

THE INTERVIEW

a story by Gorden Schweers (2017)

SERIES F-1

Max. Gross Vehicle Weight: 4,700 lbs.
Nominal Tonnage Rating: Half-Ton
6½ FT. PICKUP

MASTER OF A THOUSAND-AND-ONE LIGHT DELIVERY JOBS



LONG WEARING ALL-STEEL FLOOR has hardwood sub-floor to minimize denting. Skid strips stamped in, can't work loose.



NEW HYPOID AXLE, semi-floating type. Husky pinion. Quiet running. New, exclusive, integral housing fully exposes differential for easy maintenance. Shafts removable from wheel end.



NO-CATCH ROLLED-EDGE FLARE-BOARDS strengthen body, offer better sliding surface for objects loaded from side. Stake pockets permit mounting of up-rights for special sides and tops.



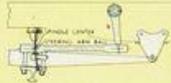
NEW MILLION DOLLAR CAB features new 3-way air control. New coach-type seat for comfort. New, Level Action cab mounting to frame for longer cab life. New Spinalounge Roofing seat with variable-rate spiral coil spring and hydraulic shock absorber available for comfort-plus.

TAILGATE strengthened with tapered truss-type rolled edge. Anti-rattle drop-chains hold tailgate flush with floor or let it swing all the way down.

RIGHT-HAND WINDSHIELD WIPER AT EXTRA COST.



BIG BODY handles standard four feet wide building materials, long enough to carry average door. Capacity of 45 cu. ft. makes it one of biggest Pickups in the half-ton field.



NEW FORE AND AFT STEERING for greater stability, more uniform response under variable conditions. Drag link and forward shackled springs follow similar arcs. Better steering geometry, easier control.

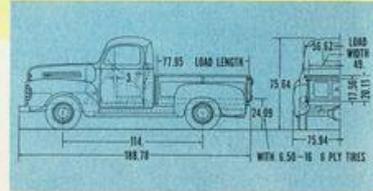
REMOVABLE BRAKE DRUMS simplify maintenance. Drum can be bought separately from hub for replacement.



The 45 cu. ft. body capacity makes the F-1 Pickup one of the biggest in the half-ton field. Big load width of over four feet gives the F-1 Pickup an amazing range of use. The new Rouge 226 Truck Six has performance galore. With standard 3.73 to 1 axle, 6.50-16 tires, gross load of 4,700 lbs. including 1,450 lbs. payload, it pulls a 10% smooth concrete grade in high, better than 30% grade in first. Engine speed at 35 m.p.h. is an economical 1,600 r.p.m. An optional 4.27 to 1 rear axle ratio steps up pulling ability approximately 14%. Truck operators choose the 3.73 rear axle ratio for economy, the 4.27 axle ratio for extra pulling ability.

ENGINEERING HIGHLIGHTS—NEW F-1 PICKUP

NEW ROUGE 226 TRUCK SIX—New, longer 4-ring, Filzhligh pistons save oil—Main and connecting rod bearings are replaceable-type—Series-flow cooling with thermostatic control—Alloy exhaust valve seat inserts give longer wear—Improved intake manifold for higher efficiency—New Loadomatic spark control for more power, more economy—New Rouge 209 Truck V-8 Available. **CHASSIS**—New Feather-Foot brakes for true and easy stopping—Needle bearing steering case control—Flat tube and fin radiator for greater durability—New airplane-type shock absorbers, front and rear—Gyro-Gelp clutch multiplies grip with increased speed.



The Interview

The others had little or no choice but to be swept in to the undertow of his vortex.

One item on the agenda for *Talent Night* at Roseville seemed inappropriate. Listed in the program distributed to the hundreds who filled the school auditorium was the presentation of the poem *Rape of the Lock* written by Alexander Pope (1688-1744). Many in the audience pointed to the item and questioned its validity in the context of the night's entertainment. The school choir was the first venue directed by Miss Ongaku. Other acts followed of questionable merit. Finally Mr. Charleston emerged from the folds of the drawn curtains to announce his presentation. As the head of the drama club, he explained that Alexander Pope had been an English poet during the Enlightenment Period and who had (as an act of moral expediency) perfected the use of satire using rhyming couplets and verse. Due to the social instability of the time, Pope's writings made extensive use of innuendos (as the audience would soon appreciate).

Charleston went on to describe the background of this poem in particular. He did so (he assured the audience and in particular the School Board) so that no one would – as he put it – get the wrong idea and consider the subject matter of the poem to be somewhat (he paused, searching for the right word) *indecorous*. The men in the audience stifled a laugh while a few of the senior students made a display of their bravado by pounding their heels against the bleachers. Charleston's preface wasn't fooling anyone. The curtain rose like a mirage on ropes. A full minute of anticipation passed in silence. Whereupon Shelly Freeman walked on to an empty stage wearing a full length gown. The bottom of her dress glided across the floor, held in place by a hoop which during Pope's era was fashioned from whale bone. The costume was on loan from the downtown Shakespearean Theater. It fit the slim figure of Shelly Freeman to perfection. Raglan sleeves in gold and purple brocade fell to either side of her arms. The bodice was pulled tightly in place by a series of laces and hooks, accentuating the torso and bare neck of a young lady. A cross of dark wood was clearly visible against her white skin.

Shelly raised her head to the highest ramparts of the auditorium. The lights dimmed until she was standing like the virgin in a single beam of light falling from the heavens. Without speaking, she tossed a few ringlets of her hair aside with one hand and with the other pulled down those on the opposite shoulder. A hair piece curled down her nape. The audience was captivated. Her voice floated like a dirge to all sides of the auditorium.

“Rape of the Lock,” she announced with feigned outrage, relating her crisis as an appeal to the sensibilities of a sympathetic and enlightened audience:

*“Say what strange motive, Goddess! Could compel
A well-bred Lord t’assault a gentle Belle?
Oh say what stranger Cause, yet unexplored
Could make a gentle belle reject a Lord?
And dwells such rage in softest bosoms then?
And lodge such daring souls in little men?”*

Laughter drifted up from the dark pit in to which Shelly was directing her monologue. Her words were accompanied with appropriate gestures such as lifting a palm towards her *softest bosom*. Not that she was trying to draw attention to her slim figure but rather as the poetic license required by the poem. It was obvious to all concerned why Charleston had chosen Shelly Freeman to take the part of Pope’s defiled heroine. She appeared to have an excellent memory and was capable of delivering her lines without so much as a pause or quaver in her voice. Hundreds of eyes followed the intimacy of her every gesture. At the same moment, she stood alone in a ring of light like an iconic flame of feminist circumspection. Shelly pressed on, expressing her utmost dismay at the ordeal she had to endure as if she was not in public but rather in the garden at Gethsemane. A lock of her beautiful curls was soon to be snipped asunder by a pair of scissors held by a rascal of a suitor. Likewise, the poem addressed several other issues that lay like a canker in the lives of those who would profess to love those who would be loved but with the appropriate decorum. By the use of candor, Alexander Pope was addressing the crucial *war of wills* between a woman and a man. That poignant intimacy was about to be described in finite detail. Nothing was lost upon the attitude of a jaded audience.

They laughed as Shelly continued, turning her face from side to side as she described the *vanities* of a beautiful socialite:

*“Think not, when Woman’s transient Breath is fled,
That all her vanities at once are dead.”*

Though the presentation came across as spontaneous, the rehearsal had lasted weeks. Charleston abridged the poem such that the recitation cut quickly to the chase: Pope’s *Belinda* was to be defiled without so much as her tacit consent. But the heroine was about to show she had enough pluck not to let the transgression pass by without comment. The reason behind such a travesty was worse than anyone in the audience might imagine: women and girls were lead astray by *nymphs and sylphs*. The fair sex could not be held accountable in any way. Shelly berated the depressing fact that a woman’s charms were devised in such a way as to be irresistible:

*“Tis these that early twain the Female Soul,
Instruct the eyes of Young Coquettes to roll,
Teach infants cheeks a bidden Blush to know,
And little hearts to flutter at a Beau...
Oh erring mortals Levity may call,
Oh blind to Truth, the Sylphs contrive it all.*

Advancing to the second movement of the poem, Shelly described how the defenseless *Belinda* *nourish’d two locks* which she was soon to lose against all propriety. Such was the cruel jest fate played upon the innocence of girls. Shelly’s voice rose with indignation as the fateful act drew near in the person of the second actor. Herein, Charleston as coach and director faced a dilemma. No youth in Roseville could match Shelly Freeman’s persona on stage. Though only 15 at the time, her appearance complimented the topic of Pope’s narrative. Making an intuitive decision, Charleston conscripted one of the student teachers, James Aguilar, for the role as her counterpoint.

Aguilar was of Italian and Spanish decent, a neophyte who had entered the teaching profession as an athletics coach that same year. When Charleston mentioned in the staff room what he had in mind for *Talent Night*, Aguilar bragged offhandedly how he had once written an outstanding essay [final mark B-] on the *Father of Liberalism* (John Locke 1632-1704).

