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# Seven Days

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**Seven Days**

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It didn't itch. I could feel it alive. It was wild and random but there was still a pattern.

My face was crisscrossed and rapidly becoming entwined. Without this thick disguise I could have never done it.

## Day One

I picked this motel not because of its remoteness but its name, “Los Banos Motel.” Just off the I5 and high up the side of an arid mountain. I felt the name said it all. They couldn’t even spell bathroom correctly.

It is painted a putrid brown with knotty cornices running along the top edge of the long, flat building. When I first pulled up the building seemed to sag with history and expel sadness. The daily beating of the sun has rendered the building into a brittle shell that only holds desperation and last days. This desperation approaches slowly and would soon surround me.

We chose this motel at the last minute. Everything seemed to be at the last minute, including the waiting I have been enduring. I arrived several hours ago. I am leaning out the number seven motel room door and watching the stirrings of the day.

There is so much dust and wide-open space, enough to cram an entire civilization into. Enough to prop up entire ideals and feverish passions. A person could not hide but could instead find things, mostly about oneself, too much about oneself.

There are no towering trees or buildings to block the restless air, only my lack of desire to capture this space and fill it with my wandering thoughts.

My left shoulder is pressing against the doorframe and I can feel the grooves of the frame and the brittle paint. The paint is a sandy yellow that flakes under my body weight. I cross and uncross my arms and place my right hand against the opposing frame as the outside consumes me.

I face the next seven days alone with the prospect she might not show up. We had been very clear about our commitment to this plan and despite my severe angst I don't doubt my conviction, regardless of the outcome. At least this is what I tell myself.

My feet are dressed up in crisp white running shoes with the laces firmly knotted. I have always liked brand new white running shoes and the way they make me lift off the ground as I walk. Leaning against the doorframe, inhabiting the crisp shoes and staring out at all the open space is creating a sensation I have never felt before. One of being on the verge of freedom, cascading towards a place I have yet to experience but have drawn on a blank template. This template is slowly unfolding before me as I inhale deeply and rub my face.

Open space has previously frightened me to the point of an anxiety attack, a closing of possibilities. Now that I have taken that fateful step I feel my heart opening and embracing...

"Hey, you got a light?" A voice shoots from a nearby pair of lips.

I react with a jump and whip my head to the left.

I encounter a wind torn face built up to a certain resistance. Lips freshly swiped with balm and hair glistening from a recent soaking. My mouth moves but my mind stumbles behind it.

"No, sorry. I don't smoke."

The man peers into my eyes for a few seconds and then disengages and walks on as he says, "You look like you was lost there for a second".

"Yeah, probably" I reluctantly respond.

“Be careful, or you’re likely not to find your way out.” The man says as he slopes down the motel walkway.

My tongue forms a word and then falls back in place as I reconsider further interaction.

*It wasn't just the weight but the coolness of the steel that sent sparks of power through my limbs. This type of power felt foreign, an unwarranted and easy power that so many take by force. Tears welled up, smacking into each other as they lined up for their descent. A giant sigh from deep within my lungs heaved forth and forced the tears to burst and re-collect.*

*I laid it on the table and ran my finger down its side, imagining the force of it holding tightly to my flesh. I didn't want to have to use it.*

*This was two days before everything changed.*

The man softly closes his door and the space sucks me back in.

I can see cars passing along the freeway below. Movement without sound. Moments bubbling and popping before my eyes; unknown thoughts swirling into new thoughts and recycling old sensations. I feel part of the wasteland as if I were kneeling inside a deep cauldron of silence. Succumbing to its insidious power.

The absolute silence struck me the first time I pulled into this motel. At least a kind of silence that is not possible in the city. A silence that calms buildings, shivers souls and replaces space.

The motel does not have pavement. Instead it is surrounded by dirt, rocks and stiff sun soaked plants. I had no idea I would welcome such quiet.

Wind is always present and the movement of dirt. There is also the occasional sound of someone walking down the motel walkway. The walkway is layered with wood planks, painted a cross between pewter and mud. The walkway has surely seen its share of fights and yelling, but mostly it is a surface for wind blown debris and scuffed shoes.

Just then a black Ford Festiva creeps into view. It strikes me that I've never seen this color applied to this car. It looks as if someone had hastily painted it and forgot to think how much the car would flaunt its uniqueness as it rode down the highway.

