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Memoir Writing
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Doin' Time

Oh take this veil from off my eyes; my burning sun will someday rise. Slowing to a roll as I approached the intersection, I flicked on my indicator and made a smooth right onto Transverse Road. The vehicle, a 1999 Honda Civic was moving along with absolute grace, achieving a slight synchrony between the speed limit and tempo of the music. Warm wind poured in through the open windows as I cruised down the wide suburban streets of Garden City, the radio assuring me, as if I didn't already know, that it was summertime and the livings easy.

Like many island nights in the end of June there wasn't much to do. After putting my liver to the test the previous nights while my parents were out of town, I felt an itch to get out of the house early. It was just after eight o' clock when I left and after spending the last week hanging out at home every night, it felt strange and out of place to have nowhere to go. In a way, I'd forgotten that this was even a problem. Driving around alone could only facilitate up to an hour of fun at max, which was forced to hold me over until one of the usual suspects emerged from the depths.

At stop signs and along straight-aways I'd pack a one-hitter, discretely burning away my money and brain cells as I rolled along the subtle curvature of the Earth. Traveling this same path almost everyday I felt somewhat like a jogger, a creature of habit circuiting a loop for the purpose of satisfying their craving for a high. For one reason or another, be it the grotesque amount of weed I smoked over the previous 72 hours or all the natural energy I currently had, but I wasn't much interested in getting stoned. Leaving the piece packed and at easy access in the center console, I started to head to a long-standing hang out spot of ours nearby.

One Old Country Road was special for a number of reasons. The large office building at the front of the road stood at about ten stories tall, bearing a sign at the top advertising its main tenant, 1-800-Flowers. Appropriately so, we began to call it Flowers, but we had no interest in the building itself. Behind it was a fairly well hidden parking

garage that in addition to a main level had an underground as well. Surrounded by the back end of parking lots on two sides and the train tracks on the other, it was tucked away nicely and at times, felt like our own little corner of the world.

It started off innocently, discovering the place as a form of refuge one summer day after getting caught in the rain during a bike ride. Over the course of our late teens this sporadically became the norm for my friends and I, hitting the underground on a rainy day in our cars instead. Gradually, we began to spend more time there and as much as I hated hanging out in parking lots, I grew oddly fond of this one. After a while there really wasn't anywhere to hang out at all and this was one of the last few places we didn't constantly get kicked out of.

Rolling along the side of the building, I glanced over at the reflection of my car passing by in the windows of the building to the left. Slowing as I approached the speed bumps, I kept my head on a swivel for any potential threats before entering the underground. As I crept slowly down the ramp, I was suspended in the same four seconds of uncertainty that I encountered every time I was about to enter the place. Who or what would be down there? The lot was empty for all but one car and it wasn't even nine o'clock yet, a safe bet that it was Friday. None of my friends were there yet; the only one of whose arrival I was actually anticipating was Mike's.

Nonetheless, I parked up and within minutes, Smitty came barreling down in his white Subaru Outback. Naturally, I left all my belongings inside the car and kept my windows open for immediate access. He posted up next to me and after a few minutes of bull shitting, his ADHD addled mind asked me to pop the trunk so he could grab something to fixate his immediate attention. Like clockwork, after finding no longboard inside, he reached for and removed the baseball bat we all split a summer ago.

A black wooden Louisville Slugger, for only twenty dollars, was a pretty good piece of sporting equipment to invest in on a four way split. However, it had become somewhat of a black cat to me, an omen of misfortune. Any time that it was out in public something bad was bound to happen. On the Friday of Memorial Day in 2012, just prior to the peak days of attendance at Flowers, the 313 car came down while a few of us were doing a whole lot of nothing. For no good reason, the bat was out, so I began to play

around with it and tape the handle. After asking why the hell I was playing with a bat and realizing I hadn't much a clue myself, he only said one thing, which stuck out strongly:

“Just not tonight guys.”

