

# **The View from the Palos Verdes Hills**

**Hal Mayberry  
2007**



This book is for those of you who remember the world before it was a sea of houses and black-top. Perhaps times were simpler then or perhaps our memories of that time exclude the mundane. Whichever is true doesn't really matter. I like to think that this book may remind us that all of our hero's occasionally have muddy feet and all of the villains had a mother who loved them.

Hal Mayberry 2007

This novel is fiction except for the parts that aren't.

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Lacy Moran and the twisting road – 2006

Big Sky – 2007

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## **Lawrence Leland Lee Jr.**

You're probably wondering what a nice kid from southern California is doing in a place like this. Well, I guess I'm wondering too. I didn't plan it this way but most of my life seems to have been unplanned. Maybe that's the legacy that I inherited from my dad.

My dad, now there was a guy that made things happen and I don't think he would have been where I'm sitting now. He was a wheeler-dealer that made it up as he went along. I know most of this from the family stories and things that other people have told me because, while I'm sure that he loved me, he really never had time for me. I was the afterthought. Born ten years too late to have been a priority to him. Still, he did saddle me with a pretentious name and did his best to provide for me. At least he provided for me in his own way.

I guess that I'm closer to my mom but she was the same way. She could travel around the world on fifteen minutes notice and as long as she had her hands full of dad's coattails she was happy. I had a brother but he was ten years older so we were never really friends. In fact, when I got to know him, I didn't like him very much.

So where did my twisting road start? Well, I guess that it started in a dusty Texas town a long time ago.

## **Alvarez Texas -1906.**

My dad, Lawrence Leland Lee had a way about him that gave him certain advantages. He made friends quickly, gained the trusts of others and generally got his way. He had grown up in a catholic orphanage in that tiny farm town and, somehow, he had turned it into a positive experience. When he 'aged-out' of the orphanage at sixteen he convinced the sisters that they should keep him on as a handy-man and provide him with room and board. It didn't matter that they had never needed a full time handyman in the past, they were glad to have him.

For two months he had hung around the town square or spent his time in the local pool hall. At first he imagined that he could hustle a few bucks with a pool stick but he quickly learned the he wasn't good enough. This didn't deter him and he made side bets on other peoples play. This pastime provided him with plenty of spending money which he squealed away in a box kept under his mattress.

It was hot in Alvarez as Labor Day approached. He knew that few farmers paid any attention to this twenty year old holiday on the first Monday in September but there would be a tractor parade and a town picnic in the park. A dusty farmer stamped into the pool hall and quickly found an RC Cola in the icebox near the door. The farmer was pissed off and he didn't care who knew it.

"God damned leaches ... now what am I supposed to do with all of them god damned melons!"

“What wrong Jake?” the proprietor asked.

“God damned ‘wrong’ is right. I had a contract with that fruit buyer, Jeremy Halstead for 400 watermelons. They were to be delivered somewhere this Saturday and the old fart up and died. I talked to his wife but she don’t know who he sold them to and she didn’t seem to care. She told me that I could contact her son next week when he got here from Chicago. Hell, next week them melons will only be fit for the hogs.”

Dad’s ears perked up at the sound of money looking for a home.

“Excuse me Mr. Cravats, I might know someone that would take them off of your hands. How much was Mr. Halstead paying you?”

“Ten cents apiece, 400 melons, forty dollars.”

Dad knew that a farmhand made fifty cents a day so forty dollars was several months work.

“Oh, I’m sorry Mr. Cravats. The guy that I know won’t pay more than four cents. Anyway, you probably wouldn’t want to deliver them all the way to Fort Worth. I guess that it just isn’t going to work out”

“Well just a minute, I could go to Fort Worth but the price is a little low. Would your guy go five cents?”

“I’ll tell you what Mr. Cravats, if you’ll give me two bucks I’ll take the bus up there this morning and see what I can do. I’ll see you back here at supertime and I’ll know if we have a deal.”

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Well dad took the bus to Fort Worth and found what he was looking for. There were posters all over town about the Labor Day Parade and picnic in the park. He went to the local ice company and arranged for two tons of ground ice to be delivered to the park on Monday morning.

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Two days later when the parade ended, folks started to arrive at the picnic, it was ninety-eight degrees in the shade and there was a mountain of ice covered watermelons. At the grocery store a melon would sell for twenty cents but these melons were fresh and ripe and ice cold. The hand lettered sign said sixty cents each or two for a dollar.

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The next day dad walked into the ATSF railroad station and asked the clerk where the train went. The old man looked at him for a minute and said,

“Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe”

Dad wasn’t amused and asked if that was all.

“Well Sonny, Chicago is on the east end of the line and Los Angeles California is on the other end”

Dad paid for a second class ticket to LA and boarded the train with \$227.50 of his watermelon money and pool winnings in his pocket. It was the last time that he ever traveled second class.

## **California – The land of fruits and nuts**

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Dad had no idea what to expect when the train reached LA and he wasn't sure that he had made the right decision. Somehow he expected a city like the ones that he had seen in Life Magazine. What he found was a fairly big town of low buildings and wood-frame houses. There were palm trees and the sun was shining without the stiffening heat of Texas. The town seemed to center around the train station and the business district that was just to the south. It surprised him to see so many Orientals and Mexicans.

As he walked out of Union Station he asked a business man where he might find a rooming house. The man just looked at dad with a blank stare and dad realized the he was Chinese and probably didn't speak the language. Again he was surprised when a Chinese boy interrupted, "Sorry mister, pop didn't understand you. Just walk across the street and turn left and you'll see several places to stay."

Dad thanked him and walked away. What a strange place he thought. The old man spoke no English but the kid spoke it with no accent at all.

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It took dad a while to realize that LA was really a loose collection of small towns interlaced with farms, dairies and factories. There was local transportation by trolley but they never seemed to go where he wanted. He was looking for a financial opportunity to present it's self.

One day, with no plan, he rented a car and drove west to the beach. He had seen big lakes and he assumed that the ocean wouldn't be much different. He followed the paved streets west until they gave way to dirt farm roads. He laughed at a road sign that proclaimed a stretch of dirt through an orange grove to be 'Sunset Boulevard'.

After he made his way through some low hills he started to see more signs of habitation and then, at the top of a hill, he caught sight of the Pacific. 'Wow' he thought. The sky and the vast ocean were a beautiful blue. There were puffy white clouds being blown by a cool breeze and he thought that it was the best sight that he had ever seen.

He drove down the main street of Santa Monica to the beach. There was a pier and a boardwalk along the sand. People were frolicking and playing in the water. He strolled along the boardwalk and came to a crowd of people standing behind a barrier.

"What's going on?" he asked a tall man who was looking over the heads of the others. "They're making a motion picture down by the water"

Dad positioned himself so that he could see the action. There were about twenty people in a group and some held open books that they were consulting. There were several men with large, shiny boards that were being used to reflect sunlight onto the actors and there was a big, hand cranked camera. The man in charge had a megaphone and he was shouting orders. Dad thought that it looked like chaos but finally, everyone was stood still. A man and woman wearing bathrobes were positioned and lighted with the reflector boards. Assistants quickly removed the actor's robes revealing their bathing costumes. The man in charge shouted a command and the cameraman started to crank. The actors started to gesture with their hands and, in what looked like a comical overreaction to everything, the man stepped forward and took the woman in his arms and kissed her. Finally the director yelled 'cut' and the assistants rushed forwards with the robes.

Dad turned to the tall man and remarked,  
"That's not how it looks at the flicks, on the screen they look like they're all alone"  
"Yea and those twenty seconds on the screen might take two hours to film. That's the fourth time that they've filmed that scene today. "

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Of course I wasn't there for any of that because I wasn't born yet but that's the family history. Here's a story that I heard from more than one source and supposedly, the guys that told me were actually there.

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### **More than one way to skin a cat or make a buck**

Dad realized that there was no way to do business with these movie people without a car. LA and the surrounding towns were just too spread out. His first business investment was \$75 for a used Model-T Ford. These little black cars were everywhere in the city and he was sure that California was several years more modern than the rest of the country . He had already talked to several people in the Motion Picture business so he sort of knew his way around.

He had business cards printed that said,

*Lawrence L. Lee*  
*Expeditor*

*Phone Torry 656-2011*

The phone number was an answering service in Santa Monica.

Dad knew that a flick was being shot on a small farm in Culver City and he stopped by the site to see if he could drum up some business. There was the usual entourage of movie people, agents, riggers, wardrobe and lighting. The wardrobe unit was a large, horse drawn van with all of the costumes needed for that day's action. In the back of the van were two small changing rooms.

Dad saw a cute girl wearing a sewing apron standing in the door of the van and he stopped to chat and flirt. She was smiling and he was smiling when they both heard the director's tirade.

"Where are the god damned coveralls? These aren't coveralls. These god damned things are worn by auto-mechanics'. I need farmers' coveralls.

The wardrobe girl covered her mouth and said, "Oh shit". She was embarrassed that Dad had heard her but, evidently, this screw-up was her fault. As the director stormed up to the van, Dad stepped up and asked,

"How many do you need, when do you need'em and should they be clean or dirty?"

The director looked at dad and shouted,

"Twelve, dirty, in an hour".

With that he turned and stamped away with some other crises to deal with.

Dad drove straight to the Sears-Roebuck store in Santa Monica and bought twelve pair of farmers bib overalls. Then he drove to the first strawberry field that he could find and talked to the foreman. In less than the allotted hour he was back on the set with twelve pair of dirty and somewhat smelly overalls.

While the actors quickly changed into their new costumes, dad made a deal with the business agent to rent the coveralls to the studio for five days at \$5 per day for each pair.

"\$25 each for the week! I could have bought the damned things for \$3 a pair"

"That true and if you like I'll take my back now but these have been treated to make them look used"

The agent laughed.

"Look ... what's your name ... Larry? Look Larry, I'll give you \$60 for all of them and you won't have to go through the charade of picking them up at the end of the week"

"Thank you sir, is there anything else that I can do for you today?" dad said with a smile.

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It wasn't long before people in the movie industry knew that dad could solve problems and he could do it in a hurry. Just like everywhere he had ever gone, people liked him and they went out of there was to help him.

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## **Business was looking up**

Even in 1908 and 1909, the movies were about pretty girls. There might have been a handsome guy on a horse but there was always a pretty girl somewhere in the flick. The prospects of being 'discovered' drew young lovelies to LA like a magnet. They were moving off the farm in Iowa to sell handkerchiefs at Woolworths in Hollywood, they were just biding their time until a Movie-Guy discovered them.

With young, ego driven, casting directors interviewing dozens of young girls, the rumor soon got around that a girls who offered special favors had a better chance of making it to the silver screen than those who kept their knickers on. Not that it was a requirement and it wasn't always true but many a budding starlet was willing to offer her services if that's what it took. My mother was one of those budding stars but she took a different path.

My mom, Linda Louise Leister, was born and raised in the farm town of Bakersfield California and like most girls her age she thought that she could be a movie star. After high school she worked hard as a waitress and save all of her money. She had an aunt who lived just north of LA in Pasadena and she made pretence of going to visit. Her best girlfriend, Missy, was equally smitten by the prospects of a film career and the two hopefuls boarded a greyhound bus to Pasadena.

Mom asked her aunt if they could stay for three nights. That's how long it took them to rent a tiny apartment in the Palms area of LA. From Palms they could take a local bus to Hollywood, Culver City and Santa Monica. Mom found a job as a night waitress at a diner and her friend, Missy, went to work at Woolworths.

Of course, as expected, weeks went by and neither even came close to a film career. They did, however, start an active social life. They often had Saturday night dates with boys from the local grocery store or the dry cleaners or telephone company. They would go to the movies and make-out in the balcony. Later they might go to a local bar and drink a few glasses of beer and if they felt safe with the guys they might have them home for coffee at the end of the evening. Mom wasn't opposed to giving just enough to keep a guy interested but she had no interest in 'giving away the company store'.

After a few months one of their dates's mentioned that he knew someone that knew someone that might, maybe, get them into a casting call for a new flick at Paramount. Missy made the evening a little more interesting for him with the promise that he would expedite their entry at the studio.

The day finally arrived and the girls took the trolley to the Paramount lot. There they joined the line with fifty other girls who had the same idea. Some of them had already been extras in movies and a few bragged that they had speaking parts. Mom wondered why that was important since the movies were silent. Mom was also a little shocked at the number of short dresses and low necklines.

The interviews were being conducted by several young assent directors and it wasn't long before mom's turn came. She sat in a low chair across the desk from a pleasant looking man in his late twenties and she soon became aware that, with the chair so low, there was no way for her to sit without him looking up her skirt and down her blouse.

He asked her about any acting experience and she told him about playing Juliet in her high school play. They chatted about what she wanted to do while he walked around looking at her from every side. She was very self conscious but she kept talking. Finally, he came to the point.

"You know that motion pictures are a visual media and your appearance is actually more important than your acting ability. Do you understand that Miss Leister?"

"Yes sir, I think so"

"Here is what we can do, you can excuse yourself now and I'll use the impression that I have already made to make a determination, or you can show me more by walking and posing. You might want to take off your jacket and let me see more of your figure and if you like you can change into an actual movie custom and I can take a look at you. Here are a couple of photos of the costumes that are available"

Mom looked at the photos on the desk. One was an evening gown cut nearly to the waist and the other was a French Maids uniform with a skirt so short that her underwear would show. Mom weighed what she would do for the job against her own values. Then she stood and shook the director's hand and thanked him for his time. As she walked towards the door the young man called after her.

"You're a nice person Miss Leister, go home and be happy. This industry will eat you up"

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In the waiting room mom looked for Missy but she wasn't there and she assumed that she was still being interviewed. After a few minutes her friend came and they walked out into the warm sunshine.

"How did it go Linda?" Missy asked.

"Fine but I kept my clothes on and I didn't get the job. How about you?"

"Oh he had me try on a couple of costumes and I think that he liked me. He said the role would be cast for a few days and then he asked me for a date."

"A date? What kind of date?"

"Oh the regular kind, you know, dinner and a movie"

"That's all"

"It's just a date Linda, nothing sinister"

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Missy had her date. Dinner was in the studio cafeteria and the movie was in a private screening room. She did a special favor for the director and she got a part in the movie. Over the next few months she was in a half dozen films, always as one of a crowd or as a secretary sitting at a desk. Only once was she filmed alone. She played a slave girl in an

Arabian night's film. She wore filmy, see-through pajamas in a harem and, although the director liked the scene he had to re-shoot it because there was too much of Missy showing for a film audience.

Through some of Missy's contacts, mom got a job in the wardrobe department and she enjoyed being around the excitement of the cinema. Five months after the start of her film career Missy told my mom that she was pregnant and she had been given a generous severance package and she was going home to Bakersfield.

"Who's the father?" Mom asked.

"Who knows, but it's been one hell of a ride" Missy answered with a smile.

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## 1909 – A very good year

Dad was doing very well in the movie business, it would have been a real shock to his clients if they had known that he was only nineteen years old. In those days no one every asked for an i.d. to buy a drink or rent a room or to arrange for a hundred camels to be delivered to sand dune near Palm Springs.

One day, while on the lot at Paramount, he saw a pretty girl in the cafeteria. She wore her hair up in a bandana and no makeup. She was a breath of fresh air in a painted world.

“Who is that girl?” he asked his companion.

“Don’t know, one of the new cuties I guess”

“Come on Mike, introduce me”

“Introduce you” I don’t know her, I can’t introduce you”

“Yes you can, you’re a producer, your somebody here, just call her over”

Mike looked peeved but like everyone else, he liked Larry and he wanted to help him.

“Miss!” he called. She looked at him and then looked around, and then pointed at herself with a question on her face.

“Me?” she mouthed.

“Yes, I need you. Come here please”

She approached with apprehension.

“Yes Mr. Gold”. He was pleased that she recognized him and he sit up and tried to look important.

“Look, I busy this afternoon but will you help Mr. Lee. He will tell you what he needs”

With that brazen statement, he stood and shook hands with dad, patted mom on the shoulder and walked away.

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Of course, it being Hollywood with a happy ending assure, they fell in love and were married. He bought a little house in Bel Air and the following summer my brother Robert was born. It was years before she discovered that dad was several months younger than she was.

With no thought to the consequences they named the baby after her father and for years my brother had to put up with a constant string of comments about his name. Mom’s dad was named Robert Everett Leister which made my brother Robert E. Lee.

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## Good fortune or not

Two things happened to dad in the fall and winter of 1919-1920. The first was a conversation with a producer at Metro about an upcoming film. The story was based in Italy and the director wanted to take the cast and crew to Europe for six months.

“It will cost a bloody fortune. Besides, he doesn’t realize that people will get sick, the weather will be lousy, and the crew will get home sick. There are a hundred reasons not to go but this guy is the best that we have and he won’t make the picture if he’s not happy”

“Why don’t you shoot somewhere that looks like Italy?”

“Do you know somewhere like that?”

“I don’t know but let me look around”

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Dad already had a place in mind. He had bought a new Packard car just last week and he had taken Linda and Bobby for a Sunday outing. They had driven down the coast to Redondo Beach for a seafood lunch. It was a crystal clear day and the blue sky and the blue sea drew them south into the hump of the Palos Verdes peninsula.

At the end of the paved road, a new community was being built. It was almost a perfect replica of an Italian village complete with copy of a marble fountain that Donatello had carved in Rome three hundred years before.

Out of curiosity dad had followed the dirt road south out of town where there were several small vegetable farms that had been tended for nearly half a century by Japanese farmers. Mom admired the beautiful Bougainville vines that nearly obscured some of the farm houses.

Across a small valley they could see an impressive villa on the cliff facing the ocean. He knew right away that it hadn’t been built recently by the developers of the new estates. They climbed the steep dirt road and entered a barnyard. A man approached and asked if he could help them. Dad couldn’t recognize the man’s accent but he said that they were curious about the house. The man introduced himself as Paco Ortiz.

Mr. Ortiz explained that the villa had been built twenty five years before by a wealthy immigrant from Spain. He had built the house as a replicate of his childhood home near Malaga on the south coast and he had even planted a vineyard in an attempt to make Spanish red wine. The weather here wasn’t really good for wine but the commercial vegetable production had been much more profitable.

The family’s children were grown and had left home and the owner had recently passed away. His widow wanted only to sell the estate and return to Spain.

“And you Mr. Ortiz? Do you want to return to Spain?”

“No sir, I came here with my parents when I was ten and for many years now I have been foreman of the ranch. I hope to continue in that capacity.”

Dad asked the price and was surprised at the amount. It was more than he had guessed but less than he knew the place was worth. He thanked the foreman and went along his way.

He had found a place that looked like Italy and he talked to the producer again about the budget for the picture. Dad calculated the total cost of filming in Italy and then drove back to the villa. This time he was referred to the real estate agent and they talked numbers. His last stop was to visit a friend from whom he might borrow a large sum of money and then he made a proposal to Metro Studios.

When it was all over, dad had purchased the villa and had leased it to Metro for six months. He had borrowed half of the money from his friend and emptied his savings for the rest. The only condition of sale that the widow made was a plea to keep Mr. Ortiz and his family on as workers. Dad even arranged for Mr. Ortiz to draw a paycheck from Metro during the six months shooting.

In the end, dad's savings were replaced, his friend was paid back with interest and he owned a villa overlooking the Pacific.

In February of 1920, the studio moved all of their equipment out and dad and mom spent a romantic weekend in the ranch. In November of that year I was born in the Redondo Beach Hospital as a souvenir of that romantic weekend. Surprise!

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## **Alicante Spain – 1921 –**

Juan Carlos Vargas was a dirt poor peasant who worked for a cruel landlord on a huge farm near Alicante on the south coast of Spain. He and his young and pregnant wife Carmella were more like serfs than tenants. The Patrón had complete control over their lives and he could do as he pleased. One misdeed and he could put them out of their home and they would never work again. The end to that dilemma would be a life of crime or death by starvation.

It was the Patrón's decision that the life of Juan and Carmella would be tomatoes. They would plant them, care for them, harvest them and prepare the soil to plant them again.

Juan hated tomatoes.

Carmella was nearly six months pregnant and her breasts and belly were growing. Still, each day she labored with her husband in the fields. Her husband was just seventeen and she was fifteen but they had the weight of the world on their shoulders. Her mother had died at thirty-four, probably from overwork, and Carmella prayed each Sunday for God to save them from this life of misery.

The morning was very hot as the pair crawled along the ground examining each plant for the fat, green, worms that came from who-knows-where to lay their eggs inside of the big, tomatoes. Juan and Carmella didn't kill the worms but saved them in a bucket to feed to their hungry chickens.

Juan saw the Patrón walk into the field and watch them. He kept his head down and looked faster for the worms. He heard the master call to Carmella to bring him a drink of water from the goatskin bag that lay nearby.

She fetched the bag and handed it to the boss and Juan heard the man talking to his young wife but he couldn't tell what he said. Looking out of the corner of his eye he saw the bastard rubbing Carmella's swollen belly and smiling at her. She was looking at her feet and saying nothing. Again he laughed and rubbed her swollen breasts.

