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The Lost Light of Liberty

A Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of

Liberal Studies

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As the stars aligned on the night of November 8th 1932, the Lorenzo family had just arrived in America from their native land of Italy. Franklin Delano Roosevelt had just won the election as the nation sought to turn away from the Great Depression. Vinny Lorenzo was two years old, and his father Nino had been a chef in Italy who always dreamt of opening a restaurant in America. Vinny's mother was Victoria, and she always wanted to open a hair salon on the East side of Brooklyn. The Lorenzo family knew about the struggles America was experiencing during the Great Depression, but their religious faith and familial bond gave them the strength to push forward with their version of the American Dream. Nino and Victoria spoke about the desires and fears about starting a new life in America.

“It’s our time to shine, Vic.”

“I certainly hope so Nino, I didn’t want to leave Italy for nothing.”

The Lorenzo family rented a two-bedroom apartment on 116 Lawrence Street. Victoria thought the area was not safe enough for Vinny, but it was the only place Nino could afford.

“Nino, this place is a shithole”

“It’s fine for now Victoria. I’ll get you a castle one day.”

He knew this wasn’t what his family deserved, but he thought he could make it work for now. Nino got a job as a janitor in one of the public schools in the area. Victoria also had to find work, even though Nino had always wanted to be the sole earner of the household. It wasn’t that Nino was controlling; he just never wanted her to worry about money. Victoria eventually found

work as a secretary at a law firm. Nino was quite unhappy with this. “These sleazy lawyers will take advantage of a pretty girl like you, Vic. If they ever grab your ass, I’ll kill em.”

“This is a good opportunity for me Nino, and we can’t afford to live off just your income.”

No matter how grumpy Nino was, Victoria still gave her husband a kiss on the cheek before she left for work every morning.

Since Vinny was just two years old at the time his family moved to America, he would never have the memories of Italy that his parents shared together.

“He will forget where he comes from.”

“Nino, it will be our job to always make sure he remembers.”

Nino and Victoria hoped that President Roosevelt would bring more job opportunities and higher wages through his federal job programs and increased government spending. Nino was able to get a job as a construction worker through President Roosevelt’s Public Works Administration. He was so happy to find decent work that he started a savings account for Vinny. Nino was a big supporter of Senator Robert Wagner’s National Labor Relations Act, as this bill ensured workers would have the ability to collectively bargain through unions of their own choice.

“This guy Wagner is gonna make sure we don’t end up making pennies on every dollar the rich man makes. It’s all coming together Vic. He’s looking out for us.”

“Don’t put all your hopes into these politicians Nino, you know they can be all talk sometimes.”

4

The Lorenzo family was starting to see the positive changes arising from the actions of President Roosevelt. They believed all their dreams would still come true.

In the fall of 1935, Vinny started his first day of kindergarten at George Washington Elementary School. Vinny and his classmates never had the nicest clothes or fancy toys, but they had a community of people who deeply cared about them. The first day of school was rough for Vinny. While the Lorenzo family was starting to become more financially stable, their clothes for Vinny were still outdated. He was wearing a beat up red sweater that looked like it was going to come undone at the slightest bump or tear.

“Why can’t I get some new clothes for the start of school?”

“Vinny, you know your father is trying to save up for his restaurant. When he makes it big, he’s gonna buy you so many new clothes. Just wait and see.”

Victoria walked Vinny to the front steps of the school and said goodbye with a hug and kiss. The kids at school glared at Vinny, since Italian kids were looked down upon in the neighborhood. As Vinny sat down before the school day began, he bumped into Mikey Sorrentino. Mikey was the school bully who had to repeat kindergarten because he still couldn’t read.

“What’s with the sweater, dork?”

“Leave me alone, you jerk!”

As Mikey was about to get violent, a boy sat next to Vinny as if he were ready to fight off Mikey. This boy was Gabriel Schumer. Gabriel was a Jewish boy who lived in the same apartment complex as Vinny. Gabriel's father was an accountant who fell on hard times during

5

the Great Depression and was trying to rebuild a life for his family. Gabriel assured Vinny that Mikey wouldn't bother him anymore.

“Come on Mikey, don't be mean to the new kid just because you're the dumbest kid in class.”

“I'm gonna get both of you after school, just wait and you'll see.”

Vinny and Gabriel decided they would teach Mikey a lesson so he would never mess with them again.

“When he gets out of class, let's push him down the stairs.”

Once the 2:30 school bell rang to dismiss the students, Mikey was the last kid out of the classroom. Gabriel decided to hide out behind the bathroom door. Vinny stood by the front entrance of the school so Mikey couldn't run out quickly. As Mikey walked out of class, Vinny could see Mikey was distraught about something. While he was young, Vinny had a good ability to identify sadness in others.

“You alright, Mikey?”

“Yeah I just don't wanna go home right now.”

As Gabriel was about to run up behind Mikey to push him down, Vinny stepped in front of Gabriel to stop him from attacking Mikey.

“So bud, you ready to go home?”

Vinny shook his head at Gabriel, signaling he did not want to proceed with the attack.

6

“Yeah sure, hopefully I have some sandwiches at home. Would you like to come over sometime?”

“That would be great.”

When Mikey starting walking home, Vinny asked him if he would like to wait for his mom to come and walk them both home. Mikey agreed and Vinny said goodbye to Gabriel. While Vinny and Mikey sat on the curb waiting for Victoria to arrive, Mikey revealed that his family was getting evicted from their apartment because his father lost his job. There wasn't any food at home for Mikey to eat, which was why he did not want to go home after school.

“You are always welcome at my house, Mikey.”

“Thank you Vinny, that's really nice of you to say that.”

Mikey had tears in his eyes as Victoria arrived. Victoria was happy to see that Vinny made new friends at school, and they all went back to the Lorenzo family apartment for dinner.

On the day he met Mikey, Vinny learned that everyone has struggles in life and things may not always be as they appear. The importance of kindness was something that Vinny grew to appreciate through his experiences with Mikey. Vinny, Gabriel, and Mikey spent that year of school as good friends until Mikey's family relocated west to San Francisco when his father got a job as a construction worker. Vinny was sad to say goodbye to Mikey, as he had made Vinny a kinder person.

“Goodbye Mikey, I hope we can see each other soon.”

“Yeah me too Vinny, you were the only person who was ever nice to me”

7

That was the last day Vinny and Mikey ever saw each other.

While Vinny’s friendship with Mikey had ended, his relationship with Gabriel would remain strong. Life started to be good for the Lorenzo and Schumer families. President Roosevelt had created over 18 million jobs throughout the 1930s, and life seemed to be stable for the boys. The Lorenzos and Schumers would get together every Thanksgiving, as Victoria would cook a massive turkey for everyone to eat. Nino would always fall asleep at 9:00 PM every year from eating too much food. “Oh my Nino, you are such a pig”, Victoria said as he would eat far more than anyone else at the dinner table. While Gabriel was Jewish, he would still spend every Christmas with the Lorenzo family. Gabriel enjoyed how the Lorenzos always made him feel as if he belonged with them. Vinny and Gabriel thought their good times would last forever. Society had other plans for those boys.

Vinny and Gabriel’s life would change forever on December 7, 1941. The Japanese had just bombed Pearl Harbor and America was set to enter World War II. Nino and Gabriel’s father Jonathon volunteered to serve in the U.S. Air Force. Nino and Jonathon both sat their kids down together and explained how they would be deploying for service. Jonathon had difficulty speaking as he was holding back tears. Nino decided to take charge and tell the boys what was going to happen.

“Alright guys, we are gonna be gone for a long time. It’s up to you both to take care of your mothers.”

Gabriel sat in silence as Vinny started to cry. Nino got up from his chair and hugged Vinny.

Gabriel and Jonathon got up and said goodbye to the Lorenzo family, as Nino and Jonathon were set to deploy in a few days. Both men left not knowing whether they would return.

As Nino was in transit to his military station, he thought about how he tried so hard to get to America, only to come back to Europe to fight in the war. Going back to the European nations was different than he expected. For the first time in his life, Nino did not think of himself as a European. He thought of himself as an American. Nino wondered if he was betraying his ancestors with this revelation, but he knew the sacrifice he made by traveling to America meant that he had a new homeland. He was prepared to serve his new country in this desperate time of need.

Vinny and Victoria would spend their nights at the dinner table mostly in silence. Vinny would ask questions about the war every so often. Victoria mostly didn't have any words of comfort for Vinny. The war had turned her cold and despondent.

“Will Dad ever come back to us?”

“I sure hope Vinny.”

Nino and Jonathon were stationed in Fort Bragg, until they were sent out to the Battle of the Bulge. They were part of the 102nd Calvary Group. Nino and Jonathon were sent on a mission to retrieve injured American soldiers fighting off the German regime. While both men were quite

successful in their mission, there was one night when they got caught in gunfire with Nazis. Jonathon was severely wounded by a gunshot to the stomach, while Nino was paralyzed by a gunshot to the spine. Both men were hauled off by their fellow soldiers to an offsite medical

9

facility. Jonathon died upon arrival to the medical facility, while Nino survived. Nino was sent back to the states and stayed at a hospital in Flushing for a few weeks before coming home.

While Nino was recovering from his injuries, Vinny and Victoria were helping the war efforts from home. Vinny would go around town picking up scrap metal, while Victoria got a job working in a factory. It was the first time Victoria had done any work with manual labor. She felt as if this was her time to prove herself. She encouraged Vinny to work hard and pray for Nino to return home soon.

“Pray for your father Vinny, he needs our love.”

Vinny and Victoria were able to visit Nino at the hospital before he was ready to be discharged home. Vinny was excited to see his father, but became frightened once he entered the hospital. Vinny felt guilt for this fear, as he ultimately got his wish of having Nino return home. Gabriel would never see his father again, yet Vinny was afraid of how Nino may remain in his life. Would he be the same father he was before he left for war? Would they ever have the good times they had when life seemed less fragile? Vinny felt as if he was being a horrible son for being afraid to see his father, and he was determined to not let this hesitation become obvious to Victoria. Vinny and Victoria waited for Nino in the cafeteria of the hospital. A nurse wheeled Nino into the cafeteria, as he was now confined to a wheelchair. Vinny almost cried when he saw Nino, but he choked back the tears. Nino motioned for his son to give him a hug.

