

Green Lake

Parker Moses was depressed, but relieved to be at least straddling his 1981 dirty green Schwinn. Beloved headphones on, which were nearly dear friends to him, he looked up and gazed across the quiet, slightly crumbling side street, and through the urban woods, catching a narrow glimpse of the silver shimmer of Green Lake in the far distance, his destination for this evening. He was nearly connected by a taut cable from his mind to the therapeutic lake, which seemed to know his moods so well.

The cement drive way for his 1950's ranch rental house had a couple long fissures that criss-crossed each other. On either side of the driveway were soft thickets of ferns surrounded by patchy dry grass mixed with weeds. The wide branches of mature Spruce trees gathered overhead, deeply shading his front yard and street. Pine cones had dropped over time and rested every 10 feet across his front lawn and sidewalk.

A few moments ago, Parker, alone with his thoughts in his house, had taken a couple quick deep sips out of a Dr Pepper that had been sitting idle on his outdated wooden countertop for half a day. He was anticipating liquid satisfaction, but instead sucked up two drowned ants and spat them out with disgust.

"Why does it have to be so difficult to just take a sip?" he threw up to the Universe. The dust particles slowly shifting about like gnats in a shaft of late afternoon light had no answer.

For many different reasons and motivations, like this one involving an unjust Dr Pepper, Parker would unflinchingly throw a leg over his bike and peddle off through the woods, riding in a straight line that ran up and down four or five pine needled strewn hills, always off the bike path, whose route made no sense to him, across a long clearing of about a 100 yards, ultimately to where people of all kinds circulated around Green Lake at sunset. It's where he could breathe and clear his head.

Arriving at the hub of the park, Parker lifted his leg off his bike and locked the frame to the back of the indoor public pool. The parking lot was full of cars, many idling with blinkers on waiting for precious parking spots. He slowly walked around two basketball courts, watching guys wearing shirts and skins, posting up, running screens and grabbing rebounds. Walking slowly in a vintage concert shirt, frayed shorts and lightly dragging his flip flops with each step, he was again marveling at the bass solo mid-way through "The Relay" by The Who. Activity was everywhere, life was happening, frisbee discs were being tossed around in every direction, paddle boats were being rented out of a hut staffed by UDub students, twenty two soccer players ran about on the soccer pitch beyond the basketball courts, even the beach was crowded.

Next to a Seattle Parks garbage can alongside the jogging path, he paused to scroll though his carefully curated Spotify playlists, looking up at times to scan the horizon of the lake and take

notice of various roller-bladers, parents pushing strollers and a lean black guy in a white tank top peek out a 14th and 15th pull up on the metal pull up bar. Releasing his grip, he landed on the wood chips below him, looked up and gave Parker a friendly little nod. Parker put as much time into editing his playlists as young couples painstakingly think about seating arrangements at their wedding.

Like a Sunfish sailboat pushing off from a pier, Parker took his first steps and joined the stream of humanity circulating the 2.5 mile path. Current mood? Better. In recent years, Parker's life had been a series of one step forward, two steps back.

Twenty years ago, even ten years ago, Parker Moses had been a sought-after session guitarist for some of the biggest rock bands of the grunge era. Then at some point, invisible to his point of view, hundreds of thousands of kids were born and raised in distant lands, in which they gravitated to changing beats, where the guitar was edited out and removed from musical equations. While he was focusing on the neck of his electric guitar, adding chart topping riffs to well-known songs, tastes changed around his sphere. Guitar based rock seemed to suddenly evaporate before his eyes. One by one, guys that he would see on a regular basis in the studios, started to not be there anymore, either moving to more fertile lands in LA or dropping out of the music business all-together, later appearing as if rising from a hatch door below the stage, wearing an old-timey burlap apron branded with a cool logo at a hip new micro-brewery.

He's been sorting his thoughts like methodically shuffling a deck of cards...for months. "It's a process," he kept telling himself. He wrote, "Move or Die" on an index card that he taped to his bathroom mirror. He read an Outside magazine article years earlier which featured a 75 year old surfer. Move or Die was the elder surfer statesman's advice to live by at that age, so Parker thought, between that and his music, that's all the advice and therapy he needed to figure out his next move.

Slightly paranoid after the steady descent from his humble heights, he felt like the equivalent of an empty restaurant that people walked past en route to the popular ones featured on Open Table.

Walking one lap of Green Lake provided the equivalent of roughly 40 minutes of music, which converted into either one 33 minute Allman Brothers "Mountain Jam" from Live at Fillmore East plus one "Real Emotional Trash" by Stephen Malkmus or near infinite combinations of three minute cuts.

Now...at this moment...reading the tea leaves of his soul, as if sticking a finger up in the air to read the wind, he chose "Svefn-g-englar" by the Icelandic band Sigur Ros. Parker was down but not out, and frankly he was especially passionate about crescendos. He felt they took a back seat to opening hooks which to him often sounded like Snickers bars. Yes, he contributed licks and riffs himself, several that converted into sales. Opening riffs were surface level sound bites compared to the more complex building, ascending crescendos that gathered steam and could rise to the Heavens like 29 minutes into Mountain Jam. He would start in a hue of deep purple,

in a torpor of thought and come off the path with blood pumping in his 47 year old heart, that was his strategy for most of his walks at sunset, the crescendo of the day.

So Parker started his walk.

When the emotional power of “Svefn-g-englar” kicked in at about a minute and 18 seconds, Parker felt as if he was swept up in a tsunami of both deep thought and confidence as everything in his world around him fell away, downshifting 5 gears into a slow motion. He had taken his first puff off an imaginary joint. The volume was as high as it could go on his second-hand headphones that he picked up at Good Will, but the soundscape imprinted on his brain in these moments came from the Gods. As if he started walking in slow motion through the center of a giant wave that cascaded over and over in a slow motion rip curl, shimmering with purple blue light. He felt as if he had everything he needed from Life in these precious ticking seconds. His imagination was reeling, an anime cartoonish hot air balloon started to unfurl from his mind, billowing upward in a fluttering pastel colored cone, which contained his fluttering thoughts which all passed through the overhanging tree branches twenty feet above like softly contained mist.