This was nothing new for a peasant, the Patrón often took liberties with women and girls and sometimes small children. Still Juan bit his lip and listened to the laughter. The man sensed that his farmer was not pleased and he called to him.

**“YOU THERE - CLEAN THAT GRASS FROM THAT TOMATO BED!”**

Juan rose and found his hoe. Carmella was still looking at her feet while the man toyed with her now bare breasts while Juan looked away and cleared a small patch of grass from the row. Then without thinking he turned and hit the Patrón in the face with the hoe.

The man went down with a look of surprise. Juan could see the ugly gash on the man's cheek and thought that it would leave a bad scar but that was ok, everyone that Juan knew

had many scars. The bosses surprise was replaced with anger as he struggled to regain his feet. Calmly Juan hit him again and again until he was sure that the man was dead.

Carmella was on her knees praying while Juan went through the man's pockets. What he found was a princely sum. It was more money than he had ever seen or had ever hoped to see. As a final bit of respect for his fallen master, he opened the man's mouth and filled it with the fat green worms in his bucket and then they ran.

With only the clothes on their backs they walked and ran to the Alicante train station and soon they were on their way to Ayamonte on the Portuguese border. Although they had no papers, they simply walked into Portugal on a hot dusty road with other dirt poor peasants. They stopped in a small village and bought some new clothes and after another long walk and they stopped for the night at a tiny inn near the beach. The next day they took a local train to the port town of Faro. They could have gone to Lisbon but he had never been in a big city and they must have a telegraph in Lisbon, a telegraph that might ask about two murders on the run.

He wanted to find a ship to Mexico or Argentina but the first one that he found was bound for Brazil. He only knew a little Portuguese and he was looking for a Spanish speaking destination. There was another ship loading cork and when he asked its destination the Captain said that he was going to California.

Juan didn't know where California was and he told the captain that he wanted to go where they spoke Spanish. The Captain assured him that they spoke Spanish in California. Juan explained that neither he nor his wife had papers and the captain assured him that they wouldn't need papers in California. Juan looked over his shoulder and the captain quickly added that the ship was sailing on the afternoon tide.

So, for most of a princely sum, the Vargas's were bound for the land of sunshine, the land of freedom and opportunity, the land of the San Pedro slums and a new life.

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The trip was interesting if you call sea sickness interesting. Juan was only sick most of the time while pregnant Carmella was sick all of the time. But, as all good things must end, so must all bad things. The ship dropped anchor in San Pedro harbor while it waited for space at the dock to unload. Here Juan and Carmella waited for three days looking at their new home but unable to land. When the ship finally tied up at the dock, the captain hid them in bundles of cork and soon they were standing on a San Pedro street corner. The captain, in a final act of kindness gave Juan four one dollar bills to tide them over. He knew that if they were arrested before he cleared port the two would bring the cops straight to the ship. His last words to the couple were "Welcome to America"

## **Home in the USA**

The captain had been right about Spanish being spoken but he hadn't told him that it was Mexican Spanish which was a long way from the south coast of Spain. He could ask

questions but he had trouble with the answers. There first quest was for a rooming house. They were directed to several but the first two were full. It was getting later in the day when he knocked on a door in, what looked to Juan like a bad part of town. A woman with a scowl on her face answered the door and he asked for a room. She smiled and answered in the Spanish of Andualcia, she was born no more the twenty miles from the Vargas's home.

They were settled into a small room and told that they could use the kitchen when it was available. Juan mentioned that he needed work and the woman told him that her husband would find work for him and it would be no problem at all.

That couple, Felix and Sonya Sanchez were the Aunt Sonya and Uncle Felix that would raise their yet-to-be-born son, Alejandro. It was from them that the boy would learn the story of how his parents came to America and it was from them that he would learn of there tragic fate.

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Felix was a man of many talents, one of which was making money from the sweat of others. He had several workers like Juan that didn't know enough about America to find work on their own. He would hire them out for a fixed wage minus his cut. They might pick fruit one day and paint a fence the next. He was good at his job and the men seldom went without work.

Sonya had a house full of kids, kids of all ages. Some were hers but most were there for the day while their parents struggled to make a living. She insisted that they be potty trained because she wouldn't change diapers. She simply shoved them into the backyard and fed them a bowl of oatmeal for lunch. If it rained, they were put into a crowded storage shed. If any ever complained to their parents, Sonya never heard about it.

Carmella had her baby and American citizen Alejandro joined the family. The church had sent a midwife to help with the birth but things had gone badly. Finally, an older boy from the backyard was sent running to fetch the priest who stopped on his way to the house to bring a doctor and the mother and baby were saved but Carmella had delivered her last child.

Felix, never one to miss an opportunity brought bundles of new clothes to Carmella and she spent ten hours a day sewing on buttons. When Alejandro was potty trained he was shoved into the backyard with the rest. It was here that Felix made a mistake. The button job played out but he knew a man who needed a barmaid for a short time. The job would only last a couple of months and Carmella had learned enough English it handle it.

When she got to the bar for her first day the owner looked at her clothes and said that they wouldn't do. He took her into the backroom and found a dress for her in a closet. It seemed that the use of the clothes came with the job. She waited for him to leave but he just stood and watched. Finally, she turned her back and slipped out of her ragged housedress and tried to get the new dress over her head. She hadn't adopted the American

habit of wearing a bra and her breasts were still heavy from the nursing. The owner helped her with the dress and told her to always leave the top two buttons undone. She knew enough about men to understand why.

She started at nine in the morning and worked until midnight. She served glasses of beer and occasionally a bottle of wine. Most of the customers were Mexican but there were some Spaniards and a few whites. One evening an old man brought a gaiter. The place was full and some shouted at him to play. Evidently he did this quite often.

She recognized the music right away. It was the music of Andualcia and the south coast of Spain. It was bull fights and Flamenco dancers. It was her music. As he played, she danced. She danced the dance of a little girl and her father dancing around the fireplace while trying to forget their crushing poverty. She danced until his fingers were too tired to play and then she kissed him on the cheek and gave him a free glass of beer.

That night, after the owner had locked the front door, she counted the tips in her dress pocket. She had made a week's wages in tips that night and she wasn't going to share it with Felix.

She liked the job and was sad that it would end in a few days. The owner's wife was coming home from a trip and she wouldn't be needed anymore. She liked the laughter and the friendly conversation and she didn't mind the pinches on her backside that were part of her business. When she got home, Juan was sound asleep from a day of exhausting work. Not that that mattered. After the doctor told them that she couldn't have more children, Juan didn't seem interested in her anymore. It was like she had been damaged and was no longer useful.

After her last night of work, the owner locked the door and she went into the backroom to leave the barmaid dress. The owner came in behind her and watched as she pulled it off over her head. He stepped forward and fondled her breasts and then he offered her a dollar to have sex with him. A dollar was a day's wages. Her first thought was to slap him but she felt an urge that Juan had no interest in. She asked for two dollars and for one dollar and fifty cents they made love, or at least lust, on the couch in his office. When she got to her room she put the money into her secret stash. She calculated that she had nearly ten dollars that no one knew about.

Carmella got a temporary job cleaning a store while the regular lady was away but that only lasted a week. One day a man knocked on the door and offered her a barmaid's job at a small hotel. He said that she had a good recommendation from her last serving job and she was delighted. Juan had no objections, he really didn't care what she did.

The bar at the hotel had a better class of customers but it wasn't as much fun as the last one. She dressed more conservatively but she found that if she bent over farther and let the customer get a good look down her dress her tips went up. Saturday night after the bar was locked she went to the boss's office to pick up her wages. There on the corner of his desk was her wages and next to them was one dollar and fifty cents. She pushed the six

quarters on the desk back toward him and smiled while he looked at her. Finally he lay two additional quarters beside the other money. Carmella made an extra two days wages in eleven minutes.

The money in her secret stash was growing and it increased even more when she started meeting other customers after work. Juan knew nothing of this and he was working harder then ever. It all started to go wrong one night when she was caught in a compromising position in the back of a car by a policeman. The customer was sent on his way and she was put into the police car. Instead of being driven to the station she was taken to a vacant lot and made to perform her talents on both cops. They let her know that they would come for her whenever they liked and that if she didn't cooperate she would go to jail. Her boss found that she was getting too much attention from customers that were coming in to schedule appointments. He fired her and she was unemployed again. She wasn't willing to go back to life as it had been before and she turned to the only person that she thought could help her. She went to her friendly cop.

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Juan noticed that she was gone when he got up to go to work. He thought that it was odd that she would be out so early but he shrugged it off. The next morning she was gone again but the room hadn't been disturbed. She hadn't been home the night before and probably the night before that. He felt a little panicked but Alejandro was asleep in his bed so he went and found Sonya and asked her.

"She's away for a few days, don't you remember?" was the answer.

"No, I guess not, do you know where she has gone?"

"No, I thought that she told you. She paid me for taking care of Alejandro for a week but if she's not back by Saturday you will need to pay me for next week."

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She wasn't back by Saturday or the Saturday after that. He asked everywhere if anyone had seen her. He even asked the priest but he knew anything. No one knew where she was.

It was near Christmas when a man whispered something in Felix's ear. After work that night, Felix and Sonya asked him to come to their room and they told him that an acquaintance had seen a girl who looked very much like Carmella in a 'house' in Long Beach. Felix tried to be diplomatic but it became clear the she was living and working in a whore house on the other side of the harbor.

Juan wouldn't believe it and he left with a lot of anger. The next day Juan didn't come to breakfast and only Alejandro was in the bedroom. He didn't come home that day or the next. Felix had a bad feeling and finally he drove the six miles to the Long Beach waterfront where he found the house and asked the madam if anything had occurred there in the last few days.

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Juan had found the house late that first night and he had asked the madam for Carmella. She had said that she had no girl named Carmella but when Juan described her, the woman said that was Chiquita and she asked for two dollars. A few minutes later she heard a scream and she and the house owner ran to Chiquita's room. Juan was standing over the girl with a bloody knife and when he turned towards them the owner shot Juan with a little pistol.

The police came but neither of the dead had identification. Their bodies were taken away and they were buried in Potters field the next day.

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“What will we do about the boy” Felix asked Sonya.

“Well, when Carmella left she paid me to watch him for the next six months. I told Juan that she only paid for a week so I've been collecting double. He doesn't eat much, let's just keep him for a while and we will see what happens. You know that even a little boy can bring in money by doing odd jobs”

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## **The perfect childhood ... nearly Larry**

Dad didn't want me raised in the mean streets of Bel Air where he believed some of the trouble that he had with Bobby was caused by his association with the rich kids next door. He thought that they had way too much sense of entitlement and I'm sure that he was right.

He decided that I should grow up in the clean air of the ranch. Mom let him know that she wanted no part of living out in the sticks and her son, Robert, was going to continue attending the same private school that he had always attended.

Well dad, of course, never saw a problem that didn't have an immediate solution. I would stay in Bel Air until I was a year old and would then be turned over to a suitable nanny, at the ranch. The family would continue to live where they were and they would all spend their weekends with me overlooking the Pacific.

I guess that the first year worked out ok because Bobby didn't manage to poke my eyes out or leave any scars on my body. My first real memories are of Miss Sata and Mrs. Ortiz.

Now don't get me wrong. I really liked my parents and, occasionally, I liked my brother but I loved Miss Sata and I loved Mrs. Ortiz. What a strange way to grow up.

I don't remember when Miss Miko Sata came to me and I didn't know her first name until I was a teenager. She was always proper and formal. She was my nanny and teacher and she was paid to care for me. She did her job the way she thought dad and mom wanted it done. She never hugged me, never kissed me, never raised her voice to me, and never once denied me her time for my questions.

She patiently explained everything to me. Why flowers bloomed, why some cheese tasted funny, how kittens were born. For every question that I had, she had an answer. I always thought of her as old but I realized later that she was only nineteen when she first came to the ranch. I also learned years later that she was third generation Japanese born to a middleclass family in Los Angeles. She had attended public high school and Japanese school on Saturdays. An acquaintance of my dad asked him if he knew of a job for this young and talented girl. Dad talked to her and she was at the ranch the next week. I learned years later that she had shamed her family by falling in love with a non Japanese boy that she met at UCLA. When it was all over she had left vowing to never go home again.

If Miss Sata never showed me any love, than Mrs. Ortiz more than made up for it. She hugged and kissed and nearly smothered me in her massive bosom. There was never a scratch unloved, never a face unwashed, never a story unread. I learned Castilian Spanish by osmosis. I was the only kid in the first grade who could quote Miguel de

Cervantes by heart. Her son Roberto and I played Don Quixote instead of cowboys and Indians. Bobby Ortiz was the brother that I wished I had.

So life was good at the ranch and I saw my mom and dad fairly often. There was no confusion in my mind about those who rotated around me. I spoke Spanish to Mrs. Ortiz and English to mom and I never got the two confused.

When I was five, Bobby and I started school. Each morning Miss Sata would drive us to the Redondo Beach Elementary and each afternoon she would pick us up. She always asked what I had learned to which I always answered 'nothing'.

Now if your wondering what she did when I was in school or outside playing, she did her other job. She was the ranch bookkeeper and she recorded the flow of every penny into and out of the business accounts. Each month she prepared a report that she gave to dad and as far as I know, he never questioned any of it.

One day during the summer when I was six I walked into the barnyard and there was a girl talking to Bobby. She was a little bigger than me and, for some reason, I didn't like her just walking into my yard. Mrs. Ortiz called Bobby into the house and I was left alone with this intruder.

I had seen this girl before. She went to my school but she was a year ahead of me. That's just what I needed, some bossy girl coming around my house.

"Hi, I'm your neighbor"

*-Who cares-*

"Did you just walk into the barnyard? You could have rang the bell" I said.

"Why would I do that, I told you, I'm your neighbor"

"What's your name?" I said not really caring.

"Which name? My first name or my last name, which do you want?"

*-Silly snot! -*

"All of your damned names!"

POW!

She slapped me across the mouth and I was on my butt in a second.

"You said a bad word" she said smiling.

"Ouch, you made me bleed"

"Do you want to play doctor?"

I had heard of this from guys at school.

"Doctor? Do you mean ... You show me yours and I show you mine?" I said a little confused.

“No dummy, doctor like I wash your face and fix your fat lip”

She helped me up and led me to the patio table. She sat me down and took a handkerchief from her pocket and then she spit on it and cleaned my face and fat lip. That’s something my mom would do.

Suddenly, out of the house came Mrs. Ortiz with two glasses of lemonade.

“Who is your friend Mijo?” she asked.

The girl jumped to her feet and did a little curtsy.

“I’m Laska Lara Langtree and I live next door”

“Laska, what a pretty name” Mrs. Ortiz said.

*-Laska, what a dumb name-*

She had said that she was right next door but she lived a quarter mile down the hill. She had to walk uphill to visit but she always did. She walked up that hill for years.

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## **Laska Lara Langtree (Laz)**

I don’t remember my mother, and my daddy and I lived in a big farm house in Palos Verdes. We have a beautiful view of the Pacific and we had some nice neighbors. We had a house keeper named Mrs. Garcia and for a long time I thought that she was my mother but she explained it to me. I loved her like she was my mother anyway.

Daddy was born in Scotland and I guess he came to America when he was a young man. I’m not really sure because when I ask about things like that he doesn’t always tell the same story. He is very handsome with silver hair and a great smile.

He told me that I was born in Boston but we moved here when I was just a baby. He hired Mrs. Garcia to look out for the both of us. She had a bedroom in the back of the house that had it’s own outside door so she could come and go as she pleased. She never went out and she went to her room very early every night. Years later daddy told me that she was a very young widow. Her husband Pedro was working in the field one day and there was an accident. A giant lattice picking machine picked up Pedro and put him into two lattice boxes. Poor Mrs. Garcia had been left alone to fend for herself.

Although she spoke English she always spoke Spanish to me. I really didn’t know that I was learning a second language. It just seemed natural for us to speak her language. She always seemed happy and she said that god had sent me to her to make up for taking her young husband.

I asked her about my mother but she said that she didn’t know anything. She did tell me once that when I was a baby there had been a woman and another baby in the house but she had left. She thought that the woman might have been my aunt.

When it was time I started to school in Redondo Beach. When I was in Kindergarten, dad drove me to school for a week and then I rode the school bus. There weren't any girls who live near us but there were three boys. Chris, Bobby and Eddy. Bobby said that there was a little boy living in the big ranch house but he was a year behind us.

### **Meeting the neighbors**

When I started school the next year I saw Bobby coming and going with a younger kid. I wanted to find some new friends so I walked up the hill to the ranch to meet this new kid. I walked into the barnyard and a very rude little boy came and told me that I should have gone to the front door instead of just walking in. I explained that I was his neighbor and he swore at me. Somehow he fell down and hurt his lip and he was very appreciative when I cleaned his bruised face but I didn't think that I was going to like him.

But I was wrong.

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## Larry@14

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What a place to grow up. There were hills to climb, cliffs to scale, beaches and coves and the blue pacific. Imagine a gang of young teens with a place to play like this. Imagine what it was like to be fourteen and having friends like Bobby Ortiz and Eddy Fugimora and Cristiano Renaldo and Laz.

Eddy was the son of a Japanese farmer whose fields I could see from the patio of the ranch house and he was my best friend. We shared everything, all of our secrets and dreams. He taught me a hundred Japanese words that we mixed with Chris's Portuguese, Bobby's Castellan Spanish and Laz's Mexican Spanish and we had a language that only we could understand. We called it 'talky-talk' and it was our secret.

Chris was the son of a Portuguese fisherman who had a boat in Redondo and he lived between the ranch and town. He was the same age as the others and a year older than me but we all fit right in.

Then there was Laz, Laska Langtree who also fit right in. She was easy to like and hard to ignore. She was also hard to beat at anything. She could run fast and jump high and she knew the secret language. Bobby and I spoke the lisping dialect of Castilian Spain while Laz spoke the local Mexican version. She knew more curse words than we knew existed. Most were so coarse that she wouldn't translate them for us.

One day she and I were riding our bikes too fast down the dirt road to town and she blew a tire and crashed into a manzanita bush. She was scratched and cut and it must have hurt like hell but she didn't cry. I was twelve and she was thirteen and we sat on the grass and looked at her wounds.

"Do you want to play doctor?" I asked remembering her saying that to me when I was a little hurt kid.

She blushed and asked,

"Do you mean that you'll fix my cuts?"

"Yea, what did you think?"

I knew what she meant but that was the first time that I thought of her as being different. As not being one of the guys.

Of course puberty changed us all. She became more girly and I became shy. She was the only girl that I could actually talk to without blushing and we spent a lot of time together.

When we were kids she had been a grade ahead of me but, I guess with Miss Sata's coaching, I skipped the fourth grade. I thought that she would be pissed but it was just the opposite. She said that now we could do our homework together.

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## Laz @ 15

It was a pretty good life growing up on that farm overlooking the Pacific. At least it was good if you liked growing up with a bunch of stupid boys. Don't get me wrong, I liked them all and we spent a lot of time together. It's just that even if we were the best of childhood friends, I was always different.

When we were young we had no rules. We could play anywhere and go anywhere as long as we were home for dinner. When I was eight we climbed down the cliff to a tiny beach and went swimming in our underwear. That night, Mrs. Garcia found my wet panties and asked me about them. She said that I had been very bad and she was going to tell my father. I asked her what I had done wrong and she said that boys and girls shouldn't show the other their private parts. Again I asked why and she made some effort to explain sex to me. When I didn't understand she said that she wouldn't tell my dad but I should remain covered around my friends.

The only other person that I could ask was Chris. He was always the one that I asked to get the truth. If he knew the answer he told it to me, if not he said that he didn't know.

“Chris, why was Mrs. Garcia mad at me because we went swimming in our underwear?”

“She doesn't want you to know about sex”

“What does swimming have to do with sex?”

“Nothing but she doesn't want you to see a boy naked and she really doesn't want a boy to see you”

“I still don't understand, I've see your underwear and you've seen mine, everyone wears underwear, She hangs hers and dad's and mine on the clothesline where everyone can see”

“Yes but she doesn't hang your bare bottom out for everyone to see”

“Well I think that it's stupid”

“Me too” he said.

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Larry always wanted to hang around with me and that was ok. He was a year younger and when he skipped the fourth grade somehow he thought that he had caught up. We did our homework together and rode our bikes together but I really wasn't his best pal. If I wanted to do something personal or private, I did it with Chris.

He was the one that I smoked my first cigarette with and told dirty jokes to. When we were eleven, we climbed down to the tiny beach to swim but this time we didn't swim in our underwear. He just striped off his clothes and dove into the water. I don't remember finding that particularly shocking so I did the same. He seemed to take no notice of my skinny, naked body but I noticed his. I don't know what I thought a boy would look like but he surprised me. When he noticed me looking, he turned towards me and stood while I satisfied my curiosity, then we swam in the cool water.

He really never paid much attention to me unless I sought him out. Sometimes I talked to him for hours and he always listened but he rarely offered much of his inner thoughts. Larry, of course, had no idea that Chris and I did anything together.

