this existence and suffering and going to and fro in vain⁸.

¹ Clark, p. 148.

² Gewirtz, p. 149.

³ Gewirtz, p. 151.

⁴ J. Kerouac, *The Town and the City* (Orlando, Florida, 1970), p. 3.

⁵ New England mill towns like Lowell, Massachusetts, on which Galloway was based, were at the forefront of the Industrial Revolution and could only appear natural to a child who knew no better. While life in a mill town did spring from the river needed to power the mills, mill rivers were usually heavily polluted.

⁶ D. Daiches, *God and the Poets* (New York, 1985), p. 53.

⁷ *The Town and the City*, p. 5.

⁸ J. Kerouac, *Desolation Angels* (London, 1990), p. 30.

Although Kerouac's months in solitude did not progress exactly as he planned, they did have a profound spiritual impact on him, as is reflected in *Desolation Angels*. In the context of St. John of the Cross' dark night of the soul, the novel reflects the first part of the dark night experience: the 'night of sense': '...as God sets the soul in this dark night to the end that He may quench and purge its sensual desire'⁹. This 'night of sense' generates in the spiritual contemplative the impression of having been separated from the divine. In his commentary on the writings of the Catholic leader Mother Teresa, Brian Kolodiejchuk summarizes the 'night of sense' as follows:

In the first night one is freed from attachment to sensory satisfactions and drawn into the prayer of contemplation. While God communicates His light and love, the soul, imperfect as it is, is incapable of receiving them, and experiences them as darkness, pain, dryness, and emptiness¹⁰.

Within Kerouac's 'Duluoz Legend', this sense of separation from the divine—which St. John likens to the weaning of a baby from its mother's breast¹¹, finds its parallel in the relationship between Jack Duluoz and his elder brother Gerard, who is represented as a holy individual, worthy of sainthood. When Gerard dies, Duluoz is literally separated from a divine person with whom he had been living. However, since Duluoz is four years old at the time of Gerard's death, his ability to feel the enormity of this separation is limited. It is only later, when he makes a conscious effort as an adult to reconnect with this divinity during his spiritual retreat to Desolation Peak, that he is confronted with the full impact of what he has lost. So while the actual separation occurs in the first book of the 'Duluoz Legend', Duluoz does not enter into the night of sense until his fire lookout retreat, when he expects to recapture that sense of connection with the divine and instead experiences St. John's 'darkness, pain, dryness, and emptiness', which Duluoz labels 'the void'¹².

Of the 15 Kerouac novels and novellas eventually published¹³, *Desolation Angels* remains one of the lesser examined works, owing in large part to its prose style: meandering and, at times, stream-of-consciousness. Warren French succinctly describes *Desolation Angels* as a 'diary-like composite', rather than a novelistic form, and suggests that the value of the novel lies less in its artistic design and more in the insights it offers about Kerouac and his associates¹⁴. French's assessment reflects the shift in styles between 'Book One' and 'Book Two': 'Book One' shifts freely back and forth in time, using the protagonist's arrival on Desolation Peak as an anchor, while 'Book Two'

⁹ *Dark Night of the Soul*, p. 38.

¹⁰ B. Kolodiejchuk (ed.), *Mother Teresa : Come Be My Light : The Private Writings of The 'Saint of Calcutta'* (New York, 2007), p. 22.

¹¹ *Dark Night of the Soul*, p. 20.

¹² *Desolation Angels*, p. 30.

¹³ The 15 works are (in order of publication): *The Town and the City*, *On the Road*, *The Subterraneans*, *The Dharma Bums*, *Doctor Sax*, *Maggie Cassidy*, *Tristessa*, *Visions of Cody*, *Big Sur*, *Visions of Gerard*, *Desolation Angels*, *Satori in Paris*, *Vanity of Duluoz*, *Pic*, and *And the Hippos Were Boiled in Their Tanks* (co-authored with William S. Burroughs).

¹⁴ W. French, *Jack Kerouac* (Boston, 1986), p. 96.

presents a chronologically organized journey through Mexico, New York, and Tangiers. Without the framework of the night of sense, the reader can easily lose track of the protagonist's evolution throughout the book.

When viewed within the specific context of spirituality, the perceived value of *Desolation Angels* varies widely, rating only a footnote in Lardas' study of Oswald Spengler's influence on the Beats¹⁵ and no direct mention at all¹⁶ in Gewirtz' chapter, 'The Buddhist Christian'¹⁷. William Blackburn, who draws parallels between Kerouac's protagonists and the life of Siddhartha, places *Desolation Angels* as the concluding volume of a trilogy encompassing *On the Road* and *The Dharma Bums*, but suggests that the value of the book lies primarily in its honest chronicling of Kerouac's journey rather than in the spirituality itself¹⁸.

By contrast, Benedict Giomo devotes an entire chapter to *Desolation Angels* in *Kerouac: The Word and the Way*. Although embracing the text, Giomo acknowledges the inherent challenges, suggesting that *Desolation Angels* presents 'the most belabored [sic] prose that Kerouac has ever published'¹⁹. Nevertheless, Giomo argues that the novel is a testament to Kerouac's candid style and his humanity, and argues that 'most men and women attempting to spend two full months in complete isolation would report back in a similar manner; in fact, most would come undone'.²⁰ However, viewed through the night of sense, the novel's focus is revealed more clearly.

In order to place *Desolation Angels* within the larger arc of Kerouac's faith novels, it is important to take into consideration the timing of the novel's writing and publication. As late as 1964, the year before the book was published, Kerouac viewed *Desolation Angels* as two contiguous novels, which he entitled *Desolation Angels* and *An American Passed Here*²¹. The original *Desolation Angels*, which eventually became 'Book One' of the published novel, was written in 1956, shortly after Kerouac's summer on Desolation Peak—nearly a year before *The Dharma Bums* was written²². *An American Passed Here*, which became 'Book Two,' covered Kerouac's travels in the year after returning from Desolation Peak, but was not written until 1961, just before Kerouac began work on *Big Sur*²³. Sterling Lord sold the two novels to publisher Coward-McCann in 1964 as standalone manuscripts.

According to biographer Paul Maher, Jr., editor Ellis Amburn read the two books under the influence of marijuana and determined that *Desolation Angels* was stylistically superior to *An American Passed Here*, whose chief value was as a historical account of Kerouac's post-*On the Road* years. Publisher John J. Geoghan felt the two

¹⁵ Lardas, p. 292.

¹⁶ Gewirtz incorporates Kerouac's stay on Desolation Peak, which is represented in both *The Dharma Bums* and *Desolation Angels*, but does not reference *Desolation Angels* directly.

¹⁷ Gewirtz, pp. 149-69.

¹⁸ W. Blackburn, 'Han Shan Gets Drunk with the Butchers: Kerouac's Buddhism in on the Road, the Dharma Bums and Desolation Angels', *Literature East & West* 21.1-4 (1977), p. 20.

¹⁹ *Kerouac, the Word and the Way: Prose Artist as Spiritual Quester*, p. 153.

²⁰ *Kerouac, the Word and the Way: Prose Artist as Spiritual Quester*, p. 153.

²¹ *Kerouac, His Life and Work*, pp. 446-47.

²² *Kerouac, the Word and the Way: Prose Artist as Spiritual Quester*, p. 152.

²³ *Kerouac, His Life and Work*, p. 421.

books were too short to sell separately and offered to purchase them as a single book—with a single advance. Kerouac initially resisted—apparently more from the desire for a second advance than any artistic concerns—but eventually agreed to the arrangement²⁴.

Given this timeline, it is difficult to argue that ‘Books One’ and ‘Two’ of *Desolation Angels* represent a cohesive novel. While Kerouac often worked on his novels over extended periods of time, the decision to merge the two manuscripts was not his, and the editing process—which occurred in the wake of the death of Kerouac’s sister, Caroline—was completed in a matter of weeks²⁵. That said, within the context of the evolution of Kerouac’s faith writings, this external decision to connect the two works is fortuitous, since the published *Desolation Angels* forms an effective bridge between *The Dharma Bums*—which overlaps ‘Book One’ in places—and *Big Sur*, which was written just after the completion of *Desolation Angels*’ ‘Book Two.’

In examining the night of sense experience within *Desolation Angels*, the writings of the Cistercian monk Thomas Merton provide valuable insights. A contemporary of Kerouac’s, Merton earned a Master’s degree in English from Columbia University in 1938 and began work toward a doctorate. However, he had left Columbia by the time Kerouac arrived in 1940. Merton converted to Catholicism in 1939 and entered the Catholic Abbey of Our Lady of Gethsemani²⁶ in 1941. At the time he died, Merton appeared to have integrated Buddhism into his Catholic faith. Perhaps not coincidentally, Merton became an admirer of Kerouac’s poetry during the final years of his life. In 1967, Merton asked his old Columbia friend, Robert Lax—who had published some of Kerouac’s prose in his Catholic magazine, *Jubilee*—to invite Kerouac to contribute poems for Merton’s new magazine *Monk’s Pond*. Kerouac did so²⁷, and the two apparently exchanged messages through Lax from time to time, although they never actually met²⁸.

In 1951, Merton published *The Ascent to Truth: A Study of St. John of the Cross*. Had Kerouac read *The Ascent to Truth* before embarking on his summer of solitude, he might have been forewarned. Merton, who had a decade of the contemplative life behind him when he wrote the book, included a passage that hints at the turmoil an unprepared soul can experience during the dark night of the soul:

But the pleasures of the interior life are so great and so pure; they so far transcend the crude joys of sense and of this world, that they exercise a terrible attraction upon the soul that meets them along its road to God ... He will do the wildest things if he believes that it will bring back two

²⁴ Kerouac, *His Life and Work*, pp. 446-47.

²⁵ Kerouac, *His Life and Work*, pp. 445-47.

²⁶ While the garden Jesus and his apostles reportedly spent the night before the crucifixion is typically spelled ‘Gethsemane’, the monastery where Thomas Merton lived and worked is called ‘The Abbey of Our Lady of Gethsemani’.

²⁷ The two poems are collectively titled ‘Two Poems Dedicated to Thomas Merton’. *The Portable Jack Kerouac*, p. 466.

²⁸ Fisher, pp. 245-46.

minutes of the joy he has once tasted in what seemed to be a vision of God²⁹.

To appreciate the relevance of this passage to Kerouac's own quest and its reflection in his 'Duluoz Legend', it is important to consider that Kerouac wrote *Visions of Gerard* six months before beginning his fire lookout post. Since narrator Jack Duluoz/Ray Smith makes reference to Kerouac's writing career in several novels³⁰, it is reasonable to presume that Duluoz wrote a similar book at the same time, drawing on his own childhood. For although the Jack Duluoz of *Desolation Angels* does not mention Gerard Duluoz, he shares both a nickname, 'Ti Pousse'³¹, and a sister, Nin³², with *Visions of Gerard's* Ti Jean Duluoz³³. Given this parallel, Jack Duluoz travels to Desolation Peak soon after completing an extended meditation on his own relationship with the divine through his lost elder brother Gerard. That his meditations on the mountain continually pull him into the past—including reflections on his childhood—suggest that he falls quickly into the trap Merton has warned about.

Desolation Angels opens with Duluoz already on Desolation Peak and moves back and forth in time as the novel progresses. In chapter two, Kerouac steps back to explain the journey that brought him to his mountain cabin. However, even within these scenes, time is occasionally stretched to deprive the reader of any clear orientation, as Kerouac ends one passage by describing the neighbouring Mount Hozomeen, which he can see clearly from his cabin: 'Over 70 days I had to stare at it'³⁴. This stretching of time from the 63 days Duluoz actually spent on the mountain³⁵ to something beyond 70 days suggests a stretched perception of time that persists throughout the 'Desolation in Solitude' portion of the book³⁶. Yet, while Kerouac leaves the reader guessing about time, he immediately establishes Duluoz' immersion in the 'night of sense', which he refers to as 'the Void'.

It's me that's changed and done all this and come and gone and complained and hurt and joyed [*sic*] and yelled, not the Void' and so that every time I thought of the void I'd be looking at Mt Hozomeen (because

²⁹ Merton, p. 131.

³⁰ Kerouac regularly made references to his own writing, as well as his friends' publications, in the 'Duluoz Legend' novels. In *The Dharma Bums*, Ray Smith visits Gallery Six to hear Alvah Goldbook read the poem 'Wail,' just as Kerouac visited Six Gallery to hear Ginsberg read 'Howl.' *The Dharma Bums*, p. 15. When describing Raphael Urso in *Desolation Angels*, Duluoz refers the reader to his novel, *The Subterraneans*, for more detail. *Desolation Angels*, p. 156. Later, in *Big Sur*, Duluoz laments the uproar that followed the publication of his 'Road' novel, which resulted in him being crowned 'King of the Beatniks, just as Kerouac was after the publication of *On the Road*. *Big Sur*, p. 4,

³¹ *Visions of Gerard*, p. 23.

³² *Visions of Gerard*, p. 7.

³³ *Desolation Angels*, pp. 70-71.

³⁴ *Desolation Angels*, p. 30.

³⁵ *Desolation Angels*, p. 92.

³⁶ 'Book One' of *Desolation Angels* is divided into two parts: 'Desolation in Solitude' and 'Desolation in the World'.

chair and bed and meadowgrass [*sic* faced north) until I realized 'Hozomeen is the Void—at least Hozomeen means the void to my eyes'³⁷.

This opening passage is filled with verbal contradictions, which set the reader adrift in the novel from the very beginning, just as the narrator has been set adrift psychologically. Kerouac alternates between capital and lower case in his introduction to the 'void', suggesting that it has become both personal and impersonal, both vitally important and meaningless. The void is the mountain, and yet it is not the mountain; it is only the mountain in Duluoz' eyes, and his immediate recognition of this faulty perception shows that even his vision of the void and the mountain is not fixed. This experience of the void, in which reality becomes difficult to pin down, finds parallel in Merton's depiction of 'interior liberty,' in which the soul experiencing a dark night pulls away from the experience of the mind and body³⁸. The rational and physical sides of the contemplative continue to interact with the sensory world, but the soul pulls away and is no longer directly impacted by the exterior world. The 'Diamond Sutra' describes a similar process on the path to Buddhist enlightenment, in which the seeker must dismiss all perceptions of earthly phenomena as arbitrary³⁹. Duluoz' relinquishing of his previously fixed vision of Desolation Peak suggests he has taken his first steps into Merton's 'interior liberty.'

Since the primary sensation of the night of sense is one of separation, it is fitting that Kerouac chooses Mount Hozomeen and not Desolation Peak as his metaphor for the void. The impassable chasm that separates Duluoz and Hozomeen serves as an ever-present reminder of his separation from the divine and, as a result, from the peace that comes from divine union. Early in the novel, Duluoz meditates on both his physical separation from the void embodied by Hozomeen and the separation of perspectives, which at times overwhelm him.

The void is not disturbed by any kind of ups and downs, my God look at Hozomeen, is he worried or tearful? Does he bend before storms or snarl when the sun shines or sigh in the late day drowse? ... Why should I choose to be bitter or sweet, he does neither?⁴⁰

Within the stretched time on Desolation Peak, Duluoz places this moment—which is as close as he will come to any kind of enlightenment on the mountain—on a specific date: August 8⁴¹. More importantly, he links his awareness of the calm of the void to a specific series of events surrounding his 'murder' of a mouse. This

³⁷ *Desolation Angels*, p. 29.

³⁸ *The Ascent to Truth*, p. 122.

³⁹ Wai-tao, p. 98.

⁴⁰ *Desolation Angels*, pp. 30-31.

⁴¹ *Desolation Angels*, p. 30.

reconnection with specific events reminds the reader that Duluoz' descent into the dark night is not yet complete. St. John describes the process of dipping in and out of the dark night, comparing it to the way that night is followed by dawn, and again by night⁴².

The central story is simple enough. Duluoz finds a mouse that has been eating his Lipton pea soup and stabs it to death with a stick, throwing the body out into the snow. Yet as soon as the confession is made, it seems to take on a life of its own, simultaneously expanding and folding in on itself, as the mouse returns again and again—both living and as a corpse—to torment him⁴³. Duluoz' guilt at the 'murder' soon gives way to a larger concern: one that connects directly to his growing awareness of the separateness of the void. As frightened as he is of being judged by a divine being, the alternative is what eventually undoes him, as he reflects on the difference between saints—in particular, St. Francis of Assisi, the patron saint of animals— and the common man.

I love Saint Francis of Assisi as well as anybody in the world but how do I know what he woulda [*sic*] done?—maybe murdered his tormentor— Because whether you murder or not, that's the trouble, it makes no difference in the maddening void which doesnt [*sic*] care what we do—⁴⁴

This is the awareness that Duluoz takes from the void, and it is a terrifying one: that he cannot earn divine union through his actions. The void is indifferent, even to one as holy as St. Francis. Kerouac extends the idea even further, positing a world where churches fall and the world eventually disintegrates 'into atomic dust':

...still the void wont [*sic*] care, the void'll just go on with that maddening little smile of its that I see everywhere ... So they'll light candles and make speeches and the angels rage. Ah but 'I dont [*sic*] know, I dont [*sic*] care, and it doesnt [*sic*] matter' will be the final human prayer—⁴⁵

Duluoz' vision of indifferent divinity, with the void standing in for God, was apparently a common perception at the time. Indeed, Merton saw similar reactions so often in his fellow contemplatives—and, perhaps, in his own experience—that he gently mocked the phenomenon in *The Ascent to Truth*. The passage is lengthy, but it fully addresses the grandiosity of Duluoz' reflections on God/Tathagata in *Desolation Angels*:

⁴² *Dark Night of the Soul*, p. 57.

⁴³ *Desolation Angels*, pp. 94-95.

⁴⁴ *Desolation Angels*, p. 96.

⁴⁵ *Desolation Angels*, p. 97.

After reading the lives of the saints and the experiences of the mystics, some people become convinced that the mystical life must be something like a Wagnerian opera. . . . Every new notion of the spirit is heralded by thunder and lightning. The heavens crack open and the soul sails upwards out of the body into a burst of unearthly and splendid light. There it comes face to face with God, in the midst of a huge *Turnverein*⁴⁶ of flying, singing, trumpet-playing saints and angels. There is an eloquent exchange of views between the soul and God in an operatic duel that lasts at least seven hours, for seven is a mystical number. . . . Eventually, after a brief musical preview of the end of the world and the Last Judgment, the soul pirouettes gracefully back into the body and the mystic comes to himself⁴⁷.

The number of parallel images between Merton's gently mocking passage and Duluoz' experience on the mountain are striking, particularly since there is no evidence that Kerouac ever read *The Ascent to Truth*. Not only does Duluoz speculate on scenes of raging angels and the end of the world, but he finds himself in the path of an approaching electrical storm, in which, true to Merton's observations, he sees a divine connection, likening his experience to the passage of the 'Diamond Sutra' in which the Buddhist seeker finally achieves enlightenment:

Suddenly the night and the radio is charged with excitement, the flashes on the horizon are like the second-to-the-last stanza of the 'Diamond Sutra' (the Diamondcutter of the Wise Vow), a sinister sound comes out of the heather, the wind in the cabin rigging takes on a hypersuspicious air, it seems as though the six weeks of lonely bored solitude on Desolation Peak has come to an end and I'm *down* again⁴⁸.

Much like Merton's operatic scene, Kerouac's experience is spectacular rather than subtle. The diamond-sharp scripture of the Sutra brings Duluoz to the 'shore of enlightenment'⁴⁹ to the accompaniment of howling wind and cracking thunder. The quiet tedium of spiritual contemplation is replaced by literal *sturm und drang*. Later on in the storm Duluoz' experience intensifies. While his soul does not soar out of his body, he does find himself stepping out of time, so that 'It is no longer Tuesday Night August 14 in Desolation but the Night of the World and the Flash'⁵⁰, and to stave off the

⁴⁶ *Turnverein* is a German term meaning 'gymnastics club'.

⁴⁷ Merton, p. 137.

⁴⁸ *Desolation Angels*, p. 64.

⁴⁹ Wai-tao, p. 107.

⁵⁰ *Desolation Angels*, p. 65.

danger he paces the cabin and recites the stanza again and again, for fear that God's wrath will cause him to be struck by lightning:

If a follower should cherish any limited judgment of the realness of the feeling of his own selfhood, the realness of the feeling of the living beings, or the realness of the feeling of a universal self, he would be cherishing something that is nonexistent⁵¹.

Yet, unlike the mystics Merton refers to in his passage, Duluoaz seems aware of the unreality of his visions and quickly juxtaposes them against the mundane reality of his daily existence. When morning comes, the storm has extinguished the flames and he is left with the minutiae of life on the mountain:

With a wet rag in the yard I wipe the summer's dust off my ruined shoes, and pace and think—the hinge of the outhouse door is loose, the chimney piece is knocked over, I'll have to wait a month for a decent bath, and I dont [*sic*] care—the rain returns, all the fires'll lose their tinder⁵².

If the 'night of sense' is not the Wagnerian opera mocked by Merton in *The Ascent to Truth*, what then is it, and how can it be measured against the experience described in *Desolation Angels*? Merton says succinctly that 'the inspirations of the Holy Ghost are quiet'⁵³, rather than filled with spectacle. Likewise, St. John of the Cross identifies three comparatively subtle signs that indicate a soul is being drawn into the night of sense: a state that Merton regularly refers to as contemplative, or infused, prayer. Since St. John describes the three signs somewhat differently in his book *Ascent of Mount Carmel* than he does in *Dark Night of the Soul*, the former descriptions will be used here, since those are the ones referenced by Merton⁵⁴. The first sign is the soul's 'realization that he can no longer meditate or reason with his imagination, neither can take pleasure therein as he was wont to do aforetime [*sic*]⁵⁵. Merton simplifies this sign as the loss of a soul's ability to meditate⁵⁶.

This sign can be found throughout 'Desolation in Solitude', as Duluoaz is unable to quiet his mind and is continually drawn into a series of apparently random dreams,

⁵¹ *Desolation Angels*, p. 65.

⁵² *Desolation Angels*, p. 67.

⁵³ *The Ascent to Truth*, p. 137.

⁵⁴ Merton's decision to use the *Ascent of Mount Carmel* sign descriptions is understandable. In *Dark Night of the Soul*, St. John's description of the third sign is confusing and appears, on a cursory reading, to be a repetition of the first and second signs. By contrast, the descriptions of the three signs in *Ascent to Mount Carmel* are relatively clear and concise.

⁵⁵ E. A. Peers (trans.), *Ascent of Mount Carmel* (New York, 2008), p. 115.

⁵⁶ Merton, p. 172.

visions and memories, ranging from afternoon snacks at the kitchen table in his youth⁵⁷, to the theft of money from his mother⁵⁸, and learning to roll cigarettes during his short-lived military service⁵⁹. Merton recognizes that in some contemplatives, ‘the reason and imagination can make a lot of noise’. The mark of contemplation, he writes, lies in the will, who, ‘hiding in a bomb-proof shelter in the centre of the soul, clings with extreme distress and desperation to the hope that God will not evade her entirely and leave her alone with the arguments of the fatuous monster outside the door’⁶⁰.

This separation of imagination and will form the framework of ‘Desolation in Solitude’, as Duluoiz’ attempts to reflect on the implications of the equanimity of the void are continually interrupted by a stream of visions and memories. Merton relates this internal restlessness to Pascal’s theory of *divertissement*, or distraction:

Men who call themselves civilized do not hunt foxes because they want to catch a fox. Nor do they, for that matter, always study philosophy or science because they want to know the truth. No: they are condemned to physical or spiritual movement because it is unbearable for them to sit still⁶¹.

Similarly, Duluoiz reflects on his past not in an organized attempt to connect with the divine through personal reflection; rather, he relives past moments because his mind will not allow itself to become completely still.

The second sign described by St. John is the soul’s ‘realization that he has no desire to fix his meditation or his sense upon other particular objects, exterior or interior’⁶². Merton describes this sign as a sense of being ‘no longer satisfied with any idea of God or of heaven that can be represented to it in the imagination’⁶³. This is the very dissatisfaction that Duluoiz reflects on when he begins repeating the penultimate stanza of the ‘Diamond Sutra’ during the thunder storm. Duluoiz goes on to coningle this Buddhist concept with his sense of the Christian heaven:

For all this phenomena, that which shows, and all noumena, that which shows not, is the loss of the Heavenly Kingdom (and not even that)—‘a dream, a bubble, a shadow, the lightning’s flash’⁶⁴.

⁵⁷ *Desolation Angels*, p. 33.

⁵⁸ *Desolation Angels*, p. 35.

⁵⁹ *Desolation Angels*, p. 38.

⁶⁰ Merton, p. 164.

⁶¹ Merton, p. 19.

⁶² Merton, p. 116.

⁶³ Merton, p. 172.

⁶⁴ *Desolation Angels*, p. 65.

In this night of storms on the mountain, Duluoiz relinquishes his need to relate the void to anything concrete or easily defined. It is all as insubstantial as ‘a bubble, a shadow, the lightning’s flash’. This shift from linking the storm to approaching enlightenment to recognizing it as insubstantial demonstrates his letting go of the memories that form in his mind, rather than attaching significance to them. In another contemplation of Hozomeen, Kerouac describes the mountain as a ‘passing through’⁶⁵: a term that he will return to again and again to describe his experiences in the second half of the novel. This quiet ‘passing through’ stands in stark contrast to the ‘flashes on the horizon’ and ‘sinister sound’⁶⁶ of the storm.

The third and final sign described by St. John in *Ascent of Mount Carmel* is that:

...the soul takes pleasure in being alone, and waits with loving attentiveness upon God, without making any particular meditation, in inward peace and quietness and rest, and without acts and exercises of the faculties—memory, understanding and will⁶⁷.

Merton describes this sign as ‘a positive attraction for contemplative prayer’⁶⁸ and clarifies that it is possible to enter contemplative prayer if memory and the imagination are active, so long as ‘their movement is no longer noticed in the depths of the soul.’⁶⁹ In *Desolation Angels*, Duluoiz’ ‘positive attraction for contemplative prayer’ finds expression less in what he does than in what he does not do: he does not abandon his post. While he never addresses the issue directly, the reality (at least within the larger ‘Duluoiz Legend’) is that Duluoiz is a competent outdoorsman who has criss-crossed the country with limited resources and has ventured into the wilderness more than once. He is in daily radio contact with his supervisors and colleagues, and could easily ask to be removed from his post—as might be necessary if he became ill or injured. Yet for all his internal wandering, he never once addresses this reality. This suggests that however unpleasant his internal and external experiences may be, he never wavers from the ‘positive attraction’ for the contemplative experience that led him to accept the fire lookout post.

Having examined Jack Duluoiz’ experience in light of Merton’s commentary on the expectations of new contemplatives and St. John of the Cross’ three signs of contemplative prayer, it is possible to return to the opening scene of *Desolation Angels* and posit that Duluoiz sees this afternoon on the mountain—when he has recognized the neutrality and separateness of the void—as the conclusion of his contemplative experience. St. John of the Cross refers to this in the final stanza of his poem about the dark night of the soul:

⁶⁵ *Desolation Angels*, p. 31.

⁶⁶ *Desolation Angels*, p. 64.

⁶⁷ Merton, p. 116.

⁶⁸ Merton, p. 172.

⁶⁹ Merton, p. 163.

I remained, lost in oblivion;
 My face I reclined on the Beloved.
 All ceased and I abandoned myself,
 Leaving my cares forgotten among the lilies⁷⁰.

After achieving a kind of spiritual acceptance on the mountain, Duluoz sees his experience as a success, commenting in the opening paragraph of the novel that ‘It’s me that’s changed and done all this and come and gone and complained and hurt and joyed [*sic*] and yelled, not the Void’⁷¹. Later, as he prepares to leave his mountain post—which has resolved itself into the original 63 days—he reiterates this sense:

Gathering all the immensities about me in a shroud I glide off with ‘Tarquin’s ravishing strides’ into the gloom of the foreknown globe, the vision of the freedom of eternity is like a bulb that’s suddenly come on in my brain—enlightenment—reawakening—adventures of raw plasticity made of material of light regonijate rigamarolerate ahead, I see through it all, ur, arg, oig, ello—⁷²

Portions of this passage reflect the expansiveness of an enlightened state—one unified with the divine. Duluoz sees himself reawakened, with a vision of eternal spiritual freedom in his mind. Even the degeneration of language toward the end of the passage—from clear, expansive, language, to nonsense words, to simple sounds—he has invoked the ineffable nature of the mystical state, which defies verbal expression⁷³. Yet, there are signs already that things are not as they seem. Given all the triumphant, spiritual beings with whom he might align himself—including Buddha, Christ, St. Francis of Assisi, Han Shan, Hui-neng, and others—Duluoz instead quotes a passage from *Macbeth*: simultaneously invoking the rapist Tarquin, who ravaged Lucrece, and *Macbeth*, who speaks of ‘Tarquin’s ravishing strides’⁷⁴ as he approaches the king to murder him in his sleep. Taken as a whole, the reader is left with the impression, not of an enlightened soul descending, like Han Shan, to drink with the butchers⁷⁵, but of an instrument of violence, who will damage the world he is seeking to rejoin.

Foreshadowing Duluoz’ departure from the mountain, Kerouac includes not so much clues as billboards signifying that Duluoz’ journey is far from complete. The single-page chapter that concludes with Duluoz’ ‘ravishing strides’ away from his mountain cabin begins with a physical and metaphorical description of what Duluoz has really accomplished during his retreat: ‘In 63 days I left a column of feces [*sic*] about

⁷⁰ *Dark Night of the Soul*, p. 18.

⁷¹ *Desolation Angels*, p. 29.

⁷² *Desolation Angels*, p. 92.

⁷³ James, p. 267.

⁷⁴ S. Greenblatt et al, *The Norton Shakespeare* (London, 1997), p. 2577.

⁷⁵ *The Dharma Bums*, p. 146.

the height and size of a baby'⁷⁶. Kerouac's assertion that Duluoz essentially gave birth to little more than fertilizer during the previous two months is hard to ignore. On the facing page, Duluoz again twists time and explains what will happen to him after he has returned to civilization:

What I learned on the solitary mountain all summer, the Vision on Desolation Peak, I tried to bring down to the world and to my friends in San Francisco, but they ... had a lesson to teach me themselves— Besides, the vision of the freedom of eternity which I saw and which all wilderness hermitage saints have seen, is of little use in cities and warring societies such as we have—⁷⁷

Later in the same paragraph, Duluoz adds, 'I know only one thing; everybody in the world is an angel'⁷⁸. Merton recognized this tendency to assume that small steps along the pathway to divine union were giant leaps to the end of the journey, commenting that 'The lights of prayer that make us imagine we are beginning to be angels are sometimes only signs that we are finally beginning to be men'⁷⁹. To truly progress through St. John of the Cross' 'night of sense' is not to experience a transient moment of awareness about the separation between man and the divine in the midst of a mystical state, such as those described by William James⁸⁰. Rather, it is to exist indefinitely in 'this darkness of sense... which is dry and emptied of all the sweetness of sense'⁸¹ for an extended period of time, until 'the four passions of the soul—which are joy, grief, hope and fear—are calmed thought continual mortification'⁸².

To truly have progressed through the night of sense, Duluoz must travel back into civilization with this newfound awareness of his separation from the divine void and try to maintain his sense of neutrality while the world goes on about him. He must come to the realization that drinking among the butchers is not a reward for enlightenment or divine union, but rather the next step in the journey. He has conquered the four passions in solitude, but he must now begin again and conquer them in the world. This quickly proves more difficult than it initially appears, as Duluoz reflects when he looks back on his departure from the mountain:

But I did think on the mountain, 'Well'... 'let us keep the mind neutral, let us *be* like the void'—but as soon as I get bored and come down the mountain I cant [*sic*] for the life of me be anything but enraged, lost,

⁷⁶ *Desolation Angels*, p. 92.

⁷⁷ *Desolation Angels*, p. 193.

⁷⁸ *Desolation Angels*, p. 193.

⁷⁹ Merton, p. 147.

⁸⁰ James, p. 267.

⁸¹ *Dark Night of the Soul*, p. 47.

⁸² *Dark Night of the Soul*, p. 54.

partial, critical, mixed-up, scared, foolish, proud, sneering, shit shit
shit—

The candle burns
And when that's done
The wax lies in cold artistic piles
—s about all I know⁸³

The emotions that return to Duluoz as he rejoins civilization are the candle flame in the poem. He cannot simply snuff these emotions by withdrawing from the worldly experiences that cause them; as soon as the experiences return, so do the emotions. Rather, he must find a way to stay in the world without feeding the fire, allowing the emotions to burn out on their own. If he can accomplish this, he will be left cool and still, no longer at the mercy of his current fiery emotional state. Using the metaphor of the candle, the second half of Duluoz' night of sense becomes a process of letting the flames of joy, grief, hope and fear—all the emotions he struggles with—burn and extinguish, so that his soul can become cool and calm. Given the somewhat rambling nature of 'Book Two' and the reality that it is, in fact, two novels edited inelegantly together, the metaphor of the dying flames of passion serves as a useful framework for examining the remainder of the text.

By the time Duluoz makes his way from Washington State to San Francisco, he is eager for the exuberant, joyful adventures he has had in the past. His excited utterance at the beginning of chapter 75 summarizes his expectations of the triumphant return of the wanderer: 'I'm in San Francisco and I'm gonna take it all in!'⁸⁴ But his soul has already stopped feeding his emotional fire, and the joy he anticipates begins to sputter like a dying flame, reflected in an evening of plans that continually fall through. He arrives at the Cellar club to listen to jazz, but the music has not started yet, so he waits on the street. He encounters two friends, Chuck Berman and Bill Slivovitz, but Berman almost immediately wanders away. Slivovitz has written some poems about death, but his poems are unfinished and can only be referred to, not shared⁸⁵. Like the music, the conversation simply cannot get started.

Eventually, the two men return to the Cellar, where the music has finally started, and Duluoz quickly loses himself in the jazz and the atmosphere of the club, where:

...everything is going to the beat—it's the beat generation, its *béat*, it's the beat to keep, it's the beat of the heart, it's being beat and down in the world and like old time lowdown and like in ancient civilizations the slave boatmen rowing galleys to a beat and servants spinning pottery to a beat—The faces!⁸⁶

⁸³ *Desolation Angels*, pp. 97-98.

⁸⁴ *Desolation Angels*, p. 147.

⁸⁵ *Desolation Angels*, p. 150.

⁸⁶ *Desolation Angels*, p. 151.

For a moment, the flame of joy appears to be burning brightly for Duluoz. But yet again, the evening seems to start and stop. His closest friends are either unreachable or lack the money to join the party⁸⁷. And with that, the evening grinds to a halt, as Duluoz itches for something to happen:

...they all just stand shuffling around in the Cellar of Time, waiting, waiting, like so many Samuel Beckett heroes in the Abyss—Me, I've got to do something, go somewhere, establish a rapport, get the talk and the action going⁸⁸.