We obliged, but the irony of it was that although the policeman's benevolence was nothing to argue with, it was the one night we wanted to be there, as to avoid all the cops that were crawling around elsewhere and the unintended paths of the drunk drivers they'll maybe catch before we get killed. Taking his words literally may or may not have paid off in the long run, but for a while they proved to be fruitful.

Staying true to his distracted roots, it was only a matter of thirty seconds or so before I found myself alone with the bat, sitting on the back of the car as Smitty skated off towards the exit ramp to go ride down the hill that led to the trash compactors. Dazing off into the vast, symmetrical architecture of the garage, I twirled the bat at my feet for a minute or so before getting up to do anything. As I turned to rise and put it back in the trunk, I noticed from afar we had a visitor on the way.

Judging from a number of initial assessments, this was not a friendly visit. The speed with which the Chevrolet mini-van rolled down was the first indicator, aside from the jet-black tints and dorsal antennas that could only mean one thing. As it got closer, slowly circling the perimeter of the parking lot before inevitability reaching us, it was clear the Uplander was an undercover car. For a second my heart sank under the knowledge that I was carrying, but frankly, there was nothing I could do.

Smitty came roaring down the exit ramp, kicking and pushing fast enough to catch up with me before they did. “Are those Ds?” he asked, even though he knew he didn't have to; we'd both been here before.

I nodded, and he followed up, “Do you have anything?”

“A little bit,” I responded. “Three grams give or take.”

“What are you gonna do?” he asked, as if there really were some sort of plan to execute in this scenario.

I let out an exasperated breath that wanted to lean towards a laugh. “Wait for them,” I said, as with almost perfect timing, they rounded the final corner. Coming into full sight through the front windshield, it was clear that my assessment had been accurate, but it was far too late for any course of action. The van buzzed loudly, thrusting into

place as we both fell silent and two shiny badges emerged from the vehicle in plain clothes. If only I rolled up my windows.

As I stepped out of the side of the van, I did my best to maintain balance with my hands behind my back. Coming in, there always seemed to someone coming out, whether in cuffs or not. The first floor of the station looked different since the last time I'd been there, almost four years before. Walls appeared to be repainted, but the overall tone was the same, exceptionally bright and energetic for a criminal precinct.

On a crisp October night in 2009, getting hauled into the third precinct for the first time felt like something out of a movie. Back then it seemed much darker. I was alone, handcuffed to a wooden desk in a likely unused office for the purpose of sparing me from the general population holding cell. Their assessment that a seventeen year old me wouldn't hold up too well against Nassau's finest junkies was a bit insulting, but I knew this wasn't the time to start denying the grace of a free pass. The silence of the lone room was something to be thankful for, yet time had never felt as slow in my entire life. Every second was a minute and every thought a lifetime, as all the moments and memories passed before me while I sat motionless and borderline unable to think.

Whether I like it or not, this room will always hold a spiritual cloud over my head. I'd doubted it for years, but during that century of seconds spent in the room I came to the full realization that there never was and never will be any God. As far as vanity goes, I don't like to consider myself the center of the universe, however I felt that I stumbled upon the final piece of evidence to solidify these claims. If there really were a God, he wouldn't have let this happen. Casual lawbreaking aside, I was a good kid. I was fully aware that my personal decisions and course of action had led me to this point, yet I couldn't help but feel selfishly undeserving of this master plan.

Earlier that year emptiness began to gnaw at me in noticeable amounts and arguably had reached its pinnacle in that moment. At the time, the scope of my existence was much smaller, and it felt like the world had locked into place. It was hard not to think of this situation as a massive roadblock, one that surpasses the idea of crime and punishment to teach a lesson; in the moment I saw none to learn. I didn't even have time

to repent like all the other sinners. All I wanted to do was get on with my life, if I only knew how.

Now, as much as I wanted to feel somewhat the same, I really couldn't. In a sense, I wanted to be disappointed in myself, but I saw no reason to be. If anything, getting arrested is supposed to teach a lesson of sorts. In this case, I'd felt that I already learned these lessons, but that clearly couldn't be true if I was in a holding cell at the moment. Hard fought battles won and lost had been the story of the last three years of my life and for once, it finally felt as if things were settling down. Finally, I had a job, which I still had to go to at ten in the morning the next day. I'd also grounded myself in terms of behavior, but I was still being brought down by my tendency to seek comfort in illegal vices. If anything, I could only feel inconvenienced regarding the situation initially. Did I really need to go through this again?