He imagined two classmates from years past, wearing sunglasses, walking just outside his peripheral vision, the guys were blurred, impressionistic as if sneering just outside an airplane window at 30,000 feet. He could catch their sneering taunts in their country club wear, “fuckin’ dreamer Parker, ha...!” In the next moment, as the viola bow cut down on the droning guitar again, deeper and deeper into the song, the polo wearing shallow boys were suddenly blown into a cloud of confetti paper bits and floated over the cove, gently landing on the water and on the backs of the indifferent ducks congregating offshore.

Parker walked slowly, knowingly, wearing sunglasses with an inward smirk on face, guitars droning to the heavens, soul aching and alive. He looked up and locked on the gaze of 60-something Japanese woman who was sitting alone as still as a tea water in a bonsai garden, expressionless, but beaming a wisdom outward from her park bench and over the waters of Green Lake. This, Parker thought, is who I naturally identify with, this seemingly loving, kind, older soul. The incredible opening surge of Svefn started to subside and as he ‘came to’ he started noticing in the upper right quadrant of his mind, a feed of meaningless Tweets, emails, and alerts for restaurant deals, blipping down, down, like the Centipede arcade game. Reality was once again trying to pull the drapes open. He grit his teeth and shut the world out again.

Walking around the contours of Green Lake at sunset was partially therapeutic for him because, when he wasn’t listening to music, which actually happened at times – he could unplug – but that’s when he overheard snippets of deep conversations taking place between pairs of friends walking past in either direction. He looked down, put his antenna up, concentrated on listening, then collected conversations, almost stuffing them away one by one into a hip worn satchel. Eavesdropping provided him some peace of mind, knowing he wasn’t the only one in town sorting things out:

“...is when my research paper is supposed to be done, but it’s nowhere near...”

“...will not pay her share of the rent, so last Tuesday we got into and...”

“...maybe, maybe not, I don’t know man, an hour longer commute would totally suck, so...”

“...yeah, so you make these installment payments, but since we broke up...”

He saw a Mexican family crossing the busy walking path, looking left and right for bike riders, strung out in a single line holding hands with three kids, like cute ducklings crossing the road, and Parker’s heart partially melted in admiration for their pureness.

Now coming out of her apartment on the opposite side of Green Lake from Parker’s rented house was Sun Li. Born and raised in the coastal city of Kuroshio, Japan, Sun donned her beloved Beats headphones, paused to look up at the setting sun and with a grin, walked eight cement steps down to hop on her motorized scooter. Wearing Kurt Cobain replica white fish-eye sunglasses, Sun zig zagged over and across a dozen blocks to Green Lake, swaying back in forth, surfing style, listening to “Indian Summer” by Pedro the Lion, at full volume. Throwing a U-lock around her scooter and a bike rack by the expansive Children’s Wading Pool, Sun stopped to survey the scene and sift through some her favorite songs, which dipped into nooks and crannies from every decade going back to 1930. Sun was at a high point, although like the many 14’ners in Colorado, her moods ranged generally higher; there weren’t many low points. She seemed to walk across a tight rope with some enviable confidence, which helped transport her from her staid neighborhood in Kuroshio to her artsy enclave in Seattle, which is a story in itself.

Parker threw his headphones back on, noticed the sun dropping further into prime time, the lake mirroring the changing hue of oranges like a Monet painting and decided to skip ahead in his queue to the meditative “Well-Tempered Clavier” by M Ward. From the torpor to the beautiful. He walked about a hundred yards feeling like he was at a stone altar of some kind, surrounded by glades of ferns, mesmerized by the effortless arpeggios, his alter ego personified by this music. He wished this instrumental song could diffuse over the Seven Hills of Seattle at sunrise, like prayer songs from prayer towers in Mecca.

Then he veered over to a low-slung tree set back from the path about 30 feet, deciding to take a break, wanting to people watch (do we always have to be moving in this country?). He climbed the tree without a thought like a happy go lucky monkey and sat on a wide thick Cedar tree branch. None of the walkers, strollers or skateboards looked askance at him. The strumming guitar of Neutral Milk Hotel’s “In an Aeroplane by the Sea” infiltrated down his ear canals and threw a rainbow into his mood:

“But for now we are young
Let us lay in the sun
And count every beautiful thing we can see

Love to be
In the arms of all I'm keeping here with me, me”

He imagined the tree where he sat was festooned with beauty, strings of pearls, cotton candy dripping, New Orleans style Madris Grau beads, thrown, clinging, carefree, bright tropical birds perched across various branches ...He swayed his criss-crossed ankles and flip flops back in forth, imagining the life of 1940's artists Joan Miro or Picasso. Incredible weather, painting in a quaint hilltop village, grapes laying across a wooden table, hour glass topless Spanish muses at the beckon to either caress or paint and not a single person for miles to Judge him.

Snapping back to reality, Parker sat alone on top of a weathered park bench. He stood up, exhaled and re-joined his fellow citizens on the asphalt path. To his right were three guys juggling rings, chatting, one was blowing fire.

The downside of so much music was that it almost seemed to warp his brain, like he couldn't rid himself of even his favorite music when he wanted to shut down. The music was absorbed with such passion that it became permanently imbedded into the grey texture of his brain. Sometimes he would try to fall asleep, eyes wincing at times in the dark, turning his head from one side of the pillow to the other, as the trippy guitar, bass and incessant drumming from The Flaming Lips, "Are You a Hypnotist?" looped over and over and over in his head, echoing as if inside giant seashells.