To gain such an accolade, Locke penned essays supporting *the unlimited accumulation of wealth* by the fortunate few. For Charleston, the coincidence was prophetic. Aguilar was enlisted on the spot. But his next challenge involved the integration of the different strengths of each actor. For her part, Shelly inspected Aguilar carefully from a distance when Charleston approached her with his suggestion. It wouldn't hurt, he insisted, if the two of them did a small rehearsal together. With the text in their hands, each read aloud their parts to the empty auditorium that same afternoon. Shelly soon forgot her misgivings and formed a friendship with the older man. Aguilar to his credit showed the school girl as much deference as he would have a woman his own age. As far as he could see, Shelly Freeman retained an innocence that the young women in university had long since abandoned in the sororities and bars on campus. So as if joining an actor's guild, they began practicing several times a week. Aguilar was more than impressed by his consort. It was most remarkable that a girl of 15 was capable of repeating large portions of a text entirely by memory. Charleston assured Aguilar privately that Shelly's intelligence was his inspiration in the first place. As her self appointed mentor, Charleston was determined to challenge his student rather than see her largesse wasted by the ongoing mayhem in his classes, many of which resembled more a gong show than an English lesson. The delivery of the poem was to be Shelly Freeman's preamble to even greater opportunities. Indeed, her presentation in front of hundreds of students and parents was impeccable. As soon as the poem introduced *th' adventurous baron*, James Aguilar stepped out of the wings and stood behind Shelly Freeman snapping a huge pair of scissors. The audience cheered with approval. Poor Belinda was to be shown no mercy.

The implement chosen for the venue had been procured for the evening by a student who worked part time at *The House of Knives*. Forged in stainless and cast oversize, the scissors were borrowed from a display in the store. Aguilar raised them up in the beam of light that had fallen on him from the overhead array. There was no mistaking his intention. Belinda was about to be defiled in front of the entire school auditorium. But the scissors were only one component of the melodrama.

The other was the costume of *th' adventurous baron*. At first Charleston had in mind an outfit from the Elizabethan period for Aguilar (to compliment Shelly's gown) but at the last moment switched to a different theme and emphasis. The athletic coach was covered in red spandex from top to bottom. His slippers were Persian with curled toes.

The Halloween outfit came with a forked tail and tight hood with sharp ears pointing out on each side. Aguilar basked in his role as a fallen archangel, the defiler of young women; one of whom was conveniently standing in the middle of the stage. Acting as to purloin, Aguilar made the footpads of a cat creeping closer to his quarry. Shelly continued with her presentation, unaware that serious trouble lurked in the rear. She continued in the tone of a dumb blonde:

*To fifty chosen Sylphs, of special note,
We trust the important Charge, the Petticoat.
Oft have we known that sev'en fold Fence to fail;
Though stiff with the hoops, and arm'd with the Ribs of Whale,
Form a strong line about the Silver Bound,
And guard the wide circumference around.*

Having said so, Shelly sashayed on stage and rolled her eyes at the audacity of those who thought themselves capable of overwhelming the defenses of debutantes such as herself. The audience responded with whistles and hoots. Behind her, Lucifer continued his stalking, snapping the prodigious scissors in the air. Just when she was most preoccupied, Aguilar tiptoed closer and in a trice snipped off the treasured hairpiece from the back of her head. Shelly grasped the dark cross above her bosom and wailed in shock:

*Flash the living Lightnings from mine eyes,
and let my screams of horror rend the affronted Skies!
No louder Shrieks to pitying Heav'n are cast,
When Husbands or Lap Dogs breathe their last.*

Aguilar stood to one side shaking the braided coil over his head like a live snake, relating:

*Let wreaths of Triumph now my temples twine
as me lady's Suitor, the prize is mine!*

To encouragement from the audience, he rejoined:

*What wonder then, fair Nymph! Thy hairs shoul'd feel
The conqu'ring force of Unresisting Steel?*

Shelly placed the back of a hand on her forehead as if to swoon. No amount of alimony could repay her for the sleight she had suffered by the loss of a few ringlets. Describing herself as *a degraded toast*, she lamented:

*Oh hadst thou, cruel! Been content to seize
Hairs less slight, or any Hairs but these!*

Shelly then drew (as described by the poem) *a deadly bodkin*, demanding restitution:

*Restore the lock! I cry; and all around (cry)
Restore the Lock! Let the vaulted roofs rebound.*

Aguilar replied by pleading his indiscretion on a bent knee:

*Boast not my fall, insulting Foe!
Thou by some other shalt be laid as low.
Nor think, to die dejects my lofty mind;
When all I dread is leaving you behind!
Rather than so, ah let me still survive,
and burn in Cupid's flame – but burn alive.*

The comic farce was nearing the point of exhaustion. Her loss was irreconcilable. Turning to the audience, Shelly assured them that in the end her deflowering would serve a higher purpose:

*This lock of hair the Muse shall consecrate to Fame,
and mid'st the Stars inscribe my name.*

The play was over. Leaving the stage under the escort of Lucifer, Shelly took his arm and winked back at the audience. The cry for an ovation ended the performance. Before the curtains cascaded from the ceiling, Shelly returned to an auditorium of applause, curtsying with a nod of most humble submission. People called from all sides, *Bravo, Bravo!*

At the same moment, in the back stands, her peers at Roseville took pointed note of her success on the stage. One such student, Jared *More* Morgan was lounging on a top bleacher. Rather than applaud, his jaws worked over a wad of gum. Up until her performance, Shelly's pheromones hadn't been on his radar. Her accomplishment changed that expectation. Also in the

audience but at the back of the chairs reserved for the parents, Charleston had risen to his feet and was applauding for a curtain call by both actors. His career in drama had been rewarded for another semester. On the other hand, in spite of his elation, Shelly's performance was destined to set in motion a complex chain reaction that Charleston would find inexplicable.

Talent Night was over for another year. The glee club filed back on stage, once again under the direction of Miss Ongaku. She encouraged the audience to stand and sing the national anthem *Oh Canada* but the effort fell flat since most in the audience knew only a few of the words. Meanwhile the *More* boy with his friends and confidants joined the throng of people leaving the auditorium. The evening streets were highlighted with rain and headlights. *More* stood out in the cold drizzle, itching for a fight. Surrounded by a swarm of teachers and adults, he detested the suggestion he was of little to no consequence, a Grade Ten student *nobody*. One group in the crowd laughed aloud at some comment that few overheard. *More* took the laughter personally, reacting by flipping off the faces of senior students passing behind the glass walls of car windows. The proceedings of the evening would have been a waste of time by impostors if it hadn't been for the scene with Aguilar as a devil in red tights. Inside his *inner sanctum*, *More's* collage of pornography would now include the image of Shelly Jane Freeman.

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The summer night though warm and quiet was filled with lemures. Insects were collecting around the nucleus of porch and street lights. A few neighbors had gathered on their back patios for late evening barbecues, sitting in circles with paper plates in their hands and steins of beer near their fold down chairs. The albino shadow of Ljssel Jacobson was shuffling around the edge of the same night, wetting down the knotted roots of her grape vines. Runners were misshapen around wires strung in rows adjacent a weathered farm house. Ljssel's father had planted ten acres of Malbecs when they first settled in their new country from Estonia. A hundred feet of tendrils were all that was left of the vineyard now that city hall had expropriated their property with survey crews followed by housing developments filled with strangers. The free world had regressed since her family fled from war and persecution in Europe. The spinster wasn't fooled in the least by the things she was watching from behind the curtains of the farmhouse. Weather was foretold by changes in the foliage of her vineyard and the behavior of men in crowds the recidivism of history.

Bent as any root with arthritis, Ljssel noticed the Morgan boy skipping briskly past her garden, slipping out in the evening no doubt for a liaison with young girls. She quipped: *That's all these fascists want; if it's not given to them, they take it by force!* Her memory was as good as any. Earlier in the summer when the vines were budding in clusters, she had waved a salutation to the boy as he strolled past her tiny piece of land. But the response from Jared was one of contempt to an overture from an old hag. She recognized in an instant what his attitude meant towards herself and even more so what it presaged for her independence. The evening news on her radio and in the weekend supplement described an increasing series of insults to human decency.

Ljssel stood with the watering hose in her hand, watching the boy's silhouette blend with the shadows of the night. She wasn't powerless even if they thought she was. With the water shut off, she shuffled in to the farmhouse by a back door. The house was in darkness. Unable to pay the monthly bill, she lived without electricity. Transparent carboys filled the passageway. It was her wine that was transformed in to the *blood of Christ* each Sunday at St. Judes. Bouquets of dried herbs hung from strings to ward off the jinn lingering in the rooms where her parents had passed on decades earlier.

Though alone with the roar of her solitude, she knew what she was up against. Those shysters with leather briefcases were waiting for her to die too; or worse to fall and hurt herself before taking away the last piece of her land for more developments. She was determined not to die of dry rot in any decrepit rest home.

At the end of a hallway, in a room that remained closed since the death of her father, a large hourglass was covered with a sheet. The sands of the hourglass were confined to a bottom chamber in a mound of white powder. In the wavering of candle light, Ljssel mumbled syllables in her native dialect and inverted the apparatus on the parlor table. Grains began trickling down a tiny constriction. *1 hour 56 minutes 43 seconds.* Destiny would fall into place with the last granule of sand. After pouring a decanter of her own vintage from the liquor cabinet, Ljssel Jacobson sat down in a chair with carved lions for arm rests. Waiting with the conviction of a theurgist, the wine tasted sweet as though transubstantiation had commenced independent of its liturgy.