“I am glad to see you my boy. I fought to get back to you.”

“Dad, I never thought I would see you again. It was all I could ever think about.”

10

“We must stay strong in times of doubt Vinny. I would have never survived if I didn’t believe that. I hope you believe it now too.”

Victoria hugged Nino and started to cry.

“I’m just glad this is all over and we can finally be whole again. At least they will never have you drafted again after this. You did well my love.”

Nino returned to the Lorenzo family home on February 1, 1946. Vinny knew he should have been happy to see his father return home from war, but Nino’s new handicap frightened him. As Victoria brought Nino home, Vinny saw the giant wheelchair his father was now dependent upon. It made a loud, creaking noise every time it started to move. Nino could barely maneuver around in his chair and Victoria found this overwhelming.

“Vinny, would you please help your father with his chair? He’s gonna fall out and break his face.”

“Yeah Ma, I’m on it.”

Vinny tried to mask his feeling about his father’s wheelchair, but Nino sensed his son’s fear.

“It’s still me, son. I’m still the same person I was before. You may think I’m weak now, but I’m stronger than I have ever been because I was able to fight my way back to you.”

That was the first time they ever spoke of Nino’s time at war.

“I don’t think you are weak, Dad. I am the one who was weak. I was scared when you wanted me to be brave. I cried when you would have wanted me to smile.”

11

“You are not weak, son. You are part of the Lorenzo family.”

Nino told Vinny to never fear uncertainty, only to conquer it. Vinny realized that even in Nino’s new predicament, his father was still the same man pushing forward to a greater tomorrow. In that moment, Vinny knew he always needed to be there for his father, as the devotion to family was something Nino always held in high regard.

Gabriel was devastated by the loss of his father. The Lorenzo family was there for him to show he would never be alone.

“You are part of our family now, Gabriel. We will always be here for you.”

“Thank you Vinny. I wish our lives could have stayed the same, just like on that first day of kindergarten. Those days with Mikey were the best times we were ever gonna have.”

Vinny and Gabriel graduated high school in the summer of 1948. The Great Depression and World War II had come and gone. Gabriel got accepted into NYU, but Vinny decided he wanted to skip college and just get a job. The two boys were now men, but the times were certainly changing. As Gabriel went off to college, Vinny got a job working as a bouncer for a night club called Joy Ride. The money was good, and Vinny enjoyed flirting with the girls waiting to get into the club. Vinny met a girl named Katie on his first night working security for the club. She was from Flushing and came from a wealthy family. Katie noticed his leather jacket and muscular build. Vinny’s cologne was strong, but Katie found it to be just right for her.

“You live around here?”

“Not too far. Just like coming here for the music.”

12

“You a dancer?”

“Yeah something like that.”

Vinny and Katie started talking about the Brooklyn Dodgers. The two started dating all through the rest of 1948 and got married in the spring of 1949. They had their first son Caleb in October of 1950. When Caleb was born, Vinny quit his job as a bouncer and got hired at one of the big factories in town. Katie was an elementary school teacher and decided it would be best if the family of three moved to the suburbs to get away from the chaotic lifestyle of the city. Vinny was concerned about leaving Nino and Victoria behind, but he knew this was something he needed to do for his family. The suburban lifestyle was something new to the area and Nino had severe reservations about Vinny giving up his city life.

“Son, you gonna be so far away from work and they don’t even have any good delis around there.”

“I’ll be alright Dad, it’s better for Caleb to not grow up in such chaos like I did in the city.”

“You had so much fun Vinny, you’re gonna be so bored there. You won’t even know anyone in your neighborhood.”

Vinny and Katie moved to the suburbs in the summer of 1951 as they said goodbye to Nino and Victoria. On July 4, 1951 Nino called Vinny to catch up on what was new with him.

“How are you, my son? Are you happy with your life?”

“Yeah Dad, everything’s great. Why do you seem sad? Everything ok?”

12

“Yeah I’m alright. Just glad to hear your voice. Can I ask you a question? Was I a good father to you? Did I provide for you and your mother?”

“Of course you did. You were everything I could have asked for.”

“I never got the restaurant, though. It all went to shit.”

“It’s alright. Just because the restaurant didn’t work out doesn’t mean you were a failure.”

“I appreciate that Vinny, You were the best son I could ever ask for.”

“You talking to me like this is goodbye Dad, what’s going on?”

“Nah son, it’s not goodbye. I just wanted to know I didn’t fail you in life. Goodnight son, I will speak to you soon.”

That would be the last time Vinny and Nino ever spoke to each other. Nino died in August of 1951, laid to rest in the cemetery next to where Vinny and Katie got married.

Two years had passed and The Korean War had been going on for a few years. Vinny decided he would volunteer in the Army to honor Nino and follow in his footsteps. As Vinny was in the grocery store, he bumped into Gabriel.

“It’s good to see you old friend.”

“Wow Vinny, it’s been so long.”

14

They warmly embraced since they had not seen each other in years. Vinny informed Gabriel of Nino’s death, and Gabriel apologized for losing touch after high school. Vinny and Gabriel chatted about their grade school days and decided to meet up at the local diner the following week.

Vinny and Gabriel met up at their old favorite diner two weeks later. Vinny informed Gabriel he had volunteered to fight in Korea. Gabriel had become a pacifist during his college years and opposed all military action against sovereign nations.

“You don’t need to be a part of the bloodshed Vinny. These wars only rip us apart.”

“You are nuts, Gabe. I am serving my country just like Nino did.”

The differing opinions on war put a strain on Vinny and Gabriel’s relationship, as Vinny questioned Gabriel’s patriotism. Vinny assumed Gabriel had been influenced by the collegiate elites he went to school with and needed to remember his roots of family and loyalty to country. Gabriel told Vinny he was ignorant and uneducated about the world around him. Vinny and Gabriel did not speak to each other for a few days after Gabriel told him there was more to life than what Nino taught him. Gabriel eventually apologized to Vinny, as they promised to never speak of the war again. Their friendship was too important to let politics get in the way.

Vinny was set to deploy to Korea in two months. As Vinny went to tell Victoria he was getting ready for war, she confessed she was dating one of the lawyers from her old law firm.

Vinny didn't know how to feel about this, but he figured she deserved to be happy. He asked Victoria to look after Katie and Caleb while he was away. As he said goodbye to Victoria, he felt a cold chill enter his body. It was the same feeling he had the day he last spoke with Nino. It was

15

almost as if this chill was a precursor to death. He thought maybe it was his turn to die. Vinny packed his bags and left for deployment the next day.

Vinny flew out to his military base on July 27th, 1953. Vinny was unaware the warring nations had just signed the Korean Armistice Agreement, which unofficially ended the Korean War. The agreement officially ended all violence within the conflict, which meant Vinny would never see any time in battle. Vinny's advisor Colonel Shaw broke the news to him.

“Son, I got some news for ya. An agreement has been signed and we are no longer setting out to fight. Our boys are gonna start coming home.”

“Sir, I never got my chance to fight. Never got my chance to prove my worth.”

“You did what was asked of you. You trained and showed up as needed. You are a fellow patriot, just as those other men out there coming home now.”

Vinny felt conflicted as he knew he could come home safely, but within himself he felt as if he let Nino down. Vinny would never be able to be the hero Nino was. He felt as if he owed some type of sacrifice to legitimize his own time served like his father. As Vinny came home a few days later, Katie and Victoria were waiting for him.

“Vinny I'm so glad you're back. Didn't even need to get all shredded up like your father.”

“Yeah Ma, I don’t really feel like much of a hero though. Not like Dad.”

16

“Your father would be proud of you Vinny. You put on the uniform and you were prepared to give the ultimate sacrifice to your country. Your father would be happy you are now home safe with us.”

“Hey Katie, what you making me on my first night back?”

“I got all your favorites Vinny, don’t worry about that.”

For the next three years, Vinny got a new construction job building houses next to the neighborhood where he lived with Katie and Caleb. Those years were peaceful and Vinny thought he could finally take a breath and plot out the next phase in his life. In 1956, Vinny decided he would take up an interest in grassroots campaigns as President Eisenhower was running for re-election. Vinny had never decided if he was a Republican or Democrat, but he appreciated that the Korean War had ended during the Eisenhower administration. He decided to get involved in some local movements to get President Eisenhower another term in office. “Why do you like this guy so much Vinny?” asked Katie. “I served my country under his watch and he brought my friends home. I feel like I owe it to him” replied Vinny.

While Vinny was volunteering for the Eisenhower campaign, Gabriel was getting married to a young Jewish girl named Sophie. They had met at the local synagogue in town and Gabriel

had never seen someone so beautiful and elegant. Gabriel wanted Vinny to be the best man at his wedding.

“So Vinny, you gonna take a break from all this Eisenhower garbage to be in my wedding?”

17

“You know I’ll be there Gabe, you goddamn Liberal shit.”

Vinny was becoming more conservative through his time working for the Eisenhower grassroots campaign, while Gabriel was still the same Liberal Democrat he was ever since he started college. There was an unspoken change in the dynamic of Vinny and Gabriel’s friendship that neither person wanted to address. As they were getting older, their bond started to fade. Their differences in belief becoming more apparent. Vinny thought about this often. He realized that most bonds don’t simply end in a quick instant of rage or sadness. These bonds slowly evaporate over time until both people wake up one day and realize they aren’t the same people they used to be. While Vinny would never turn his back on Gabriel, it would never be the same as it was. This realization brought much sadness to Vinny, but he would not let that ruin Gabriel’s wedding day. Gabriel got married on October 13th, 1956. It was a day Vinny would always remember for the rest of his life.