Parker was in line once at an independent bakery shop across from Green Lake, waiting in line with 7 other people for a late afternoon coffee, three of which were also wearing headphones. He was absolutely captivated, transported by the perfectly timed circulating opening chords of "Indian Summer" by Luna. The lead guitar was hitting the notes so precisely, with such miraculously timed perfection that he thought Greenwich Mean Time in England could be officially set to it. And talk about crescendos...across the street from Green Lake, in this bakery, the line didn't move fast, expectations in non-corporate establishments were lowered, so he was able to mainline the song into his veins that shot to his brain which kneaded his dopamine like soft bread. He wanted to pump his fists up in the air, he wanted to form a mosh pit in this very line, with these strangers, but when he looked over at the hipster next to him, he was calmly scrolling with his thumb through oxford shirts on Trunk Club.

A friend from Charlottesville, VA used to holler to him, like a 1970s helicopter pilot from MASH wearing aviator sunglasses, hollering over the propellers when he thought Parker was wound up too tight in self analysis, "You gotta roll down the fuckin' windows of that car man and BREATHE! Roll down the fuckin' windows!!" Remembering this, Parker inhaled through his nostrils like a Zen priest and took one step forward to the counter where a sultry but tough looking Roller derby girl working part-time at the bakery addressed him, calmly, chewing gum, without a smile. Maroon lipstick. "Next."

Like rotating concentric circles, Sun and Parker were closing the gap on each other as they walked the paths of Green Lake, unbeknownst to each other. Sun used to work with Parker

seven-eight years prior when she was manning the console as a sound engineer and he, in the back corner on a three legged stool, contributing his professional licks, bits and solos to songs. Sun did everything from answer the phones, book talent, make beer runs for the band, she loved it all. They had an effortless rapport when they saw each other every six months or so, never hesitant to engage, respectfully disagreeing on an idea that didn't suit the situation or throwing in a quick hug at 1:15am after wrapping up seven hours of studio time. Platonic, yet Parker couldn't help but notice Sun at times, leaning back in a chair, tipping it back on the hind legs, laughing at a crass joke and looking sexy.

As Sun was rounding the South end of Green Lake passing in front of the kayak center, Parker found his feet planted at the waters edge a hundred yards to the North because the clouds narrowly parted, allowing sun rays to beam down onto his face. He knew these meditative moments were rare, so he stood there, eyes closed while the Leon Bridges "River" started strumming into his soul.

"Been travelling these wide roads for so long...
My hearts been far from you..."

Strollers, joggers, talkers and walkers streamed behind his shoulders on the path, but he was blissfully unaware of anything but transcendently focused on the loose guitar strumming. He imagined himself emerging from a crouched position rising up like an air-filled gentle giant, chalk drawn in browns and greys, to the point where he stood with one foot on either side of the half mile wide lake. He looked down with care at the specks of friendly people dotting the rim of the lake, soothing music wafting through his simple mind. Parker descended down again and laid down next to the lake in a spooning position, wrapping his arms around the lake and the music kept his mind at ease, keeping company with the lake at sunset.

Parker was so content during this song and this moment that he shed a tear, but knew from experience the moment ends. He got back on the path, came to again, thought he was the only person within 700 miles thinking what he was thinking, which seems special and true. We are supposed to stop and smell the roses, right? Are other people 'smelling' to the degree he does? Maybe they should, maybe they do.

1

The lake was almost completely covered in late dusk colors and shadows, he was nearing the completion of one loop and as he stopped to consider his next song, Sun noticed the back of his head and shoulders through the people on the path. Sun was bursting at the seams, absolutely rocking out to the final fist pumping minute of "Cha Cha Cha" by the Little Ones, which any lottery winner should know. She was practically skipping with glee. She walked faster and faster up to Parker as he was stooped over, still scrolling through Yo La Tengo songs. From behind his

back, Sun reached up and put her hands over Parker's eyes and asked, "Guess who buddy!" Parker's brain mentally tripped down a couple of stairs in a parking garage, being so thrown off by these hands on his eyes. He knew the voice, the only voice he knew in his life, who had an ever so slight Japanese accent.

"Sun Li..my God.." Parker grinned out.

"He bozo!" Sun playfully tossed at his face as she took off her headphones, "Cha Cha Cha" just fading out.

It's amazing the narrative that the mind can invent within one or two seconds or less. Parker's heart jumped, pleasantly surprised at running into Sun, and at the same time her mood contrasted with his which bummed him out and furthermore, slightly OCD, he was so looking forward to finishing his walk with "Detouring America With Horns" by Yo La Tengo, which was his crescendo song, in keeping with his quirky walking ritual. That was one second. In the second second, his mood lifted because he knew crossing paths like this was likely a once in a lifetime event. Second three started...

"Sun, you..." Parker managed to start.

"Miss me," she quickly added laughing.

"Now that you're here, I do. I'm so sorry, but I've been off the radar for maybe a little too long."

Sun drew in his guilty, depressed tone, making it into a cool scarf that wrapped around her neck, without taking her eyes off Parker. She knew how to ignore, deflect and finesse someone else's moods.

Parker added, "I bet there's been some chatter out there that I've tuned out and dropped out. I can't deny it, but maybe I'm not alone."

"Shit ya man, what are you talking about? Sun grinned with amazement. "Of course, you're not alone man. Me too! Gary, Jose, Beard'y, Charles, Vick and on and on and on. Everyone knows things have changed, technology has changed, the industry has changed, console's have changed, Jesus man, I know, but shit, whatcha gonna do. It's been like that for decades. I bet the boys in Motown were looking at the 1980s like it was 2079. It's all relative Parker. Now we're the Motown guys. Why don't you just drive Uber to..." Sun was rattling off like she used to do at 3:19am, which made a lot of eyes roll, like, 'just Chill Sun...'

"Uber? Sun, I know, I know, I know..." Parker was starting to defiantly say, but Sun cut him off.

"Yeah, I know, I know, I know, but you haven't done shit, have you mate." Sun was confident, carefree, and Parker almost blinked his eyes, as in, Am I really hearing this? Wasn't I just in a pleasant cocoon floating over Green Lake?

“Parker..my scooter, which I know you’re jealous of, is just up there. Would it be a forward for me to say, let’s ride for a bit and maybe grab a tea or something, catch up. I’d love to really know how you’re doing,” Sun said, lowering her voice a bit, striking a more genuine tone.