The peaceful composure gained on the mountain is gone in an evening, and Duluoz is once again yearning for the bright flame of joy: an emotion he desires but can no longer generate himself. But the void is not finished with him yet. Returning to his hotel room, it is only in the stillness of his bed that his night of sense returns:

In my room invisible eternal golden flowers drop on my head as I sleep, they drop everywhere, they are Ste. Terese's roses showering and pouring everywhere on the heads of the world—Even the shufflers and madcaps, even the snarling winos in alleys, even the bleating mice still in my attic a thousand miles and six thousand feet up in Desolation, even on the least her roses shower, perpetually—We all know that in our sleep⁸⁹.

The mice and rose showers from earlier parts of the journey demonstrate that Duluoz' mind remains active, but the emotions have cooled. While the rose petals fall and mice continue to make noise, he sleeps through it all, peaceful in the midst of the activity he imagines. Rather than waiting to 'take it all in' as he did at the start of the night, he is content to let it all go and rest.

As the remainder of the novel progresses, there is a continual stutter-step in Duluoz' persistent attempts to 'get the talk and action going', which stands in opposition to the flow apparent in *On the Road*, *The Dharma Bums*, and *The Subterraneans*. Plans are made, but momentum never builds. People are late to meetings, too poor to join the fun, or simply called away. It is as though Duluoz' exterior life is constantly being thwarted. Yet, the moment he slows down and rests his head on his pillow, the showers from heaven begin to fall upon him. He is forced again and again to return to his interior life for the simple reality that life on the outside will not coalesce into the fluid joy he experienced with Japhy Ryder in *The Dharma Bums* before going up onto Desolation Peak. Once he realizes this, Duluoz resolves to leave

⁸⁷ *Desolation Angels*, p. 154.

⁸⁸ *Desolation Angels*, p. 155.

⁸⁹ *Desolation Angels*, p. 157.

San Francisco and travel down to Mexico City. As he crosses the border into Mexico, he finds himself the sole passenger on the bus as it pulls up alongside a bus full of prison inmates. This image—the final visual in ‘Book One’—can be read as a sign that Duluoz himself is a prisoner to the journey he started on Desolation Peak. Having committed to reuniting with the void, he cannot turn away from his quest simply by leaving the country. This suggests that he no longer views his dark night of the soul as entirely voluntary. Rather, the dark night has a hold of him and is dulling his senses in a process that is at least partly beyond his control. Duluoz appears to recognize this change, as he concludes ‘Book One’ with the plaintive question: ‘Desolation Peak, what more do you want?’⁹⁰

Although ‘Book Two,’ which is subtitled ‘Passing Through,’ was originally intended as a discrete novel, the concept of ‘passing through’ continues a theme that began on Desolation Peak and was expanded upon shortly after Duluoz’ return to civilization. As he tries to sleep in the ranger’s station bunkhouse after descending the mountain, Duluoz ponders what awaits him:

Ahead of me are adventures with other far madder angels, and dangers, tho I can’t foresee I’m determined to be neutral—‘I’ll just pass through everything, like that which passes through everything—’⁹¹

Duluoz’s vow to be neutral suggests that he envisions ‘passing through’ as a process more akin to ‘slipping past’ the mad angels and danger that await him—getting by these obstacles without being touched. In the end, however, he truly does ‘pass through,’ as if through a flame, with every experience leaving its mark on him and preparing him for the next step in the journey. Having passed through his failed quest for joy and ecstasy in San Francisco, he travels down to Mexico, where he finds, not the neutrality of the void, but the flame of grief waiting for him. He is mourning the loss of his old life of pleasure seeking with his ‘mad angel’ friends: no longer a fellow reveller but a prisoner on a solitary bus.

Although Duluoz remembers Mexico from his younger days as ‘gay’ and ‘exciting’⁹², the reality he finds is ‘a certain dream, even sad, darkness’⁹³. Even old Bull Gaines, with whom Duluoz stays, presents himself as a sad junky, shuffling around ‘a dismal room’⁹⁴ looking for a tablet of codeine that he already consumed the night before. This is a far cry from the ecstatic Benzedrine, alcohol and marijuana-fueled escapades of *On the Road* and *The Dharma Bums*. Through Gaines, Kerouac issues a warning to his fictional self, as Gaines reflects that:

⁹⁰ *Desolation Angels*, p. 244.

⁹¹ *Desolation Angels*, p. 117.

⁹² *Desolation Angels*, p. 249.

⁹³ *Desolation Angels*, p. 250.

⁹⁴ *Desolation Angels*, p. 250.

...there's a great resemblance between the dope fiend so called and the artist so called, they like to be alone and comfortable provided they have what they want—They don't go mad running around looking for things to do 'cause they got it all inside, they can sit for hours without movin [*sic*]⁹⁵.

Duluoz has fled the mad joy of San Francisco, only to find that its polar opposite—the quiet grief of Mexico City—leads him no closer to the void. The absence of joy does not bring peace; rather, there are still more emotions to be burned down to cold wax. Duluoz is unable even to recreate any sense of solitude for long, as his friends from San Francisco begin arriving in Mexico City. Even Irwin Garden's 'persevering grim gaiety'⁹⁶ in dragging Duluoz and the others out into the Mexico City nightlife fails to rouse Duluoz from the sense of grief that has enveloped him:

How unbelievably bleak the actual world really is after you've dreamed of gay whore streets and gay dancing nightclubs but you end up as Irwin and Simon and I did, the one night we went out alone, staring among the cold and bony rubbles of the night⁹⁷.

Hoping to rekindle the flame of joy by revising past joyful haunts, Duluoz must accept that Mexico brings only the bleak flame of grief. In the end, Duluoz passes out of his sorrow in the same way he abandoned his attempts at mad joyfulness in San Francisco, leaving Mexico in the hope of finding peace in New York. Irwin Garden feeds this desire, persuading Duluoz that his future is waiting for him in New York, saying:

Jack, you've had all your peace in Mexico and on the mountain, why dont [*sic*] you come to New York with us now? Everybody's waiting for you. Your book'll be published eventually, within a year even, you can see Julien again, get a pad or a room in the Y or anything. It's time for you to *make it!*⁹⁸

Garden's encouragement sparks the next flame to be burned through—hope—with the suggestion that many of Duluoz' problems, including poverty and loneliness, can be resolved by moving to New York. At first it seems as though, finally, Duluoz'

⁹⁵ *Desolation Angels*, p. 251.

⁹⁶ *Desolation Angels*, p. 273.

⁹⁷ *Desolation Angels*, p. 272.

⁹⁸ *Desolation Angels*, p. 280.

hopes will be met. He sells his second novel for a \$1,000 advance, and he falls in love with a girl named Ruth, whom he considers marrying. He even accompanies Irwin and Simon to lunch at the Russian Tea Room with the artist Salvador Dali⁹⁹. However, there are, as always, hints that things cannot continue in this blissful way forever. Ruth almost immediately develops a ‘skin rash’ from their lovemaking¹⁰⁰. And although she loves Duluoz, she also confides that she loves his friend Julien as well¹⁰¹. He cannot even trust in his soon-to-be-published book. Shortly before leaving New York to visit his mother, he downs half a bottle of Jack Daniels while waiting for a cab to take him to the bus station, commenting that ‘I foresaw a new dreariness in all this literary success’¹⁰².

Once again, Duluoz’ shift from one extreme of emotion to the next coincides with a physical move, and his transition into the final passion, fear, occurs on the bus ride to Florida. Sleeping off his whisky hangover, he leaves his rucksack unattended near the driver well and wakes to find it gone. This disappearance reveals the extent to which Duluoz—despite his efforts at detachment—has bound his identity inextricably to his belongings. Not only has he lost his clothing and camping gear, he has lost the final chapters of his novel *Tristessa* and, ironically, the whole of *Desolation Angels*¹⁰³. Enveloped in the abject fear that he has lost everything, Duluoz crashes emotionally:

I started to cry. And I looked up and saw the bleak pines by the bleak mills of the Roanoke Rapids with one final despair, like the despair of a man who has nothing left to do but leave the earth forever¹⁰⁴.

Haunted by the prospect of going on after such a loss, Duluoz turns to God and suspects this latest trial of having a divine origin. He reflects back on a bliss felt before he was born and wonders:

Is God *everything*? If God is everything then it’s God who slapped me. For personal reasons? Do I have to carry this body around and call it mine own?¹⁰⁵

His horror lasts from Roanoke Rapids to Raleigh, where he is told that his rucksack has been located and will be sent on to his destination in Winter Park, Florida. Yet the bubble of hope he lived in during the early days in New York—before his relationship

⁹⁹ *Desolation Angels*, p. 306.

¹⁰⁰ *Desolation Angels*, p. 297.

¹⁰¹ *Desolation Angels*, p. 298.

¹⁰² *Desolation Angels*, p. 310.

¹⁰³ It is likely that the novel lost is what eventually became ‘Book One’.

¹⁰⁴ *Desolation Angels*, p. 311.

¹⁰⁵ *Desolation Angels*, p. 312.

with Ruth began to deteriorate—cannot be recovered. When he returns to New York, he finds himself convinced that Ruth is sleeping with Raphael Urso. His idyllic fantasy about marrying her and moving to Connecticut sours, and he sees ominous signs in the sight of ‘a pregnant woman pushing a baby carriage in front of a cemetery’¹⁰⁶. Ruth has soured on him as well and asks him to move out because her therapist has told her their relationship is not good for her ‘psyche’¹⁰⁷.

Still broke because his advance is coming at a rate of \$100 per month¹⁰⁸, Duluoz borrows \$225 from Irwin and prepares for his final journey of the novel: to Tangiers, Morocco¹⁰⁹. On the ship, he experiences the final transformation—what he refers to as his ‘complete turningabout’¹¹⁰. Attempting to summarize the change that has been coming on him since his time on Desolation Peak—the night of sense—Duluoz comments on the boat that:

And the same feeling came to me: Avoid the World, it’s just a lot of dust and drag and means nothing in the end. But what to do instead?¹¹¹

Duluoz has tried isolation, frenetic society, a partial Mexican retreat, and literary ambition; none have brought him what he needs. In the end, the change comes not from the outside but the inside. Tangiers offers many of the same temptations he has faced throughout the novel. He meets up with another ‘old bull’—Old Bull Hubbard—but finds this one, who once shared Old Bull Gaines’ overpowering addiction, to be a far less harsh version of the man he left in Mexico. Hubbard is ‘strong and healthy, no longer skinny from drugs, all tanned and muscular and vigorous’¹¹². Hubbard has been undergoing a catharsis of his own in Tangiers, and he predicts to Duluoz that, when he is finished with the novel he is writing, he will be ‘as pure as an angel’, prompting Duluoz to ask the question he has been building to since his first night on Desolation Peak: ‘But where’ll all this shit get us?’¹¹³

Hubbard’s answer is deceptively simply, and yet it paves the way for the conclusion Duluoz needs. ‘Simply get us rid of the shit’, he says, ‘*really* Jack’¹¹⁴. Here lies the meaning behind Duluoz’ ‘night of sense’, through which he has been travelling since his first recognition of the void in Mount Hozomeen. He has travelled through the flames of joy, grief, hope and fear, until finally, at the end of the novel, he has no extremes left within him. As Duluoz leaves Tangiers and travels through Paris and

¹⁰⁶ *Desolation Angels*, p. 316.

¹⁰⁷ *Desolation Angels*, p. 321.

¹⁰⁸ *Desolation Angels*, p. 297.

¹⁰⁹ *Desolation Angels*, p. 216.

¹¹⁰ *Desolation Angels*, p. 330.

¹¹¹ *Desolation Angels*, p. 330.

¹¹² *Desolation Angels*, p. 335.

¹¹³ *Desolation Angels*, p. 341.

¹¹⁴ *Desolation Angels*, p. 341.

London, the extremes of the novel are replaced by a growing sense of weary peace, and he sees a reflection of his own simplified mindset in the:

...fat calm tabby cats of London some of whom slept peacefully right in the doorways of butcher shops as people stepped over them carefully, right there in the sawdust sun but a nose away from the roaring traffic of trams and buses and cars¹¹⁵.

Like the cats, Duluoz is still a nose away from the life that threatened to burn away his soul, but he is untouched by it. He has no need to physically run away from the call of the East End or the British countryside. He acknowledges their appeal, but affirms that ‘I had no time and no desire to hang around, I wanted to go *home*’¹¹⁶. Back in the United States, there are more moves—from Florida to California and back again with his mother— but it all slides over Duluoz and he mentions the events with a newfound detachment that signals his arrival at the end of his night of sense. The movement continues, but the emotions have burnt themselves down to cold wax, and he no longer races from place to place in search of new sensations.

In a final act of severance from his old life, Duluoz returns to Mexico and watches from his hotel window as an earthquake destroys the building across the street. The Mexico he knew, just like the life he once knew, is being swallowed up by the earth. The fuel for his emotional fires is reduced to cold rubble. He summarizes his hard-won sense of calm in the final lines of the novel:

A peaceful sorrow at home is the best I’ll ever be able to offer the world, in the end, and so I told my Desolation Angels goodbye. A new life for me¹¹⁷.

From the perspective of St. John of the Cross’ night of sense, *Desolation Angels* transcends the individual trips taken by Jack Duluoz during the course of the novel and reveals itself as a unified spiritual journey, at the end of which Duluoz emerges having calmed the passions of his soul and accepted his place within the void. Within the larger arc of Kerouac’s faith novels, Duluoz has been stripped of the spiritual weaknesses that obstructed his progress in *The Dharma Bums* and finds himself in the position described by St. John as signifying the conclusion of the night of sense:

¹¹⁵ *Desolation Angels*, p. 358-59.

¹¹⁶ *Desolation Angels*, p. 359.

¹¹⁷ *Desolation Angels*, p. 397.

...when the harmony of the sense and the interior faculties cause a suspension of labour and a cessation from the work of meditation, as we have said (which is the dwelling and the household of the lower part of the soul), these enemies cannot obstruct this spiritual liberty, and the house remains at rest and quiet¹¹⁸.

Before moving on to address *Big Sur*, there is one final aspect of *Desolation Angels* that warrants reflection: one which hints at the spiritual collapse to come. Although Duluoz has allowed his emotions to be calmed through the night of sense, he has neglected—across the whole of the novel—a vital component of spiritual contemplation. This component is reasoning, and Merton addresses the danger early in *The Ascent to Truth*, noting that ‘reason plays an essential part of the interior ascesis without which we cannot safely travel the path of mysticism’¹¹⁹.

Throughout *Desolation Angels*, Duluoz’ quest is not an intellectual pursuit. He brings no books with him to Desolation Peak, and he never attempts to discuss his spiritual crisis with reference to the teachings or writings of others. Early on in *The Dharma Bums*, Ray Smith/Jack Duluoz warns Japhy Ryder he does not ‘give a goddamn about the mythology and all the national names and flavours of Buddhism, but was just interested in the first of Sakyamuni’s four noble truths, ‘all life is suffering’¹²⁰. Throughout *Desolation Angels*, Duluoz remains true to this rejection of formal study, and it is this neglect of a crucial aspect of his spiritual development that will halt his progress toward a reunion with the divine in the second half of the dark night of the soul: the ‘night of spirit’.

¹¹⁸ *Dark Night of the Soul*, p. 54.

¹¹⁹ Merton, p. 10.

¹²⁰ *The Dharma Bums*, p. 14.

CHAPTER IV: *BIG SUR*—DULUOZ' NIGHT OF SPIRIT

Big Sur, which was written in the fall of 1961—just weeks after Kerouac finished a rough draft of what became 'Book Two' of *Desolation Angels*¹—chronicles Jack Duluoz' attempt to complete a second retreat into the mountains and is arguably the final volume of the 'Duluoz Legend'. Although the novella *Satori in Paris* covers Kerouac's 1965 trip to France², Kerouac later described it as being a 'minor key' in the larger 'symphony' of the overall 'Legend'³, *Big Sur*, then, is a finale of sorts: a completion of the spiritual journey begun in *Visions of Gerard*. When read within the context of Kerouac's last years, this finale seems to suggest what author Benedict Giomo refers to as a 'rite of passage from modernistic mystic to hopeless drunkard'⁴. However, while alcohol certainly plays a significant role in the narrative, viewing Duluoz' heavy drinking as the dénouement to his crisis of faith would be an oversimplification, as binge drinking features in many of the 'Duluoz Legend' novels, including *The Dharma Bums* and *Desolation Angels*.

In *Big Sur*, drinking is a symptom of the spiritual crisis with which Duluoz struggles, but it is neither the cause nor the end game. Instead, Duluoz, having emerged from the night of sense, attempts to return to the wilderness, escaping the crush of media attention that has seen him crowned 'King of the Beatniks'⁵ and perhaps attempting to reconnect with that sense of the void, which seemed so clear on Desolation Peak. Instead, he progresses into the second part of the dark night of the soul—the night of spirit—and encounters, not the peace he predicts the retreat will bring him, but rather suffering that is ultimately too much for him to bear.

In *Dark Night of the Soul*, St. John of the Cross writes that the night of spirit, although one half of the larger dark night, does not begin the moment the 'night of sense' ends:

The soul which God is about to lead onward is not led by His Majesty into this night of spirit as soon as it goes forth from the aridities and trials of the first purgation and night of sense; rather, it is wont to pass a long time, even years, after leaving the state of beginners, in exercising itself in that of proficients⁶.

In the opening pages of *Big Sur*, three years have passed since Duluoz retired to the 'peaceful sorrow' of his mother's house at the end of *Desolation Angels*⁷. They have

¹ Kerouac: *His Life and Work*, p. 421.

² Kerouac, *His Life and Work*, p. 450.

³ Jack Kerouac, *Selected Letters 1957-1969*, p. 466.

⁴ Kerouac, *the Word and the Way: Prose Artist as Spiritual Quester*, p. 179.

⁵ *Big Sur*, p. 4.

⁶ *Dark Night of the Soul*, p. 57.

⁷ *Big Sur*, p. 4.

been difficult years, filled with *sturm und drang* brought on by incessant media demands in the wake of the publication of Duluoz' *Road* novel, and he admits to having been 'drunk practically all the time to put on a jovial cap to keep up with all this'⁸. However, he has not turned away from his spiritual quest during those years, and, indeed, when he takes one last jump off the sobriety wagon before setting out for friend Lorenz Monsanto's Big Sur cabin, he awakens to a rebuke from a Salvation Army volunteer, cried out on a nearby street corner, that seems intended just for him: '*Satan* is the cause of your alcoholism, *Satan* is the cause of your immorality, *Satan* is everywhere workin [sic] to destroy you unless you repent now'⁹.

If the night of sense experience may be summarized as calming the four principle passions of the soul—joy, grief, hope and fear¹⁰—then the night of spirit is described as the flooding of the soul with divine light, which is so blinding as to be perceived as darkness. To clarify this concept of dark light, St. John uses the analogy of an owl's eye, overwhelmed by the light of a clear night and therefore blinded¹¹. This juxtaposition of darkness and light finds parallels throughout *Big Sur*, where the nights in Raton Canyon exercise a powerful hold on Duluoz.

Despite the fear he experiences alone in the 'crashing dark'¹², Duluoz ventures out into the night again and again throughout the novel, wandering through the woods¹³ and writing poetry on the beach¹⁴. The emotional difference between day and night can even be found in the word selection. Kerouac describes Duluoz' first afternoon in the canyon as 'marvelous,' 'rapturous,' and 'heaven'¹⁵. But when night falls, the retreat becomes 'frightening,' 'gloomy,' 'horrible,' and full of 'screaming ghosts'¹⁶. This shift between peaceful day and dangerous night continues throughout the book.

Before delving too deeply into the novel, it is helpful to get some context for the emotional toll the dark night of the soul eventually takes on Duluoz. While Thomas Merton provides a strong intellectual analysis of St. John of the Cross' writings on the dark night of the soul, he does not claim at any time to have experienced a dark night himself. Further, he focuses the majority of *The Ascent to Truth* on St. John of the Cross' theological foundation, as well as on the early steps of the night of sense. The reason for this becomes clear toward the end of the book when he states that:

In the Night of Sense and the Prayer of Quiet the contemplative is still in his infancy, and the tragedy is that in most cases mystical prayer does not get beyond this cradle stage¹⁷.

⁸ *Big Sur*, p. 5.

⁹ *Big Sur*, p. 6.

¹⁰ *Dark Night of the Soul*, p. 54.

¹¹ *Dark Night of the Soul*, p. 64.

¹² *Big Sur*, p. 18.

¹³ *Big Sur*, pp. 196-202.

¹⁴ *Big Sur*, p. 21.

¹⁵ *Big Sur*, p. 20.

¹⁶ *Big Sur*, pp. 21-22.

¹⁷ Merton, p. 214.

One can infer from the general tone of the book, and the emphasis throughout on instruction for the beginner contemplative, that Merton's personal experience may not have extended beyond the night of sense. Certainly his few descriptions of the night of spirit seem at odds with the pain one might imagine would accompany such a thorough blinding of the soul. His comment that the commencement of the night of spirit is 'a paradise of peace, interior liberty, spiritual growth'¹⁸ has the ring of a midwife or obstetrician advising a pregnant woman that childbirth will be a 'good pain'.

To gain a better perspective on *Big Sur* and how it can be viewed as a night of spirit, it is helpful then to turn to the writings of Mother Teresa of Calcutta, a Catholic nun who privately documented her own dark night of the soul experience. Her writings and the accompanying commentary supplement the writings of both St. John of the Cross and Thomas Merton and provide descriptions of a night of spirit that are relatively contemporary with Kerouac's writing of *Big Sur*. Unlike Merton's 'paradise of peace,' the book *Mother Teresa: Come Be My Light* depicts the experience as a 'state of extreme aridity' in which 'one feels rejected and abandoned by God'.¹⁹ Brian Kolodiejchuk, who edited the book, goes on to write that the 'experience can become so intense that one feels as if heading toward eternal perdition'²⁰. This internal confusion over whether one is approaching heaven or hell appears again and again in *Big Sur*, as Duluoz struggles with his interior and exterior lives.

The novel opens at the conclusion of a two-day drinking binge, with Lorenz Monsanto arriving at Duluoz' hotel room to find him sprawled on the floor among empty bottles. This opening image of Duluoz—debauched and unconscious on the morning of his intended return to the wilderness—previews the spiritual struggles to come. Gone is Ray Smith of *The Dharma Bums*, who persuaded Japhy Ryder that there was 'wisdom in wine'²¹. Duluoz awakens from his bender disgusted with himself for ruining his intention of a quiet return to San Francisco 'by getting silly drunk while hiding in the alleys with bums'²².

Ultimately, Duluoz manages to pull himself together and resume the contemplative quest he began on Desolation Peak. From the very beginning, there is a sense of urgency about this return that was not evident in *Desolation Angels*, and Duluoz recognizes that he is in danger of losing the threads of his spiritual awakening if he does not recommit himself to the process soon:

'One fast move or I'm gone,' I realize, gone the way of the last three years of drunken hopelessness which is a physical and spiritual and metaphysical hopelessness you cant [*sic*] learn in school no matter how many books on existentialism or pessimism you read, or how many jugs

¹⁸ Merton, p. 175.

¹⁹ Kolodiejchuk, pp. 22

²⁰ Kolodiejchuk, pp. 23

²¹ *The Dharma Bums*, p. 158.

²² *Big Sur*, p. 3.

of vision producing Ayahuasca you drink, or Mescaline take, or Peyote goop up with²³.

Through this passage, Duluoz reveals that he has not been entirely spiritually idle during the past three years, whatever his current physical state might suggest. He sought to heighten his awareness of the otherness of the void through extensive reading and the ingestion of psychotropic drugs. The specific drugs he mentions—Ayahuasca, Mescaline and Peyote—are not productivity enhancers like Benzedrine or social lubricants like marijuana or alcohol. Rather, each has a connection to Native American religious ritual as aides in vision quest experiences. Yet all his study and experimentation have ultimately been in vain, and he has chosen to return to the wilderness—to make a ‘fast move’ back to the experience begun on Desolation Peak before his dark night is gone forever.

Early in *Big Sur*, Kerouac shifts from the void metaphor prevalent in *Desolation Angels* to one of darkness, which will recur throughout the novel. Having missed his ride to Monsanto’s cabin, Duluoz must hire a cab, and the driver drops him at the entrance to a dirt road rather than taking him through to the cabin. Night has fallen, and Duluoz makes his way toward his wilderness retreat by lantern light. In what becomes a recurring image throughout the novel, the feeble manmade light proves ineffective against the surrounding darkness:

When the cab leaves I therefore turn on my railroad lantern for a timid peek but its beam gets lost just like the car lights in a void and in fact the battery is fairly weak and I can hardly see the bluff at my left²⁴.

Kerouac’s imagery as Duluoz begins his journey back to contemplation is similar to a metaphor offered by Merton in his description of the dark night of the soul: that of a car driving at night:

The way of faith is necessarily obscure. We drive by night. Nevertheless our reason penetrates the darkness enough to show us a little of the road ahead. It is by the light of reason that we interpret the signposts and make out the landmarks along our way²⁵.

²³ *Big Sur*, p. 7.

²⁴ *Big Sur*, p. 24.

²⁵ *The Ascent to Truth*, p. 114.

Although there is no documentation suggesting that Kerouac read *The Ascent to Truth*, this passage finds a number of parallels in *Big Sur*. Duluoz' visceral experiences in *Big Sur* are not tempered by rationality; he brings no books to read, no work plan, no local guide. He comes to the canyon simply to experience it. Yet, without Merton's 'light of reason', Duluoz lacks anything to provide balance for his sensory experience. As a result, his rational mind—his lantern—is feeble and failing, and he struggles to orient himself in the darkness of his night of spirit. So completely is he set adrift that he cannot even sense the ground beneath his feet. Instead, 'it feels like being up in the air somewhere', and the 'roaring mystery' of the night quickly swallows the only illumination he has brought with him²⁶.

As he fumbles along the darkened path, Duluoz' only option is to shine his lantern at the ground directly in front of him and make his way step-by-step through the night, fearful that any moment 'my lamp will carry me astray if I dare to raise it from the ruts in the dirt road'²⁷ and perhaps send him plunging off a nearby bluff. This terrifying journey mirrors the entry into the 'night of spirit' described by St. John of the Cross, who says:

...Divine wisdom is not only night and darkness for the soul, but is likewise affliction and torment. The first is because the height of Divine Wisdom, which transcends the talent of the soul, and in this way is darkness to it; the second, because of its vileness and impurity, in which respect it is painful and afflictive to it, and is also dark²⁸.

In this respect, Duluoz' impurity is literal, as the only reason he is forced to inch his way to the cabin on foot at night, rather than being dropped off at the door by Monsanto during the day, is because he was drunk and unable to rouse himself when Monsanto arrived to pick him up²⁹. His forced, blinded march through the canyon thus becomes the beginning of his night of spirit as he is literally plunged into darkness. That he makes this trip without an adequate lantern is indicative of the way that he will be hampered by a lack of detached reasoning throughout the novel. Ultimately, he is unable to complete his journey through the dark and is forced to sleep in a meadow and wait for the sun to rise to find the cabin. In the morning, he discovers that his terror was well founded and that he had been inching his way along a path bordered by a thousand-foot drop. This dawning awareness colours Duluoz' impressions of *Big Sur*, and he views it as a much more dangerous environment than *Desolation Peak*:

²⁶ *Big Sur*, p. 10.

²⁷ *Big Sur*, p. 10.

²⁸ *Dark Night of the Soul*, p. 64.

²⁹ *Big Sur*, p. 4.

So that later when I heard people say ‘Oh Big Sur must be beautiful!’ I gulp to wonder why it has the reputation of being beautiful above and beyond its *fearfulness*, its Blakean groaning roughrock Creation throes, those vistas when you drive the coast highway on a sunny day opening up the eye for miles of horrible washing sawing³⁰.

This sense of isolation carries through the novel, even during the times when Duluoz is not physically alone. Having survived this first journey into the night of spirit, he can no longer look at his surroundings in the same way. His contrary perception of Big Sur as fearsome and horrible separates him from those who eventually join him at the cabin. This sense of isolation fits with Merton’s assertion that few contemplatives are able to move beyond the cradle stage of the night of sense, leaving those who enter the ‘night of spirit’ necessarily alone in their experience³¹. Mother Teresa echoed this sense of aloneness frequently, albeit privately³², in her writings about her own night of spirit, which seemed to rob her periodically of the ability to speak of it:

I don’t know, but there is such a deep loneliness in my heart that I cannot express it.—For months I have not be able to speak to Fr. Van Exem³³ and I find it harder and harder to speak. How long will Our Lord stay away?³⁴

In the early days of his Big Sur retreat, Duluoz appears to have returned to the contemplative experience he began on Desolation Peak, although his meditations are coloured by his increasingly antagonistic impressions of Big Sur. He even finds a parallel to Mount Hozomeen on a cliff that overlooks his cabin:

That first night I sit there and all I know, as I look up, is the kitchen light is on, on the cliff, to the right, where somebody’s just built a cabin overlooking the horrible Sur, somebody up there’s having a mild and tender supper that’s all I know—The lights from the cabin kitchen up there go out like a little weak lighthouse beacon and ends suspended a thousand feet over the crashing shore³⁵.

³⁰ *Big Sur*, p. 15.

³¹ Merton, p. 214.

³² Mother Teresa repeatedly asked those to whom she wrote about her spiritual path to destroy her letters. Kolodiejchuk, p. xii.

³³ Fr. Van Exem was Mother Teresa’s spiritual advisor for most of her life, beginning in 1944.

Kolodiejchuk, p. 5.

³⁴ Kolodiejchuk, p. 158.

³⁵ *Big Sur*, p. 21.

Here, the image from *Desolation Angels*—Mount Hozomeen as a separate void, visible but unreachable—is altered, recasting the void as darkness, penetrated only by a faraway lit cabin. The light is weak, however, and ends a thousand feet before it reaches him—tantalizingly close and yet untouchable. As on Desolation Peak, Duluoz begins to make peace with the separation, and he incorporates the little lighted cabin into his nightly ritual—walking down to the beach and writing poetry in the dark because he fears that his lantern will scare the cabin’s residents away and bring an end to his one respite from the dark terrors of nights in Big Sur. But the dark light will not be so easily tamed, and Duluoz soon learns that his images of tender suppers are pure fantasy. The lights belong to carpenters working overtime to finish work on the otherwise unoccupied cabin³⁶.

In describing the journey through the night of spirit, Merton comments that ‘It is by the light of reason that we interpret the signposts and make out the landmarks along our way’³⁷. In *Big Sur*, Kerouac employs signs to warn of Duluoz’ impending spiritual collapse in the absence of reason. Chapter eight of the novel calls to mind the meditations on Desolation Peak, as Duluoz sets out a plate of chocolate and cheese for the cabin’s mice in penance for the ones he killed in the earlier book and meditates on the natural world around him:

There’s the raccoon in his fog, there the man to his fireside, and both are lonesome for God—There’s me coming back from seaside night sittings like a muttering old Bhikku stumbling down the path³⁸.

Yet, no sooner does Kerouac establish this bucolic scene than he pulls the rug out from under the image, reminding the reader that Big Sur has not finished terrorizing Duluoz. In the closing lines of the chapter, Kerouac foreshadows Duluoz’ spiritual collapse in the same environment that had once brought him such peace: ‘For who could go crazy that could be so relaxed as that: but wait: there are the signposts of something wrong’³⁹. In the ensuing chapters, Duluoz identifies several such ‘signposts’: clues that his perception of the world has become compromised.

Perhaps the first ‘signpost’ that something is about to go terribly wrong with Jack Duluoz is Kerouac’s explicit naming of these ‘signpost’ warnings at all. Kerouac’s ability to craft experience into fiction without seeming to have done so is a hallmark of his novels. At times, this can lead the casual reader to view him as little more than a gifted diarist, or, as Truman Capote once famously scoffed, a typist⁴⁰. In *Big Sur*, the clear warnings of what is to come seem heavy-handed at first glance. However, as the novel unfolds, it becomes clear that the very imposition of order on these events is a symptom of Duluoz’ spiritual and mental disintegration. The signposts are not

³⁶ *Big Sur*, pp. 31-32.

³⁷ Merton, p. 114.

³⁸ *Big Sur*, p. 37.

³⁹ *Big Sur*, p. 39.

⁴⁰ Clark, p. 174.

harbingers that something wrong is coming; rather, they are clues that the ‘something wrong’ has already begun.

Benedict Giomo relates these signposts to the distress that psychologist William James attributed to all religions and suggests that they are early indicators that Duluoz’ awareness of his spiritual suffering has caused him to become divided against himself: at once hopeful and despairing, self-reliant and helpless. Duluoz, says Giomo, spends much of the novel ‘attempting to reclaim physical, spiritual, and metaphysical wellbeing’⁴¹. Certainly, contradiction is a strong theme throughout *Big Sur*, and the revisiting of parallel—or even identical—situations with different results is a motif in Kerouac’s writing. When read as a continuation of the work begun in *Visions of Gerard* and continued in *The Dharma Bums* and *Desolation Angels*, the reader is confronted with an inescapable sense of déjà vu. The mountain cabin, the mice, the drinking binges: these are all things Duluoz has engaged with before. Each is a signpost in a way. That Duluoz, as Giomo notes, has become aware of the signposts is a signal that they have outlived their usefulness and must now be disassembled.

The first of the signposts Duluoz identifies comes in Chapter Nine when he tries to take a deep ‘Yogic’ breath of sea air and instead fills his lungs with an overdose of ‘iodine, or of evil, maybe the sea caves, maybe the seaweed cities, something, my heart suddenly beating’⁴². This two-page chapter is filled with images from Duluoz’ past: the red bandana and Thérèse of Lisieux’ shower of roses from *The Dharma Bums*⁴³, the doomed mouse from *Desolation Angels*⁴⁴, the cabin and its meticulously catalogued larders from both novels⁴⁵. And yet now these trappings of simplicity and spiritual engagement seem false and poisonous. Duluoz is learning that—much like the Heraclitus river paradox—he cannot recapture earlier experiences merely by surrounding himself with copied artefacts. Made forcibly aware of what he has attempted to do, Duluoz reflects on his situation:

Thinking I’m gonna get the local vibrations instead here I am almost fainting only it isn’t an ecstatic swoon by St. Francis, it comes over me in the form of horror of an eternal condition of sick mortality in me—In me and in everyone—I felt completely nude of all poor protective devices like thoughts about life or meditations under trees and the ‘ultimate’ and all that shit, in fact the other pitiful devices of making supper or saying ‘What do I do now next? chop wood?’—I see myself as just doomed, pitiful—An awful realization that I have been fooling myself all my life thinking there was a next thing to do to keep the show going and actually I’m just a sick clown and so is everybody else⁴⁶.

⁴¹ Kerouac, *the Word and the Way: Prose Artist as Spiritual Quester*, pp. 183-4.

⁴² *Big Sur*, p. 41.

⁴³ *The Dharma Bums*, p. 10.

⁴⁴ *Desolation Angels*, pp. 94-5.

⁴⁵ *Desolation Angels*, pp. 61-62.; *The Dharma Bums*, pp. 196-99.

⁴⁶ *Big Sur*, p. 41.