It was a light night at the precinct. The cop that arrested me the first time, back in 2009, stopped by for a little bit to have a chat. We both recognized each other right away, as if I hadn't seen the guy in Dunkin Donuts a handful of times over the last four years to begin with. As far as the good cop / bad cop dichotomy goes, he was my bad cop, but in fact he seemed like a pretty cool guy. He asked me about what I was doing, school and the likes, success, etc. I told him I was doing pretty well, after which he had the audacity to comment, "Well, not really, 'cause you're here."

For a second I wanted to say that based on the look I shot him and his response, he wanted to agree, but he really was one of those cops that will make arrests by the book just to sit on his ass for the rest of the night and do paperwork. I borderline laughed and cringed when he exuded the line, "Saving the world one joint at a time" while filling out the papers for the other unlawful possession of marijuana charges that were held up in the cell with me. He regained a brief interest in me after learning I attend Stony Brook University, prying in for any details regarding the infamous Lola Tan.

"I mean, I know who she is," I responded. "I read the newspaper."

A copy of Newsday wasn't necessary to inform me of one of fifty something drug dealers in Lauterbur and as a result, I felt an odd combination of feelings inside. In a way, I was borderline insulted by his attempt to pry about something grossly irrelevant, linked

merely by one association, but deep down, I grinned at the secrets I'd be able to keep within. Purely, I had nothing to say on the matter because as far as the drug market goes, we were well separated and my channels were more secure. Through the spring of 2012 I was Lola Tan, perhaps better because I wasn't stupid enough to get caught.

As demoralizing as it felt to be under the judgment of these pricks, deep down I felt an odd satisfaction from the idea that one day I'll have a clean legal record and be beyond all of this. Thirty years from now, my children will laugh in my face when I tell them I got arrested for the simple possession of marijuana three times in my life. This very instance forcefully thrust me into a bout of existential nightmare, in which after months and years of doing everything I could to set myself on the right track, I've fallen off again and become forced to question my every step. Staring blankly at the painted yellow cement walls, I did my best to pass the time as anyone does in the absence of a clock. Despite the looming burden of everything that had just occurred, I tried to get comfortable and help the next few hours go by as quickly as possible. Naturally, I couldn't help but stick to the theme of lawbreaking and for better or worse, drifted off into the abyss of my thoughts.

After checking to see if the coast was clear, I slipped carefully through the rusty bars of an old fence frame, emerging from the shady overgrowth into the blazing hot July sun. This entrance provided more convenient access and was well worth the hours it took to find the day before. Moving fast, I ran twenty yards across the barren parking lot to an empty tractor-trailer bed, a common point of cover in entering the fortress. Head on a swivel, I moved to the crumbling loading bay that closed off a corner, putting an end to my westward exposure of at least a hundred fifty yards across the lot. In a failure to contain my excitement, I continued to run, panting and wheezing closer towards the gate with each heavy step. At the final turn, I was silently blindsided by the almost mystical appearance of a black male in his mid-thirties, popping out from one of the red factory doors with immaculate timing.

Immediately sensing the fear on my face – I was stunned to even see another person there, let alone one that could possibly shank me – he raised up his hands and started to shush me.

“You being chased?” he started, calm, yet conscious to block my path. It was as if he could see inside my muscle memory quietly chanting, “run, run, run,” knowing exactly why for having been there before.

“Uh?” I barely understood.

“Are you being chased? Did someone chase you in here, cops, anybody?”

“No.” Suddenly it became clear I had a lot less to worry about in terms of danger, but much more to consider as for the sketchy grown men occupied with the level of potential heat directed in the attention of our play pen for the last week.

“You sure? If somebody’s after you that’s all we gotta know.” We – he wasn’t alone.