Parker’s head dropped with a nodding grin and while he looked down for a second, he noticed Sun’s sexy nice calves and painted red toe nails.

As they strolled down the asphalt jogging path, they were each encased from the waist up in chunky ornate art frames that bobbed along with them. Sun’s mood and personality appeared as soft circles of brighter oranges, faint yellows and a spectrum of reds. Parkers appeared as geometric dark purples and charcoals.

Sun’s headphones were still draped around her neck started to emanate out the opening prowling bass lines of “Needles in my Eyes” by The Beta Band.

Sun exclaimed, “Wait, Parker..! She held a headphone up to his ear. He grinned and bobbed his head to the bass lines, which sounded like they were meandering through brush to a hidden beach.

She grabbed his hand, led him to a park bench across the path and they both jumped up on it. She placed one ear bud in his left ear and she kept one in her right ear. She cranked it up as loud as it could go and threw her arm around his waist, hips joined, swaying side to side. They sang out in unison, Parker felt like a teenage boy in church pews, looking askance at anyone who thought he might not look cool.

“Needles in my eyes won’t cripple me tonight alright!”

“Twisting up my mind please pull me through the light alright!”

Parker couldn’t believe his luck at running into Sun. He looked over at her, wearing white sunglasses, singing out without a care in the world and then looked over at walkers and talkers looking over at them, some smiling, some too immersed in their own convos. Parker felt a jolt of awakening his old self that had been lying dormant in a storage locker. The locker doors buckled and knocked, something was trying to get out.

“Alright, you get the point, let’s go” Sun decisively called out and pulled him off the bench. She started jogging ahead of him and called back as Parker stood there, kind’ve dumb founded.

“Let’s go!” she called again.

Parker looked down at his flip flops, not believing he was actually...jogging. Something he hadn’t done in months, but it felt primal, like he was on the move to clearer waters, better food, brighter lighter. He couldn’t help himself stare at her jogging frayed jean shorts ahead of him, about to unlock her scooter. His mind was racing forward, his mental juke box queuing up

“The Modern Age” by the Strokes. Before he knew it, Sun was ready to go on her motorized scooter. She had one foot on, one foot off like out of an advertisement, almost picture perfect.

“Sun, hey, I just want to say that it’s really fucking awesome running into you and...well, he sputtered. Would you mind if we chilled out a bit at my house just up through the park. He pointed with his head in the direction and Sun looked on.

“Sure buddy, I was hoping for a beer at the new bar across from the playground...” Sun was starting to go on.

“Yeah, I know...it’s just that I’m kind’ve tight on cash these days.” It pained Parker to admit. “I’ve got some Corona’s, limes and can make a pizza” he dribbled out, almost wishing he could take that lame suggestion back. Reality seeping back into his elusive happy moments again.

“Let’s do it!” Sun chirped, undeterred by his shifts of mood or confidence.

2

They pulled up on the drive way, Parker raised the manual garage door and they parked the scooter and 1981 dirty green Schwinn inside.

They were both damp with sweat after the ride. It was dark now.

Parker walked into the kitchen while Sun walked through the short hallway and into his shag carpeted living room, picking up picture frames and artifacts from the past 20 years. Parker opened his fridge door and said “You hungry? Should I get the pizza going? It’s from Zeek’s up on Phinney.”

Sun was wearing a sleeveless lime green flowered shirt with a couple buttons. She unbuttoned it without looking at Parker and tossed it on a chair, underneath was a tight grey tank top.

At the sight of this from the kitchen through to the family room where Sun stood, Cage the Elephants “Shake Me Down” blasted out of the right side of his brain, like an explosion out of The Matrix, “I’LL KEEP MY EYES FIXED ON THE SUN!” then dead silence. A paper towel was mysteriously nudged off the top of the fridge by the blast of sound in his head and drifted down to his feet. Parker steadied himself by tightening his grip on the fridge door.

“Sun, I gotta ask now that I’m bringing a girl into the house...do you have a boyfriend..?” he asked out of respect.

“Buddy, I broke up with Jonesy a couple months ago. I thought you might have caught wind of that. I knew you guys didn’t really know each other, but he kind’ve become a lame dick.” Sun unapologetically threw out like tossing a hunk of keys onto the coffee table.

Parker was nodding in agreement while inside he was stammering with “don’t say lame! I’m not lame, don’t be lame. You depressed shit. His mind starting to fall into a shame spiral.

“Parker, you there?” Sun caught on quick, his were eyes not following along. “I’m kidding, he was trying to get back into surfing, which...at his age, good luck. He was in good shape, but I don’t know. Seemed kind’ve random. He played guitar, but too many barre chords for me, ya know? Like, easy Jack Johnson. He also tried getting into importing and exporting tea and I know, he kind’ve lost interest in me and I just shook my head and lost interest in him over time too.” Parker was listening now, more intently. This seemed realistic. He always wondered about the tea trade and was almost glad someone like him was exploring it.

Sun continued, “So remember how we helped out on that album by the band that used to sometimes open for Blood Wart? Well, Jonesy had hooked up a few times with that chick bassist, thinking I didn’t know, but on one beer run in particular, I came back, walked past the janitors closet and they were fricking thrusting away in there next to the mops!”

“Jesus, really, with Carla?” Parker caught himself checking her out a few times back then too.

“Yeah, so that was kind’ve the beginning and then it was off and on and off and on until two months ago” she finished in mild disgust and then casually reclined like a cat onto the couch, propping herself up by her elbows, revealing a tantalizing side boob to Parker. It was definitely more than a hand full and her dark hair draped down over her back. Oh, you’re good Sun.

Sun’s phone started lighting up. Parker could see texts dripping in one after the other.

“Anything going on? Parker wondered, stepping further into the room, holding the pizza.

“Shit buddy, I gotta go...” Sun sighed. “I didn’t get a chance to tell you, but I’ve been freelancing n’ stuff, helping out Merge Records and these guys are begging me to come down *right now* and man the console for them, I guess they’re feelin’ it now,” Sun laid out.