Viewed within the context of the larger ‘Duluoz Legend’, this recognition of the scene Duluoz has set for himself as nothing more than a collection of ‘pitiful devices’ represents a second, and even more profound, step into the darkness. For although Duluoz cannot stop the sun from rising over Big Sur every morning, his recognition that the cabin, the canyon and everything else is little more than set dressing in a ‘show’ of his own manufacture effectively sweeps the stage clean, leaving Duluoz with nothing material that he can put his faith in, staring at ‘waves which are suddenly not waves at all’⁴⁷. Merton refers to this step in the contemplative journey as clearing the ‘eye’ of the intelligence so that it can receive ‘the infused light of faith and of contemplation’⁴⁸. For Duluoz, this clarity is too much for him to withstand. Rather than staying with the experience, he attempts to dismantle the set by taking all his perishable food and spreading it out on the porch for the animals. Then he removes the cover from the rat poison Monsanto has supplied and leaves it open on a top shelf⁴⁹. It is an equivocal move: one that could be interpreted either as an attempt to mitigate the damage his actions will undoubtedly bring about or to lure the mice and rats to the cabin where they can then ingest the rat poison and die—thus clearing the stage of its actors as well as its set pieces. Whatever his motivation, Duluoz then leaves his cabin retreat—having spent an indeterminate number of days, perhaps as few as three or four or as many as twenty-one—and hitchhikes back to San Francisco⁵⁰.

The second sign comes during Duluoz’ return to civilization as he attempts to hitch a ride for the first time in many years. His painfully clear eyes now see everything around him as little more than set decoration in some farcical approximation of American life, and he imagines that the family of four who pass him in a station wagon keep racks of crisply pressed clothes in the back of the car so that they can emerge dressed like millionaires every time they stop for food⁵¹. Duluoz’ awareness extends to himself as well, and he is confronted with the reality that, as much as he rebels against the notoriety that has followed in the wake of his book’s publication, a return to anonymity in his present condition brings its own false perceptions. As he stumbles down the road on blistered feet and tries to make himself as presentable as possible, he reflects on the possibility that the occupants of the passing cars see him as:

the Hollywood hitch hiker with the hidden gun and... a rucksack on his back as tho he’d just escaped from the war in Cuba—Or’s got dismembered bodies in the bag anyway⁵².

The third sign comes after Duluoz arrives in San Francisco and learns that his cat Tyke, which he left in the care of his mother, died the day after he left New York. Duluoz’s reaction seems disproportionate to the loss, something he is acutely aware of:

⁴⁷ *Big Sur*, p. 41.

⁴⁸ Merton, p. 119.

⁴⁹ *Big Sur*, p. 42.

⁵⁰ *Big Sur*, p. 43-44.

⁵¹ *Big Sur*, p. 45.

⁵² *Big Sur*, p. 47.

Ordinarily the death of a cat means little to most men, and a lot to fewer men, but to me, and that cat, it was exactly and no lie and sincerely like the death of my little brother⁵³.

Giarno sees Duluoz' reaction to Tyke's death—the first of a number of animal deaths in the novel, including a mouse, an otter and a tank full of goldfish—as part of his larger awareness of 'the uneasiness and wrongness that exist in the natural world, in society, and within the heaving breast of man'⁵⁴. However, when read within the larger arc of the 'Duluoz Legend' as a whole, the death of the cat and Duluoz' connection of the event to the death of his brother suggest that the 'Legend' Duluoz began in *Visions of Gerard* is beginning to collapse in on itself. The parable of older brother Gerard Duluoz and the family cat is a key scene in *Visions of Gerard*⁵⁵—one that he revisited, with different results, in *Desolation Angels*⁵⁶—and the fact that Duluoz has left the Big Sur mice to an uncertain fate in opposition to what Gerard preached adds a layer of gravity to the news of this latest cat's death. Further, Duluoz' allusion to a brother who is little rather than elder points toward the reality that he has outgrown the myth of St. Gerard established in *Visions of Gerard*. Duluoz has grown both spiritually and physically, while Gerard remains a small child. With the news of this cat/brother's death, the three signposts come together, and Duluoz is submersed in his night of spirit.

In the pages following Duluoz's return to the city, he sets off on a pilgrimage of sorts in an attempt to find his way back to the light of his lost spiritual bliss. With Gerard Duluoz, the boy saint, long dead, the first person he seeks out is Cody Pomeray, whom he has viewed as a substitute for Gerard since the early pages of *On the Road*⁵⁷. However, on the drive to Pomeray's home, Duluoz spots another 'signpost': a radio tower that he mistakes for a flying saucer⁵⁸. His desperation to reconnect with the divine is clearly growing as he chooses to see a common tool for human communication as a visit from some other—perhaps even spiritual—world.

The visit with Pomeray is ultimately awkward and unsatisfying. In lieu of Dean Moriarty from *On the Road*, Duluoz is confronted by a relationship that no longer exists—one that Duluoz has at least partially dismantled himself⁵⁹. The juxtaposition between the current meeting and the friendship that was is driven home when Duluoz hurries to explain a year old missed appointment. As Duluoz makes his excuses, he sees

⁵³ *Big Sur*, p. 49.

⁵⁴ *Kerouac, the Word and the Way: Prose Artist as Spiritual Quester*, p. 186.

⁵⁵ *Visions of Gerard*, pp. 10-11.

⁵⁶ *Desolation Angels*, pp. 94-97.

⁵⁷ Both Cody Pomeray and Dean Moriarty are fictionalized versions of Neal Cassady. While Kerouac refers to Moriarty in *On the Road* as 'some long-lost brother,' he clarified this point in a 1955 letter to Cassady, writing: 'I'm not too sure that maybe you arent [sic] my brother Gerard reborn, because he died in the summer of 1926 and you were born... when? in 1927'. J. Kerouac, *On the Road* (London, 2000), p. 9; *Jack Kerouac: Selected Letters 1940-1956*, p. 472.

⁵⁸ *Big Sur*, p. 66.

⁵⁹ *Big Sur*, p. 66-68.

a framed photo of him and Pomeray from the *On the Road* days. The fact that he is only now making his apology underscores the gulf between them⁶⁰.

Having failed to reconnect with the ‘mad angel’ from *On the Road*, Duluoz quickly attempts to replace him—recasting the part with a young man he meets named Joey Rosenberg. Rosenberg, whom Duluoz dubs a ‘beat Jesus’⁶¹, appears as a merging of Duluoz and Dean Moriarty. But the connection does not hold, as Duluoz later reflects:

...in the morning when I look into Joey Rosenberg’s eyes I instantly realize it IS Him, Jesus, because anyone (according to the rules of my reverie [*sic*]) who looks into those eyes is instantly convinced and converted ... in reality, a few months later I threw away his shoes in the ashcan back home because I felt they had brought me bad luck⁶².

Moriarty cannot be replaced because he is not Pomeray; he is only Duluoz’ perception of what he might have been. Just as he cannot hold on to the image of Gerard the elder brother, he cannot recreate Moriarty with a new actor playing the role.

The final stop on Duluoz’ unsuccessful pilgrimage takes him to a TB hospital to visit a Buddhist friend, George Baso, who is apparently dying. Although Duluoz remembers Baso as a devout Buddhist and a strong influence on his own spiritual evolution, the man he finds in the hospital is embittered and seems to have given up on life at the age of 30. Worse, Baso presents this fatalism as a natural extension of his spirituality, telling Duluoz that, ‘I guess all the Dharma talk about everything is nothing is just sorta sinking in my bones’⁶³. Lost in his night of spirit, Duluoz is profoundly affected by the sight of his friend’s deterioration and reflects that the visit ‘adds to that darkness in my mind, all these DEATH things piling up suddenly’⁶⁴.

This linking of the darkness to death signals the beginning of Duluoz’ true spiritual collapse under the weight of his night of spirit. While he has been suffering in the darkness, this glimpse of what he perceives as the endgame to all his religious striving triggers a pessimistic shift that is ultimately incompatible with his desire for divine union. As he sits with Baso in the hospital, he projects himself into the hospital bed, commenting that:

I mean it was my first frightened realization of what to be Japanese really meant—to be Japanese and not to believe in life any more [*sic*] and to be gloomy like Beethoven yet to be Japanese in gloom, the gloom of Bashô

⁶⁰ *Big Sur*, pp. 68-69.

⁶¹ *Big Sur*, p. 72.

⁶² *Big Sur*, pp. 73-74.

⁶³ *Big Sur*, p. 81.

⁶⁴ *Big Sur*, p. 78.

behind it all, the huge thunderous scowl of Issa or of Shiki,⁶⁵ kneeling in the frost with the bowed head like the bowed-head-oblivion of all the old horses of Japan long dust⁶⁶.

Given the largely pessimistic tone of this passage, it is possible to see Duluoz's assertion in the following pages that someday he will accompany Baso to Japan as a commitment that he will eventually join Baso in his death of faith if not in his literal death⁶⁷. Duluoz returns to Big Sur soon after this visit, accompanied by Pomeray, Monsanto and several other friends, but his 'night of spirit' is effectively undone, and the remainder of the book chronicles Duluoz' spiritual collapse—his joining of Baso in the 'bowed-head-oblivion' of spiritual pessimism.

The key to this spiritual collapse can be founded in the signposts highlighted by Duluoz in the first third of the book, as well as the imbalance created by his neglect of the reasoning side of his spiritual quest. In *Ascent to Mount Carmel*, St. John of the Cross devotes several chapters to the dangers inherent in relying on supernatural signs and visions during the dark night of the soul. According to St. John, the validity of these signs and visions ultimately becomes irrelevant. Whether they are internally-generated fantasies or external revelations sent either by God or the Devil, contemplatives should not be guided by them, but rather by reason⁶⁸. Merton echoes this sentiment, advising that the contemplative 'can make much more progress to sanctity by following the light of reason than by indulging in an unregulated taste for extraordinary penances and for suspicious spiritual "experiences"'⁶⁹.

Having essentially turned his back on the intellectual, or rational, side of his spirituality, Duluoz has allowed himself to be caught up in an 'unregulated taste' for signs and omens. As a result, he is unable to distinguish between signs that will lead him closer to divine union and those that lead him farther astray. This imbalance ultimately leads him to move beyond the dismantling of the spiritual 'set' he began during his initial visit to Big Sur to a dismantling of the entire mythology around which he has built his 'Beat' spirituality: the parable of his elder brother Gerard presented in *Visions of Gerard*.

Shortly after returning to Big Sur with his friends, Duluoz discovers that an otter he had written poetry about during his initial visit has died⁷⁰. Forgetting momentarily that the Big Sur cabin had never been the peaceful spiritual retreat he had found on Desolation Peak, Duluoz sees the otter as symbolizing the death of his Raton Canyon haven. The otter is quickly followed by a second corpse—one that is more inextricably bound up in the mythology of Gerard and Duluoz' spirituality:

⁶⁵ Matsuo Bashô, Kobayashi Issa, and Shiki Masaoka are all poets who specialized in haiku, a form of poetry Kerouac embraced from 1957 onward, even after he had largely abandoned his spiritual quest. R. Weinreich (ed.), *Book of Haikus* (New York and London, 2003).

⁶⁶ *Big Sur*, p. 80.

⁶⁷ *Big Sur*, p. 82.

⁶⁸ *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, p. 181.

⁶⁹ *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, p. 109.

⁷⁰ *Big Sur*, p. 106.

We go down the old sad path of the bhikku and suddenly I see a dead mouse in the grass—‘A wee dead mousie’ I say cleverly poetically but suddenly I realize and remember now for the first time how I’ve left the cover off the rat poison in Monsanto’s shelf and so this is *my mouse* .. once again I’ve unconsciously sabotaged all these great plans of mine to be kind to all living beings even bugs, once again I’ve murdered a mouse one way or the other⁷¹.

This aggrandizement of both Duluoz’ care for living beings and the mouse’s foreseeable demise pushes him further into spiritual pessimism and he begins to view the canyon as a sort of diabolical Garden of Eden, complete with an evil green serpent⁷². Further, the mouse—like Tyke the cat—serves as a reminder that Duluoz’ childhood memories, including the tale of Gerard and the cat who ate the mouse, have been corrupted. This downward spiritual spiral continues at a rapid pace until Duluoz begins to see his own childhood experiences with his saintly brother Gerard as childish dreams that have, in his adult state, been perverted into paranoia that his friends are ‘witching me into madness’⁷³.

Ultimately, however, it is Duluoz himself who perverts *Visions of Gerard* through his relationship with Cody Pomeray’s mistress, Billie, and her young son Elliot. Shortly after meeting Billie, he accompanies her home and begins an intense, destructive love affair with her in the hopes that ‘that thing I saw (that horror of snake emptiness) when I took the deep iodine deathbreath [*sic*] on the Big Sur beach is now justified and hosannah’d and raised up like a sacred earn to Heaven’ through the act of their lovemaking⁷⁴. But instead of being ‘raised up’, Duluoz continues his decent, forming an instant negative opinion of Elliot, whom Billie perceives as an embodiment of ‘spiritual beauty’ but Duluoz regards as ‘one of the weirdest persons I’ve ever met’⁷⁵. Through Elliot, the purity of Duluoz’ conception of the saintly child is perverted, and the boy becomes almost subhuman in Duluoz’ eyes: ‘drooling long slavers of spit from his lips’ as he watches Duluoz and Billie make love⁷⁶. When contrasted to the reverence with which childhood is treated throughout the ‘Duluoz Legend’, it is possible to view the microcosm of family life depicted by Duluoz, Billy and Elliot as a dismantling of the myth of Duluoz’ own childhood.

In 1950 and 1951, Kerouac wrote a series of letters to Neal Cassady that include many of the stories incorporated into *Visions of Gerard*. The Gerard depicted in these letters is more complex than the child saint of the novel. While he recounts the story of Gerard and the cat as proof of his brother’s saintly demeanor⁷⁷, he also writes of a

⁷¹ *Big Sur*, p. 110.

⁷² *Big Sur*, p. 110.

⁷³ *Big Sur*, p. 117.

⁷⁴ *Big Sur*, p. 147.

⁷⁵ *Big Sur*, p.148.

⁷⁶ *Big Sur*, p. 157.

⁷⁷ *Jack Kerouac: Selected Letters, 1940-1956*, p. 252.

darker, more malevolent Gerard, who fabricates ghost lights to terrify his brother and sister⁷⁸, and lurks in the darkness beside Kerouac's crib, exuding hatred⁷⁹. This darker Gerard is expunged from *Visions of Gerard* but finds expression in the depiction of little Elliot, who drools as Duluoz makes love to Billie.

Eventually, Duluoz brings Billie and Elliot back to the cabin in Big Sur, and the family portrait devolves further as Billie alternately beats her son, and threatens to kill Elliot and herself⁸⁰. Duluoz is rapidly deteriorating as well; he flees from his new family to the nearby river, only to become convinced that the neighbours have thrown gasoline in the water to poison him⁸¹. From that point on, his paranoia grows rapidly. He becomes convinced that his food has been infused by 'all the death of otters and mice [sic] and snakes'⁸² and that his friends Dave and Romana are part of an anti-Catholic society bent on poisoning him⁸³. Frantically dragging his blankets from place to place in a futile search for a safe place to sleep, Duluoz is consumed by the voices screaming in his ears, crying out that 'I'm not human any more [sic] and I'll never be safe any more [sic]'⁸⁴. It is amidst this internal turmoil that Duluoz sees a vision of the Christian Cross⁸⁵.

In *Kerouac, the Word and the Way*, Giamo suggests that the vision of the Cross represents a moment when 'the "higher part" of Duluoz emerges to make a vital connection with the powers that be'⁸⁶. Giamo goes on to say:

This is why *Big Sur* culminates with a vision of the Cross—to keep the spiritual being alive as it springs from the dark night, and despite the departure from previous teachings, influences, and aspirations. At the end of *Big Sur*, after all that gritty 'passing through' and 'peaceful sorrow' of *Desolation Angels*, Duluoz truly comes home to settle down in mind, body, and spirit after roaming so far and wide⁸⁷.

However, to view this vision of the Cross as a spiritual homecoming is to interpret it in isolation within the text—effectively reducing the experience to a *deus ex machina* on Kerouac's part. The desire to view Duluoz' vision in a positive light is understandable. Having followed the spiritual evolution of Jack Duluoz across eleven

⁷⁸ Jack Kerouac: *Selected Letters, 1940-1956*, pp. 255-256.

⁷⁹ Jack Kerouac: *Selected Letters, 1940-1956*, p. 256.

⁸⁰ *Big Sur*, pp. 181-188.

⁸¹ *Big Sur*, p. 192.

⁸² *Big Sur*, p. 198.

⁸³ *Big Sur*, p. 203.

⁸⁴ *Big Sur*, p. 204.

⁸⁵ *Big Sur*, pp. 205-206.

⁸⁶ *Kerouac, the Word and the Way: Prose Artist as Spiritual Quester*, p. 192.

⁸⁷ *Kerouac, the Word and the Way: Prose Artist as Spiritual Quester*, p. 192.

novels⁸⁸, the reader wants to see Duluoz triumphant—the journey completed. But the vision of the Cross is a brief respite in the middle of a growing storm, and it soon gives way again to the battle between angels and devils taking place in Duluoz' mind⁸⁹. In the midst of this chaos, the family dynamic continues to deteriorate, and Duluoz becomes convinced that the child Elliot knows about the battle between good and evil being waged and is in fact a 'warlock disguised as a little boy' who is bent on destroying Billie⁹⁰. It is this vision, in which the saintly Gerard presented at the start of the 'Duluoz Legend' gives way to the demonic Elliot, that continues to grow even as the glimpse of the cross fades away. Indeed, as Duluoz wakes from a fitful night filled with dreams of God Monsters and Vulture People, it is Elliot and not the Cross that transfers to his waking mind, and Duluoz reflects again that the boy sees and knows everything that is happening in Duluoz' mind:

At dawn also I've almost dimmed into sleep three times but I swear (and this is something I remember that makes me realize I dont [*sic*] understand what happened at Big Sur even now) the little boy somehow thumped his foot just at the moment of drowse, to instantly wake me up, wide awake, back to my horror which when all is said and done is the horror of all the worlds the showing of it to me being damn well what I deserve anyway with my previous blithe yakkings about the sufferings of others in books⁹¹.

To borrow an image of Giamo's, Duluoz does finally come home in the closing chapter of the book. However, it is not to keep his spiritual being alive, but rather to bury it. Returned to the waking world, Duluoz does not find any kind of peace restored to his wilderness retreat. Instead, he goes 'wandering up and down the canyon crying with that bag under my arm: "What on earth's happened to me? and how can earth be like that?"'⁹² It is only in the final moments of the canyon that Duluoz is able to find meaning in his spiritual quest. Trading places with Gerard/Elliot, he hovers over his sleeping family, staring at them 'wild eyed like my brother'd once stared at me in the dark over my crib'⁹³. He has taken Gerard's memory into himself and is ready to dismantle the myth entirely.

At breakfast, Duluoz informs the others that he cannot stay in Big Sur, and Dave suggests that they bury their garbage in order to leave the cabin as tidy as possible for Monsanto's return. Billie offers to dig the pit, but instead creates what Duluoz is convinced everyone recognizes as a child-size grave 'exactly the size fit for putting a

⁸⁸ In a 1961 letter to agent Sterling Lord, Kerouac listed 13 novels in the Duluoz Legend. However, two of the novels—*Memory Babe* and *Visions of Julien*—were never completed. *Jack Kerouac, Selected Letters 1957-1969*, p. 326.

⁸⁹ *Big Sur*, p. 206.

⁹⁰ *Big Sur*, p. 206.

⁹¹ *Big Sur*, p. 211.

⁹² *Big Sur*, p. 212.

⁹³ *Big Sur*, p. 213

dead little Elliot in'⁹⁴. Having dug the child's burial plot, she hands Duluoz the shovel and asks him, 'Do you want to finish the job yourself?'⁹⁵ Elliot begins crying hysterically and tugging at the shovel, furthering Duluoz' conviction that he knows all. In the end Duluoz takes up the shovel amidst Billie's taunts and Elliot's pleas. 'I simply get mad and dump earth over the garbage and tromp it all down and say, "The hell with all this madness!"'⁹⁶ While Duluoz does not literally bury Elliot, he does bury 'the garbage', including all of his conceptions about boy saints and spiritual wilderness retreats—leaving it buried beneath the earth of Big Sur. He then leaves Billie, Elliot and all his San Francisco friends behind and returns to his mother in New York.

This ceremonial burial of Duluoz' spiritual garbage is, perhaps, a less cathartic conclusion than the vision of the Cross. However, it is the conclusion Kerouac wrote: the conclusion to a book he described in a letter to friend Gary Snyder as being 'honester' than *The Dharma Bums*⁹⁷. This honesty is the real triumph of *Big Sur*. The novel does not end as his 'soul pirouettes gracefully back into the body'⁹⁸ after his salvation at the foot of the Cross—the Wagnerian opera that Merton so eloquently mocked—but with Duluoz facing the end result of his commitment to his 'Beat' spirituality. Perhaps the strongest tribute to this commitment can be found in notes made by Merton for a lecture shortly before he died:

In all the great world religions there are a few individuals and communities who dedicate themselves in a special way to living out the full consequences and implications of what they believe⁹⁹.

By refusing to allow himself to be permanently consoled by the dream of the Cross and instead awakening and seeing the experience on Big Sur through to its disturbing conclusion, Duluoz confirms his commitment to the consequences of his beliefs, which include the destruction of the myth of Gerard that formed the basis for his spiritual quest. That is the heroism of the novel: the refusal to turn away from his dark night, even though it brings not peace but complete spiritual collapse. Kerouac concludes the story of Duluoz on a hopeful, but still honest note—allowing the story to end where it will end, whether or not he is still there to write about it: 'Some good will come out of all things yet', Duluoz muses, as he looks ahead to his homecoming, 'And it will be golden and eternal just like that—There's no need to say another word'¹⁰⁰.

⁹⁴ *Big Sur*, p. 213.

⁹⁵ *Big Sur*, p. 214.

⁹⁶ *Big Sur*, p. 215.

⁹⁷ *Jack Kerouac, Selected Letters 1957-1969*, p. 361.

⁹⁸ Merton, p. 137.

⁹⁹ Inchausti, p. 74.

¹⁰⁰ *Big Sur*, p. 216.

CONCLUSION

In many respects, the very premise of Jack Kerouac's 'Duluoz Legend' thwarts the notion of finite boundaries and conclusions. The blending of fiction with autobiography within the 'Legend' opens simultaneous paths inward and outward to the extent that the reader is presented with a body of work that, 40 years after the death of its author, is only now beginning to reveal its secrets. This thesis overlays the framework of the Catholic mystical concept of the dark night of the soul, as outlined by St. John of the Cross, on the spiritual 'Beat' arc within Kerouac's novels. This process of revealing the inherent structure within the apparent *spontaneous prose*¹ of the 'Legend' enables the reader to begin the process of analysing the religious themes that flow through Kerouac's writing.

The dark night of the soul is, first and foremost, a purification ritual, geared toward purging a devout soul of personal shortcomings that would interfere with a complete relationship with God. While *Visions of Gerard*, *The Dharma Bums*, *Desolation Angels*, and *Big Sur* are by no means the only books in the 'Duluoz Legend' concerned with spiritual matters, they do present an accurate framework for the most active portion of Kerouac's religious narrative, with *Visions of Gerard* serving as the initial book in the series and the source of the spirituality revealed in later novels, and *Big Sur* revealing the end of Duluoz' quest to reunite with the divinity represented by his elder brother Gerard.

With these four books in place, it becomes possible to see where others fit into Kerouac's faith narrative. *Doctor Sax*, the second novel in the 'Duluoz Legend', expands the tenets of 'Beat' spirituality, taking a strongly Christian image of an evil world-destroying snake and muddying the waters by creating a hero who literally emerges from darkness and death: 'the dark figure in the corner when you look at the dead man coffin'². Doctor Sax ultimately fails in his attempt to rescue the world³, but the planet demonstrates its ability to save itself by sending a bird to dispose of the snake⁴. In the end, the powerful Doctor Sax is no more capable of altering the universe than little Jack Duluoz, who narrates Sax' adventures from the sidelines. Thus, 'Beat' faith evolves beyond the simplicity of good versus evil into a place where the spiritual world is something the protagonist can strive to understand but not to alter.

Later in the series, *On the Road* resurrects Gerard in the figure of Dean Moriarty, the mad angel⁵ and 'holy goof'⁶ who leads the novel's protagonist, Sal Paradise, across the country again and again. The spiritual implications of this journey

¹ In describing his writing, which he refers to as spontaneous prose, Kerouac suggests that structure stems from dead language and that novels should be no more organized than the flow of a river and that the writer should revise only sparingly. *The Portable Jack Kerouac*, pp. 484-485. However, examination of his notebooks and manuscripts has demonstrated that he regularly developed multiple drafts and edited extensively.

² J. Kerouac, *Doctor Sax* (London, 2006), p. 7.

³ *Doctor Sax*, p. 203.

⁴ *Doctor Sax*, pp. 206-7

⁵ *On the Road*, p. 236.

⁶ *On the Road*, p. 176.

find expression in a dream Paradise recounts in which he is being pursued by a shrouded traveler as he flees to a Protected City, where Paradise predicts that he will be reunited with ‘some lost bliss that was probably experienced in the womb and can only be reproduced—tho [*sic*] we hate to admit it—in death’⁷. The ‘Protected City’ and ‘lost bliss’ that can only be re-experienced in death suggest a longing for heaven and the divine, and the protagonist’s last name—Paradise—shows itself as a fitting name for a man on a spiritual journey. At the end of the book, Moriarty has been restored from beatific angel to beaten-down man, so ragged that he cannot even be admitted into a friend’s car for a lift to the bus station⁸, and the ‘Duluoz Legend’s protagonist must look within himself, rather than to others, to find spiritual guidance. Finally, *Satori in Paris*, serving as an epilogue to the series, shows Kerouac, stripped even of the name Duluoz⁹, literally trying to find himself again as he tries unsuccessfully to track down his ancestors in France in the wake of his spiritual collapse in *Big Sur*. These three additional books complete the faith arc in the ‘Duluoz Legend’, advancing the evolution of Duluoz’s development as a ‘Beat’ and his ultimate collapse into spiritual limbo, where he is without both his faith and his own sense of spiritual identity. Viewing these seven novels within the entirety of the ‘Duluoz Legend’ makes it clear that ‘Beat’ faith was a—perhaps even *the*—dominant theme in the series.

In this thesis, I have argued that Kerouac’s ‘Duluoz Legend’ novels trace a cohesive spiritual arc with a beginning, evolution, and conclusion. This establishes the interpretation of the spiritual aspects of each novel as part of a larger, consciously developed ‘Beat’ faith, rather than relics of Kerouac’s Catholic past and misinterpretations of his readings about Buddhism. Viewed in this light, it becomes necessary to re-examine Kerouac’s ‘Duluoz Legend’ novels separately from the ‘Beat’ triad of Kerouac, Ginsberg and Burroughs. While the ‘Beats’ may not, as John Lardas argues, ‘put forth a coherent religious system of creeds and doctrines’¹⁰, the ‘Beat’ faith within Kerouac’s ‘Legend’ does reveal a consistency if it can be evaluated separately from such works as Ginsberg’s ‘Howl’ and Burrough’s *Naked Lunch*. ‘Beat’ faith, as Kerouac wrote about it, blends Catholicism and Buddhism with a belief in the potential divinity of human beings, as represented by Gerard. Further, analysis of the parallels between ‘Beat’ faith and the dark night of the soul facilitates a stronger interpretation of *Desolation Angels* and *Big Sur*, both of which have been viewed in the past more as character studies than novels about spiritual evolution.

Toward the end of *Kerouac, the Word and the Way: Prose Artist as Spiritual Quester*, Giamo argues that ‘we must keep in mind that Kerouac would never have hit rock bottom had he not aspired to the high heavens’¹¹. I would argue that, if we substitute ‘Duluoz’ for ‘Kerouac’ in this statement, we see the cohesiveness that separates the spirituality in the ‘Duluoz Legend’ from a mere collection of Buddhist and Christian themes and elevates it to a ‘Beat’ quest. The ‘Duluoz Legend’ chronicles the spiritual journey of a man who ‘aspired to the high heavens’ and pursued his personal

⁷ *On the Road*, p. 112.

⁸ *On the Road*, p. 280

⁹ J. Kerouac, *Satori in Paris* (London, 2001), p. 1.

¹⁰ Lardas, p. 6.

¹¹ *Kerouac, the Word and the Way: Prose Artist as Spiritual Quester*, p. 201.

religion through a journey paralleling the Catholic dark night of the soul, ultimately reaching 'rock bottom' and losing himself completely in his commitment to living out the full consequences of his 'Beat' faith. This journey springs from the death of Gerard Duloz and concludes with the symbolic burial of the boy-saint Gerard, whose memory has become too corrupted to sustain Duloz's spiritual quest any longer. We must not be led astray by the awareness that alcohol eventually destroyed the author Jack Kerouac. Within these novels, it is faith that drives Jack Duloz and faith that is his ultimate undoing.

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MAYOR OF HOLLYWOOD EXCERPT

CHAPTER I

I'd never been shot, which, when I think about it, is kind of strange.

I've shed some superficial blood: twice in minor car accidents and once after hiking out of a remote mountain pass following a twin-engine plane crash. I've also been jumped in a few dark alleyways and had to use my mixed martial arts prowess to fend off would-be assassins. I got a Golden Globe nomination for a brain tumor that made me think I saw ghosts, and my Emmy came for falling in love with and then forgetting Topher Grace seven times in 24 hours after a shelf full of Hummel figurines fell on my head. But I was never shot, stabbed or beaten unconscious. Mother thought victim roles were weak, not to mention a one-way ticket to a career guest starring in crime dramas.

I worked steadily from the ages of 4 to 18, but I've put my acting career partly on the back burner since college. I try to fit in a film during summer term, but it's generally a relationship comedy or indie drama, where the potential for life-threatening injury is minimal. So when Mark's cell rang just after one a.m. on a Sunday morning, I had no idea the call would set in motion a chain of events that would put me in the path of a bullet for the first time. Or that the blood that spilled would be real.

Mark normally investigated cold case homicides. But he'd just come off two weeks on loan to the LAPD's organized crime taskforce, working surveillance all over the city. He got home around nine and fell asleep almost as soon as his head hit the pillow. I was still awake, putting the finishing touches on a chapter about film studios' interference in LAPD criminal investigations during the 1920s, '30s, and '40s. The final draft wasn't due until Monday afternoon, but I've always done my best writing after midnight.

The short, extremely loud cut from Rocky Horror's *Time Warp* came midway through a paragraph about Mary Miles Minter. Mark usually kept his phone on vibrate, so I could only assume the clip had been selected for maximum annoyance value. He hated surveillance, and these hadn't even been his own cases.

'Adamson here.' After a moment, his tone shifted into more collegial gruffness. 'Hey Leo.'

He began dressing with the phone clamped to one ear. There must have been a steady monologue coming from the other end of the line because he said little. Not a good sign. When Leo talked nonstop, he was generally high.

Mark was putting on his green shirt—the one I hate because it makes him look like a forest ranger—when the call finally ended. He put on his St. Jude medal and buttoned the shirt over it.

'More short staffing at the task force?'

Mark shook his head, hunting around for the shoe he'd kicked under the bed.

‘Double homicide over by Sunset and Cherokee. Leo’s on scene.’

Mark held up his hand before I could comment.

‘He seems straight, just a little amped.’

‘I thought the upside to working cold cases was no middle-of-the-night calls.’

‘These are fresh. Male in his sixties and a thirty-something female.’

‘And that’s a cold case how?’

Mark adjusted his tie in the full length mirror I’d inherited from my grandmother. At 6’3’, with thick black hair and green eyes, he made just about anything he wore look good. Anything except for that damn shirt. I’d been tempted more than once to ‘lose’ it at the dry cleaners. But Mark’s ex-wife was what he bitterly called a makeover queen, demanding that he change everything about himself. I’m still a big enough name on the Hollywood scene enough to make him nervous, and it took a while when we first started dating to persuade him that I had no secret plans to drag him to Robertson Boulevard for spray tanning and an executive manicure. So the ugly green shirt remained a protected species, for now.

‘One of the uniforms told Leo the scene looks similar to an unsolved double homicide at the same location. There’s no detective assigned to the original case anymore, so it comes to us if there’s a link.’

As an actress, I understand long hours and unpredictable schedules. But the truth was that I’d missed Mark’s presence over the past couple of weeks with an intensity that scared me a little. I didn’t want to wake up that morning alone again. I saw the look on his face before I even realized that I’d rolled my eyes.

‘I can’t pick my schedule, Luce.’

‘I’m spoiled and unreasonable. Sue me.’

Mark sat down on the bed and leaned across my computer.

‘Hey, don’t do that. These past two weeks have been bad. I’ve missed you like hell too.’

The annoyance drained away and was replaced by disappointment.

‘Sorry. Really, I’m sorry. Not sure where that came from. I just thought we’d have the rest of the weekend to ourselves.’

‘Yeah, me too.’

He kissed me and went in search of a sport coat. My concentration shattered, I set the computer aside.

‘This is all your fault you know,’ I said.

‘How so?’

‘I used to be fine in this house all by myself. You deliberately disrupted my slow slide into hermit-dom, and now you’re pulling the ‘I gotta work’ card.’

‘Sorry babe. It’s just the way I was raised. You want an unemployed golddigger boyfriend, you’re going to have to hit the club circuit. I hear they aren’t hard to find. Then you can trade loneliness for bankruptcy.’

I laughed. ‘Don’t need a man for that, just a private jet. I could run through my money in five years with one of those, two if I’m really ambitious.’

Mark sat on the edge of the bed and kissed me. He brushed a stray lock of hair from my cheek and stared at me in that intense way of his that makes me ache.

‘There’s an idea. Can the jet come with a hot female pilot in a body-hugging flight suit?’ Total deadpan until the left corner of his mouth twitched. I planted my foot on his chest and pushed him off the bed.

‘Go on to your crime scene, Detective. I’ll spend the wee hours of the morning in bed with a couple of movie directors.’

‘Cecil B. DeMille can’t love you the way I do, sweetheart.’ He kissed me again, and then he was gone.

CHAPTER II

Alone in the house, I slept badly until about seven, then went downstairs in search of breakfast. Mark and I share the Hollywood Hills house I bought shortly after I turned 18 and got access to my Coogan account: 15% of everything I'd ever earned in film or television. It's small compared to some of the places we rented when I was growing up—just three bedrooms—but it sits on two acres of land, which is huge by L.A. standards. Its other major selling point was age. In a town that values historical preservation about as much as crow's feet around the eyes, the house dates back to the 1930s. It even came with its own mystery: a 1940s starlet disappeared while living here with her movie producer lover. That bit of Hollywood lore attracts tourists as much as the knowledge that I live here—although, to be fair, I attract my share of gawkers, particularly since my role in the latest Ang Lee film.

Although we'd been involved for over a year, Mark had only recently moved in, and he still kept his North Hollywood condo, subletting it to a detective in narcotics. So far, the transition had been far from smooth. Mark is pretty enlightened, but even he had trouble with the idea of living way above his pay grade on his girlfriend's dime. I was sure some of his colleagues at the LAPD's Hollywood Bureau gave him a rough time about it. I thought about suggesting we get something smaller in one of the cop-heavy enclaves around the city, but I'd had a few solid, high-profile film roles during the past few years, and even the sporadic attention I got from paparazzi would annoy any neighbours. Plus, I love my house.