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## **Puberty – Not for the faint of heart**

### **Larry**

Of course, I knew all about puberty, growing up in an era that had no sex education in school and having a brother who thought of me as some lower life form I was forced to learn the facts of life the old fashion way, from the boys at school.

Some of the things that I heard seemed so outlandish that I thought that they must have been a joke. Still, Bobby, Eddy, Chris and I discussed them and tried to sort out what it was all about. Of course, all of the discussions were about sex. Chris didn't contribute much in these investigations and he always seemed to know more than he was telling. Finally, one day while we were delving into our knowledge of the female anatomy, Chris had enough.

"If you want to know about girls, why don't you ask Laz?" he said.

I was shocked. I couldn't ask Laz about things like that. For one thing, she probably wouldn't know and for another, she was the only girl that I could talk to and I didn't want to piss her off. Finally Bobby broke the silence,

"Larry's in love with her and he would be too embarrassed"

"I'm not in love with her! She's our friend. She would be too embarrassed to talk about things like that"

Eddy laughed, "Who are you kidding Larry, you have been following her around like a puppy-dog since we were six years old"

"Yea" Bobby chimed in, "The sister that you never had".

I was angry that my friends were picking on me, even if it were true. Laz was special to me and I was special to her and I just didn't like the way they kidded me about it. Still, I wasn't about to ask her about body parts and stuff.

### **Laz**

I guess that I was fourteen, a little later than most, when it all started. Of course all girls knew that their bodies were going to change and we were all ready for that first menstrual cycle that signaled the end of childhood and the start of womanhood. When the big day finally arrived, I talked to Mrs. Garcia, and she told me about pads and tampons and how my breasts would start to develop.

She also told me a story that I had a hard time understanding. She said that nature made beautiful flowers that budded and grew. The flowers were happy just to be with the other flowers until, one day, they felt a special need. When they felt that need, a bee appeared to care for the flower. The flower didn't have to call the bee, it just knew.

I was really confused by the story and I asked,  
"Aren't there many flowers and many bees?"

She just smiled and said that the right flower would attract the right bee. I decided that the bees and the flowers would take care of themselves and with or without her advice I was ready for my womanhood.

Later, of course, I realized that she hadn't answered any of my real questions especially the ones about those strange feelings that surprised me. You would have thought that I knew about sex from the girl-talk at school. Oh I knew about 'doing-it' and 'frenching' and 'feeling-up' but no one ever told me about these feelings. I talked to a loud-mouth girl who said that she 'did-it' all the time and I asked her what it felt like. All she said was 'wonderful'.

So here I was with a dad that I wouldn't ask, a thirty-five-year-old housekeeper that wouldn't tell, a bunch of giggly schoolgirls that may or may not have know, and feelings that I didn't understand, and then salvation came into sight.

Mrs. Garcia asked my dad if it was OK for her niece to stay with her, in her room, for a couple of weeks. Dad had no objections and the next day, twenty year old Rosita Garcia came into my disturbed life.

Rosita was pretty in a gaudy way. She wore dangling ear-rings and too much lipstick and she left her top two buttoned of her blouse undone so she could show the cleavage of her ample bosom. She looked at me like I was scum but I stuck to her like glue. I asked her several times if we could talk and finally she came to my bedroom.

She walked in and looked around. She opened my dresser drawers and my closet and, finally, she lit a cigarette and flopped down on my bed.

"So little rich girl, I thought that you would have nicer stuff"

"What's wrong with my stuff?"

"Nothing, it just that most of it is like the stuff that I had when I was a kid. Why don't you get your daddy to buy you some better underwear? That crap from J.C.Penney is for little girls."

"I'm not a kid, I'm a young woman"

"Yea whatever you say, what do you want to talk about?"

"Sex"

"What would you know about sex?"

"Nothing, that's why I want to talk to you."

"Why do you think I knew anything about it?"

"I don't know, you're kind of grown up but still young. You're pretty and you look like boys would like you. I just thought that you might know about these strange feelings that I'm getting lately"

She laughed and smiled at me. Her voice lost the cocky attitude and she looked at me. In a softer voice she asked,

"When did your periods start?"

"Two months ago"

For the next hour she talked about growing and boys and boyfriends and good feelings and what she called her 'magic sleeping pill'. She seemed a little more somber when she talked about fooling around and petting and necking and finally real sex. She told me to never believe a boy when it came to sex. She said that when I decided that I wanted to do-it he absolutely must use a rubber. No exceptions.

She told me that the feelings were normal and that all women had them. She told me that at my age my body was still confused so the feelings could come any time but when I was a little older they would usually only come when I thought about sex or I was with a boy.

I asked her about the Catholic Church's teachings that using birth control was a sin. Again she gave a sad little laugh.

"What you do, is have sex as late at night as you can, and then go straight to confession in the morning. That way the sin only counts for a few hours."

"What about this 'magic sleeping pill' isn't that a sin too?"

"Yes but just a little one. You only have to confess that once a month."

I noticed that Rosita had a tear in her eye. She sat on the bed and motioned me to come to her. She hugged me and cried a bit. She said that she had trusted a boy and now she was pregnant. She said that she was going to marry this boy next week and she hated the idea but she had no choice and neither did he.

That night in bed I tried to resolve all that she had told me. There were still many unanswered questions but she was right about the magic sleeping pill.

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## **Larry – Summer of 1933**

Our summer vacation from school started in the usual way. We played on the cliffs and climbed down to the cove. We swam in the ocean and fished in the surf. The only difference was that Laz wasn't with us.

She seemed different now, more girly and quieter. I worried that she was sick but I guess that I knew that she was growing up. I went to see her, once in a while, and we had nice chats but it wasn't the same.

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## **Laz – The same summer**

Just before school was out for the summer a girl in my class, Maryann Weston, started eating her lunch with me. We had known each other for as long as I could remember but we had never been friends. She was nice and talkative and if we were younger I would have been suspicious that she wanted something from me. Now, it seemed innocent and rather nice.

On the last day of school, she suggested that we visit during the summer. She lived about a mile closer to town but she said that she could ride her bike to my house. I knew that Larry would want me to be with him and the rest of the guys but Maryann's offer sounded better.

She came to see me several times during the summer and I went to see her. I even had a sleepover at her house where we painted each other's nails and braided each other's hair and stayed up very late talking about movies and books and stuff.

I decided that I wanted to read some classic girl's books and dad took me to the San Pedro library where I had checked out several. I read *Sense and Sensibility* and *Little Women* and when I finished those, I read everything that the Bronte Sisters ever wrote.

Dad was gone most of the time and Mrs. Garcia cooked and cleaned but mostly, I had the place to myself. Mrs. Garcia retired to her room by eight and my bedroom looked out onto the front veranda so she couldn't even hear me unless I yelled to her. In the past I had been nervous to be so alone at night but now I enjoyed it.

Larry came every day to see me. At first he made up some story about being worried that I was sick but that was just an excuse. His constant attention had irritated me in the past but now, I rather liked it. I supposed that I was being influenced by the British writers and I started serving him tea.

We quickly discovered that neither of us cared for hot tea so we settled on iced tea. Almost every day he came around four o'clock and we would chat. He told me what he and the others had done that day and I told him what I was reading. Sometimes we would stroll along the cliff-top and look at the sea. That's when he started holding my hand.

One afternoon, I made a mistake. I had been reading *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Bronte and it had stirred some of those feelings in my belly. Just as Larry was about to leave I kissed him on the cheek. He looked surprised and touched his face where my lips had touched him. He said "Thank you" and I answered "Your welcome"

As he walked away I thought "What have I done?"

---

## **Larry**

With no warning she kissed me. Just out of the blue. Of course I had been kissed a lot by mom and Mrs. Ortiz but this was Laz. Laz who I dreamed about, who I fantasized about, I'm sure that my feet didn't touch the ground all the way home.

The next morning Bobby, Chris and I went fishing while Eddy helped his dad do something. We rode our bikes to the beach when the tide was low and Bobby and I cast fat sand crabs out past the surf. Chris was from a fishing family and he had no interest in what we were doing. Lately, he seldom was interested in what we did.

I could hardly keep still thinking about Laz's kiss. Bobby caught a nice halibut that he put on a stringer and kept in the water to keep it fresh. All I could think of was how soft her lips had been. I felt a little guilty about the thoughts that I had after I went to bed last night. When I couldn't stand it any longer I said,

"Laz kissed me yesterday"

"What!" Bobby said.

"Yep, she just kissed me"

"Did you kiss her back?"

"Well, not exactly. She kissed me on my cheek when I was leaving"

Chris said nothing and looked away.

---

## **Laz**

"Missy, Larry is here and he brought you a present" Mrs. Garcia said.

"Damn!" I thought looking at my watch. It was only eleven o'clock and here he was like a little puppy. I knew that the kiss had been a bad mistake. I went out on the veranda and there was Larry in dirty jeans holding a fish.

"Hi, I brought you a halibut for lunch. I hope that you're hungry"

What could I say? He was so eager and so nervous. I know that if I had said 'Boo' he would have run for the road.

"Mrs. Garcia! Larry brought us a fish for lunch. Does that fit into your plans?"

Mrs. Garcia came onto the veranda in her apron. She smiled at the embarrassed boy and took the fish.

“Lunch will be in a half hour on the patio, Missy”

I sent Larry to clean up and contemplated what I had started. Still, he was the same boy that he always was. He had always wanted to be around me and he still did. I just had to let him know that nothing had changed.

---

Lunch was served on the patio table. It was a beautiful day with fleecy white clouds and a sparkling blue ocean in the background. The table was set with tall glasses of iced tea and a platter of sizzling fish cooked in butter with onions and garlic and hot peppers. There was a stack of hand-made tortillas and a side dish of spicy beans. After a few bites, Larry thanked Mrs. Garcia in his flawless Spanish and she beamed and left us alone.

“Larry, you can’t let that little kiss change anything”

“Oh that, I understand, it was nothing ... really”

*-What does he mean ‘nothing’? It was nothing to me but I know that it was a big deal to him-*

“Ok, so you understand that nothing has changed?”

“Absolutely. I think that this is the best fish that I’ve ever eaten. Do you think that Mrs. Garcia would give me the recipe?”

---

The sun was down below the horizon and the summer day was fading fast. Mrs. Garcia had already gone to her room when I heard the squeak of the swing on the front veranda. Daddy was away and no one else was around. The first thing that I thought was that Larry had come back. I was a little angry when I walked into my bedroom and looked through the front window. Someone was sitting on the swing and it wasn’t Larry. It was Chris.

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“Hi Chris” I said as I walked to the swing and sat down.

“Laz”

“How are things?”

“Fine and you?”

“Why didn’t you knock on the front door?”

“Oh, I didn’t want to disturb your dinner”

We just sat there looking at the dying day. Chris was never predictable and I had no idea why he was here. I just waited and finally he spoke,

“You know that you have really screwed him up”

“I know, I didn’t mean to. It was that damned book that I’m reading. It’s ok now, I talked to him today and he understands that nothing has changed.”

Chris just chuckled and sat watching the sea. After a while he turned towards me and asked,

“Are you ok?”

*-What the hell did that mean? Of course I wasn't ok. My body was changing, my thoughts were weird and I had funny feelings in my belly. I had just kissed a boy that felt more like my brother than a friend and now a guy that I had known most of my life was sitting on the swing in the dark and asking if I was ok. Hell no, I'm not ok-*

“I'm fine”

Chris stood and we walked to where his bike was leaning against the porch. He was bigger and taller and a few months older than me. When we got to his bike, he turned and put his hands on both of my shoulders and kissed me. He kissed me on my lips and then he smiled at me.

“Thank you” I said.

“Your welcome”

Then he rode away into the dark.

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## Laz – Shopping

I asked daddy to take me shopping for school clothes and we drove to the J.C.Penney store in San Pedro. He strolled through the store with me while I picked up the usual assortment of skirts, blouses, sweaters, jackets, sweatshirts, pajamas, and Mary Jane shoes.

When I walked into the underwear department I picked up a package of white cotton panties and several white cotton bras. Daddy seemed a little embarrassed.

“I’ll wait for you by the cash registers Pumpkin.”

I’m sure that he knew by now that I wore a bra but he had never said anything about it. When I met him, he paid for my purchases and we went outside.

“Let’s have lunch out today sweetheart. I know a nice place on the water.”

I couldn’t remember ever eating at a restaurant with dad. He was away much of the time and we didn’t go out often. When he came home from his trips, he always brought me presents and when I was younger he would hold me on his lap and read me stories. My puberty seemed to change him as much as it changed me. He didn’t hug me as much as he used to and where before, modesty hadn’t been an issue, now he respected my privacy.

The restaurant was very nice and we sat on an outside patio overlooking the harbor. I wasn’t sure what to order from of the extensive menu so daddy ordered for me. The waiter brought him a glass of red wine and me a tall drink with pineapple and cherries and a little umbrella. I had an avocado salad with fresh scrimp and daddy had a small pork chop. For desert we both had pineapple sherbet and everything was delicious.

“Honey, I know that growing up without a mom has been hard on you and I’ve tried my best to raise you. It was easy before you started to change. I hope that Mrs. Garcia has answered your questions but I know that she’s more a grandmother’s age than a mom’s. If you still need help with your ... changes ... maybe I could make an appointment with a lady doctor who could talk to. What can I do to help?”

*-Sure dad, please tell me why I feel weird sometimes and why Chris kissed me after we had been playmates for most of our lives and how the hell am I going to get rid of Larry without breaking his heart and if I’m going to hell for using my magic sleeping pill?-*

“I’d like some nice underwear please”

“Underwear? You just bought underwear”

“I bought little girls cotton underwear. That’s the same kind and the same brand that I’ve worn all of my life. I want something with lace on it”

“But Honey, no one will see it, what difference does it make?”

“I’ll see it and I’ll know that it has lace on it. Isn’t that enough?”

He looked at me with a little smile. He recognized the great divide between the way a man thinks and the way a woman thinks. Not a little girl but a young woman. He knew

that he would never understand but it didn't matter. His daughter wanted lace on her knickers and that's what she was going to have.

We drove to a small shop call Meson d' Lingerie. Inside there were several comfortable chairs for a gentleman to wait while his companion shopped. An older lady greeted us and he introduced me as his daughter. She rang a little bell and a younger woman took me through a curtain and into the back. We went to a small, private room where she asked me to remove my skirt and blouse and she took my measurements. She was very nice and she told me that since I was still growing that we would pick out things that fitted me now and things that would fit me in a few months.

After I dressed we walked to the display of bras. They were all colored silk and very few were white. She dismissed the idea of a 'training bra'. She said that a girl or woman should wear something comfortable that showed her natural beauty and not some pre-shaped contraption that made all girls look alike. We found several that I liked and returned to the dressing room. She waited outside while I changed and then she checked the fit. I was a little embarrassed by the tiny size of my budding breasts but she said that I looked lovely.

"Don't be in such a rush to grow up. Be proud of who you are now"  
"Yes Ma'am"

When we looked at panties I was a little shocked. There were no ordinary panties. Almost all were silk French knickers with loose legs and were covered with Chantilly lace. One pair that I couldn't take my eyes off of were low cut and appeared to have been made of black silk foam.

"Those might be a little ... mature ... for you but if they make you feel good then you should have them."

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When I joined daddy, the lady brought two large bags and handed him the bill. He frowned at the price and then smiled at me.

"Does this make you happy honey?" he said as he handed the lady several bills.  
"Yes daddy and thank you"

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## **Family Dinner**

### **Larry**

My parents showed up bright and early Saturday morning with my brother. He hadn't been to the ranch in months and I wasn't particular glad to see him. It was a combination work and family visit. Dad and Robert would meet with Miss Sata to review the ranch accounts while mom would meet with Mrs. Ortiz regarding household matters. Robert had just finished his first year of law school and dad wanted his to see how the ranch business was run. Later that afternoon Mrs. Ortiz would prepare the family dinner to celebrate my fourteenth birthday and I asked mom if I could invite the girl next door.

---

Laz was delighted and I held her hand as we walked to the ranch. She didn't mention the kiss again so I figured that she was over whatever had bothered her about it. Mom and dad had seen her often when we were kids but now they paid extra attention to her. Even Robert flirted with her a little. That, of course, pissed me off.

Just before dinner, dad was nervous and he made several telephone calls. Robert told Laz a couple of slightly off-color jokes and mom fussed with the table decorations. Miss Sata joined us and at the last minute dad came to the table with a big smile on his face. I knew that he had closed some big deal and now he was even richer than ever. He opened two bottles of good red wine and poured everyone a glass. Laz and my glasses were only a quarter full and then water was added. Still, he had never offered me wine before.

We had a nice salad from the garden and dad refilled the wine glasses. This time Laz and I had a full glass. Mrs. Ortiz announced that there would be a special main course of spicy halibut and that I had taught her the recipe. It was prepared the way that Mrs. Garcia had served it to Laz and me the week before. Everyone liked it and even Robert made a snide remark that if I worked hard maybe I could get a job in the ranch kitchen.

The wine had elevated everyone's spirits and dad asked Miss Sata if she would honor us with a song. I had no idea that she could sing or that she would consider doing it in public. The polite Japanese lady excused herself and went to her room. When she returned she was wearing a beautiful yellow silk kimono and she was carrying a long-necked, three stringed, instrument that she called a 'Sanxian'. She sat on the hearth and played a few notes then she sang a beautiful song in Japanese. Laz and I could understand some of it because we knew talky-talk but much of it was lost. The melody was haunting and her voice was lovely. When she finished I noticed that Laz had a tear in her eye. I patted her hand under the table but she didn't look at me.

Dad led the applause and Miss Sata apologized for her very poor Japanese. She said that three generations of English had taken the nuances of the language from her. Then she surprised all of us when she asked Laz to walk with her. They were gone a long time and when they returned, Laz said goodbye to everyone and asked me to walk her home. She held my hand but I got no goodnight kiss.

---

## Laz

Larry's invitation surprised me. I had practically grown up around the ranch but I hadn't seen his parents or his brother in a long time. I thought that if it was a family dinner I probably shouldn't be there but Larry insisted so I put on my best dress over my new silk knickers and we walked to the ranch. He held my hand and I saw no reason to object. Mrs. Ortiz met me in the yard and hugged me. She said the obligatory comments about how much I had grown and how pretty I was. I didn't particularly believe her but it felt nice that she said it.

Mr. and Mrs. Lee made much the same comments and that was nice. I hadn't seen Robert for years and he was all grown up. He was much like his father with his smooth ways that gave you the impression that he was really glad to see you and that you could trust him. I was a little embarrassed when he made a few flirty remarks but I guessed that he was bored and was just going through the motions. I could tell that Larry resented his brother.

Dinner was good and I had some wine. I had drank daddies wine on occasion but he didn't know it. The one time that I had actually drank three glasses and I had been sick in the bathroom that night. The first glass was three-quarters water so I felt safe but later Mr. Lee poured me a full glass and by that time my judgment was already impaired. Miss Sata sang a beautiful song and I guess the melody and the wine made me cry. Larry tried to hold my hand under the table but I was afraid that I would say or do something stupid so I ignored him. After her song, Miss Sata asked me to walk in the garden with her and I was really relieved to get out into the fresh air.

---

We strolled through the garden to a small table and chairs that sit under an arbor. We sat and she took a small box from under her Kimono.

"Did you enjoy dinner dear?"

"It was very nice" I said trying not to slur my words.

"Did you enjoy the wine dear?"

"Oh Miss Sata, I shouldn't have drank the second glass. I'm so tipsy and I'm afraid that I'm going to make a fool of myself."

She laughed and opened the little box,

"Here dear, this is a Geisha trick that my grandmother taught me. These are called 'wine-crackers' or something like that in Japanese. When you eat them they stop the effects of the alcohol."

The crackers were crisp little balls that tasted like an unsweetened cookie. They were very dry and I knew right away that they would soak up a lot of wine. I ate two of them and in a few minutes my head was not quite so clouded.

"Just sit still for a few minutes dear. Do you know that I find your names interesting? When I learned them eight years ago I did some research on them. Not to be nosey but

just out of interest. Langtree is an English name and perhaps the most famous was Lily Langtree, the actress, who only died a few years ago. She had the nickname, Jersey Lily. She married several times including a man here in California that raised race horses. Your middle name, Lara, brings to mind the heroine of Boris Pasternak's famous novel Dr. Zhivago. Do you have any Russian ancestors? Your first name is the most interesting. Laska, it's the name of some polish dancers and a spicy soup in the Middle East but the best is a poem written by an Englishman about a love between a cowboy and a Mexican girl. She was firey and bold and he was cool and calm. Like all good poems about cowboys it has action and thrills and danger and, of course, tragedy. I memorized a few lines so you can tell what this name-sake of yours was like.