Parker agreed with feelin’ it, but he was almost mentally conditioned for this, things not working out as he has so clearly saw it in his head. You get the rebound, dribble down court and lay it up off the glass, done. Yet the Gods had tied his Chuck Taylor shoe laces together at the free throw line.

Sun was putting her shirt back on, buttoning a couple buttons and said, “I’ll tell you what Parker. A bunch of the old crew is getting together this weekend up on Shaw Island, at Bender’s place. You liked Bender, right? He remembers you, he’s cool and welcoming, there’s a bunch of

bedrooms and couches, whatever, we'll figure it out. You should come up, I'd love to see you up there."

"Done." Is all Parker could say, wide eyed, unblinking, far less bummed now.

"Meet me 11am Saturday at Kenmore Air on Lake Union, we'll fly the fuck up there," Sun grinned, adding, "Vick has an IN at Kenmore and we can actually fly for free, no shit." He runs Kenmore's website and ticketing system. I'm not exactly sure how he does it, but I already have my ticket. I'll shoot him a text for one more.

Parker tentatively responded, "What I said about the cash situation, unfortunately, just really sucks, but I'm working on it, it's not as dire as I led on, but..."

"Dude, don't worry about it. Gotcha covered this time." Sun knew how to convince anyone and close the deal.

3

It was a misty grey day in Seattle, but Parker wore his aviators and his brown hair flapped in the wind while the pilot flipped the switches to light up the engines. Parker thought the plane and the idea of flying up to the San Juan's was cool and he felt lucky. Dozens of times he would look up in the sky and see a white sea plane floating over downtown on trajectory to the North and wish he was in the plane.

He looked back towards the office and Sun was slowly walking down the pier, looking hung over. Parker wondered if the recording sesh' had gone late and involved whiskey.

"Hey Parker...this is cool, right? Sun called out over the propellers from 20 yards away, carrying a duffle bag over her shoulder.

"You alright, you look a little banged up, no offense Sun" he called back.

The thick bearded pilot, wearing shades, and keeping the door open with a tatted up arm, smiled and welcomed them aboard with a couple other REI clad Millennial tourists.

"Parker, I'm gonna get some shut eye, ok. We ended up going to 4am, but we locked it down. Felt good to be back in the saddle and help those guys out. They broke out bourbon and weed, my God, I just need a little beauty rest, k" Sun looked and acted like a burned out Hollywood actress from the 70's. Parker actually felt like the mature one in this situation, being well rested and having finally quit cigarettes after 32 different attempts. He inhaled deeply, syphoning the whirling, discombobulated winds into his nostrils.

The propellers grew more and more intense and the plane started to pull out from the pier. Lake Union was crowded with vessels, sailboats, charter boats, kayaks, you name it, but somehow without any direction from anyone, a path opened up like a landing strip right down the middle of Lake Union. Parker queued up, "Let it Rain" by Clapton, pulled his green canvas jacket up to his beak and looked out the small oval window as vessel after sailboat after motor boat passed by faster and faster, the plane tightly bouncing, building up speed.

The bumping bass provided the foundation for "Let it Rain, let it rain, let the rain come down on me" which pounded along to the beat of the pontoons on the lake. Approaching Gaslight Park, the nose of the plane lifted off above the industrial ruins of bygone Seattle, rising and tipping a wing left towards Puget Sound. Envelopes and bills addressed to Parker sat like a Still Life painting in a cluttered pile back on his kitchen counter top, providing sweet temporary relief. The Captain, who looked like a roadie for a jam band, informed the 5 passengers that the flight would touch down in the San Juan's in an hour.

4

Parker drifted off to sleep within minutes and woke in a dream of extreme silence while the speck of the white sea plane silently moved across a vast bright blue sky, nothing above or below, only sky. The only sound was his breathing like an astronaut in space. A white dot moving in a line across sky blue sky. Snap to a subway car rattling down the tracks and Parker was sitting down, wiping his eyes and looked to his left and right to get his bearings. A cross section of an unknown city, old, young, sitting, standing, corn rows, every race, gazing out the windows, looking down at phones, some nodding off. Parker imagined his Dad who had passed away a couple years ago. He thought of his good-natured Dad, somehow somewhere in Heaven and now miraculously choosing to become finger prints on the metal pole to the right of Parker in this subway car. Parker looked around and then focused his gaze on the barely visible fingerprints. A collection of finger prints, curling around the shiny metal pole, waiting for a host. Sure enough a young Hispanic man wearing Beats headphones, going to school at night to get his degree as a Radiology Technician, reached over to steady himself while listening to DJ Shadow and griped the pole where 'Dad' was waiting with an infinity of time in his back pocket. Not knowing while the lad was scrolling through his class notes that a man from Chicago by way of the Cosmos and back, latched onto his unsuspecting brown hand and at the next stop walked off the car and up the subway stairs to the city above, "good-bye Son, I'll see you soon." Parker craned his neck back to follow the student before he disappeared behind a large faded ad of a Tequila bottle. Parker suddenly got choked up thinking about his Dad and the corny jokes he used to tell the family at the kitchen table in 1987. Dad was trying his best, but Parker didn't know it then nor did he begin to comprehend what doing your best even meant.

Snap to and Parker was sitting in a crowded church he didn't recognize while an African-American pastor spoke in muffled sounds up at the pulpit, like he was wearing a gas mask. Parker looked diagonally to his left over the heads of the strangers to the front of the church

then tracked up to the top of the wall and could barely make out a vapor curling over and over in the upper reaches of the church where no one noticed anything but him. The nicely dressed congregation looked ahead with reverence while Parker was looking up high at this bit of vapor and wished he could cup it up in his hands. The greyish vapor curled over, twisted and spun around then sifted out the corner of a dark vent. Parker continued to stare at the vent, his eyes started to well up and he said to himself, "I miss you Dad. I know that was you."