“You did it Gabe. You got yourself a good one. Don’t mess it up.”

“You know I won’t Vinny. This is what I always wanted in my life. I wanted to rebuild my family.”

“Definitely did that today. So happy for you Gabe.”

On the night of November 6th, 1956 Vinny and Katie sat anxiously awaiting the results of the presidential election. Vinny had put so much effort into getting Eisenhower re-elected. He would have been devastated if it was all for nothing.

18

“We gotta make sure Eisenhower gets it tonight. Gotta get another four years. He did right by us.”

“Alright Vinny calm down. Don’t have a heart attack over this guy. Whatever happens is whatever happens. You did you’re best.”

“Doing your best doesn’t always get you to where you need to be. My father taught me that.”

Vinny was elated to see that President Eisenhower won the election by a landslide. President Eisenhower received 457 electoral votes in comparison to his opponent Adlai Stevenson II, who only received 73.

“We did it Katie. He’s got the election.”

“Sounds good Vinny. Now let’s not talk about politics for another four years ok?”

“Come on Katie, don’t be like that. It’s people like you who end up oblivious to the world around you because you don’t pay attention to these things.”

“Just because I don’t go to your town hall meetings and sit around the television watching the news all night long doesn’t mean I don’t care. Come on Vinny, I work my ass off for this family. Don’t come at me with this shit.”

“Alright Katie enough. Tonight was a good night. Let’s just leave it at night. I’m going to bed. Goodnight.”

For the next two years Vinny continued his job building houses. The money was good, but Vinny felt a lot of pressure now that Katie decided to stay home and spend more time with

19

Caleb. The days were long and Vinny’s back would start to ache. He numbed himself by drinking on the job. He knew he shouldn’t be doing it, but he felt it was necessary to get through the days. Vinny and Katie’s marriage was struggling as Vinny’s long days at work interfered with family time.

“Vinny I don’t know what I’m gonna do with you. You are either working or home drunk. I can’t have you around Caleb like this.”

“How else you want me to be Katie? You want me to work, I say yes. You wanna stay home with Caleb. I say yes. What else can I do to make you happy?”

“I have been married to you for almost a decade Vinny. You never been this bad before. You breaking down on me or something?”

“You certainly don’t think I’m breaking down when you’re spending all of my goddamn money.”

“Vinny you are losing a grip on yourself. You barely even talk to Gabriel anymore.”

“Gabe is fine. He’s got his wife and his new house. He’s a grown man. I don’t need to check up on him like he’s an infant. I’m always here for him and he’s already for me. Nothing is gonna change that. Stay out of it Katie.”

“It’s never too late to make it better Vinny. Do it now while you can.”

“Fine Katie, you can bring Gabe and his family over for the holidays and you’re gonna see the only problems are the ones that you cause.”

20

On July 4th, 1958 Vinny invited Gabriel and Sophie to spend the holidays with the Lorenzo family. Vinny had not seen Gabriel since the wedding, as the Schumers had moved to Pittsburgh shortly after they got married.

“It’s so good to see you Gabe. Been like two years now huh?”

“Yeah Vin, haven’t seen ya since the wedding.”

Vinny sensed some tension in Gabriel’s demeanor so he invited him out back to have a cigar.

“You ok Gabe? You seem like you have a bug up your ass.”

“Well Vinny, I gotta say it seems like you forgot about me. You haven’t seen me in two years. You never call. The only reason Sophie and I are here today is because Katie called us.”

“You know I been busy building those huge houses. Katie stopped working because she wanted to spend more time with Caleb. It’s all on me now.”

“Katie told Sophie you been drinking a lot these days.”

“Katie said that about me? She shouldn’t be talkin considering I’m the one paying the bills around here.”

“I pay the bills for my family too Vin. Doesn’t mean I drink all night when I come home.”

Vinny felt as if this was a setup by Katie to have Gabriel gang up on him. Vinny was certainly losing his grip on reality, as work and home life had just become too stressful. He wondered if

21

Nino felt the same way at this point in his life. Did Nino have the same issues as Vinny? Was Nino just a better man than Vinny? This was something that always haunted Vinny as it was always his desire to live up to his father.

“Come on Gabe, don’t come to my house and start this shit.”

“Look Vinny, it’s your life. I just don’t want you to spiral out of control to the point where you can’t make things right again.”

“Alright Gabe, I hear ya. I’ll make it better. She’s just so goddamn annoying these days. I can’t take it.”

“I understand Vin, but this is the life we chose. We have to be the best versions of ourselves or else the legacies left behind for us mean nothing. I make the choice to be all I am to honor my father. I know you want to be that same kind of person to honor Nino.”

“It’s been so long since he’s been gone. I can’t even remember his face. Sure there are pictures around, but when I close my eyes I can’t see him anymore. Why can’t I see him anymore?”

“You have to clear your mind and body of all this shit and then maybe you will be able to see him again. Don’t let this fog cloud your ability to remember him.”

Vinny broke down in tears as he realized Gabriel was speaking an uneasy truth. Vinny had become someone he did not recognize nor aspire to be. It was within this moment he knew that life had gotten the best of him for the first time in his life. Vinny knew he could never let that happen again.

22

It was now the summer of 1960. The presidential election was heating up. Vinny was excited at the prospect of having Richard Nixon become president. He figured Nixon would maintain the integrity of the Eisenhower administration. Katie was a fan of John F. Kennedy and believed Nixon would eventually let Vinny down.

“Vin I gotta tell ya, he’s not like Eisenhower. This guy is bad news.”

“Katie you don’t know what you’re talking about. Nixon is the guy to carry on Eisenhower’s legacy. Kennedy is just gonna raise my damn taxes and give all these lazy ass bums on the street more food stamps.”

“Damn it Vinny, I don’t know how you got like this. Nino was so proud of FDR and Nixon isn’t anything like him. What would he think of you now?”

Vinny almost lost his temper and struck Katie, but he held back. Vinny wondered why she would bring Nino up every single time they had an argument. Was she trying to emasculate him? Was she disappointed he couldn’t be the man Nino was? Or was it just that she knew she could hit at the one thing that meant the most to Vinny: Nino’s legacy.

“Why you gotta bring up Nino like this? He’s been gone for years Katie. I am my own man. Nino had his time and I love him but you can’t keep living in the past. You don’t

understand what it's like to live in his shadow. Every day I gotta wake up and he's not here. Every day I gotta wake up and think about if I'm doing the right thing for you and Caleb. Every day I gotta work my ass off and try to stay sober. I do it for you and Caleb but it's rough. Haven't had a drink in over two years, but you trying to push me over the edge here."

23

"Vinny I can't take life with you anymore. Every day seems to be a burden for you. I understand your life is rough. It's rough for me too. I promised to love you forever and I always will. I just can't stay with you anymore. I'm taking Caleb to my parents' house. We can work out for you to see him on the weekends or something."

"So that's how it's gonna be Katie? After all these years and everything I have done for you, now you just gonna up and leave with my kid? Who the hell do you think you are?"

"You lost sight of who you are a long time ago Vinny. I don't know what happened to you. Maybe life didn't always come easy for you. Maybe I didn't make my appreciation for you known enough and for that I apologize, but the truth is I simply can't do this anymore. This needs to be goodbye."

"Alright Katie, you gonna regret this but I'll let you go. I did everything for you and Caleb. I admit I let life get the best of me, but I never walked away from you. Now you are walking away from me. I hope you always remember that."

"Don't put this all on me Vinny. I take responsibility for my part in this marriage. You need to take responsibility for yours."

Katie and Caleb moved out of the family home on June 30th, 1960. Vinny was destroyed but he refused to let Katie see him cry. He was determined to make her look like the villain in this situation, even if he knew the blood was mostly on his hands regarding their marriage. Vinny turned to Caleb and said goodbye to his son.

24

“Hey Caleb, whatever happens in life just know I tried to be there for you. Don’t let anyone tell you anything else. You got it?”

“Yeah Dad, we will always still be there for each other. You’re always my number one.”

“You’re my number one kid. Always and forever.”

Vinny kissed Caleb on the cheek as Katie packed up the car. He gave her a look like he wanted to slit her throat. Katie nervously closed the trunk of the car and drove off without even acknowledging Vinny one last time. With Katie and Caleb gone, Vinny had nothing left to hold on to in life. He contemplated suicide but couldn’t get up the nerve to go through with it. The only thing left in life for Vinny was his political activism. He would pour his heart and soul into the Nixon campaign and make a difference for his country. The fact that a Nixon victory would upset Katie would just be icing on the cake for Vinny.

Vinny got some tickets to the 1960 Republican National Convention from his friend Archie at the construction sites. The convention was a three-day event from July 25th-28th in Chicago. Vinny knew this would be a long drive, but he figured this would be just the thing to take his mind off of Katie and Caleb.

“God damn Arch, you’re a life saver. All this shit going on at work I need a few days off.”

“Yeah Vin, it will be nice to see Nixon up there on the stage. I’m feeling good bout this. Kennedy ain’t got shit on em.”

“Yeah that Boston piece of shit goin nowhere fast.”

25

The drive from New York to Chicago was bumper to bumper traffic and Vinny was losing his patience on the road. He got cut off by a driver in front of him as he was trying to make a right turn. He beeped the horn and was about to stick his head out of the window to yell at the guy, but he held back. For some reason unbeknownst to Vinny, he thought of Katie. Vinny knew Katie would have wanted him to let go of his anger in that moment, and he did. Vinny started to cry in that moment of sudden revelation. Archie didn’t understand what was going on, but figured he needed to support his friend. Archie was never the type of person to acknowledge personal feelings, but he knew he needed to say something.

“You alright there, Vin. What’s going on?”

“Just thinking of someone I used to know.”

“So you good or what?”

“Yeah Arch, screw off. I’m good. You try driving in this disaster right here.”

Vinny and Archie finally arrived at the convention. It was being held at the International Amphitheater on South Halsted Street. The two men were so excited to walk in the arena. It was as if they were children on Christmas once again.