Personally, I was having adjustment difficulties of a different kind. Mark told me he was Catholic early on in our relationship, but when people say 'Catholic,' they usually mean church on Christmas and Easter, and maybe fish on Fridays during Lent. Mark was at mass every Sunday even if he'd been up working all night before. He tithed 10% of his pay check to his church, went to confession regularly, and had the rectory number programmed into his cell. It wasn't unheard of for him to get a weekend call from Father Somebody to talk to a kid in the congregation who was going astray. I didn't begrudge him any of that. I donated time and money to a home for teen girls just off Hollywood Boulevard and sent money to the Red Cross whenever there was a disaster. It wasn't *what* he did. It was *why* he did it. Maybe it makes me selfish or screwed up, but the idea of a higher power who expected me to fend for myself and yet do all kinds of things for him didn't just confuse me, it made me kind of mad. Mark and I argued about it once before he moved in. Then, at some point, he got a look on his face I couldn't read and said maybe I'd see things differently some day. Since then, we had a kind of detente. He went about being a Catholic, and I didn't comment one way or another. I had a feeling we couldn't keep that up forever, but I didn't want to jinx a relationship that was making me so happy.

When I finally got downstairs, Nessa was already in the kitchen, rolling out dough for what I hoped would be chicken pot pie. A tiny woman in her fifties, Nessa wore alarmingly high platform shoes that brought the top of her head to about level with the tip of my nose. Her hair was short, blonde and spiky, and she wore one of a closetful of skull-and-bones t-shirts over stovepipe jeans.

‘Hey Luce. How’s my favourite vampire?’ My inability to sleep for more than three hours at a stretch was a long-standing joke. I leaned over, and we exchanged kisses on the cheek.

‘Didn’t see your boy’s car out front.’

I settled into one of the high stools that lined the island workstation. I’d had the kitchen remodelled almost a year ago and still wasn’t used to it. Too much chrome and hard edges for my taste. Nessa, on the other hand, *loved* the new kitchen. In fact, she had feelings for the Aga stove that bordered on the unnatural, something I’d told her more than once.

‘He went out around one. Homicide in Hollywood,’ I said.

Nessa wrinkled her nose. ‘What an uncivilized time to be working. Want some breakfast?’

I grinned, and Nessa got out the griddle.

‘Pancakes and bacon?’

‘Sounds good. But no eggs. I see an egg and I’m outta here.’

Nessa had worked for my mother and me for as long as I could remember. When I grew successful enough, my film contracts included board for Nessa and access to a kitchen on location. Nessa adapted to my mercifully brief flirtations with Zone and locovorianism, and she made some of the best pancakes in existence. Unfortunately, once Mark and I got serious, it became obvious that she was a major reason he’d resisted moving in.

It was nothing to do with Nessa personally. She and Mark shared an obsession with sci-fi programs and could talk Star Trek and Blake’s Seven until my eyes rolled back into my head. Mark liked Nessa; he just didn’t like the idea of a fulltime private chef. He preferred cooking himself whenever possible and scrounging for leftovers when it wasn’t. I preferred maintaining a weight that kept me out of those ‘Got cellulite?’ montages on celebrity-watch websites. Eventually we compromised. Nessa came in once a week and stocked us up on healthy meals we could finish off quickly if Mark was too tired to cook or not up for my efforts—Even I wasn’t generally up for my cooking. Who knew you couldn’t broil steak in a Pyrex dish?

I cried the night before I cut Nessa back, but I needn’t have worried. After nearly 20 years Nessa had a waiting list that included just about every actor, director and producer who ever shared a meal with my mother and me, and a few who merely heard rumors. We didn’t discuss money, but I was fairly certain she’d doubled her income since Mark moved in. I stayed flexible about the exact day she stopped by to cook, and she generally didn’t bill me for the odd nostalgia meal.

During breakfast, Nessa gave me updates on her A-list clients. No names, of course. One actor Nessa dubbed Harold, after ‘Harold and Maude,’ insisted on dining completely nude. It was some kind of fetish, obviously, but he never had an erection and he looked good naked, so she didn’t mind. I told Nessa about one of my graduate

students, who was convinced he'd solved the Black Dahlia murder. He said the killer was Howard Hughes.

'Wasn't that murder solved already?'

'Several times. I guess I should be grateful he didn't name his own father as the killer. That was in vogue for a while.'

'Come to think of it, I'm not sure where my Dad was back then.'

'I smell my next project.'

After breakfast, I left Nessa to cook in peace and went back upstairs to primp for my morning run. It sounds hopelessly vain to anyone who isn't in the industry, but I swear the paparazzi can smell a bad hair day at 100 yards. I found a reasonably clean track suit, pulled my hair into a high ponytail and launched into my millionth internal debate about whether I was getting too old for bangs. It was really the only hair decision I had left. Zoe, my agent, faked a heart attack if I even hinted at cutting it short or changing it from my natural blonde.

I applied a little tinted lip balm and, once I was satisfied that I wouldn't die of shame if any pictures ended up in the tabloids, headed out for my usual loop. I came back an hour later and went straight into the basement for another 30 minutes of free weights and stretching. With Mark sleeping at the station house for much of the past two weeks, I had a lot of excess energy to burn. By the time I returned to the kitchen for some water, Nessa was gone and Mark was home, wolfing down scrambled eggs and toast. He looked exhausted.

'I didn't expect you back this morning.' I kissed him on lips that smelled like stale coffee.

'I don't have much time. This case is going to be a mess. As of 90 minutes ago, I was contemplating an assault with a deadly weapon on my own partner. Figured I better cool off before heading into the station.'

'Not a cold case after all?'

'Oh it's cold all right. Arctic. That *similar* murder Leo was on about happened in 1931, and it was apparently solved.'

Mark reached over and pulled me onto his lap.

'I left him to do the final workup of the scene. Told him I had to catch 9:15 Mass and then consult my history professor girlfriend about the original case. The homily was about forgiveness, so I guess Leo gets to live to see another day.'

Mark kissed me hard. Something about the case had him interested. Mark was always amorous when he thought he was onto something at work. I wasn't complaining.

Forty-five minutes later, the forest ranger shirt was on the floor, and I lay naked, pressed up against him. I thought Mark might've fallen asleep and was debating

whether I should wake him when he rolled over, propped himself up on his elbows and kissed me.

‘This wasn’t supposed to be a social visit. So stop fooling around, Dr. Cassidy, and tell me about this murder?’

‘1931, huh? All right, no promises, but I can try to name that tune. What do you know so far?’

Mark slipped out of bed and fished his notebook and a pen out of his jacket pocket. Then he returned to my side and searched for the names.

‘Do you always conduct your interviews naked?’

‘Only with very beautiful women. Lucky for you I’m extremely picky. Okay, got it. The victims were Charles Crawford and Herbert Spencer. Ring any bells?’

‘At ‘Crossroads of the World’?’

‘That’s the place. You know it?’

‘Sure. Strange case. Lots of press coverage. No movie stars involved, but I’ve used it in a couple of courses.’

‘Give me the highlights.’

‘Well, Crawford was a local businessman.’ I put air quotes around ‘businessman.’

‘What was his quote-unquote line of business?’

‘Real estate, but it was a cover for organized crime. He ran a bunch of brothels up in Seattle before coming to L.A. A political insider, though he never held office himself. Mostly pulled strings.’

Mark began taking notes. I paused but he gestured for me to continue.

‘He had some run-ins with the law. Stock swindles and attempted blackmail, but nothing stuck. Crawford also invested in a local magazine, *Critic of Critics*, and used it to attack his political enemies. Herbert Spencer, the other victim, was the *Critic*’s editor and one of its primary writers. It was a pretty small operation. Those kinds of magazines were in vogue back then. There were dozens, mostly grinding someone’s personal axe. Rarely lasted more than a year or two. *Critic* was no exception.’

Mark was frowning now. I continued.

‘Anyway, I can’t remember the exact date, but sometime in 1931 Crawford and Spencer were shot dead in the building where Crossroads stands now.’

‘They catch the killer?’

‘A former deputy D.A. named David Clark. Claimed Crawford had some compromising photographs and was blackmailing him. Clark was running for municipal

court judge when he was arrested. He pulled in 67,000 votes from his jail cell but lost the election.’

‘Convicted?’

‘Not for that murder. Twenty years later, he shot and killed his law partner’s wife, pled guilty, and died of a heart attack three months into his sentence. It’s interesting historically, but not well known. How’d your uniform hear about it?’

‘He took some tour. *Hollywood’s dark side.*’

‘Corruption, sex, and murder—that’d qualify.’

Mark was still frowning at his notes. ‘Our female vic was Kath Diamond, a staff reporter for L.A. Weekly. Male vic was Ken Greene. A journalist and a businessman, sort of.’

I breathed in sharply. Ken Greene.

‘You know either of them?’

‘Everybody knew Ken Greene. He was an A-list agent.’

‘He ever represent you?’

‘God, no. My mother told me to stay the hell away from him.’

‘Why?’

Something in Mark’s voice made me pause. It was the kind of tone he took on when he wasn’t sure he wanted to hear what came next. I chose my words carefully.

‘There’s not much that I really *know*. But Greene was a fixture on the party circuit. I was a teenager, and we probably shouldn’t’ve been at the same parties. Know what I’m saying? But he was always there.’

‘He ever do more than party with the kids?’ Mark tensed. ‘Or you?’

I shook my head. ‘Not that I know of, and *definitely* not with me. Don’t make too much of it. Greene wasn’t the only one of that kind. There was never any shortage of creepy older guys hanging around. You learned to ignore them. I’m not saying I was never approached. But my mother was like a hawk.’

Mark relaxed. ‘I’m liking your mother more and more.’

‘Wait until you meet her. You’ll change your tune. What was Greene doing with a reporter anyway? He retired years ago.’

‘I spoke to Diamond’s boss. She said Greene was throwing his hat into the ring for Mayor of Hollywood.’

Mayor of Hollywood. An honorary position since Hollywood wasn’t officially a city. The Chamber of Commerce created the title for Johnny Grant, and he held it until

he died in 2008. He roared on parade floats and made the introductions when new stars were unveiled on the Walk of Fame. The title was pretty much synonymous with Johnny Grant in the minds of locals, and I was surprised anyone was thinking of a successor. Probably part of the doomed campaign to secede from Los Angeles and keep tourism revenue local.

On the surface, Ken Greene had the credentials: lots of celebrity friends and contacts, plenty of time in his retirement to wave at crowds and kiss babies. Still, I'd never much liked the guy.

Mark drummed his pen against the side of his notebook.

'Know any of his former clients?'

'Sure. Tanya Voss, Aaron Styles, Mick Monroe, Kaylie Porter, Devon Osborne—'

Mark's pen hovered over paper for a few seconds before he clicked it shut.

'I don't think Lieutenant Fortensky will approve a fishing expedition through the Hollywood elite.'

I laughed. 'Probably not. If it helps, I know Aaron pretty well. He was way more tapped into the party scene than I was. If you let me know what you need, maybe he can recommend someone specific.'

Mark set down his notepad. 'Aaron Styles? *The* Aaron Styles? Just how well do you know him?'

I slipped my arms around his neck. 'You didn't meet me in a nunnery.'

'How *well*?' There was a definite edge to his voice.

Aaron and I had been hot and heavy for about a year when I was 18 and could finally shake off my mother. But I wasn't about to tell Mark my ex was last year's runner up for People's Sexiest Man Alive. Instead, I kissed him. No response. Shit. I tried another approach.

'It was a long time ago. Not very memorable, know what I mean?' I kissed him again, and this time he kissed me back.

'Good answer.'

Mark got out of bed and reached for his clothes.

'So, you want me to call Aaron?'

He took a few seconds to consider my question. When he did speak, it was more than a little forced.

'Sure, why not? Give him a call. See if he knows Greene's party pals. Leo and I are meeting with Greene's ex-wife. Maybe she's the jealous type, and this will all turn out to be an ugly domestic.'

‘How is Leo?’

Mark turned his back on me, ostensibly to get a fresh shirt from the closet. I waited him out.

‘I’m pretty sure he was on something.’

I could guess how much that admission cost Mark. Leo Freed was his father’s old partner and a role model for Mark when he was growing up. One of the few photos he brought when he moved in was from his Academy graduation: proudly wearing his dress blues with his mother on one side and Leo on the other. Tucked in one corner of the frame was a prayer card, signed ‘Be careful, Sweetie. Mom’ Alongside the photo was a book sealed in a glass case—an academy graduation gift from Leo. It was a limited edition—*Excerpts from Visions of Cody*—signed by Jack Kerouac. Out of curiosity, I looked up the book’s resale value once. \$2,000. Big splash out on a cop’s salary.

A decorated homicide detective, Leo had been almost single-handedly responsible for capturing the Sunset Strangler and saved the lives of at least a dozen of his fellow officers at one time or another. He wasn’t just respected. He was idolized. But then his wife died from ovarian cancer and Leo fell apart. He was reassigned to work cold cases with Mark to shelter him until he could retire with full pension.

‘What’re you going to do?’

Mark didn’t turn around. ‘I don’t know.’

He left a left a few minutes later, promising to try to get home by seven. After he was gone, I picked up the phone and called Aaron.

CHAPTER III

Aaron was in town, and we agreed to meet at The Ivy for lunch. When I arrived, the waitress kept me waiting at the hostess station. It was all part of the game. She knew me and knew I was on the reservation list. This was just a reminder that I still needed a few more big roles to be in Aaron's league. Anyone who thinks celebrities run Hollywood has never met a waiter or an assistant. I was on the verge of bypassing her entirely when Marty Gerhardt swooped down on us from the patio.

'Lucy Cassidy! I knew it was you! What's this? You come to my inner sanctum and you don't tell me?'

Marty Gerhardt was, at 6'4', a shade taller than Mark, but easily twice as broad. He wasn't fat, just massive. Every part of him was made on a larger scale than a normal human being. With blue eyes and cropped silver hair, he wore an Armani suit and a yarmulke that seemed to be held in place by sheer willpower. As a producer, Marty's instincts were legendary, and he had half a dozen best picture Oscars under his belt. He'd cast me in my first movie, and when I was looking for a project to fill my summer break, he was the one I went to.

Besides having an eye for good scripts, Marty knew *everybody*, and it wasn't uncommon for him to fill a table at The Ivy all day with back-to-back meetings. He tipped very well for exclusive use of a table, something not lost on my waitress. Chastened, she picked up a menu and waited.

'Spur of the moment thing, Marty. Lunch with Aaron.'

Marty squinted down at me. 'Anything I should know about?'

I laughed and gave him a hug. 'Purely social. Aaron's extravaganzas take at least six months to shoot, and UCLA would never release me for that long.'

'Mmmmm. What *are* your plans this summer?'

I raised an eyebrow but didn't answer. I didn't need to. Marty would know full well that the drama I'd scheduled for July and August had been shelved. *Contractual problems*. I didn't know the whole story, but the director had a longstanding, well-publicized drug problem. Zoe was scrambling to find a replacement, but my commitment to UCLA didn't lend itself to last-minute jobs.

'We're set to start filming June 1, and my leading lady is pregnant,' Marty said. 'I didn't know babies came this big. Shoots in Napa. Shall I send the script?'

'I'll tell Zoe to expect it.' It was all code. The *pregnancy* could be anything from a stint in rehab to bad chemistry between the co-stars. Whatever the specifics, something had gone wrong with his cast and Marty was calling in a favour. There was no question that I owed him a few. I sighed inwardly and hoped Mark liked wine country. Otherwise, it would be a long, lonely summer.

We hugged and told each other how fabulous we looked, and then Marty headed back to his table and the suddenly solicitous waitress led me to mine. Aaron was already

there, chatting with an older couple who seemed to melt into the background when I approached.

‘Lucy!’ Aaron stood and hurried around the table. He pulled me up off my feet into a hug.

‘Hey Aaron.’

When my toes touched ground again, I stepped back to get a look at him. God, he was ridiculously handsome, and he’d had to pump up considerably for the *Enigmara* films. He wore a black silk sweater that was meant to hang loose but strained against his biceps instead. Conscious of an audience, I was relieved when we sat down. Didn’t matter how many leading roles you had under your belt—When you sat down to lunch with Aaron, everyone was looking at him.

Our food arrived with startling speed: lime marinated chicken for me and crab cakes for Aaron. Although the alcohol flowed at the tables around us, we both stuck to diet sodas. I didn’t drink before six as a rule, and Aaron didn’t drink at all anymore—as a very serious rule. While I dug into my chicken, Aaron grinned at me across the table at me.

‘So, Lu-Lu, I’ve heard a most interesting rumour.’

‘About?’

‘About you.’

‘Damn. Christian and I want to keep things quiet until the next Batman film. His ratings skew higher if he’s single.’

‘Cute. No, my dear, a very reliable source tells me that you’re involved with some seven-foot-tall freak of nature who’s better looking than me.’

I laughed. I should’ve known. Aaron had an intelligence network that rivalled Perez Hilton. Of course he’d heard about Mark.

‘He’s 6’3’. But you’re right. He is better looking than you.’

Aaron expressed mock alarm. We’d dated too young and knew each other too well to ever be involved again. While the opportunity for a fling was always there if we were both single, I knew he wasn’t really jealous.

‘So, where did you find this guy? My source says she can’t place him. Is he a model?’

‘Put a leash on your friend, Aaron. He’s not a model. He’s a cop. A detective, actually. Mostly cold cases, but he helps out in other departments.’

Aaron finished his Diet Coke, and, like a genie, the waitress slid another in front of him. Although mine was half empty, she replaced it with a fresh glass.

‘Cold case detective, huh? Did he help you find your mother’s heart?’

I considered telling him the truth about how I met Mark for about half a second, then dismissed the thought. If Aaron somehow hadn't heard, it was unlikely anyone else had, and that was very, very good. I shrugged as nonchalantly as I could manage.

'I got some creepy fan mail. He helped me put a stop to it.'

Aaron rolled his eyes. 'Did yours send you an effigy woven from her own hair?'

'Not that I'm aware of.'

'Then I *so* win this contest.'

I *so* doubt that, I thought, but I kept silent.

'How's UCLA treating you?' He pronounced it Ooo-klah.

I shrugged again, this time more naturally.

'I teach. I write. I get an inordinate kick out of being called Dr. Cassidy. An even bigger kick when they call me Dr. Beaulaire.' I flipped into an overly enthusiastic L.A. drawl. '*Malibu Cove* still airs every weekday at 4 p.m. on TNT. I could probably teach Klingon instead of history, and my lectures would still be full. But enrolment's down across the UC system, so my bosses aren't complaining.'

The waitress returned a nanosecond after Aaron finished his crab cakes and we ordered coffee. Time to get down to business. Aaron read my mind. He'd always been pretty good at that.

'So you said you needed to pick my brain, Luce. I'm not sure what I can tell you. You were always the smarter one. But fire away.'

Aaron leaned back in his chair, stretched and flashed a mile-wide grin at me. Rows of perfect teeth.

'Did you hear about Ken Greene?'

Aaron righted himself, suddenly looking troubled.

'Yeah, I heard. Freaky thing. What about it?'

'Well, I wondered how well you remember him. You know, from when he was still working.'

His expression turned suspicious.

'Why are you asking about Ken Greene, Luce?'

His sudden shift of mood caught me off guard. If Aaron had a fault, it was that he took very little seriously. The perpetual happy-go-lucky kid. Yet, here he was, mood soured by the spectre of Ken Greene.

‘It’s Mark’s case—he’s the cop—and he’s trying to get some background on Greene. I don’t remember too much about him except he was a fixture on the party circuit. He was your agent for a while. I thought you might know more.’

Aaron exhaled forcefully. He stared at me for a moment, and then threw his head back and laughed.

‘Oh my God, Lu-Lu, you scared the shit out of me. I thought you were about to tell me you were one of Greene’s girls.’

I had no idea what he was talking about, and it must’ve shown on my face. Aaron lowered his voice.

‘Well, having a mother like yours had an upside. You really don’t know, do you.’

‘You want to let me in on the joke?’

Aaron picked up on my tone and tried to suppress a grin. He leaned across the table, laid his hand on my arm and spoke softly.

‘Well, for starters, Ken Greene was my dealer.’

Aaron pulled back and I stared at him. Maybe I shouldn’t’ve been shocked. Most film sets had a crew member who supplemented his income by supplying whatever you might want to swallow, snort or shoot up. But Greene? He made a fortune without even bending the law. Why take that kind of risk? My confusion must’ve shown because Aaron scooted his chair slightly so that we were closer together, and continued to speak, very quietly.

‘Look, I don’t want to piss on his grave. He made me a lot of money. But he also gave me my first hit of coke when I was 15. He did that for a lot of his clients. It wasn’t a money thing. I think he got a kick out of being Doctor Feelgood. It would’ve been funny, I guess, if we weren’t all so young.’

‘What did you mean by *his girls*?’

‘He liked them young, real young. Mostly nobodies—pretty, insecure girls who’d do anything to stay on his roster.’

‘Nobodies?’

‘What do you want me to say, Lucy? They weren’t like you, and they were probably desperate. I dunno. I can’t be sure, but I thought Lily Cameron was one of them. I know he gave her drugs.’

Aaron stared at his coffee for a moment before going on. ‘He tried to give me a girl, as a sort of reward, when I made my first million, but I refused. I did a lot of crummy things back then, but I hope I never sank that low.’

He seemed genuinely troubled by the memory. I put my hand on his arm.

‘Not on your worst day, TurnStyle.’

Aaron visibly relaxed. He smiled softly.

‘You *seriously* are not allowed to call me that anymore.’

‘Fair enough. *Aaron*, are you sure about Lily?’

‘Just about the drugs. We got high together a couple of times. You remember her, Lucy. Took her a dozen takes to get through a single line. She was hopeless.’

I remembered her. Lily had held a minor recurring part on *Malibu Cove*: Principal Ward’s daughter Katie. She was barely passable as an actress when sober, and that wasn’t often. The producers got fed up and had her written out. Two weeks after shooting her last scenes for the series, Lily drowned in a swimming pool in West Hollywood. No one in the apartment complex admitted to knowing her.

‘When was the last time you saw Ken Greene?’

‘A little over five years, three months and 12 days ago. Sorry I can’t be more specific, but it’s all kind of a blur before then. And he was at the top of my Do Not Contact list, so my assistant wouldn’t’ve told me if he called.’

‘Hmm. I didn’t make your list?’

‘Not even close, Lu-lu. Excessive studying doesn’t qualify as an addiction yet.’

Glad to be moving away from Aaron’s past, we shifted to happier topics. Aaron had a quasi-serious girlfriend, an executive producer on one of his films, and I promised to bring Mark around for dinner sometime soon. Then he was off to negotiate a contract, and I drifted around The Ivy, saying hello to all the right people. Not my favourite part of the business, but unless I was willing to give up the industry for good—and I wasn’t—it had to be done.

CHAPTER IV

I spent the afternoon reading through a pile of barely intelligible research. It was intended to be the first chapter of a dissertation on William Randolph Hearst and the film industry. Maryellen Harper, a first year Ph.D. candidate, was attempting to draw parallels between film reviews published in Hearst papers and financing for directors' future projects. It was a solid concept. Unfortunately, Maryellen was *not* a solid student. Her end-of-year review was coming up, and, had she been anyone else, I'd draft a memo recommending that she be dropped from the program. But Maryellen was the granddaughter of one of the history department's most loyal and generous donors. That made things stickier. So I was combing through a pile of ambiguous facts and sketchy supposition, looking for some way to guide her back onto the path toward scholarship.

I was curled up in a worn leather Georgian wingchair in the front room, with my feet tucked underneath me and Maryellen's first year's work spread out on the ottoman in front. Mark brought the chair with him from his condo, and it was one of the few pieces of furniture in the house that fit his 6'3" frame. Sitting in it, I felt like Alice in Wonderland after she'd taken the shrinking potion. Mark's other significant contributions to the room sat on the far wall across from me: a 52" plasma television and a wall-to-ceiling bookcase. The TV was a toy for grownup boys. Until his arrival, I didn't have a set in here at all.

The bookshelf had intrigued me from the moment I saw it in Mark's condo. I'm no slouch in the reading department, but between the UCLA research library and L.A.'s amazing public library downtown, I never really felt the need to own much more than a few classic history texts. So having a lot of books in the house was new. The top shelf was given over to everything Jack Kerouac had ever written, along with a few by Allen Ginsberg and William S. Burroughs. Most were inscribed on the flyleaves with notes from Leo: gifts commemorating birthdays, graduations and school awards. But a few of the more recent releases were ones Mark picked up on his own, even though I was pretty sure he hadn't done more than skim *And the Hippos Were Boiled In Their Tanks*. When I asked why he was buying books that seemed more to Leo's taste than his, he said Kerouac had grown on him. He did admit *Hippos* was intended as a gift for Leo, but he was holding off until his partner came out of his present funk.

'Kerouac's great writing,' said Mark. 'But it's best enjoyed on a sunny day when life is good. I made the mistake of reading *Big Sur* when my marriage was falling apart. Seriously bad decision.'

That conversation was back when Mark was still living in North Hollywood. Now, *Hippos* remained ungifted. I didn't ask why. But even leaving aside Leo's influence, Mark was a flat out bibliophile, and one with broad tastes at that. Below the Beats were the criminology and psychology books you'd expect a cop with a Master's degree to own, but there were also two shelves devoted to the complete works of Graham Greene, and a bunch of books that reflected a genuine love of reading. He had Tolstoy, Nabokov and Isaac Asimov, but he also had Terry Pratchett and the complete Megatokyo series. At Mark's insistence, I unearthed some favourites of my own from used book stores, so the middle three shelves were mine: Los Angeles histories, Joan Didion, P.D. James, Jon Krakauer, and the Harry Potter series. Tucked onto the bottom shelf were a well-thumbed Catholic Bible and a *Lives of the Saints* that looked like

Mark'd probably had it since his First Communion. There were also a few Thomas Merton books he took with him on stakeouts. I thumbed through some of the higher shelves when I needed a break from research, but I never touched the bottom shelf books. Truth be told, I wasn't comfortable having them out in the open, but I was too embarrassed by my own spiritual prejudice to say anything. More proof our 'don't ask, don't tell' approach to religion couldn't last forever.

It was just after six p.m., and I was flipping through one of the worst annotated bibliographies I'd ever read when my cell rang.

'So Marty messengered over the script about an hour ago and I've been thumbing through it.'

Zoe Maldonado, my agent since I was 14, seemed to think introductions were a waste of time.

'Sorry to interrupt your Sunday, Zoe.'

'No worries. When Marty Gerhardt calls, we all jump. Anyway, this looks like a great opportunity for you. 1920s. Poor girl marries rich boy. Boy loses everything to bad investments and eats bullet. Girl stuck rattling around an old house with boy's domineering mother. A little depressing for my taste, but well written.'

'Any idea why the part's suddenly up for grabs?'

'Ha! Marty didn't tell you? Well, of course, I'd *never* name names, but it seems that the young lady he originally signed is a secret squirrel. The-government-is-monitoring-my-brainwaves crazy. Her handlers have kept her more bizarre behaviour mostly off the radar, but it's only a matter of time. And you know Marty. He's old school. Doesn't subscribe to the theory that all publicity is good publicity. Way I heard it, he paid big money to get out of her contract.'

'Who are the other principals?'

'Elsa Granger's locked in to play the mother. Dead hubby's still open, probably Steve Garrison or Milo Turner.'

I groaned. So this was why Marty was calling in a favour.

'It'll be Milo.' Milo and I were on-screen sweethearts for two seasons on *Malibu Cove*, largely because his general misogyny and my intense dislike of him in particular read like sexual chemistry on camera.

'Yeah, that's my take. Sorry, babe. Want me to get you out of this?'

'No. I owe Marty. I guess I can put up with Milo for a summer.'

'Probably less. He's only in about a quarter of the script. If it's any consolation, he dies very badly.'

I laughed. 'Good. Just make sure Marty understands that this makes us square.'

'Will do, sweetie. Gotta run. Potential new client.'

Zoe hung up, and I turned back to my work. About 15 minutes later, I'd finally given up and was packing everything away when I heard Mark in the hall. I kissed him as he crossed the threshold into the front room and got a blast of stale sweat and cigarettes for my trouble. He let me go quickly.

'I know, I stink. The cigarettes at least aren't mine. The former Mrs. Greene has a pretty startling nicotine habit.'

'Chain smoker?'

'No, I mean really startling. Long trains of ash that she'd flick into the air. By the time Leo and I got out, we were showered in the stuff. I swear, Luce, you've never seen anything like it. It defied gravity.'

I laughed, but didn't move in for another snuggle. Mark got the hint.

'Well I can see this funk is spoiling my chances for romance. Why don't you throw whatever Nessa left us in the microwave while I take a shower?'

I made a show of pinching my nose before kissing him again.

'Why don't I make you some French toast instead?'

Mark gave me a look I'd only seen once before—when he accidentally crashed my laptop trying to download some crime scene photos. It was the kind of look cute 10-year-old boys turn on their mothers to minimize whatever trouble they've gotten themselves into.

'You broke the stove?'

'Uh, no. I, well, I was meaning to tell you.'

'Tell me what?'

'I gave up French toast for Lent.'

I stared at him.

'It's just for 33 more days.'

'It's the only thing I cook really well.'

'Yeah, I know. That's kind of the point. You give up something you really enjoy. You know, sacrifice. Sort of a big part of Lent.'

It was a really petty thing to be mad about. I knew that. But I was pissed off anyway. Mark put his arms around me.

'Still love me?'

'I guess.'

'This really bothers you.'

‘I’m an agnostic, bordering on atheist, Mark. I just don’t get it. But I’ll get over it. It’s only food. Go shower, and I’ll see what Nessa’s left us. And use lots of soap, please.’

In response, Mark pulled me close and blew a wet raspberry on my neck. I shrieked and pulled away, but by the time I righted myself for a counter attack he was already halfway up the stairs. I went through to the kitchen, knowing I’d handled things badly but still feeling aggrieved.

I filled Mark in on my lunch with Aaron over bowls of curry. Though tired, he seemed alert and relaxed, clearly happy to be on a real case again after all that time on surveillance. He took a few notes and considered what I’d said.

‘How heavy was Aaron’s habit?’

‘Mark, he’s been clean for six years.’

‘The occasional party favour or something more significant?’

I chose my words carefully.

‘Look, I don’t want you to get the wrong idea about Aaron. He’s a good guy. He was a good guy back then, just a little lost.’

‘Lucy—’

I hesitated.

‘I didn’t know any of this until later, but from what he’s told me he was pretty much loaded all the time. Coke during the day, then pot or pills at night. I remember the mood swings, but I guess I didn’t want to see what was happening. And I wasn’t at the clubs until much later. By that point, he was getting out of control.’

‘What brought the party to an end?’

‘His grandmother died, and he went on a huge bender. They were pretty close, and he took it hard. I went over to tell him how sorry I was, and there were people everywhere. I don’t even know who they all were or how he knew them. Maybe he didn’t. He was in the bathroom, puking into the shower, so I left. Couple of days later, I heard on Access Hollywood that he’d gone to rehab. And that was it. As far as I know, he’s been straight ever since.’

‘When did he fire Greene?’

‘Same time, maybe five years ago. He fired everyone—agent, manager, personal assistant. Started over completely. Look, Mark, I’d appreciate it if you kept Aaron’s name out of this. That stuff’s all in his past.’

Mark stretched in his chair, straightening his long legs.

‘Unless something else comes up, I doubt there’ll be much reason to bring him into it at all. Ailsa Greene said her ex had a preference for young models, although she doesn’t know who the latest one was. Fits with what Styles told you. He’s apparently

been short of cash the last six months too, bouncing alimony checks and missing tuition payments to their son's school.'

'D'you think he had a drug habit of his own?'

Mark shrugged. 'Won't know until the toxicology report comes in. Mrs. Greene seemed to think it was all going to another woman. She thought he was probably keeping it under wraps. A 20-something girlfriend might sour his chances for becoming Mayor of Hollywood.'

'You don't seem convinced.'

Another shrug. 'I dunno. A trophy girlfriend's hardly a major shocker in this town, but we'll run it down anyway. I'm still trying to get in touch with his assistant, Emma Calendar. She'll probably know more about Greene's personal life than his ex. I'm having trouble believing any kind of honorary title is worth getting bent out of shape for though.'

I gave him a look. 'Never underestimate an ageing man's ego.'

'Hey!' He swatted my arm. I picked up my bowl and took it to the sink.

'Turn 35 and you're suddenly shacking up with a movie star. Mid-life crises are no joke.'

'*Former child* star. Did I tell you a producer from *The Surreal Life* called yesterday? They've got a spot in the next cycle if you're still interested.'

I grabbed a dishtowel from the sink and lunged at him, but Mark had six inches on me and a cop's instincts. Before I knew it, he had me upside down in a fireman's carry.

CHAPTER V

An hour later, when the phone rang, Mark was watching an episode of *The Prisoner* on DVD. I couldn't bring myself to be frightened by a show where the big enemy was a giant inflatable ball so I retreated to my office to work. I took the call. Someone was shouting down the line, trying to be heard over talking and what sounded like country music.

'Is Detective Adamson available?' The voice sounded young.

'Who is this?'

The caller hesitated. 'I was instructed to call him, Ma'am.'

Ma'am? When had I graduated from Miss to Ma'am? Mark appeared in the doorway.

'Sorry, my cell phone crapped out, so I routed my desk number through.' He took the phone. 'Adamson here.' Whatever the caller said made him clench his jaw. 'No, you did the right thing. I'm on my way. Don't let him leave.' Another pause, then Mark laughed softly. 'Yes, that was her. I'll let her know.' He hung up.

'Officer Mendelson of Hollenbeck Division said to tell you he was a big fan of *Malibu Cove*.'

Despite myself, I laughed.

Mark sighed. 'I gotta go get Leo. He's making a scene down at the Ten-Seven.'

The Ten-Seven, code for an officer going off duty, was a cop bar out in North Hollywood.

'Can't somebody else take him home?'

Mark shrugged. I knew the answer. Nobody else could take him home because nobody wanted to embarrass the great Leo Freed. So they let Mark do it.

'You want me to come?'

I'd made the same offer a dozen times, and he always turned me down. This time, however, he stared off into space for a few seconds. Then he nodded, not quite looking at me.

The Ten-Seven was a squat building on Victory Boulevard, just past the 110 Freeway. In a former life, it was an island-themed bar, and its current owner, a retired Devonshire Division detective, hadn't bothered to change the exterior, although someone eventually graffitied 'To protect and serve' across one of the surfboards at the entrance. The lot was full, so Mark parked on a nearby side street. I'd planned to wait in the car, but he surprised me by walking around and opening the passenger side door. He held out his hand. My confusion obviously showed.

'Martino passed his sergeant's exam, so a lot of the guys from Hollywood are in there. No time like the present, right? Unless you don't want to.'

I smiled, took his hand and got out of the car. So this was it. I was finally going to meet the *guys*. I wondered what had brought this on. Was it something about the case, or had my lunch with Aaron rattled him more than he'd let on?

