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For my grandparents, Joseph and Rosemary Giannini

When a man knows another man
Is looking for him
He doesn't hide

– Frank Stanford, 'Everybody Who is Dead'

You'll always end up in this city. Don't hope for things elsewhere:
there's no ship for you, there's no road.
Now that you've wasted your life here, in this small corner,
you've destroyed it everywhere in the world.

– C P Cavafy, 'The City'

One

IT WAS THE MIDDLE OF September, and Conway had let McKenna take him out to a firing range in Bay Ridge to show him how to shoot. McKenna had been a cop for six years until he shot someone in the line of duty and they put him out with three-quarters pension.

‘Can’t believe Ray Boy’s out,’ Conway said. ‘Free. Just walking around.’ He held up the gun and fired at the paper target, missing wide.

‘Dude,’ McKenna said, taking out his earplugs, ‘you really should put these on.’ He offered a set of headphones.

‘I’m gonna go what, deaf?’ Conway did feel a light ringing in his ears, but it was like a far-off music.

McKenna said, ‘When you shoot, you gotta have confidence. You got no confidence now. The way you’re letting the gun pull you around, you’re gonna always miss outside.’

‘Ain’t gonna miss I got the gun right in the guy’s gut,’ Conway said.

‘That’s a situation you’re probably not gonna find yourself in.’

The firing range was in a warehouse next to an abandoned textile company and right across from a Russian supper club. From the outside it looked like the kind of place where snuff movies got made. But gun nuts, cops and otherwise, knew about it and came in and fired down brown-lit rows at cardboard cutouts and paper targets. On some targets there were snaps of ballplayers, Mets gone bad, slumping Yanks. Conway had an

old newspaper clipping of Ray Boy, and he'd tacked it onto his target. Thing was he hadn't even hit it yet and it was big, a fold-out page from the *Daily News*. Ray Boy, all those years ago, freshly collared, on his way into the Sixty-Second Precinct. Wearing sunglasses, the fuck.

McKenna stood next to Conway now and showed him how to grip the gun. 'You got fish hands, Con. Close up your fingers.'

Conway tightened up his hold and pulled the trigger again. Wide right. 'Maybe it's this type of gun.'

'You don't know shit about guns. Trust me. Twenty-two's good for you.'

'I need a sawed-off shotgun.'

'That's for the movies. This is what I got you.'

Conway fired a few more times, hitting the outer rim of the target once but still missing the picture of Ray Boy, and McKenna seemed to be growing frustrated.

'Maybe I'll just come with you,' McKenna said.

'I'm not taking you away from Marylou,' Conway said. 'Things go wrong, I don't want you near me.'

'And what about Pop? What happens to him?'

'Let me worry about that.'

'Bunker is supposed to call you when?'

'This afternoon.'

Bunker was a private investigator out of Monticello who McKenna had hooked him up with via some retired cop who'd settled in Forestburgh. McKenna had used another connection, a State Trooper who knew a guy who knew a prison guard at Sing Sing, to find out that Ray Boy had settled somewhere in the general vicinity of Monticello after getting out. Where exactly, they couldn't pin down, but Bunker claimed to be on it.

McKenna said, 'You're going too quick. I understand why. But you're gonna do this, you should wait. Few days. Few months. A year. Don't go in underprepared.'

‘Every day he’s out I’ve waited too long,’ Conway said. The truth was that he didn’t want to be prepared. He wanted to be primitive about it.

‘You better keep shooting.’ McKenna turned away. Conway held the gun out and tried to see Ray Boy running away from him. It wouldn’t happen like that, Ray Boy backing down in his crosshairs, but it was what he needed to see if he was going to show McKenna he could place a shot. He fired again. Barely clipped the outer edge of the target. It was a start.

Bunker called at three. Conway was on the bus home to Gravesend, the gun wrapped in towels in a gym bag at his feet.

‘This Ray Boy’s doing well,’ Bunker said. ‘Know you’re not wanting to hear that.’

Conway moved in his seat. Tried to picture Ray Boy living the high life. ‘You mean, what? He’s got money? A girlfriend already?’

‘He’s got this house in Hawk’s Nest. Been in his family for years. Does a shit ton of push-ups. Gets checks from his mother.’

‘Hawk’s Nest?’

‘About twenty minutes from Monticello.’

‘You can take me there?’ Conway said.

Bunker said, ‘Whenever you want. You come up here, I’ll meet you at the racetrack and show you the way.’

‘How long’s the drive from the city?’

‘Three hours, maybe. Little less.’