She would hunger that I might eat,  
Would take the bitter and leave me the sweet;  
But once, when I made her jealous for fun,  
At something I'd whispered, or looked, or done,  
One Sunday, in San Antonio,  
To a glorious girl in the Alamo,  
She drew from her garter a dear little dagger,  
And – sting of a wasp! – It made me stagger!  
An inch to the left, or an inch to the right,  
And I shouldn't be maundering here tonight;  
But she sobbed, and, sobbing, so swiftly bound  
Her torn reboso about the wound,  
That I quite forgave her. Scratches don't count  
In Texas, down by the Rio Grande.

I was amazed at the depth of this fragile woman. She seemed to have a mind that encompassed everything. How did she remember my middle name that she probably heard once eight years ago? Why was she being so kind to a tipsy and foolish child who had drunk too much wine? Did she know that hearing these few lines that a dead Englishman had written fifty years ago would make me look at myself to see if I was as strong as his Laska?

She smiled at me and said,

“He has loved you since the day that he met you when he was six years old.”

“Yes, I know”

“Please never hurt him or if you must, be as gentle as possible”

“I don't feel the way about him that he feels about me”

“I know”

“He is one of my best friends”

“Yes and I imagine that the tall boy, Chris is the other”

“I made a mistake when I kissed him”

“I knew that something had happened”

“How can I tell him that I only want to be friends?”

“Either tell him or leave things the way that they are now. It’s your choice. Perhaps he will find someone else but I doubt it. This is a strange situation for those so young. Again let me ask that if you must hurt him, be as gentle as possible. I love that fine young man although he must never know that. How do you feel now dear?”

“Sober and confused”

“Life is confusing”

“Miss Sata, what do you know about Robert? Larry never talks about him”

She didn’t answer at first as she weighed the question.

“Arrogant, self-centered with a misplaced sense of entitlement, are there anymore questions that I can answer dear?”

---

I was deep in thought when Larry walked me home. He held my hand and I thought that perhaps I shouldn’t allow it because it only encouraged him but that would hurt him too much. He stood at my door waiting to see if I would kiss him but I didn’t. After he was gone I walked out to the swing to see if Chris was there but it was empty.

*-Where the hell is the bee when I need him?-*

Did I feel a need and was it for Chris? No, I decided, I just felt a need for a friendly shoulder to cry on.

---

## **Summer's almost gone**

### **Larry**

It was the first of September and we were all starting high school next week. Big changes were in our future starting with a school bus that would take us to Redondo Beach High School each morning. I hadn't done much with Laz that summer except our visits. I wanted to take her someplace like dinner or a movie but I knew that she wouldn't go. Then I got the idea for all of us, the old gang, to go to a movie together. I asked Mr. Ortiz if he would drive us to Redondo Saturday night and bring us back to the ranch. He said that he would take Mrs. Ortiz and they would sit away from us. Bobby, Eddy, Chris and I were in but I still had to ask Laz. I was a little surprised when she readily agreed. So our end-of-summer night out was a done deal.

Everything went well. We all sat in the balcony with Laz between me and Chris. I held Laz's hand and we watched Clark Gable and Joan Crawford smooch on the screen and I bought Laz a bag of popcorn and a coke. When I walked her to her door that night I tried to kiss her but she turned away.

---

### **Laz**

Larry asked me to go to the movies with him and the others and I felt safe enough in that crowd so I said yes. Mr. and Mrs. Ortiz took us all to the Strand Theater in Redondo where they sat downstairs while the five of us went to the balcony. I sat between Larry and Chris and Larry held my hand. The movie had lots of kissing in it and Bobby and Eddy kept snickering. I asked Larry for a coke and while he was gone Chris pointed to a couple sitting in the top corner of the balcony. Even in the dim light we could see them locked in a passionate embrace and I could just make out the guys hand under the front of her sweater. That brought a real rush of the strange feelings in my belly but when Larry came back we paid attention to the movie.

Mr. Ortiz dropped Bobby, Eddy and Chris off at the ranch and then drove Larry and I the quarter mile to my front door. Larry not only held my hand in the car but he rubbed his knee against mine. I was almost to the point that I was going to have a talk with him but not that night. He tried to kiss me goodnight but I turned away and I decided to talk to him the next time that I saw him.

It was a beautiful night and it was only nine o'clock so I walked into the yard. Daddy was away on one of his trips and Mrs. Garcia was sound asleep so it didn't matter what time I went to bed. As I walked around the side of the porch I saw Chris's bike leaned against the rail. I walked to the swing and he was sitting there waiting.

"How did you get here so fast?"

"Shortcut"

*-When the flower feels the need, the bee will appear.-*

“Did you enjoy the movie?” I ask.

“Did you?”

“I saw those kids in the balcony. I wanted to watch more but I was too embarrassed”

“Did you like the kissing in the movie?”

“Yes”

“Let’s try it”

I laughed nervously,

“Do you want to kiss me like Clark Gable?”

“No, like the kids in the balcony”

I held my breath and hot needles went through my belly, I started to answer but his lips covered mine. His hand was under the edge of my sweater and my head was spinning. I kissed him hard and felt the tip of his tongue touch my lips. I was out of control and I needed to get my bearings. I felt him reach under the hem of my skirt and put his hand on the inside of my thigh so I gave him a little push and told him to stop.

“Chris, I’ll decide if you can go there. It’s my choice, not yours, do you understand?”

He seemed perfectly calm.

“Yes Laska Langtree, I understand, now lean forward”

When I did he reached up under the back of my sweater and unsnapped my little white cotton bra. When I sat back he felt of my tiny breasts still under my sweater.

“They get bigger when I touch them. Why is that?”

“It’s about sex and babies and stuff” I said a little breathlessly.

He took my hand and put it on the front of his jeans.

“I get bigger too. I guess that it’s about sex and babies and stuff but not in the same way”

---

We sat on the swing for a while and I managed to keep most of my clothes on. When he was ready to leave I walked down the walk with him.

“Chris, it’s our secret?”

“Our secret Laz”

“Promise?”

“Yes and I never break a promise”

He leaned over and kissed me then rode his bike into the night.

---

I was on the lookout the next few days for any signs that he didn’t keep our secret but I saw nothing. No leers, no snickers, nothing. I was pleased that he had kept his promise.

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## **The day before high school – 1933**

### **Larry**

I walked into Laz's front yard and she was sitting on the porch swing waiting for me. We had a talk about high school and new people and new friends and what was in store for us. I suggested that we might both make new friends and we might even have dates with these new people. She agreed but assured me that we would always be best friends and that nothing would really ever come between us. When I left I had a good feeling about the future.

### **Laz**

I couldn't let this situation with Larry go on for any longer. I knew that he would be over early to talk about the movie and I sat on the swing and waited for him. I was deep in thought about what Chris and I had done on the swing the night before when Larry came into the yard. He seemed so glad to see me that I nearly relented but I held my ground.

"Larry, we have to talk. Look, I don't want to hurt you and you know that we will always be friends but you have to leave me alone now. High school is new for both of us, new people, new friends, maybe dates and football games and dances with new people. You have to go your own way now. Do you understand?"

"Why can't it just stay like it is now? We can meet new people and still have it the way it is now"

"No Larry"

"Aw Laz, don't be that way"

"Larry!"

"Yea, ok, but you'll be sorry, you'll want me back and then we will see about that"

"Goodbye Larry"

He stamped out of the yard in a huff.

*-Well, it's going to be chilly on the school bus tomorrow.-*

---

## **High School - 1933**

### **Larry**

Riding on the school bus with Laz was a little uncomfortable but it got easier as the days went by. After a while we started saying 'good morning' and 'see you later' but that was about it.

I enjoyed my classes and I studied hard. After all, what else did I have to do? Miss Sata helped me when ever I needed and we talked often. In fact, we talked more than we had in years. I was really surprised how smart she was. Bobby and Eddy seemed the same although we didn't have any classes together. They both took stuff like wood shop and metal shop while I took algebra and French.

Chris seemed to drift away from us. He made several new friends and he always seemed to be in the company of some cute girl. They weren't always the same girl but they were always cute. When I saw Laz at school she was always with a group of girls. They all dress alike and, in some ways, they all looked alike. They wore Mary Jane shoes, dark skirts and white blouses and occasionally they all wore colored sweaters. I wondered if they agreed the day before what to wear.

Although I watched lots of girls, I don't actually have any memory of talking to any of them during my entire freshman year.

---

### **Laz**

The bus ride to school was cool but I could see Larry look at me out of the corner of his eye. I could tell the he was still hurt and, in some ways, I wanted to pat him on the arm and tell him that it would be ok. I didn't of course because it would have just given him hope that I had changed my mind. Bobby and Eddy always said 'hi' to me and they looked a little embarrassed at the tension between Larry and me. I decided to wait and see if he would ever speak to me again and on the fourth day he said 'good morning'. That made me feel much better. Chris didn't ride the bus.

At school, I spent my spare time with Maryann. We had arranged to have several classes together and within a couple of weeks we had made several new friends. I avoid chatting with boys because I didn't need the aggravation. The school had a football team that played every Friday night. Following the game there was a dance in the gymnasium that was free for all students. Some of the girls went to both the game and the dance but Maryann and I decided to skip the dance for the time being.

I saw Chris around the campus and I couldn't miss his company of cute girls. I even heard a couple of girls talking about him in the restroom and I got the idea from their conversation that he was driving a pick-up truck. I knew that he had just had his fifteenth birthday and the driving age in California was sixteen. I saw him alone one day and I talked to him about his high school experience.

“Hey Chris, long time no see”

“Hello Missy, you look like little-Miss-school-girl. I see that your still wearing black shoes, I hear the brown and white saddle shoes are the latest thing”

“Since when are you interested in girl’s fashions? Oh yes, I remember now, your the latest heart-throb with the teen set”

“Smart-ass”

“Chris, do you eat with that dirty mouth?”

He leaned over and kissed me on the cheek.

“How are you Laz? Is Larry still staying away?”

“Yea, it seems to be getting easier for him. I’m just hanging out with my girlfriends and trying to be invisible”

“Why do you want to be invisible?”

“Oh, I don’t know, I don’t need any turmoil. I want simple. I want easy for a while. Chris, are you really driving to school?”

“How do you know that?”

“Girls grapevine, there are no secrets”

“There are some secrets”

“Yes, some ... what about you driving?”

“Dad gave me his old pick-up truck and I’m driving”

“You’re not old enough”

“So, call the cops”

“Chris, I would never get you into trouble. I have to go”

“See you around Laz”

---

A funny thing happened just before the Christmas dance in December. I was walking to class with Maryann when a guy stopped me. He wasn’t just a guy, he was Moose Johnson, the biggest guy on the football team.

“Excuse me Miss” he said obviously embarrassed and looking at his feet. I looked at him and then at several other members of the football team that were standing nearby trying to look inconspicuous.

“Yes?”

“Miss, I’m Clarence Johnson and I was wondering ... I don’t suppose ... would you go to the Christmas dance with me?”

I was surprised and just a little suspicious of the other guys that were watching.

“Clarence, did your teammates put you up to this?”

“Yes Miss but I wanted to ask you anyway, I just didn’t have the nerve. They said that I should be brave and asked the prettiest girl in school and I see you and your friend walk by every day and, no offence to your pretty friend, but you’re the prettiest girl that I’ve seen”

Maryann looked at me and then said to Moose, “No offence taken Clarence”

*-Oh what the hell, I have to get out sometimes and this guy looks harmless enough.-*

“Ok Clarence but I’ll meet you at the dance. I’ll be at the front door at eight-thirty and my dad will pick me up at ten thirty. These are the rules, any objections?”

“No Miss ... please ... what’s your name?”

---

My dad was out of town so Maryann’s mom took me. She was amused by the whole deal and she let me know that she wouldn’t have allowed her daughter to do such a thing but I think she liked the idea that I would take the chance. When I got to the front door Moose was waiting with a flower corsage for me.

Being a football player did have some benefits when it came to getting a small table for two. He was very sweet and we danced a few slow dances. He held me so far away from him that I wasn’t sure that we were dancing the same steps but it was fine. I was surprised when he told me that he was an excellent student and he was taking all of the college prep classes. He said that he had played football to try and get over his almost terminal shyness but so far it hadn’t worked.

In the course of two hours he told me his innermost hopes and fears. He was infatuated with a girl in my English class but he was too terrified to talk to her. He didn’t ask her to the dance because if she had turned him down he would never get a chance to meet her. I knew her and wasn’t surprised that he found her attractive. She was as tall as he was and a little plump. She was very smart and I doubted that she had ever had a date. I asked him if he wanted me to have a talk to her about him.

“Oh no Miss, don’t do that. I’ll just get myself together and talk to her. If I could ask the prettiest girl in school and have her go with me then I can do anything.”

---

I felt good when Mrs. Weston dropped me off at home. As she drove away, I saw a pick-up truck parked down the road and I walked to the swing. Chris was sitting there in the dark and strangely, I had no pangs in my belly.

“No date tonight Mr. Cool?”

“Earlier, how are you?”

“Very well, thank you . I had a nice evening with a nice guy”

“Are you going to see him again?”

“No, but it was really nice.”

“Good”

“Good what? Good that I had a nice time or good that I’m not going to see him again?”

“Both”

“Are you looking out for me Chris?”

“Why would I do that?”

“You know why”

“Goodnight Laz” and he walked towards his truck.  
After a minute I called after him,  
“Chris! I don’t mind”  
“I know” and he was gone.

---

## **Another year and more**

### **Larry**

The school year came and went with no big changes in my life. Ranch life was much the same until the spring when dad hired a new Mexican lady to help Mrs. Ortiz. Miss Sanchez now did all of the house cleaning and helped in the kitchen. When the ranch had lots of temporary workers for planting or harvesting, then she cooked for them.

I was becoming more interested in cooking and I was making a collection of recipes whenever I found a dish that interested me. Miss Sanchez brought a whole new taste to the ranch. She was raised in Sonora, Mexico and they had a different way to deal with peppers and spices. She was a treasure trove of new ideas.

When School started in the fall, I finally caught up with my age group. Skipping a grade had left me the youngest in every class until now. I was also feeling more self confident and I asked a freshman girl to go to a football game with me. She brought a girlfriend and for the first time since Laz and I went our separate ways I really enjoyed a girls company.

Bobby and I were still good friends but Eddy was spending more of his time with the Japanese students. He said the he didn’t feel comfortable with groups of white kids. It seemed strange to me.

I thought that I was over Laz and on her birthday, I didn’t even think about giving her a present but I did know it was her birthday.

### **Laz**

I had no more dates during my freshman year and my summer was spent with my girlfriends. I didn’t see Chris for a long time although I did hear of some of his escapades from my friends. Larry seemed to be adjusting to life without me and in general, life was good. Before school started My dad and I went shopping for school clothes in San Pedro and without asking he took me to the Meson d’ Lingerie. I had developed some in the last year and my fine silk underwear was too small.

The lady who served me said that I had grown enough that I had to make a decision about serviceable or sexy. She showed me both and I bought both. I had no prospects that anyone other than Maryann would every see it but I loved the way that it felt on my body. Daddy surprised me when he said that we should find a better place for clothes than J. C. Penney. The shop that he found provided me with clothes that were close enough in style

so that I wouldn't stick out at school but nice enough to always look just a little better than the other girls.

---

I guess that I was a little surprised to see Larry walking with a cute freshman girl at school. I wanted nothing but the best for him and I wanted a chance to talk to him without him becoming enamored with me again and if he really had a girlfriend, it might workout after all.

---

Dad really went overboard for my sixteenth birthday. He took me to dinner at a nightclub in Hollywood and the next morning there was a new Packard convertible sitting in our driveway. I had learned to drive years before when Larry and I drive one of the ranch trucks around the pasture. Now I just needed a lesson or two on the road and I would be ready for the world. Daddy said that he was leaving on a business trip but he would be back in a week to teach me. I don't know how Chris knew about the car but he met me at the school bus the next day and drove me home.

"Happy Birthday Laz"

"Thanks Chris, I thought that you had forgotten"

"Why would I forget, I've spent thirteen or fourteen of them with you"

Thinking back, he was right. I wondered why he was here and why now.

"I hear that you need a driving lesson"

"Where did you hear that?"

"A new Packard is news that travels fast. I'm surprised that Larry isn't here"

"He has a new girlfriend. She a cute freshman and I've seen him with her every day since school started"

"Her name is Wanda Clark and she's a virgin and she will be as long as she's with Larry"

"Chris, you're terrible. How could you possibly know that anyway?"

"Girls talk, some of us listen. Do you want to know any secrets about your girlfriends?"

"No! ... Like what?"

"I thought that you didn't want to know"

"Does anyone know about us?"

"Only if you told them"

"Ok, tell me what you have heard"

---

Most of the things that he knew weren't really deep, dark secrets but one bit of information shocked me. A girlfriend that wasn't really in our inner circle had a birthmark in a place that didn't show except when she was naked. I had seen it at a sleepover at Maryann's house one night and Chris described it to a tee.

"How do you know this?"

"Gentlemen don't tell"

"You're telling me now!"

"Miss Laska Langtree, I would tell you anything"

“Oh”

---

That afternoon we drove the Packard for miles. Chris insisted that I drive and after an hour on back roads he sent me into Redondo Beach where I spent the next hour driving in traffic on the city streets. As the sun sank towards the ocean we made our way back to the house where I had Mrs. Garcia fix us a nice supper and we ate on the patio. After Dinner she asked me if I was ok for her to retire to her room.

I found some of dad’s red wine and we sat on the porch swing sipping our drinks. Chris showed no inclination to leave so when it got chilly we went into the living room and sat close together on the couch. We had more wine and I was feeling a rosy glow.

Chris put a record on the phonograph and asked me to dance. I stood close to him and wondered if something was going to happen. I could feel the tingle in my belly as he put his arms around me and we slowly moved to the music.

“Chris, I’m a little tipsy from the wine”

“I won’t let you fall”

“Hold me tight incase I need your help”

“What kind of help would that be?”

*-Bastard, you know what kind of help I need. You’re the god damned bee and I’m the helpless flower. Why are you playing games with me now? Where the hell have you been for the six months since I’ve seen you?-*

“Whatever help that you think I need”

He picked me up in his arms and carried me to my bedroom. He laid me on the bed and smiled at me and asked,

“Same rules?”

“Mostly”

He sat on the bed and removed his shoes and then he removed mine. I had some serious flutters inside my belly now. He pulled his t-shirt over his head and then he unbuttoned my blouse.

“Nice underwear Laz. You’ve come a long way from J. C. Penney.”

“Thank you I guess, remember Chris, same rules”

He kissed me lightly on the lips and somehow my silk bra was on the floor. Another kiss and my wool skirt joined it. I was left wearing only the French silk knickers that he complemented me on. Chris slipped out of his jeans and lay beside me wearing only black boxer shorts. I had no fear the he would take advantage of me. I was more afraid

that I would ask him to do something that I would regret later. I tried to find the buzz from the wine to blame but now I was stone cold sober.

He was very slow in his caresses. He explored all of me that he could see, and he never once did he move his hand towards my knickers. He seemed cool but I sure as hell wasn't I held him as tight as I could and tried to get his knee between my legs. I wanted to hurry but he wouldn't. It took a long time but in the end it was worth the wait. I was glad that Mrs. Garcia's room was so far away because, in the end, I was very loud.

We lay locked in each others arms for a long time and then I had to go to the bathroom. When I put my hand on my belly it was wet. I touched Chris's boxers and they were also wet.

"I'm glad that you joined me"

"Me too" he said.

---

I was in my pajamas and slippers when I walked with Chris to his truck and I had a nice glow and I wondered why he stayed away for so long.

"Chris, do you care for me?"

"Of course"

"Do you love me?"

"I suppose, in my own way"

"What does that mean?"

"I love you the way that you love me. Not every minute of everyday but I'll always be there for you and you'll always need me in one way or another"

"I suppose you're right"

"I kissed him softly on the lips and he drove into the chilly night."

---

Later I lay in bed and thought what I'd done. What we had done.

*-You are a lying slut. You let the world think that you're miss goody-two-shoes, Miss virgin in white and here you are with a secret life. This isn't a fantasy you dummy, you really let him take off most of your clothes and kiss you from one end to the other and you practically begged him to make you see the stars and now you're the virgin ice queen again. Hell, in the few dates that you've had you have never let a boy kiss you on the first date, touch your breasts or put his tongue into your mouth. You are a wicked, wicked girl.-*

I lay there for a while and then decided that I would never get to sleep without my magic sleeping pill

---

## **Time slips away - May, 1937**

### **Larry**

How could four years of high school gone by so fast. We were really just children when we started. There was Bobby, Eddy, Chris and, of course, Laz and I was so in love with her but she knew better. She was the only girl that I had ever really known and the thought that she would lose interest in me was hard to take. For a long time I was mad because she dumped me but I finally realized that she really never had the same feelings for me that I imagined. She wanted to be my friend, even my best friend, if a boy and a girl could be best friends but I wouldn't let it stop there. I dreamed of the day when we would be married and raising kids. In my dreams we always lived in the ranch house and Miss Sata and Mrs. Ortiz lived with us. It was just a kids dream but it sure wasn't Laz's dream.