The Festiva resembles a matchbox car in stature and it is not much of a getaway vehicle. Most people could topple it with a hearty shove.

A thin woman in her thirties with short black hair, shockingly pale skin and a nervous energy trips out of the car with wobbly legs. Her right hand keeps running through her hair as she opens the heavy door to the motel front office. Another woman stays in the car. She seems to have her eyes closed.

The sun is in full bloom and its rays bathe the Festiva, causing it to brighten and possibly cook the person inside. She doesn't move and seems to exhale deeply in order to embrace the warmth.

I glance out towards the highway again to witness the silence of the cars.

*I first noticed her long almond hued hair. Her caramel eyes flickered with life and darted about in hesitation. Cheeks flush with the blustery wind. My seat creaked as I shifted for a closer look.*

*Ten years ago I sat in a classroom, not knowing my future had stepped in the room. She strode across in a blur of minute movements and sat down. Sitting upright, bold and undaunted.*

*My attempt at following the lecture was permanently disheveled and would never quite recover. Her name, Melania, crossed my lips in a whisper. Within minutes a strange feeling overcame me. I wasn't one to believe in love at first sight. Besides it wasn't really love that I felt. It was more like a deep sensation of comfort, settling into my bones.*

*Class continued and the sound of the professor blipped on and off.*

I shove the door open. Toss my bag on the bed, open it and take out my black bathroom case. I walk into the bathroom, put down the case, unzip it and take out the clippers. I plug it into the wall socket, snap it on and shear off the first strip of beard, along the right side of my face. Another strip, then another falls off my face and into the blackening sink. I stick my chin out, tilt my head up and buzz along my neck in several quick vertical swipes. The whirring blades slice off my side burns, then finally my mustache and under my bottom lip. I click off the clippers, put them down and thrust into my case for the electric razor. My right thumb slides up the switch into the on position, the fingers on my left hand come together and pull up the skin along the right side of my cheek as I run the razor methodically over the area. I do the same on the left cheek with hands switched and then pull down the skin between my nose and lips and clear off the stubble. All that is left is the hair under my bottom lip and a few stray hairs still poking out. After the last hair is shorn I open the razor's top, hit the top part against the side of



the sink and then do the same with the open razor. The sink and counter are littered with my whiskers so I move the case, clippers and razor onto the toilet. I sweep the hair off the counter and the rim of the sink into the filling sink. The faucet is opened and water comes flowing out while I toss water along the side to completely rid the sink of my hair. White porcelain gleams back at me as I throw water on my face, wetting every inch of flesh and then swipe off the water with a nearby towel. I shove the clippers and razor back into the case, zip it closed and put it on the counter. I shut off the lights and walk out of the bathroom.

The pale woman came back to her car and is now pulling it backwards and then into a spot two doors down from me. She is speaking to the other woman who is now awake. They grab duffel bags from the back seat. The doors open with a slight creak and the dirt welcomes their tired and cranky feet.

I am not staring at them but doing enough to witness their movements. It is all I can do.

They swing towards the motel door. The pale one pushes the key in, turns it and thrusts open the door. The other woman has honey colored skin and long dark hair with eyes that point at the ground as she walks into her new room. I wish she was Melania, but she isn't.

The door shuts forcefully, leaving me in the silence.

I walk back into my room, towards the bathroom and back again, taking small laps around the enclosed space. I close the door, step off the walkway and head off towards the motel office.

*We entered the building within three minutes of each other. Our watches were synced, our outfits were as discussed and our resolve was outwardly iron clad. Glass was everywhere and eyes were scanning both of us. I was to wait thirty seconds after she entered. The three minutes between my entrance and her arrival stammered on until the sound of the door laid a cool shiver through my body. A man asked if I needed help while a guard at the front door paid attention to my movements.*

*“Sure, I’d like to take a look at this piece.” I sounded off crisply.*

*“No problem sir, I must say that is one of my favorite items.”*

*The man pulled it out of the case, laid it on a black surface and took a half step back. Behind me I heard “Do you know the time” in a familiar voice and then several seconds later it began.*

I am walking across the dust swirling parking lot in my new white sneakers that I normally keep impeccably clean. However, in this moment I want to feel the earth underneath me.