“Hey Vin, I heard this place opened up all the way back in the 30s.”

“Seems like it held up nicely. They should renovate this place sometime. I wouldn’t mind workin on it.”

“Nixon should give us a job in his fucking administration with all we have done to get him in office, ya know what I’m sayin?”

26

“Keep dreaming Arch. Sure would be nice though, wouldn’t it?”

“Always keep your dreams alive Vin, that’s all we ever keep in life.”

“Seems like my dreams died a long time ago. Katie and Caleb are gone. My father is dead. My mother doesn’t have much longer to go either. Nothing played out like it was supposed to.”

“Here’s the deal Vin. The great thing about dreams is that when they don’t work out, we can make new ones. You gotta learn to adapt my friend. Stop being such a sad sack of shit. Nixon wouldn’t hire you for shit with your depressing ass.”

“Shut up Arch, you goof. I appreciate the sentiment though. Let’s just have fun and do what we gotta do in life. Everything else will hopefully fall into place.”

The convention was notable due to Barry Goldwater, a senator from Arizona removing himself from the presidential race. Vinny knew this would mean Nixon was a lock to win the nomination and all of his grassroots work for Nixon would pay off.

“Now that this Goldwater piece of shit is out of the way, our boy Nixon can take it all the way to the White House.”

“No kidding Vin. This is great. I told ya things were gonna look up for you. It’s all about perspective. Change your attitude and it will change your entire life.”

Vinny was so blinded by his admiration of Nixon that he could not see he was denying an inevitable truth. Happiness does not come outward from others, but only from within could he ever truly find happiness ever again. As Vinny sat down, he realized this truth, but he blocked it

27

from his mind. He figured the truth was too painful to acknowledge right now and he desperately needed something to hold onto. Nixon was going to be that thing for Vinny, whether it was a healthy coping mechanism or not.

The time came when Vinny and Archie were seated and the convention had begun. Archie was able to get seats in the third row of the arena, which meant Nixon would be in clear sight. As Nixon entered the stage, Vinny felt as if all could be whole in his life once again. This would be the start of his better tomorrow. Nixon’s speech emphasizing “bringing the facts home” was something that resonated with Vinny. He needed truth in his life. Truth was a multifaceted thing in Vinny’s life. Truth meant acknowledging the future and the past. Truth meant pledging to be a better person. Truth meant forgiving himself for his past flaws. Truth meant the America that Nino always dreamt of. The 1960s were going to be the decade when Vinny would finally make himself feel whole in life. Nixon’s speech at the convention was that starting point for Vinny. As the convention ended and the crowd began to file out, Vinny smiled for the first time since before Katie left him. Archie noticed and wanted to celebrate Vinny’s newfound happiness.

“Now that’s what I’m talkin bout Vin. It’s a new decade with our boy Nixon. Ya just can’t pussy out on me anymore. It’s gonna be a good life. I promise ya that.”

“I can feel it now Arch. I really can. Thank you for these last few days. You really brought me out of my darkness. I appreciate you for that.”

“No worries Vin. That’s what friends are for. Now let’s get the win for Nixon in November or else this is all for nothing.”

“No kidding Arch. Let’s make it happen.”

28

For the next three months Vinny and Archie campaigned every day off from work that they had. Both men thought they could bring balance to their lives by accomplishing their goal of getting Nixon elected. The time finally had come for Election Day on November 8th, 1960. Vinny and Archie met up at the local diner to watch the election results. As the night progressed, Vinny’s worst fears had become a reality. Nixon had lost the election. Kennedy had received 303 electoral votes, while Nixon had only received 219. All of Vinny and Archie’s work for the Nixon campaign was for nothing. Archie shrugged off the disappointment, but Vinny couldn’t let it go. A lump in Vinny’s throat developed as he had come to terms with the fact that he let himself become distracted with Nixon to avoid his emotions regarding Katie and Caleb. It all would have meant something if Nixon won, but with this loss the dark cloud over Vinny’s head had now resurfaced. Vinny said goodbye to Archie as they paid the bill for their table. Once Vinny knew Archie was out of sight, he went into the 24 hour liquor store and bought some booze. For the first time in years, Vinny took a drink.

Vinny brushed through the crowd on the sidewalk to an empty parking lot where he could finish his bottle of booze. The taste was something Vinny had longed for in the years since he was sober. His pain of all he had lost had suddenly become numb. Vinny was no longer filled

with sadness, but a blanket of emptiness. He enjoyed that emptiness. As Vinny stood in that parking lot for thirty minutes, he became extremely intoxicated. Stumbling to a payphone, he wrestled some change out of his pocket to make a call. Vinny wanted to speak to Katie after all this time apart. He was so drunk he wasn't sure if he could properly dial her number. He was so relieved when she actually picked up his call.

“Katie, you there? I-I'm sorry about all it all ended up.”

29

“Vin, is that you? Why are you calling me so late? Where are you?”

“Down by the liquor store. I know I shouldn't have done it. I know that Katie. I failed in life. I could never be the man who Nino was. You knew that. You always knew that.”

“Vin, it was wrong of me to always throw your father in your face. You struggled enough to be your own man. While I simply cannot be with you any longer, I still wish for you to find peace in life.”

“I drank tonight Katie. I know I shouldn't have. I couldn't take another defeat in life like tonight. Just couldn't do it. I thought if I joined something bigger than myself like the military or the Nixon rallies that life would bring some type of meaning to me. But now I realize you and Caleb were the only purpose I ever had. Now you are both gone.”

“We aren't gone Vinny, but Caleb cannot be around you while you are stumbling around in life like this. I will come get you and take you back to your place. Stay where you are.”

“Alright I'll wait for ya here. I appreciate it.”

Katie picked up Vinny and as he drunkenly stumbled into her car, she knew he was in need of help. Over the next few days, Katie let Vinny stay at her place so he could see Caleb. It was the first time since their breakup that Vinny felt whole again. All the time spent with Archie on the campaign trail was merely a distraction, this was what he needed in his life. Vinny confessed to Katie that he felt he could not stay sober and needed to find help. She found him a 28 day rehab facility. Vinny was worried about how he was going to maintain his bills while he was away, but Katie had money saved from her father that she spent keeping Vinny's apartment. Vinny figured

30

she was only helping him for Caleb's sake, but Katie genuinely wanted Vinny to heal himself and find a way to bring happiness into his life.

Vinny entered rehab on December 1st, 1960. He was scared of feeling alone again. He wished he could have stayed with Katie and Caleb, but knew Katie's generosity would soon be coming to an end. It was his time to fix himself. Katie got him a spot in a Bronx rehabilitation center for alcoholics and drug addicts. His first day there was far from what he expected. He thought it would be a place where everyone would be yelling, crying, or despondent. Much to Vinny's surprise, everyone was quite welcoming to him. He had his first group session with Dr. Reuben and eight other patients. The group sat in a circle and took turns introducing themselves and sharing some personal details about their lives and struggles. There was a woman who caught Vinny's eye. Her name was Shantah. She was a 21 year old black woman from Flushing. Shantah began drinking when she was 14 due to an abusive stepfather. Shantah's mother eventually left her husband, but the damage was already done. Vinny had never been involved with a black woman before, but there was something about her that he just could not get over. Their eyes connected every minute of their sessions, but they never spoke to each other once the

sessions were over. After the first week at the facility, Vinny finally decided to formally speak with her.

“So that’s some real powerful shit, you talking about in the sessions.”

“Well that’s what rehab is, isn’t it? It’s just my story. Everyone’s got one.”

“Very true. You just seem so fearless in how you say it. I’m embarrassed anytime I speak about myself.”

31

“No need to be embarrassed. We are only as strong as our weakest moments.”

“Never thought of it like that before.”

“Well maybe now is a good time to start.”

Vinny and Shantah looked into each other’s eyes as if they knew they were supposed to cross paths in life. The thing that Vinny found to be so amazing about Shantah was how she actually got out there and fought for the change she wished for. Vinny always Katie simply talked about political change to make herself seem educated and self-important, but Shantah had a genuine passion for what she believed in. This made her seem irresistible to Vinny, as he simply needed more of an opportunity to get to know her. Vinny and Shantah were inseparable for the remainder of their stay in rehab.

When they got out, Vinny asked her to move in with him. Shantah was hesitant, but was overcome by her sudden passionate connection with Vinny. The couple moved in with each other the first week of January 1961. Vinny wasn’t sure if his neighbors would approve of him having a new girlfriend who was black, but he was determined to protect Shantah from anyone

who would have a problem with her. Vinny was determined to be happy now, and this was how he was going to achieve that goal.

John F. Kennedy had his presidential inauguration on January 20th, 1961. Vinny and Shantah watched the inauguration on television. Vinny was still bitter about Nixon's loss, but Shantah was very excited that Kennedy was now the president.

“Oh that man gonna do great things for this country. Just wait and see.”

32

“Eh you sound like my ex now.”

“Maybe she was on to something.”

“Maybe you broads just don't know what you're talking about.”

“Oh Vinny you are such a silly man.”

“And you are one pretty lady.”

There was a knock on Vinny's door. Shantah went to open it and much to Vinny's surprise, Katie and Caleb were there. Caleb rushed through the door to jump on Vinny's lap on the couch. Katie remained at the front door shocked that Vinny would bring a woman into his apartment so close after getting out of rehab. Vinny wanted Caleb to stay and visit, but knew Katie wouldn't want him around Shantah. He promised Caleb he would take him to a baseball game once the season started. Katie had Caleb wait in the car as she took Vinny aside to speak with him.

“I would prefer if you would be alone during your visits with Caleb. Why does your lady friend need to be here right now?”

“She’s a nice girl and she makes me happy. Why do you have to be up my ass about this?”

“How do you expect me to start having Caleb visit you knowing you have some random girl in your apartment?”

“He doesn’t need to stay in the apartment with me. I’ll just take him out for our visits and then drive him home afterwards. He doesn’t need to be around her if ya don’t want.”