“No, no, I’m fine,” I said, gasping between breathes in my mid-pubescent voice swing that did the best to assure comfort, yet jumped up to an octave of clear and present alarm.

“Okay, good... what are you doing here anyway? It’s not very safe you know...”

Considering now that this man might actually be someone legit, my excuse was weak. “Oh you know just... exploring” – I couldn’t help myself – “What about you?”

“I’m doing the same, just... looking around ya know?” His response was awkward, a combination of evident lying and the odd role reversal of interrogation. It was likely a surprise for him to see such a brash attempt at flipping the gun around; when else would a ninety-pound, fifteen year old white kid caught lurking around an abandoned building complex be so quick to poke inquiries back at the adult who found him, rather than stunt at the fact he’s clearly outmatched.

After a bit of a pause, he continued, “Well, we’re doing our thing alright. Anyone else with you?” – I nodded – “Just keep it quiet and make sure no one else follows you in here” – not getting caught seemed to be the uniting theme – “You never saw me.”

“Thanks,” I spouted nervously, not knowing what to say. He disappeared back inside, and I ran the last fifteen feet or so to the gate. Coming back from an orthodontist appointment, I was already late for our daily expedition.

The former Avis company headquarters closed back in 2001, long before my arrival to the 'Sau a year back in '06. A few days back, aimlessly riding bikes with Mike, I lamented on my braggadocios tales of touring the abandoned insane asylum in Central Islip when I was only in seventh grade. Determined to seek excitement of this caliber, we waited until nightfall and executed a well thought out break-in without any exterior intel from the cool kids in town regarding the secret entrance. It really felt like some James Bond type shit. We had the most fun dashing in and out of the shadows that dressed the outskirts of the wide open lot that bore the exposure of up to two football fields on one side, accompanied by a dense network of buildings and warehouses to the east. Ill prepared to tour the darkened interior at night, we came back right away the next day. With a crew now, we spent just about everyday of the next week or so familiarizing ourselves with every square inch of the place, destroying everything in our path along the way. Arguably, any one of us would agree then and now that this was one of the best weeks ever, a pivotal peak in the inconsequential world of youth.

Looking to the sky I saw Shaw out of the corner of my eye, his girly ass hair poking over the third story rooftop, running back quickly to confirm my arrival. In the wake of my new discovery, I frantically reached for my phone in an attempt to call off the execution of any shenanigans that were sure to be afoot. Blake, Chirag, Mike and Shaw: no answer from anyone. After a minute or two of hesitation, believing for a second that maybe there was nothing to worry about, I moved through the gate and into the courtyard.

For a second, stopping dead in my tracks, I regained my suspicions as if in slow motion, a sizeable chunk of cinderblock floated peacefully from the sky. Crashing down onto an industrial sized cooling fan, pieces of smashing rock showered the air, breaking the vow of silence I made only seconds ago. Following the first was a second, and a third, before soon enough the ground and cooling units were being pounded with a steady stream of fragmented cement, diving over the roof in clusters of four. As much as I wanted to believe they were checking to see if I was down there before the barrage began, I took good faith in staying put, and that my newfound friends were much less

likely to kill me than the ones that were more or less currently trying. Lasting a couple of minutes, the onslaught was an assault of the senses. I can only imagine their process of collecting the chunks of death, patiently aligning them along the roof in anticipation of my arrival.

In its heyday the courtyard was probably beautiful, a rocky oasis of greenery planted smack dab in the middle of corporate wasteland. It was now covered in shards of glass and cinderblock, the broken open breezeway serving as a bridge between the office building on one side and the warehouse / factory bits on the other. Sure that it was over, I cursed up at my cohorts and began the dash into the northern corridor. Racing up the stairs, the insides of the building were still eerie to navigate alone. I broke quickly into the main room on the second floor, tearing through the wreckage of what had been done in days ago as our first order of business.

Rounding a corner, I continued down the hall through familiar territory. At the other end of the room, blinds draped the broken wall sized windows, which without the glass seemed to be naturally acting sliders. Hesitant to emerge in the anticipation of another dangerous plot, I first threw a metal rod through the blinds before stepping on to the roof.