The motel office is attached to the far southern side of the motel. It is a clapboard edifice. It holds an imposing sway over the guests due to its peaked roof and garish gargoyles and other barbarous ornaments placed in and around the building. These alloy creatures permanently stare, grimace and hover over the motel.

The people that pull up to Los Banos Motel have few other choices for a place to stay so the creatures do little to staunch the flow. Today there have only been the two women who have arrived at the motel. In total there are four parked cars scattered in front of the motel.

I push open the surprisingly heavy office door and step inside. Despite the hum of the air conditioner the heat is stifling. As I walk inside the office I immediately see the scattering of creatures and the ancient front desk. The desk is covered by a dark slab of wood that looks heavier than the front door. There is no sound of a TV but instead a radio playing jazz softly in the background.

As I step up to the desk the owner comes around the corner, seemingly out of a jazz club. His long brown hair has spackles of gray pulled back into a neat ponytail. His belly protrudes over his jean shorts and his shirt is emblazoned with some sort of dragon. His skin is chalky and he seems to walk with a heavy burden.

“How can I help you?” He says with a slight twitch of his upper lip.

“I was wondering where there is a place to eat around here.”

“Sorry to tell you but that gas station you passed on your way up here is all we got. Unless you want to drive about ten miles east back across the freeway, then you’ll find a restaurant or two in Los Banos.” He says this with a calmness and freshness that belies his daily communication of this information.

“Well, I guess its chips and snickers for now. Thanks.” I say too convincingly.

“Don’t mention it,” he says as he pivots back towards the music.

## **Day Two**

My eyes slam open. A patchwork of blurry streaks stains my vision. I feel cool and wet saliva pressing against my cheek. I lift my head and swipe, then roll off my stomach to my side. The bed is small, but another body could easily fit. I don't want to spend another night here.

There are no shots of light splayed out across the room. Motel curtains are always astonishingly effective at shutting out the sun. I can't tell if it is still night.

Just then I hear a soft crying sound passing by my door. It fades away into a closed door. Then silence again.

She couldn't call me, because we had decided against cell phones at the last minute. We didn't have time to buy throwaways so we decided on meeting here, a motel we had only seen from the freeway.

When the discussion of where we should meet came up we both said "Los Banos" simultaneously, then laughed. It was a rare pocket of joy that we both needed. In the past every time we passed this spot of a city we always pointed it out. We had driven up I 5 at least a dozen times over the years.

I think of all the cars that have cut through the night as I sleep. The darkness enveloping them, taunting them to fall asleep. I have always enjoyed lying in bed at night while watching TV. There is a comfort that the darkness in contrast to the screen allows me and a calmness that permeates my body.

Last night I couldn't watch TV in bed. I lay on my back under the cool sheets and stared into my future, not falling asleep for hours.

The sound of a car leaving the motel pinches my thoughts and I jump back to this dark room. Where is she?

*I see her arriving in our dark green Mustang. I am sitting on the motel room chair that I placed on the walkway, watching the daily ablutions when I see the caustic grill moving slowly into view. A smile jumps to my face and I lift out of the chair and bound towards her car. Quickly, just as she is reaching the motel a black Mercedes rips into view and bears down on her. I pause for a half breath before sprinting towards her car. She opens the door and turns to me. The black car stops behind her and out jumps a familiar angry black mustached face. He is wielding a long steel blade that throws the sun off in sharp angles. I am yelling but no sound comes out and she is smiling as the man lunges towards her with the blade held high. I see her smile, her long almond hair, and her bare neck and then it is all red and I am screaming.*

“No! Stop!” I yell out to the empty room. My breath comes quickly. I can feel the pounding of my heart and my hands are ripping holes in the mattress. This room doesn’t make sense. I don’t recognize the walls or the huge dull painting hanging at an odd angle. I’m looking around, flitting my eyes from the TV to the bathroom. Within a few minutes I begin to relax.

The mattress takes my body weight and my lungs expand fully and my heart thumps with fewer beats a minute. This is another nightmare I’ve continued to experience over the past week. I must have fallen back asleep.

Ever since we decided on this path I have been wracked with nightmares. Some are violent, others hopeless. At night, she comes to me in nightmares, during the day in controlled memories. My memories are my food.