Now blocks away in a placid night, the *More* boy entertained the illusion his future was benign. Like a protective matrix, it intimated he could do as he pleased with friends. Their good times together would never end. Such indulgence left his crowd of young adults all the more delinquent. *More* whistled quietly in to the shadows of the night, a limber animal in a leather windbreaker. His year of probation for the stabbing incident had ended a week earlier. He was free again. His head was light and he danced on the pavement. After leaving his basement room, he made a point of loitering on the porch of the Morgan household, spying on his family. Inside the grey outline of a room, his parents and younger siblings breathed like fish in the miasma of light cast from a television screen. An antenna on the roof of the house locked on to live broadcasts from a citadel miles away in the distance. The TV pulsed with the discharge of light particles. The expression on the faces of his family was graven. Gino Morgan and his wife, Linda Morgan, sat on a couch against one wall. A ceramic bowl was passed to a pair of children sprawling on a rug of hooked loops. The activity on the TV, images flashing for a few seconds, might well have been shadows dancing on a far wall of a cave as described by Plato. For his part, Jared felt nothing but contempt for the four sets of eyes that were focused on their sovereign lord and master, *the media*.

Standing in the shadows of the porch, Jared shifted his attention for a few seconds to the images on the screen. The feature was *Davy Crockett*, a Walt Disney Special *Rated G for the viewing pleasure of the entire family*. Music was overdubbed on the drama. The actor Fess Parker portrayed an outdoors man dressed in buckskins in the pretense he was a backwoods yokel, wielding a bowie knife and the replica of a Kentucky rifle. A chorus of baritone voices sang the hero's praises in the background: *Davy Crockett, King of the Wild Frontier...*

Jared had better things to do than waste his time watching *Walt Disney*. At school many of his teachers held the belief that TV was the opiate of any family. They pontificated: *Kids who watch TV don't go anywhere*. Inside the room, the ceramic bowl was passed up from the rug to the adults on the couch. *Davy Crockett* (Fess Parker) had just succeeded against all probability in eluding a band of Italian actors dressed as semi-naked savages. First his father and then his mother dipped their hands in the bowl, spilling kernels of popcorn on themselves and the couch.

Linda Morgan shook salt from a shaker over the bowl and returned it to the children on the rug. Sounds of a frontier conflagration permeated the room. The audience was catatonic. At the peak of the drama, the *Disney Special* was interrupted by a commercial sponsor who attempted to convince 12,500,263 viewers in less than 60 seconds they needed a specific brand of liquid dish soap to return their dishes *to a sparkling clean condition*. Germs portrayed as anthropocentric bubbles with broken teeth were dispatched down the vortex of a whirlpool at the bottom of a kitchen sink. Then Davy Crockett (Fess Parker) was shown again, engaged in hand-to-hand combat with actors in black mustaches at the *Battle of the Alamo*. In the sixty minute epic *manifest destiny* was the underlying theme: immigrants were taking possession of a new continent by any form of expedient action. Though never stated during *the viewing pleasure for the entire family*, violence and genocide were deemed noble pursuits. Sales of the liquid dish soap increased tenfold. Like a shadow, Jared slipped away in to the soft embrace of the night.

The room enshrining the TV had been Jared's from birth. His cradle had been replaced by a surplus bed from St. Jude Medical Centre. But the arrival of a TV and roof top antennae exiled the teenager to a small room in one corner of the basement of the house. After passing lines of wet laundry, past washtubs and a cluttered workbench, his new quarters provided one advantage: private egress to the night of the city. The *More* boy had freedom handed over on a silver platter.

Gino Morgan rationalized the displacement of his son from the upstairs room with the excuse it gave the boy the opportunity to study in peace and quiet after school. Without a second thought, Jared used the private egress to have a girl in the neighborhood, Snejana Gait, spend a night with him at the end of the month when she was on one of her first periods. He'd soak the bedsheets in a washtub of bleach afterward to get rid of any stains. But the indiscretion became public when Snejana confessed to her father's threats where she had spent the night. The Gait family was outraged and the Morgans shocked. Snejana was sent to a clinic to have a pregnancy test and warned never to see the Morgan boy again under any circumstance. That was fine with Jared. He had gotten what he wanted and found amusement in defending himself against such prudes: *Whats the big deal? Nothing happened! We're just friends.*

Likewise, at school, Jared listened less to his teachers and more to his hormones. In one assembly, Mr. Rawley arranged for a panel of psychologists to discuss the phenomena of growing social unrest amongst youths in the '60s. While the student body sat and listen in deference, the experts labeled the younger generation as *alienated*; they were described not as students but as something akin to aliens from another galaxy. But at the same time the psychologists failed to identify a subculture of young men like Jared Morgan who lived like voles in basement rooms throughout the city. Neither did they discuss the obvious that at night their friends tapped on their basement windows, encouraging them to come out and run with the pack. Jared was answering that summons on a summer night.

As the patriarch of his family, Gino Morgan reserved time at the dinner table to talk about solid *family values* to his three children. "Common sense isn't common after all," he'd pass along from something he'd read in a Reader's Digest in the waiting room of a dentist's office. His children exchanged glances. Another boring lecture over dinner had commenced. Daddy would begin by reminding them for the umpteenth time how fortunate they were he was a hospital cleaner at St. Jude Medical Centre in the downtown core.

"Its a steady work," he'd confide. "It puts food on the table and pays the rent." Making a pay cheque was the only accomplishment that mattered; people would always get sick and need to go to the hospital. Their father was there with his mop and cleaning fluids ready to keep the place germ free.

"Let me tell you," he'd continue, "there's nothing demeaning about cleaning up after other people. *A friend in need is a friend indeed.*" He smiled, having repeated the cliches hundreds of times until he was convinced they were beyond question.

Jared poked his fork in to his potato. If anything, he resented having to hear the same junk science from the dumbos who ran his life like penitentiary wardens. Now was the time to blow those smug psychos at the assembly out of the water.

"Even if it means doing shift work for forty-five boring years?" he said, pointing out the obvious downside to his father's sermon.

"Job security!" Gino Morgan snapped back. "In the end, your reliable old daddy will get a pension and be put out to pasture. That's what all those young nurses call me at work: Mr. Reliable.

Always ready with my mop and disinfected bed pans!”

“Who says *Mr. Reliable* will be around to collect your Timex?” Jared rejoined. “The way you look you’ll be gone and forgotten long before your pension comes due.”

Jared’s two siblings laughed. Their older brother was smarter than their father, a punster who could poke fun at the adults and the ridiculous things they said and did. Linda left the table to clean the pots on the kitchen counter. Her husband and her eldest boy were always at logger heads.

“You young people have it *too damn easy*. You want everything without making any sacrifices!” Daddy pushed his meal aside. His hands shook at the slightest hint of conflict.

“Your lousy *me generation* doesn’t know what real hardship feels like. I was flying in Lancasters when I was your age!” Gino’s bloodshot eyes were distracted, recounting the mental breakdown he had suffered in the European *theater of war*. He had spent his nights trying not to drown in anxiety.

“We bombed their cities from 6000 feet and they shot back shrapnel at us!” Gino gripped the edge of the table as if the kitchen had taken flight.

“That air borne tin can would shake in every rivet when those shells went off anywhere near us in the clouds!”

The table with its plates and cutlery shook in response to his grasp at sanity. A conscript’s descent back to the hell of an air battle was accelerating. But the war meant nothing to the next generation. Jared was cool and detached, enjoying the power he held over this father. Fumbling to extract pictures from his wallet, Gino was indignant at the sight of aerial photos taken by bombers over cities like Munich and Stuttgart. He could hear the whistle of bombs falling from the open belly of his Lancaster. The war had been over for 24 years. Jared reminded him:

“Pops, we’ve seen those pictures hundreds of times. If the allies would have lost the war, you’d all have been hung as war criminals.”

The younger Morgan children laughed again. Daddy didn’t look so *adult* when his complexion was flushed. A sunburn appeared on his neck and face when challenged about his role in the war. A few of their teachers were Quakers. Wars were the result of flaws in people and political systems.

Gino turned his eyes around the room, watching for the Messerschmitt that had circled their bomber before opening a deadly fusillade. He was on his feet, ready to parachute out of an open bay door. The walls of the kitchen were the same color as those in the prisoner of war camp. He was a few breaths away from an attack of asthma.

“You kids are lucky to be alive in this day and age,” he wheezed. “Our aircrews lost their lives so you could have a better one! Those teachers of yours don’t know what they are talking about. The war gave the world more than just *seven years of plenty!*”

“Hardly,” rejoined his son. “You’re so well off you ride a bicycle to work.” Jared’s siblings laughed once more. The idea of their father pedaling off to work on a bicycle during *years of plenty* was hilarious. “All you’d have to do is grow a beard and you’d pass for Rabbi Kamiskie on his way to the synagogue,” Jared directed an amused smirk towards his brother and sister.

Gino moved backwards until he was against the counter. His hands responded to a tremor. He quoted from Father Mapple’s sermon of a previous Sunday: “You’re passing yourself off as some *Joseph* in Egypt. Just wait until your generation are in control. Every last one of you’d make the world worse for the rest of us.”

“You’re right,” Jared agreed. “You’d have to bow down in front of my throne to get anything to eat. Then maybe it’s not that much different than getting a pay stub from the medical centre every two weeks.”

Linda wiped her hands on her apron. The handsome cadet she had watched sail off in to the blue horizon in 1941 came back with a broken psyche. As a mother and wife, she had spent decades putting the pieces of a rubik’s cube back in place.

