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May 8, 2024

1969

Casper hated his parents, almost as much as he hated the war. He hated them in the way where you hate your parents when you're young but as you get older you kind of realize they just want the best for you. At eighteen years old he still hadn't reached that phase. Reed, his older brother by 4 years, was sent to fight the Vietcong, and his parents' support made Casper hate them even more.

"He's doing his duty as an American," they would say. His parents still held firm belief in the establishment. Being the wealthy owners of three oil refineries across the Texas desert, Casper learned to hate his family's wealth accumulated at the cost of the earth. This is probably the same reason he enjoyed the things he did.

His brother did not survive his first year at war. Casper was 15. After his brother died, he and his parents moved to Los Angeles. During his sophomore year of highschool he started going to rallies against his parents wishes, sneaking away from classes to join the picket line. About halfway through the school year, in February of 1968, he began to become a regular attendee of these protests, befriending a couple around his age. A blonde-haired blue eyed girl with quite a bit of spunk a couple years younger than Casper, named Lucy and her boyfriend James, a tall and strong kid a couple years older than Casper with long brunette hair commonly flowing out of some sort of headband. They dressed similar to a lot of the hippies who were at these gatherings, bright colors and patterns, loose and somewhat revealing clothing. Casper admired the way they conducted themselves and eventually started to look up to James as another big brother and visa versa.

Lucy and James joined the mile high club in the bathroom stall of a Pan Am flight to Cabo, a trip orchestrated by Lucy's parents for her fifteenth birthday. She begged them to let her bring James, declaring they love each other and all she wanted was for him to be allowed to come on the trip or she wouldn't go. Of course, her father worried about bringing his fifteen year old daughter's boyfriend on a family trip, being Lucy's third that year, but there was something different about the look in her eyes from the rest that made him want to meet James. Once he did, he was still a bit hesitant because of James' age; however, he seemed respectful and nice enough so he set two rules: No funny business and one dinner for just himself and his daughter. They never got to dinner.

Being disowned by her father after the Pan Am incident, Lucy shacked up with James. James' mother was young and often worked when her husband was still at war, so she did not even know Lucy was living there for the majority of the year. James' dad was a huge fan of the 60s western, and kept a Smith & Wesson revolver on the wall above his bed. James would

sometimes take it off its perch now and again just to feel a little closer to his dad when he was away. James and Lucy introduced Casper to Marcus after a rally. The four of them bonded over a joint Marcus had rolled for them under an overpass covering the LA river. They chatted about the war, politics, and how much they despised all of it. Casper did not tell them this was his first time smoking marijuana and he was so high the only way he noticed the police was when the other three got up and ran. Marcus threw a rock at the cop cars as they sprinted for their lives yelling, "Oink oink, Piggies!"

Marcus never had many friends growing up in Los Angeles outside his brothers. His parents were first generation immigrants from Mexico, so he never really felt like he fit in with the rest of kids his age. With most having some racial prejudice or another, he mainly kept to himself at school before he met James. They met in pottery class freshman year and hit it off after James had his back when the teacher said he smelled like beer. Later that week James surprised Marcus with two 40oz beers that they split. James kept saying he had a discount at the market but Marcus knew he had stolen them but kept it to himself because he still appreciated it. That was the same day Marcus met James' girlfriend, Lucy.

Marcus thought Lucy was one of the most beautiful girls he had ever seen and always was a bit flustered when she was around. She had this attitude about her that she was not going to take disrespect from anyone while also having a bubbly personality. One time he had seen her scare off some kids that were throwing trash at a homeless man. Although he felt this way, being his best friend's girlfriend he never thought to act on his attraction. In the next year or so before meeting Casper, the three of them grew as close as you could. They told each other everything, even the things they hated about themselves and they always found solace in each other. One day Marcus and James broke into their highschool and spray painted graffiti over the office, the walls, and the tennis courts. Lucy kept watch in the car since she could not climb the fence due to the leg she bruised the day before. Apparently she had run into the corner of their dining table.