Things got easier when I met Wanda. She was so cute and she liked me right away. Even though I was a year ahead of her in school we were the same age. We had been dating for two and a half years when I asked her to my senior prom.

“Wanda, will you go to the prom with me?”

“Of course silly, who else would I go with?”

She had been right of course, we were going 'steady' and I think that she had bigger plans for us. Lots of kids got married right after high school and I knew that she had that on her mind. She had one more year of high school and I was starting as a freshman at USC in the fall but I'm sure that she had a plan for all of that. I just wasn't sure that her plan matched my plan.

### **Laz – Same time**

I couldn't wait for high school to end. I had enough of classes and the gossip and the boy-girl games of courtship and breakups. It seemed like most of the girls that I knew had found their future husband or were maneuvering to find one. The last thing that I wanted to think about was getting married. It wasn't that I didn't have any prospects it was that I had no interest in the guys that I knew.

For over a year I had been dating a snob from Palos Verdes Estates who thought that we made the perfect couple. I had met him at a wedding and he had seemed quite nice. He was my age and he attended a private school in San Pedro, no, not the part of San Pedro near the harbor but the part up on the cliffs west of town.

Thomas Thurman Jr. was a nice enough looking young man with impeccable manners who thought that I was from the 'right kind of people'. I asked him why he thought that and he said that he saw me driving a Packard. I told him that I had stolen it and that the cops would be there any minute and he politely chuckled.

I supposed I thought that he couldn't possible be as stuffy as he sounded so I took him up when he asked me for a date. He could be very charming when he wanted to. Most of my high school dates had taken me to the Strand Theater in Redondo for a movie and then they had wanted to park in the dark for some serious making out. I had a rule that I never kissed on the first date and I never let them feel me up. This wasn't the best way to get a second date but a few guys came back for more. I saw Chris from time to time and if I needed any special attention he was always obliging.

Sometimes I wondered about Chris and the way I felt about him and the way that I hoped that he felt about me. It wasn't just the pseudo-sex or the nearly-sex that we occasionally had, it was a feeling that he was out there somewhere and he somehow knew when I needed him. I still laughed at the flower/bee analogy but often it seemed to be true.

So this good looking and charming rich kid from the right side of the tracks asked me for a date and I accepted. At the appointed time he arrived driving a Cadillac coupe and he was wearing a pearl gray suit. I was dressed in a sweater and a flared shirt and when he came in and met my dad, he said that he would wait while I changed. I had no intention of changing but he waited anyway.

We drove to a cliff-top restaurant overlooking the San Pedro harbor where a window table was reserved for us. The waiter brought two menus but mine had no prices printed in it. Tomas made some suggestions and then he ordered for me. We had wine with dinner although neither of us was old enough to legally drink. After dinner we drove to a night club where we had a nearly private table and we listened to a black girl sing with the voice of an angel. We had cocktails and I poured half of mine in the potted palm while he wasn't looking. We danced several times and he made no attempt to hold me too tight or to put his hand on my butt.

At exactly midnight he walked me to my front door and without asking he kissed me on the cheek. As he drove away I checked the swing to see if Chris was there but it was empty. I didn't really expect to see him but he often turned up when I did something new or unusual. I guess that I felt a little disappointment.

Over the next year Thomas and I dated on a regular basis. He was always a gentleman but as we got to know each other better we did progress to kissing and then French kissing and I let him feel of my breasts but only through my clothes. I liked the idea that he wasn't pushy or aggressive in his attention to me. A few months ago he started dropping hints about what 'we' might do after high school.

His family made sure that he had been accepted at Stanford University near San Francisco and he would be moving there in September. He hinted that I might find a job in that area. I was sure that he wasn't talking about marriage and I tried to get a straight story from him.

"Tomas, help me understand what you are suggesting. You are going to school in Palo Alto and you think that I might move there? Exactly what would my status be?"

“Well, like it is now. We’re close friends and we would remain so”  
“And just how would I afford to live there ... as your friend?”  
“Well I would naturally pay for your accommodations and what ever expenses that you might have”  
“And we would continue to be friends?”  
“Yes and I would hope someday that we might be more than friends”  
“Friends like boyfriend-girlfriend or closer friends ... sleepover friends”  
“That, as it is now dear, is entirely up to you”

*-Damn this guy is wishy-washy ... if he wants to sleep with me why doesn't he ask. I'd probably say no for now, but at least he would be out in the open-*

---

I told him that I'd let him know soon about Stanford but for now we had my Senior Prom and my graduation to think of.

---

One week before the prom he picked me up in the afternoon for a drive through the hills. I had a new pair of sunglasses in my hand when he held the door for me and I got into his car I accidentally dropped them through the crack in the seat and as he walked around to his door I felt between the front seat and the back seat. As he opened his door I found something and looked at it. His face froze as I saw the foil wrapper of a Trojan Prophylactic. It was the package for a rubber.

“Thomas! What’s this” I asked already knowing what it was.  
“I don’t know dear, it looks like a chewing gum wrapper” he said in a weak voice.  
“No, I don’t think so. It looks like someone was screwing in the backseat”  
“Well I did loan my car to a guy, maybe it is his”  
“God damn it Thomas, don’t lie to me. Be a man and admit it”

He sighed and smiled a little.

“Look dear, I don’t put you under any pressure to relieve my ... tension. I’m not made of stone and I’m sure that you understand. It has nothing to do with our relationship. It’s just something that men have to do”

I thought about this for a minute and then I smiled. I realized how good I was going to feel when this jerk was out of my life. My first thought was to have Chris beat the crap out of him but I didn’t want to wait that long to deliver my message. I leaned forward like I was going to kiss him and then I grabbed what I assumed were his testicles and I squeezed very hard. I was pleased with the results and I made a note to use this tactic whenever the situation called for it. The last that I ever saw of Thomas Thurman Jr. was a dust cloud from his very nice Cadillac as he drove unsteadily away.

The next day at school I saw Chris across the lawn. He was talking and laughing with a couple of guys and he gave no indication that he had seen me but when the sun went down that evening he was sitting on my porch swing.

---

“Well Laz it’s all over town that you dumped Mr. Money-Bags. Can’t you ever keep a secret?”

“I only told a couple of girlfriends.”

“If you want to keep a secret, never tell a girl.”

“Well, I dumped the asshole because he was a .. an.. asshole. That’s the best thing that I can think to call him”

Chris said nothing. He knew that if I wanted to tell him more then I’d tell him.

“I found the foil off of a rubber in his backseat and he finally told me that it was ok because he wasn’t made of stone and I wouldn’t screw him”

Chris just waited for the rest of the story.

“I grabbed his balls and squeezed so hard that I think that his eyeballs popped out”

Chris laughed.

“Damn Laz, you aren’t just another pretty face. Do me a favor, if I ever piss you off just slap me”

“Oh Chris you would never treat me like that”

“No I wouldn’t Laz, not ever”

We kissed and cuddled on the swing for a while but I didn’t want him to go any farther. The thought of Thomas in the backseat of his car with some girl’s legs around him just killed any passion that I might feel that night but Chris made no move to leave. He would stay as long as I needed him.

“Chris, will you take me to my prom?”

“You mean the suit and tie prom with flowers and all of that?”

“That’s the one”

“How do you know that I don’t already have a date for the prom?”

“Because you were waiting for me to ask you”

“Then I’m your guy but I don’t have the right kind of clothes”

---

## **A Mystery – Laz**

### **Two weeks until graduation**

It was a week before the Prom and two weeks before my Graduation when daddy told me that he would be away for a while. He wasn't exactly sure when he would be back but he guaranteed me that he would see me graduate. He had been away a lot that spring and, as usual, he was evasive when I asked where he was going. I didn't press the point because it had been this way for as long as I could remember.

He had forgotten that Mrs. Garcia had asked for some time off and I would be in the big house alone while he was gone. I didn't bother to remind him because he would have made a big deal out of it and he would probably have found someone to stay with me.

I kissed him goodbye on Saturday morning and when he was gone I drove Mrs. Garcia to her sister's house in Wilmington. The prom was a week away so I was alone for a while.

I thought of asking Maryann to spend a couple of nights but she was busy with her own preparations. Thursday after school I came home and made a snack. Homework was a thing of the past now that graduation was so near so I read the latest Life Magazine and then just lay around the house. I remembered when I was seven or eight I was alone in the house for a short time while Mrs. Garcia and Daddy went to the store for something that we just had to have. While they were gone I went through every closet and dresser drawer.

I idly walked to Mrs. Garcia room but I knew that she had nothing of interest. When I was little I was surprised at how little she had. A quick look at her closet and dresser confirmed that nothing had changed. My dad's room was always so neat and tidy that he sometimes joked that it was his military training but I didn't think that he had been in the military.

His dresser held shirts, socks and underwear but nothing personal. The closet held a surprising array of nice suits, jackets and shoes some of which he had taken with him on this trip. There was only one picture in the room and it was of me taken last year. The picture was updated from time to time and I didn't know what he did with the old pictures. Maybe he just threw them away.

The real mystery in the house was his office. There was a comfortable desk chair, a large, locked file cabinet and an old fashion roll-top desk. I had never been in the room when the desk wasn't locked. I sat in the chair and spun myself around the way that I did when I was little and then I tried the file cabinet drawer but it was securely locked. I was ready to leave when I tried to roll up the top of the desk and it opened.

I was so surprised that I nearly fell off of the chair. It had never been open when he was away and I had tried it many times. I looked at the lock and saw that it was, indeed, locked but it hadn't been completely closed when he turned the key.

My first thought was that I should just close it and leave everything alone but it couldn't be closed until it was unlocked. With a feeling of excitement and little-girl naughtiness I pushed the top all the way up. The desktop was as neat and tidy as daddy's bedroom. There were sharp pencils in a cup, a letter opener and a blotter. There were also two ink bottles, one containing blue ink and one containing black. I wondered why anyone would need two colors of ink. The drawers, of course, were locked by the same lock that was meant to hold the top.

Across the top of the desktop were several pigeon-holes that held nothing of interest until I came to the last one. In it was a key that I was sure would open the file cabinet.

It was a three drawer cabinet like the ones that I saw in the office at school. The contents of the top drawer were as neat as all of dad's things. There were many folders filed alphabetically and a quick look revealed tax-records, receipts, insurance papers, the title to the cars, a large check book and several years of bank statements.

The middle drawer was organized in the same way but its contents were far different. There were many folders with names all filed alphabetically. The folders contained letters. Some folders had only one letter and some had many. There was also an address book and a ledger. I felt a little guilty for snooping into daddy's private things but curiosity far outweighed those pangs.

I opened the bottom drawer and found more tidy folders but this time I recognized some of the labels. There were all of the pictures of me that had been on display before they were updated. He had never thrown any of them away. There was a folder with every report-card that I ever received, another filled with what looked like all of the pictures and drawings that I ever done in school. In another were all of the paper valentines that I had ever made for him.

Looking at many pictures I realized that Mrs. Garcia had taken most of them. There were photos of me as a little girl sitting on daddy's lap. Some had dates on the back and some didn't. When I was a little older there were pictures of me and the boys. Larry, Bobby, Eddy, Chris and me. One was all of us and instead of my play dress I was wearing boy's clothes including those flat men's caps that everyone wore in the '20's.

I remembered that I sometimes wore Larry's clothes if we were going to play where we would get really dirty. He didn't mind and I wondered why girls always had to wear dresses. I was glad that times had changed and now I occasionally wore slacks. I looked at Larry and Chris. Larry had always been the one for me until he made a pest of himself. Chris had never paid much attention to me then or now. I missed the closeness that I had with Larry for so long.

Looking through these treasures I wanted to cry when suddenly I was struck by the icy fingers of fear and the hope that a lifelong mystery might be solved. The next folder was labeled 'Family'.

The first thing that I saw was an old photo of a young man wearing a military uniform. It was fancy with lots of brad and a sword and I looked closely to see my dad's tender face. In the back was written 'Highlander's 1917'. The next photo was of several soldiers wearing battle helmets standing near a ruined wall. On the back was written 'France 1917'. I was sure that one of the men was daddy but it was hard to tell. The next was very different. It was taken in a hospital ward and daddy was propped up in bed with his leg in a plaster cast that was suspended on wires from a frame above him. On the back was written 'St. Catherine's Hospital, Edinburgh, 1917'. I had no idea that dad had been in the military and now I knew that he had been in the Great War and that he had been wounded.

The next picture took my breath away. It was a young woman in an old fashion white blouse who was smiling slightly at the camera. On the back was written 'Lara, 1918'. Could this be my mother? Dad had never answered my question about my mother. He had never told me her name. When I was young I asked and he said that her name was 'mommy'. Her name was Lara like my middle name.

Quickly I looked at the next picture and saw the saw same slight smile but this time she was holding a baby in her arms Was that baby me? I turned the picture quickly. 'Mother and Laska, Boston, Feb. 15, 1919' It was different handwriting. This must have been my mother's hand.

There were no more pictures. There was another fat folder in the drawer but I was so emotionally drained that I closed and locked the cabinet. I felt deep remorse for violating my dad's privacy and I felt elated to have actually seen a picture of my mother. I was torn on what to do. I needed to know where she was and why we lived here alone. I thought that the answer might be in the now locked cabinet but I really wanted my dad to tell me. Thinking about this I relived the disappointment of his previous refusals to discuss it. I put the key back in the desk and rolled the top down but, of course, it was still unlocked.

The next morning I took the key and put it into my purse. I had thought about it most of the night and I was going to ask Chris if he knew how I could get a copy.

---

## **The Prom - Laz**

Saturday was filled with hairdressers and excitement. I spent a couple of hours with Maryann helping her decide on lipstick and rouge. Her date, Bruce, was also her fiancé and we talked about her wedding plans. I was home by five and Chris would be here at six-thirty. We were meeting Maryann and her guy for dinner at seven thirty and we planned to be at the prom by nine. That was an hour late and I didn't care.

Chris arrived wearing jeans and a t-shirt but he was carrying his prom cloths over his arm.

“Why aren't you dressed?”

“I didn't want my sister laughing at me. She's giving me a hard enough time now for just going to the prom”

“Why would she think that?”

“She said that fishermen didn't go to proms and they sure as hell don't wear white dinner jackets”

“You're not a fisherman”

“Well, we know that but she doesn't believe it yet”

I gave him a little kiss on the lips and sent him to our spare bedroom to change. I was sitting at my dressing table wearing my silk underwear that was covered by a very nice slip when he walked in.

“Can I help?” he asked,

He looked great. He was wearing black slacks and shoes, a long sleeved white shirt and a white dinner jacket but he was missing his black bow tie.

“Chris! I'm not dressed yet”

“Oh Laz, I've seen you in your underwear before. Can you tie a tie?”

“Of course”

I finished my lipstick and then held up my prom dress. Chris helped me into it and then I tied his tie. Looking in the mirror I thought that we would be the best looking pair at the dance.

“So Laz, do you want to go in my truck or your Packard?”

“Very funny, Chris let me give you the money to pay for dinner. It might be expensive.”

“Not necessary dear, I robbed a bank on the way here tonight”

“Sure you did” I said as I tossed him the keys to the Packard.

---

## **We danced the night away – at least part of it**

I was happy and a little sleepy as Chris drove us through the night. We had a wonderful time at dinner and the prom. He always surprised me with his charm and grace. He made

witty conversation with Maryanne and her fiancé, he danced all of the latest steps, and he danced with Maryann with no awkwardness while I felt odd and stiff dancing with Bruce. We stopped at Larry's table and chatted with him and Wanda. She looked very pretty but she still looked very young. Larry was as polite and attentive as ever. There was always a familiarity between us and I missed the closeness that we once had but I didn't let him know.

We stayed until the last dance and then drove to a Café in Manhattan Beach for coffee and pie. Driving toward home I snuggled next to him with my head on his shoulder. He had been the perfect date for the evening. As I dreamed a little I thought about how good he was to me when I needed him I often wondered what I really meant to him. Was I just one of his many girls or were we bound together in some way? When we were together he was always attentive but then he would be gone for days or weeks or even months. I thought that it was strange that he always showed at the right time. Maybe Mrs. Garcia had been right all of those years ago when she told me about the flower and the bee.

*-Do you love me Chris? I think that I could love you if you gave me a chance-*

When we got to the house, I went into my bedroom and Chris followed. He unzipped my dress and helped take it off over my head. Then he went to the spare room while I changed into my pajamas and slippers. I didn't bother with a robe and I could hear him in the kitchen when I sat on the living room couch. He came in wearing just his jeans and carrying two mugs of hot chocolate. He sat beside me and handed me a mug.

"No shirt Chris?"

"My t-shirt isn't very clean and I'm through with the fancy clothes"

"Hmm. Thanks for the drink"

"Your welcome, did you have a good time?"

"Wonderful" I said as I leaned against him"

"What happened to your fine, silk underwear?"

"It's on the bedroom floor, do you mind?"

"Not at all, I was just admiring the bumps on the front of your jammys"

"What do you like about my bumps?" I asked dreamily.

"I like the way they grow when I do this"

---

After a bit of steamy making out he smiled and asked,

"Bedtime?"

"Yes please"

He picked me up in his arms and carried me to my bed. He lay me down and sat beside me and I thought of 'time' rushing around and away from us. We had been little kids together and schoolmates together and almost lovers together and now our time in high school and our childhood was nearly over. He was the one that I trusted most and relied on most. He never betrayed our secret and he never threatened me in any way. I wished

that I loved him more and I wished that he loved me more but it wasn't necessary for us. We were together when we wanted to be and that was all that mattered.

“Same rules Laz?” he asked.

“No Chris, there are no rules tonight”

---

I woke in the middle of the night and felt for Chris next to me but I was alone in bed. I listened for him somewhere in the house but then I heard his truck start. I felt a sense of loneliness that he had left without saying goodbye. I pulled the covers tight around me and thought that maybe I should find my pajamas. I felt a little blue lying naked and alone in my bed and I didn't know why but I felt like I was going to cry.

I heard his footsteps on the porch and then the sound of the front door. Chris slid into bed and cuddled next to me. He was freezing and he put his cold feet on me.

"Where have you been honey?" I asked.

"I forgot to move the truck last night. I thought that you might not want the neighbors knowing that I spent the night with you"

"Your such a nice guy ... did you get dressed?"

"No, I couldn't find my clothes in the dark."

I snuggled against him trying to warm him, and then I laughed just a little.

"What?" he asked.

"Nothing. It's just that your bare butt shinning in the moonlight must have made a glorious sight."

His bare skin was pressed against my bare skin and he was getting warmer.

"Chris?"

"Yes honey"

"As long as we're awake ..."

---

I woke just before ten and I could smell coffee. I found my robe and slippers and found Chris in the kitchen just poring two large mugs.

"Good morning honey" I said squinting at the bright sunlight coming through the kitchen window.

Chris was dressed in his jeans and t-shirt and his prom clothes were neatly folded in the kitchen counter.

"Good morning Miss Laska, did you sleep well?"

"Some of the time" I laughed and kissed him. He smelled and tasted like Colgate tooth paste.

"Your dressed early, are you leaving?"

"Not yet, I have to fix your breakfast. Oh, I nearly forgot, here's the key that you wanted duplicated."

I had forgotten the key. Suddenly my mind was in turmoil over the content of the locked cabinet. I wanted to forget all about it but I knew that I would be in there again soon.

"Laz, are you alright?"

"What? ... Oh sure, what's for breakfast?"

---

Chris stayed until noon and he would have stayed longer if I had encouraged him but he could see that I was preoccupied so with a kiss and a pat of my butt, he drove away. I had meant to ask about his plans for after graduation but it had slipped my mind.

I had a nice hot bath and I looked at myself in the full-length mirror on the bathroom door. I had been the nearly pure virgin all of my life and now I wasn't anymore. I didn't feel any different and looking in the mirror I didn't look any different. I guess that young girls imagine that some miraculous transformation would take place but except of the memory, memories, the three memories, I was the same girl that I had always been.

---

I held out until two o'clock before I opened the file cabinet. I went straight to the bottom drawer and looked into the last folder. It was all legal looking papers. There was daddy's birth certificate. He was born Lavern Leicester Langtree in Avenel Scotland on January 14<sup>th</sup>, 1900.

Looking through several documents I learned that he attended the Highland Academy for boys and later Saint Andrews University. He was commissioned Second Lieutenant in the Royal Highlander Regiment in January of 1917. Some faded Army orders sent the new officer to France in July of 1917 where he was wounded soon after because in September of the same year he was transferred to the military ward of St. Catherine's Hospital in Edinburgh.

The next paper brought a little tear to my eye as I read the Certificate of Marriage between Mr. Lavern L. Langtree, bachelor, and Miss Lara L. McGregor, spinster, in the Registers Office in Edinburgh Scotland on March 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1918.

There were two, long expired, Passports. Dad's British and Lara's American. That surprised me because I had just assumed that mom had been Scottish or English. Looking through her passport I saw a picture of a young girl, perhaps fourteen or fifteen and I noticed that she was about three years younger than daddy. She had left New York for Leith Docks near Edinburgh in May of 1914 and she had returned to the port of Boston in January of 1919. That was just a month before I was born.