Parker woke and looked across the aisle to see Sun rousing. Out below the oval window were masses of dark green forested islands, looking barely inhabited. A green and white rectangular ferry boat was making its way up the passage and a white strand of wake trailed behind it. Parker stretched his legs, shivered a bit and tried to shake off the cob-webs from an hours nap. The plane took a long curving line, tipping its white wing downward and then started making its line to the water.

All the sudden the plane jolted, black smoke poured out of the left engine and minutes later the plane plummeted into the Sound.

5

A nondescript sepia toned urban street is lined with sepia toned buildings in a monumental city of otherworldly nature. It's night time and there's a single sepia light above the door to the bar which has no name.

Inside, the bar is fairly small, like a tidy open rectangle with a pool table in the back, situated off the corner of the twenty foot long bar that takes up the right wall. Coats are hung up on the wall to the immediate left and the dark stained, wood-boxed ceiling was lower than normal, perhaps only seven feet, giving the bar a cave-like feel. Dim sepia toned lights hung in the air and one could hear pool balls occasionally cracking, punctuating the murmur of conversations happening among the ten patrons mingling about the bar.

Taking steps toward the pool table in back, an omniscient eye hovers forward like an invisible drone; it passes by the back of Parker who half turns his head to acknowledge it. The eye listens to two men having a conversation as if they were breaking bread, getting to know each other.

"...that's right, this is around 17 million years ago when I sold lottery tickets from behind a window in a convenience store for 30 years outside of Bakersfield," the sleepy eyed Indian man said as he grabbed his pool cue, chalking the tip while looking across the maroon felt table for his next shot.

He continued, "if there's one pattern I noticed, within the first two months of those 30 years, is the look of longing in a person's eyes when they ask for a lottery ticket, like, 'please...will you

pick the right one Sir, I need to pull the rib chord, I need an Out. I'm hungry right now.' Eventually, between the dozens of packs of cigarettes that I sold each day, which were stuffed into front shirt pockets, pants pockets and walked out the door, well, every person became a blur of a number, just more bodies coming in and out." He exhaled from his own cigarette, leaned down over his pool cue and knocked a shot into the corner at a 45 degree angle.

A tall man stood like a sentry clutching his pool cue off to the side. Both listening to the story and watching for his possible next shot, his body stood still while his eyes glided left to right.

Vihaan was trying to bank his next shot into the middle pocket, but missed and turned away to lean against the wall.

Vihaan was playing against a 22 year old young man named Andrew who previously died in the Battle of Hastings, but thousands of years later, their paths happened to cross.

Andrew approached the cue ball and looked over at the striped 5 ball in the corner, and said, "I was so fucking scared that day...so fucking scared in that Battle and I was hiding behind the largest tree in our hamlet, which I used to climb all the time as a kid, it was my favorite tree, but I was shaking, and alone and my parents had fled two days before, and wave after wave of William the Conquerer's troops kept marching from over the hill.."

Parker was wearing a simple maroon v-neck Tshirt. A beer was in front of him. He thought to himself, "My God, was it just a few days ago that I was staring at bottles of sleep aids at Walgreens. That seemed like Heaven to me at the time. No matter the day, the weather, the year, the current event; in Walgreens, walking the aisles past every conceivable human hygiene product, you're guaranteed to hear the pleasant sounds of "Africa" by Toto or another cheerful song from the 80s. Snap. Gone."

The guy sitting to his right looked over at Parker. He read his mind and watched Parker watching himself in his recent memory. "Hey Parker, my name's Stan. Welcome. Believe it or not, you're gonna like it here." Stan gave him a quick wink, a reassuring grasp on the shoulder and clinked beers with him.

The bar door opened and in walked a pleasant looking fellow who looked like he had come in from an invigorating walk in the woods. He was taking his jacket off with a grin on his face while he looked around the room. Hanging his jacket on one of the open pegs, the guys at the bar half pivoted and called out, "Marty! Where ya been?"

Marty was a gardener in County Wexford south of Dublin and had died while straining to shift a mature Boxwood shrub into a perfectly dug hole in the corner of a geometric garden on a country estate, the owners having hired him as he was about to turn 79. It was the fourth and final Boxwood that he intended to move that October day.

“Hello lads, he called out to the bar room, what a wonderful experience that was.” He said as he was kicking his boots off and slipping on a pair of exquisitely molded Birkenstocks that even the most highly rated Podiatrist in Dublin couldn’t have fashioned better.

An African American man, Wendell Baker, was twisting around in his bar stool at the end of the bar, closest to the door, wearing a clean, white, form fitting vintage tank top. He still had sculpted shoulders and arms from his boxing days and he had the looks of a model to boot. Wendell greeted Marty’s grey eyes with warmth, “which tree was it this time, Marty?” He always looked forward to hearing about Marty’s escapes, which were different from most of the guys Wendell had come into contact with over the eons.

“Oh Wendell, it’s great to see you again,” Marty said as he walked up to Wendell and gave him a sincere hug for a few seconds. “I wish you could have been there for this one. You see there was an ancient Beech tree along the River Barrow outside this tiny town called St Mullins and for some reason, despite the incredibly lush and picturesque countryside, I was taken by this one tree while I was floating past it, navigating a narrow barge up the river. I must have been 18 years old then. The barge was loaded down with mulch that I was taking to a job up the river and anyway, I noticed this massive, perfectly formed Beech tree and it just appealed to me as a very special tree. It wasn’t a religious experience or anything like that, but it had the presence of a decorated General or something, square jaw jutting up towards the sky with dignity. I sought it out a few more times over the course of my life and it only grew grander, in my mind, with time.”

Marty paused his story to order a drink, “Jameson, neat, please,” he conveyed to the bartender who was just drying off a high ball glass.

Wendell leaned back as much as he could on the low-backed bar stool and placed his hand around his ice cold Gin and Tonic, but was utterly relaxed and left his hand there for a bit, not feeling the need to take a sip.