The summer of 1969 was setting up to be the best summer of their lives. Casper surprised all four of them with tickets to Woodstock, that he had bought with money he made pawning stuff around his home. The rest of them could not believe it.

"Give me some fucking skin brother. I can't believe you did this!" Marcus sticks out his hand and Casper slaps it with a smile. Lucy gazed at the ticket, mouth gaping, mesmerized by it.

"Far out..." Lucy grabbed the ticket. James wrapped his long arms around the four of them.

"Guys, this is a sign. I can feel it. Who knows what the future holds, next year Marcus and I... we might be drafted. Maybe you the next year, Casper."

Their grips tightened.

"We have to make the most out of this summer."

The group hug broke up.

“How?” Casper thought the festival was enough; however, he could see it in James’ fierce expression that he had something more in mind.

James reached into the pocket of his floral pants and took out plastic saran wrap surrounding what looked like a small piece of paper sectioned off into a two by three grid.

Lucy wrapped her arm around James’ hip staring at the squares while Marcus gently took the plastic from James’ hand. “Is that what I think it is?”

“Acid...” Marcus handed it to Casper who’s eyes widened at hearing the name of the schedule one substance. Lucy snatched it from Casper.

“No way! I’ve always wanted to try it. Will you too, Marcus?”

Marcus grinned, excited. “I’m so in!” Casper glanced at him. Worry welled up inside him. He had heard terrible things about what LSD would do to you from his parents, but what did they know anyway, he thought.

James noticed Casper’s uncertain expression and took the plastic from Lucy before reaching out his hand to Casper. “Will you fly with us, Space Cadet?” Casper looked at the hand, then at James’ convincing glare, a glare that could pierce your very soul as if it knew you. Casper smiled and grasped his outstretched hand.

“Let’s do it.”

That summer, on an evening where the reds, oranges, and purples of the sun painted the spotted clouds, Marcus and Casper converged on James’ apartment. They knocked on the door and James’ mother opened the door to their surprise. Casper assumed she must have been on her break between her day and night shifts. When Casper entered James’ room Lucy was already there. Her and James were sitting on the opposite sides of the room. Lucy kneeled on the bed, arms crossed atop the windowsill admiring the sunset. James was at his desk lighting an incense and setting it up in its skinny tray. Marcus sat on the bed behind Lucy, admiring the sunset as well as her figure.

As the sun disappeared, James divided the 2x3 sheet and gave each of them one square, except for himself who elected to take two. They all placed the drug soaked paper onto their tongues and waited. About 30 minutes went by and James’ mom came bursting into the room. It was a call for Casper.

Casper never forgave his dad for making him come home that night. He carried that hate and anger the whole car ride home, and it became amplified by the LSD once he was in his room. He sat up in his bed for hours thinking of how terrible everyone was. Killing innocent people in a country that we have no business in. He hated his parents for supporting his brother's death. He hated his murdering country for starting this war. He hated the phony Hollywood patriarchy that the rest of his classmates obsessed over. Casper had never let this hate come out before, something about the drug in his system had unlocked all the doors bottling it up. He looked out the window to see a car crawl past his house with an American flag bumper sticker

and park outside his neighbors house. He hated that flag. Casper had so much hate in his body the only thing he could do to tame it was grab his school journal and start writing. Writing about everyone he hated, starting with the man in the car outside.

Back at James' apartment, Lucy couldn't control her racing mind. James did not notice when she rushed frantically to the bathroom, but Marcus did. James was too high to care so Marcus went chasing after her. He closed the bathroom door behind him to see Lucy kneeling over the toilet gagging. Marcus thought even in this state she looked beautiful. He rushed over to hold her hair back as she started throwing up. Marcus could not take his eyes off the toilet bowl, which Lucy's rainbow colored throw up filled. When she was done she fell into Marcus' arms and they held each other tight. Lucy moved away to look him dead in the eyes. Her pupils were so big you could barely see the color in them and her skin was sparkling like glitter. She put her hand on his cheek and drew her lips to his.