33

“Vinny this was supposed to be a time to work on yourself. Not to go start a new relationship.”

“Watch your mouth around me Katie. It’s my life. If you don’t want Caleb around her I said I would keep them separate, but other than that you can kiss my fucking ass.”

“You never change Vinny. You are always trying to find something to make you happy, but it never works. You will never be happy because you are a miserable fuck. You always will be.”

“Get out of my driveway Katie. Don’t come back here unless you are dropping Caleb off. You decided to end things with me and now I have moved on. You need to deal with the decisions you made.”

“I can say the same about you Vinny. Why don’t you think about that?”

Katie drove off as Caleb waved goodbye to Vinny through the backseat window. Vinny waved goodbye to Caleb and wondered if he would ever have a moment with his son that didn’t end up breaking his heart.

Racial tensions were high in the spring of 1961. Vinny and Shantah were truly in love with each other, but Vinny was starting to have doubts if their relationship could last. People would give side glances at them when they would go to the grocery store. Victoria stopped speaking to Vinny for a month after she found out he had a black girlfriend. Vinny wondered if Nino would have accepted his relationship with Shantah. He knew that Nino was never exactly a very inclusive man, as his prejudices were never masked to spare anyone's feelings. Vinny

34

hoped his father would have respected his decision to be with Shantah, but he knew this was a more idealized version of his father than he was truly able to admit to himself. Vinny's relationship with Shantah made him wonder if Nino's journey to America would have been considered a disappointment. Would his father have thought Vinny let him down? After all Vinny was now a divorced alcoholic with a black girlfriend in a bad area of town. That certainly could not have been what Nino dreamt of for Vinny. Vinny couldn't even drink away his anxiety of Nino's potential disappointment, as he was afraid his relapse would trigger the same effect in Shantah. Vinny had not seen Caleb in months, as Katie was determined to keep their son away from him and his new life. Could this be what life was determined to be? Was this all that Nino truly sacrificed himself for? Was Vinny destined for more, but simply could not deliver on the promise of the American Dream? He simply could not deal with the potential that his life was ultimately meaningless so he spent his days buried in his work and in his goal of sobriety. Vinny figured if he could keep himself sober, he could keep his life in balance.

Shantah was coping with her sobriety much better than Vinny. She had become involved in several civil rights movements with the hope that she could bring some justice to racial inequality across America. She had joined the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) and was

planning one of the first freedom rides. Shantah wanted Vinny to join her as CORE was planning a freedom ride to Jackson, Mississippi.

“Come on Vinny, join us in Mississippi. We gonna be makin big changes here. Help me be a part of it.”

35

“Shantah, you know I can’t take the time off from work. Besides it’s not safe for you to be going down there. You seen what’s been going in the news? You are risking your life out there. Hooting and hollering won’t change the world. I been there, done that for Nixon and that got me nothing.”

“I can’t just sit around and do nothing about it. Don’t you see how everyone stares at us all the time? Don’t you see how your family abandoned you because of us? If we were living in the south, it would be so much worse. I can’t be passive about this. I just won’t do it, so you gonna have to wish me luck and I hope I have safe travels.”

“Alright Shantah, I’m gonna let you go but I don’t think this is a good idea.”

“I’ll see you when I get back.”

Shantah left on the freedom ride on May 4th, 1961. Vinny was hesitant to see her leave, but he knew there was no purpose in trying to convince her to stay. He kissed her goodbye as a cold chill returned to his body. It was the same feeling he felt when Nino left for war. It was the same feeling Vinny felt when Katie drove away with Caleb for the last time. This was a precursor for loss. Vinny knew the feeling all too well in his life at this point. He watched as

Shantah's bus drove away. He knew he could have been seeing her for the very last time. There was never anything in Vinny's life that ever turned out the way it was supposed to, so he wondered if considering the worst case scenario might actually bring some pleasant surprises for him.

The next twenty days were rough for Shantah and the other freedom riders. There were riots and violence wherever they arrived. Klansmen would show up and try to beat the riders to

36

death. Many times the police were on the side of the klansmen, so authority figures served as no protection for the righteous cause. The only time Vinny and Shantah would speak to each other would be when she called him from a payphone.

"Shantah, you need to get back here. I told you this was a bad idea."

"No Vinny, I can't turn back now. This is my purpose. Through all the drugs and alcohol that I struggled with in all my years, this is how I can repent for it all."

"You don't need to kill yourself in a civil rights riot just to make up for your past. That's bullshit and you know it."

"I wouldn't expect you to understand this, but you need to respect that. I want to thank you Vinny for all that you have done for me. You helped me get sober, you sacrificed your family for me. I never thought I would have someone love me the way you have and I thank you for that."

"Alright if this is what you feel you need to do, then I will respect it."

It was May 24th, 1961 when the Freedom Riders arrived in Jackson, Mississippi. The riders were beaten by a white mob and Shantah was killed as she was hit by a car driven by a local Klansman. Shantah's brother called Vinny to tell him about Shantah's murder. Vinny was devastated, but he couldn't say he was surprised. He didn't even cry when he hung up the phone. It wasn't that Vinny didn't love Shantah, he simply was numb to all that had happened in his life. The inevitability of loss and disappointment was something that Vinny was all too familiar with at this point. He wanted to drink so badly, but he knew that wasn't what Shantah would have

37

wanted. Vinny wanted to honor her legacy and live a better version of his life. He felt he owed it to her.

Vinny decided to call Victoria and tell her what happened. They hadn't spoken to each other in such a long time. Victoria apologized to Vinny for not speaking to him because of Shantah. She realized her prejudices should have never gotten in the way of her relationship with her son. Vinny wanted to reconnect with Caleb, but he wasn't sure if Katie would allow it. Victoria said she would speak with Katie to see if she could be convinced to let Vinny back into their lives. Katie ultimately relented and dropped Caleb off at Vinny's apartment. Vinny and Caleb were so happy to see each other. Caleb was growing into a young man, but time stood still whenever he was with Vinny. It was just like the good old days when life seemed like everything was going to be ok. For the first time in years, Vinny didn't feel sad or need to drink. He was content with his surroundings and dedicated himself to becoming a better father for Caleb. Vinny hoped he could make things right with Katie. He knew they would never get back together, but he wanted to develop a friendship with her for Caleb's sake. Vinny's time with Shantah made him realize that life was fragile, and he needed to make the most of the time he had remaining.

He had almost drank his life away, but for once all was not lost. It was only beginning. Now was the time for Vinny to honor Shantah's legacy.

Vinny thought it would be a good idea to get Caleb involved in some civil rights marches around town. He knew he had not lived up to being a good father, but he figured he could try to make a positive impact in his son's life and teach him that all people need to have their voice heard. Vinny got in touch with Shantah's brother Jamal, who was organizing a peaceful protest for worker's rights in Brooklyn and invited Vinny and Caleb to join.

38

"Come on son, this is gonna be good. We gotta make sure to go out there and support Jamal and his friends."

"I don't know if I want to go out there today. I heard about all these riots and stuff. Mom told me to stay away from over there."

"Mom gets a little too worried sometimes. I promise I won't let anything happen to us."

Vinny reassured Caleb to calm his anxiety, but deep down he knew things could go bad very quickly. He wondered if bringing Caleb to the rally was a bad idea. Would he be considered a bad father if something happened? Could he live with himself if Caleb was put in danger? Vinny decided to follow his instincts, as he felt this was an important life lesson for his son. Caleb seem comforted from his father's reassurance.

"Alright Dad, I'm just happy we can be together again. If anything happens just promise we will get out of there quick."

Vinny and Caleb met up with Jamal on the eastside of Briarwood and were embraced by the people marching for their cause. Vinny could see Caleb's tensions easing as he was starting to enjoy himself. Vinny had a realization that of just how far he had come in his life in just over a year. Archie would have been shocked to see Vinny at this rally, yet he felt more at home with the organizers than he ever did at the Nixon campaign. He initially thought it was all because of Shantah, but then he came to realize that maybe he was just searching to initially belong in all the wrong places. Could it be that Vinny found his purpose in an unlikely scenario? He was confident in his purpose, his role as a father, a sober man fighting to stay clean, and finally a man

39

with a purpose of equality and civility. The event went on without any disruptions or police activity. Vinny and Jamal embraced each other at the end of the night.

“Thank you Vinny for coming out today and honoring my sister.”

“No problem Jamal, she made quite an impact on me. I'll miss her forever, but I feel like she got me in the right place in life. Makes me realize what is really important in life. All this time searching for somewhere to belong. Never thought it would be here though.”

“Sometimes we find what we need in the most unlikely places my friend. Enjoy this day as it reminds us we can become whole again. As one we will rise and seek solace in the sunlight. The light of liberty was once lost, but shall be found again.”

“How can you know all this? Times are rough and you guys are putting yourself at risk every day for this. I worry about you Jamal.”

“Don’t worry Vinny, our purpose is greater than our lives. We will march for as long as we can, the next generation will pick up where we leave off. Your son is a good young man. He will honor your legacy.”

“Never thought I had much of a legacy. Just a drunk who couldn’t make his family whole.”

“You underestimate yourself. Your struggle is what brought you to us. We need to bridge the gap between the racial lines. A unilateral movement goes nowhere. We can’t do it without you and more people like you.”

40

Jamal told Vinny about The Albany Movement, a desegregation coalition that was picking up serious headlines in the south. Jamal wanted Vinny to join them later that year when they were planning to join the protests. Jamal told Vinny about Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and the non-violent protests he was being a part of. Vinny wanted to support Jamal and his friends, but felt he could not leave Caleb behind. He was afraid to tell Jamal of this, so he simply blamed it on not being able to get time off from work. Vinny was embarrassed to tell Jamal his hesitations about leaving Caleb. Would Katie ever let him visit Caleb again knowing he left to go participate in a civil rights movement in the south? Vinny just got Caleb back in his life, and this would certainly throw a wrench in the reunion. He didn’t even want Caleb to tell Katie he took him to this rally. Vinny told Caleb to say he took him to a baseball game that day if Katie were to ask. Vinny hugged Jamal as he and Caleb were getting ready to leave.