Marty continued his bard as he mentally stepped into his memory, feet crunching through tall grass as he approached the giant Beech tree, “so I’m back...from going back to that tree.” He looked around as if finally recognizing where he was and in the presence of other people. “I went back to that tree and I lived the days, seasons and life of every single leaf, from the moment the very first leaf unfurled on the sapling to the very last leaf that fell off the tree on its dying day, and there was an exact day.”

Wendell was captivated and impressed, saying, “Marty, that’s amazing, I’m so happy for you. Now are you saying, that, I’m thinking this big tree you’re talking about had hundreds of leaves on it and you like, embodied yourself as a leaf, each leaf of the tree..?”

“That’s exactly right, Wendell, so for one whole season, from Spring to Fall, I was a leaf at the very top of the tree and another year, I was a leaf that hung gently underneath a small branch towards the bottom and it was an experience to feel each and every leaf grow from its bud,

coming out of winter, to the welcome green leaf of Spring and it was a joy to wait for the exact second – and I could feel it was coming, but I didn't know exactly what minute – when the leaf was released from its branch. I laid back and rode every single fluttering leaf as each one fell to the ground in the Fall of every year for three hundred and fifty years. I giggled because it was quite a thrill!" Marty slapped his hand on the bar with a laugh. "You know, you bumped into other leaves and branches and one time I hung there for days until a gust of wind dislodged me and I finished my ride down. I enjoyed every vantage point from every leaf and was able to watch so, so many barges glide under the tree over the years.

"The life of a tree is very similar to the life of a human. I could feel life and energy coursing up through the trunk and out it's fingertips, er, branches, especially after an above average rain soaked month during it's "teenage" years. And..." Marty trailed off for a beat, before going on, his eyes getting moist, "I couldn't put my finger on why the reverse happened. Why this immense Beech tree, a bull of a tree along the river for upwards of three hundred fifty years, ultimately reached its peak. It's like a mythical clock began ticking down its demise, which ultimately happened sixty-three years, two hundred twelve days, nine hours and six minutes later and I saw it happen," Marty finished. He grabbed his Jameson, raised his glass in a cheers to Wendell, who grinned, grabbed his glass and they clicked, to The Beech Tree.

"Marty, sounds like you really felt something, as much as we can actually feel here, in those three hundred and fifty years or however long that was. I'm gonna think about that trip because reincarnating, if you will, as hundreds of individual leaves sounds worth exploring and I haven't done that in a while. I rode that meteor I told you about for two million years, but it felt one dimensional compared to your experience. Hey, maybe I could live as a bonsai tree!" Wendell cracked up at the thought. The vibrant 30 year old Marty quickly shot back, "Oh, I got one in mind for ya Wendell, I'll show you sometime, ha!"

Parker got up from his stool to step outside into the crisp night air. Two guys were standing outside, smoking cigarettes, having a friendly conversation. They turned to acknowledge Parker and said "Hey there, Parker, Welcome, buddy." Clint had died by firing squad, falling backward into a mass grave, and Roman died from a virus that transferred to his lips from a Coke can within a vending machine in the dimly lit hallway of an office building. Parker noticed that half of Roman's mist-like body was submerged into the brick wall of the bar, as he continued his conversation, "Yeah, the delivery man is here too, of course, I'm mean I've been here 621 years now, and I just saw him the other day. Don didn't know he had the virus, it was the last stop of his day, he was whistling, perspiring; he paused for a beat and unconsciously breathed on the can as he put it in the slot and the virus hung on the can overnight. I bought it the next day and exhaled my last breath 7 months later." Clint turned to Parker and asked, "So Parker, you went down in a plane crash, is that right?"

"Yeah, I can't believe it, I 'think' it just happened, but I can't tell where I am, what day it is, what time it is, anything, but it's reassuring what I'm seeing."

As they were standing there getting to know each other, a huge procession of people, walking with elbows linked or with their arms slung over each others shoulders, about as wide as a football field were walking and floating upward over the cobblestone sepia lit street. They all seemed to know each other. Clint leaned over to Parker as he was gazing upward in wonder, "Oh, those are hundreds of miners who have died over the centuries, from the quarries of Brazil, the coal mines of West Virginia, the gold mines of South Africa, you name it. They go for these strolls and it seems like they never run out of things to talk about," Clint finished with a grin, then he exhaled and his cigarette flicked off and disappeared. Parker couldn't see the end of the procession, but it looked miles long. The procession curved and bended upward then to the left until faintly out of sight.

Back in the bar, half of the guys filed out and were within seconds on a vast, charcoal colored, lunar landscape, which descended gradually down to a massive silver toned water fall which resembled the colossal Dettifoss waterfall in Iceland, but was five times larger and even more dramatic. It was almost frightening how many billions of gallons of water were blasting off the top, spraying out and thundering down into the abyss below, collecting and calming below where it narrowed in a dark canyon and disappeared out of sight.

On either side of the silver river, hovering in the darkness like glowing fireflies, were the gentlemen from the bar, Parker included. They and hundreds of other spirits looked like dots interspersed, hovering in silence as they looked down at the waterfall and its contents. Within the crush of the waterfall were billions of agonies, anxieties, grudges and ghostly calamities taken, recorded or lived presently on Earth.

The glowing dots seemed to meditate upon the scene they have come to watch many times before. Sitting detached and helpless, chins on knees, eye brows raised or at rest, they watched and they knew from experience. A couple glowing dots, or angels as it were, alighted, floated close to the waterfall and entered its contents, looking with sympathy at these twirling, tragic images. The silver river in the black night wasn't billions of gallons of water but microscopic, ghostly droplet images from present Earthly time flashing by in the millions into the towering mists. Hundreds of millions of sweating palms on steering wheels, late for a desperate job interview, a succession of wrongly accused screaming heads forced onto chopping blocks in Mongolia, thousands of scenes from hospitals, waiting rooms, battle fields, receiving news of husbands and wives and children who were dying or about to die; flitting images of various mens faces, seconds before they are shot, hopeless students applying for jobs during economic Depressions, unemployed men, jumping off bridges from eighty different countries, missionaries from 1300 in Southeast Asian rainforests being brutalized by natives, rubbery polio-legged children, crying as they starve, flies buzzing indifferently around their bulging eyes, volcanos erupting sending lava into ancient villages, legs burning; anxious immigrants sinking in ships, slaves from Africa getting unjustly whipped, crying children being ripped away from their mothers, Eskimos gazing out over a bleak tundra, not finding the meat they need to last through winter, but the most prevalent images by far were the faces of billions of people

anxious or alone, sad, worrying, wondering, hoping and not getting what they wanted or needed: food, shelter, clothing, money, acceptance, connection, empathy, love. Holding up on a plate, “Look what I made?” and being dismissed. Expectations out of line with the meagre dishes placed in front of them. Parker took notice and was speechless. He was not alone, in fact, the gushing of scenes made him wonder why he had ever doubted himself.