James' father awoke to the sound of someone throwing up. He had been discharged from the war after escaping captivity and had gone straight to bed when he got home, hoping to surprise his son in the morning with breakfast. He put on his robe to see what was wrong in the bathroom and after no answer on the first knock went to James' room to check on them. His wife had told him James had friends over and he worried about if one of them had drank too much. He creaked the door open to a dark room. No one on the bed. No one on at the desk. No one even on the floor. Just one figure, partially blocking the silver moonlight from entering the room, but just enough light shown to where he could see James. Sitting. Cross legged. Atop the windowsill. Completely naked.

Casper heard nothing from the others the next day; however, two days later he woke up to a small stick hitting the window to his bedroom. He looked out the window to the dark street below to see a Buick Skylark parked below, James' dad's car. He walked downstairs and out to the car to see Marcus waiting beside the car. They were leaving for New York where Woodstock was being held. James' dad had given him an ultimatum after the incident the other night: Enlist in the military, or find a new place to call home. The next day James had told his dad he planned to enlist so he would leave him the keys. When his mom and dad were out at lunch, he grabbed the Smith & Wesson off the wall and took the car with Lucy, planning to never return again. It was hard for him to convince Marcus to leave his brothers but James told him he could have the car after if he ever wanted to return. Casper did not take much convincing. He packed a backpack full of clothes and his school journal full of drawings he had yet to complete. On the way out the door he took his mothers purse from the hooks in the foyer and just like that they were on the road to New York.

They drove all through the night then pulled over somewhere in New Mexico to get James some rest driving. Casper volunteered to drive next. He drove for about 6 hours. James examined his fathers revolver in the passenger seat as they listened to the radio.

Another protest turned to riot after protesters at Berkley were arrested outside their dorms. The police resorted to force in order to contain the mayhem. We will be back with you shortly with information on the injured.

“Fucking pigs.” James put the revolver at his feet. As if he was mouthing the language of Satan himself, a cop pulled behind them with its lights on signaling them to pull over. “Fuck! Be cool.”

Casper pulled the car over at the nearest turnout and the cop approached the driver side window.

“Do you know why I pulled you over?”

Casper thought for a moment, “Sorry, no.”

“Your break lights are out.”

“Oh I had no idea I’ll be sure to fix that right away.”

The officer glanced at James then Lucy then Marcus then Casper, then back at Marcus before Casper again.

“License and registration.”

Marcus rolled down the window to speak to the officer, “Are you sure that’s necessary, man? I mean we can go get the lights fixed right now it’s really no trouble—”

“Was I talking to you!? I don’t believe you goddamn hippies have any money to fix this thing if you wanted to! Now give me your license and registration.” He leaned close to the back seat window where Marcus was sitting, “And you’ll address me as Officer. Boy!”

“Fuckin pig,” Marcus muttered under his breath.

“What did you call me?”

You could hear a pin drop on the soft car mats.

“Step out of the car.”

“What no here, here’s my license—” Casper was waving it out the window.

“I said... Get the *fuck* out of the car.”

Marcus didn’t break eye contact, his glare full of hatred and defiance, but he opened the door and stepped out of the car onto the dirt.

The first punch came quickly. An uppercut to Marcus’ stomach causing him to fall to his knees. Lucy let out a yelp and Casper opened the door in a foolish attempt at help, but the cop swiftly brought his hand to the pistol sitting in his holster.

“Don’t fucking move.”

Casper sat back in his seat and closed the door. The second punch came as Marcus was catching his breath. A right hook to the jaw knocking Marcus’ head into the door beside him. The cop grabbed him by his curly black hair and dragged him around to the front bumper.

“I should ask you for your papers.”