“Take it easy, I was right there,” said Blake, easily the softest of us all. I wasn’t going to argue; we’d just started hanging out that week.

“Dude you don’t even know what just happened... and where the fuck is everyone else? That shit with the bricks, are you insane? You could’ve killed me if I was stupid enough to walk through it!” My panicked vigor was strong back then, a bit reminiscent of the kid who’s always getting hurt and spends much of their time trying to avoid the reoccurrence.

“Stop being a bitch you would’ve been fine. Besides, it was Shaw and Mike’s idea anyway.” A typical Blake move; lay the blame on everyone else to save your own face over the matter.

“Well I saw some guy down there” – now my presence was of interest – “and I don’t know what the fuck he’s doing, he said he was just like playing around like us... I mean what the fuck is that shit about?” My vocabulary, although growing, was a victim to the notion that I had no motivation to clean up my speech just yet, and that I was in

fact finally on the cusp of being able to spout profanity with little to no objection from anyone around me.

“C’mon, let’s go find them.”

Allegedly, the rest of our group fled down from the other side of the roof, placing them well into the opposite side of the building. Heading back down the same stairs I came up, we mulled the possibilities of what shady activities the other people could possibly be doing in here. As we proceeded through the ground level breezeway into the tidier parts of the factory, our conversation was abruptly cut short by the sound of a deep and vaguely threatening, “HEY!”

Upon instinct, I darted in the other direction, only to stop and turn for a second after noticing that Blake hadn’t moved an inch.

“Hey, fuck you pussy!” he shouted.

For a moment, I had never been so alarmed in my life. Before I could even begin to freak out on him, let alone accept a premature death, the voice from the depths started again, this time softer and confused: “What the... Blake?”

“Holy shit dude I knew it. That’s Tyler.”

“Brush?”

“No, White. C’mon, let’s go.”

Sprinting no more than fifty feet down the hall, Blake was proven right as lo and behold, there he was, poking his head down from an empty slot in the ceiling. A member of our grade, Tyler was somewhat of a psychotic jack-of-all-trades. He was currently accompanied by another one of our peers, Ricardo, who was merely a year to our senior. Surely, they had some explaining to do.

“Well what are you ladies doin’ here,” Tyler started. I didn’t know the fellow much outside of the fact that he was the kid who showed up to a massive track meet on rollerblades once, partially buzzed. However, in the close-knit network that growing up in a small town facilitates, just about everybody is or was friends at some point, and I was currently the beneficiary of Blake’s status as a near lifer in the hamlet.

Blake took the floor, “Don’t worry ‘bout it bitch... the fuck you guys doing up there?”

“Oh ya know, just a little... electrical work,” followed by a playfully menacing laugh. “Basically, me ‘n Ricky been stripping the place for copper wire” – he belched – “We’ve got a good amount so far, just finished tearing up that big room down at the end of the hall.”

I left the conversation to see for myself what exactly he was talking about. Bright, white tiles dressed the floors of a giant room that was nearly the size of an Olympic ice hockey rink. Dashing across the former showroom floor, I glanced down through the missing tiles at the series of wires and cables that hummed from beneath. It kind of amazed me that people my age even knew how to do something like this. While we were on a mission of mere fun through destructive exploration, they were delicately undressing the buildings infrastructure in pursuit of illicit funds.

As I ran back to Blake, Tyler and Ricardo, one of who was out of the ceiling now, I came to the realization that the guy I saw earlier was most likely involved in the same racket. They continued to move down the hall while talking, and I caught up with them as Tyler was concluding an explanation of their scheme.

“Late at night, come through in my dad’s truck. Clip the gate with some bolt cutters, load up the back with this cart” – he gave a push and a pull to an old, oversized laundry bin – “Then, we take it down to New Cassel and get that shit scrapped: straight cash.” As I peered through a window on the factory doors the man popped out of before, it became clear to me we were at least the only people in sight. Suddenly I felt safe, as much as anyone could be in this situation.