“Let’s be thankful for what we do have,” Linda reminded her family. Then to her son, she said, “You stop your smart ass remarks to your father! For one last time: *Do-you-hear-me?*”

Rather than reply, Jared left the dinner table. At a back corner of the kitchen a narrow passage led to the basement. His cell was walled off by bare studs covered on the inside by sheet rock. A small electric heater moderated the dampness in the enclosure. Jared tossed himself on to his metal cot. He had been rebuffed again. He didn’t like it one bit. His mother had taken *Daddy’s* side in the exchange, even though he was the weaker combatant of the two.

Staring at the ceiling, Jared listened as his family moved over to the room above his own to congregate around the TV set. He could hear his little sister, Suzie, switching around channels looking for the right comedy or soap opera. Disjointed scripts from the TV filtered through the ceiling of his bedroom, like water running through a sieve. Upstairs his family settled on Channel 5 for the evening news.

Walter Cronkite's resonate tone described an endless series of assassinations and conquests for CBS. Jared got up from his bed to dislodge a panel on the back wall of his cramped room. After taking advantage of Snejana, he had been ingenious in finding a new outlet. This private craving had both name and character. He called it his *inner sanctum*.

Paneled wood stairs leading up to the front porch of the house attached to the back wall of his basement room. Having cut open a panel in the wall of his bedroom, a crawl space was available under the stairs. His *sanctum* was a tiny but private cave.

An extension cord allowed the heater to operate in the alcove. A lantern ran on batteries. Like a Sistine fresco, Jared took pleasure in pasting collages of nudes to the walls and ceiling of his meditation retreat. The pictures of modern nymphs came from an assortment of magazines dedicated to *the entertainment and amusement of men*. His mother's picture as a young woman in a dress of calico was at the center of an overhead collage along with pictures of models in swimsuits from a Sears' summer catalog. For repose in the cellar, Jared squeezed a deflated camping mattress through the opening between wall studs. After centering with deep breaths, Jared lay on his back, exploring the connection between personal wealth and a brothel of women. He could almost touch the image of his mother's delicate face, frozen in place by the time machine of a camera. As a recent addition to his harem, a picture of Shelly Freeman had been added to his collage of nudes. After stealing a *Yearbook* from another student, Jared snipped out Shelly Freeman's head from pictures taken of her participating in Roseville's extracurricular activities. Her cameo with its long hair and engaging smile was pasted over the face of a nude model. The composite turned Shelly Freeman in to an exhibitionist with a large bust and wide hips; the model's fingers toyed with her pubic hair.

*More's* experiences in the *inner sanctum* were liminal, a sanctuary his mind would instinctively turn towards no matter how many women he professed to love in future marriages. Even as the youth lay alone in that private space reaching towards one more plateau, a battlefield of words drifted down to him from the upstairs TV. The deference Linda Morgan had shown him as a child remained as little more than a distant echo:

*After passing through the metal fingers of turnstiles at the National Exhibition, his mother had given the boy a dollar from her shoulder purse. With the bill waving like a flag, Jared dodged through the crowds towards a booth where .22 rifles were lined along a counter. The price at the arcade was six shots for one dollar. On the opposite wall, rows of decoys moved in ranks behind tiers of painted waves. Jared barely took aim, pumping out a succession of bullets with his trigger finger. The ducks continued moving across the diorama as though nothing had happened. Was it possible to have missed the target six times in succession? Were the bullets blanks? Jared looked with disappointment at the proprietor, holding the empty .22 in his hands.*

*The obese proprietor stood back with his hands in his apron, fingering the easy money to be made from the distemper of boys and men. Rows of his rifles were loaded and chained in place, waiting for the next group of psychotics. He had these little buggers figured out. Sure, the kid could have a second chance but only if he could be trusted not to go to the police afterward.*

Images papering his inner sanctum left Jared craving for the feel of a rifle stock. It would take more than six shots to take down an entire world.

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Jared thought he might be late. The rendezvous point was still several blocks in the distance. The commercial frenzy of the city had ended at nightfall, permitting him to slip off in to the anonymity of a summer evening. This feeling of solitude was comfortable. Shuffling like a dancer on a tight wire, the boy took up the words to a popular song on AM radio, singing the refrain - *You've got to live for yourself / for yourself and nobody else*. He was responsible for his own pleasures. He didn't need to listen or take dirt from nobody.

Trees stood in file along the street, their canopies glowing in the light of street lamps. The doors to a few homes stood open. Groups of immigrants in sleeveless t-shirts were gathered around tables playing cards and listening to music from Italy or the Ukraine. They laughed as some lost and others won at cards. A few loitered on their dark porches, smoking cigarettes and conversing in whispers. They stopped talking when a figure passed them in a leather windbreaker and Redman sneakers.

Jared also slipped past an old farmhouse in disrepair but was too distracted with the time he'd spend with Lee Chan and the others to notice the danger he was near. He ran a comb through his hair, pulling the strands away from his forehead and back towards his neck just as Eddy Byrnes did on *77 Sunset Strip*. The *Elvis* look was in fashion; slick hair, side burns, and dovetails at the back of the neck.

The media supplied Jared and his friends with roles to imitate. Such that the teenage star Eddy Byrnes fit the mold of an Elvis Presley but only after an exhaustive audition of hundreds in the Los Angeles area. As a pretender to the throne, Byrnes was encouraged on camera to simultaneously smile, chew gum, and comb his hair. His nickname on the serial was *Cookie* and a theme song was played every time he appeared on the screen. The actor's confidence came from the awareness he could pass himself off as the photocopy of another media star. The pretension of a nation of recruits to the *Elvis* persona was that scores of young women would become hysterical the moment they walked out on stage or - as with Jared and friends - the moment they slipped in to their *inner sanctums*. It never seemed to occur to any of them that they were as indoctrinated (some would go so far as to say *brainwashed*) as any who had been sent to *reorientation* camps. Instead their elders like Cronkite lectured them on the responsibilities of defending their democratic way of life.

Ahead in the darkness, a parking lot opened up like the empty space of an amphitheater. Yellow light pooled below lamps fixed in concrete pods. Jared hung back for a brief second. Though abandoned, the space reminded him of the previous summer. The open field of Hastings Park had been filled by the tents and paraphernalia of a carnival. Rather than enjoy the distractions, Jared ended up cradling another boy's face in his arms on the way to the medical centre. Five of his friends had gone to the carnival together, wandering around the concessions, taking rides like *Helter Skelter* and *Earth Shaker*; listening to the hawkers promise stuffed toys if their clients could knock down a pyramid of bowling pins or drive a weight up to the top of a scale with a sledge hammer. Groups of girls gathered around rides and the boys spent time gawking at women in heavy makeup and toreador pants who were with older men. But another group from Richelieu Academy accosted Jared and his friends in the throng of people.

One of the group recognized Jared as the *More* kid who had shouted insults at his team members during their basketball playoff. Neither of the boys gave a hoot about school loyalty but it became an excuse to spark a fight. A blond senior from the rich boys' clique began taunting Jared, calling him a *more-on*. Jared's friends tried to avoid them in the crowd but the taunting got louder and more cutting. Frauleins in their summer dresses turned and laughed. The Richelieu crowd had taken up a chant, shouting as a group *Moron! Moron! Moron!* Jared and his friends dispersed towards the parking lot but the blond youth caught up to Jared at the toll kiosk. Taunting him to stand and fight, the youth was so sure of himself in front of his friends he tossed a knife on the pavement at Jared's feet. On an impulse, Jared lunged at the knife and flashed it at his antagonist. Blood from the boy's face followed the sweep of the blade. The blond youth fell to his knees with a cry, holding his face in both hands. Everyone scattered. The parking attendant in the kiosk intervened. First Aid attendants from a trailer on the grounds swarmed the area. A wet cloth was applied to the wound but it was soon soaked in blood. *I'm his brother*, Jared told the paramedics as he cradled the boy's head, holding the towel over the open wound. On the way to the medical centre in a taxi, the blond student sobbed in his arms. When questioned by the police, Jared tried to lie but there were too many witnesses.

The empty lot stood ahead of him like an accusation. His year long sentence of probation was over. Jared looked at his hands and clothes. Stains of blood could be washed away but not his regrets. Jared shrugged, telling himself: *he asked for it*. Then another memory. Earlier in the summer Jared and his friend Shriver plied Lee Chan with cheap vodka at a party given by Shriver's girlfriend, Patti Boilet. It didn't take much before Chan was staggering around the neighborhood. Nothing could have been more comic than watching their fat little buddha friend falling all over himself. Wrapping his arms around one of the lamp posts in the parking lot, he babbled that the street lamps looked like *drooping flowers*. The real world was fake. On the grass perimeter, Chan threw up the contents of his stomach while Jared and Shriver taunted him he wasn't *caucasian enough* to hold down his alcohol.

Moving across the parking lot, Jared noticed that the octagonal lamp posts were in fact painted green like the stems of giant flowers. *That dumb shit wasn't that far off*. A grid of white lines marked the area in the parking lot where a legion of cars would park during store hours.

At the far end of the asphalt, a wall of glass formed the storefront of a *Safeway* food market.