Conway flipped the phone shut and looked around at the other people on the bus. An old lady with shopping bags. A couple of Our Lady of the Narrows kids clutching bulky knapsacks in their laps and listening to iPods. This guy, Hyun – Conway knew of him but didn’t really know him – who ran numbers for Mr Natale and was sweaty and nervous,

holding onto the overhead strap with one hand and gripping a thin stack of papers with the other. And there was the peg-leg homeless lady who rode the B1 and the B64 all day, her wheelchair ornamented with shopping bags. None of them knew he had a gun. None of them knew he was going to get in his car, drive upstate, and kill Ray Boy Calabrese. Probably none of them knew Ray Boy. Or they'd forgotten his face from the papers. The kids weren't even alive then. A lot got washed away in sixteen years. Conway thought of Duncan's grave: all those paper poppies from his once-a-week visits. He'd knelt there and made a promise that none of the people on the bus knew about.

Walking back home, Conway watched pigeons on the sidewalk out in front of Johnny Tomasullo's barber shop. He looked up at a pair of boots hanging from the telephone wires. People didn't do that much anymore. He remembered throwing his school shoes up there after he was done with junior high. Then he leaned against a parking meter and thought about how he was going to deal with Pop. Kid gloves. Lies.

Pop was at the door to greet him when he came in the front gate. 'You've been where?' Pop said.

'Bay Ridge with McKenna. At the gym.'

'I need you to pick up my prescription.'

'Not now.'

'When?'

'Maybe later. We'll see. Otherwise I'll get Stephanie to run it over.'

'No, no, no. That's too much trouble. I'll go get it myself. To put Stephanie out, ridiculous.'

'Don't walk up there with your leg, Pop. Stephanie doesn't mind. She's my friend. It's four blocks. She doesn't mind.'

'Ridiculous.'

Conway went inside and got his car keys off the hook in the kitchen and a roll of duct tape out of the tool closet. He put the duct tape in the gym bag. Pop followed close behind. 'I'm busy, Pop,' Conway said.

'But you'll go get it?' Pop said.

'Maybe.'

'I'll go.'

Conway said, 'Okay. I'll go up and get it.'

But he had no intention of going. He left the house and went down the block and found his Civic parked by P.S. 101. He opened his phone and called Stephanie. Asked her to deliver the prescription to his old man. Told her just call first so she didn't scare him. Ring the bell a few times, he said. Sometimes Pop couldn't hear it. Stephanie was happy to do it, thrilled to get out from behind the counter. At least that was taken care of. And Pop would have company to distract him, even if only for a few minutes at the door. Stephanie was goofy, she had this frizzy hair like in cartoon strips and an accent nasty with the neighborhood, but she was kind, especially with old timers.

Driving away up Benson Avenue, headed for the Belt, Conway tried not to picture Pop in their sad living room with the dusty cross on the wall and the Sacred Heart Auto League calendars everywhere and the lampshade that was stressed to flimsy. But the picture came anyway: Pop in a ragged recliner, pillows everywhere, reaching out for the channel changer and trying to hear what they were saying on TV. Pop clawing his fingers into a go-to jar of Vicks VapoRub and massaging his neck, the Vicks blobbing up in his neck hair like a wispy chrysalis in a tree. Just waiting for Conway to get home with the scrip.

Now, beginning this very moment, Pop had nothing, had no one. Conway knew he wasn't coming back. He was at the end of something. Maybe Aunt Nunzia would come around to

check on Pop, but she had her own problems. A construction worker son who gambled away her social security. Squirrels in the wall. Her husband's loans she was still paying off. Pop had squat. The house and his prescriptions. The windows he stared out. The kids around the corner he liked to call the police on. With Conway gone, he might try to stop living. Not off himself. Just give in quietly. Stop breathing with the TV on.

Plumb Beach wasn't on the way, but Conway backtracked on the Belt. You could only get there by a short lane exit off the eastbound side after Knapp Street.

A parking lot was split in half on either side of the gated entrance. Conway pulled in and parked next to a small Dumpster. It was the same spot they'd found Duncan's car parked. Conway kept a tally of his visits on the Dumpster. He used a rock or whatever sharp was around to scratch a line. He'd come at least two or three times a week for sixteen years. A whole long section was covered in his deep-etched lines. He leaned over and added one now with a snapped-off bicycle handle he found near his front tire.