“Hope to see you again soon my friend. Be safe out there.”

“Never forget your worth in life. Your compassion sets you apart from the rest of them. You are greater than your greatest weakness.”

On December 15th, 1961 the Albany movement set out to march with Dr. King. Jamal marched along the followers and got arrested. He never called Vinny to tell him the news. Jamal knew that while Vinny was true to the cause, he needed to be there for his son. Vinny and Jamal eventually lost touch, as Vinny was unable to get a hold of where Jamal was. He feared the worst for Jamal, but knew that was the price to pay for the movement. Vinny thought of Jamal as a fallen soldier in war. For the first time in years, Vinny thought of Gabriel’s father. In many ways there was a parallel between Jamal and Gabriel’s father. Both men set out to fight for what they

41

believed in. They were equally willing to sacrifice themselves for what they believed were the greater good. Both men ended up making the ultimate sacrifice as Jamal was eventually gunned down by police claiming Jamal’s civil rights group had become unruly in Alabama. Vinny never got the news, but always knew Jamal would eventually sacrifice himself for the cause in some manner. Vinny took this time to call Gabriel and meet up with him. He had not seen Gabriel in quite some time and always felt as if he let his best friend down in life. Vinny would make sure that would never happen again.

Vinny and Gabriel met up at Joy Ride, the old club that Vinny used to work at. The place had become run down and a shadow of its former self. Vinny found humor in the irony that Joy Ride mirrored his own life. Even though it wasn’t what it used to be, there was still worth in the entity. Vinny was regaining the worth in himself as well. Gabriel walked into the bar. As he and Vinny embraced each other, it was as if time had stood still. All the pain the years had caused

simply vanished. They were able to be the kids they used to be. The laughs were genuine. The pain of everyday life had numbed ever so slightly. Gabriel represented the hope that was lost in Vinny's eyes. It wasn't that Gabriel hadn't experienced hardship in his life, but he preserved far more than Vinny could ever fathom. Vinny wasn't envious of this revelation. He was wholeheartedly content that his friend was able to find the peace in life he could never seem to grasp. Gabriel was always Vinny's role model and he was never ashamed of that. As long as they had each other, life would never be as dreary as it may sometimes appear to be.

Vinny and Gabriel sat down at their favorite table in the bar. It was the one on the left side near the men's room, since Vinny always wanted to be close to the bathroom after a long night of drinking back in the day. As they got to the table, Little Caesar and the Romans just

42

started playing their set. Vinny hadn't heard live music in years, and the sound reinvigorated his soul in a way he hadn't felt since he was a teenager. He was so elated that he didn't notice Gabriel's distraught look on his face. His clothes seemed like they had been wrinkled from being in a suitcase for days. Vinny decided it would be best to let Gabriel enjoy the show before asking personal questions. It was difficult for Vinny to not order a drink while he was at the club, but he wanted to maintain his sobriety. Vinny gazed at the bouncer in the back of the club. He couldn't help but compare himself to the new security at the club. The guy was younger, had more muscle mass, and seemed to gain more attention from females than Vinny ever did all those years ago. There was a time prior to rehab when these revelations would have extremely bothered him, but now Vinny felt as if he truly knew what was now important in life. His former pettiness needed to be eradicated in order to build upon his newfound clarity. As The Romans finished their set, Vinny and Gabriel decided to go to their old favorite doughnut shop. It was the only doughnut

shop in town that was open 24 hours a day. While Vinny needed to give up alcohol, he certainly wasn't ready to give up his sweet tooth.

As Vinny ordered a chocolate glazed doughnut and a scoop of vanilla ice cream, Gabriel slid into a booth in the corner. He wanted to make sure nobody was around them. Vinny wasn't sure why, but he figured Gabriel had his reasons. Vinny brought his food to the table and finally decided to ask Gabriel about his life.

“So what's new with you? How's Sophie and the kids?”

“We got divorced a few months ago. She got full custody of the kids. I don't even get them on holidays.”

43

“Damn I'm sorry to hear that. What happened? You were both so happy? I always knew Katie and I had our problems, but you two were solid as a rock the whole time.”

With a lump in his throat, Gabriel told Vinny why Sophie wanted a divorce.

“I told her I was gay. I've always been. Ever since we were kids. Couldn't hide it anymore. She found me in bed with one of the guys from work. Forgot she was coming home early from work that day. She took the kids and never came back.”

Vinny's initial reaction would have been to storm out of the doughnut shop, but he was trying to be a better person and Gabriel was his oldest friend. He wasn't mad at Gabriel, but he feared for his friend's safety. A gay man living in that part of town would certainly be a target for violence. Furthermore, Vinny was concerned people might think he was gay if he was seen hanging out

with Gabriel around town. He wanted to be a good friend, but also wanted to protect his reputation.

“You gotta keep this a secret. The gays get stomped on around here like its nothing. You know what the gangs used to do back in the day. Hell they still do it now.”

“I know, I know. I wasn’t planning on making this known. Sophie was never supposed to find out. She’s not telling anyone cuz she thinks I will lose my job, and she still wants me to send money for the kids.”

Gabriel was about to cry, but he kept it in. Ever since Sophie left him, he didn’t want to show any emotion in public. Nothing that anyone could possibly use to “figure him out” or implicate any of his friends such as Vinny. The two friends sat in silence as Vinny digested the information

44

he received. He decided he would protect his friend and have him move into the apartment. It would be what Shantah would have wanted. Vinny’s new purpose in life was to help those in need and this was how he was going to honor Shantah’s legacy. Gabriel happily accepted Vinny’s offer, as he was currently living in an old apartment in the Bronx with a busted air conditioner and occasional rat infestations. Vinny bluntly stated he didn’t wanted Gabriel having any encounters in his apartment, as this would make them both a target for the conservative families living in Vinny’s apartment complex.

Things went smoothly for Vinny and Gabriel for a few months. Gabriel got a job working for the construction company, and Vinny was becoming more accepting of who his best friend truly was. The potential of danger was always there for Gabriel if his secret was discovered, but Vinny was there to protect him from potential threats. The workday was rough for Gabriel, since

most of his coworkers made homophobic jokes towards each other. The worst part for him was he couldn't tell them to stop, as this certainly would have implicated his orientation. He learned to just laugh it off and become one of the guys. Vinny was pained to see his best friend have to live with this sad reality of life, but he figured as long as he was there to protect him everything would be alright.

Vinny and Gabriel's existence got thrown for quite a surprise one Saturday afternoon when Vinny heard a knock at the door. He opened the door and a man in a suit was standing in the hallway with a nervous look on his face.

"Hey are you Vinny? It's nice to meet you. I'm Joseph. I-I'm a friend of Gabriel. I was wondering if he was around. We were supposed to meet up later tonight."

45

"He's out getting some things at the store." So you a friend of Gabriel? How do you two know each other?"

"Just an old friend from work."

"You the special friend from work? I already know about him. You don't need to bullshit with me here."

"Yeah that's me. How did you know? Can't believe he told you. He seemed like he would never tell anyone about any of this."

"I'm his best friend. I look after the guy. I gotta protect from all this craziness out there. Why did you come here? You two caused a lot of damage for him and his family."

“He didn’t tell you? We are moving to California together. I got a place for us and everything. It’s time for us to live our truth ya know.”

“I don’t know if I feel comfortable letting him go out in the world with you like this. He’s gonna be a target out there. You both will be.”

“I know that, but life isn’t worth living if you are living it in fear.”

“No shit, but still can’t be naïve here either.”

As Vinny and Joseph continued speaking with each other, Gabriel walked in the door. He seemed surprised to see Joseph there, but relieved that Vinny was seeming to accept him.

“Gabe, what the hell is this? You planning to move away with him?”

46

“Yeah it’s time for me to be happy. I didn’t want to tell you like this, but I don’t need you protecting me forever. I appreciate you looking out for me, but its time I explore the next chapter in my life.”

“I’m not ready to say goodbye to you again.”

“We will never say goodbye, we will always come back to each other. You are all I have left of the good old days.”

Gabriel and Joseph moved to California at the end of the 1962. It had been a whirlwind of a year for Vinny and Gabriel, but a time they would never soon forget. Gabriel and Joseph’s relationship made Vinny realize that the things in life that are most difficult are the ones most

worth fighting for. He realized he didn't need to protect Gabriel anymore. Maybe he never truly needed to protect him at all, but that sense of purpose drove Vinny to be a better person. Maybe Gabriel gave Vinny the ability to feel worth again. He hadn't felt that way since the beginning of his marriage. Vinny was sad to see his friend leave, but felt a sense of closure. It was not a closure that someone feels after a death, but a closure felt after an accomplishment. The turning of a chapter indebted to the gift of personal growth and gratitude. Gabriel always made Vinny be the best version of himself, and for that Vinny would never be able to repay him for that. All that Vinny could do to honor his friend was to accept him for who he was and strive to be a beacon of hope in a world that was seemingly engulfed in darkness and intolerance. Through Gabriel's journey of self-discovery, Vinny found himself rededicated to finding ways to make the world a better place. It was time for Vinny to find the next way to make that goal a reality.

47

It was now January of 1963 when Vinny got a call that would forever change his life. Katie had called him crying and Vinny knew it had to have been something bad. They really only spoke to each other about Caleb's visitation schedule, so Vinny was quite alarmed to have Katie call him in the middle of the night. Victoria's neighbor had called Katie thinking Vinny still lived with her, as Victoria never told anyone about the divorce. Victoria had spent the evening watching television with her friend when she suddenly had a heart attack and died. She was gone by the time the ambulance had arrived to the scene. Vinny sat in silence as Katie explained what had happened. He was devastated, but also simultaneously numb to the pain of it all. Anytime Vinny tried to do well in his life, something always seemed to drag him back down to the pits of existence. He wanted to have a beer so badly, but he knew he would drink himself to death that

night if he did. Vinny's willpower towards sobriety had wavered in recent history, but nothing was as bad as this night. Katie agreed to meet Vinny at his apartment and talk things over. She left Caleb with a neighbor as she didn't want Caleb seeing Vinny in such a dark place.