I opened the next document and felt a stab in my heart. It was a Death Certificate from the Boston Health Department. It stated the cold fact that on March 11<sup>th</sup>, 1919, Mrs. Lara Lynn (McGregor) Langtree had died from the effects of Spanish Influenza.

*-Oh my god! My mother had died just a year after her marriage and a month after the birth of her daughter. Daddy, at nineteen was a father and a widower-*

I cried for a while and then I returned all of the papers to the condition that I found them in and then I locked the cabinet. The contents of drawer two would have to wait for another day.

---

## Graduation and a little party - Laz

Dad came home on Thursday and I was all set for graduation. School that week had just been going through the motions and we had Friday off. The only crisis that week came from Maryann. She asked me to come home with her after school and I knew that she was in distress.

She was engaged to Bruce and they had tentively planned a wedding for Thanksgiving but he changed all of that. He had planned to work with his dad in their hardware store but he had unexpectedly been accepted to The University of California in Berkeley. Maryanne was beside herself. She had offered to marry him and move to the bay area while he attended school but he didn't think that was a good idea. He said that he would need to give all of his attention to his studies.

"So sweetheart, what are you going to do?" I asked her.

"There's no way that I going to stay home and wait for him to write to me. I want to live with you somewhere and get a job. Is that ok?"

"Of course it's ok as soon as I decide what I'm going to do"

I didn't mind having her as my roommate but that meant that I would have to get my own act together.

Thursday Larry approached me with an invitation.

"Laz, I want to get the old gang together tomorrow for lunch. I've already talked to Bobby and Eddy and I'm looking for Chris now. Please come, it'll probably be that last time that we will all be in the same place at the same time."

Well he looked so excited that I couldn't say no. I had talked to Bobby and Eddy occasionally but I hadn't seen much of Larry for a long time. I wondered if Chris would join us.

---

I walked onto the patio of the Lee Ranch house and Mrs. Ortiz greeted me with a hug. For so many years she had been nearly my mother and I always liked her. Bobby was right behind her and because it seemed like a festive occasion I hugged him and gave him a kiss on the cheek. Larry and Eddy were talking on the patio and I hugged and kissed them both.

*-Did Larry hug me a second longer than the others. I'm sure that he did-*

Chris walked up and asked if he could be included.

Lunch was iced tea and fried fish served the way that Larry had learned form Mrs. Garcia so long ago. The day was bright blue and the ocean was sparkling. Although I had seen this hundreds of times I never grew tired of it.

Mrs. Ortiz brought a framed picture and sat it on the table. It was the five of us when we were about ten or eleven. We were standing on the edge of the patio with the ocean in the background. A discussion started about when it was taken and how Mrs. Ortiz got us to stand still long enough for the picture. She came from the house with her little Brownie camera and she took a last picture taken together.

I asked Eddy why we called him that when his name was 'Isoroku'. He laughed and said that it had been Larry's idea. Their kindergarten teacher had called him Izzy but Larry thought that was a girl's name so it became Eddy.

"How about you Laz, where did you get Laska Lara?" Bobby asked.

"Lara was my mother's name but dad hasn't confessed yet where he came up with Laska"

There was lots of laughing and finally the subject got around to the future.

"So what are you doing after high school I asked Eddy?"

"My world is strawberries. I've got to convince pop that we can grow and market strawberries without so much hard labor"

"Good luck with that, your dad seems very set in his ways to me" I said.

"Oh he asked about you the other day"

"Did he, I'm surprised that he remembers me"

"How could he forget you? You were eleven when we all went to my house to get something and you met him. You bowed and greeted him in Japanese. You addressed him as Fugimora-san and he was very impressed."

"Well, you had taught that to me just a few days before. I'm glad that he remembers"

"Bobby, what are you going to do now" I asked.

"Dad wants me to learn the ranch business. I told him that I already knew but he laughed at me. Next week, I'm going to get a two week lesson from Miss Sata on bookkeeping. She's going to show me how the money comes and goes."

"Chris, are you going fishing with the rest of your family?" I asked knowing that he had no interest in fishing.

"No, as a matter of fact, I start a fulltime job working for the Redondo Beach Police Department"

"What?" both Larry and Bobby asked together.

"You're going to be a cop?" Larry asked.

"Someday but first I'm going to learn how to be a cop. For the next few months I'm going to wash cars, sweep floors, go for coffee and do anything else that needs doing. In January I start at the LA Police Academy and if I pass, then next summer I'll be the youngest member of the Redondo cops"

Everyone was excited for him and lots of jokes were made about fixing parking tickets and eating donuts.

“Larry, I know that your starting at USC in the fall, tell us about that” I said.  
“Well, dad wants me to study business and to specialize in the entertainment industry. I have different interests. I would really like to specialize in the restaurant industry. I have lots of ideas about that and for the last year or so I’ve been collecting recipes. “  
“Do you want to be a Chef?” Bobby asked.  
“I don’t want to be a cook but I do want to do the planning and management.”  
“If you don’t want to cook, why are you collecting recipes?”  
“Well, first, I like to eat but, more importantly, I think that the way to succeed is to introduced new things that people will buy”

I think that we were all impressed by Larry’s thoughts and ambitions.

“What about you Laz” Eddy asked.  
“Dad wants me to go to college but I don’t want to be a school teacher or a nurse so I want to get a job until I get a better idea of what to do with my life”  
Chris laughed and asked,  
“Why don’t you just get married like the other two-thirds of the girls in our class?”  
I gave him a quick look and thought of a few dirty things to say but I just smiled and said,  
“Why Chris, I would do that except all of the good ones are taken”

---

As the party broke up I thanked Mrs. Ortiz. I took Larry aside for a quick word.  
“Larry can we talk next week, I need some advice”  
“Sure Laz, I’m busy Sunday with family but why don’t you come here Monday for lunch, ok?”

Chris was leaving and I called after him to wait and we walked to his truck together so we could talk alone.

“Chris, I’m really proud of you for joining the Police. I think that you’ll make a good officer.”  
“Why do you think that, Laz?”  
“Oh because you’re a great guy and your really good at ... doing things”  
He laughed.  
“Here Hon, this is the phone number of the Police business office. If you need to get in touch with me just leave a message with whoever answers the phone”  
“Anything else?” I asked.  
“Can I kiss you here in front of god and everyone?”  
“Just a little one”

---

## **Redondo Beach High School Auditorium – June 5<sup>th</sup> 1937**

### **Laz**

We were all there in our best Sunday school clothes and I had a new Bulova watch on my wrist that dad had given me for graduation. Just before we went onto the stage we slipped on our black robes and donned out mortarboard hats. We were seated alphabetically and we all endured several speeches.

While our valedictorian talked about us being the future and how ready we were to take up the challenge, I was wondering how many of my classmates were pregnant. Several couples were already married and many more would be within the next few months. That's what you did in 1937, grow up, finish school, get married, have kids, live your life and then die.

Maryann's older sister confided to her that she had got married so she could have regular sex but later she wished that was be back in school or in college or anywhere else that wasn't where she was.

The school principal started calling us up to receive our diplomas.

Isoroku Fugimora

...

Laska Lara Langtree

...

Lawrence Leland Lee Jr.

...

Roberto Jose Maria Ortiz

...

Cristiano Lucas Renaldo

...

And then it was over. Our childhood was gone and we were no longer the 'future', we were the 'now'.

---

On the sidewalk in front of the auditorium we all were greeted by our family and friends. There was my dad and Mrs. Garcia. She was half of my family and she was proud of me. She had her little Brownie camera and was busy snapping pictures. Dad hugged me and then I noticed that he had been chatting with Larry's dad. They weren't really friends but they had been neighbors for many years. Mrs. Lee was there and she gave me a hug. Mr. Lee patted me on my shoulder and Larry's brother Robert shook my hand. Miss Sata stood in the background and smiled. Mr. and Mrs. Ortiz and Bobby all hugged me.

Later I walked through the crowd looking for Chris but he was gone and I never did see any of his family. I was surprised to see Mr. and Mrs. Fugimora. They stuck pretty close to the Japanese community but here they were, him in a very old suit and she in a

conservative oriental dress. I bowed to Mr. Fugimora and he nodded in the Japanese way. I bowed to Mrs. Fugimora and she bowed to me in the same manner. Then I did my best to converse in my very poor Japanese.

“Fugimora-san” I said still bowing.

“Laska-co” he responded adding the feminine ‘co’ to my name.

“I hope that you are well”

“Very well, I hope that you are happy Laska-co”

I never really understood this exchange but Eddy said that it was traditional.

“As happy as one could be in these times”

I was surprised when he said in English,

“You good girl Laska-co”

“Thank you” I responded.

After more bowing Eddy walked away with me,

“Way to go Laz, you’re a real charmer”

“It’s easy to fake it in Japanese, see you Eddy”

---

## **The truth, the whole truth ...**

Sunday morning dad and I had breakfast on the patio and then I confronted him.

“Dad, this can’t wait any longer. I need to know about mom”

He sat for a while looking off into the distance then he answered in a calm voice,

“I’ve always known that we would have this conversation someday but I thought that maybe you would forget about it. It’s not that I have had anything to hide from you it’s just that it’s still very painful for me to think about.”

I waited while he got his thoughts together. I didn’t want to give him any indication that I had already discovered some of the truth in the bottom drawer of the file cabinet.

“I’m sure that you know that I was born and raised in Scotland. I graduated from Saint Andrews University during the Great War and I was commissioned as a military officer. Like so many, I was sent to France in 1917 to fight for King and Country and like so many, I was wounded. It happened not long after I arrived at the front and for a while the doctors thought that I might lose my leg.

Fortunately I was sent to a hospital in Edinburgh where the doctors did a good job of fixing me up. I spent several weeks with my leg wired up so that I looked like the man on the flying trapeze. I was a funny looking sight. There were several young girls who came through the ward bringing books and magazines. Today I think that they are called ‘candy strippers’ because of the uniforms that they wear.

One day a young lady who was older than the others came to my ward and she seemed to take an interest in me. She was a foreigner, an American who was living with an uncle in Scotland.

She came the next day and the next and every day after that. We chatted and joked soon she was all that I could think of.

Her name was Lara Lynn McGregor and she was from California. She was just fourteen in 1914 when she had traveled from her home to visit her aunt and uncle in Scotland. At first she didn’t say why a girl so young had made a sea voyage but later she told me.

Her mother had died suddenly in 1913 and her dad was so distraught that he couldn’t cope with his life. His doctor said that he had to have rest and treatment in a ‘special’ hospital and there was no one to take care of her. She had never met her Uncle McGregor when she arrived in Edinburgh.

After a year her dad was well enough for her to return but the German navy had made sea voyages to the USA far too dangerous. So she was stuck in Scotland. She finished her schooling and volunteered to work with wounded soldiers. She was just seventeen when we met.

Of course we fell in love. How could I not love her. She was all sunlight and fresh air and sweet-smelling soap and laughter and love. The army was through with me. They had got all that I had to offer and then they sent me on my way. That was a good thing because I never intended to be apart from Lara again.

We were married on March 2<sup>nd</sup> 1918 and we talked about where we were going to live. I was willing to go anywhere and she wanted to return to California. A few months later she gave the wonderful news that we were going to have a baby. We were overjoyed.

The war was winding down and travel was becoming safer but another complication entered our young lives. A killer sickness called the Spanish Flu was spreading across Europe and America. It would appear in a city and in just a few days, many, perhaps hundreds of people were dead. It was no time for us to travel and we took refuge at the McGregor country estate and avoided any new contacts.

In June we received word that Lara's father had died in Boston and his lawyer wanted us to contact him as soon as possible. Lara was also determined that our baby be born in the United States so we made plans to travel across the Atlantic in January. It was a bad time to cross the stormy Atlantic but we had very little choice.

In December the flu seemed to have abated and we were ready for the new world. The crossing was pure hell with mountains of green water battering the ship everyday. The crossing should have taken five days and it took seven. No sea captain would risk repeating the disaster that had befallen the HMS Titanic in those very waters just seven years before.

In Boston we found that Lara's father had leased a very comfortable apartment for a year and the lease still had several months to go. We informed the Probate Attorney that we were in the country but we wouldn't be able to see him until after the birth of our baby.

You were born Feb. 15, 1919 in Boston General Hospital. You were named for a childhood friend of your mothers and for her. Oh we were so happy. You were a beautiful baby or at least we thought so. For the next two weeks no couple and no parent could have been happier than we were. Lara was talking about the house in California where she had grown up and how much you were going to love it. We wrote a letter to the attorney so we could be done with all of that business and be in California before spring."

Daddy sat for a while saying nothing and then he spoke in a lower voice.

"The Spanish flu had killed many people in Boston in the summer of 1918 but there had been no cases for months. Suddenly an outbreak occurred in one neighborhood and it was our neighborhood. Your mother woke on March 9<sup>th</sup> with a high fever and by March 11<sup>th</sup> she was gone. Just like that, she was gone."

---

I walked to him and sat in his lap. I hugged him and kissed his face the way that I had when I was a child.

“That’s enough dad, you can tell me the rest when you feel like it. Just sit with me now”

We sat that way for a long time and then he went into his office. When he returned he handed me two pictures. One was mom sitting and smiling and the other was her and me the day that I was born.

“I save these for you honey, I just had to wait until you were ready to see them.”

---

## Hello World - June 1937

### Laz

Monday at noon I went to the Lee Ranch and Larry was waiting for me. He hadn't asked why I wanted to talk to him and he was willing to wait until I decided to tell him. He said that he would cook lunch for me but it would be an experiment.

In the kitchen he had prepared a dish of dry spices and some fresh vegetables. On the stove was a strange pan that was very wide at the top and small at the bottom. He told me that it was a Wok and it was used to cook Asian food. He took a bowl of fresh fish that had been cut into bite-size pieces and then marinated in a fragrant sauce. It all looked very interesting. He asked me to sit a bowl of fresh salad on the patio table and be ready to eat in just a few minutes. He heated the Wok until it was very hot, then he added some peanut oil that smoked and tossed in the spices. The kitchen was filled with the pungent aroma of something new and then he tossed in the vegetables. When they had cooked for less than a minute, the fish was added, stirred once and carried to the patio where it was spooned onto out plates. While it cooled enough not to scald us he poured each of us a glass of red wine.

The lunch was incredible. I couldn't identify any of the spices or the sauce but I liked all of it. Larry carefully recorded my comments in his little notebook. He said that one day it would be part of a master plan for a restaurant.

After the lunch and the wine, he sat back in his chair and waited for me to begin.

"Larry, I need a job and your dad can help me if he will. He told me at graduation that if I ever needed help to just call. What do you think that I should do?"

The question sounded a little dumb after I had actually said the words out loud and I think that Larry had the same thought.

"Ok, Laz lets call him"

"What? Now?"

"Yes, now"

Before I could protest, Larry led the way into the house and dialed a number. He spoke to a secretary and then hung up.

"Dad will call us in a few minutes. What kind of job are you looking for?"

*-Something exciting and romantic and adventuresome. Something with lots of exotic travel and I want to meet loads of interesting people, and it should pay really well-*

"Anything, I don't really want to wash windows or mop floors but I could I guess"

"I doubt that dad would let that happen. Do you think that working in a restaurant would be interesting?"

*-Hell, no-*

“Everything sounds interesting”

I was saved from further interrogation by the ringing of the telephone.

“Hello Mr. Lee, its Laska Langtree”

“How nice to hear from you dear, I’m sorry that we didn’t get to visit more at the graduation. What can I do for you?”

“I was hoping sir, that you might give me some advice on finding a job”

*-Please don’t say no-*

“What kind of a job, dear?”

“Anything”

“Hmmm ... let me call you back in a few minutes”

---

I was too nervous to chat but Larry filled the silence with talk of recipes and restaurants and business plans. Finally the phone rang and Larry answered it then he handed the phone to me.

“Hello”

“Hi honey, look, would you like a job as a gofer?”

“Sure, what is it?”

He laughed.

“It’s really called a Production Assistant. The job is at Paramount helping the director, assistant director or anyone else that they assign you to”

“Paramount?”

“Yes, Paramount Studios, the movie place”

*- Be still my heart (thump thump thump)-*

“So what do you say dear, it starts Wednesday, can you do it that soon?”

“Yes, what do I do?”

“Tomorrow afternoon you drive up to the Bel Air house and spend the night with us. Wednesday morning I’ll go to Paramount with you and make sure that you get the right assignment. There are some jerks there that I don’t want you to work for. Be sure to bring clothes for four days. You can stay with us as long as you like but you will probably want to rent a place of your own soon.”

*-I couldn’t believe it. I was going to work at a movie studio and I had a great title, Production Assistant. I wondered what it paid-*

---

When Mr. Lee drove up to the Paramount front gate the guard just waved us through. He parked in a spot marked 'Reserved' and we walked towards the business office. A man in a dark suit called to us and Mr. Lee shook his hand.

"Laska, this is Max Goldbloom and 'no', Max, she's not my niece"

That brought a laugh because many men seen with a younger woman will always introduce them as their niece.

"Pleased to meet you Mr. Goldbloom" I said with my best smile.

"Are you some hot new Starlet that Larry wants us to pay a fortune for?"

"No sir, I want to be a gofer"

He laughed at that and after a few more jokes he went on his way.

"Who was that Mr. Lee?"

"Max runs the place dear. He's the president of Paramount"

"I wonder if he needs a gofer."

"He's one of the jerks that I want to keep you away from"

---

We found the guy that Mr. Lee was looking for. He was a nice looking young man named Les Silver. He was the assistant director who worked with Mark Hester. Mr. Hester was the number one money maker for Paramount and Les was his number one assistant.

They all shook hands and Mr. Lee kissed me on my cheek and then I was being shown my new office and I was filling out papers and having my picture taken for my security badge. The girl in the payroll had me sign some forms and when I asked, she told me what my pay would be.

"You're on probation for three months and if you don't screw up, you'll get a ten dollar a week raise."

I was amazed. My pay was \$50 a week to start. That seemed like a fortune to me.

"Do you know where I can find an apartment?"

"The Del Ray Arms, right down the street. \$25 a week and they pay utilities"

"That's half my pay, how can I afford that?"

She laughed.

"Honey, you either need a roommate or a sugar daddy"

---

My first real day at work was an education in frustration. My first mistake was wearing a dress and high heeled shoes. The job started at eight but when I walked into the production unit's office at 7:45, Les was shouting at me. There was a meeting in his office and he wanted coffee for eight people. By nine I had a little notebook so I could write down what and where I needed.

I needed to remember names and where offices were and what a 'revised day-shoot schedule' was and where the script changes were or where they should be. It was after seven in the evening when I was sitting in my tiny office rewriting my notes so they would make sense later when Les stuck his head in.

"Laska?"

"Laz"

"Laz, you did good today. Go home we have a busy day tomorrow."

*-How could it be any busier than today?-*

---

Things got easier as I learned my way around. I stopped wearing dresses and high heels. I was in slacks and flats like all of the other gofers. I learned to use one of the hundreds of bicycles that were everywhere on the lot. I learned not to ask Les what he meant by some obscure request, just write it down and run, run, run.

I rented a tiny apartment at the Del Ray Arms and if I ever had a day off I was going to see Maryann about moving in.

In the middle of my second week, Les gave me a quick briefing for the rest of the week, "Laz, we start rehearsal on Stage 7A tomorrow. Mark won't be there and we will just run some lines with a couple of the actors. You have to be sharp and quick. Any delay when you have the crew working costs money. Lots of money so do your best."

*-My god, no pressure at all. Do your best and don't waist a zillion dollars of Paramount's money. I wonder if I'll get even get close to completing my three month probation-*

The next day we ran lines with a couple of actors. They were nobody special, just Clark Gable and Mae West. I tried not to look at them because I didn't want to look completely stage struck. I did learn some interesting things. Clark Gable isn't as tall as he looks on the screen and Mae West doesn't act, she just plays herself all of the time.

*-I love this job-*

---

I did move out of the Lee's home and into the apartment. Maryann moved in with me and I got her a job at the studio as a script-girl. It was her job to follow the actor's lines and to correct them if they were wrong. If the director wanted to know the next line, the script-girl had better know what it is. Sometimes the actors or the director made changes to the script and Maryanne had to pencil it in and make sure that the writers revised the master copy.

The summer seemed to race away and before I realized it, the holiday season had arrived. In early December, I received an engraved invitation in the mail to attend the Lee Family

Christmas and Honokaa party. The festivities would take place in the ball room of the Bel Air hotel and dress would be formal.

Having no idea what 'formal' meant I called Mrs. Lee and asked. She was always so sweet to me and she offered to take me shopping. I bought a very pretty dress and some new shoes and her I took her to lunch at the department store. While I thought about the three weeks pay that I had just spent, she gave me some tips on Hollywood party behavior.