He stood and went through his routine. He walked past a huddle of Rent-a-Throne port-a-potties where old Russians came to shit and then curved around the abandoned pavilion, squat and shadowy, stickered with regulations and peeling-off fish decals and a sign that said HORSESHOE CRAB HARVESTING IS NOT PERMITTED. A pair of children's sneakers hung from the broken-down beach fence in front of him. Seagulls pecked the dirty sand. Empty Corona bottles and Newport packages and condom wrappers rimmed the seaweed-skirted shoreline. He went down to the water and looked out at the Gil Hodges Memorial Bridge in one direction and Kingsborough Community College in the other. Fort Tilden and Jacob Riis were across the bay.

Ray Boy, who had tormented Duncan for being swishy since grade school, called Duncan one afternoon pretending to be a kid he met in the city, saying he wanted to meet out at Plumb Beach and hook up, and Duncan just goddamn went. He'd gotten his license a couple of months before, and he drove to Plumb Beach, parked next to the Dumpster with the lights off, and went down to the shoreline. The scene unspooled on repeat in Conway's mind: Ray Boy and his crew, Teemo and Andy Tighe, charging Duncan from out of nowhere, pounding and kicking him, Duncan getting up, making a break, realizing he'd dropped his keys somewhere, running past his car, jumping over a guardrail and onto the Belt, dodging lights and cars, knowing that someone would stop to help.

Next Conway walked from the shoreline back to the guardrail beyond his car. He stood up on the rail, balancing himself with his arms out, watching the cars rip by on the Belt. The car that didn't have the time to get out of Duncan's way had been doing seventy.

The court called it a hate crime. They also called it manslaughter. Pressure came down from the LGBT Alliance, and Ray Boy, Teemo, and Andy Tighe got sent away for as long as the judge could get away with. Conway called it cold-blooded murder, and he knew that Ray Boy had been the ringleader. Conway was twenty-nine now, working at a goddamn Rite Aid on Eighty-Sixth Street, living with his old man who had never recovered from Duncan's death and wondering what had happened to his mother who was long gone to alcohol. He wanted Ray Boy's blood. The fucker deserved to wind up dead in a trunk, buried out in some shithole spot with no fanfare, no marker, just skin and bones rotting back into the earth. He tried not to imagine his brother dead on the Belt all those years ago, a picture that always came back to him. He got down from the guardrail and went to the car.

* * *

The drive up was quick, no traffic, and Conway kept the pedal to the floor. He'd only been outside the city a few times. Long Island for his brother's grave. Jersey for a cousin's confirmation. Baltimore for a shitty wedding. Mostly, Staten Island and the Bronx were the ends of the earth. He marveled at the world on the other side of the George Washington Bridge. The Palisades Parkway. Bear Mountain. A traffic circle where he followed signs to Central Valley. Trees everywhere. Leaves turning colors. Cars with their tops down. Then he got on 17. Factory outlets. Strip malls. Exits into towns with names that sounded like what you'd call your dog. Monroe. Chester.

Conway hooked up with Bunker at a Shell across from the Monticello Raceway. He pulled up behind Bunker's Citation.

Bunker got out, lit a guinea stinker, and came over to Conway's window. He looked more like a washed-up substitute teacher than a private eye. 'Conway?' he said. 'You want to get a coffee?'

'Not really,' Conway said.

'Ray Boy's is about fifteen, twenty miles up the road. When we pass the place, it's on a road called Parsonage, big white house on the left, I'll put my blinker on one-two-three and then keep driving.'

'That's fine.'

'If you get down to the train tracks and the river, you've gone too far. I'm not turning around there. I'm taking a different way back. But at the river, if you get down there by accident, you pull a U and go back up Parsonage.'

'How much I owe you?'

'Your buddy took care of it.'

Conway nodded and said nothing.

Bunker headed back to his car and drove away, kicking up gravel on the side of the road. Conway followed him up

Route 17B. His phone buzzed in his pocket. He took it out and flipped it open.

‘Where you at?’ McKenna said on the other end.

Conway said, ‘Heading there now.’

‘I should’ve come with.’

‘No.’

‘Listen, dude, I got bad news. *The Village Voice*, I just found out they did a spread on Ray Boy getting out. Had a thing remembering Duncan. Said the case didn’t get enough attention back in the day.’

‘So?’

‘That’s a lot of eyes on Ray Boy is what I’m saying. I’m gonna reemphasize I think you should wait.’

‘Can’t wait.’

‘They’ll send you up anyway.’

‘I’m not going to jail,’ Conway said.

McKenna said, ‘I’ll have Marylou put out her Mary statue.’

Conway closed the phone. He had this thing with McKenna where he just stopped talking. He’d always liked it, but now it was permanent, like he’d said the last thing he was ever going to say to him.