After a few days, there was hardly any new territory left. Just about everything we’d found along the way, we’d broken. From tossing fire extinguishers through windows, to hurling open bottles of chemicals across rooms, we were now challenged to get more creative with our destruction. Throwing things off the roof was too risky, as for the unnecessary attention it was bound to attract. An untouched elevator door was most likely the priciest thing to fall victim to our wrath, and was a personal discovery of mine. When I managed to pry it open with the speaker piece of a corded phone, I could swear it still dinged the way an elevator would after opening.

Even on day one, the first room we encountered was overwhelmingly enough. Scattered at different ends of the room were five teenagers, executing varying levels of destruction at the expense of the strength they could each spare. While I merely made dents hurling anything I could find at the weak plaster, two of the others were driving their shoulders directly into the walls, plowing right through them.

Yet here we were now, silent and focused, after having clipped the electricity for a long, well tucked back hallway that hadn't appeared to be touched in years. Up on one of their shoulders, I carelessly knocked loose the plastic covering, letting it drop to the floor. Approaching the ends with great caution, I removed each of dusty light bulbs with tender care. None of them were hot, but the caution was worth heeding anyway. We moved down the hall in groups of two and three, plucking the white fluorescent tubes from the brown wooden fixtures that were clearly a victim of 1970's interior design.

After about an hour we had no more than a hundred, but no less than fifty. We piled them in a corner on the other side of a closed door at the end of the hall. Each grabbing a handful, we surrounded an open stairwell that dropped off to the tune of about twenty or so feet. It was time.

I can remember the first time I heard one break. Accidentally crunching on a u-shaped one inside a nifty corner of the tuberculosis wards back in 2005, the sound was phenomenally unfamiliar. It was like nothing I'd ever heard before. In fact, it was kind of beautiful. Upping the ante on my exploration, I tossed a chunk of cinderblock into a pile of about fifty of them, sending across the room a deep burst that echoed through the fragments of white dusty air as they simmered down after erupting from the ground up.

Now, in the booming echo of the multi-story stairwell, the sound was resonating much differently. After a delay of a few seconds or so, they would smash asynchronously in clusters of three or four. A few minutes went by and after being about half way done, I watched from the other side of the door for the sake of sparing my ears. Considering the time it took to remove and collect the bulbs, it was a pretty anticlimactic experience overall, but no one wanted to admit it. Knowing that this was our Citizen Kane of

destruction within the building, we each took silent pride in our commitment to the complete and total obliteration of our surroundings.

We managed to hold the streak of consecutive visits at around five or six within seven days. During my final trip to the place, we were asked kindly to leave by some rent-a-cop in charge of patrolling the area. Arguably, he could've been much more harsh after discovering us, but it's possible that he just chalked it up to kids being kids. Although I'd never end up going back, every now and then one of my friends would report back about a solo trip they took, or an effort to show it to an unfamiliar friend. Somewhere down the line, across two separate instances, Blake, Mike and Chirag each ended up getting caught there. None of them ever really got into significant trouble as a result, but sometimes that's what happens when you're young. While the copper wire thieves, my peers excluded, were serving hard time for getting caught in the act, we were learning lessons the easy way, slowly but surely.

The whole place ended up being demolished by 2010 and was replaced rapidly by a sprawling strip mall, an effort to replace the already failing one a quarter of a click east down Old Country Road. Although the new shopping center is much less of an eyesore, deep down we all hoped Avis would never be destroyed. Not much of anything stands as a reminder of what used to be there, aside from the same guardrail on Zeckendorf and a large, folded up magnet from inside that now rests in the glove compartment of my car. They may have paved paradise and put up a parking lot, but nothing will ever allow me to forget the moment that I realized my friends were truly surgical, to an almost psychopathic degree, the time we removed over fifty fluorescent light bulbs for the pleasure of watching them break.

Out of sight but very much within an audible range, a voice called my name from the distance, abruptly thrusting me to attention.

“Cavanagh”

Without missing a beat, I responded, knowing for certain that this was the moment I'd been waiting for all night. It had to be well past midnight, but there really wasn't any way to know for sure.

"Where I can see you."