The Ten-Seven stuffed an impossible amount of seating into an extremely tight space. A wide bar ran up the left side of the room, with half a dozen booths along the right-hand wall and a narrow aisle in between. An extra booth had been jammed into the very front, with a juke box squashed into a corner for good measure. Although the space was dark, I could see a definite pecking order, with younger men and women at the front sporting crew-cuts or tidy French braids and off-duty uniforms of white t-shirts and jeans, and the detectives occupying the back area, most still dressed in button down shirts and ties. Only Leo broke the rank barrier, slumped on the barstool nearest the door, with his head down on the bar.

Still holding my hand, Mark led me past Leo toward a crowded table at the back. Some of the shouted conversation seemed to die away, replaced by whispers and furtive glances in my direction. I resisted the urge to cling to Mark's arm. The bartender looked at me, and I saw his eyes grow wide before he turned away and began cleaning a highball glass. It seemed to take us an eternity to reach the table in the back. Lacking the delicacy of the bartender, the booth's occupants all fell silent and stared openly. I wanted to sink through the floor. Being stared at by total strangers on the red carpet was one thing. I knew I belonged there. But here...I had no idea what Mark's friends would think of me.

There were seven of them, six men and a woman, all dressed in variations of the detective's uniform. The coat rack had so many navy and gray sport coats that I wondered how anyone walked out with the right garment. For several long seconds, I stared at the *guys*, and they stared at me. Finally, a short, muscular man who looked to be in his 40s spoke.

'Jesus fuck, Adamson. I thought you were full of shit!'

His voice was a broad Southern drawl, and the last word was drawn out into a prolonged sheeee-iiii-t. I laughed loudly, then clapped a hand over my mouth. But the giggles, once started, weren't going to stop, and I continued to sputter nervously. Muscle man threw his head back and laughed along with me. Mark scowled at him, but the left corner of his mouth twitched.

'Lucy, the eloquent gentleman in the corner is Eldon Smith, Homicide.'

'Nice to meet you Eldon.'

A tall, olive-skinned man with wire-rimmed glasses thumped Eldon on the back of his head. 'Show some freakin' manners! Didn't I tell you my party was a red carpet event?'

I reached across the table to the man with the glasses. 'Then you must be Sergeant Martino. Congratulations.'

He tried to stand from his position at the centre of the booth and took my hand.

‘Nope. Still Detective until a spot opens up. But please call me Gabriel.’

Although I wouldn’t have thought it possible, the group squashed closer, clearing tiny corners for Mark and me. Diane Foley was a tall, curvy redhead with a friendly face. Also in Homicide, she winked at me when we shook hands. We’d spoken a few times a year earlier, and I hoped the wink meant that she didn’t intend to bring up the circumstances of those conversations. Daniel Taylor, from Vice, was a tall black man, dressed like a stock broker with a white collar shirt and suspenders. His partner, Ezra Levine, looked unkempt and sickly, with long thinning hair, pale skin, and an ill-fitting suit. His eyes were focused and friendly though, and he shook my hand.

‘Been in court all afternoon testifying against a couple of drug mules.’

The final two men could have been twins, from their receding brown hairlines to the slight paunches over their belts. And indeed that’s exactly what they were. Mark gestured to the one sitting next to me.

‘Ted Kesey, Sex Crimes. And that’s his brother, Ed. He’s in Homicide. Guys, this is Dr. Lucy Cassidy.’

‘Please, it’s just Lucy.’

Gabriel sipped his beer. ‘Are you kidding? If I spent that many years in school, I’d make my own mother call me Doctor.’

My mother referred to my schooling in a tone that most people reserved for stints in prison. ‘I’ll try that on her. See how she takes it.’

Diane turned to Mark. ‘You two drinking?’

‘Can’t. Been up since one this morning working on the Greene case, and I’ve got an interview with Kath Diamond’s boss at first thing tomorrow. I made my contribution to the destruction of Gabe’s liver a couple of days ago. We’re gonna give Leo a lift home.’

The rest of the table exchanged knowing looks. Ted leaned across the table and spoke softly.

‘He was okay until Max took his keys away. You know how he is. One minute he’s snoring into his scotch, and the next he’s throwing barstools. Wouldn’t be such a big deal, but there was an Academy graduation last week, so we’ve got rookies in tonight.’

‘I’ll get him out of here. Can you take care of his car?’

Ted nodded. ‘I’ll leave it at the station.’

‘Thanks.’

With a weary gesture, Mark pushed himself to his feet. Taking the cue, I stood also.

‘It was really nice to finally meet you all.’

Diane winked at me again. ‘Nice to meet the woman who’s keeping our Markie out of trouble.’

When we reached the front of the bar, Mark squeezed my hand and whispered for me to wait outside. He emerged about a minute later supporting Leo, who was barely conscious. Mark half dragged, half carried him to the car, dropping him into the back seat. He had Leo’s jacket looped over one arm and fished through the pockets, coming up with three prescription bottles and a baggie with a dozen pills inside. After reading the labels and scrutinizing the pills, Mark dug his knuckle into Leo’s sternum. Leo jolted and partly opened his eyes.

‘What the hell you doin’?’

‘Making sure you aren’t dead!’

Mark slammed the passenger door and circled to the driver’s seat. When he turned back toward Leo, I saw his jaw muscle pulsing. He wasn’t just angry. He was scared. Mark held up the pills.

‘Percocet and Adderall. You got some extremely painful form of ADHD?’

‘Gimme that!’

‘Show me a prescription, and I’ll consider it. Damn it, Leo, what the hell were you thinking? What if somebody in there saw you with these?’

Leo snorted. ‘Someone in there gave ‘em to me.’

‘Who?’

‘Someone who gets it better than you, kid. Gimme a break. I need it. The other shit puts me to sleep.’

‘About this other shit. Prednisone, Propranolol, Tramadol? Something you want to tell me?’

‘Tell you after the case.’

‘There is no case, Leo! Not one of ours anyway. It’s going to turn out to be the ex-wife, a jealous girlfriend, or someone who’s even more desperate than Greene to be mayor of some nonexistent city. We should kick it back to Homicide where it belongs.’

Leo closed his eyes and leaned his head back. For a moment, I thought he’d gone to sleep, but he started speaking again. Some kind of poem.

‘Some spirit...pursuing all of us...’

‘Knock it off, Leo.’

‘...overtake us before heaven.’

Mark turned around and started the car, hitting the gas so hard we lurched forward.

‘Mark!’

Mark stopped, then started again more slowly. He exhaled a long breath.

‘Sorry.’

‘...makes us sigh, sweet nauseas...’

‘Mark, what’s he talking about?’

‘...some lost bliss, womb...’

‘Stop it, Leo.’ Mark’s voice had lost a lot of its fire. This last command sounded more like a plea.

‘...only, in death.’

Leo finally stopped, but he didn’t reopen his eyes. Mark turned back toward the 110. By the time we merged onto the 101, he seemed calmer and Leo was snoring.

‘Mark, what was that?’

‘Kerouac. *On the Road*. It’s Leo’s favourite book. He can recite long passages from memory. Really annoying.’

‘Sounds pretty morbid.’

‘That bit’s the dream of the shrouded traveler. Sal Paradise dreams that death is pursuing him on his journey to heaven. It sounds better when a drunk guy isn’t mangling it. He quotes it a lot around anniversaries. His wedding, his wife’s birthday, the day she died. He hasn’t done it in a while, but it’s pretty much my cue that I’ll be pulling him out of an alley behind some bar at four in the morning, covered in vomit and broken glass.’

‘Shit.’

‘Pretty much.’

We drove the rest of the way home in silence.

CHAPTER VI

When we pulled into the driveway, Mark left the engine running.

‘I’ll take him home, probably crash on the couch.’

‘He’s going to need carbs to soak up that alcohol. What are the odds he has food at home?’ Mark didn’t answer. ‘I won’t lose sleep if he pukes in the downstairs bedroom. I’ll put my mother there if she ever comes for a visit.’

Mark laughed. ‘Sure you don’t mind?’

‘I’ve seen worse. Let’s get him inside.’

‘I can handle him. Take the pills, and flush the ones in the bag.’

‘Will do.’

Leo either woke up or he’d been playing possum during the ride home. In any case, he shook off Mark’s efforts to help him up and stumbled into the house. I took the bottles through to the kitchen and washed the Percocet and Adderall down the sink. Before long, I heard vomiting coming from the guest bathroom. I brought Mark a couple of bottles of water and then returned to the kitchen to make pancakes and turkey bacon.

When Mark and Leo emerged 45 minutes later, the food was cold, but Leo picked at it anyway. He seemed much more alert. Mark stalked around the kitchen until Leo finally pushed his plate away, then dropped into the seat next to me.

‘You want to make a few more cryptic suicide threats, or you want to tell me what the hell’s going on.’

Leo glared at him for a minute, then looked down at the table.

‘My liver. Thought I had a few more years before it’d be a big deal. Was wrong.’

Mark stared at him.

‘What? You thought I started drinking when Rosie died?’ He made a contemptuous gesture with his hand. ‘I just kept a better lid on it in the old days. Your dad pulled me out of a few bars. Got the diagnosis at a clinic in San Bernardino a few years before she passed. Didn’t want it going in my file. Quit cold turkey. Rosie was thrilled. And then, well, you know what happened after. I got sick a couple of weeks ago. Some idiot rookie saw me in the ER at County, thought I was dying and called in the brass. I got a few more years in me, but I’ll be spending them in a deck chair. Basically I’m screwed.’

‘Leo—’

‘Damn it, kid, shut up and listen. I don’t want to go out rummaging through somebody else’s case files, trying to solve some 20-year-old murder where the do-er’s probably dead anyway. I got the Lieutenant to hold up disability paperwork for another

month. That's plenty of time to close this case. Homicide isn't sitting around knitting booties. They can spare us one. And a fresh case won't kill you. Could still be connected to those earlier murders anyway. You said yourself there were similarities.'

Mark didn't answer.

'Remember what you used to say when I came to see you and your mom? Soon as I walked in the door, you'd want to know: 'Did you catch the bad guy today?''

Mark was silent for what seemed like minutes, then pushed back his chair and stood up.

'Fine. You want to finish this case? We'll finish it. You want to OD on whatever your old buddies can smuggle out of the evidence lock up? I can't stop you. But it's probably going to be me, you know, who's gonna have to pull you out of your own shit when you finally find your *lost bliss*.'

He walked out. Leo didn't say anything until we heard Mark's feet on the stairs.

'Fucked that one up, didn't I?'

'Pretty much.'

'Rosie always went to her sister's when I came home in the bag. Said I was a sweet husband but a pain in the ass drunk.'

I retrieved the pill bottles from the counter.

'I'll hang onto these for you until the morning. Need anything?'

Leo pushed back from the table.

'Nah.'

He left the kitchen without another word. I waited until I heard the bedroom door close and then went upstairs to find Mark. He was unloading his gun. A second one, Leo's, was already in the lock box.

'You mind if I put the bullets in the wall safe?'

'Of course not. Do you think—'

Mark shook his head fiercely. 'No. Most likely he'll sleep it off and pretend to forget the whole thing in the morning. But I'd never forgive myself if he tried anything here.' He stepped back, and it seemed like he was going to fall. Then he righted himself, shut the lock box, and sat down on the bed. I took the bullet clips and the pill bottles and put them in the safe. Then I put the lock box back in its drawer and joined Mark on the bed.

'People say shitty things when they're in pain.'

'I owe him.'

‘I don’t care what he did for you. I don’t care if he pulled your mother from a burning building. There’s nothing so big it justifies you helping him go out on a high note so he can drink himself to death. He’s an addict. He’s playing on you to get what he wants.’

Mark rubbed at his jaw.

‘He’s lost everything these past few years.’

‘*Almost* everything. What he’s done to his career, that’s on him.’

‘Still, I can’t stand seeing him like this. My dad—’

‘Mark, you don’t have to—’

He took my hand and squeezed it. Some of the tension seemed to drain from his face.

‘No, it’s okay. It’s pretty much an open secret at work. Nobody protected my father the way they do Leo. He was always shitty to us. Not much of a cop either, from what I hear. Used to slap my mother around after a bad day. Then he spent eight months working a deep cover job for Vice and came home with a cocaine habit. One night, he put my mother in the hospital. I found out later Leo drove my dad to Chicago and told him to forget the way back.’

‘Did he?’

‘Yeah. That’s where they found him anyway. Someone stabbed him in a parking lot after a Bulls game when I was 15. Crack pipe in his pocket and a pharmacy in his veins.’

‘That’s horrible.’

‘You know, I was one of the few people on the force who ever met Rosalyn. Leo’s wife. She looked after me when Mom was in the hospital that last time. Twenty-two years of marriage, and most of his partners never met her. And I never saw her again after my mom got home. Leo came by a lot, but she never did. He always said it was best to keep your family completely separate from the job. He broke that rule for us, but only partly.’

‘And you decided today that maybe this wasn’t such a great policy.’

Mark barked out a laugh.

‘Not the most complicated thinking. I just know that you’ve let me in on almost every aspect of your life, and I’ve kept you away from the biggest part of mine. That should change.’

I leaned over and kissed him on the cheek. He smiled softly and rubbed his jaw again.

‘Actually, if you’re free tomorrow morning, I could use your help,’ he said. ‘Once he’s sobered up, Leo should be fine to take home, but he won’t be fit for interviewing witnesses.’

‘I don’t have any lectures. You want me to drive him home?’

‘God no. You think he’s in a shitty mood tonight. Wait until tomorrow. I’ll get one of the guys to pick him up early. I was hoping you’d come with me to *L.A. Weekly* to interview Kath Diamond’s boss.’

Mark was relaxing by the second with the change of topic so I let him run with it.

‘Any particular reason you think you’ll need an historian?’

Mark looked blank for a moment, then knocked his fist against his forehead as if checking to see if anyone was home.

‘Shit, I completely forgot to tell you. The ME recovered two slugs—one from each victim. Both .38 calibre. We’ll have to wait for the ballistics report but the techs say the bullets look old and well preserved.’

‘Old as in 1930s old?’ I asked. Mark shrugged. ‘You really think the murders could be related?’

‘Do I think it’s Crawford’s ghost out for revenge? No. Could be a copycat crime though. Two reporters, two public figures, kind of. And if someone tried to replicate those original murders, there must be a reason. Maybe Diamond was looking into the original murders for an article. Anyway, you’re more likely to catch a connection like that than I am.’

‘Can I carry a gun?’

‘No!’

I sighed.

‘Oh well. I guess I’ll come along anyway.’

We went to bed, and Mark was out in five minutes. He can sleep off his stress. I tossed around for hours, finally drifting off sometime around four. I woke up again at seven when Mark roused Leo. He’d managed to get dressed without disturbing me, which was no easy task, so I pretended to sleep until a car pulled up 20 minutes later and took Leo away. When I got downstairs, Mark was in the guest bathroom with a mop and a pile of old towels. So this was part of his job now, cleaning up after Leo. Mark took most of the towels straight out to the trash.

CHAPTER VII

When Mark and I arrived at *L.A. Weekly*'s Culver City offices, we were ushered through a warren of cubicles to a large office at the back of the building and left there with no indication of when anyone would join us. The room was large, square and filled with light, with a scarred wood desk shoved into one corner, surrounded by bar stools and covered with layouts for the newspaper's book review section. The centre of the room featured a group of love seats gathered around a coffee table. The only nod to an individual work space was a small TV tray table with a laptop computer. The room's overall tone was one of collaboration and open communication.

Jessica Fontaine, *L.A. Weekly*'s editor-in-chief, swept into the room about five minutes later, drinking deeply from a mug of aromatic tea. She was short woman in stiletto heels, with piles of blonde curls so heavily processed they would snap off in a mild breeze. She wore black leather pants that were inappropriate to her age, her size and the time of day, and a silver sweater with a plunging neckline that showed off more cleavage than I, for one, wanted to see. Although her face was free of wrinkles, the plastic surgeon's work appeared to halt at her jaw line. Judging by her neck and hands, I guessed her to be in her 50s.

I looked over at Mark just in time to catch the side of his mouth twitching before he stood up and extended a hand to Jessica Fontaine. 'Thanks for meeting with us so early, Ms. Fontaine. I'm Detective Mark Adamson, and this is—'

'Lucy Cassidy.' Jessica released Mark's hand and turned to me. Her voice was breathy and smooth. 'It's a pleasure to meet you, my dear. I thoroughly enjoyed you in *Autumn Song*. But I'm afraid you've caught me at a loss. Surely none of our writers asked you to meet them here?'

Her forehead was Botoxed, making it impossible to guess how well she liked *Autumn Song* or how annoyed she was with her writers. Her small smile—the only clue—could have been warmth or embarrassment. Either way, she hadn't mentioned Kath Diamond at all, which seemed odd under the circumstances.

Mark gently cut in. 'Dr. Cassidy is with me, Ms. Fontaine. She's an historian. She teaches a course at UCLA on Los Angeles during first half of the 20th century.'

'I see. Of course, we're all horrified by what happened yesterday.' She widened her eyes at us, possibly the only way to project horror with her frozen face. 'I had my assistant make copies of all Kath's current notes. She was working on two projects for us: the profile on Ken Greene and a retrospective on gonzo journalism and its influence on current writing styles.'

Jessica gestured for us to sit down. There was a manila envelope on the coffee table, which she slid across to Mark with one manicured finger. He took a small pad from the inner pocket of his sport coat and jotted down a few notes.

'It would also be helpful to look at her computer files.'

‘She kept most of her files on her laptop, but there’s a CD in there with everything she kept on our servers. Like most journalists, she guarded her source material, so there isn’t much that goes back more than a month or so.’

Jessica took another deep drink from her mug and set it aside. Mark looked up briefly from his notepad.

‘Forgive me, Ms. Fontaine, but the reporters I’ve come across aren’t generally this forthcoming. I’ve gotta ask. Are you giving me everything she was working on?’

‘We’re primarily a lifestyle publication, although our advertising does give us the luxury to publish features like the gonzo journalism piece from time to time. I worry about keeping our advertisers happy and whether any of my writers is accepting special treatment in return for favourable reviews. But until you called me yesterday morning, I never once worried about the safety of anyone on my staff.’

Jessica faltered momentarily, took a deep breath, and seemed to pull herself together. She raised her head and jutted her chin out slightly.

‘You’ll have our full cooperation. We’re not a daily, so *scooping* the competition isn’t an issue. We’ll honour Kath in due time, of course, but publishing the details of a double murder is well outside our editorial parameters. You don’t need to worry about interference from this office. Everything we have is in that envelope.’

Jessica glanced at me and lowered her voice.

‘But I’m afraid I don’t quite understand why you feel an historian will be of help here.’

Mark ran his finger along the rings of his notepad. ‘There’s a limit to what I can tell you about the case, and I have to ask that what I do say stays within the confines of this office, at least until we have a suspect in custody.’

Jessica nodded, but Mark wasn’t satisfied.

‘Ms. Fontaine, at this point, we don’t know who the primary target was—Kath Diamond or Ken Greene. If you assigned anyone to conduct even the most preliminary research based on what we’re about to discuss, you could well be placing that person in danger. Do we have an understanding?’

Jessica nodded, although I could see that her posture had stiffened. I wondered whether it was nerves or anticipation.

‘Is there any reason Ms. Diamond was meeting Ken Greene at the Crossroads of the World specifically?’

‘Historical buildings were a key *platform*, if you like, in Ken’s campaign for mayor of Hollywood. Los Angeles doesn’t have the most stellar record for landmark preservation, and he wanted to raise public awareness about the area’s historical buildings. Crossroads is a protected site. I presume that had something to do with the decision to meet there. Why?’

‘Bear with me for a moment. Was there any reason she might have researched the history of the property, maybe as part of the article?’

Jessica shook her head. ‘I don’t think so. She was more focused on Ken’s past accomplishments. Local history isn’t terribly popular with our readership. Why is this relevant?’

Mark scribbled down a few more words before answering her.

‘There are some aspects of the murders that recall a historical incident at that same location approximately 80 years ago.’ He looked over at me and nodded.

‘Crossroads of the World was built in 1936,’ I said. ‘Before that, the property was owned by an organized crime figure named Charles Crawford, who was active behind the scenes in local politics. In 1931, Crawford was shot to death there, along with the editor of a local political magazine, Herbert Spencer.’

I looked over at Mark, and he picked up the story.

‘We recovered several very old bullets from the victims. Dr. Cassidy tells me they’re the same calibre as the ones used in the Crawford/Spencer murders. Two politicians, two journalists. It could all be a coincidence, but—’

‘—it would be a big one.’ Jessica finished for him, ‘Surely David Clark isn’t still alive?’

I shook my head. ‘No, he died in prison in 1954 after killing his former law partner’s wife. But he was never convicted for these murders.’

Mark ran a hand through his hair.

‘If our killer decided to replicate the Clark murders, there must be a reason. Maybe there are other similarities beyond what we already know. So it’s important that you share with us anything that might shed light on the connection.’

‘There is something. But—’ She fell silent, her face unreadable behind the Botox mask.

‘Sometimes the smallest detail can be important. If you’re concerned about Ms. Diamond’s reputation, I’ll do my best to keep anything you tell me as discreet as possible within the context of the investigation.’

‘What? No, no, it’s nothing like that. Kath was still young, and she was so intense about her work. Melodramatic, I sometimes thought. Last week she hinted around a bit that her piece on Ken Greene might be more controversial than we expected. I didn’t take her seriously. I thought she’d probably uncovered stories about his skirt chasing. The fact that Greene cheated on his wife is not a revelation. But now— I just don’t know.’

‘She didn’t mention anything specific?’

‘No. Just said she thought I’d be surprised.’

‘Who was she speaking with besides Greene?’

‘Actually, she’d managed to interview quite a few of his former clients, the biggest name being Kaylie Porter. I’m not sure how she swung that one.’

Mark held up the envelope containing Kath Diamond’s notes.

‘Are the transcripts of her interviews in here?’

Jessica shook her head.

‘I don’t think she’d transcribed anything yet. She used a digital recorder, so the interviews would be stored on her computer. Or more likely on an external hard drive. They take up a lot of memory. There were no tapes or digital recorders in her desk.’

‘Would they be at her apartment?’

‘I would imagine so. You’ve been there already?’

‘I’ll go through the inventory today. Thanks for your time. I think that’s all for now. I may have other questions at some point.’

Jessica stood. ‘Of course.’

Mark rose as well and took out a business card, which he passed to her.

‘If you think of anything more that might be relevant, please call me.’

‘Yes, yes, I will. Can you find your way out again? I know it probably sounds heartless, but I have some deadlines looming.’

But before we could leave, a girl appeared in the doorway. She was petite and wore black Marlene Dietrich pants: high and narrow-waisted and wide at the cuffs. The hair was more Jean Harlow: ice cream blonde with finger waves that gave way into pin curls. God, I hoped it was a wig. I couldn’t imagine spending that much time on my hair unless there was a camera and a pay check involved. Thankfully, she apparently drew the line at padded shoulders for historical accuracy because her shirt was a sleeveless white tank that looked straight out of the Gap. Her face was heavily made up, with pale, powdered skin, heavy black eyeliner and dark red lipstick. She’d caked her chin and forehead with foundation in an unsuccessful attempt to hide several outbreaks of acne. She looked very young. I suppressed the urge to elbow Mark in the ribs. Barring the white tank, the girl was vintage 1930s.

Jessica Fontaine was apparently not expecting her.

‘Oh, Emma. You didn’t get my message?’ When the girl didn’t answer, she went on. ‘We’ve had to turn all of Kath Diamond’s notes for the article over to Detective Adamson.’ Jessica gestured at Mark. ‘Emma was hoping to use some of Kath’s research for Ken’s eulogy.’

Mark turned to the girl. ‘Emma Calendar? I’ve left you a number of messages.’

Emma looked at Mark and tried to back out of the office, but he stepped into the doorway and cut her off. He stood close to her, forcing her to either look up or away. Despite the difference in height between them, she looked him straight in the eye, hands on hips.

‘I’ve been busy.’

‘When your boss is murdered, it’s generally not a good idea to ignore calls from the police.’

Jessica Fontaine stammered something, but Mark put up his hand to silence her.

‘You have some reason not to want to meet with me, Miss Calendar?’

‘Nope.’

‘Good, so we can talk now.’

He turned to Jessica Fontaine. She looked far more alarmed than Emma. Mark’s *detective* tone could be disturbing if you’d never heard it before. Hell, it could be disturbing even if you had. He softened his voice and turned to Jessica.

‘Is there an office or conference room we could use?’

‘You can talk in here.’

Emma Calendar folded her arms. ‘Don’t bother. I’ve got nothing to say.’

Jessica Fontaine looked briefly at the girl, grabbed her mug of tea and left the office anyway, closing the door behind her.

‘Have a seat, Miss Calendar.’

Emma looked briefly past us at the closed door. I got the impression she was thinking about making a run for it. But she slumped onto one of the love seats instead. We sat down across from her, and Mark held up the folder with Kath Diamond’s notes.

‘What did you want with Kath Diamond’s research?’

Emma shrugged.

‘Sorry, Miss Calendar, didn’t catch that.’

‘Eulogy.’

‘For Ken Greene?’

‘Yeah. So?’

‘Who’s paying you for that?’

Emma stared at him. Up close, I could see a few more covered up acne patches. No wrinkles, but her eyes were glittery and her pupils were huge, likely from cocaine. Barely eighteen, if that. I remembered Aaron’s words: *He liked ‘em young.*

Mark took out his notebook. 'How long have you worked for Ken Greene?'

'Six months.'

'What exactly did you do for him?'

'Different things.'

Now that he had her cornered, Mark dialled back his approach.

'Whatever he needed, huh?'

'Guess so.'

'Tell me about an average day. What time would you come in to work?'

'Eleven, maybe twelve. He went to a lot of parties, so we didn't start early.'

'He have an office?'

She shook her head. 'I went to his house.'

'In the Hollywood Hills?'

She made a show of examining her red polished nails. 'He had an office in the basement.'

'I've seen it. So what would you do when you were at the office? Give me some examples.'

Emma touched her hair briefly. It wasn't a style that would tolerate much fiddling.

'Sometimes I'd call people to set up lunch meetings. Well, not the people themselves, but their assistants. You know, like, have your people call my people?' She smirked. 'And he had me do a lot of research on the Mayor of Hollywood.'

'What kind of research?'

'Whatever I could find. I went to the Chamber of Commerce and pretended I was writing a book on Johnny Grant, tried to find out what he did when he was Mayor. They didn't want to tell me much. And I found newspaper clippings in the *L.A. Times*, stuff about parades and new stars on the Walk of Fame. He wanted anything with Johnny Grant's name on it.'

'Background information.'

'Yeah. And he had me dig up anything I could find about Hollywood becoming its own city.'

'Is that something that could happen?'

Emma shrugged. ‘Got voted down the last time, but he thought it might happen. There was a group trying to get it on the ballot for the next election. You ask me, he was wasting his time. But I guess he was rich enough to do what he wanted.’

‘Was Greene in the office with you while you worked?’

‘Sometimes. Mostly he was out at meetings or parties.’

‘He ever take you with him to these parties?’

‘A couple. Took me to the Daytime Emmy Awards. I wanted to go to the Oscars, but he went with some actress instead.’

‘Make you mad?’

Emma shrugged.

‘These people Ken Greene asked you to call, did they ever tell you anything about his reputation?’

‘Why? He got a bad one?’ She smirked.

‘Like the kind of women he was involved with?’

Emma grew still and fixed her eyes on the coffee table between us. She scowled but didn’t answer. When Mark spoke again, his voice was quieter, coaxing.

‘Emma, did you have a personal relationship with Ken Greene?’

‘No.’ She looked at Mark, at the table again, at the wall. Her face turned pink under the makeup. ‘No way! He was, like, freakin’ old. No.’

‘Emma—’

She stood up abruptly. ‘What are you deaf? I said no. No, I wasn’t fucking Ken Greene. You get it? You writing that down? No means no, cop. Or maybe that’s too hard a word for you to understand. I hear L.A. schools suck ass.’

She glared at Mark, but he didn’t say anything, and she sat back down on the love seat.

‘I’m not stupid. Write that in your book.’

When Mark spoke, his voice was even, as if the outburst hadn’t happened. ‘Let’s talk about something else.’

‘Good! Fucking boring conversation.’

‘He get into any arguments with anyone lately?’

‘Just his wife.’

‘What was that about?’

‘Same thing as always. Money. She called, like, every week, yelling about money. Said he wasn’t paying what he owed. Said she was gonna have his wages garnished. Told her I didn’t even know what that meant.’

‘She meant garnished. It’s when they take money right out of your pay check.’

‘Oh, well, that wouldn’t of worked. He didn’t have a regular job.’

‘So she talked to you. Did she ever talk to Greene?’

‘No way! That was order number one. I wasn’t supposed to ever put her through. She knew it too. Pissed her off.’

‘Anyone else you weren’t supposed to put through?’

‘Nope. Can I go now?’

‘Just a couple more questions. Did you ever talk to Kath Diamond?’

‘Once or twice, in the beginning. Then she started calling him directly on his cell.’

‘He give many people his cell phone number?’

‘Almost nobody. But he really wanted that article.’

‘I need you to think hard. Did Kath Diamond ever call you, I mean after she had Greene’s cell number, to ask questions about him?’

Emma stiffened in her seat. ‘No! Look, I didn’t talk to her much. Never even met her. And I really gotta go now.’

Mark nodded and she stomped out of the office, pausing at the door to look at me. ‘You oughta get some plastic surgery you wanna keep acting. That last movie, you looked fucking old.’

Then she was gone, slamming the door behind her. Mark put his notebook back in his pocket and ran his hand through his hair. I started to say something, but he shook his head.

‘Let’s wait until we get out to the car.’

Jessica Fontaine was nowhere to be seen, so we showed ourselves out.

CHAPTER VIII

Mark kept quiet until we were inside the car, and I followed his cue.

‘Emma’s apparently not a fan of my work.’ I don’t think he even heard me. Instead, he stared at the steering wheel for a moment before speaking.

‘Well, shit.’

‘So I guess we know who Ken Greene’s latest conquest was, huh?’

‘Yeah. And we know something else too.’

‘What?’

‘That’s not Emma Calendar.’

‘I don’t follow.’

There were a few folded pieces of paper on the dashboard. Mark extracted one and handed it to me. It was a photocopy of an Indiana driver’s license. The girl in the grainy photo looked a little like Emma, but the hair was straight and unfussy.

‘Birth date on file at the DMV says Emma Calendar is 25 years old,’ said Mark. ‘If that girl we just talked to is a day over 16, I’m one of the Jonas brothers.’

‘But you let her leave?’

‘Her pupils were dilated, so odds are she was holding. I guess I could have taken her in. But arresting statutory rape victims is not my favourite way to spend an afternoon. Besides, I bust her on a drug charge, she’ll never tell us anything more about Greene.’

‘Did you see her hair?’

‘And the clothes. 1930s?’

‘Pretty accurate, except for the t-shirt.’

‘So she may be involved.’ Mark drummed his fingers on the steering wheel. ‘I shouldn’t have let her leave.’

‘She’s young, and tiny. I doubt she could pull off that murder.’

‘Not alone, at least. But she could’ve told the killer about the Crawford shootings.’

‘Which brings us back to why anyone would want to copy them in the first place.’

‘There’s gotta be some connection. What’d Clark say they were blackmailing him over?’

‘Incriminating photos. Taken years earlier at a party. According to Clark, they wanted him to soften his stance against organized crime and help them frame the chief of police.’

Mark put the Crown Vic in gear and pulled out onto Sepulveda. ‘Sounds like a pretty farfetched excuse, Luce.’

‘You have to remember this was the early 1930s. Los Angeles was notoriously corrupt. Just a few years before the murders, Crawford was involved in a drawn out investigation into charges that several police detectives drugged a city councilman and then photographed him with an undressed, unmarried woman so that he could be charged with violating morality laws. Crawford ran a string of rather famous brothels in Seattle before coming to Los Angeles, yet he’s consistently referred to in the Los Angeles Times as a local politician, even though he never held any kind of office.’

It was still technically rush hour, so Mark avoided the 405 and headed back toward Hollywood via surface streets.

‘So Clark’s defence would have been plausible back then?’

‘Two separate juries bought it. He was acquitted of Herbert Spencer’s murder after an initial mistrial. Given that they’d failed twice to convict him, the D.A.’s office never tried him for Crawford’s shooting.’

‘How did Spencer figure into this? He was an editor, right?’

‘Journalists were often just as corrupt back then. In fact, a reporter with the L.A. Examiner tried to extort \$20,000 from Crawford in 1930, threatening to expose his alleged connection to an oil stock swindle if he didn’t pay up. Crawford worked with the police to catch the guy in the act of taking the money.’

‘The police helped a mobster catch an extortionist?’

‘That’s L.A., baby.’

Mark mulled over what I’d told him.

‘How solid was the case against Spencer?’

‘As far as I know, it was just Clark’s word that he was in on it. But there was some pretty strong evidence that Spencer knew his life was in danger. Shortly before the shootings, he published a blurb in his magazine basically saying that if he or anyone on his staff was found dead, incriminating documents in a safety deposit box would be turned over to the police. But nothing like that was every found.’

‘So basically, back then, you had a mobster who styled himself as a politician, who was both an extortionist and a victim of extortion himself, somebody who started out peddling flesh up in Seattle. And you had a journalist who may or may not have also been corrupt, but who definitely knew his life was in danger.’

‘That about sums it up.’

Mark scratched his jaw. 'Flash forward to yesterday's murders. We have a local businessman running for an honorary mayorship, with a penchant for very young girls. And a journalist who thought she was onto something bigger than a puff piece for a lifestyle magazine.'

'So far Greene's a better fit than Kath Diamond.'

'That's what I'm thinking. So if someone really did copy the earlier murders, it was probably the Greene/Crawford connection that really caught his or her interest, unless Diamond was dirtier than her boss knew.'

'Don't forget Clark. If someone copied the murder, the killer probably sees himself in a similar position. Maybe he has a public image or a career that Greene and Diamond were threatening.'

'Or she,' Mark corrected. 'Well, if that's the link then Kath Diamond may have inadvertently interviewed her own killer. Maybe she asked the wrong question, and that got her killed. Fontaine said she was intense. I can see someone agreeing to be interviewed for a puff piece about the run for honorary mayor, then getting freaked when the questions were a little too tough.'

'And then there's Emma, or Lisa.'

'Any chance she's actually dressing like someone from the original murders, maybe Clark or Crawford's wives?'

'Not likely. She's confusing Jean Harlow and Marlene Dietrich, but neither of them had anything to do with Crawford, as far as I know.'

'Think the clothes are real vintage?'

'I doubt it. Kid like that couldn't afford the real thing, even if she could find it in wearable condition. Probably replicas. Tons of Internet sites sell them. Judging by the hair, she's pretty hard core. Even if it was a wig, those things take a lot of maintenance.'

'So we can rule her out as a crazy OCD serial killer. If she was obsessed with the '30s, the clothes would have to be real. She's got some kind of drug habit. Probably not meth or crack, unless she's new to it. Could be cocaine, if Greene was supplying her, or maybe something prescription.'

'This gets worse and worse. You really think she's 16?'

'Tops. Leo and I'll swing by her apartment later and pick her up. You want me to drop you at home?'