Could be he killed Ray Boy, got caught, went to jail at Sullivan Correctional. Or he got away with it, made a break for Canada. He had always wanted to see Nova Scotia. But maybe Ray Boy got him, strong-as-shit Ray Boy who could probably crush the gun out of his hand in a second flat, laughing at him for being puny while he did it. Cool-as-shit Ray Boy, grinning like he did on the way into the courtroom the first time Conway saw him after Duncan died, just grinning so no one could see, that grin saying, *I killed your fag brother, kid.*

The last stretch to Ray Boy’s place was down a broken road with no shoulder. Small houses on the side of the road looked left for dead. Sawhorses blocked driveways. Shattered windows

were stapled shut with plastic. Roofs were buckled and crumbling. Conway shut the heat and the radio and focused on Bunker's left blinker, waiting for the signal.

They made a quick left turn onto Parsonage. Bunker slowed down and flashed his blinker and then kept driving toward the river and the train tracks.

Conway stopped the car and looked up: a white frame house at the end of a long uphill driveway. A dump pile and a burn bin and a couple of abandoned trucks dotted the yard. The mustard-colored shades on all the windows were pulled. The white paint was ribbed with dirt. The front steps sagged. Wet wood was stacked on the porch. Other houses were scattered on the road, but they were not close.

Conway opened the gym bag and took out the duct tape and the .22. He turned the gun over in his lap and looked up at the house again. He tried to see through the walls. Imagined Ray Boy doing pull-ups on a bar tucked into a doorway. Imagined Ray Boy drinking coffee from a Styrofoam cup, legs up, watching the news. Imagined Ray Boy's new prison fierceness, a thousand times harder than before.

Paralyzed wasn't the word for how he felt, but he couldn't move. Just like when he was a kid next in line for confession. Those days he'd choke and cough, get pushed into the confessional by Sister Erin or Sister Loretta, and he'd lie to the priest: 'I had bad thoughts about Alessandra Biagini. I stole a comic from Augie's. I told my mother I did my homework even though I didn't so I could watch cartoons.' Now there was no nun to push him out of the car, but he wished there was.

The front door of the house opened. Ray Boy came out on the porch and turned on a swampy floodlight overhead and lit a cigarette. He wasn't wearing a shirt. Just boxers.

He was muscled up and had homemade-looking tats on his chest and forearms.

Conway crossed himself and said a prayer. He knew it was wrong to pray about this kind of thing, and maybe he didn't even believe that prayer did anything. Probably he didn't. But he'd never stopped going to church, never stopped praying, even if it was only as good as rubbing some bullshit lamp and making wishes. In church, when he was a kid, he'd stare at Duncan, who had these polished brown rosary beads and was always praying decades like a fiend, and he'd be amazed that his brother even believed.

The image of Duncan praying kicked Conway in the heart, and he got out of the car. He charged up the driveway, the gun in front of him and the duct tape in his jacket pocket.

Ray Boy, his eyes all squinty, seemed to notice him, and Conway was surprised that he didn't bolt or charge, that he just leaned back against the porch rail, blowing smoke.

'Get down,' Conway said, approaching the porch behind the gun.

Ray Boy went to his knees. 'Hey,' he said.

'You know who I am, right?'

'I've been hoping you'd show.' Ray Boy tossed his cigarette over the porch rail and got all the way down, hands locked behind his head.

'Been thinking about you, too,' Conway said.

Conway squatted over Ray Boy and jacked him in the back of the head with the butt of the gun to knock him out like they did in movies. It didn't work. Ray Boy didn't really even seem fazed by it. Conway told him to stay still and taped his feet and hands and mouth. Ray Boy didn't move.

Conway pressed the gun against Ray Boy's back. He still wasn't struggling. Conway wanted him begging the way that Duncan was no doubt begging that night out at Plumb Beach. That was always what Conway had hated to think about most, Duncan down on all fours like a dog, Ray Boy

and his buddies spitting and saying fag-this and fag-that.

Conway peeled the tape away from Ray Boy's mouth a little and said, 'Say, "Don't." Say, "Please don't."'

But Ray Boy said nothing. His lips were against the rotted, peeling porch floor.

Conway noticed one of the tats on Ray Boy's arm. Duncan's full name spelled out in shaky green print. Below that, Duncan's death date.

'Fuck's this for?' Conway said.

Still nothing.

'What'd my brother say to you that night? He begged you?' Conway jabbed the gun deeper. 'Answer me. Fuck did he say?'

Ray Boy said, 'He went, "Remember third grade. We were friends. Please don't do this."' And started crying.