"Be very careful dear with how much you drink. The gentleman will try to get young girls drunk but you are in control. I find that a glass of white wine can be filled with water and you can sip it for hours. Lots of men will flirt with you and some will make indecent offers. Just smile and ignore them. If there is dancing, don't tolerate a hand that is too low on your back. Some men try to feel of your bottom just to see if they can. Never go to a man's car for any reason. When possible, find a trustworthy escort for these occasions. I might suggest that my son, Robert should act as your escort for this party seeing that it's your first exposure to this crowd. Would you like that dear?"

*-Will Larry be there?-*

"I've only met Robert a couple of times and he is a little older, perhaps Larry would be more suitable"

"Larry chooses not to attend these affairs but I'm sure that you will enjoy Robert's company"

---

## **Robert E. Lee**

### **Laz - December 11, 1937**

At exactly nine o'clock I handed my Packard key to a parking attendant and walked into the lobby of the Bel Air hotel. Mrs. Lee had told me to have Robert paged when I arrived but he was waiting for me. I wasn't sure how to greet him even though I had met him on several occasions. I wasn't sure if I should shake hands, hug him or what. He solved the problem by taking my hand and kissing me lightly on the cheek.

He was a handsome man of twenty eight and he was dressed in a tuxedo that I was sure hadn't come from J.C.Penney. I knew that he had attended both USC and the USC law school and he had been an attorney for a couple of years. Like his father, his business was with the movie makers in Hollywood. I knew that Larry didn't like him but that might have just been a big brother thing.

I took his arm and we went to the Christmas and Honokaa ball. I tried to follow Mrs. Lee's advice but I did drink just a little much. Robert was a great dancer and he made me look like I knew all of the popular steps. I was introduced to far too many people to remember although I did recognize several genuine Hollywood stars.

At the end of the evening, he decided that I had too much wine to drive home so he put me in a Taxi that he paid for in advance. It wasn't the romantic move that he could have made but it did show some concern for my safety.

A few days later I was surprised to see him on the set at Paramount. He stuck his head into my cubbyhole and asked if I was free for lunch. I made a quick check with Les before we went to the cafeteria for a quick bite.

"What brings you to Paramount?" I asked.

"Oh I'm working on some contract negotiations for a client. Sorry, I can't say who"

"Is it Lassie? What are you asking for, bigger dog biscuit?"

He made a feeble attempt to laugh at my distorted sense of humor.

"No dear, I really can't say but if I could tell you I think that you would be suitably impressed"

*-Oh come on, you can't be a name dropper if you don't drop the name-*

"Eat fast Robert, Les will be hollering for me"

"Laska, I have a social function Friday night, I wonder if I could impose on you to accompany me?"

*-What is that? Is he asking me for a date or does he just need a sweet, young , thing on his arm?-*

"What kind of a social function Robert?"

"Oh, a cocktail party at the club, more of this holiday nonsense. I thought that we would see-and-be-seen for an hour or so and then we could go out for some dinner".

"What's the dress code?"

"Cocktail dressy, we need to look our best"

"What time will you pick me up?"

"Nine and I'll need your address"

*-Does he remember that I'm only eighteen?-*

"Here, let me write it down for you"

---

"Hello Mrs. Lee it's Laz, what's Cocktail dressy?"

---

December 17<sup>th</sup>, 1937

INTERNATIONAL  
**Herald Tribune**

**Massacre in Nanking**  
**Japs Kill Thousands in Chinese City**

Two of the local residents were greatly upset to read the morning headlines. Eddy Fugimora was already feeling like an outsider even among his friends and now he knew that anti Japanese sentiment would drive him farther from mainstream California.

Miko Sata had equal misgivings. She felt no connection at all to Japan and she was as outraged as her California neighbors at this abomination but, unfortunately, she knew that she would be lumped in with the rest of the local Japanese as a target for the public's ire.

## **Happy New Year 1938**

**Laz**

For the rich and famous of Hollywood and the rest of us who were hanging onto their coattails, the New Year was an occasion to be celebrated. For the rest of America it was just another cold day as the country sank deeper into the devastating depression.

I bought yet another ball gown and Robert and I rubbed shoulders with the movie elite. As the band played Auld Lang Syne Robert kissed me very lightly on my lips. It was brazen behavior for him and while it didn't exactly set my heart a flutter, it did give me a pleasant feeling. Maybe he did think of me as more than a suitable companion.

I wasn't getting enough kisses in my busy life and I expected Robert to be just a little more affectionate. Maybe a New Years kiss was a sign of things to come.

## **Happy Birthday - February 15, 1938**

**Laz**

I don't know how Robert knew that it was my birthday but he came for lunch at the studio. He knew that I seldom dated on a weeknight because I went to work so early. We sat in the cafeteria and chatted and when it was time for him to leave he handed be a small package and told me to open it that night at bedtime. Then he asked me to call him no matter how late it was.

I supposed that I knew that it was a birthday present and I was a little intrigued by the package and the request for a call. Robert didn't like public displays of affection but I kissed him on the cheek anyway.

That night, with Maryanne eagerly watching, I opened the package and found a diamond bracelet. Granted it wasn't the biggest diamonds that I have ever seen and there wasn't an overabundance of them but it was a real, god-damned-big-deal, diamond bracelet.

"Call him, call him" Maryanne was saying.

"Get out of my bedroom, your not going to share this moment with me"

"Please, If I don't get some romance through you then I don't get any at all"

"Go!"

"Alright but I'm going to listen at the keyhole"

Maryanne was right about not getting any romance. Her fiancé had been home only once since he started college and I didn't see any sign from her that it went ok.

I called Robert and he was pleased. He downplayed the bracelet and then apologized for being out of town for the next ten days. He had a trial in San Francisco but he said that he'd hurry back as soon as he could. I interpreted that as Robert-speak meaning that he would miss me very much and he couldn't wait to see me again.

## Alpha Sigma frat house – April fools day – 1938

### Larry

There must have been fifty people on the front porch of the frat house and most of them were just a little drunk. The Easter break had started after the last class had ended that afternoon and it looked like the party would go for hours. I wanted to be on my way the next morning and I didn't want to drive with a hangover. Still it was hard to ignore the pretty young things around me.

Life had certainly changed since high school even if it had been less than a year since graduation. I heard the talk of party girls and 'modern' women when I came to USC but until I pledged to Alpha Sigma last December I hadn't experienced it. Hell, I hadn't even imagined it.

I was really getting into this recipe collection thing that I started in high school and now I was going on a road trip to see if I could expand my knowledge. My plan was to leave the next day for San Diego and Mexico and see what I could find. Tentatively I wanted to visit the Hotel Del Coronado in San Diego, the Caesar Hotel in Tijuana, the Rosarito Beach Hotel, the Alpha Hotel in Ensenada and maybe the U.S. Grant Hotel back in San Diego. My goal was to find unique dishes that a new restaurant might serve.

My frat brother, Chuck, was laughing at me for wasting Easter break party time driving through Mexico.

"Who's going with you?"

"No one, it's just me"

"Bullshit, your not going to Mexico for a week alone"

"Yes I am"

"I'll go" said a girl standing near Chuck.

"What?" was my reaction.

"I'll go. I've never been to Mexico."

"You know that it's a working trip. I'll be talking to hotel cooks and stuff"

"That ok, when do we leave?"

I looked at my frat brother and he just shrugged. I looked at the girl and she smiled. I didn't even know her name and she was volunteering to travel to Mexico for several days.

*-Maybe this is one of those 'modern' women that I've been hearing about-*

"What your name ... Miss?"

"I'm Molly and your Larry. Are we going or what?"

---

As we drove down the two lane highway that ran along the cliff tops overlooking the ocean I wished that I had borrowed a better car. My dad had several cars, anyone one of which would have been more impressive than my old, black, 1933 Chevrolet. Still Molly

didn't seem to mind. She chatted and sang little songs and seemed to be having a good time. It was late afternoon when we arrived in San Diego and took the car ferry across the bay to Coronado Island. The Hotel Del Coronado was a huge Victorian hotel that was famous for the distinguished guests that often stayed there. I had a reservation for one room but there was no trouble getting a second room for Molly.

At eight o'clock we dined in the pretentious Crown Room where the service was impeccable and the food quite tasty but for my purposes it wasn't interesting. It was mostly French Cordon Bleu with a little upper class British influence. I sat there over coffee while Molly went to the restroom. It was nine-thirty and the evening seemed over when she came back with a big smile.

"I talked to the attendant in the restroom and she said that there is a hot place in San Diego. It has music and dancing and lots of good things. Oh she said that we should take a cab because you may be too drunk to drive when we come back. The name is Cheuys and every taxi driver knows where it is.

---

The place was a dive filled with sailors and tourists and lots of Mexicans. The music was loud and the drinks were strong. After a few shots of Tequila I got into the right mood and we danced until they closed the place at two in the morning.

Things were a little fuzzy at breakfast the next morning if you call eleven-thirty still morning. Molly seemed unaffected by our carousing and she had a big breakfast. While sipping my fourth cup of coffee I found two pages of notes in my little tablet. I had three recipes for snacks that I labeled 'bar-food'.

---

We were both put off by our arrival in Tijuana. The Caesar Hotel was a couple of miles south of the US border crossing but it looked like another world. The road to the hotel was lined with cardboard shacks, all of which seemed to be selling something to the tourists. Gambling was a major industry ranking second to prostitution. There were scantily clad girls hawking their wares on the street to anyone who showed an interest.

In the calm of the hotel dining room we sampled the famous Caesar Salad that had brought us here but it was no different than any good restaurant's in Los Angeles. I canceled my room for the night and we made our way twenty miles south to the Rosarito Beach Resort Hotel.

Arriving was like a breath of fresh air. We were hot and dusty from the dirt road and the patio of the old hotel was cool and inviting. It was old Spanish architecture and it really gave a feeling of luxury. We had comfortable, adjoining room that each had its own toilet and bath. This was a luxury that very few American hotels provided.

The manager suggested a siesta or perhaps a swim in the beautiful tiled pool. Dinner would be at nine-thirty and there would be music and dancing later. The weather seemed

a little cool for a swim so we both opted for a nap. We met at eight-thirty in the bar for drinks and then had a sumptuous meal. After dinner while Molly freshened up, I talked to the cooks and got some good things for my notebook. When the music started it was soft and romantic and the evening was beautiful. We danced and drank a cocktail called a Tequila frappe. It was made with lime juice and some other liquor and they tasted very good. Too good.

---

The harsh light of dawn brought a sense of reality to me. My head hurt and my mouth was dry and tasted awful. I opened my eyes and realized that I wasn't alone in bed. Molly was snoozing next to me with the covers pulled up to her chin. I soon realized that I was still fully dressed including my shoe.

I eased myself out of bed and walked through the open door into the adjoining room. Again I was disoriented. It was Molly's room. She had spent the night in my room and since I was fully dressed I assumed that she was also but when I discreetly looked back at her I could see her dress and several pieces of underwear lying on the floor. I really wanted to brush my teeth but my toothbrush was in the other room where she was sleeping.

*-What the hell, if she's a modern woman then I can be a modern man-*

I walked into her bathroom and used her toothbrush then I quietly left and went to the breakfast room.

---

I was on my fourth cup of coffee and my second glass of orange juice when she walked in looking happy and fresh.

"Good morning Larry, I see that you dressed for the occasion" She said with a smile.

"Morning Molly, I'll just run to the room for a minute. I'll be back soon"

---

Halfway between Rosarito Beach and Ensenada we found a cantina overlooking a tiny bay. There were several American cars parked in front so we stopped looking for some lunch. A Mexican with a large mustache greeted us and showed us to a pleasant outdoor patio with a nice breeze and a view of the beach. He told us that lunch was fresh shrimp and cold beer. When I asked how the shrimp was prepared he gave me a funny look and said, "The usual way".

I looked at the other tables and noticed that everyone was sipping beer from brown bottles but no one was eating.

Our beer came and it was very cold and tasted very good. I had never thought of Mexico as a place for good beer but I was learning. Molly touched my arm and said,

"Larry, look at that"

I turned to see the man with the mustache carrying a large, wire basket that was filled with steaming hot, bright red shrimp. These weren't the tender little morsels that were

common in Southern California, they were big guys with their heads still on with foot long whiskers. The man dumped a pile into the center of each tile covered table while a little girl followed with bowls of red or green hot sauce. Molly and I just looked at each other not knowing exactly what to do.

We got our directions from the other diners who were busily breaking off the heads and peeling off the shells. All of this was discarded onto the floor and the rest was dipped into the hot sauce and devoured with gusto. The little girl was putting a stack of fresh, hot, tortillas onto each table which added to the feast.

Soon, Molly and I were expertly peeling and eating the succulent crustaceans and the cold beer just added to the enjoyment.

---

“What a marketing idea, do you realize how much labor goes into the preparation of scrimp? All of that peeling and cleaning is where most of the profit goes.”

She just kept looking at the scenery as we entered the city of Ensenada. The Alpha Hotel was on a bluff above the bay and was easily the most impressive place around. I parked in the small lot and Molly hopped out of the car.

“I’ll check us in while you get the cases dear, but first, I need a potty stop”

*-a potty stop ... that’s cute-*

When I got to the lobby she met me holding just one key,  
“I swapped our two rooms for one suite, let’s go take a look”

*-One room? Suite? Are there two beds?-*

The suite had a sitting room, bathroom, and a large bedroom. There was a balcony with a nice view but it was also very private. While we had a view of the bay, no one could see us. There was only one bed.

I put the cases in the bedroom and found her sitting on a lounge on the balcony. I looked at her with lots of questions but she just smiled,

“Relax Larry and don’t be so serious. This is just for fun”

*-Fun? What kind of fun?-*

She strolled into the bedroom and called to me,  
“Larry honey, the manager said that dinner was at ten tonight and it’s been a long drive, why don’t we have a siesta now? Will you help me?”

She was waiting for me to unzip the back of her sundress. I had been noticing all day that she had no bra and she was showing a lot of cleavage. I unzipped the dress and then turned my back.

“Turn around Larry. I have something to show you”

*-Oh God, I hope, I hope, I hope ...-*

---

She was an excellent teacher but she graded on the curve. I got a C- the first time but by the time that we dressed for dinner I was up to a B+. I couldn't believe that it was happening to me. It was something that the guys at school bragged about but I had always thought that most of the talk were lies. I wanted to stand on our balcony and yell to the world that I wasn't the last virgin at USC anymore and Molly had given me a B+. I wanted to brag to someone but I had always thought that a gentleman never tells. Of course that was when I didn't have anything to tell.

*-Maybe I could tell Laz ...Laz? Why would I ever tell Laz that I had sex with another girl .. woman? Why am I thinking about Laz now? Laz is gone! Gone! ... Stop thinking about her-*

Dinner was ok, nothing special but the dancing in the cabaret was fun and I was very careful not to drink too much. She was chatty and funny but all that I could think about was improving my grade. We went to our suite about two and the last rational thing that she said to me was,

“Remember Larry, it's just for fun”

---

After a late breakfast we set off to see the town. She was dressed in a pretty sundress with sandals and a big straw hat. We had made slow love that morning but she didn't want to hold my hand as we walked. We kissed in bed but she didn't kiss on street corners. She must have noticed my confusion because we found a bench in a park and she explained it to me.

“Larry, honey, don't look so sad. I know that this is your first time and I don't want you to be confused. We are here for you to write in your notebook and for us to have fun. We are not here to fall in love, or to become engaged, and to start looking for a house near a good school. I like you or I wouldn't be here. You like me or you wouldn't be here. I like sex. I'm sure now that you like sex although I wasn't sure back at Rosarito beach when I couldn't get you to take your clothes off when we went to bed together. We have one more night in our suite. Do I need to ask the manager for a separate room?”

*-My god, this is almost exactly what Laz told me the day before we started high school. Damn, why am I still thinking about Laz? -*

“I’m sorry Molly if I gave you the wrong impression. I’m just learning as I go. You can stay with me tonight but that up to you. We are always free to make our own decisions”  
*-I hope that she believes that I mean that-*

She smiled at me for a few seconds then she patted my knee,

“Good, honey, now let’s find a nice place for lunch”

---

We had another wonderful night and I didn’t write a thing in my notebook. The next day we made the long drive to San Diego where I had planned to get rooms at the U.S. Grant Hotel but I would never convince them to let us stay together. Instead, I drove through the beach communities and found a funny little place on the pier. There were several little bungalows out on the pier and I rented one without ever saying how many guests there would be.

Dinner was hot dogs and cokes at a roller coaster near the beach. We danced in a crowd of sailors in several bars along the boardwalk and we made love to the sound of the surf that was just thirty feet below our bed.

---

Thursday afternoon we drove back to USC and I asked what she was doing for Easter,  
“Oh I have to go to Santa Barbara to meet my fiancé’s parents.”  
I tried to hid my surprise,

“It’s a long drive”

“Oh, we’re taking the train. Up on the Daylight and back on the Owl”  
She was referring to the day and night train that they would take.

“Is he a student here?”

“No” was her only answer.

---

Molly had left her car in a student parking lot and she asked me to drop her on the sidewalk. When she had her suitcase she smiled,

“It’s been fun Larry. Don’t take yourself so seriously. Bye honey”

“Molly, what’s your last name?”

She looked back with a devilish grin.

“Larry, you have just spent five days feeding fish to an Irish girl, here is a hint”

She walked away singing a little song,

“... Cockles and Mussels ... alive alive Oh”

I laughed, I knew her name was Molly Malone and I hummed it to my self all the way to the Alpha Sigma house.

*-In Dublin's fair city-  
-Where girls are so pretty-,  
-I first set my eyes on sweet Molly Malone-*

It was a busy time for frat parties and a couple of weeks later I was chatting with Chuck.

“Hey, have you seen Molly Malone at any of these social things?”

“Who?”

“Molly Malone, the girl that went to Mexico with me”

“Did she tell you that was her name?”

“Well, she told me it was Molly and hinted that it was Malone. She’s a student here”

Chuck looked a little amused.

“Larry, she’s not a student here and I’m pretty sure that her name isn’t Molly. She comes to frat parties sometimes but always at some school break. The last time that I saw her was at the start of Christmas break last year. Some of us think that she’s probably a school teacher that’s looking for a walk on the wild side. I hope that you showed her a good time in Mexico”

“She seemed to enjoy it” I said and walked away.

“Oh Larry, I remember now that she seems to go for the young guys, like you”

*-Well, I’ve always heard that you never forget your ‘First’, I guess that I’ll go through my whole life remembering good-old-what’s-her-name-*

*-Laz would think that it was funny ... Damn ... why can’t I get her out of my mind-*

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## **Paramount Studios – April fool’s Day – 1938**

### **Laz**

There was an air of excitement when I got to Stage 7A that morning. If all went well, the final few scenes of the movie would be finished and there would be a big party afterwards. I had heard a lot about ‘wrap parties’ and it sounded like they were something special. Maryanne was working on our set so if there was a party we would be there together.

Things didn’t go well that morning. There was a conflict between the director, Mark Hester and a Mrs. Green who was the Hay’s code censor. It was her job to make sure that the movie adhered to the strict morality code that had started in 1934. If she didn’t like the dialog in the script, she marked out the offending words with a blue pencil and the writers would have to change it. It was funny because until the script was changed, the actors would use the word, ‘Bleep’ in place of the bad word. It was hard not to laugh when an actor delivered his line by saying “I don’t give a bleep what the bleep bleep does”

Well that morning she and Mark just couldn’t see eye to eye. She caused eleven retakes of one scene because the actress was showing too much breast. She would pull the girls blouse up and by the time the scene was filmed the blouse was back down. Finally she stood in front for the cameras and shouted so that everyone in the studio could hear.

“Look! You can’t film her god-damned nipples. She can show them to me and to the director and to the god-damned church choir but she can’t show them to the camera. Make up your mind, are we going to be here all god-damned day or is she going to cover up?”

I guess that Mark Hester had enough because he called for a wardrobe lady and they used some tape to keep the starlet modest. The funny part of the whole affair was that Mrs. Green had been a silent film star who had her nipples on display in every film that she ever made.

When we broke for lunch I went to the cafeteria with Maryanne and she was still laughing at the nipple incident.

“Damn Laz, I don’t see what that actress is so proud of. She doesn’t have anything special”

“I guess that she thinks that there special or at least she thinks that if she show’s them on the screen other people with think that she’s special. Hell, Maryanne, you look better than she does”

“Thank you, I think. Have you been looking at me Laz?”

“You’re pretty hard to miss in that eight by ten flat of ours”

She laughed and thrust out her meager bosom. She seemed in a really good mood and I suspected that she had decided it end it with her fiancé. He had strung her along for too long and I thought that she as eager to move on.

It was nearly five o'clock and there was just one scene left to film. Les Silver used his megaphone to announce,

"The set is closed. All non-unit members are asked to leave the studio. If you don't have a badge that says Unit-11 on it, leave now"

I wondered what that was about. The set is usually only close when a hot love scene is filmed and the actor and actress want some privacy. The more mature players have no trouble turning their passion on and off but often younger men and women, boys and girls get into the roll with too much emotion. Girls get flustered, guys get ... well it would be embarrassing if they didn't have time to cool off.

Mrs. Green had a new guy working with her that day and he was very eager to learn his business. The stage hands set up a scene on a couch in a dimly lit room. The word on the set was that this would be very sexy.