The store outlet was one of a chain, built like identical pods across the city. The headlights of a few cars flitted past on the main highway. His friends had been told to pick him up in the parking lot at 9:15 sharp. *Where the hell are they?* Forced to wait even for a few minutes left him edgy. A police cruiser passed in the distance. Did they have his name on file along with the information about the incident at the carnival? His lawyer pleaded *self defense* to a bovine judge who looked over the accused with amused interest. *White specks of sand built up a tiny island in the hourglass. 1 hour 35 minutes 17 seconds.*

Buildings on all sides were separated by a vacuum of dark spaces. Eyes rather than stars filled the night, watching his every move: the police; those people on their porches; teachers and parents; even that old hag out watering near her creepy house. He needed to phone Lee Chan's home number, find out why he was late. But he didn't have the right change in his pocket when he stood in the booth on the corner of the parking lot. Hours not minutes were passing. Jared slammed the folding doors in frustration. *Would Shelly Freeman be in the back of Chan's pickup?* She was friends with Mattie Andres, the space cadet who kept pestering him in school with her poems and notes: *I need you more than you can imagine. You're my every breath. Your softest kiss will drive me insane – I love you always – Mattie A.* And more recently phone calls to his house. On her last call, Jared gave her an ultimatum, telling her if she wanted to join Chan and the others she had to bring along her friend Shelly Freeman – or she couldn't call his house again.

Even if Mattie didn't show up with Shelly Freeman, other girls would come along for the ride. Leah Harris always ran with the pack; and Patti Boilet whose parents were drunks and never cared where she was or what she was doing.

Of the guys, it was the same few who like Jared cruised the city in the evenings. During the week, Chan's father used his F100 to deliver produce from the Asian farms in the delta to a chain of family markets around the city. On Saturday evenings, Chan was given the keys to the truck when his father settled down to play keno and drink saki with his friends. Word passed like a wild fire through Jared's crowd in high school they had a free ride available.

Except for the pickup, few in the school would have given Chan a second chance but the truck was his passport to inclusion. His *fair weather* friends could go out for a lark on his ticket.

At 17, Shriver and Patti were pushing the envelope, bragging to the others at the school about their nuptial exploits. They had a tattered book they passed around, showing any number of different positions they were free to explore. As the alpha male and female of the group, they always rode up front in the cab next to Chan. Jared and the rest of his friends piled in to the back of the truck's open bed. After that first cruise, Patti networked for the them, putting out word to the prima donnas in the school. Soon other Lolitas as young as 14 were making arrangements to be picked up on dark corners. Then the suggestion came from Billy Green they dig out an old mattress from his parents' garage. The mattress got tossed in to the back of the pickup like contraband. The stakes just got higher. There was the chance, the intimation, it would be put to good use. The game had gotten more risqué.

It was past 9:15 and his magic carpet of metal still hadn't appeared. Jared's frustrations were raw. He could hear the taunt – *Moron! Moron!* – to the point he couldn't control his anger. As if holding a knife in one hand, he slashed at open space. But he calmed down soon afterward, fighting for control of his distemper. Waiting was not an option inside his *inner sanctum*. Still he stood alone, like a painting by an impressionist entitled *The John*. For distraction, he took out a package of cigarettes and book of matches from the pocket of his windbreaker. The habit of smoking was cool, a stepping stone towards manhood. Movie stars chain smoked, even in westerns. Jared lit up and inhaled, his features neolithic in the firelight. *Exhale*. Smoke cascaded out of his lungs and nostrils. With a cigarette dangling from his lips, Jared slipped in to the fictional gestures of his movie icons. The windows of the Safeway rose as a mirror to the roof of the building. The transparent image of an angelic face stared back at Jared Morgan. Little else mattered beyond the ghost in the window.

Indulging his ego, Jared was skilled at assuming the disguise of others like Elvis Presley, Robert Mitchum, and now (for a fleeting moment) John Wayne with a cigarette dangling from his lips.

Inhale. Even with the sedative, the delay continued to irritate him like a skin disease. As if in Chan's oval face, he snapped his fingers at his own image in the glass and fumed, *Hurry up, jerk!* A moment later he opted for another identity. Reverting to a copy of Eddy Byrnes, Jared took his comb and teased aside the locks on his forehead. The girls in his school considered him *cute*. Jared assured himself he had a right to any of the girls at school he wanted just like the actors portraying gangsters could have any number of women they wanted too. Maybe this was why Chan was late. The truck had taken a detour to pick up the mattress. Otherwise the night was shot. Time was passing. *Tiny grains of sand made an inaudible impact, falling as if from nowhere. 1 hour 26 minutes 4 seconds.*

Jared paced the sidewalk looking through the windows of the *Safeway*. The produce was arranged under sheets of cellophane. The floors reflected the glare of an array of overhead florescent lights. Posters in huge letters advertised special prices and sales on a range of products from the four corners of the world such as grapefruit, pineapples, and toilet paper. A dozen cash registers blocked the exit. *The land of milk and honey* demanded payment in full and at fixed prices.

Occasionally the headlights from passing vehicles arced across the surface of the glass like beads of electrical fire. Forced to linger on the sidewalk, Jared's physical presence was monitored by a surveillance camera, one of hundreds which stood guard throughout the city. Those who took a walk in the evening or those who joined a demonstration on the steps of City Hall were kept under surveillance by the omniscient eyes of cameras. Even at Roseville, cameras stood watch over the hallways and entrances of the school such that a code phrase would be broadcast on the PA system when an intruder was detected entering the building.

Voices dogged Jared's thoughts like transcripts from a tape recorder. A deluge of words turned his mind in to a battlefield of conflicting theologies: *Ask not what your country can do for you...float like a butterfly, sting like a bee...we'll all be world famous for 15 minutes...better dead than red...the content of his character not the color of his skin....no one has the right to take the life of another human being...give me liberty or give me death.*

The desperation of a dysfunctional world poured through his basement ceiling at news time. His conscious mind was a liquid not a wall and saturated. Yet there was an amusing part: his father. Gino Morgan had the habit of coming home from work and laying down for a nap on the couch in the TV room, often with the news blaring in the background. The old codger had mastered the knack of snoring his way through the televised mayhem of the twentieth century. Jared took pleasure in watching his father jolt in his sleep while the news casts described the collateral damage of napalm and insurgencies.

Traffic passed on the main road. Jared glared back at the drivers. Finally a vehicle flashed its high beams from a distance. *Ljssel Jacobson took a light sip of her wine. 1 hour 26 minutes.*

The truck approached at high speed. Patti's face was between Lee Chan and Shriver in the front cab. She waved through the windshield as the truck approached. *This feels good.* Their crowd was together again; nothing else mattered. Other faces lined the back bed like targets at an arcade. The pickup was full for an evening run. The rear wheels left a patch of smoke when Chan shifted down, exploiting the calibration between the engine and the transmission. The truck packed a Y-V8 as its power train. With help in shop class, Chan managed to bypass one of the mufflers. The sound was impressive when Chan pushed the F100 past its threshold.

Across from the parking lot, faces in the pickup turned to look in Jared's direction. Chan shouted, "Come on, *More Boy*, climb aboard!" Jared flew across a grid work of white lines like a track athlete. Rear tires bite in to the roadway the moment his hands took hold of the rim and his body was suspended in the air. The momentum threw Jared face down on to an old mattress. The others in the pickup laughed at his mischance even as he scrambled against one side of the truck bed, between several friends.

Though it may have appeared otherwise, the moment he joined the group, the others had little or no choice but to be swept in to the undertow of his vortex.

Ten of them were together for the evening. Four *accomplices in crime* lined one side of the truck bed and girls with bathing suit tans were on the opposite side, sitting with their arms wrapped around their legs. Between them, the mattress was a stretch of no-man's-land.

The pickup did a U turn in the street and raced across several empty lanes, proceeding south towards Broadway.

Jared was smug with elation. *Shelly Freeman* had come along, sitting between Mattie Andres on her left and Leah Harris near the back of the enclosed cab. Mattie had wedged herself in the corner where the tail gate locked in place. Shelly sat alone it seemed, facing Jared. The arrangement meant nothing as far as she was concerned, an act of mischance. It was a painful fact she didn't belong in this group. Mattie had begged her on the phone to come with her *just this once*, to bolster her chances with Jared Morgan. He was so *cute*, she pleaded, so *adorable*. On the receiving side of the nuisance call Shelly had scorn on her face and agreed to come along but for her own motives. As far as she was concerned, Roseville was an intermediary step towards more achievement and higher caliber people. Her yellow brick road leading to Emerald City was *long and winding*. But she had yet to break ties with people such as Mattie Andres whose foibles were as transparent as her fixation on a moron like Jared Morgan. But she came along *just this once* if only to get a clinical look at her friend's obsession like dissecting specimens in Science class. This, she thought, was guaranteed to be an eye opener. Perhaps it was from being on stage with Aguilar but she had to admit Jared fascinated her a little like lifting up a snake on a long stick. Sure, he strutted around in tight jeans like a stud pony and made asides in class that could be amusing. But he was also a trouble maker with a short fuse who went around stabbing people in the face. And just listen to what he bragged of doing with Snejana Gait! Did Mattie really think he was capable of maintaining a decent relationship? Would he make a good provider and father to her children? *What was Mattie thinking?*

The warm night air was refreshing. Shelly looked away, regretting the flaws in her character that enticed her to come along. Mattie's nonsense on the phone amounted to: *Jared said this to me; and he did that or this a year ago*. A mirror stood above the phone in the hallway of the Freeman home. She listened, staring in to her own eyes until she made the decision to teach *Little Miss Muffet* a lesson she'd never forget. The impulse was whispered in her ear as by a viper in a tree. She'd reduce her naive sister to tears when her exhibitionist in tight pants made it obvious he wanted something better than anything Mattie Andres could offer him. Shelly knew for a fact her own nude image was up on the wall in Jared's so-called *inner sanctum*. She'd come along if only to kill two birds with one stone.