Rising for the first time in at least two hours, I made my way towards the chipped steel bars of the cell. Since my arrival, three people had come and gone, while one more significantly irritable man joined the show in holding number three. The man speaking was none other than my newest pal, Officer Copagna, who was now free of his vest and utility belt. Seeming satisfied in his stellar police work, he knew he'd be settled in for the rest of the night after nabbing a hard-bodied criminal like myself.

He began the procedural I'd already heard a number of times tonight: "Listen, I don't care how you feel or whatever you want to say, this is just a formality. Answer the questions like you know you should."

I nodded, granting him the floor to proceed.

"Okay, Cavanagh what's your address?"

"102 Concord Street, Westbury" – pausing for some odd reason, I continued to blurt out the rest – "New York... 11590."

"Okay, in case you didn't already know, you've been charged with the unlawful possession of marijuana. It's a violation, not a big deal" – easy for him to say – "You have to appear in court on... the 28th of Ju... no that's today. It's Tuesday, July 9th, that's *Tuesday*, July 9th."

After emphasizing the correction of his error more times than necessary, he proceeded with the debriefing. "Do you no longer feel the effects of intoxication and are you well enough to be released on your own? Remember, just say yes, you don't want to be here all night."

"Yeah, I'm good."

Already on his feet, he walked towards the cell and handed me the ticket through the bars. "All you have to do is show up to court. Don't miss it and make us issue out a bench warrant, 'cause we'll find you faster than you think. And when you go there remember to plead guilty. Don't make us have to show up at that jungle in Hempstead because you think you can get away with pleading not guilty. We got the evidence,

there's nothing else to do. The judge'll give you an ACOD – adjournment in contemplation of dismissal – and all you have to do is stay out of trouble for a year.”

If this were all new to me, I wouldn't be very worried at all. Back in September of 2012, I managed to spare myself from charges of resisting arrest and obstruction of justice by eating an unlawful possession, aware of the reasonably fair punishment. However, the year I was supposed to spend out of trouble was not yet over. After coming to the realization it would be a long summer before it even began, I'd barely made it past the first month without managing to get arrested. He continued while I glanced over the ticket repeatedly, absorbing no new information.

“Since you were such a gentleman tonight, we're gonna let you keep the backpack.” The backpack, oh the backpack! The backpack that wasn't actually mine, but I knew I would have to assume responsibility for anyway the second the search began. The backpack, that inside contained two foot-plus bongs, a gas mask, a scale, numerous sliders and bowl pieces, as well as the one-hitter and grinder that served as the probable cause to ensue the search in the first place. That damn backpack.

Before I could even realize it, he'd opened the door to the cell. Although I was technically free to go, it didn't feel that way. Walking freely around the precinct is an odd feeling, so much that you're compelled to stand virtually still. Reaching for the backpack, I felt the faintest sense of victory after it stared me down for hours while sitting in a chair directly across from the cell. It entered territory it should have never even come close to, yet by some stroke of luck made it out alive.

“That's it?”

“That's it. Stay out of that parking garage, you shouldn't be hanging out there anyway.” If this was the point to drive home, I can't be entirely sure it was necessary to go through all of this. At least I could count my triumphs in managing to maintain possession of a crushed up dime that remained in the bottom chamber of the grinder all the while.

“Alright, have a good night,” I said, exiting on a verbal rather than physical interaction. The last time I got arrested, I made the mistake of shaking the hands of all the cops around me when I got released. I regret it only in the sense of feeling foolish, regardless of how respectful I intended to be in the moment.

After unpacking the manila envelope that held the remainder of my belongings, I strapped up the black Jordan backpack and without another word, headed straight out the door. Although I'd never actually worn the backpack before, it was very comfortable, sporting heavily padded arms and a soft, squishy back. At this point, I was happier to have the backpack itself back rather than the contents; it'd be a shame if it ended up wasting away, locked up as evidence until further notice.