'Take me to the campus instead. I'll see if I can find any recent papers on the Crawford/Spencer murders. It's not terribly well known. Frankly, I was surprised Leo had heard of it. Maybe I can help you figure out where your killer's getting all that information.'

Mark looked across at me. His expression was unexpectedly fierce.

‘Don’t talk to anyone about this, Lucy. You could jeopardize the investigation, potentially alert the killer and put yourself in danger.’

‘Database search only, I promise. All the *L.A. Times* archives are online. I wouldn’t even have to go to the library.’

Mark looked dubious, but I didn’t back down. He’d brought me into this. He couldn’t expect that I’d just forget about it now. Eventually, he nodded.

‘Fine. Electronic search only.’

‘Yes *Detective*.’

‘Look, I’m sorry. You’ve been a big help. And if I didn’t know you, I’d probably be calling the university now, asking someone to do exactly what you just offered to do.’

‘Well, I promise I won’t go on any stakeouts without checking in with you first.’

‘That’s not funny, Luce.’

I reached over and played with his hair.

‘Oh come on, it is a little funny.’

I tickled the back of his ear. Mark has ridiculously sensitive ears. He threw a scowl in my direction, but I knew I’d broken his mood.

CHAPTER IX

A search of the usual databases turned up pretty much what I'd expected: no one in my field had published anything substantial about the Crawford/Spencer murders. Ultimately, the killings fell victim to the Hollywood factor. In any other city, the double-murder of a gangster and a journalist by a candidate for judgeship would be enough to launch it into local legend. But Los Angeles had too many scandals, and the killings didn't feature any celebrities. And since Clark admitted to the murders within a few days, there was no mystery to whet the public's appetite. So the story was quickly forgotten.

After I wrapped up my research, I stuck around campus for a while, working on an upcoming lecture on the fall of the Hollywood studio system, before calling a taxi to take me home. I found Mark in the living room, stretched out on his chair, with his laptop and an unfamiliar hard drive balanced on a nearby end table. He had sound-reduction earphones on, and was sporadically writing into his notepad. He seemed totally relaxed, and anyone who didn't know him might have assumed he was just doodling. But I knew better. Mark goes into something close to a Zen state when poring over evidence. He can sit for hours waiting for a clue to float to the surface. He's got the soul of a researcher, and I suspect that's why his solve rate is so high.

I left him to his work and went out for a long run, heading down toward Beachwood Drive after finishing up my usual route. Back in the basement gym, I skipped the arm curls and made a mental note to call Becca, my trainer, and let her know that we had eight weeks to whittle me down to waif-like so I could fit into all those drop waists and shift dresses. Somehow I doubted Mark would be crazy about this side of my film career. When we'd met, I'd been training up for a role as a free-spirited surfer. He liked me tan and buff, liked me even better when the film wrapped and I let my body grow a little softer and curvier. He joked occasionally about what a relief it was that I'd managed to escape teen stardom without an eating disorder. No, he wasn't going to be happy to see me starving for my art.

After stretching, I left a message for Becca from the basement extension, then went back upstairs. By the time I got out of the shower, I could smell something amazing coming from the kitchen. I found Mark transferring fish in butter sauce from a sauté pan onto plates that were already piled high with rice and vegetables. Two glass of white wine were on the table. I'd have to wait until after dinner to tell him about my new diet. I walked up behind him and put my arms around his chest, resting my cheek against his back. Once he'd finished plating the fish, he turned around and gave me a long kiss.

'To what do I owe all this pampering?' I asked, once he'd finally pulled away.

'I need to pick your brains again tonight. Figured I'd soften you up with dinner first.'

'Soften away.'

The fish was amazing, all the more delicious because it was probably the last butter sauce I'd be consuming for a while. After the long hours Mark had spent on

surveillance jobs and Leo's recent drama, it was nice to have a quiet, unhurried dinner. Mark clearly sensed that too and waited until we were halfway through the fish to update me on Leo's condition. Ted Kesey was the one who'd picked him up. Leo asked him to stop by a liquor store on the way back to his apartment. Bad thing to ask a recovering alcoholic. Instead, Ted took him to an AA meeting, and then another, and another.

'Ted says Leo was pledging moderation when he finally took him home.'

'I would've paid to see that.'

'So would I. Look, Luce, I'm really sorry I dragged you into that. I freaked a little when I saw all those pills.'

I reached across the table and squeezed his hand.

'Don't worry about it, Mark. It's fine.' Then, remembering my impending weight loss. 'You can pay me back by remembering this romantic moment in about a month. I'm really grumpy when I'm hungry.' I told him about the film, and as I expected, he was sceptical. To his credit though, he let the announcement pass with a short harangue about unhealthy body images and a threat to force feed me strudel if I so much as had a dizzy spell. As we were finishing dinner, I asked him what part of my brain he needed to pick.

'Actually, it's about an old movie of yours: *Venice Winter*.'

'That's digging back some. I was 17 at the time. But I'll tell you what I remember. Kaylie Porter and I were sisters who had to fend for ourselves after our mother abandoned us. I won a dance scholarship to a school in the Midwest and Kaylie died of a heroin overdose. We spent a month filming on Venice Beach, and my mother had a gall bladder attack on the first day of filming, so she couldn't hover the way she usually did. I smoked three cigarettes—closest I got to teenage rebellion.'

Mark chuckled. 'Living on the razor's edge.'

'That's just the way I roll. What's this got to do with your case?'

'Kath Diamond's tapes from her interview with Kaylie Porter. Diamond asked her about something that happened on the *Venice Winter* set, and Porter really went off. Almost shut down the whole interview. Was there anything particularly weird about that shoot?'

I guessed he already had something specific in mind and was being deliberately vague. More interviewing 101, either from the Academy or his grad school days at Villanova. I opted to play along.

'I don't remember anything out of the ordinary. But then, my threshold for *ordinary* is probably a little tweaked. I once worked on a film where the director and the screenwriter used to get into fist fights. They couldn't ban the writer from the set because he was an investor, so they hired a production assistant whose whole job was to write down whatever either of them wanted to say to each other, cut out the abuse and

profanity, deliver the message, write down the response, blah, blah, blah. During the wrap party, it came out that the two of them were having an affair. They hurled insults at each other all day, screwed each other's brains out all night.'

'Point taken. Have a listen for yourself. Let me know if it rings any bells.'

I followed Mark into the living room and he cued up the recording, turning up the volume. Kath Diamond's voice filled the room.

'Your first film after finishing *Malibu Cove* was *Venice Winter* with Lucy Cassidy.'

'Yes.' Kaylie's voice was throaty and harsh, just as I remembered it. 'Ken and I were a little concerned about shooting a movie with one of the other girls from the *Cove*, but the part was too strong to pass up.'

I smiled inwardly. Greene had done everything possible to get me bounced from the movie so that Kaylie could be paired with a less established actress. But the studio heads didn't think either one of us was big enough yet to float a film on our own. It was the last time we ever worked together. Neither of us would ever admit publicly to a problem, but whenever the opportunity came up to work together, we'd suddenly develop scheduling conflicts. Once I shifted into college mode, the competition eased, with Kaylie the clear winner. We weren't even in the same price range anymore, although I was creeping back up the ladder.

'I understand there was an incident during filming, and Ken Greene had to intervene on the set. Do you remember that day?'

There was a pause, but when Kaylie spoke again her voice was unconcerned. 'That was a long time ago. Who else have you spoken to?'

'Ken Greene, of course. I thought I might contact Blake Hart, but it seemed to me that you would have the clearer memory of what happened.'

'Ken visited the set from time to time, just to make sure I was being treated well. It's not unusual for an agent to maintain a visible presence like that. I don't remember him being there that day, but I suppose it's possible.'

Actually, it was unusual, very unusual. Suddenly, I did remember that day, and I knew full well that Kaylie did too. Kath Diamond, on the other hand, had either failed to notice the brush off she was getting or chose to ignore it.

'I also spoke to a crewmember on *Venice Winter*. He said that Ken Greene was called to the set after Blake Hart damaged a camera. He was your boyfriend at the time, wasn't he?'

Kaylie's voice turned cold. 'You seem to know a lot about it. Maybe you can tell me why Ken would involve himself in one of Blake's well-publicized drug-fueled antics. Or maybe you can tell me what any of this has to do with me.'

'Your agent. Your boyfriend. And from what I hear, the bill for the damage came to you. Hard not to make some kind of connection'

This time there was no pause, no icy chill. Kaylie just exploded. ‘What the hell are you playing at? You wanna ask me questions about Blake Hart? Blake Hart? I thought this was a fucking puff piece on Ken Greene! What the fuck does Blake Hart breaking a fucking camera a million years ago have to do with anything?—’

There was a loud clunk, and then the sound cut out. I knew from personal experience that Kaylie could rant indefinitely, but she knew enough to cut off the recorder. Sound resumed moments later, and she was calm again, answering a few softball questions from Diamond about Greene and his place in the Hollywood community. Mark cut off the computer playback.

He turned to me. ‘Do you know what that was all about?’

‘Yeah, I remember the Blake Hart thing. He took some bad drugs, flipped out, had to be taken away. Not the first or last time I saw something like that. Kaylie either. I don’t know why she would’ve flown off the handle about it.’

‘Well, give me the back story. Maybe something will jump out.’

Most of the main actors in *Malibu Cove* were locked into doing one movie for the studio after the series ended. When plans for a big screen *Cove* project fell through, the studio had just a few months to exercise the option. Kaylie and I were tossed into *Venice Beach* to appeal to the teen demographic. It turned out to be a good thing for both of us. The film was popular with critics and did well enough at the box office to help us break away from our teen soap images. Many of our co-stars weren’t so lucky, facing years of horror flicks and buddy road films before similarly finding a breakout role, fading into movies-of-the-week, or leaving the industry altogether. I gave Mark the movie’s background before getting down to the incident on the set.

‘You’ve got to realize that Kaylie was *the* highest paid teen actor on television at the time, and Greene was pissed when they shuttled her into the film at the last minute. If Kaylie flubbed the role, he was going to have a hard time pitching her for other movies. Unlike the rest of us, she never shot films on *Cove*’s hiatus, so she had no big screen experience.’

‘Why not?’

‘She didn’t think she had to. Kaylie was a party girl. Not out of control or anything, but she liked to spend her downtime throwing her money around: flying out to Paris for fashion week, being chased by paparazzi across the beaches of Miami. We all thought we’d have a few more seasons of *Cove* before it was cancelled, so maybe Greene didn’t push her. I don’t know, but she had a lot more riding on the movie than I did, even though she was making more money.’

Mark picked up his notepad.

‘Okay, how did Blake Hart figure in. Guy was a skateboarder, right?’

‘Mostly. You probably remember his dad, Abner Hart?’

‘From the surfing documentaries?’

‘That’s him. He homeschooled Blake and his brothers on a yacht while he sailed the world chasing great waves. Two of the brothers started a beachwear company, but Blake made a name for himself as a skateboarder. I don’t know if you’ve watched the X Games lately, but the sport attracts some sketchy looking characters. Lots of red-rimmed eyes and acne. Blake, on the other hand, was his dad in miniature: blonde, tan, totally gorgeous. He had a reality show when he was 15, and he supplemented his winnings pretty well by basically playing himself in movies and TV shows. He and Kaylie started dating about six months before production started on *Venice Winter*.’

‘Was he in the movie?’

‘Background in some of the exteriors, doing stunts on the boardwalk. Mostly he just hung around the set and made a nuisance of himself. Blake was a walking pharmacy, and even I could see that he wasn’t too bright about how he mixed his drugs.’

‘How do you mean?’

‘One time, he lifted a bottle of Valium from the director’s trailer. He washed a handful down with an energy drink. I’m not sure what he was trying to do. He didn’t seem to care what he took. When Kaylie was filming, he’d run off down the boardwalk, buy whatever was nearby and it would be gone before we broke for the day. He just swallowed whatever he could get his hands on, kind of like a toddler. Instant gratification.’

‘So when he damaged the camera, that was drug related?’

‘I assume so. I was shooting one of the dance scenes and Kaylie was memorizing her lines for the next day’s shoot. Blake left for a while, and about half an hour after he came back he started storming around. Accused me of stealing his skateboard and threw a punch at the director. Security tried to eject him from the set, and he threw a SteadyCam. Kaylie must’ve called Greene because he showed up about ten minutes later. Security helped hustle Blake into his car, and Greene took him away. The next day, I heard Blake was in the psych wing at UCLA hospital being treated for some kind of anxiety disorder. The party line was that Blake had a panic attack. Anybody asked us, that’s what we were expected to say. Kaylie had to pay for the damaged equipment, and I remember she was pretty angry about that.’

‘Did Greene represent Blake?’

‘No, he was with an agency that ran out of Santa Monica. It specialized in repping celebrity athletes.’

‘But Greene was there in ten minutes. Are you sure about the timeline?’

‘I can’t remember exactly. It might have even been less. Everything happened so fast, and they were gone by the time the police arrived. Greene took one of the producers aside before he left. I don’t know what they talked about, but I remember the cops were pissed about being called out if nobody intended to press charges.’

‘So Greene got to the set, talked the producers out of having Blake arrested and got him out of there, all before the police arrived?’

‘Yeah.’

Mark rifled through his notes.

‘Greene’s office was in Beverly Hills. You couldn’t get from there to Venice in 10 minutes. Suggests he was already in the neighbourhood when Kaylie called. Did the press know about her and Blake?’

‘Oh yeah. They PDA’d all over town.’

‘How about Blake’s drug use? Was that common knowledge?’

‘Definitely. His reality show once showed footage of his stomach being pumped. His skate sponsors forced him into rehab, and he spent a month surfing at some private clinic in Hawaii. Treated the whole thing like a big joke.’

‘Sounds like you knew him pretty well.’

‘He was just one of those guys who was everywhere. And he talked a *lot*. Spend five minutes with him at a party and he’d bring up rehab on his own, usually after asking you where the good drugs were. He was a doof, but never seemed to get anyone other than himself in trouble, so it wasn’t a big deal.’

‘So Greene wouldn’t have been too worried about Kaylie’s image if she was linked to the incident.’

‘No. That kind of notoriety mostly makes you more marketable.’

‘Then why bail Blake out? Why commit your client to replacing a piece of expensive equipment she didn’t break? Why involve yourself at all?’

I flashed back to my lunch with Aaron. *Ken Greene was my dealer.*

‘You think Greene supplied Blake with whatever caused him to flip out?’

‘It would explain his commitment to sweeping it under the rug.’

‘And Kaylie’s reluctance to talk about it to Kath Diamond. If Greene was dealing to Blake, it was probably through her. Blake wasn’t in Greene’s league—he’d never have taken him on as a client.’

‘Did Kaylie have a drug problem?’

‘Not that I knew of, but that could just mean she kept it under control. We were pretty competitive, both during *Malibu Cove* and after. And my mother kept a close eye on me. Kaylie and I didn’t socialize much outside of work. I saw her at industry parties, but that was pretty much it.’

Mark made a few final scribbles before tossing his notebook aside.

‘Competitive. What does that mean?’ He sounded amused.

‘There’s a dictionary in my office, if you’d like to look it up.’

‘It’s not wise to mouth off to a police officer during an interview. I could cuff you right now.’

‘Should I call my lawyer?’

‘Just answer the question, Dr. Cassidy. I don’t think of you as the competitive type.’

‘You’re going to see me as the homicidal type if you try to arrest me.’

‘I just want one story about you being competitive. Just one.’

‘I put cayenne pepper on Kaylie’s Oreos.’

‘You did what?’

‘We were both up for the same cookie commercial. The casting director ordered pizza, and it came with those little packets of cayenne pepper, so I put some on Kaylie’s cookie just before they taped her audition. She coughed and spit it out, and I ended up getting the part.’

Mark raised his eyebrows. ‘Seriously, you did that?’

‘I was six.’

He pulled me onto his arms.

‘I had no idea you were so devious.’

‘It was a national commercial.’

CHAPTER X

I came back from my run the following morning to find Mark with his usual breakfast—dry cornflakes and a glass of chocolate milk—and ruffling through a sheaf of paper. He gave me a perfunctory kiss, barely looking up from the pages, which seemed to be a list of names and dates. I rummaged through a drawer full of peanut butter flavoured Zone bars to find the last caramel cluster, poured myself a glass of orange juice and joined him at the kitchen table.

‘Hey Luce, do you know how I could find out how successful an actor is?’

‘I’m more bankable than Miley Cyrus but not as much as Sandra Bullock.’

‘Seriously.’

‘Try IMDB.’

Mark swallowed a mouthful of cornflakes and gave me a look.

‘I am what?’

‘The Internet Movie Database. IMDB.com. It’s a cross-matched listing of movies, television shows, actors, directors, pretty much anyone in the industry. Search the name, and if they worked much at all you should find a listing. Why?’

‘Greene’s former agency sent me over his client list. Maybe his mystery girlfriend is on here somewhere.’

‘Wasn’t he retired?’

‘Yeah, but I’m guessing he’s still got a lot of these names in his Blackberry. It’s as good a place as any to go cherry-picking. All I’ve got here though are names and dates of representation.’

‘IMDB could help you narrow it down. If they’ve done much work at all, the IMDB listing will at least have a date of birth, help you find the younger ones. Anyone who’s on Greene’s list but not on IMBD probably deserves closer attention.’

‘Why’s that?’

‘Greene took Aaron on when he was making the *Lost Empire* series, poached him straight from a junior agent at the firm. He hasn’t handled beginners in a long time—his forte was the multi-million dollar deal.’

‘So, if he’s got a nobody on his client list—’

‘There’s a reason.’ I finished my Zone bar and looked over at the list. ‘I’ve got some free time. Do you want me to run the names through IMDB?’

Mark shook his head. ‘We’ve got a couple of newly minted detectives at the station. I’ll give it to one of them. This kind of project builds character. Check this out though.’ He flipped back a few pages before handing it over. ‘About halfway down the page.’

I scanned the list. Some of the names I knew, others I didn't. And there in the middle: Katherine Diamond, repped from 1998 to 2001.

'Kath Diamond was an actress?'

'Looks like it. Actually, can you look her up on IMDB from here? I'd like to know what her resume looked like.'

We went through to my office, and I fired up the computer. Kath Diamond's listing had three credits from procedural cop shows and one independent film. All of the parts came in 1998. Then there was nothing more.

'Well, she had a few roles,' Mark said.

'Yes, but these are all walk-ons. Look how far down the cast list she is for each one. If she had one spoken line, that was probably it.'

'So no big pay days.'

'Definitely not. I'll bet if you compared the regulars on the three television shows, you'll find somebody on Greene's list: someone with enough industry clout to do an unknown actress a favour.'

Mark scowled. 'All men, no doubt.'

'Why do you say that?'

'Come on, Luce. If your agent collected toy boys and then asked you to get them bit parts in your movies, would you do it?'

It's a miracle I didn't choke on the image of Zoe with a string of 17-year-old boys.

'Definitely not.'

'Exactly. The connections here will probably all turn out to be middle-aged male actors. He gives them drugs and pretty girls as party favours, and they hand out bit parts to the chosen few. Green repped women, but I'm guessing this particular *service* was strictly for the boys' club.'

Suddenly, Kath Diamond's IMDB page was beyond sad, and I shut the browser. I remembered what Aaron said: *I hope I never sank that low*. Clearly there were at least four people on Greene's list who did: men with starring roles in each project Kath Diamond landed while she was repped by Ken Greene.

Mark reached out and linked his fingers through mine. 'How did you survive in that world, Lucy?'

'I got my first national commercial when I was four years old. Being a kid in the industry brought its own hazards, and, trust me, you really don't want to know about them. But I was well established by the time I hit my teens, and, for all her faults, my mother invested my earnings well. I was never this kind of desperate. Girls like Kath

Diamond and Lily Cameron, they would have done anything to get what I was lucky enough to have.'

'Lily Cameron?'

'She's probably on that list somewhere. Just a girl who didn't make it.'

I disentangled my fingers from Mark's left the office. I wanted nothing more than to be alone.

CHAPTER XI

Mark and I didn't see much of each other over the next few days. Leo had recovered as much as he was going to, and he and Mark submerged themselves in the Diamond-Greene case. I spent much of the week in lectures, faculty meetings, and a two-hour conference call with Dr. Terrence Laurent, head of the UCLA history department, who was delivering the keynote address at a conference in Prague. I'd emailed him my assessment of Maryellen Harper's work, and we went round and round about how to deal with it without jeopardizing the Harper Trust's funding. In the end, nothing was resolved, and I hung up the phone fuming at the ability of one young woman to hold the entire department hostage.

On Friday, I worked from home while Mark, who had spent most of the week chasing down everyone in Greene and Diamond's respective Blackberrys with Leo, drove up to Santa Barbara to testify in a child custody case. Reopening a cold case, he'd managed to prove the wrong man was serving life in prison. Despite catching the real killer and helping the falsely accused reunite with his ten-year-old daughter, the investigation had been miserable from start to finish, and Mark's name was mud with the case's original detectives. Worse, the LAPD was now facing a multimillion-dollar lawsuit for false imprisonment. A complete disaster for everyone but the man who was walking out of prison after seven years.

Mark arrived home just after 7 p.m. His navy blue 'court' suit was wrinkled and damp, white dress shirt untucked and only partially buttoned. He carried his grey tie crumpled in one hand. He looked utterly drained. I met him at the door with a Scotch and soda—something he only indulged in after really shitty days. He pulled me into a tired hug.

'Rough hearing?'

'Rough everything.' He released me and took a sip of his drink. Taking off his jacket, he wandered into the front room and he flopped into his favourite chair.

'No place to change back into your civvies?'

Mark looked down at his dishevelled suit.

'I just wanted to get out of there. Carter and Malvern, from the original case, were at the courthouse, throwing the evil eye at me. Like it's my fault Hamblin didn't kill his wife.'

'You up for going out to dinner?'

'Sure. You mind if we swing buy St. Joseph's on the way? Shouldn't take more than 10 minutes.'

'This another Lent thing?'

Mark shook his head. 'More like a court thing. I hate testifying. Prosecution only wants to hear what's good for them. Defence is the same. They drag you this way

and that with questions, and I end up feeling like I told a million little lies. Never adds up to more than half the whole truth. Just feeling a need to go to confession, you know?’

I didn’t and felt that space between us called *religion* grow just a little larger. I gave him another hug.

‘No problem. I’ll try not to exude too many heathen vibes.’

St. Joseph’s is a little church on Franklin south of Griffith Park. It’s not far from LAPD’s Hollywood substation, and Mark’s been going there since he joined the Force. There were two people waiting by the wall near a polished wooden door that must have been the confessional. He joined the line, and I sat in the back row of pews so I could look around without seeming too much like a tourist in Rome.

The room was narrow but long, with stained glass windows that stretched up to a high ceiling. There were a few people kneeling in pews near the confessional. A young man with a shaved head stood in the aisle a few rows up from me, staring up at one of the stained glass windows. The scene depicted was Jesus on his hands and knees, struggling to carry the cross. After a minute or so, the young man moved off, coming to a stop before the next window. By the time he’d moved to the third window, I realized I was grinding my teeth.

I have this reaction to pretty much any overt display of religion. Churches, prayer circles, proselytizers at the front door. There’s some implied helplessness in prayer that makes me edgy. I was trying to get past it. Religion obviously meant a great deal to Mark. But I just didn’t understand why you would want to believe that some invisible being had the power to make your life better or worse.

Mark came out of the confessional, but instead of making his way toward me, he joined the cluster of people already kneeling. His eyes were closed, but I could see that some of the tension he’d come home with had drained from his face. After a few minutes, he stood up, and I met him on the front steps.

‘I see you managed to avoid being struck by lightning,’ he said.

‘It’s a miracle. Have you been absolved for consorting with lawyers?’

Mark laughed. ‘I know, Father Carlin gives me grief about it too. Says he’s waiting for the day I come into confession and tell him I killed a man in Reno just to watch him die. What can I say? Testifying always feels like lying to me. What do you want for dinner?’

‘How about Carla’s House of French Toast?’ I’d meant it as a joke, but the edge in my voice was unmistakable.

‘That’s really bugging you, isn’t it?’

‘It’s about the only domestic thing I’m capable of, and you’ve given it up for more than a month!’

‘I know. That’s kind of the point.’

‘Driving your girlfriend nuts is your goal for Lent?’

‘Just a side bonus.’

I punched him in the shoulder.

‘Seriously, Luce. It’s kind of a family tradition. After my Dad left, Mom had to work, so we all took turns making dinner. You don’t have many vices when you’re a kid, so we’d mostly give up some kind of food for Lent. Then one year we decided that we’d each give up something we loved that one of us made for dinner. By the time I was in high school, it was pretty much set in stone: my mom’s taco pie, Ginny’s tuna noodle casserole and my chicken and biscuits. Then, on Easter morning, we’d all get together in the kitchen and make all three.’

‘Tacos, tuna and chicken in one meal?’

‘We kind of grazed all day. My point is that I gave up your French toast because I love that you make it for me. This is probably a good time to warn you that I’ll be waking you up at dawn on Easter Sunday to make me some.’

‘I’d be lying if I said I get it.’

‘Damn. Father Carlin said if I kept putting holy oil in the ice machine, you’d be converted by now.’

‘Ha, ha.’

We stopped at a light, and Mark leaned across the seat and kissed me on the cheek.

‘It’s all about sacrifice, Luce. You give up something you didn’t really care about to begin with, it wouldn’t really mean anything. This makes you appreciate what you already have.’

CHAPTER XII

Leo was waiting for us in the driveway with a pizza when we got back from dinner. He was thinner than a week ago, but clear eyed. His greying hair looked unwashed, he was pale, and he needed a shave. If he was embarrassed by the state I'd seen him in last week, it didn't show. He kissed me on the cheek and entered the house without an invitation.

'Hey darlin', sorry to barge in on you so late, but you know how it is. Never really go off the clock.' He waved a pocket notebook at Mark. 'Ready to compare notes?'

When we'd first started dating, Leo dropped in on us an average of four nights a week. I don't think he liked spending much time in the condo he and his wife had bought together. Too many memories. After a while, I objected to the regular intrusions, and the late night visits tapered off, corresponding, I thought, with an upswing in Leo's heavier binges. I sometimes felt guilty about that, but didn't see any alternative. We couldn't be Leo's personal AA.

I headed for my office, but Mark met me in the hall.

'Actually, would you mind joining us? If there are more connections to the Crawford case, we'll need you to spot them.'

'Just call me Miss Marple.'

Back in the living room, Mark settled back into his chair, I curled up on the couch, and Leo dropped into a rocking chair by the window. It was his customary perch. Without preamble, he opened his notepad.

'So I've spoken with everyone on Kath Diamond's contact list. Nothing exciting. Starter marriage at 21. Lasted 18 months and ended badly according to the parents. Guy's name is Arthur Ludner. A real piece of work. Cops were called out three times on domestics over the course of their marriage, found Diamond with some pretty impressive bruises on the second call, but she claimed she got them playing roller derby. Parents confirm she was in a derby league: the High Desert Hellraisers out in Rancho Cucamonga.'

'Diamond went back to her maiden name after the divorce?' Mark asked.

'Never gave it up. Her parents say it's her professional name. Apparently, she published a book while she was still in college: some romance novel. I looked up the ISBN. It's out of print.'

'So we have a violent ex-husband in the mix.'

'Yeah, but he alibis out. The esteemed Mr. Ludner was in the Multnomah County Detention Facility at the time of the murders, serving three months for unpaid child support for a kid he fathered in high school. He's still up there, due to be released in about a month. I guess we can look into the possibility that he hired someone to go after Diamond, but it doesn't seem likely. Seems like he'd go after the mother of his kid

if he was going after anyone, and according to the guys in Portland, Ludner works on and off as a short order cook when he's not in the pokey. Has a grand total of \$47.32 in his bank account.'

Mark scratched his jaw. 'Can't see someone like that getting the cash to hire an L.A. shooter. But we probably shouldn't rule it out. Could be that he found some idiot willing to do the job on credit. Shooter got confused and did the ex-wife instead of the baby mama. Anyone else in her life seem interesting?'

'According to everyone I called, Diamond was nice, friendly, and a little melodramatic, but not into anything anyone thought would get her killed. Her bank accounts are pretty boring. The lady put 10% of every pay check into an IRA and another 10% into a saving account she never touched. Probably some kind of emergency fund. No unaccounted for deposits or withdrawals. I did find a couple of things that are maybe interesting on her laptop. Her Greene article was definitely shaping up to be more than a puff piece.'

Leo flipped through his notebook again.

'Yeah, here it is. Diamond had a list of every client Greene had going back to the early '80s. She'd flagged all the women under 25, as well as anyone who dropped him after less than a year's representation. Then she had a separate list of clients who were arrested on drug-related charges or did time in rehab, and a list of clients who died. She seemed to be tracking down causes of deaths, but that list is incomplete.'

Mark chewed on his lower lip. 'Sounds like she suspected Greene was dealing and was looking for a pattern. Probably fishing around for sexual harassment victims as well. Emma Calendar flagged?'

'Nope. Can't find anything says she was any kind of an actress.'

'You didn't pick her up?' I asked.

Leo growled. 'Kid's been in the wind since Officer Bleeding Heart here let her walk out of *L.A. Weekly*.'

'It was a mistake,' Mark muttered.

'Letting a potential material witness probably living under a false identity stroll out of an interrogation. A *mistake*. Ya think, kid?'

Mark didn't say anything. Eventually, Leo waved a hand dismissively.

'Lost count of the times I let a pretty face interfere with my judgement. I guess you're entitled to one. Better be the last on this one. What you do when I'm retired is your own business.'

I thought about pointing out that Emma Calendar was many things, but a *pretty face* probably wasn't one of them. But I doubted Mark would appreciate me interfering in his reprimand.

Mark pressed on. ‘She hasn’t been back to her apartment. We’ve got a BOLO out on her. Shouldn’t take too long. She stands out.’

Leo nodded. ‘Not too many places a refugee from the 1930s can hide. Something else interesting. I found lots of scraps of paper in that stuff you picked up from *LA Weekly*. Pages torn from a spiral notebook, but I couldn’t find the notebook they came from. The pages seemed to be notes she’d made on the fly. Most of it was in her computer somewhere. Maybe she tore them out so she’d know what she’d transcribed. Didn’t strike me as the most organized person.’

‘So there could be a notebook out there with things she didn’t get to transcribe before she died.’

Leo picked up the train of thought. ‘Maybe she had it with her, and the killer took it.’

‘That fits in with the original 1931 murders,’ I said. ‘Hang on. I printed out some of the archived articles. Let me grab them.’

I got a manila file of articles from my office. When I returned, Leo and Mark had brought the rest of the pizza out from the kitchen. It was cold, but neither seemed to mind. My stomach growled, and I shuffled the papers to mask the sound. Finally, I found the article.

‘Here it is. The *Critic of Critics*, that’s the magazine Crawford financed and Spencer edited, ran a small advertisement in an issue that was published a couple of days before the murders. I haven’t been able to track down the original magazine, but this is a copy that appeared in the *LA Times*. It’s likely all a copycat killer would have access to. Here’s the gist of what it said: ‘If any member of the staff is molested it will be the signal for the opening of a safe deposit box in the vaults of a certain bank. In that bank are described the names, addresses, haunts and habits of all those who would be interested in closing the mouth of the editor.’’

I passed the printout to Leo, and he read it over for himself several times before handing it on to Mark.

‘What’s the ‘certain daily newspaper’?’

‘I don’t know. The *Times* and the *Examiner* were the two major dailies in the city back then, so it was probably one of them.’

Mark put the printout on an end table. ‘And they never found a safe deposit box.’

‘Spencer—he was the *Critic*’s editor—had a Bank of America box, but they didn’t find anything incriminating in it. Crawford, the publisher, had two boxes, but they’d been cleared out by the time the police got to them. One held an expired driver’s license. The other had nothing but a few rubber bands. There were rumours that Crawford had a third box, but it was never found.’

Mark grunted. ‘So we have another potential connection to the Crawford/Spencer murders. A journalist who might have kept a notebook with incriminating information in it. Information the killer didn’t want to make it into her computer files. It’s thin though. For all we know Spencer was just trying to make himself seem important.’

I rested the file folder in my lap. ‘It probably doesn’t matter what he originally intended. There isn’t likely anyone left alive who knows what Spencer really knew, so a copycat killer would just be going off the public record. A rumour might be enough of a connection for him, or her.’

Leo swallowed a large bite of pizza.

‘You said this Crawford—the mob guy—was investigated for framing a city councilman? Was there extortion involved?’

I nodded. ‘That was probably the original plan. Compromising pictures was a common way of shutting people up. It’s what the shooter, Dave Clark, said had been done to him. Maybe the councilman refused to play along, or maybe it got out of hand, but they ended up going through with the arrest.’

‘So maybe our shooter thought Diamond was planning some kind of shake down,’ said Leo. ‘Everyone I spoke to said she was a straight arrow, but a suspicious person might see her muckraking differently. Maybe the meet at Crossroads was to arrange some kind of payout, Diamond balked, and everything went fubar.’

‘Foo bar? That’s a nightclub, isn’t it?’ I asked.

Leo grinned. ‘Fucked up beyond all recognition.’

‘Or maybe,’ said Mark, ‘Diamond wasn’t all that squeaky clean. Maybe she set up the meet to demand a payout from Greene and our shooter, and the killer decided to eliminate them both.’

Leo shook his head. ‘I dunno. The techs went through Diamond’s computer. Over the last couple of weeks, she’s been looking into some major league publications. *L.A. Times*, *Vanity Fair*, *People Magazine*, *Time*. Visits to all the websites, paying specific attention to masthead pages and submission guidelines.’

Mark sat back. ‘Sounds like she knew she was on to something and was scoping out a buyer. Did she contact anyone?’

‘No. But I did speak to someone at *People* who said she was on their “No Fly” list.’

‘What’s that?’

‘List of writers who’ve either previously turned in shoddy work or pitched one too many harebrained article ideas. It’s a one-way ticket to the circular file for any future submissions.’

‘So Diamond had pitched them ideas before.’

Leo nodded.

‘The way I see it,’ said Leo, ‘we’ve got a couple of possibilities for how this played out. Diamond was the target and Greene was Mr. Wrong-Place-Wrong-Time. Greene was the target and Diamond was the bystander. Either way, that makes the ties to the 1930s killing a series of monumental coincidences. Or else Diamond and Greene were both targets, and maybe the ‘30s murder plays in somehow.’

‘Anything back from ballistics?’ Mark asked.

Leo laughed bitterly. ‘Yes and no. Venkman said the bullets are old, but wouldn’t elaborate. I asked him if old could be 1930s old and he told me I’ve been watching too much CSI if I think answers come that fast.’

‘So where do you want to go next?’

‘I’d better go pay a visit to Diamond’s ex before Multnomah County cuts him loose. Wanna come with?’

Mark shook his head and filled Leo in on Kath Diamond’s Kaylie Porter interview.

‘I doubt I’ll get near an A-lister like Porter, but I’d like to take a run at Blake Hart. From what Lucy says, he’s probably a softer target anyway.’

‘Maybe I should come with you,’ I said.