The fireflies, the spirits, hovered in silence with empathy, watching each individual scene go by in slow motion, as if they could pause the movie reel to gaze at a single frame before it wizzed by. One angel held for a moment the shivering face of a poor farmer in Siberia who sat crouched at the base of a stone wall, as if the angel was holding the framed picture of a loved one before it hurtled downward into the near bottomless mists. They have all been there, every single glowing dot at one time or another. They didn’t know, but know now and have known for millions of years now, how short lived – a micro-second – all the billions of worries and suffering lasted, but to this day there has never been a way to communicate with living people, whose lives lasted no longer than a fly.

For hours or days, glowing dots gathered in silence to watch this one scene, while others floated off in different directions. This was not the only river or window into the past, present or future, there were many, but this was one way to pass the eons. The glowing dots collectively sent waves of prayers that penetrated into the thundering waterfall, but alas the prayers were no more effective than a nurse from the Middle Ages wiping a rough rag across the perspiring forehead of a teenage son right before he died of Cholera. It was a calm, temporary feeling, but by no means snuffed out the antagonizing, gritty disease.

Day 1 for Parker, if you could even call it a day. He liked what he saw, if you could call it seeing. He liked what he thought, if you could call it thinking, but he felt a pulse of something, a current: Sun-Li. Could she be here..?

Walking down the sepia cobble stone street at night, hands thrust into his pockets, a white ghostly train packed with laughing, loud talking men blasted up out of the street going straight up in the night sky. He stopped to watch them rocket upward for several seconds, then silence. The new normal. Everyone was in good spirits. He met countless other guys and everyone had a story. He couldn’t believe the mixing and matching of lives and eras. It emboldened him, not that he needed it anymore. Did he squander an opportunity, his Life? Sure, but it was like he had washed that one dish and now a stack of dishes a mile high were waiting for him.

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Parker thought he would try to find Sun-Li, so he flew like Superman through galaxies for thousands of light years. There was a near omniscient, intuitive feeling to his senses, but he couldn’t see or know all. The blackness was never ending, but he felt he was getting close. He chuckled to himself at what he was noticing, that what passed for a Man Cave during his life, the humble garage, was now taking on a whole different dimension for the Woman Cave. Would you have expected anything different from her, but this designated Zone ran roughly

two billion light years each way, up and down, in a square. The stars were more clustered and tinged with pinks that Parker had not seen upon his entry. He descended down into a more densely packed spectacle of light. It resembled where he came from but now women were everywhere. Some comic relief, it seemed, No Men Allowed. He walked and walked these crowded streets, and while passing through a festive plaza, he saw what resembled a sewer cover and climbed down. It was a party in a room that first appeared to be the size of the Super Dome, but it kept unfolding and unfolding. It was a party! It was a dazzling, chic party the size of which boggled his mind and it looked so fun. He descended a mirrored staircase, chandeliers hung everywhere, tables and different bars were as far as the eye could see, all on different levels, in different styles, in perfectly appointed rooms of different sizes, but each felt warm and cozy. He walked down several interconnected hallways, walking through and past what resembled collections of hotel lobbies from around the world, out of Architecture Design magazine, the best of the best from Switzerland to Cairo, Portugal, Paris, Hong Kong, Turkey, St Petersburg, you name it and thousands of women were locked in vibrant conversations, laughing, talking loud and enjoying themselves. Every single laughter that's ever been heard, was represented in every room. Legs crossed, leaning forward, reclining back with arms draped across over rich fabrics, holding the perfectly mixed Martini, this was taking the afterworld to the next level. For days Parker navigated hallways and rooms, taking his time and marveling at this cornucopia, knowing Sun was close by.

He pushed open a door to leave the room, turned a corner, got a little turned around, and stood in a quiet well-appointed hallway. The sounds of the parties became muffled behind cushioned, upholstered doors that had shut. The hallway had ornate symmetrical mirrors, velvet green walls and a parquet wood floor with dimly lit uplighting. Parker sensed something that he had never felt in his living life or this afterlife and he could feel it in every ion in his body. He slowly turned around and sitting by himself in a chair at the end of the hall was a friendly looking black man who looked like a short order cook. His white shirt was worn and stained, he had salt n pepper hair, which was slightly puffed and uneven. His skin glistened and he sat there, perfectly calm, with a slight, relaxed grin on his face. "God..?" Parker hesitatingly uttered, to which He increased his grin a small percentage. The two looked at each other in silence, then the black man gripped the arms of his chair and slowly rose without losing eye contact with Parker. He slowly walked towards Parker, stopped a foot from Parkers face then wrapped his arms around Parker in a warm, kind hug. Parker was stunned and slowly put his arms around the Man. Radiant energy beamed through them and ignited outward, a flock of tropical birds left an ancient tree over the Ganges River at pink sunset. Parker closed his eyes and saw every single worry that he ever had in his life, thousands of them, floating in front of him, all lined up like blobs of murky water in a huge square. With his chin resting on Gods shoulder, Parker smiled and the worries evaporated. He couldn't believe he ever worried about anything, none of it mattered or had any bearing on anything. Radiance and omniscience blasted through him, God released his arms and they stood there looking into each others eyes. Nothing was said, only felt. God put his hand on a swinging door, looked back at Parker,