Mattie gushed her appreciation, setting a time to be picked up at the corner of Adanac by Patti and the others. Hanging up the phone, Shelly said out of spite, "This should be interesting." It won't require a lengthy rehearsal.

With the wind tossing her hair in the truck, Shelly was back on stage. Across from her, her new *Lucifer* with a baby face was convinced every gesture his debutante made was performed with the explicit intention of attracting his attention: an expression she made or changed; the clothes she wore or didn't wear; gestures such as the shifting of her head to one side; the beating of her heart and finally her every breath. Everything Shelly did from the moment Jared entered the prison walls of the truck bed became his focus. With dopamine infusing his brain, the blood began to flow between his legs. Shelly Jane Freeman couldn't live a moment longer without the rapture of having him between her legs.

In a few seconds, Shelly accepted her error in judgment. This script belonged to the theater of the absurd. Backing out from her part in the play wasn't possible. She lowered her eyes and looked away, caught like a gazelle between cross hairs. Chan geared down at a corner before spinning the entire truck on an acute turn. Smoke rose from the asphalt where the tires made contact. Shelly reproached herself for such having a callow motive. *Lover boy* was sitting across from her, undressing her with his eyes. *What's that mattress doing in the truck anyways?* She was affronted. *Mattie never said anything about any mattress! The time ran down to 1 hour 20 minutes 12 seconds.*

Even as Jared's eyes assessed her, she sat despising everything about him but primarily his presumption. Not that she wasn't beautiful but rather that he held *himself* in the highest regard. She wasn't fooled. The seniors were talking and laughing amongst themselves in the washroom how Jared had a picture of his mother up on the wall alongside his collection of nudes. These *Paul Morels* would have sex with their own mothers if they thought they could get away it. *Does he think women that cheap or what?* She fumed, trying to maintain her composure. *I've got to get out of here. Even Shakespeare couldn't dream up a bigger cast of lunatics.*

The vortex held each of them on the periphery of its centrifugal field. Artificial light filled the empty streets. People were home with their families, watching TV or preparing for the next day of work.

At best Shelly could disengage after making a few carefully placed excuses. She wanted above all to apologize to her friend saying *I'm so sorry, Mattie. I didn't mean to hurt you like this*. It was too late for an apology. *1 hour 18 minutes 7 seconds*.

Though Patti had been spoken for in the front cab, the young women in the back of the pickup were fair game. Puckie Green might engage Leah or Mattie in a wrestling match on the mattress just as easily as Danny *Psycho* Chisham might pick out either of the same girls. Mattie would have gone along with it if she thought it would make Jared jealous. But the real prospect of being violated brought Shelly to the edge of panic. She'd defend herself at all costs, even if it meant being choked. For the moment though she was *off limits* to any of the others as far as Jared was concerned. But he just didn't get the rest of the script. She was off limits to himself as well. The type of men Shelly Freeman most admired were those Jared Morgan couldn't toss off his turf. She wanted a Sir Galahad or Tagore in her life who'd encourage her to scale any pinnacle. Instead this deadbeat in a dirty truck had her by the ankles and was dragging off the cliff face. Her hands clung to cold rock. It took nothing more than a gesture or glance between the two of them to have Jared consider her as his *property* like a car or motorcycle. Even if the other girls in the truck found satisfaction in satiating the drives of primates like a *Green* or a *Fosse* or, as with Mattie, *Morgan the privateer*; the idea was so venial to Shelly, she put her head down, stifling a laugh.

Ljssel Jacobson wet her lips as if in communion with the blood and tears of Christ. 1 hour 15 minutes 7 seconds.

Of those in the truck, Shelly regarded Chisham as the least predictable. Curled in a corner, he was preoccupied with whatever rolled around in the cage of his mind. During childhood, his parents had the habit of dropping him off with strangers while they traveled to Las Vegas and Reno to play the slot machines and take in the floor shows. Now as a teen, they badgered him to become a professional for the family name and reputation. The girls at school regarded him as pathological. Each time there was news of the rape and murder of an elderly woman on the east side, they wondered among themselves if Chisham wasn't the culprit. Perhaps not now but in the future. For this summer, like with Leah Harris and Mattie Andres, *Psycho* could be counted on coming back for the thrill of another night run.

Looking over her shoulder, Patti gave a signal to one of the other girls. Then she turned back towards the hood of the truck, encouraging Chan to press the gas pedal deeper to the floor. The needle on the gauge showed they had a full tank of high octane. They could drive for most of the night and never consider pulling in to a gas station. *One hour 12 minutes 57 seconds.*

The group careened around a labyrinth of surreal streets on the lower east side. Freight yards and warehouses were illuminated under flood lights. Like travelers through a ghost town, the pickup raced through intersections. Nothing but the present moment mattered. The illusion of freedom disregarded the speed limit. Overhead, in some areas of the city, trees in bloom stood under the canopy of a dark sky. *1 hour 6 minutes.*

At a traffic light, an open jeep filled with college undergraduates pulled alongside. Shriver beat the door panel of the truck and shouted taunts at them but Chan took a quick left turn against a red light when the drunks piled out of the jeep. They were left standing in the street, shouting curses as the truck sped away in another direction. Acting deranged, Puckie Fosse gripped the back of the tailgate, yelling back in contempt. Jared stuck his fist in the air as a parting gesture. The jeep couldn't follow. They were free again, laughing amongst themselves. This felt good.

In a few short weeks, the rains would return and bells ring at 9 am. Hundreds of students throughout the city would be compelled to march like conscripts to their assigned places. In the months that followed, daylight would shorten with longer periods of overcast. Street lamps flashed on at the slightest suggestion of dusk. Back in their assigned roles, the students separated in to different groups. Shelly's friendship with Mattie would come to an end when Shelly didn't return any of her phone calls. Danny Chisham would be sent to sessions with a psychiatrist and be put on anti-depressants. The Boilet girl would discover she was pregnant and Jared Morgan would continue fighting with those he considered more important than himself. *One hour 3 minutes 10 seconds.*

As far as Shelly was concerned, the fake revelry in Chan's pickup had the markings of a delusion. For a moment, she was back under the glare of stage lights, misquoting Ophelia, *All the world's a dangerous illusion.* Within a year, several of the graduates were destined to join the establishment's *war machine* to wage battle against poor people in foreign

countries. Others like Danny Chisham would find themselves incapable of escaping a rainbow of addictions. Shelly Freeman would discover that the career she had in mind demanded not only commitment but also a terrifying leap of faith. Such were their lessons independent of any diploma. *The hourglass trickled down to 60 minutes.*

Chan raced their cabal through traffic lights turning scarlet before the front tires were safely on the opposite side of the intersection. Moments from causing an accident, vehicles braked in front of green lights, watching a truck full of exhibitionists endanger itself and others. Shriver yelled taunts at pedestrians and Chan leaned on his horn when vehicles got in the way. Seeking more distraction, Chan pulled in to an empty parking lot at another supermarket. A shopping cart had been left at the back of the lot. A conspiracy passed between them. Puckie tapped on the cab window, "Do you have any rope?"

The plan was mutual in the back of the truck. With a tether, they'd be able to drag the cart behind themselves through the streets. Jared and Puckie leaped out of the back of the truck bed and positioned the cart as a trailer behind the tailgate, tying it in place with a length of polypropylene. With the rope tied like reins to each side of the cart, two inside the truck held it in place by pressing their feet against the back gate.

They nominated *Psycho* to be the cosmonaut in the cart, now dubbed *Sputnik One*. Chisham did as he was told and clambered in to the metal basket. Chan and the others in the cab were laughing and waving thumbs up like three lunatics. "Blast off!" Jared yelled over his shoulder. A moment later the truck charged forward, dragging the cart behind them. The boys gesticulated behind themselves, "Faster...faster...faster!"

Chan climbed the speedometer up to 50 kilometers, running in a straight line through a confluence of side streets. An apron of sparks surrounded the cart wheels. Though moments away from serious injury (and scared witless) *Psycho* was screaming *Yahoo* over and over. Shelly laughed too and shouted for Chan to speed up even more. Instead the truck stopped. The bearings in the cart wheels had disintegrated. *Psycho* scrambled headlong out of the cart across the mattress and back in to his place in the pickup bed. He was gasping, exhilarated and hysterical. The girls were amused with his antics along with Chan and the others in the cab. *Forty-nine minutes.*

They pulled away with a squeal of their tires, leaving *Sputnik One* to topple in the middle of the road. A drive-in restaurant at Skeena and Hastings became their next destination. Racing through a confluence of residential streets, they finally re-entered the main highway. To amuse themselves, the girls began to plagiarize lines to popular songs, describing the angst and heartbreak of teenage life. Syndicated record companies paid to have their songs played under the rubric of *The Top Ten* on the music charts. The same songs were played for weeks and then months on end until they became the national anthem for an entire generation.