Lucy started sobbing. Rage started to build in Casper. He pulled the car door handle to open it but James stopped him, putting his hand on his shoulder. Casper turned to see James. Jaw clenched. Face twisted. Eyes ablaze. Gripping the revolver in his left hand so tightly his knuckles

were white. Casper jumped in his seat at the sound of Marcus' face getting slammed and pinned onto the hood of the car. The cop put his face close to Marcus'.

"Now what do you call me when speaking to me?"

Marcus spat blood onto the hood of the car. The cop slammed his head into the hood again then threw him into the dirt and stood over him with his back turned to the car.

"You think you're strong?"

He unholstered his pistol and aimed it at Marcus.

"This is what strength looks like."

Casper never even noticed James open the door. He couldn't keep his eyes off the violence, not necessarily enjoying it, but fascinated. So he was startled when James quickly stood up and hit the officer over the head with the butt of the revolver. The officer dropped his gun and fell into the dirt. James stood over him. So much rage in his face he might look unrecognizable to most. But Casper had seen rage like this before, in himself a few nights earlier. James aimed the revolver at the cops head.

"Feel strong now piggy?"

BANG!

James didn't speak for a while after that. Lucy was sobbing holding a beaten Marcus in her arms. James took the cop's keys and drove the police car down a dirt road a couple miles up with the cop stuffed in the trunk. He didn't tell anyone where he was going or ask for any help. Lucy tended to Marcus' wounds with loving care, pouring water on a rag and wiping away the blood. Casper waited a minute but then went after James in the Skylark. He found him at the spot where you would turn off onto the dirt road, sitting, gun in hand, looking at the dirt. He got in the car after Casper pulled up beside him. They sat for a moment in silence, neither one wanting to acknowledge what just transpired.

"I had to do it." James was looking down at his dad's revolver. "He deserved it."

Casper tried to think of the words to say but he couldn't. He simply muttered, "Yeah," then pulled onto the road.

As they were driving the sun was setting, painting the sky red, just like a couple nights before. James couldn't help but notice that the pistol was making Casper uneasy so he put it in the glovebox. As the blue hour came, they approached the turnout where Lucy and Marcus still sat in the dirt. Marcus was sitting in her lap, using her body as a sort of backrest, guiding her hand with the cloth to his cuts. He seemingly made a joke which had Lucy laughing hysterically.

"What do you think of that?"

"What?"

"*Them.*"

Casper looked at James' frustrated expression then back at Lucy and Marcus.

"What do you mean?"

James opened the glovebox and took a long look at the revolver, then back at Marcus.

“Never mind.”

He closes the glovebox and opens the door. As he approached her and Marcus, Casper saw Lucy’s expression change from joy to defiance. Marcus moved away from her as quickly as he could with his injuries and gave James a thumbs up and a coy smile.

They used Casper’s stolen money that night to book a room at a nearby motel. Marcus and Casper slept in one bed while James and Lucy took the other. Casper awoke to James shaking him. They went across the street and got some breakfast. Leaving the room, Casper had to step over Lucy who was sleeping on the floor away from James’ bed. After breakfast, they came back to the room to Lucy crying on the edge of the bed getting consoled by Marcus. Lucy quickly tried to hide it when they entered the room but she was doing a bad job at it. Lucy stormed out of the room and James moved to chase her, but was stopped by Marcus grabbing his wrist.

“Don’t.”

That night Casper woke up to whispers in the dark. He briefly went back to bed but was once again woken, this time by the door closing. He noticed Marcus was gone from the bed and figured he needed to use the bathroom; however, he heard the engine of a car starting and twin beams of light shining through the window. Casper opened the curtains to see the car belonging to James’ dad pulling out of the motel and speeding off, driven by Lucy with Marcus riding passenger.

The next day the police came. James stepped out of the room and gave himself up as if he had known they were coming. He didn’t struggle. He didn’t protest. He just left. Casper wondered why Lucy and Marcus would tell the police, but James told him it’s for the best.

“You were a good friend, Casper,” he said. “Thank you for the tickets.”

The End