In the same way the doors always seemed to be revolving as I entered, they continued to spin on my way out, as two well dressed detectives hauled in another young man in double handcuffs, the classic fat boy treatment. Both of the officers eyed me with malicious intent, raising my concern that once I'd leave the precinct, I'd get rolled up on again and searched more thoroughly by a savvier duo of lawmen. After being rescinded the right to post up within the confines of the parking lot, I set off walking east down Hillside Avenue and flipped through my phone in search of a ride.

Luckily my first choice, John, was quick to answer.

"Hey man," – I could tell from the tone of his voice that he'd already heard the news from Smitty, but of course the whole story had yet to be told – "I'm at Googz's house right now, where're you?"

"I'm fucking, umm... walking down Hillside right now, you wanna pick me up? I still gotta get my car from Flowers 'n I got work in the morning tomorrow" – the road was blissfully quiet, as I jaywalked my way to the southern side – "You wanna scoop me at the iHop on the corner of Willis?"

"Sure buddy, I'll be there in a few."

Hanging up the phone, I meandered down the final block or so until I reached the dark lot of the currently closed restaurant. It was around one in the morning now, and although I felt uneasy sitting alone with a backpack of paraphernalia, the cool summer air was enough to keep me relaxed in the moment. It didn't feel like long at all before I could hear John's 1984 Camaro roaring down the street from over a block away. Rising to my feet as the red hunk of steel barreled into the parking lot, I quickly jogged towards the ride before he could even stop. Acting fast, I hopped in the passenger side of the two-door and tossed the backpack on the floor between my legs.

"Let's roll."

Within a matter of seconds, I was obligated to tell the story that I'd end up having to tell over and over again, to all of my friends, acquaintances and any persons of interest. It's never too bad to dish out the details the first time around, but as relieving as it was to vent, in no way, shape or form did I feel good about everything that just happened. In fact, I felt horrible, so much that I didn't even want to do anything. Sleep seemed to be too much of a burden, and as much I just wanted to get stoned, I knew it would provide little relief in my stark awareness of the grand paradox the drugs had currently come to serve.

Sometimes, these feelings have a way of delivering their blow in a directly physical fashion. They leave your stomach to boil while the turmoil of thoughts pours over and over in your head. After a while, what's occurring upstairs doesn't even matter anymore. Obsession becomes the norm and your only wish is to painfully remove the stabbing feeling lodged deep beneath your gut before it spreads like a cancer to every organ.

The ride to Flowers wasn't long at all and as we entered the down ramp to the now darkened underground, I couldn't help but feel an odd sense of longing, similar to discovering your childhood home has become abandoned and will probably stay that way. All the times, good and bad, were now behind me in a way I'd never realized. I couldn't feel anything for the place except regret, in having wasted so much time there and knowing that I'll never feel the same way about it again. Like a bad break-up, any last bit of romance had absolutely run dry, and I knew that any time I'd hear the name I'd never want to come back.

As the car echoed through the garage and into the final strip, my hooptie stood alone in the only section where the lights stayed on. I exited the car and John peeled off, leaving me to bask in the silence of an empty Flowers for one last bit of reflection. Naturally, I packed the one-hitter with a bit of what I had left, burning one last time in a spot that had felt like mine for years. As I stared off into the distance at the parallel beams I'd grown so fond of for their symmetry, a million moments flashed before my growingly dull mind.

Back in the summer of 2012, I made a bold proclamation about how we would make the transition out of Flowers. Time would serve us well; we'd grow up, get jobs, and after my senior year at school, we would have hopefully found a better place to congregate. This is when I would use my wit and charm to write an open letter to the CEO or president of 1-800-Flowers, thanking them for choosing Carle Place as the location of their headquarters, while detailing my deeply complex love-hate relationship with the place. I would even intend to be as ambitious enough to detail the thousands of dollars in drugs I'd dealt out of their garage, as well as passing on the blueprints for the sure to be extinct sport of flowerball. Before today, I'd imagine this letter to pay homage to growing up imperfectly. It would show our grace for gaining a sense of community, yet depict the dread of being a go-nowhere and that thankfully, at least one of us made it out alive. No matter how much the realization pained me, I knew that I would never feel this way again and thus, never end up writing the letter.