I swing my legs over the mattress edge and feel the dingy carpet. A shock of sensation chills my grogginess so I lurch upwards and take a few shaky steps. My upper body feels heavy, pressing down on my tired legs. I grasp the edge of the curtain and push it to the side. A blade of sun cleaves my face before I can react. The curtain falls back into place and I stumble towards the bathroom.

*I saw Melania stretched out on a lounge chair, next to the pool. She was reading a book. Her head was covered with a floppy straw hat. Her legs were a peachy yellow combination that edges towards a darker hue depending on the light. Her toenails were painted red. Some of her toes were rubbing against each other, giving themselves small massages.*

*I slowed my walk down as I entered the pool area, holding two water bottles in my hands. I felt a strong emotion surging upwards; it was as if the air inside my lungs was escaping. I felt a lightness to my body that I was sure was joy. I stared at Melania lying out in the sun-drenched day and our life appeared as a bright spot, the possibility of us living comfortable was real. I could see the comfort; all of that hardwood floor, lush green grass begging to be cut, and high vaulted ceilings to gaze upon. It seemed that we were making the right choices, that our lives were headed in the right direction. If I only knew that in a few months our lives would smack into a gale wind of desperation I could have possibly prevented.*

*A child ran past me, stomping his bare black feet on the hot surface and screaming in glee. I strode towards Melania, her beautiful curling toes and now her smile as she saw me approach.*

I am against flipping on the light. Instead I stand in front of the mirror, allowing my eyes to adjust back to the darkness that slowly allows me to see. I can see the contours of my face, an etching of the shape, and shadows within the darkness creating the depths of my skin. The oval mirror is plastered to the fading lime wall and a serrated crack runs three quarters down at a severe angle. The crack ends abruptly as if someone has plugged their finger there to stop it. My face is behind this crack and looks as if it is hiding no matter how close I bring my face to the mirror's surface. I try to get a full look at my face without the fissure flaying my face but the crack is too long and the mirror is too small. I feel that if I pull hard enough I can wrench half of the mirror off the wall and leave the rest for an unimpeded reflection. Although this option would leave a smaller mirror it would allow for a partial fullness. There is a days worth of stubble lying across my face, I can see it in the darkness of the bathroom and feel it with my hand. The skin around my eyes feels forcefully scrunched that strange sensation after having woken up from a deep sleep. It will take more than water and rubbing to loosen the feeling, it will take time. Usually closing my eyes and waiting for it to pass is the remedy. I sway in front of the mirror taking a few deep breaths and trying to relax my face. The white linoleum counter is cool to the touch. The chilly tile keeps me awake. I look down at the creamy tile and see my toes flexing as my swaying forces them to bare my shifting weight. It is an odd

sensation to be barely conscious but still able to stand and register thoughts and sensations.

I turn into several steps and stand naked before the shower. Light pushes through the tiny clouded bathroom window. I stare at this window, at the cloud blue bathtub and the water stained wall tile. My arms dangle at my sides, my forearms lightly brushing my hips. I can see the naked bodies stepping into this tub, receiving the jagged spray of the showerhead and placing a firm foot down on the tub surface. They are searching for something sturdy as they shudder in sadness, horror or anticipation. Bodies wracked with guilt, trepidation and possibly acceptance. I cannot embrace their feelings for I am consumed by my own but I do understand. Los Banos Motel is their journey, not their destination, the emotion boils and the vacuous time sucks at their past and allows them to retreat into a shell.

I feel the thousands of bodies, women and men and children, surging into this tub, replacing each other. My stripped body is ready to follow and replicate the past.

I bend over at the knees and turn the knob, which is followed by a flow of water crashing onto the blue tub. I pull the piece of stainless steel that redirects the water through the showerhead. I stand up and without testing the temperature of the water allow myself to step into the tub.