As Vinny opened the door, Katie hugged him for the first time in years. She wasn't mad at him, or casting judgment on him. She was simply there to be of comfort to him. Vinny felt that warm feeling in his heart, just as he did when they first met. The two former lovers stayed up all night reminiscing about Nino and Victoria. Vinny looked at Katie in ways he hadn't in years. He couldn't tell if he was just sad and lonely, or genuinely falling back in love with her. He leaned in to kiss her, almost as if by accident. He didn't even consider the possibility that she would run out of his apartment because of his actions. To Vinny's surprise, Katie didn't get up and leave. She embraced him and for the first time in years, they were intimate with each other. They woke up the next morning with hesitation and guilty expressions on their faces.

48

"So does this mean we are getting back together? You always wanted me to become sober and be the husband you never thought I was. I can be that for you now."

"I don't know what I want right now Vinny. I'm not going to say that last night was a mistake, but I don't want you thinking this is automatically going to lead to something. I don't want to confuse Caleb. That kid has been through enough with the two of us in all these years."

"I understand. It was just nice to be with you again. Reminded me of back in the day."

"Is this going to be an issue for you? I don't want you drinking again because of an impulsive decision we made."

“Nah I’m good. So you’re saying there’s a chance for us again? Is the door still open?”

“The door is never closed with us, but I can’t guarantee things will be back to the way it was. I have to go now to get Caleb. We can talk in a few days.”

Katie walked out of the apartment in a hurry. Vinny felt bad for her, as if she was doing a walk of shame for some random one night stand. He never wanted her to feel that way about herself. He was now determined to win her back. Vinny decided to show up that evening with some flowers for Katie. He figured he could pass off the flowers as simply a nice gesture and make it seem like he stopped by to see Caleb. Vinny knew he should have been spending his time planning Victoria’s funeral, but his sudden reclaimed fascination for Katie was something he simply could not put aside at the moment. He rang the door-bell and much to his surprise, a man answered the door.

49

“Can I help you?”

“Yeah I’m Vinny, Caleb’s father. Who are you?”

“Oh hey, nice to meet you. I’m Sal, Katie’s fiancée. I’ll call Caleb down for ya.”

Caleb ran down the stairs to embrace his father for the surprise visit. Katie was in the backyard tending to her garden when she saw Vinny and Sal talking. She nervously walked over and said hello to Vinny. The two made awkward conversation with each other, as Sal was standing with them oblivious to what had happened the night before. Vinny realized that people say the most to each other when they say what they think they are supposed to, rather than what they actually want to say. He asked Sal about himself, his relationship with Katie, his love of basketball, all

the things you are supposed to ask when you come face to face with your replacement. Vinny wanted to punch him in his face, but he knew Sal didn't deserve that. Sal was a good guy, and Vinny just had sex with his fiancée.

From what Vinny could observe, Sal and Caleb had a good dynamic with each other. Caleb seemed to genuinely care for him, and Vinny was happy that his son had a male figure in his life who he could see every day. It took a lot for Vinny to admit this to himself. A few years ago this would have sent him in a downward spiral of rage and drunken confusion, but he remembered how Shantah and Jamal taught him to strive for a greater purpose. Vinny realized he would always be there for his son. He knew Caleb would always make him the top priority in his life, so Sal wasn't a threat. The only sad revelation for this day was that Vinny realized he would never get Katie back. He needed to let go of the past, and Katie was that last part of his troubled history. Vinny needed to bury Victoria, but he also needed to set Katie free. She had been a good

50

mother to his son. She had been there for him when Victoria passed away. He was even able to hold her in his arms one last time that night before. He couldn't be mad at her for any of it. Vinny could only express gratitude for his ex-wife, so he gave her a hug and handed her the flowers. She knew what those flowers were supposed to mean, but she gracefully accepted them and even let Caleb go for an unplanned visit with Vinny.

Vinny and Caleb drove around for hours that day. He broke the news about Victoria to Caleb. Vinny wasn't sure how Caleb was going to take the news. He was too young when Nino died to remember his grandfather, but Caleb had fond memories of Victoria. Caleb cried for a few minutes in the car, but he soon pulled himself together. Vinny was proud to see his son be so

brave in this time of loss. Vinny told Caleb they could do anything he wanted that day. Caleb decided he wanted to drive past Vinny's old neighborhood and hear stories about Nino and Victoria.

Vinny drove past Nino's old favorite deli and told Caleb about how Nino would always say they had the best pickles in New York. They drove past the hairdresser where Victoria would always get her done. Vinny laughed thinking about all the times Nino would tell Victoria that place was too expensive, only for Victoria to tell him to shut up. For the first time in a long time, Vinny could reflect upon Nino and not be sad or envious of his father. Could this be from Vinny finally defeating his demons and finding peace in his life? He hated how he buried the thought of Nino for all these years. His father was a good man, and didn't deserve to have his legacy shunned away just because Vinny was struggling to live up to his vision. From that day on, Vinny took a part of each day to remember his parents. Some days he would laugh, some days he would choke up with tears, but he felt a desire to embrace his emotions for the first time in his

51

life. The impact of emotional pain wasn't as devastating as it once seemed. This was Vinny's acceptance of life.

Victoria was buried next to Nino, as that was something they always wanted. Vinny was glad he purchased two burial plots when Nino died, as he would have hated to see his parents be buried in separate places. He was at peace with himself, but he felt bad that Caleb broke down and started crying. Vinny was glad that Katie attended the funeral. He always appreciated that Katie maintained a good relationship with his family even after the divorce. After the ceremony ended, he gave Katie a hug and drove off. As Vinny walked into his apartment, he checked his

mail. There was a letter from work. Vinny was terrified it would say he was getting laid off. He made a whole story in his head about how this was going to happen. He figured he would have to start all over again right as he was finding peace in his life. Much to his surprise, Vinny read the letter and found out he was getting a promotion.

The construction company's manager announced his retirement and selected Vinny to be his replacement. The manager never knew about Vinny's issues with alcohol, as Vinny was quite a functional drunk back in the day. He was relieved this guy never saw him at his worst. The letter said there was going to be a formal dinner to announce the promotion and he could bring guests. He decided to invite Caleb, Katie, and her boyfriend. Katie had seen him at his worst in life, so he thought she deserved to see him come out of the darkness. Vinny needed this moment to show Caleb that he was worth something in life. He usually hated dressing up for events but after everything that had happened in his life, Vinny felt as if he needed to enjoy every moment of life at this point. As Vinny was getting dressed, he thought about Nino and his goal of the American Dream. He wondered if this was his version of that. During Vinny's drinking days he

52

thought it was all a fallacy. He thought that Nino was a misguided idealist stuck in his stubborn ways of grasping towards an unattainable dream of wealth and glory. But then Vinny realized that wasn't what the American Dream was about. The American Dream was about creating a family. It was about creating a home for himself and his son. It was about staying sober. It was about fighting to live another day.

The night of the banquet was like a pure fantasy. Vinny thought this must have been how Nino and Victoria felt when they first came to America. He finally got the validation he so

desperately needed in life. For the first time in his life, he allowed himself to feel pride. It was a good feeling. He had always done things for the sake of his parents, for Katie, or for Caleb. This was something just for him. It didn't feel selfish, it just felt right. The subsequent time that Vinny had in his new position was amazing. He had the respect of his peers, he bought a new house for himself, bought a new Ford Mustang for himself. Vinny knew it was an extravagant purchase, but he figured if he kept it in good shape he could give it to Caleb someday. All was good for awhile. That was all until November 22nd, 1963.

President John F. Kennedy had just been assassinated. Vinny saw the news on the television at work. While he never thought of himself as a fan of Kennedy, he was frightened by the thought of America being compromised. Nino always said to put country before politics, and on that day Vinny took those words to heart. He made a silent prayer for the Kennedy family and he got to thinking about how his worldview had changed in the three years since the last election. He had gone to rehab, met Shantah, grieved the loss of her, and got involved in political activism. Vinny thought of Archie and the night of the Nixon convention. He no longer related to the man he was on that night. Vinny wasn't sure if that was a good or bad thing, but he accepted

53

how life had changed. If anything, there was an acceptance that sometimes it takes time to fully realize who we are as individuals. Sometimes people think they have a full grasp on who they are as people, but there are just some moments in life that can make you realize how little you know about yourself. Vinny sat down in his chair and wept. It was a cleansing of his former self. He was no longer the hard-headed bouncer from Joy Ride. He was a middle-aged man in touch with who he was in life and his worldview had changed with the experiences that influenced his life. He thought of Shantah and how much she had an impact on his life. He probably would

have been the same prejudiced alcoholic he was all those years ago if not for her. The thought of who he could have been in life if he had stayed on his destructive path frightened Vinny, but his tears released all the anxiety and sadness he was feeling. Rather than focus on what could have been, Vinny decided to focus on what he had truly become. After work Vinny drove home, called Caleb and told him how much he loved him. Vinny knew Caleb was getting older and would be graduating high school soon. He realized he never truly apologized to Caleb for the transgressions he made earlier in life. Much to Vinny's surprise, Caleb never judged his father for those struggles. Vinny was the father Caleb wanted, regardless of his flaws in life. The imperfections were merely part of life, and Caleb never resented his father for that. Vinny was so relieved at this revelation. The death of President Kennedy made Vinny realize that every moment creates a chain reaction of events. The Kennedy assassination was horrible, but at least it brought a great conversation for Vinny and Caleb. Vinny knew the country needed time to repair itself and now he had the strength to help see that through. He had a newfound resurgence in his dedication to his country.