Picking a song, Leah started as the lead singer, her two sisters joining in as in a fraternity. The lyrics she chose were recorded by a group of pre-Janis Joplin teenyboppers from a borough in New York City. Leah Harris warned the juveniles in front of her *My boyfriend's back, so you better watch out / You're gonna be in trouble now*. Shelly and Mattie took up the chorus: *Hey la, Hey la, my boyfriend's back*. Leah continued with her lines of defective poetry, *My boyfriend's gonna save my reputation / If I were you I'd take a permanent vacation*. The voices of the other girls slid in to the groove, admonishing those opposite them in the truck that as young women they could not be vilified with impunity. Shelly made eye contact with Jared as she sang along with her friends.

Mattie Andres took her turn. She was in the Miss Ongaku's glee club and had been told she had a good voice. She enunciated the same attitude, crooning *I met him at the candy store / that's when I fell for* (the girls sang the next line in one harmony) *the leader of the pack*.

Finishing those lyrics, Mattie switched to the falsetto of a male voice and described how *I told my girl we had to break up / hoping she would call my bluff / then she said to my surprise, Big girls don't cry*. Leah and Shelly broke in with the chorus, confirming their resolve *Big girls don't cry / No they don't cry*.

Co-ordinated gestures accompanied the songs as for a stage performance. Shelly was back in her element, posturing on stage with hundreds of people spellbound by her presence. Placing one hand under the elbow of an arm raised upwards, they looked as if they were directing traffic using hand signals. *Big girls don't cry*.

The pickup waited for the traffic light at Hastings Intersection to change.

The drive-in with its stalls for cars was a few blocks away. It was Shelly's turn as the lead vocal. She chose an Elvis original with a provocative theme: *Its Now or Never*. She threw her head back and gave the boys in the truck an ultimatum: *Its now or never / be mine tonight / tomorrow will be too late / my love won't wait / Cry me an ocean / if we lose true love and sweet devotion*. With meticulous restraint, Shelly mocked Jared Morgan's possessive dharma: *Let your arms invite me / for who knows when we'll meet again this way*.

Forty three minutes. Shelly could have been performing at Stratford, flippant even as she begged for attention, a surrogate lover with a broken wing. The four boys gawked with open mouths like a band of spellbound chimpanzees. Behind his eyes, Jared was back in the dark auditorium of the school, watching Shelly Freeman receive an ovation. Envy ignited a new game of roulette. His pupils retracted, aligning the sights at the end of a barrel. The magazine held an identical number of shots as at the arcade. No one need ever know what the second round of shooting had cost him. The traffic lights continued changing, moving through a program of signals which permitted cars to turn or proceed in 16 different lanes at the major intersection.

The east signal flipped on its green eye. Chan wheeled his father's delivery truck in to the lot surrounding the drive-in. Almost all of the stalls were taken by others out cruising for the weekend. Motorists turned their attention to the arrival of a pickup full of delinquents. Chan's group thrived on notoriety. In the parking lot, they indulged the image they were cool and tough; the young women in the group incorrigible. Chan raced his V-8, impatiently waiting for another car to free up a stall.

Once parked, the boys sauntered like tough guys to the restaurant, followed by their women. Above the counters, a menu displayed photographs of grilled meat layered between varnished buns and strips of melting cheese. Tumblers several times larger than normal were tilted to one side, spilling off pink and green malts. Fish and chips were pushed across the counter in paper bags. Utensils of white plastic filled bins at the end of the counter. Staff in stainless steel kitchens worked an assembly line, serving hundreds of transients.

“What can I get you?” Jared asked. Shelly was staring up at the overhead menu. She avoided this type of processed food. Further she resented his question. Morgan was hitting on her. Even making eye contact was dangerous.

“I haven’t decided,” she said, concentrating as if the menu was a blank surface. “What about you, Mattie?”

“Billie said he’d get us something,” she volunteered, hoping the statement would put Jared in his place. She glanced back at the people in the open booths who were looking over their group as if they had arrived from another planet. She liked getting attention but this type of staring was rude. Bobby and Patti were clinging to each other in the queue. “Hey,” *Psycho* interjected, “look at this one!”

A white convertible with the top down pulled in to the parking lot. A driver and his paramour were in the front seat, consumed in public by passion for one another. The convertible drove slowly around three sides of the drive-in as if on automatic pilot. Those in the parking lot were amused. Chan’s group followed the car’s slow progress along one side of the drive-in and transferred their attention to the other side when the convertible re-appeared at the opposite window. Men made lewd comments and whistled to express their approval. The convertible then merged with the flow of traffic on the main avenue. Morgan moved closer to Shelly. *Why doesn’t this guy just bugger off!* She excused herself, moving away before he had the opportunity to paw her as his pet fifi. Alone in a restroom scarred with lesbian graffiti and telephone numbers, Shelly flipped through her purse but didn’t have enough money to call a taxi and return home. Patti came in to the room after her. “You okay, Shell?” she asked. And Shelly said, “Yes, yes, I’m fine.” *Twenty five minutes.*

At the counter, the balance of the order was served and taken out to the pickup by Chisham acting as the menial of the group. Chan stayed in the cab of the truck. His malt was passed to him through an open window. *Psycho* waited on the tarmac until the others jumped in to the back of the truck, lifting the tray out of his hands. The food would turn their race through the streets in to a carnival. Under the hood, the engine came back to life in a cloud of octane.

Shelly had decided to take a bus back home but upon leaving the restroom the pickup was directly in front of her path. The vacuum at the center of the vortex was overpowering. Rather than risk an assault by hyenas at night, she rejoined the group. Shelly was pulled up and over the side of the pickup bed.

Dozens of heads turned in their direction. The vagabonds were back in the same situation. *Twenty minutes worth of time remained between themselves and the last grain of sand.*

A trail of refuse spiraled behind the pickup. Shelly sat curled up in a tight envelope of tension, struggling with depression. She regretted every second spent with Andres and her uncouth friends. The girls were separated from their aggressors by the chasm of a pee stained mattress. Shelly looked away when Morgan caught her looking at the mattress. Her fear made conquest all the more alluring. Time was running out. He wanted her *now*. She was stalling yet had gotten back in to the truck of her own free will. *She has no damn right to refuse.* Venting his temper, Morgan tossed his tumbler out of the pickup. The plastic lid held the contents in place until it exploded like a container of paint on the asphalt. His friends in the truck cheered the impact. Chan beat on the horn, watching the antics in his side mirror. Shelly stiffened. They were planning on making a detour so that Jared could have his friends help him assault her. The girls would stand around in a group and pretend they didn't know what was happening. She should have stayed in that dirty bathroom until they left without her. Sitting next to her in the truck, her friend Mattie Andres was close to tears: the boy she craved to serve was ignoring her in preference for the intoxicating scent of new orchid. Shelly didn't have the least bit of interest. Every girl in her school was talking about what he and that pedophile at the shooting arcade had done together.

The truck was racing to nowhere. Implicated by the association of her sex, Shelly couldn't escape becoming a bridesmaid to a truckload of succubi waltzing down an aisle to the tune of *Here Comes the Bride*. Hormones belong to wild horses. The capricious exchange of vows didn't interest her in the least. *The sands continued spiraling through the vortex of the cincture: 16 minutes 29 seconds.*

Morgan reached across the mattress in an attempt to coerce her but she pulled back in to a tighter package. Nicotine contaminated the taste of his lips. *Finally* - he got the message. Jared James Morgan wasn't *good enough* for Shelly Jane Freeman. He watched as the neon backdrop of the city flashed behind the beautiful cameo of her face. *Psycho* pulled his jerkin over his head and lit a cigarette. The mattress was empty. *The old woman was cataleptic, listening for the impact of the last grain of sand.*

Psycho passed the cigarette to Billy Green and after taking a few drags, Billy passed it along. But Jared used the end to light the tip of another from the package in his coat pocket. Taking a few drags, he slipped inside the protective shell of a John Wayne – or any other film star he cared to emulate. Grey smoke cascaded from his lungs, unraveling on the wind. Shelly stifled a laugh. Every attempt that made Jared cavalier in Mattie’s eyes made him a bigger fool to her. She thought: *Go get a life!*

(It would *however* be interesting to speculate on a different outcome if by some mischance Eros out of cupidity enticed Shelly to become infatuated with the *More* character. As an understatement, her parents would have been infuriated, vehemently blocking any such connection. They didn’t want him *or* his family anywhere near their circle of social elites. Concurring with Jared’s attitude, for them it didn’t matter one iota that Gino Morgan had once risked his life in the cumulonimbus above Berlin. Their daughter would marry up the social ladder or not at all. Mrs. Freeman regarded her daughter’s intellect as worthy of raising their status to social connections of the best quality). *Seven minutes.*

The pickup roared past another vehicle waiting at a sign on a side street. A dented sedan patched with body filler spun behind the pickup. High beams fixed against their bumper. Under an after market scoop on the hood, eight cylinders respired with fuel injection. *Six minutes.*

Chan’s load of passengers looked back at the faces of two nonentities with shaved heads. Chignon and Delanie were out cruising the town for the weekend, looking like wolves to cull the weakest of the herd. The gas peddle on the floor of the sedan mitigated the boredom of a pair of sociopaths working in dirty low paying apprenticeships.

Shelly’s hair cascaded across one shoulder and her face when she looked back at the men trailing them. She glanced at Morgan. Toying with his attention as if he was her mouse, she deferred to a game of flirtation. Curling up with her arms across her legs, she pretended distraction by the matching reprobates behind them in a dented wreck. Inside the windshield of the sedan, Chignon passed a lewd remark to his collaborator.