*“We have to do something,” Melania said.*

*“I know.” I responded after a second pause.*

*“I didn’t grow up to be poor again. I can’t. I won’t.” Melania spewed firmly as a tear rolled down the right side of her cheek.*



*“Why did this happen to us? We were supposed to do so much more.”*

*I enclosed her and with my left hand wiped away her tear and looked in her glistening brown eyes telling her “We’ll be fine, I’ll take care of us. Don’t worry.”*

*“It’s not fair...I want more. I don’t care what it takes Sebastian I won’t let it happen.”* Melania barely got this out before she started sobbing. *I held her tighter and whispered in her ear, “Don’t worry we’re going to be ok. I promise.”*

It’s five o’clock in the afternoon but I have not gone outside all day. I have not turned on the television. It is only the second day but Melania fills my mind with thrashing thoughts. I cannot face the day, the people and the sunlight. I’ve been lying in bed, flopping from one position to the next. I have also been standing, walking over every piece of carpet, touching the walls, examining the empty drawers and trying to realign the painting on the wall.

Over the last ten hours I have dropped to the floor at least fifteen or more times and pushed out a set of twenty push ups. My chest pulsates and feels stretched taut across my body. This exercise keeps me alive.

I don’t want to think about the event. I squeeze my temple and shove my face into the mattress and scream.

*“Do you know the time?”*

*The gun was pulled. The guard gives over his heavy weapon. I corralled him and the two employees to the east side of the building and told them all to lie on the ground except for the owner. His black mustache twitched as his eyes bored into my skull.*

*“Put that jewelry into the bag.” I told him as the gun was trained on the people on the ground.*

*He slowly obeyed and went to hand the bag over. Suddenly he grabbed my arm and pulled as he bellowed “You can’t do this to me!”*

*“Let go of him!” screamed Melania.*

*The owner would not let go. With my other arm I struck his forearm several times. His grip loosened but he lurched at me yelling, “I won’t let you!”*

*My fist connected with his cheek and he flailed both arms at my head, connecting two times. I surged backwards and break free of him. Melania and I turned and ran towards the front door.*

*He scrambled over the counter and ran towards us. Melania flung around and yelled, “Stop!” He didn’t and the gun sounded.*

*He was struck in the shoulder. His body jerked and he stopped running, and then dropped to his knees.*

*We both stood for several seconds staring before I grabbed Melania’s shoulder and drug her out of the store and into the cold day.*

The motel door cracks open to reveal night. I step outside, close the door and walk into the darkness.

### **Day Three**

Her long almond hair is tied back. Her eyes are closed. The driver's window is down. A slight wind trails over her face. Her head is against the headrest. The gun is in the trunk.

A siren sounds in the distance and Melania's eyes pop open. She sits up, opens the door and stands on the hot pavement. The pounding heat rains down on her as she focuses on the whining noise. The sound slowly diminishes. She climbs back into the seat.

Her thoughts travel through time, seeking a place when she didn't have to worry about money, sirens or make decisions that will forever alter her world. This place existed. Now it is a memory, a covered slate forever lodged into her mind.

The jewelry is in the trunk, in the same bag. She hasn't touched it since placing it there. There is a strong power keeping her from opening the trunk. She hopes this power will falter and allow her to claim the freedom she is fighting for.

The past two days have joined in a bleeding wash of memory. She has shed tears and sobbed uncontrollably as she has confronted the choices she made and the life she now inhabits. Her desire to flee has been tempered with a fear so severe that she has spent the past day and a half in her car. Sleeping, eating and thinking alone in her car.

She thinks of her love waiting in that musty motel and is propelled to reach him. Then she is struck with the thought of both of them being caught. Could she live with herself if they were both destroyed?

The gun and jewelry are heavy. She knows this. She has to test her strength. The car waits.

She starts the Mustang and drives towards the desert.

## **Day Four**

“I can’t betray her.”

I sit outside at one in the afternoon. The door two rooms down is swung open and TV conversation floods through. The man staying in that room arrived this morning. He drives a white Ford Taurus plastered with bumper stickers.

*The Best Things in Life aren’t things.*

*What’s our oil doing under their soil?*

*Horn Broke Watch For Finger.*

His skin is the color and texture of an old black saddle. His head is shorn and wind bounces off of it at an angle. He walks with a hitch to his stride that brings his right hip up slightly higher than his left and causes him to thrust forward with every stride. He wears blue jeans, brown boots and a short sleeve white t-shirt. There are several tattoos coiling up his arms that are difficult to see because of the darkness of his skin.

I am sitting on my motel room chair I have placed outside and my left leg is crossed over my right with the ankle balanced on my thigh. I am staring out into the bright day and I can hear him looking through his bag.

The breeze is subtle and it runs before me along its flimsy path.