54

The date was now Tuesday November 3rd, 1964. President Johnson was seeking re-election against Barry Goldwater. Vinny had changed his voter registration from Republican to Democrat earlier that year. That was something he never thought he would have done four years ago. He respected President Johnson's ability to guide the country after the Kennedy assassination, and felt that Johnson could lead the country in advancing civil rights in a way Shantah could have only dreamed of. He invited Caleb and Katie to watch the election results at his house. She had broken up with her boyfriend a few months ago. Vinny was genuinely sorry

that Katie couldn't make her relationship last. He wanted her to find peace in her life the same way he finally did. For Vinny his career and sobriety were his American Dream, but for Katie her American Dream was having a family. He felt bad that he couldn't give that to her. He hoped her boyfriend could have given that to her but it just wasn't meant to be. Maybe Vinny could give her happiness in making sure that Caleb was successful in life. He would always make sure he would look out for him to make Katie proud. President Johnson won the election by a landslide. Johnson received 486 electoral votes, while Goldwater only received 52. Vinny was so happy to see the results come in.

“We did it guys. Johnson's got it til 68.”

“Glad to see you happy Dad. It was a good night.”

“Alright Caleb, lets go home now. Your father needs to go to work tomorrow.”

Vinny always hated watching Katie and Caleb leave, but he knew that everything was in a good place in their lives. The pain of not having the ideal family was numbed for Vinny, as he knew

55

the ones he loved the most were alright in this world. Katie and Caleb drove off and Vinny went to bed.

Over the next four years Vinny watched Caleb graduate high school and enlist in the military. He was so proud that his son was now a third-generation military man. The legacy had come full circle. Vinny knew that Nino would be so proud of Caleb. Vinny knew that the Vietnam War was escalating and Caleb would most likely have to fight over there at some point.

He prayed for his son every night that he would be ok. While Vinny was so scared that Caleb would be sent to fight in Vietnam, he was blindsided by what would occur stateside on April 4th, 1968. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. had been assassinated and the country was in great despair. Vinny felt that same darkness in his stomach when Kennedy was assassinated. Two American leaders gone in under 5 years. The vision for America that Kennedy and King sought was something that Vinny didn't always know he wanted but grew to admire. The good thing was that Vinny was at a point in his life where he didn't fear for his sobriety in chaotic times anymore. He was strong now and could deal with whatever life brought his way. That was the lesson that Kennedy and King brought to him. For that lesson, Vinny was forever grateful.

The night was now November 5th, 1968. The presidential election was that night and a bizarre night for Vinny. It was the first election night in many years that he wasn't with Katie or Caleb. He was alone and Richard Nixon was battling Hubert Humphrey for the keys to the White House. Everything Vinny liked about Nixon in 1960, was what he loathed about him in 1968. Nixon didn't seem to be the one who would lead civil rights into the next decade. He didn't seem like a man who would keep Caleb safe while serving in the military. Vinny felt as if his ignorance eight years ago could lead to his downfall now. Nixon had defeated Humphrey by a

56

margin of 301 to 191 electorate votes. Vinny's previous dream now became his nightmare. He was scared that Nixon would forget the marginalized. Shantah's brother once spoke to Vinny about the lost light of liberty. Vinny realized the true meaning behind the lost light of liberty. It was when we as Americans turn our backs on each other. It was when we prioritize the powerful over the powerless. That is when the American Dream dies. The American Dream is not obtaining sole dominance of goods and services but building a stronger community for the

greater good. Vinny finally understood why the American Dream was so important to Nino. It wasn't about creating a greater life for just his family, it was about making the world a better place through service. Vinny always thought Nino wanted the restaurant for wealth, but he wanted it to show how someone could start from nothing and rise to something. That didn't mean that Nino would ever forget about those who would still struggle. Even though Nino never achieved his goals, he always appreciated those who tried. Even if they failed they still had value to the country. Vinny feared that Nixon wouldn't share those same values. Those values are what shape the American Dream.

Nixon was inaugurated as president on January 20th, 1969. It was a distraught time for Vinny. Caleb was set to deploy to Vietnam in a few months. Vinny was unsure of the future when he received a phone call. It was Gabriel. He was back in town for a few weeks and wanted to visit with Vinny. They decided to meet at Joy Ride the day after the Nixon inauguration. No matter how old that place was, it was always going to be their spot. Vinny got there early and sat at the old table. Gabriel walked in a few minutes later. His boyfriend wasn't with him and Vinny feared they may have broken up. Luckily Gabriel told Vinny they were still together but he

57

decided to take the trip alone. Vinny was glad to see that Gabriel was safe and happy in life. Gabriel always had a way of bringing Vinny out of the darkness.

“How you are you Gabe? I wasn't sure I would ever see you again.”

“You know I would never forget about you. You saved my life back then. You were there for me when I needed help. You always accepted me for who I am. I can never repay you for that.”

“You don’t need to say that. You were the one who was always there for me. You taught me to look outside of myself to see that everyone has their own path in life. Our journeys may not always be the same, but our goals of happiness are. I would have never learned that without you.”

“Been thinking about life a lot these days. It was never easy when we were kids, but it has really been rough over these last few years. I always thought you would drink yourself to death. I always thought I would kill myself being stuck in the closet. The thing is we are both still here.”

Vinny and Gabriel discussed their own versions of the American Dream. Gabriel’s version of the American Dream was to live as an openly gay man unafraid to be his true self. He understood Vinny’s revelation that the American Dream is different for everyone. That was the great thing about their friendship. They could always relate to each other no matter which direction life took them. Vinny would have never thought he could have a gay man as his best friend, but he realized this was who Gabriel always was. This was the person he met all those years ago. The one who saved him from Mikey, the one who cried with him during World War II. The one who

58

would always be there for him no matter what. Joy Ride would always be the safe haven for Vinny and Gabriel regardless of the chaos of the outside world. That was always the escape they needed. The fuel necessary to charge through the struggles of life. As long as Vinny and Gabriel

could still create those memories together, there was nothing that life could do to drag them down.

Joy Ride eventually went out of business on April 1st, 1970. Vinny and Gabriel stood in front of the entrance one last time to say goodbye to the place they loved so much. For the first time in years, Vinny cried. Gabriel hugged his friend and they didn't say anything for minutes. As they finally left, Vinny wanted to visit the old pharmacy. He walked down the aisles and looked at the shelves remembering the old candy bars that would fill the shelves. While Joy Ride was now gone, Vinny realized he had an entire city of memories to enjoy. He was going to be able to let Joy Ride go as he accepted that it wasn't the bar that was special, but the memories he created there. He would always be able to create memories wherever he was and for that he would always be grateful. The memories could always play in his head like the television reruns he would watch in the middle of the night.

Gabriel and his boyfriend had rented an apartment in the neighborhood next to Vinny's house since Gabriel found a new job as a consultant for an accounting firm. Vinny was glad to have Gabriel close to him again. Vinny was happy that Gabriel felt comfortable to move back East and be his true self. Caleb was set to deploy in a few days and Gabriel decided he would throw a going away party for him. Caleb was excited to say goodbye to everyone. The date was August 1st, 1970. It was a hot summer day and Caleb had a flight out to the base the next day. Vinny and Katie met up at Gabriel's apartment before Caleb arrived. They set up the tables and

were both happy about Caleb's accomplishments in life, but sad about the inevitable departure of their son leaving for war. Regardless of the situation, they were determined to put on a happy

face for their son one last time. Caleb arrived and was so grateful for the party. He hugged Gabriel and lifted him up in the air out of pure joy and surprise. Katie broke down and starting crying. Vinny was frustrated that Katie couldn't contain herself, but he was trying to be sympathetic given the situation. Caleb walked up to Vinny and extended his hand. Vinny pulled him in and gave a hug. The party lasted for hours. It was a joyous occasion when time seemed to have stood still. For that day, all was right in the world. It didn't matter that Nixon was president, it didn't matter that the country was at war, all that mattered was that there were people who loved each other no matter what.

At the end of the day, Vinny asked Caleb to step outside with him for a private chat. Vinny knew he wanted to have one last talk with his son, even if he didn't know everything he truly wanted to say.

“So son, I know we don't have much time left together but I wanted to make sure you know that whatever struggles I have had in life, you were always my inspiration to fight through it. I hope you will use that strength to fight for your country.”

“I always knew you fought for me. You were always concerned about being a failure to me, but you never were. You were everything I could have ever asked for.

“You were never mad at me that I couldn't make it work with Mom?”

“I never blamed either of you for that. It's just life. We try. Sometimes it doesn't work. At least you were still always there for me. I thank you for that.”

“You remember Shantah's brother?”

“Yeah of course, why?”

“He told me once that America is the light of liberty, but that sometimes it is lost. I lost my light of liberty a long time ago, but you helped me find it. You helped me find the lost light of liberty.”

“Maybe it was never truly lost Dad. Maybe you just needed to understand what it truly was. Maybe it was something you always had but didn’t realize it yet. I’m still glad you have that peace of mind now.”

“So how do we say goodbye to each other son? I don’t know how to do this.”

“Maybe we don’t have to say goodbye. Maybe we just say see you later. See you at the deli. See you at the movie theater. See you at the arcade. See you when I close my eyes at night. That way we never truly say goodbye.”

“Yeah son, so then I leave you with this. I’ll see you again at the deli. I’ll see you again at the movie theater. I’ll see you again at the arcade. I will certainly see you every time I close my eyes at night. I’ll never say goodbye to you my son.”

“Then that’s all that needs to be said. We did it Dad. We both have our American Dream.”

“I guess we do. It’s all I ever really wanted.”

Vinny and Caleb said goodbye to each other that night. They decided it would be best for Caleb to leave for deployment alone in the morning, as this was the perfect night and perfect way

to leave things. Nothing else needed to be said. Vinny knew that Caleb had gone by the time he woke up in the morning. He had a lump in his throat, but he knew his son would protect himself and others. That was his purpose in life. That was his light. That was his dream.