Jared followed the focus of Shelly's eyes towards the sedan clinging to their bumper. Even from a distance, he understood the context of the comment passed to Delanie. The sedan pushed closer, separated by the space of a few meters. Infuriated, stealing a prompt from *Thunder Road*, in the next second Jared flicked his cigarette at the windshield of their intruders. The act was as natural as taking down ducks in an arcade; but what he really wanted to do was take down the pedophile who had ruined his childhood and puberty. *Poofff*. A shower of sparks burst across the glass in front of Chignon and dispersed like fire flies over the roof of the car. Intimidated for a split second, Chignon gripped the wheel, shouting obscenities back at the pickup. Delanie flashed a disabled pistol he had tossed on the mat at his feet. The weapon might be used later in the evening to intimidate cashiers at gas stations or grocery outlets. Chignon pumped the gas pedal, screaming *Get those little bastards! Get those bastards!*

Three minutes. Chan was distracted, watching a crisis develop in his rear view mirror. The sedan was following far too close; followed by something like a firecracker bursting on its front windshield. *What the hell is going on back there?* He accelerated but the sedan matched their speed. Shriver and Patti looked back over their shoulders as if separated by a meter of glass from their friends. Chan accelerated again as panic spread through his passengers.

Behind them, an arm covered in tattoos extended from a side window, clasping a bottle of beer. The arm bent back like a catapult before hurling a full bottle at them. The grenade of glass burst on the pavement by the side of the truck. The girls screamed they were in peril and *Psycho* beat in desperation on the back of the cab. There was no mistaking the situation. They were being pulled down in to the same dark hole. Delanie rearmed. The sedan pulled close again, intent on digging its claws in to the tail gate. The arm paused in a back stroke, followed by the launch of another missile. Like its predecessor, the bottle smashed open on the pavement near the truck.

The sedan backed off for a moment but only long enough for the arm to reemerge with a fist clenched around another bottle. The hood with its air scoop slithered back in to position. Chignon and Delanie moved like professionals, waiting for the truck to turn broadside for a direct hit. Once shattered, the bottle would send shards flying in every direction. The arm bent in an arc to achieve better trajectory.

Chan's passengers were begging him to accelerate as quickly as possible. *Sixty seconds.*

The chase was on. Chignon and Delanie thought the panic in the truck entertaining, like watching a cage of drowning rodents. The older pickup loaded down with the weight of ten people couldn't outrun the power under their hood. Their speeds rose to 95 then 120 kilometers as they barreled through residential streets. Chignon pushed the needle on the tachometer to its limit. First one then three more bottles were lobbed at a moving target. Sooner or later, checkmate would come when the truck made a wrong move. Delanie was waiting for that window of opportunity.

Chan had one advantage. From making deliveries with his father, he had the layout of the city memorized. The truck ferreted out abrupt detours but the sedan was persistent. At sudden turns on tight corners the high beams would retreat. As soon as their flight was in a straight line again, the catapult moved in on them with another missile. *Nothing but a pinch of sand was left in the top globe of the hourglass.*

Next to Chan, Shriver and Patti held on to the inside of the cab when the pickup swung around corners. Two miles away Chan knew of an escape route, an unpaved road in an area of warehouses. The tires squealed as they left the pavement and raced down the dirt road of the alleyway. High beams pierced the cloud of dust rising behind them. The crisis became inescapable, their predators determined to cause great injury. *Ljssel consumed the last bitter drop of wine in her decanter.*

Once out of the alleyway, Chan swung the truck around a median and in to a side road. Another vehicle came between the pickup and the sedan, allowing them to gain a small advantage. But Chignon was a master at warfare, using his gas peddle to corner his opponents. In any case, their time was up.

Chan cursed in mandarin, negotiating a tight corner in an abrupt turn. The sedan hurled another bottle at the side of the truck on the same curve. For a second all four wheels of the pickup were pressed against the asphalt. Then the front left tire hit a rut or pothole in the road surface. Only the tires on the passenger side were in place until the pickup gained lateral momentum and became airborne. Tons of metal rotated in the air as if on a spit.

The sedan witnessed the incident unfolding and fled at high speed.

With the truck in mid air, the bodies of its passengers were tossed through space. A triad of virgins became weightless and flew through the air like ethereal spirits. For a split second Jared saw Shelly hurtle past him, her hair streaming down her back and her arms extended in front of herself like a trapeze artist.

As the only witness to the accident, Edith Vincent was out walking *Princess* (her miniature poodle) for one last time in the evening. She described to the tabloids and finally to the inquest how the bodies of three young women flew past her on a quiet walk. Then how each made contact with an impregnable object that snuffed their conscious lives. Out in the street the pickup continued to disintegrate. First one terrible crash as it landed on its roof but continuing to roll it landed back on its broken axles. The doors were thrown open and destroyed. Chan, bleeding and in shock, clung to the wheel behind a shattered windshield.

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Jared Morgan awoke in paradise. The room was spotless. Bed sheets were folded under his arms. The white drapes were drawn. In one corner of the room, an angel with waist length hair was cleaning a tray. Jared watched in awe. She was the most beautiful woman he had ever seen, a *houris* in heaven. He tried to make an appeal, causing her to turn. Her complexion was flawless.

“Am I in heaven?” he asked.

“You’re finally awake,” Snejana said softly.

He looked around the room, searching for a clue. *How had he gotten here? What had happened?* The angel anticipated his unease, “This is the place of St. Jude, the patron saint of desperate cases.”

It was painful to put references in their proper order. The angel drew to the side of his bed. She dabbed his arm with a cotton swab, saying with tenderness, “This will help you rest.” The needle she inserted felt wonderful and he lapsed back in to the rest of the blessed. Two men were waiting on either side of his bed when he awoke.

“Where’s my angel?” he asked.

“The nurse will be back shortly,” one assured him.

“How soon?” Jared asked. He was in love with her. Shelly Freeman was no longer of the least importance. Jared wanted another needle. It was a crisp morning in the world outside the hospital. The drapes were bright but still drawn.

“Miss Gait will return soon enough,” the other man assured him. Both men had pads in their hands and fountain pens for taking down notes. *Who the hell are these guys anyways? Nobody needs to take down notes in heaven!*

Just to make the situation all the more egregious they started asking a series of questions to which they scribbled down his responses. To answer he had to turn his attention from one side or the other as they alternated the interview. Jared was annoyed. He didn’t give a farthing for the past. He wanted his angel back.

“We need to know a few details about the -ah- accident,” said the man on the left side of the bed. At the mention of *the accident* Jared’s vitality flushed away. He laid his head back on the pillow and lapsed in to unconsciousness. The angel touched his arm and called his name. He came back from a winter landscape. The two men were still sitting at his bedside. They could have been there for an hour or have come back days or weeks later.

“Please stay,” he pleaded with the angel.

“They’ll leave soon,” she assured him. It was to his advantage to cooperate.

“This will just take a minute,” said the one man.

“We’d like to know why you were speeding?” asked the other man.

“Yes,” said the first man. “Why were you traveling in excess of 160 kilometers an hour; and with so many of you kids sitting out in the open bed of a pickup truck?”

“What happened to the others?” Jared asked in a panic. “To Puckie and Mattie? And to – to *Shelly Freeman*?”

“You’re the first we can talk to,” cut in one of the men. Their persistence suggested they had other work to attend to during the long hours ahead of their schedule.

“We really *do* need a statement,” said the other.

The final terrifying minutes in the pickup were inescapable. Jared closed his eyes but the scene from the night of the tragedy returned with the vengeance of a horror film.

“We know this must be difficult,” one detective said, expressing empathy.

“But we need to close this case and move on as soon as possible.”

The men stood like bookends at the end of his bed. The angel whispered to him though she wasn't in the room. On the condition she wanted him to co-operate, he'd make the effort.

"Why were you speeding?" asked the detective once again.

"We were being chased," Jared volunteered.

"By whom?" The men were scribbling down notes.

"For what reason?" asked the other detective.

Jared focused on the space of oblivion above his bed. His extremities were numb. Perhaps he'd be paralyzed for the rest of eternity. Finally he volunteered:

"We were out – cruising - like we usually do as friends. That night we had almost the same number of girls as us guys."

The men transcribed every word.

"Everything was really cool until these two other guys came racing up behind us."

"Did you get their license number?"

"It all happened too fast. *Psycho* – Danny Chisham -- was sitting on my right in the back of the truck. Then like some idiot -with no provocation- he flicks this cigarette at the other car. It bursts in to a zillion sparks when it hits the windshield. 'Nice going, you little fool!' I yell at him. I felt like grabbing him by his throat and choking the life out of him then and there but already the maniacs in the sedan behind us are lobbing Molsons at the truck.

Bottles are flying past us one after the other and bursting apart on the pavement. All because of *Psycho* Chisham. That little bugger was always getting himself and everyone else in trouble!"

The room was silent. Jared opened his eyes. The men were at the bottom of his bed, smiling to the point of hilarity.

"What's the matter?" Jared asked.

One man suggested to his associate: "You tell him, Gabriel."

"Sure," said Gabriel. "Since you still can't tell the truth after all the suffering you've caused your friends and their families, we can't let a moron like you enter *The Gates of Heaven*. Sorry."

**END**