Within several minutes he appears outside of his door, staring as I do.

“Damn it sure is hot.” He says with a rumbling southern drawl.

“Yeah, it was worse a few days ago.” I respond with shocking alertness.

I don’t really mind speaking with motel patrons. But I after three and a half days in this motel my interest in others is dwindling.

“This motel here ain’t right. It feels like an abnormal environment. Can cause folks to do abnormal things.” He says in a distant but determined way, almost as if he frequently finds himself in abnormal situations.

“Yeah.” I agree with a start.

“Man told me one time. ‘I’m gonna tell you something simple point blank. If it don’t feel right chances are it ain’t.’” The man shifts and takes a deep breath. I look over at him and see that his forehead is tightening and his lips are pursed. I look away.

“Best damn advice I ever got.” He says and turns back into his room closing the door behind him.

Within a few hours he had joined the soundless whirr of passing cars.

It shouldn’t have taken more than one day to arrive. We set seven days because we wanted to make sure that she had enough time, but it should not be taking this long. A thought of deceit spills into my mind and I quickly dismiss the idea. I can’t believe she would do that, not after everything. I am floating through my memories, my thoughts, and my stench of regret. I can’t find what I am searching for but I can feel it, it is bouncing around in my head and my feelings, my very sensations.

I love her and was going to marry her before we felt forced to make the decisions we had. I know something is wrong. She is very smart and has a sense for things, for impending problems and always makes the right decisions.

We promised each other this would be our way out. It would be simple. We would just have to fight through this time to reach our future. But it wasn’t ever supposed to be like this. It should have never been like this.

My mind is filling up with thoughts I cannot handle. My time is vanishing.

## **Day Five**

I am running. The earth sweeps underneath my feet, creating a wave of grainy wind that disturbs the terrain. I sprint. The brush slaps my bare legs, creating red lines that stripe my muddy flesh. Breath comes from within my lungs, expelling into the dawn and I suck in more air. I let loose a gasping groan. My stride does not shorten, my feet continue to strike the bare ground, side stepping rocks and scattered pieces of gnarled wood. The air that surrounds me, it encases me, slams off my perspiring body and heads for the scraggly plants and myriad animals dodging the abandoned train that is me. I pump my arms with the full density of my muscles, creating steam and energy that lights the day and flings me forward. This day claims me and holds me without guiding me. I feel a burning twitch in my thighs and curling into oblivion. I see the road and the flushing sound of cars passing through the golden morning.

My mind switches off and my body takes control. I am descending through the starkness and into the clearness. I step on forgiving land and come closer to hard reality.

I am fifty yards away from the whooshing cars and trucks. I am forty yards closer to my goal. I bound through the burn, the howling of my feet jammed tightly in my white shoes. Ten yards is all that I see.

I run straight across the highway. A semi screams its horn, as I pass not fifty yards before its steel grill. My body feels the force of the wind being shoved forward by the weight of the semi. My legs churn as my feet connect with the pavement, a resting place for so many. I hit the center earth divide and my pace slows as I dip into the sloping valley and back up the other side. A car passes two seconds before me as I continue to



sprint across the freeway. I leap onto the other side and land on my humming feet. I stagger for many steps as I realize the amount of discomfort I am in.

I am wearing running shorts and a tank top. I lay my arms across the top of my head and heave several times while I barely maintain my standing position. I remember waking up and then blackness and now this searing pain in my lungs. The cars continue to rush by me as my lungs recalibrate and allow me to live. My heart thuds underneath my flesh and bones and I feel alive, connected with the world for a moment. I take profound breaths and make small circles as air reaches my brain. I stop moving and look across the buzzing highway, up the hill and see the motel. The outline of the building is etched in the dark morning. I begin my ascent back to my room.

I have to wait for seven days I think from my usual perch on the creaky walkway. I promised. She is going to show up. Where is she? She is being careful and must be lying low until she feels it is right to make the drive. She knows where I am. My skin is anxious. The passing days are the same. Different faces but the same people. Brown people, white people and black people circling around me. She must be driving up the freeway, with her hair blowing as she sings. She has to be safe, we are safe.

“You got the time?” asks a brown woman with a saggy face I hadn’t noticed.

“Yeah...” I say as I dip into my open room and see that my watch says three from the table and then step back outside.