‘No way, Luce. Jessica Fontaine was one thing. If Diamond freaked Porter out during that interview and she’s connected to this mess in any way, Hart might be part of it as well. From the way you described him, he’d make a good triggerman: drug dependant and a completely unreliable witness for the prosecution if he was ever caught.’

I felt my face getting hot. ‘I can handle myself.’

‘This is a murder investigation, not a part in some movie.’

‘And what’s that supposed to mean?’

‘It means that I don’t want you in the line of fire.’

‘Oh, and when did that change of heart come about?’ It was a low blow, and I knew it. Mark didn’t say anything. He just stared at me. Thankfully, Leo intervened.

‘Back to your corners, you two.’ Leo threw Mark a curious look, which surprised me. Was it possible that Mark hadn’t told his partner everything about the case that had brought us together? I started to speak, but Leo put a hand up to silence me and turned toward Mark.

‘It might not be the worst idea in the world to take her along. You know what it’s like dealing with industry types. They lawyer up faster than anything. Hart might be more willing to talk if he sees a familiar face.’

‘For all we know, he’s the shooter,’ Mark snapped.

‘Maybe, maybe not. Even if he is, he’s not going to take aim at her with you in the room, and there’s plenty of security here at the house. Anyway, it’s more likely he’s got nothing to do with it. But he might be able to shed light on what freaked Porter out. From what you said, their relationship is long dead. Put the fear of God into him so he isn’t tempted to tip Porter off. And if you think there’s any chance he was in on it, we’ll post an officer outside your house until it’s all over.’

Mark was mutinous, and he glared at both of us for a while before finally nodding his assent. Leo went over a few more points, but the atmosphere in the room remained arctic, and he soon left. Mark stalked off to bed almost immediately, while I stayed downstairs.

I fell asleep in Mark’s chair and woke up after midnight by the sound of footsteps on the stairs. He appeared in the doorway, dressed in ratty grey sweatpants and a Red Sox t-shirt. I started crying, and he hugged me tightly. We stretched out on the couch together and lay silently in each other’s arms for a long while. Finally, Mark was the first to speak.

‘I just don’t ever want to be that scared for you again.’

CHAPTER XIII

Mark scheduled an interview with Blake Hart for 1:30 the following afternoon at his company's headquarters on Melrose Avenue in West Hollywood. Over sandwiches in the sunroom at the back of the house, Mark laid down the ground rules for the trip. I could see he was still very tense about including me, so I listened quietly and nodded in all the right places.

'If Hart gets squirrely, I want you to back off. Don't press him. Let me ask the tough questions. If he's hiding anything, better that he sees me as the bad guy than you. If he gets aggressive, get out of there.'

'Got it.'

'And Lucy, if I do anything really sexist, like ask you to get us coffee or to wait outside, play along. Depending on how this guy reads, I might want to buddy up to him, just a couple of jocks talking about chicks and cars.'

I tried and failed to stifle a smile.

'I believe I'd pay money to see you do that.'

'I'm serious, Luce. You may be too smart to fall for this stuff, but the sad reality is that most people aren't. You play to their egos and their blind spots, and they follow right along. It's not the most positive side of the human psyche, but it makes my job easier.'

'I'm an actress, remember? Not a bad one if you read my last reviews. I know how to take cues.'

'Yeah, but you don't always take them from me.'

I mimed a knife twisting into my chest.

'Your words are like a dagger to my heart.'

Mark rolled his eyes and took his empty plate over to the dishwasher.

Blake Hart's skate gear company, *Wheels on Fire*, sat at the corner of Melrose and Gardner, across the street from Johnny Rockets. The bottom floor was a large storefront selling high end skateboard decks and custom-painted helmets, as well as skateboard parts and accessories, and overpriced t-shirts and jeans from Blake's clothing line. A short section of skateboarding halfpipe was installed in one corner, and a couple of pasty-faced boys were fooling around when we entered the store, falling out of tricks they were nowhere near mastering. A sleepy sales clerk with bad skin and a Dew Tour t-shirt slumped over the main sales counter. In any other job, he'd probably have been tossed out long ago, but disinterest is the stock and trade of the skater's set. This one was a master, failing even to raise an eyebrow when Mark showed his detective's badge and asked to see Blake. Punching the speaker key on the counter phone so that he wouldn't have to lift the handset, he mumbled in the general direction of the microphone.

‘Cop for Blake.’

An equally bored voice rasped back.

‘Send him up.’

The clerk nodded vaguely to the back of the store.

‘Stairs are in the back. Top floor.’

To show how little he cared for us, he yawned in our faces, exposing teeth that had clearly chewed something green on white bread for lunch. He dropped his gaze back to the counter contemplating stacks of bearing boxes. We walked to the back of the store and found the stairwell.

A young woman in a black pencil skirt met us at the top of the stairs. Anti-skater clothes and understated makeup. I wondered if Blake kept her around for the parents coming to buy junior his first board. She flashed Mark a toothy smile, stopped staring at me a lot more quickly than most people do, and led the way to a conference room at the far end of the floor. Promising that Blake would join us in a minute, she directed us to a refrigerator filled with bottled water and energy drinks, and left us alone. After a few moments, we heard the sound of wheels on hardwood, followed by a thump. Then Blake charged into the room, board in hand, looking pretty much as he had the last time I saw him almost ten years ago.

He was on the short side, around 5’7’, with a mop of sunbleached hair, a flawless tan, and the most brilliant blue eyes. Dressed in a Hawaiian-cut shirt with graffiti scribbles, board shorts and unlaced sneakers, he was a big, beautiful kid, immune to the ravages of age or hard living. One other thing hadn’t changed either: his pupils were pinpoints.

Blake dropped his board at the door, nearly cracking Mark in the ankles, bounded across the room and gave me bear hug.

‘Luce, I knew it was you! Saw you on the store camera with the big guy. Knew it was you right away. I’m so fucking glad to see you! What’s it been, like five years?’

‘More like 10, Blake.’

‘Jesus, no way. No Way! We can’t be that fucking old. Seriously?’

Blake gave me another hug before stepping back. He looked bewildered, but my recollection of Blake was that he was pretty much bewildered by life in general.

‘So okay, you’re here with the cop. Wait. You’re not a cop, are you? I thought you were a librarian now.’

‘Historian, Blake. I teach over at UCLA.’

‘That kicks ass. I saw you in something recently though. I’m sure I did.’

‘I still do film work, mostly over the summers.’

‘Yeah, I feel you. Gotta keep diversified. I’ve been doing some stunt choreography myself. There’s a couple of skate movies coming out, so, you know, I work with the actors, plus do some of the harder stuff myself. Oh, and I’m doing a beer campaign in a couple of weeks. Gotta fly to Germany for that. But mostly I’ve got the stores and my clothing line. Keeps me busy, right?’

‘That’s wonderful, Blake. Can’t wait to see the commercial.’

‘Yeah, It’ll be a cool time.’

Blake turned to Mark.

‘Sorry, dude, I’m a little scattered. Haven’t seen Lucy in forever. You’re the cop, right?’

Mark extended his hand and Blake shook it.

‘Detective Mark Adamson. Thanks for taking the time for us. Okay if I call you Blake?’

‘Ha. You call me Mr. Hart I won’t know you’re talking to me. We’re pretty informal here.’

‘Okay. Blake. Hope it’s okay I brought Lucy. She heard me setting up the appointment this morning and insisted on coming along.’

‘No prob. Lucy and I go way back.’

The woman in the pencil skirt stuck her head in the door.

‘Garrison’s here to see you.’

‘Shit! Was I expecting him?’

Pencil skirt shrugged. Clearly, a well-organized day-book wasn’t something Blake was familiar with. Probably why we’d managed a same day interview. *Sure, dude, come on over. Whatever.*

‘Okay, no prob. Put him in the testing room and get him a beer.’

Blake turned back to us and shrugged apologetically.

‘One of my investors. Gotta keep the money happy, right? Shit! I’ve got no manners at all. Have a seat. You want anything? We got stronger stuff in my office if you don’t like what’s in the fridge.’

I couldn’t even fathom what constituted *stronger* to Blake. I wouldn’t have been surprised in the least if he offered Mark a line of coke. Was this ‘Garrison’ guy his dealer? Mark accepted an energy drink and I took water. We all sat down at one end of the conference table.

‘So what can I do for the dudes in blue?’

‘I’m looking into the murders of Ken Greene and Kath Diamond. Are you familiar with what happened?’

Blake looked up at the ceiling, down at the table, drummed his fingers on well-scratched wood.

‘Greene, Greene, Greene. Dunno. Was he on the circuit?’

‘He was Kaylie Porter’s agent about 10 years ago. He was killed last week while running for Mayor of Hollywood.’

‘Oh yeah! I do remember him. Kaylie and I were tight back in the day. I met him a couple of times. Solid guy. Sucks that he died, right?’

‘Definitely sucks for him,’ Mark agreed. ‘How about Kath Diamond? Did you know her?’

‘No, I’d remember a name like that. But Ken, that’s totally bizarre. Been a long time since I seen him though. Mostly at parties with Kaylie.’

‘Kath Diamond was a reporter for *L.A. Weekly*. Just before she died, she interviewed Kaylie. Did you know that?’

‘Nah. I still see Kaylie from time to time, you know, but we don’t really hang out anymore. ‘Sides, she gets interviewed all the time. See her on the cover of *Vanity Fair*? Hot!’

‘Yeah, I saw it,’ Mark said. I doubted it was true. Mark leaned towards books in his downtime. It was hard to imagine him flipping through *Vanity Fair*. ‘She’s a beautiful woman.’

‘Yeah. Hard to believe she’s pushing 30, right?’

‘Definitely. Look, Blake, in the interview with Kath Diamond, Kaylie got kind of upset when Diamond asked her about an incident on the set of *Venice Winter*. Something that involved you. It’s probably nothing, but we don’t really have much to go on right now, so I gotta chase down everything, you understand?’

Blake stopped drumming his fingers and started scratching vaguely at the tabletop. ‘I guess so. That was kinda forever ago though, you know.’

‘I know. That’s the shit part of being a cop. You gotta run down everything. You never know what’s important. According to Diamond, you kinda lost it on the set one day, and Ken Greene had to take you to the hospital. Do you remember that?’

Blake fell silent for a moment, then shrugged. He flashed a killer smile at me.

‘I dunno. I was seriously messed up back then. Coulda been the freakin’ president driving me around, and I probably wouldn’t a known it. What’d he take me to the hospital for?’

‘The papers said it was some sort of anxiety attack.’

‘Huh? Oh, yeah. Yeah, I did have a lot of anxiety back then. Lot of stress from being on the pro circuit. Plus I’m ADHD. I spaz out sometimes. So Greene took me to the hospital? That was cool of him. Like I said, he was a solid guy.’

‘Any idea why being asked about that might have pissed Kaylie off? She was really angry. She actually walked out of the interview for a few minutes.’

Blake resumed drumming his fingernails on the table, this time to a slower rhythm. He looked over at me, twisted his mouth, then leaned conspiratorially toward Mark.

‘Well, you see, Kaylie gets pissed a lot. You know how some chicks are, am I right?’

I knew a cue when I heard it, but to emphasize the point, Mark gently nudged me under the table with his foot. I stood up.

‘Blake, I need to use your ladies’ room if that’s alright.’

Blake sat up.

‘Uh-huh, sure Luce, no prob. Just keep going down this hall, and you can’t miss it.’

I excused myself and wandered down the hallway, taking a good look around.

CHAPTER XIV

The corridor walls were lined with photographs, mainly of Blake during the height of his pro days. There were a couple of movie posters as well showcasing Blake's skating talent. Variations of the skater-boy-wins-uptown-girl theme.

Most of the doors were closed, but there was a long window set into the wall about halfway down, in a darkened section of hallway. The room on the other side was likely the testing area Blake mentioned earlier. I moved up close to the window. Spacious, square and high-ceilinged, it was a sort of skate park in miniature, with a much larger halfpipe segment than the one in the store downstairs, plus a few rails, ramps and steps scattered about. A boxful of safety gear was shoved in one corner, and several skateboards were piled on a small table. Several folding chairs were clustered by the interior window, and a tanned, handsome young man sat in one, immediately across the glass from me.

It must have been a two-way mirror because the man didn't look up, even though I was inches away. That would explain the dimmed hall lights. Interested investors could watch the product testing without being seen by the skaters.

Garrison, if this was him, was tall and thin, with well-toned arms. Beyond that, he was cut from pretty much the same surfer mould as Blake: blonde, blue eyed, gleaming teeth. He'd have been hard to pick out on any given afternoon on the Santa Monica bike paths. He seemed agitated, continually readjusting his legs and glancing toward the door. There were at least a dozen skateboards within reach, but he showed no interest in any of them. Several times, he seemed about to stand, but he merely resettled himself and resumed the fidgeting. If he was an investor, he wasn't a happy one.

I considered going in and introducing myself, but that would spell the end of my involvement in this case if Mark found out about it. So instead I made half a dozen mental notes about Garrison's behaviour and continued down the hall towards the ladies' room.

I took my time, and when I emerged, I found Blake in the hallway.

'Oh, hey, Luce. Left your friend back in the conference room. Can't keep my investor waiting. You know how it is. Awesome to see you though. We're having a launch party at the end of the month for the rollout of my new video game. The designers are calling it Hart Landings for now, but I told 'em it's gotta change. Way too lame. Anyway, I'll make sure you get an invite. Probably better not bring the cop, though. Gonna be some party favours being passed around, you feel me?'

Not knowing what to say, I just hugged him, and he ducked into the testing room. I lingered, hoping for a look at the two men together, but glass went dark within seconds, giving Blake and his investor complete privacy. I went back to find Mark.

We compared notes in the car.

'Didn't get much from Blake after you left. A couple of crude jokes about women in general, and some vague allusions to Kaylie's skills in the bedroom. Classy

guy. Seemed kind of in a hurry to get away from me. Probably the drugs. Who the hell gets lit right before an appointment with a cop?’

‘That’s Blake. No common sense. But he might’ve had other reasons for being nervous.’

I filled him in on my impressions of Garrison, emphasizing that they’d all come from the dark side of a two-way mirror.

‘Well, Hart’s definitely lying about that incident on *Venice Winter*. He remembers what Ken Greene did for him, no question. Difficult to know what to make of it though. Could be that he knows something about Greene he’s not saying. Or he could just be lying because he remembers he was high that day. Stoners don’t always take the trouble to learn about the statutes of limitations. And even if he does know something about Greene, it might not have anything to do with the murder. I don’t know. This case is starting to feel like a black hole. Maybe Leo’ll get lucky up in Washington, and Diamond’s ex-husband’ll confess to hiring a hit man.’

‘You think that’s likely?’

Mark shook his head.

‘No way we’ll get out of this with so little trouble.’

‘So what’s next?’

‘What’s next is the boring part of police work. I go back to the office and run backgrounds on everyone at *L.A. Weekly*, all the candidates for Mayor of Hollywood, Greene’s family, Diamond’s family, and anyone else who might be remotely connected to either one of them.’

‘What about the Crawford/Spencer murders?’

‘Hell if I know. Do me a favour. Write up something about the ‘30s shootings for the murder book, will you? It doesn’t have to be elegant, just who, what, when, how. Any details you think are important. Plus anyone connected with the case who could possibly still be alive, like maybe the victims’ kids or anything like that. Do you mind?’

‘No problem. Are you planning to go see Kaylie Porter?’

‘If I can, but you’re definitely out of that one.’

I laughed. ‘I doubt I’d be much help to you there anyway. Like I said, we were competitive. I’d be surprised if she’d take a call from me.’

‘So I’ll just have to rely on my charm. God help us all.’

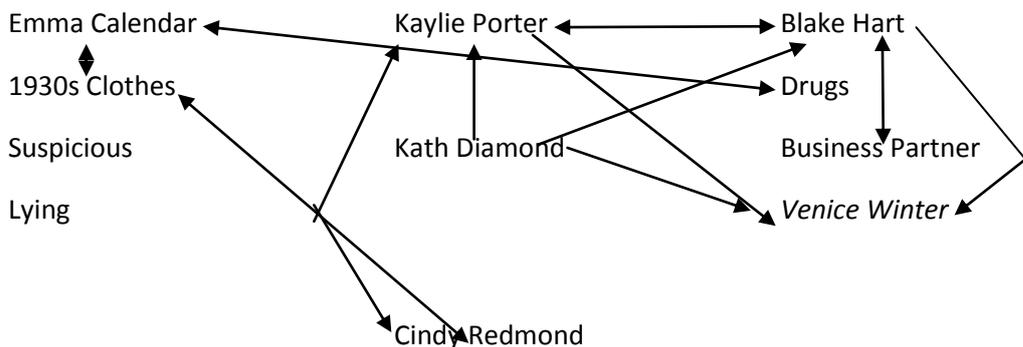
I reached across and tussled his hair.

‘Oh, I don’t know. Your charm is pretty damn effective.’

CHAPTER XV

Mark dropped me off at home, and I spent an hour sifting through my notes about the Crawford/Spencer murders. But I kept drifting back to Ken Greene's assistant, Emma Calendar, and Blake Hart. Something about them connected, although I wasn't sure what it was. I doubted they'd ever met. Emma was a good ten years younger than Blake if not more, and, while that wouldn't necessarily have stopped him, waifs were never really his type.

Sometimes putting my thoughts in writing helps me visualize better, so I scribbled both names on a piece of paper. I drew lines out in all directions from each name and wrote out everything that came to mind.



Cindy Redmond. That was it.

I met Cindy Redmond when I worked on *Malibu Cove*. She was Kaylie's personal assistant. Later, sometime after I went to college, Cindy left Kaylie and joined a small production company that did mostly documentaries. She'd called me once or twice about hiring me for voiceover work, and we kept the possibility open of working together if the right project came up. But that wasn't the only reason our paths crossed. Cindy was an amateur historian and one of Rudolph Valentino's Women in Black.

There were a lot of rumours about who the original Woman in Black was: a terminally ill girl Valentino befriended, a distraught lover, a secret wife, a publicity stunt. Whoever the first one might have been, she was joined and replaced over the years by a number of Valentino devotees. At any given time, there were two or three people claiming to be the 'real' Woman in Black, like it was some kind of franchise passed down over the generations. Some years, there was a parade of Women in Black, each processing in a stately manner up to Valentino's crypt on the anniversary of his death with a single red rose in hand.

Beyond her annual pilgrimage to Valentino's grave, Cindy had an interest in stars of the silent film era, and the last time we spoke, she was working on a biography of Clara Bow. It was one of those lifetime projects. She was way too fascinated by her subject to get out of the research phase. We bumped into each other from time to time in various libraries and archives around town. She was smart and efficient, if a little left of centre. She was also an active member in several of the more fringe historical groups around town. If Ken Greene's assistant styled her hair like Veronica Lake and wore '30s clothes, there was a good chance Cindy might know her. With any luck, she could shed

some light on two areas of the investigation: Emma Calendar and the incident on the *Venice Winter* set.

I doubted Mark would be thrilled that I was following leads on my own, but calling him at work felt too much like asking permission. Besides, Cindy was only peripherally connected, and she might not know anything useful. If she did I could always tell Mark I'd bumped into her by chance. I called her with little idea of how I was going to justify a meeting after more than a year without contact, but it didn't matter. She was happy to hear from me, and we arranged to meet for coffee at the Urth Caffé on Melrose. Herbal tea and organic muffins aren't really my thing, but it was a block from her production company's office.

Cindy was already seated at an outside table when I arrived, dressed in the jeans and black t-shirt that were her uniform whenever tailored vintage clothes weren't practical. It seemed a little cold for short sleeves, but she is one of those Angelenos who think any day without rain is good beach weather. We did the double-cheek kiss where nobody actually makes any contact. Cindy was a little older than me, but not much. Working for Kaylie had been her first job out of college. At my suggestion, we moved to a table nearer the counter, where I couldn't be seen as easily by passersby.

'Lucy. So weird that you called today of all days. I had a project come across my desk this morning that had me thinking of you.'

'Voice over?'

'Eventually maybe. More of a consulting gig in the beginning. Son of a camera man brought us some amazing footage from the '40s and '50s. Apparently, the guy used to make home movies between takes, lots of candid shots of different actors. Preserved the film well too. He finally died, and his son brought us the film. We're trying to figure out what to do with it.'

'The son have stories to go with the film?'

Cindy laughed. 'That's actually the problem. He's got a hilarious anecdote to go with every frame. Guy reveres his father, and he's really anxious to have us make a movie about him. I don't think he's lying so much as embellishing, but we're going to have to run just about everything he says through some kind of reality tester.'

'You want to be sure things at least *could* have happened the way he says they did.'

'Exactly.'

'Any idea when you'd need this?'

'Wouldn't be until sometime in the fall, at the earliest. We're doing a series of interviews with the son, getting his stories on film. Then we'll start combing through the footage and see what we have. You interested?'

'If I have time. If not, I'll put you in touch with a couple of historians who could help.'

‘Excellent.’

I ordered a honey oatmeal muffin and a glass of ice water, and we caught up on general life stuff before I raised the issue of the 1930s girl. Cindy sipped at a mug of tea that smelled like Vicks VapoRub and nodded.

‘Yeah, I’ve met her. She comes to the Silent Society film nights pretty regularly. And she’s at Bar Sinister every Saturday, open to close. That’s her real hair, by the way, not a wig.’

‘That’s gotta take forever.’

‘And then some. And those clothes are all handmade.’

‘Seriously?’

‘Said her mother taught her. Acts like it’s no big deal. Girl could be making a lot of money just with private clients. If she got involved in costume design, she’d probably be able to write her own check.’

‘So why the bottom rung job with Ken Greene?’

‘Dunno really. She could definitely do better. I met her about six months ago at a book signing at the Hollywood Heritage Museum. Asked where she was from, and she just turned around and walked away. Not just from me—out of the building. Squirrely. Everywhere she goes, people compliment her on her clothes, her hair. People offer her work, and it seems like she’s interested in the extra money, but it never goes anywhere. She doesn’t show up, doesn’t call back, or just plain pisses off her potential customers. Then there’s the obvious drug problem. Whatever she’s taking, she should switch. It’s not doing anything for her.’

‘Do you know her last name?’

‘Calendar.’

So whoever she was, she was living as Emma Calendar all the time, not just at *L.A. Weekly*. ‘What about where she lives?’

Cindy shrugged. ‘Just that it’s somewhere in Hollywood. I’ve seen her walking home after Bar Sinister closes. Why? Are you looking for her?’

I told her briefly about the murders, hoping that I wasn’t giving out anything confidential. When I got to the part about the *Venice Winter* incident, Cindy chewed on a fingernail, realized what she was doing, and put her hand under the table.

‘Jesus, will you look at me? I’m sorry if you and Kaylie are friends, but just thinking about that woman stresses me out. Longest three years of my life.’

‘I don’t think Kaylie would ever accuse me of being her friend.’

‘You’re better off. That woman is madder than a March hare.’

‘You remember Blake smashing the camera?’

‘Oh yeah.’ Cindy stopped and looked down at the table for a minute. She checked her fingernails again. Finally, she looked up. ‘Look, I don’t want you to think I’m disloyal. Normally, I’m a see-no-evil-speak-no-evil kind of girl. But Kaylie pretty much threw me under the bus, so I don’t feel particularly compelled to keep her secrets. And I’m established enough now not to be scared of her anymore.’

‘What happened?’

‘I worked for that bitch for three years. Blake dumped her for some punk rock guitarist, and she lost it. I mean, she was never a poster girl for clean living, but she got seriously out of control. I don’t think she loved him or anything. More like her ego couldn’t handle being the dumpee. She cracked up on the set of a movie I’m legally precluded from naming, missing calls, forgetting her lines, stumbling around, you name it. One day, she collapsed on the set and they forced a drug test on her, which she failed, of course.’

‘I never heard about that.’

‘You wouldn’t have because she laid the whole thing on me. Told the producers she’d misplaced her pink lemonade Snapple and grabbed mine—something she did all the time. Thought it tasted funny but she was dehydrated. Total bullshit, but there was too much money on the table. Everyone needed it to be true. So I got canned, and she got a *sober buddy* for the rest of the shoot to keep all the bad people away. Ken Greene offered me the equivalent of three months’ salary to sign a nondisclosure agreement, which I’m probably violating just by telling you, so keep it to yourself. I was young and stupid, but one of the producers felt bad and recommended me for this job. So we all won in the end, I guess.’

‘Do you remember the fight with Blake? We were thinking how strange it was that Ken Greene got to the set so quickly.’

Cindy snorted. ‘Strange, yes. Uncommon, no. Greene was always Johnny-on-the-spot where Kaylie was concerned. Guy gave me the creeps.’

‘He ever hit on you?’

‘God, no. I think I was too old for him. Offered me blow a couple of times. Charming. To tell you the truth, I made myself scarce when he was around. He and Kaylie were always behind some closed door, and she was usually high as a kite when he left. I just wanted to make it through without any felony counts on my record.’

‘And you stuck it out for three years?’

‘Those entry jobs are weird. You leave too soon, you’ve got no dedication. Stay too long, you’ve got no ambition. And the reputation follows you.’

Cindy and I chatted a while longer, but I didn’t learn much more. The longer she thought about that long ago nondisclosure agreement, the more circumspect she became. Eventually, she headed back to her office and I drove home, with the oatmeal and honey muffin sitting in my gut like a rock. I wasn’t sure what I’d gotten from the meeting or if any of it meant anything to Mark’s case. Emma Calendar had been on the

Old Hollywood scene about six months and was working way below her potential. Ken Greene hovered around Kaylie even though she was far from his only client. Whether it was for sex or drugs was anybody's guess. There was one thing: Blake may have made no secret of his drug habit, but Kaylie apparently did. Enough to lay her drug problems on her assistant instead of getting treated for 'exhaustion' at the nearest rehab centre. And *Venice Winter* wasn't the last time Ken Greene helped clean up a mess for Kaylie.

But how the hell did Emma Calendar figure into any of this? If Mark's guess about her age was on target, she was way too young to have had anything to do with *Venice Winter* or even to know Cindy Redmond back when she was Kaylie's assistant. I left the Urth Caffé feeling like I'd created far more questions than I'd answered.

CHAPTER XVI

Mark got home late and left for the station before I woke the next morning, so there was no chance to tell him what I learned from Cindy. I returned from my run to find Zoe on the doorstep with a copy of Marty's script and a letter I needed to sign, informally committing to the film. I thumbed through the script while Zoe paced the kitchen in noisy stiletto heels. After she was gone, I jumped in the shower, then left to deliver a lecture on Keystone Studios founder Mack Sennett, the man responsible for launching the film careers of Charlie Chaplin, Gloria Swanson, W.C. Fields, and Bing Crosby.

I didn't have office hours on Wednesdays, but Maryellen Harper was waiting for me in tears when I came out of my lecture. Her grandfather had called her at 7 a.m. that morning, telling her, no doubt in the same calm, measured tones with which he discussed adding a new wing to the library, that he was disappointed in her and suggesting that perhaps she leave academia before she publicly embarrassed the family.

His call came on the heels of Maryellen's breakup with her boyfriend, so, for the moment at least, school was her *whole life*, and she was desperate to get her research back on track. She looked terrible and smelled sour, so I took her out into the sculpture garden, and we spent three hours going over her research.

When I got home just before four, Mark and Leo were ensconced in the kitchen, comparing notes and wolfing down microwaved portions of Nessa's shepherd's pie. My stomach did a jealous lurch. I planned to grab a diet 7-Up from the fridge and flee, but Mark threw an arm around my waist as I passed, pulling me in for a kiss. Leo had his own form of greeting.

'Ever talk to a corpse before?'

After waiting a moment for the question to resolve itself, I attempted a response.

'Don't think so. Why?'

'Looks like Ken Greene had a zombie on the payroll.'

Leo seemed to feel this was enough sharing, and he shovelled ground beef and mashed potatoes into his mouth, attacking the plate as though it was his last meal.

'Emma Calendar?'

Mark nodded. 'I was right about her being younger than 25. Turns out that the real Emma Calendar died four years ago in Indiana. Drunk driving accident.'

Leo grunted something around a forkful of food. He wasn't particularly fastidious about chewing with his mouth closed. I looked to Mark.

'I called Emma Calendar's family in Indiana, described the girl, and they said it sounded like their younger daughter, Lisa. Didn't take her sister's death well. Been in and out of trouble ever since. No one's heard from her in 10 months.'

Leo choked down the last bite on his plate and rejoined the conversation.

‘Not since she jumped burglary and drug charges. A group of kids breaking into upscale houses and stealing prescription drugs. Her boyfriend was the ringleader. Terre Haute PD emailed over her mug shot. It’s definitely Lisa. She’s 16—as of last Friday.’

‘Do you think Ken Greene knew?’

Leo grunted again. ‘Probably why he hired her. Maybe he didn’t know all of it, but he definitely knew she was jailbait. Predators can sniff out that kind of thing easy.’

I sat down at the kitchen table, tried not to stare at the food. It was now or never.

‘Actually, I learned a little something about Emma. I mean Lisa.’

‘How so?’ Mark’s tone was flat.

I told them about my meeting with Cindy Redmond, shifting it to a Trader Joe’s grocery store because I knew Mark would never buy me bumping into anyone at an organic tea shop. The only hot drink I can tolerate is chicken broth, and they don’t generally serve that in quasi-vegan establishments. I probably shouldn’t’ve bothered. For an actress, I’m a shitty liar, and it was obvious neither of them believed that part of my story. I ploughed ahead anyway and told them what Cindy told me.

‘Well, it fits with what we know about Lisa Calendar,’ said Mark. ‘She’s 16, passing herself off as 25. Probably nervous about getting too entrenched anywhere until she knows if her sister’s identity will hold up. Definitely doesn’t want to work anywhere she’ll have to fill out tax forms.’

‘How does it fit in with the case?’ I asked.

Leo answered. ‘How does anything in this case fit in? Double homicide with historical overtones seems a little sophisticated for a 16-year-old from the boondocks, but weirder things have happened.’

Mark polished off the rest of his food and shifted his and Leo’s dishes to the sink.

‘Maybe she got caught up in something bigger here in L.A.,’ he said. ‘There are plenty of Black Dahlia Goth girls around. Lisa Calendar might have a similar thing for the Crawford killings.’

Leo grunted. ‘Diamond, Greene or both figure out her story, threaten to rat her out. Maybe Greene even uses it as leverage to get into her pants. She panics and kills them both.’

I wasn’t convinced. ‘Over some burglary charges?’

Mark checked his notes. ‘People have freaked out over less.’

‘When are you going to talk to her?’

Mark shrugged. ‘When we can find her. Her landlord hasn’t seen her for a couple of days. No sign of a struggle in the apartment, just typical teenage mess. Hard to tell if she packed a bag, but we think she’s rabbited. Terre Haute P.D.—that’s where

Lisa's parents live—is keeping an eye out for her, but I doubt she'll go back there. Kids like that—home's the last place they go.'

Leo belched. 'What your friend Cindy Redmond said makes Kaylie Porter a lot more interesting. Trying to dump a drug charge on the *staff* says a lot about her moral compass. Be interested to know what else Greene swept under the rug for her and when he stopped cleaning up her messes.'

Mark rubbed his hands across his face. 'Is there anybody connected with this case who wasn't screwing somebody over? Greene's seducing teenagers and passing out drugs like they were candy. Calendar's on the run from a drug charge and may or may not have killed someone to cover her tracks. Porter wreaks havoc pretty much everywhere and then gets Greene to clean up her messes.'

'There's always Blake Hart,' I said.

Mark rolled his eyes. 'Right, Hart. Unless he's tied in some way we don't know about, his main offence is being a rolling narcotics violation.'

Leo closed his notebook. 'Could be we've got an NHI here.' Mark glared at him, and Leo threw up his hands. 'You tell me who the upstanding citizen in this clusterfuck is, kid.'

'We've got no proof Kath Diamond was involved in anything illegal, Leo. And nobody's worthless, not even the coke heads and the crazies. Besides, there's still Lisa Calendar.'

'Who's still alive, as far as we know.'

'What's NHI?' I asked.

Leo smirked. 'No human involved.'

Mark, furious, seemed about to say something. But I never found out what because, at that moment, the Indiana Jones theme song rang out. It was Zoe's ringtone. Kissing Mark on the cheek, I headed for the living room, answering as I walked. Zoe's voice was shrill on the other end.

'Lucy, thank *God* you're not in a lecture!'

Class periods were the only times I shut off my cell entirely. Zoe had begged me to let her number at least ring through, but I refused. I couldn't very well slam my students for ringtones in class if I was taking calls from my agent at the lectern.

'Zoe, you've got a copy of my schedule. It's taped—'

She cut me off. 'That's fucking irrelevant at the moment, Luce. Just answer me one question, and be straight as shit with your answer. I can't do much if you lie to me.'

'Zoe, I have no idea what you're talking about.'

I heard her take a long slow breath, then there was a sharp crack as she slammed what I assumed was her office door.

‘Have you ever, for a movie, a TV show, photo shoot, party, private joke with that fucking cop, EVER, taken your clothes off when there might have been a camera around? Every fucking cell phone has a camera now, so think carefully!’

CHAPTER XVII

A few moments later, I was sitting cross-legged on the hearth in front of the electric fireplace, one arm wrapped around my knees, the other hand sweating from squeezing the phone. At first I couldn't process what Zoe was saying, but eventually the noise resolved itself into words.

'Lucy, hon, I know you're still there. Tell me what happened.'

Mark entered the room at some point and was standing in the doorway, staring at me. I heard the front door close. The noise shook me out of immobility, and I jumped to my feet, stomped across the room and shouted into the telephone.

'No way in hell! And don't you dare accuse Mark of something like that! I am not a fucking idiot, Zoe! There are no pictures, there is no video, there is nothing out there that would embarrass Marty or anyone else! Why the hell would you even—'

Somehow, Zoe's voice slipped through my tirade. She was speaking more calmly now. I guess only one of us could be freaking out at a time, and I was doing the honours.

'It's not Marty, Luce. The *National Enquirer* called. They say they have pictures—lots of 'em. Want to know if you'd like to comment. I'm sending one to your phone right now.'

Mark was closer now, sitting on the ottoman, touching my knee. I jerked away. My inbox pinged and I opened the attachment. I've never posed nude, but there was something familiar about the shot: something in the face and the posture. I couldn't remember. I was younger, probably in my teens. But it definitely wasn't me. That wasn't my body. And yet somehow, it was. I clicked back to Zoe.

'I don't understand. There's something familiar about the picture, but I swear to you, Zoe, I've never posed nude. And those definitely are not my breasts. It's some kind of fake.'

'Are you sure?'

'Of course I'm sure. You think I'd forget something like that?'

'Are you willing to put money behind it?'

'What do you mean?'

'If they're doctored shots, we need to hit the *Enquirer* now, with guns-a-blazing. I know a lawyer with experience—'

'Do it.'

'Lucy—'

'Do it. That's not me, Zoe.'

‘Lucy, you need to understand. They’re running with the pictures tomorrow. Why do you think they called so late in the day? We’ll never get any kind of injunction at this hour. The best we can hope for is to limit the exposure. We’ll stop them before they publish any more and hit them with a defamation lawsuit. We’ll probably win. Doctored shots are pretty easy to spot. If they’re fake—’

‘They are! Goddamn it, so stop with the fucking *ifs*. They’re fakes!’