“It’s three o’clock.”

“Damn. I got to get going.” She says with a look of genuine concern.

“Hey, you know how to get to Gilroy from here?” she asks with a familiar inflection as she slides a foot closer to me.

“Yeah, just take the 152 going west and you’ll run into it after an hour or so.” I respond.

I don’t want to talk to her or help her but I feel as if I’m in some zone of necessity, and if I don’t speak with her I’ll dwindle away. Her face reminds me of so many women I’ve seen in Los Angeles. Why is she here?

“Thanks.” She turns to walk away and then pauses for a second while she seems to mull over the idea of saying something else. She slowly turns back.

“No worries you’ll get through it. Gotta have faith.” And then she quickly scurries off to her room three doors down to avoid further interaction. Her door closes lightly and I’m left staring at the space she was just occupying. I can feel the stiff breeze, hot and thick, settling in for a few more hours.

I want to believe this woman with the saggy face. I have to believe her. I feel myself sliding and my body is not preventing it.

## **Day Six**

If you were to wake up on this particular day at the Los Banos Motel in room number seven you would be greeted by a clean room. The painting on the wall is perfectly straight and the bed is made. If you were to step outside you would be welcomed by a clear day that would bathe your face with soft light and puff a cool breeze over your warming cheeks. The height of this motel would afford you a panoramic view of the wide-open space and the freeway running just below it. You would see five cars tightly stacked against the wooden walkway on this busy Saturday morning. You would see a white car, two black cars and a red and green one. The silence might overwhelm you or bring a sense of calm and peacefulness. The moving air would pull you into the open space and taunt you with its sweetness. Once you had taken several deep breaths you would head back into the room, close the door and pause for a moment. You would hear water dripping and wonder how you had missed it when you first rose from your slumber. The carpet would mash underneath your bare feet as you slowly pad towards the bathroom. You would softly push open the half closed door and be greeted with hot air, a fogged up mirror and drawn shower curtains. Your eyes would be drawn to a piece of stock paper lying on the sink counter, you notice there is another piece of paper underneath the first. You see words scrawled across the paper in thick black ink. You would pick up this paper and read it.

*My sweet Melania,*

*I can barely write this letter to you. I love you so much. I cannot unhinge my heart.*

*You are sitting in front of me every second, I cannot take a breath. Don't be angry.*

*Love,*

*Sebastian*

You would place this note back on the counter, to the side of the second note. The second note is thinner paper and has blue ink spread across in looping letters. Your hand would tremble as you read it.

*My dearest Sebastian,*

*I am sitting in the parking lot, not ten feet from you. I feel the need to write you this letter, to get it all out. I love you so much. I have been through such torment these past few days. My heart is filled with you and the anguish you must be going through right now. I know that you love me and that you will wait for me but I worry about our future. What life have we started with the decisions we've made? Where...*

You would see that the letter stops abruptly so you would place it back on the counter. If you were to walk towards the shower and pull back the curtain you would see two naked bodies, a woman and a man. You would see one embracing the other around their chest, with the other person's head nestled between their neck and shoulder. Both pairs of eyes are closed. The showerhead drops methodical droplets of water into the standing water that surrounds these two bodies. You might think you see their chests rising and falling, but you are not sure.

## **Day Seven**

A tan-colored Chevy wheels up Bluff drive, its motor gasping for water. The driver is wearing a brand new Yankees cap, scuffed brown work boots, jeans and a black t-shirt. His maple colored elbow hangs out of the car window.

He pulls up to Los Banos Motel, parks and goes into the front office. Five minutes later he comes out with a flourish, lands in his car and pulls it farther down the motel. He grabs his green bag from the front seat, slides out and slams the door. His fingers fiddle with the keys as he lopes towards the door. He slides to a stop on the creaky walkway, jams in the key, turns it with a grunt and thrusts the door open. He tosses his bag on the bed, pulls out a cigarette pack from his shirt pocket but finds it empty. He goes back to his bag, flips it over and dumps out the contents on the bed. Rifling through the creased clothes he finds another cigarette pack and tears into it. He stands erect as he jams a cigarette between his baked lips. He turns and throws his cap on the small table and steps outside.

The door to room number seven stands ajar as he lights the cigarette, looks out towards the freeway and succumbs to the cool breeze.