‘Then the *Enquirer* already knows that, and they’re running the spread anyway. They obviously think the sales bump will make the lawsuit worthwhile. And—’ Zoe hesitated. ‘They’re probably prepared to argue that the damage to your reputation will be minimal. Actresses pose nude all the time.’

‘Zoe, I’m on tenure track at UCLA. This kind of scandal could get me fired.’ I’d worked so hard to be taken seriously, only to have some asshole with a computer take it away.

‘I know, sweetie, I know. But it would all be too confusing for a jury. Are you an actress or a professor? Most people know you from your movies. Your teaching is going to end up being irrelevant in court. Shit. I just wish I knew where the hell this came from. Why would anybody doctor pictures of you in the first place? I don’t know. Maybe the girl you’re replacing in Marty’s film. She’s crazy, right? Could be she’s handy with Photoshop, or else is fucking somebody who is. Look, Luce, I gotta get the machine rolling on all this. I’ll need to call Marty. You know how he feels about this kind of shit. He may drop you from the picture. I’ll call you when I know more.’

She clicked off. I stared at the picture until Mark slid the phone from my fingers, spun it around. For a long moment, he didn’t say anything, just scrutinized the picture. Acting like a detective. I hated him seeing me like that. Finally, he spoke.

‘That is definitely not you.’

‘You believe me?’

‘What’s to believe, Luce? I think I know your body pretty well, and that’s not it.’

I started to cry. Mark pulled me to my feet and into his arms. He stroked my hair, whispered a million different reassuring things. I didn’t hear any of them.

CHAPTER XVIII

The sky fell in the next morning and kept dropping every day. The *Enquirer* published seven pictures across a two-page spread, each one worse than the next. The lawyer Zoe recommended secured a temporary injunction, but the damage was already done. Every day, the photos showed up on additional porn sites, and I kept a couple of law students busy tracking down site owners and issuing cease and desist letters.

Based on my apparent age in the photographs and my hair style, Mark and I narrowed the pictures to the second season of *Malibu Cove*. Ironically, this was what slowed the spread of the pictures: not that they might be fake, but that if they were real, they were child pornography since I was only 15 that year. Unfortunately, it was also what launched the story into the mainstream press. Sex pics were old hat in Hollywood, but high profile kiddie porn was still news.

Mark stayed home with me the first day, screening calls. Marty's came just after nine. Personally, he was supportive. I think he even believed me, but it didn't really matter. He had to protect his investment. He didn't drop me from the film outright, but we agreed to hold off on deciding about the contract for a few weeks to see if things blew over. I'd signed already, but the morality clause made it child's play to break. My mother phoned about an hour later. She screamed at me for damaging *her* reputation. I'm not sure how she thought I'd got out from under her nose at 15 to pose nude, but logistics didn't seem to faze her. She shouted until I hung up.

Aaron called just before lunch to tell me that *Access Hollywood* planned to broadcast photos of us having lunch at the Ivy, linking us romantically and suggesting he'd been the person who took the photos. He recommended the private investigator who'd handled the theft of his sex tape with tennis champion Anya Watson. The tone of his voice was straight-forward, almost casual, as though he'd passed on this information to dozens of friends in similar situations. I didn't know whether to laugh or cry.

The call I'd been dreading most came shortly before one. Dr. Laurent was still in Europe, but I'd left messages at his office and on his cell phone. I'd also called human resources and UCLA's press liaison. He finally phoned from his hotel in Paris.

'Dr. Cassidy, I'm so glad I've reached you at last.' Terrence Laurent was unfailingly formal. As a graduate student, I'd only ever been Ms. Cassidy. I wondered if he even knew my first name.

'I'm so sorry for all of this, Dr. Laurent. The photos aren't real. I don't know where they came from.'

'Jealousy, no doubt. Listen, I've already contacted the Dean and the Chancellor and given you my full support. I fear that may not take us very far, but rest assured that you have the backing of the history department.'

I doubt I did a very good job of disguising my shock. Aside from Mark, no one else at UCLA seemed to want to support me. Maybe they feared the pornography taint.

'Thank you, Dr Laurent. That means a lot. But if you think it would be best for the department if I—' My voice hitched for a moment, '—resigned, I'll understand. I

don't want to damage our funding.' It was a pointed reference to Maryellen Harper and her grandfather. Given that I'd just put the heir to our most generous donor on academic probation, I suspected the Harpers would demand my dismissal. I heard a sigh on the other end of the line.

'I was once the victim of rumour mongering myself,' he said. 'It was my third year at Northwestern. I failed a graduate student, and she accused me of sexual misconduct. She recanted eventually, but it nearly ruined my career.'

'I never heard that.'

'Give it time. You will. Whenever I'm up for a new post, that 30-year-old charge re-emerges. Keep focused, Dr. Cassidy, this too will pass.'

Now it was my turn to sigh. 'I hope so.'

I thought I was through the worst of it. I was wrong. The call I wasn't expecting came about an hour later. Mark answered and made a face I couldn't read. After listening for a few seconds, he took the phone into my office at the back of the house and shut the door. I went into the kitchen and picked up the extension, something I hadn't done since my mother and I lived together.

'Father Carlin, how—?'

'I called your North Hollywood condo, but it seems you no longer live there. You gave this number to one of the youth group boys in case of an emergency.'

'Father, I'm sorry, I—'

'A conversation for another time, son. Confession, perhaps. I called to ask if I can be of any help to you. And Dr. Cassidy, of course.'

I heard creaking as Mark sat down.

'Lucy says the photos aren't real, and I believe her. But this thing is taking on a life of its own. Reporters are calling, her job is in jeopardy, the phone just keeps ringing and none of it's good. Her mother called about an hour ago. I dunno, I guess I thought she must be exaggerating. You know, we all think our parents are—. But I could hear her across the room, yelling, saying horrible things to Luce. I've never heard anyone talk to their family like that, not anyone I wasn't about to arrest at least.'

'Sounds like she's had to navigate the world without much help. Difficult family situation, no spiritual foundation. It can't have been easy.'

'She's always seemed so together. I guess there's a lot I still don't know about her.'

'It's good that she has your support.'

Mark took much too long to respond.

'Mark?'

‘I dunno. Maybe I’m over-reacting. I can’t help thinking that this is my fault.’

‘Your fault?’

‘The timing is strange. Lucy’s been helping me with a case, and it’s starting to look like an old friend of hers—a guy named Blake Hart—might be involved, and I gotta wonder if the two things are related.’

‘Even if that’s true, you can’t have predicted something like this.’

‘I should never have gotten her involved. I should have protected her.’

I couldn’t listen to any more. *I guess there’s still a lot I don’t know about her.* I was losing Mark, not to another woman or a job or anything that made sense. To some invisible God I didn’t even believe in. To a set of beliefs that had no space for me. Or maybe I’d never really had Mark to begin with. Maybe he always knew this was only temporary, someone to pass the time with until he found a nice Catholic girl.

I kept the phone in my lap until the muffled voices were replaced by a dial tone and then put the receiver back. Was Mark right? Could Blake really have done this? I had no illusions about his character, but murder and doctored photographs seemed like a stretch. But then, what did I really know about him? We hadn’t seen each other in ten years. We were friends on set but nowhere else. Zoe’s suspicions about a jealous competitor for the starring role in Marty’s film seemed more plausible, but I couldn’t do more than guess until I knew where the pictures came from. They seemed *so* familiar.

When Mark finally emerged from my office, he went around the house putting all the extensions on silent and suggested I take a nap. He didn’t mention Father Carlin. I went upstairs but couldn’t bring myself to go into our bedroom. For the first time since Zoe’s call, those pictures weren’t the primary thought racing through my mind.

A conversation for another time, son. Confession, perhaps.

What did that even mean? As far as I could tell, confession was where you went to admit things you felt guilty about. What was Mark doing with me that was so wrong? Dating a non-Catholic? Living together? Or was it just the fact that he’d lied about moving out of the North Hollywood condo? And if he’d lied to Father Carlin, who else had he kept secrets from? Mark might’ve finally introduced me to the guys at work, but he was still pretending to some people that he was living in North Hollywood. I tried to remember if his mother had ever called our home number, and I couldn’t. He was still ambivalent about me.

I went through to the back guestroom and curled up in the spare bed. I thought I might cry, but I didn’t. I guess I should have known. My relationship with Mark had started in a mess, and it looked like it would end that way too.

CHAPTER XIX

Mark offered to work from home for a few days, but I lied and said I'd be okay on my own. I got through my lectures until the end of the week, trying to ignore the surreptitious texting around the lecture hall and the fact that attendance had doubled, leaving standing room only at the back of the hall. But when word broke that I was 15 in the photographs, not even Dr. Laurent's support could help me. My lawyer, Alan Stern, came with me to a meeting with the school Chancellor. With Stern's help, I managed to emerge from the meeting on 'emergency sabbatical' with full pay.

Mark and Leo were still working the Greene-Diamond murder. Lisa Calendar hadn't resurfaced. Leo interviewed a number of her friends, but no one admitted to knowing where she'd gone. Mark's Lieutenant was still hesitant to okay an interview with Kaylie Porter. In the meantime, he'd green-lit closer scrutiny on Blake Hart. Even if he was cleared of any connection with the Diamond-Greene murders, he'd be a good high-profile take-down for Narcotics. Even this was proving to be difficult—Blake hadn't been seen at his home or office in days, and his agent insisted he was in Germany training for the beer commercial. If that was true though, he hadn't flown on any commercial airline because his name wasn't on any passenger logs flying out of LAX, Burbank or Orange County, and his passport hadn't been used in nearly six months.

I was too shaky to drive so Allen Stern took me home. When the kiddie-porn angle surfaced, I'd had a kind of meltdown, and Mark called in a doctor who wrote me a generous prescription for Xanax. I'd left the bottle untouched until now, but, having just listened as three human resource executives calmly talked away my academic career, I took one of the pills and went to bed.

When I woke, the sun was setting and my mouth tasted like I hadn't brushed my teeth in a month. I got a Diet 7-Up from the fridge. In what I was sure was some kind of clinical denial, I was still dieting for Marty's film. Mark was home, sitting on a deck chair on the back porch. He was scribbling notes, but when I stepped onto the deck, he put the pad aside and reached for me.

'When you didn't call, I got worried. I rang the department secretary and told them I was in your Intro to Film History class. What's an emergency sabbatical?'

I kissed his forehead.

'Means I still get paid.'

'I'm sorry, Luce.'

I made an attempt at a shrug. 'Best I could expect under the circumstances.'

'When's the sabbatical end?'

'When the publicity dies and they can find a quasi-legitimate way to fire me.' I sighed and chewed a fingernail. 'Dr. Laurent is still in my corner. But it just keeps getting worse.' I buried my face in his chest and we sat there for a while as the sun went down.

‘New leads on the case?’ Mark looked dubious. ‘Come on, Mark. I have no life of my own at the moment. Don’t deny me the chance to live vicariously.’

Mark made a face, then pulled the notebook closer so that I could see. It didn’t matter—I’d never been able to read his handwriting.

‘Well, it looks like I’m finally going to get that interview with Kaylie Porter. The Lieutenant wants to mull it over this weekend, but I don’t see how he can say no now.’

‘What happened?’

‘Remember Garrison, Blake Hart’s quote-unquote investor?’

‘Yeah?’

‘Well, it turns out that he *is* an investor, sort of. His full name’s Garrison Eames, and he’s Blake Hart’s cousin. Not only that, he’s also the grandson of Walter Eames, founder of W.E. Petroleum. Aside from the oil company, the family owns a string of upscale hotels and...’ He flipped a page. ‘...a brewery. Apparently, Eames Blonde Ale is quite popular in Europe.’

‘Smells like money.’

‘Lots of it. Garrison’s the primary heir, but the Harts get in on the trust as well. That’s how old Abner funded all those surfing documentaries. Blake’s share is managed by a trustee and goes straight into his businesses. He’s no longer allowed to tap in directly because of his drug history.’

‘And Garrison Eames is the trustee?’

‘Right in one. But that’s not all he is. They’ve done their best to keep it out of the press, but apparently he and Kaylie Porter have been involved on and off for about a year now.’

‘She’s involved with the guy who manages her ex-boyfriend’s trust?’

‘Incestuous, huh? Who knows? Maybe she met Eames through Hart and decided to trade up. Whatever’s going on, it all adds up to a pretty big pile of money sitting very close to whatever Diamond dug up on Porter and Hart. Not quite motive yet, but it makes me curious.’

‘Any connection to Lisa Calendar?’

‘Not that we’ve found so far. Eames, Hart and Porter are out of her league socially. But she might have met them through Greene. We’ll show their pictures to Lisa’s more talkative friends, see if they recognize anyone. Eames and Hart, at least. I’m guessing someone would have mentioned it already if she’s been kicking back with Kaylie Porter.’

‘What about the Crawford murders?’

‘Nothing new. Still too much to dismiss as coincidence but not enough to make any sense. But that reminds me. I have a favour to ask.’

‘What’s up?’

‘I’ll be straight with you. Officially, we’re following the Diamond and Calendar leads on this one, with Porter as a potential material witness. Lieutenant Fortensky’s not completely sold on the Crawford angle. He’s willing to let Leo and me run with it, but only if we can manage with the manpower we have. And until Lisa Calendar surfaces, there’s not much we can do with her directly.’

‘So you need a little free labour.’

Mark sighed and flashed me a resigned grin. ‘That’s about the size of it, yeah.’

‘You sure you want my name connected to the investigation?’

‘If we can say we had an historian on sabbatical from UCLA tracking down the story, it’ll keep that end of the investigation chugging along nicely until Lisa Calendar surfaces. Sound pretty impressive in court too.’

‘You could easily end up with an historian who was fired from UCLA for kiddie porn on your witness list.’

Mark squeezed me, kissed my hair. ‘Even if we solved this tomorrow, it wouldn’t get to trial for six months at the inside. By that time, your lawyers will have put this to bed, I’m sure of it. Odds are, the defence won’t even be able to mention those allegations in court. Plus, your department will be able to say they released you to confer with the LAPD on a high profile case. Nice way for them to save face.’

I hugged him tightly. ‘I wish I had your faith.’

‘My mother’s saying a novena for you. You’re restored reputation is pretty much in the bag.’

‘I don’t even know what a novena is.’

‘Nine days of rosaries. Some serious praying.’

I tried to imagine Mark’s mother—who hadn’t even met me yet—on her knees praying for the career of her son’s heathen girlfriend. A few days ago, I probably would have resented the intrusion of someone else’s God into my life. Now, I felt just the tiniest bit comforted. I didn’t believe for a minute any amount of praying was going to help me, but something about a total stranger trying felt good. It was more than my own mother was willing to do.

‘Where’d you go, Luce?’

‘Sorry, what?’

‘You looked like you were a million miles away just now.’

‘Sorry. Just thinking. I really do wish I had your faith.’

Mark took my hand, squeezed it.

‘Well, I guess we could just prepare for the worst. You’re totally discredited and have to leave your career behind to write historical romances under a pseudonym.’ I punched at him, but he blocked my fist easily and kept going. ‘And, owing to the social stigma, you retreat from society and spend most of your time in the house, aerobicizing and homeschooling our three beautiful children. Hey, now I think about it, the downside sounds pretty sweet. Except I want a dog. If you get to be the reclusive novelist mother of my children, I think we should get a dog.’

‘What? Having a devoted, and—might I add—spectacularly toned, mother to your children isn’t enough for you?’

‘Are you suggesting that my kids are gonna be hard to raise? Heck, they’ll all be geniuses. Practically raise themselves.’

‘They’ll get that from my side of the family.’

We’d reached a point of decision. We were either going to have ‘that’ talk or else plunge headlong into ridiculous fantasy. Simultaneously, we both opted for the latter. By the time *my* mathematician daughter had earned a chair at MIT and *his* twin boys had respectively taken over the LAPD and Scotland Yard, I’d managed to push the doctored photos, Father Carlin’s call, and my collapsing career to the back of my mind, if only for a few minutes. It was the first time I’d laughed since Zoe’s phone call. It felt good.

CHAPTER XX

Despite the jokes of the night before, I slept badly and was up at dawn. Mark was still asleep, so I made a run to Randy's Donuts in Inglewood. My part in Marty's film was all but off the table, and a couple of chocolate glazed seemed as good a way as any to end my ridiculous diet. By the time I got back, Mark was in the kitchen making coffee. He made no move toward the donut box but watched while I piled three donuts on a plate, then stared at them without eating. Finally, I gave up and put my head on the table. I heard Mark sit down next to me and felt his hand on my back.

'Want to talk about it, Luce?'

Actually, I'm wondering if you're ashamed of the best relationship I've ever had. I'm questioning whether I can trust what you say because you obviously lied to Father Carlin about me, and I'm afraid he's not the only one you're keeping us from. But mostly I'm wishing I never picked up that extension.

I shrugged. 'It's nothing. Really, I'm just tired.'

'Did I ever tell you what I do for a living?'

'What?'

Mark put his hand on my arm.

'Detection's kind of my stock and trade. Look, this isn't an accusation. It's been a crazy couple of days, and, as far as I'm concerned, you pretty much get a pass on anything short of a fling with a Calvin Klein model.'

I had a brief impulse to laugh, but it died quickly.

'You were listening in on my conversation with Father Carlin. What is it that you think you heard?'

Think I heard? I looked up at him.

'He didn't know we live together,' I said finally.

'No.'

'Does anyone besides Leo?'

'What's that supposed to mean?' There was no accusation in his voice, only confusion.

'Your mother always calls on your cell. Your sister too. Do they think you're still living in Northridge?'

'No, of course not. Why would you think that?'

'Well, what else am I supposed to think? You're too embarrassed to admit it to your priest? Maybe you don't want your family to know either.'

I was surprised by the venom in my voice. So was Mark. He stood up abruptly and moved toward the hall. I had to turn in my chair to look at him. For a moment, he stared into space.

‘That’s not it at all.’

‘Then what is it Mark? Because all my friends know you live here.’

With effort, Mark returned to the table and sat down across from me. He ran a hand through his hair.

‘It’s just part of being Catholic, Luce. Unmarried couples living together is still a no-no. It’s not that Catholics don’t do it. We just have a long-standing tradition of lying to our priests about it.’

‘I don’t understand.’

‘Most Catholics can name a couple of Church laws we don’t agree with. I’m not a fan of the Pope’s position on abortion, for example. Not enough mercy. And don’t get me started on how the Church deals with paedophile priests. But I don’t stop being a Catholic because my faith is deeper than a few bad policies made by a bunch of old men in Rome. Personally, I think sex outside of love is not so much morally wrong as just not particularly good for anyone concerned. I love you, and I’m not ashamed of the fact that I live here. But if I tell Father Carlin straight up that I’m living with you, then as far as he’s concerned, I’m committing mortal sin. He could refuse to give me Communion, and I’d rather he not do that.’

‘Is that what you think?’

‘What?’

‘That we’re living in sin.’

‘No, Lucy, that’s what I’m trying to tell you. Look, I don’t want to sound flippant, but this is just the way it is. We don’t come right out and say we’re living with someone, and the priest doesn’t ask. Then, if you want to be married in the Church, the priest calls you in and insists that you get your own place until the wedding.’

‘Does anyone really do that?’

‘More than you’d think. But a lot of people just lie a little more, give him a friend’s address and insist they’ve moved there. Everyone involved knows it’s BS. But I can’t believe God really gets upset about it.’

‘So if no one asks and no one tells, why did Father Carlin call you on the fact that you live here?’

‘Because he saw it on the evening news. That kind of backed him into a corner. Look, Lucy, I promise you, I’m not hiding our relationship.’

‘Then why haven’t I met your family?’

Mark laughed, saw the look on my face, and struggled to take a more serious attitude.

‘They’re intimidated.’

‘What? Why?’

This time, when the smile returned, he didn’t bother to chase it away.

‘Oh, I don’t know, Luce. Maybe it’s because you’re freakin’ famous. You know, when I first told them about you they thought I was having them on. I had to show Karen that paparazzi picture of us at Toi on Sunset before she believed me. I tried getting them over for dinner once, and the whole thing collapsed under a discussion about makeovers and the cost of a Beverly Hills haircut.’

I smiled. ‘You should’ve have told me.’

‘I figured I’d give them a little more time. But if you don’t want to wait, we’re both invited to Karen’s for Easter brunch. It would mean going to church with us first. It’s kind of part of the day.’

‘Ah, I get it now. This is just an elaborate way of getting me to go to mass with you.’ But I laughed.

‘Feeling better?’

‘Yeah, actually. Weird, huh?’

‘Nope. Psych 101. Look, I hate to rush out, but I gotta go to work. Will you be okay, really?’

I nodded and he leaned over and kissed me. He took his blue suit jacket down from the kitchen door hook. Once it was on, he absently plunged both hands into his pockets, then pulled an unfamiliar cell phone out.

‘I almost forgot.’ He handed me the phone. ‘It’s a burn cell. We’ve got all the information on it down at the station. Your name’s not attached to it in any way. Narcotics uses them all the time, but even if it was somehow traced, it would come back to us, not you. The number’s taped to the back.’

‘Gee thanks. What am I doing with it?’

‘It would really help if you could find out if the Crawford story is floating around anywhere in town: tours, screenplays, museum exhibits, anything. Use the name Adrienne Lewis when you call anyone. That’s the name we’ve registered with the phone.’

I raised an eyebrow at him.

‘Adrienne?’

‘What can I say? I’m a *Malibu Cove* fan. Besides, I figured it would be easier for you to remember. You sure you don’t mind doing this?’

‘What else have I got to do?’

‘That’s the spirit.’

Mark left, but was back less than a minute later, his cell jammed to his ear and signalling in the air for a pen. I found him one, and he sat down at the kitchen table writing. He grunted a few times into the phone before finally speaking.

‘Yeah, that’s the day we spoke to him.’ He listened a while longer. ‘I doubt that. Thirty minutes.’

He hung up.

‘Leo found Blake Hart. He’s been at Promises rehab in Malibu since Monday. Could be nothing—the guy’s a frequent flyer—but we’re going down there to play good cop/bad cop with him.’

He grabbed the notepad and stood up again.

‘If he calls you, let the machine take it. The rehab stint’s pretty convenient given the timing. He could be hiding out. If that’s the case, Hart’s looking more and more like a suspect, so it’s better if you stay away from him.’

I nodded and he was gone. For the first time since we’d met, I was jealous. He had somewhere to go and I didn’t. In fact, unless I wanted an entourage of photographers, I was pretty much trapped in the house. With few other alternatives, I took the burn cell up to my office and the pile of notes I’d compiled on the Crawford murders. Even if it went nowhere, I could probably get an article out of it when the dust settled. Not much of a silver lining, but it was something. I got to work.

CHAPTER XXI

Six hours later, I had a stack of articles from the *L.A. Times*' online archives and a list of what I hoped were reasonable suggestions for follow-up. The major players in the Crawford case were all long dead, so it was unlikely that the Diamond-Greene killings were directly related that way. It was possible though that Diamond was chasing down the story on her own and perhaps found whatever had been contained in Crawford's emptied deposit boxes. If it was money, it was also possible that Diamond's death was a straight-up robbery, with Greene as an unfortunate bystander. On the surface, that seemed pretty unlikely. Crawford's offices were torn down after his death to erect the Crossroads of the World shopping mall. If there was something on the property, the workers probably would have found it.

Of course, it was possible that Diamond found whatever it was somewhere else, and the attackers were seeking a key or flash drive, which she might well have carried with her. The list of things that would keep their value across 80 years was pretty short: gold, coins, diamonds, maybe some kind of stock or bond. Incriminating paperwork or even the proverbial smoking gun would be of interest only to an historian, and we didn't typically kill people to publish a book that only other historians were likely to read. So whatever Crawford was hiding would have to have intrinsic value to be a motive for murder today.

If Diamond wasn't on to anything related to Crawford and Spencer, then the connection between the murders could be in some form of message—using the past to hint at whatever Diamond and Greene had gotten themselves into. But what? That the past can't be buried forever? Was the killer trying to turn a spotlight on some sort of collusion between Greene and the press? Or was the finger being pointed toward David Clark? Although press accounts were sympathetic to him in 1931, he had a breakdown a few years later—turning up in Paris without much of an explanation. Then in 1953 he killed again—this time, his law partner's wife. Was he the connection? Perhaps the killer was making a point about the favourable press Greene was getting. He certainly seemed to have skeletons in his closet. Was one of them murder?

By two o'clock, my eyes were swimming from the research, so I took a break to make myself a fruit smoothie and turned to the other half of my assignment: looking for modern uses of the Crawford story. Trying to track down an unproduced screenplay in Hollywood was like looking for a needle in a stack of needles, so I tried the tour company route first. I hit pay dirt on my ninth call.

Caroline Bennett ran a walking tour company called Ish Kabbible Tours, focusing on mysteries, scandals and hauntings in *Old Hollywood*. She sounded young and had a faint Boston accent. Her company had no office, just a P.O. box and a telephone number. I guessed she was an aspiring actress who had done her best to scrub out a dialect that would limit her work prospects.

'Did you see my Halloween segment on the Travel Channel? I'm sorry but I'm already working with a production company on a movie about the Crawford murders. We've registered a rough draft of the script with the WGA, so it's too late for that story.'

I debated mentioning to her that you couldn't actually register exclusive rights to a historical event, then decided against it. I probably should've thanked her and hung up, leaving the rest to Mark and Leo. But I was bored and frustrated. And besides, hadn't Mark said this entire line of inquiry was somewhat unofficial? If that was the case, there couldn't be any harm in spinning my wheels a little further.

'I'm not making a film, Miss Bennett.'

'Caroline, please. Miss Bennett is straight out of Jane Austen.'

'Caroline, I'm actually doing some research for the L.A.P.D.—'

'Oh my Gawd!' Her accent came back full force. 'Is Dreamline involved in something illegal? I'm just the creative consultant, but I was thinking of investing.'

I jotted down the name Dreamline on a Post-It note.

'This may be, it probably *is*, nothing, Caroline. But it's important that I learn as much as possible about how the screenplay came about. I'm afraid I can't tell you more.'

Caroline's voice lowered to a whisper.

'Of course. Just please, you'll tell me if I'm being scammed, right? I don't have a lot of money.'

'If there's something fraudulent going on, you'll be notified, of course.'

'Thank you. I don't have a lot of capital, and I can't afford to blow it on a scam. Do I need to come down to the station?'

I stifled a laugh. Was this what Mark ran into in his investigations? A generation of people who had watched way too many procedural cop shows?

'That won't be necessary. I'm an historian. I was brought in because I know the Crawford story well. I just have a few questions for you. Do you have time now?'

'Oh, sure, I guess. What can I tell you?'

'How long have the Crawford/Spencer murders been part of your tour?'

'About two years. I only use it in one of my tours: the Walk of Infamy. I came across the story by accident when I was researching the Julien Petroleum stock swindle. I pitched a series of historical articles, including Julien Petroleum and the Crawford murders, to *L.A. Weekly*, but they weren't interested.'

'Do you remember who you spoke to at *L.A. Weekly*?'

'Nobody. I emailed them a pitch for a series of five articles about L.A. life in the 1930s. Never heard back. But the Crawford story was interesting so I added it to the tour. A crew from the Travel Channel followed me around for their Halloween special on Los Angeles, and the story they chose for my segment was the Crawford murder.'

They actually had me redo that part of the tour so they could film me from different angles.’

‘Is that how you got connected with Dreamline?’

‘Yeah. Rob—his name is Robert Burdett—called right after the show aired, said he was with Dreamline Productions and they were interested in doing a movie on the Crawford murders. He wanted me to be creative consultant and help them with all the research.’

‘When was all this?’

‘Not this past Halloween, but the one before, so about a year and a half ago. Rob brought in a writer—his name is Jason Kearnes—and we wrote the screenplay. I’m credited on the WGA draft and everything. Rob’s been shopping it around. He says he has some interest in it, but nothing solid yet.’

‘Did you ever meet anyone else about the project?’

‘Only one other person. A woman. I know he had other partners in Dreamline because he talked about them sometimes. I never met them. I think one of them was named Gary, but I’m not sure. Sorry, maybe I should have gotten more information before I agreed to work with them, but they’ve always been professional.’ Caroline lowered her voice. ‘Rob isn’t dangerous, is he?’

‘I don’t have any reason to think he is, Caroline. Thank you so much for your help.’

‘Can you tell me anything? Anything at all? I’m kind of freaked out.’

I felt bad for her. Here I was, asking her all kinds of questions, suggesting the people she thought were her ticket out of obscurity were crooks, even homicidal maniacs.

‘This is all routine, and most of the time nothing really comes of it. It would be best though if you didn’t mention our conversation to anyone at Dreamline. Do you understand?’

‘Of course. I won’t say a word.’

I took down Caroline’s home and personal cell numbers, as well as her email addresses, and promised to contact her the instant I knew anything.

CHAPTER XXII

Mark got back from Promises, looking like he'd been in a minor bar fight. There was mud all over his shirt and grass stains on his knees and shins. His shoes were scuffed and dirty, and one of his pant legs was torn at the cuff. He'd done his best to cover the worst of the damage by buttoning his jacket and adjusting his tie. He had some scratches on his hands and face, but nothing serious.

'What the hell happened to you?'

Mark groaned and moved into the living room, dropping into his oversize chair. I got him a Red Stripe from the fridge.

'Turns out Hart hasn't gotten over his *anxiety* problems. When he saw Leo and me, he did a pretty ridiculous job of faking a panic attack. I can't believe anyone ever paid him as an actor.'

'Mostly he did skateboard stunts and one-liners: 'Gnarly, man,' or 'What's up, chica?''

Mark laughed, but it looked like the effort hurt him.

'Are you okay?' I asked.

'Yeah, I just got sucker punched by some rich kid with a reasonable right hook. Promises won't let Hart take medication so they took him into the sunroom to settle him down, and he ran out through a fire door. I went after him, and a couple of idiots doing Tai Chi out on the lawn started chanting "Narc." One of those peaceful warriors is the guy who hit me. I'd like to think he'll be doing the rest of his detox in the Twin Towers detention centre downtown, but odds are he'll be back in his comfy private room at Promises Rehab by this time tomorrow. We combed the beach, but Hart was gone.'

Mark looked down at his suit.

'Most of this damage came from Leo. We followed Hart down a trail between Promises and the beach when Leo lost his footing and slammed into me. Crashed into a bush at the bottom of the hill.'

I stifled a laugh. Mark tried to look wounded.

'It's not funny.'

'Sorry, sweetie, but it kind of is.'

Mark took a swig of beer. 'Any luck with your research?'

I told him about Caroline Bennett and Dreamline Productions. If he was surprised by the level of detail I'd got from Caroline, he didn't say. He took my Post-It note and transferred the contents to his notepad.

'So where does all this get you?' I asked.

‘Not sure yet. I mean, it’s not like Hart has some kind of stellar reputation to protect. If Greene was his dealer, that’d do Greene more damage than Hart. But innocent people tend not to run. I dunno. Hopefully, when we track down Lisa Calendar, she’ll be able to help us connect all the dots.’

‘Any closer?’

‘Actually, yeah. Turns out Lisa hasn’t read the drugged-out-teen-on-the-run manual. I got a call from Terre Haute PD this afternoon. Lisa went home yesterday and conned some money out of her mother. S’posed to use it to take a bus to New York, but she called home a few hours later asking for more. Mom was pretty sure she was high, so she called the local cops. Tough love. They haven’t found her yet, but Terre Haute’s pretty small.’

Mark’s expression turned apologetic.

‘I’m catching a flight out first thing in the morning. We don’t really have enough to get her extradited. And I can’t wait until we do. If she’s involved in this, she’s in danger every day she’s out there. Murderer, accomplice, whatever. She’s still sixteen.’ He was quiet for a minute. ‘Hey, why don’t you come with me?’

I wondered if the invitation was for his benefit or mine. ‘What for?’

‘Change of scenery. You’ve been cooped up in here for almost two weeks. We can fly into Indianapolis and rent a car from there.’

‘They have tabloids in Terre Haute.’

‘Yeah, but they probably don’t have much of a paparazzi presence.’

‘You’d be surprised.’

‘I’m unlikely to get any leads that take me to private resorts in Thailand, Luce. Terre Haute’s what I got. Take it or leave it.’

I took it, and we caught a flight out of LAX the next day. If I thought we could sneak out unnoticed, I was wrong. A dozen or more paparazzi were camped outside Terminal Six, along with a few quasi-legitimate reporters. Airport security tried to shield me while Mark got our bags, but, within moments, I was blinded by popping flashes inches from my face. I couldn’t see to get inside the terminal. I was pushed in different directions—whether toward the entrance or away, I couldn’t tell. And the questions came from everywhere.

‘Will there be more photos Lucy?’

‘Have you been in touch with the photographer?’

‘Is it true you’ve been fired from UCLA?’

‘Are you planning to press charges?’

Press charges? Who would the police arrest? I didn’t even know where the pictures were coming from.

‘Were the *Malibu Cove* producers aware of the photo shoot?’

‘Did your mother arrange the pictures to help you break out of the teen demographic?’

I swallowed the bile in my throat. Someone bumped me hard from the right, and I nearly fell. An unseen hand jerked me roughly to my feet.

Not all the questions were for me. ‘Detective, did you know about Ms. Cassidy’s past?’

‘Have you been contacted by Internal Affairs?’

‘Will the media interest affect your ability to investigate the murder of Ken Greene?’

Then another one came at me: ‘Has Playboy offered you a spread?’

I took another hit, this one from the back. And now I was really falling. Then an arm caught me by the waist, held me up and propelled me forward. I heard the sound of sliding doors, and the shouts of the paparazzi began to fade. By the time my vision cleared, we were heading past the ticket counter. I looked around in confusion and saw the man at my side was Mark. Just behind us, three security guards kept watch for any reporters that might slip through the entrance.

Mark whispered in my ear. ‘E-tickets and carry-on luggage. Greatest inventions of the past 100 years. I’ve gotta check my gun in, but these guys’ll get you through security and into the Continental Presidents Club. Nobody’ll be able to get to you there. Be back as soon as I can.’

My three guards said nothing while we made our way through security. Mark joined me in the Club about 45 minutes later.

‘Check it out. We get to fly together after all.’ He held up two first class tickets. ‘Check-in manager felt so bad about the scene out front he upgraded me. Didn’t hurt that I accidentally flashed my badge along with my weapons permit.’

I didn’t answer. I’d offered to upgrade his ticket to start with, but the paperwork with the LAPD would’ve been a nightmare. I suspected at the time there was a little pride involved as well. But I can’t fly coach anymore, not with any hope of being left alone. Mark put his arm around my shoulder and pulled me closer.

‘I’m really sorry, Luce. I had no idea things would be that bad for you. That question about your mom was—’

‘Out of line? Just a little.’

‘I was going to say evil.’

‘If I get angry, it makes a better picture. Hazards of the job.’

‘Well, it shouldn’t be.’

We didn't say much until our flight to Indianapolis was called. Mark held my hand through the entire flight, disengaging only when it was time to get off the plane. It was probably my imagination, but I could still see spots from the camera flashes back in L.A. All in all, Terre Haute was starting to sound pretty damn good.