Mrs. Green called to Mark Hester that she was going to let her apprentice take this one. The director answered that he didn't want to be held back by some new kid. The actors came onto the stage wearing robes and the new guy, Ted Phillips took his place just behind the camera.

The lights in the studio were dimmed so that just the circle of light around the couch was on. The actor and actress removed their robes and a gasp was heard in the dark. He was wearing just bathing trunks and she was wearing very short shorts and a tube top that barely covered her generous breasts. The knitted tube tops were often used to give the illusion that an actress was naked.

With the help of an assistant she lay on the couch and where she spread her legs. The actor carefully crawled between her knees and then settled between her raised thighs. The censor was looking back at Mrs. Green wondering what to do. He wasn't supposed to say anything until the filming actually started. The assistant covered the pair with a blanket so that just their heads were showing. The camera rolled and the actor started making exaggerated thrusts with his hips. The censor started to wave his hands when suddenly the blanket was ripped away and the actress, nude to the waist, shouted in a loud voice, "Kiss me quick I'm BLEEPing"

Suddenly several flash bulbs popped and the house lights came up. The entire unit broke into applause and the laughing actress pulled up her tube top. Mrs. Green was laughing and slapping Ted Phillips on the back. Mark Hester walked into the center of the stage and motioned Phillips to join him.

"Ted, I want to welcome you to the movie industry and I hope that you enjoyed your introduction to the job. Here let me introduce you to Miss Candy Kiss, you can see her any night at the Pussy Cat Club in Santa Monica. Her partner in this charade is Jack Mullins who owns the Pussy Cat. We have some great pictures of you that we will all see soon. So here is your reward for your part in all of this."

Mark handed a plaque to Phillips. On the memento was mounted a large blue pencil.

Mark turned to Les, who used his megaphone to announce,  
“Cut! Print! That’s a wrap”

The doors of the studio opened and people poured in. There were caterers with food and drinks, execs from the front office, actors, agents and anyone else who could get on the set.

### **The wrap party – April 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1938**

I had never seen such a party. The last few weeks had been very busy and very stressful and now it was over. Not only that but most of us had a week off. Monday morning, the set builders would tear out the old set and start building a new one. Unit-11 wouldn’t be needed for a full, glorious week. Our next day of work would be April 8<sup>th</sup>.

There was music and drinking and a lot of fooling around. Mrs. Sullivan, the wardrobe mistress appointed herself to watch over the younger girls. She would scold them if they drank too much and she was downright pushy if some guy took too many liberties with them.

I saw Maryanne dancing with several guys and she was laughing. I dance with a couple and received some very indecent propositions. A cameras man kissed me and then moved on to someone else. In the next hour I was kissed, felt up, pinched and I received a proposal of marriage. Mark Hester, who I didn’t think knew my name shook my hand and told me what a good job I had done.

I finally drank three cups of coffee and dragged Maryann to my car and she was singing and laughing all the way home.

“Maryann, what’s got into you? I thought that you were an engaged woman. What would Bruce say if you saw you like this?”

“Oh screw Bruce or should I say that I didn’t screw Bruce so he went off to Berkley to find a party girl. That’s why I told him to buzz off. Ha, buzz off unscrewed Bruce”

She was laughing and slurring her words.

“You look like you had a good time”

“I did, I got kissed and ... you know ... felt ... two guys French kissed me. I only ever did that with ... you know ... the jerk at Berkley”

I made some coffee and managed to get her into her pajamas. After a while she faded away into sleep with a smile on her face. I wondered what Robert would have said if he knew what I did that night.

The next morning Maryanne and I both had headaches but aspirin and a good breakfast took care of that. I told her that I was going to the PV house to see my dad and she decided to go to her parent's home for a couple of days.

"You don't sound very enthusiastic about that honey"

"Well, I'll just have to go through mom's third degree about Bruce. You know, 'what did you do to lose such a great guy', 'will he take you back?', 'You'll never find another as good'. What a bunch of crap"

"Do you want a lift?"

"No, I'll take my car so I can get away when I want to"

"Well, in the cold light of dawn did you have a good time last night?"

"God yes. I felt so wicked. It was like the rules didn't apply for that one night. Three guys wanted to sleep with me. No one except Bruce ever wanted to have sex with me"

"Well, I suspect that a lot of guys have wanted to have sex with you but never let you know"

---

I was so glad to be seeing daddy again. I had been so busy and he was traveling so much that it had six weeks since we were together. I hadn't forgotten about the rest of the story about him and my mother and I had several days to learn all that I could. I also thought that if Larry was home I'd visit him and find out what life at USC was like.

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## **Heart to heart with Dad Laz**

Dad really looked good. He was relaxed and happy. Sunday night he surprised me by taking me to dinner in San Pedro and I reminded him of the time that he brought me to that city to buy underwear.

“How did you know where to go for fancy French underwear dad?”

“I saw the sign in the store window”

“Sure you did and I just flew here on my magic carpet”

He laughed at that.

“I have had the occasional need for things like that.”

“Do you realize that I know more about Larry’s dad than I know you? Where do you go on these trips? Do you ever date? Do you have a girlfriend?”

*-What do you do for sex, dad?-*

“Funny that you should mention that, we need to have a talk about lots of things. Things in the past and in the future but for tonight just let me enjoy an evening with my number one love”

---

Monday morning dad was in his office and there were several things piled on his desk. Mrs. Garcia wasn’t there so I made breakfast while he finished whatever he was doing. Over bacon and eggs he seemed to have everything ready.

“Ok honey you remember that I told you about your mother. Try to picture what it was like for me with a tiny baby that needed constant attention. I had arrangements to make and eventually I had to see the probate lawyer. The lady next door said she would watch you for a day or two but I needed a nanny right away.

I didn’t know where to start so I called the attorney and he gave me the name of a woman that he could recommend. I took a taxi to her address and I was surprised when we arrived at a shelter for battered women. Still confused I enquired about Mary Alice O’Malley.

Presently, a young woman presented herself and I told her that I was looking for a temporary nanny. I told her that my attorney had recommended her and she was confused as confused as I was. She said she wasn’t looking for a job but she did know the attorney. He had helped her find the shelter after she was put onto the street by her father. Now I was as confused as she was. She was a little teary when she told me her story.

“I had no place to go you see. My father wouldn’t let me in the house and I had no money. It wasn’t my fault, I did nothing wrong but he wouldn’t listen.”

“Start at the beginning” I said.

## Mary Alice O'Malley

When I was growing up there was a boy at the orphanage that was run by my church. In 1917 he joined the army and was sent to Ohio for army training. While he was gone we wrote to each other and near the end of his training we wrote every day. My mom had passed away years ago and my dad had started drinking. He was ok when he was sober but he was a very mean man when he was drunk. One day he found one of Tommy's letters and he beat me for carrying on behind his back. I tried to reason with him but he was just mean.

Tommy came back from Ohio and said that he was going to France in a couple of weeks. I couldn't stand that idea that he might go and get killed in the war. I wanted to be a good catholic girl but I wanted him too.

A week before he was due to ship out we went across the state line and got married. We were so stupid but we did it anyway. He borrowed a car and we drove in the night to some little town and knocked on the door of the justice of the piece. A sleepy old man married us for five dollars and gave Tommy a hand written piece of paper saying that he were Mr. and Mrs. Thomas O'Malley. We found a rooming house and we spent the next twelve hours ... consummating our marriage.

The next day Tommy told the army that we were married and they said for him to take the papers to his headquarters and have his records changed. Well they wouldn't take the hand written paper so we planned to go back and get the real ones. The trouble was that we couldn't find the town. All we had was the name of the man who had married us.

With his buddies car we drove through the back roads looking but there were so many turns and all of the villages looked alike. I said that we needed a map so we could check off the places that we had already been but before that could happen Tommy's unit was ordered to New York to get the boat. I didn't hear anything for a month and I thought that he was on the high seas bound for France. Then I got a letter from the clerk in his unit. He had never received the marriage papers and after what had happened it was really important. What had happened? The clerk said that there had been some mix-up because Tomas wasn't on the passenger list of the ship.

I went to Army headquarters here in Boston and I learned the truth. The bus that he was riding on in New York had been in a bad accident and he was killed."

She stopped here for a while and wiped a tear from her eye.

"It took a while and a lot of prayers for me to get over the shock but at last I could face the future. I was so young and stupid that I didn't even realize that I was pregnant. I knew that something was going on so I asked a nun at church That's when the weight of all of it fell on me."

Now she wept into her handkerchief for a while.

“My dad went crazy and locked me out of the house. I tried to convince him that I was married but he beat me and tore up the hand written paper. I went to the priest but he said that because I hadn’t been married in the church there was nothing he could do. I had to sleep on the street and beg for food.

A man in a nice suit offered me money to have sex with him and I ran away. The trouble was that I knew that when I was hungry enough I would take his money. Another man in a suit approached and I wasn’t sure what I would do but he was an angel. He was your attorney and he brought me here. My baby girl Mary Elizabeth was born just two weeks ago and I don’t know what I’m going to do.”

Dad stopped there and thought for a minute and then continued.

“I knew that I had to help this girl and she needed to help me. We gathered her belongings and her baby girl and drove to my flat. I explained that she would stay there with the two babies and I would find a room somewhere. I thought that I would be in Boston for only a few more weeks but we would face that problem later.

I found a room at the Hibernian Club and we were ok for a while. Mary Alice said that she had an aunt in California but she didn’t know how to find her. I suggested that she come to California with me and maybe we could locate her. I pointed out that she would be no worse off in sunny California than she was in cold and snowy Boston.

I settled your mother’s estate and found that she owned some property and had some other assets. The attorney had me named as her executor and he gave me several hundred dollars to cover my expenses.

Mary Alice agreed to go to California and I was glad for the help with you. We had developed a strange relationship. We didn’t always get along and she often surprised me. I was brought up in such a prim and proper home that everything embarrassed me. She was Irish Catholic and she had no modesty at all. She thought nothing of breast feeding both you and her daughter while I watched. It was just something that you would never see in upper class Scotland but in her neighborhood it was seen all of the time.

Not long before we left for the west coast, she complained that she needed new underwear and she held up a pair of knickers with a hole in them, to demonstrate her dilemma. When you told me that you wanted some nice underwear I thought of that incident.

Well, we all rode the train to Los Angeles and found this house. I thought that it was paradise but she said that we couldn’t live in the house together, it would be immoral. We negotiated for a while and she finally agreed that if I hired a live-in housekeeper it would be alright.

I went to the local church and asked if they knew someone that I might hire. I was told of a young Mexican girl who was a recent widow and who spoke some English. That's how Mrs. Garcia came to live with us.

Anyway, a couple of months past and we settle into a routine. It was as if Mary Alice was the mother of the family, I was the father, and Mrs. Garcia did all of the work. Mary Alice could be quite bossy and she often nagged me to do this or that. To tell the truth I was getting a little fed up with her when she seemed to soften. She became milder and more attentive. She laughed at my witty conversation and she started kissing me goodnight. Just a peck on the cheek but she was kissing me.

In the evening after you girls were asleep and Mrs. Garcia had gone to her room Mary Alice would bring her book and sit on the couch and snuggle up against me in a very familiar way.

I found that we had some things in common. We were only a month apart in age and you girls were only a week apart. She was interested in classical literature and so was I. She was a very good dancer and so was I. Some nights we would dance to the phonograph.

One afternoon she suggested that Mrs. Garcia watch you girls that night and we could go out to dinner. We went to a nice restaurant in Redondo and later we went to a night spot for drinks and dancing. When we came home she kissed me goodnight but not on the cheek. I must admit that even though I was still in deep mourning for your mother, she was stirring some basic feelings in me.

I was faced with the prospects of taking the easy way out and marrying her or finding a way to live my own life. I believe that she would have married me even if love had little to do with it but then everything changed.

She had written many letters searching for her aunt that she only knew by name and that she lived in California. One day the post brought a letter from Mrs. Margaret Sullivan who lived in Santa Barbara. After reading the letter, there was no doubt that this lady was her aunt.

More letters were exchanged and finally a visit was purposed. Mrs. Sullivan wanted Mary Alice and her baby to come for a short visit and we both guessed that this would be the final interview to see if they got along. She begged me to accompany them on the train and I finally relented. She would visit her aunt and I would stay in a seaside hotel until some verdict was reached.

The night before the trip she was very clingy, holding onto me and touching me. She kissed me several times and hugged me often. At bedtime she seemed to be waiting for something and I suspected that she would have come to my bed if I had asked. My body said yes but my aching heart said no.

We rode the train to Santa Barbara while Mrs. Garcia watched you. It was the first time that I left you with her but it certainly wasn't the last. I waited for two days, in a very nice room overlooking the beach and enjoyed the ambiance. In the afternoon of the second day a man in a chuffer's uniform found me and ask that I accompany him to the home of Mrs. Sullivan.

The deal was done, the aunt and niece loved each other and Mary Alice was going to live with the older lady and manage her affairs. The baby would have a nanny and later a governess. Mary Alice wouldn't be returning with me to the ranch and I was to pack and ship her few remaining possessions. I was both relieved and disappointed.

I spent the night in a guest room and Mary Alice didn't come to call. The next evening at dinner I talked to Mrs. Sullivan for some time and she was impressed with my education and bearing. She enquired about my social status and I explained that I had inherited a membership in the Bel Air Country Club but I had done nothing about that yet.

She played some music on the phonograph and asked me to dance. She was impressed at my ability and I felt like I was having a job interview and it turned out that was what it was. Before I left, she gave me the address of a friend that might need an able bodied young man who could dance and who spoke well and had good manners. When I left for the train station, Mary Alice didn't kiss me good bye”

I was a little overwhelmed by my dad's story and I had lots of questions about the 'job' that he alluded to. I looked at dad for some hint of what happened next and he continued.

### **A new career or a twist on a very old one**

“I did write to Mrs. Sullivan's friend, a Mrs. Amherst, and she needed a traveling companion to take her to San Francisco. She said that at seventy-five, she preferred to travel with a nice young man over a woman. She said that a man could get things done while a woman waited for someone to help. I arranged all of the travel, booked the hotel, hired a car and accompanied her to a social function at the Golden Gate Country club. I was away from home for eight days and I made a month's wages. Mrs. Amherst gave me a letter of recommendation and referred me to several friends. My cliental grew steadily until I had about all of the business that I cared to handle.

Honey I want to assure that in the years that I have been doing this ... job ... I have never done a single thing that was improper or that I couldn't tell you about. I often felt like a babysitter for the geriatric set. I seldom worked for anyone who was less than twice my age. The only occasion that I can think of was a woman in her forties who wanted me to make her ex-husband jealous. I thanked her for her enquiry and I declined her offer.

As you might guess, my business often took me to Santa Barbara and on these occasions I would call on Mrs. Sullivan and her niece. As I told you, Mary Alice and I had much in common. You and her daughter were the same age and we delighted in telling cute kid

stories. I took to mailing her photos of you and we wrote often. As your romantic heart might tell you, of course, we fell in love.

While you knew nothing of my friendship with her, she and her daughter Mary Elizabeth who we call MaryLiz, knew all about you. I was her daughter's uncle Lavern and you were her cousin Laska. I took MaryLiz to a father-daughter dance when she was thirteen. I listened to her sad story when she thought that she was fat and ugly and no one would ever love her. I was introduced to the boy that she is going to marry and a week from Sunday I'm giving the bride away"

"Dad, why didn't you ever tell me about this?"

"What could I say sweetheart, 'I'm going to Santa Barbara to sleep in my lover's bed and help raise her daughter.' I know that I didn't handle that but you grew up well and happy and the worst that could happen was you would be mad at me for a while. If I had told you, what would you have done?"

I thought about this for a minute realizing that it would have been a difficult and awkward situation for the both of us.

"So what are you going to do now dad?"

"Mrs. Sullivan passed away eleven months ago and Mary Alice wanted to wait a year before we made any decisions. It's our plan now to be marred on the 4<sup>th</sup> of June in Saint Michael's church in Santa Barbara. I have to sign a paper promising that any children that we have will be raised catholic"

I tried to keep a straight face but I couldn't.

"Dad, is there any possibility that you will have more children?"

"Well ... not if ... I doubt ... No dear, one like you is enough"

"Thanks dad, I think"

*-Why don't you admit that the only way that you would have more kids is if the rubber breaks-*

"Will you sell this house and move to Santa Barbara?"

"I'll spend time in Santa Barbara and with your permission we will spend some time here"

"Why would you need my permission?"

"Because dear, when I had your mother's lawyer in Boston transfer the title to the house I had it put it into a trust for you. On your twenty-first birthday you will be the legal owner of the house and you'll come into a nice sum of money"

---

## **A new way of looking at things**

Thursday morning, before he left for the train station for his trip to Santa Barbara, dad gave me the key to the file cabinet and told me to look at everything. He said that the middle drawer had all of the letters from his clients and in the large folder in the back were all of the letters that Mary Alice had written to him over the years. He said that I would enjoy watching my cousin MaryLiz grow up in the pictures.

“I hope that you will attend my wedding but I’ll leave it up to you. I love you sweetheart” he said and then he was gone.

I spent all morning reading the letters. The business letters were just as he described them but the personal letters were captivating. I read them in order and I followed the change from casual acquaintances to completely evolved lovers. I couldn’t know what he wrote in his letters but I could guess.

I laughed at her little innuendos like “that was wonderful” and “that never happened before”.

I suppose I felt a little jealous of MaryLiz for being his ‘other daughter’ but she had been such a sweet child, an awkward teen and now a lovely young woman. It was obvious that she may have called him uncle Lavern but she thought of him as her dad. When I finished, I locked the cabinet and let it all soak in. I decided that the best thing that I could do was love my dad, embrace his new wife and to try and become friends with my new cousin.

---

## Maryanne oh Maryanne

I called Maryanne and asked her to come over that afternoon and then I put all of the turmoil out of my mind.

Before she arrived I phoned the Lee Ranch and asked for Larry but Mrs. Ortiz told me that he was away but he should be at the ranch sometime the next day. As I hung up I heard Maryanne calling from the open front door.

---

While I was trying to get some lunch together, Marianne was into dad's liquor cabinet.

"Laz, do you know how to make a Martini?"

"No but I've drunk them when I've been out with Robert. I think that they're made of gin and something Italian. Do you like them?"

"I don't know, I read that they're the latest thing for the Hollywood set and that's us isn't it ... We work in Hollywood"

"Well if they're the latest thing then I'm sure that dad has the stuff"

We read the labels and finally found something on a dry vermouth bottle. We used a kitchen measuring cup and mixed a batch and our first sip sent us to the ice box to cool things off. I remembered one of Martini that I drank had a twist of lemon in it and Robert's had a green olive. We didn't have any green olives so we tried a black one but that obviously didn't work. We finally settled on a twist of lime from the tree growing in the back yard.

Lunch was peanuts and several Martinis and of course it didn't take long for the cares of the day to vanish and we became a little loose in our talk. It was obvious that Maryanne was still very angry with Bruce.

"Laz, do you ever see that guy that took you to the prom? What was his name, Chet?"

"Chris, his name is Chris and I haven't seen him for a while"

"He was really cute, when he danced with me he held me just close enough that we touched but not too close. His lips were near my ear and he hummed along with the music. I thought you were really lucky"

"I was and he can be very nice"

"Isn't he always nice?"

"Well not when he wrestled with me on the ground and got my dress muddy"

"What! Did he attack you?"

"No, I attacked him but we were seven at the time and he didn't show a girl a bit of mercy"

We drank another round and I knew that I had enough but Maryanne was really getting into it. I couldn't tell if she was as drunk as she sounded or maybe she was just using the booze to let out her pent-up emotions. Whatever it was she certainly let them out.

“Do you know that Chris saved my virginity? You know that I’m a virgin don’t you? Are you still a virgin?”

I ignored her slurred question and she went on.

“The night of the prom, Bruce reasoned that we would be married in just a few months and we should make love for the first time in a hotel room. He even showed me a key to room 211 at the Surfside Motel in Manhattan Beach. I was going to do it when I met Chris. He seemed so nice that I decided that maybe I should look around a little before I committed to the only guy that I ever dated. Bruce was really pissed off and things were different between us after that. When he suddenly got the offer from the University of California, it gave him an out.”

She mixed another drink and sat close beside me. I knew that she needed a friend to tell her story to.

“I guess I panicked a little and I told him I would go with him but he said that he would need all of his time to study. That’s when I asked you if there was room for me in your glamorous life.

I thought that he would be home for thanksgiving but no, he was too busy. He only came home for three days at Christmas and we spent one of those days with his family. That’s when I found out.”

I waited but she just sipped her drink and I thought that I saw a little tear in her eye.

“Found out what honey?”

“His mom told me that they were all excited when he got the letter from Cal and that he was going to surprise me with the news at the prom. When that bastard was trying to get me into a motel bed he already knew that he was going to Berkley and that I wasn’t going with him!”

The little tear became a lot of big tears and the many glasses of gin led Maryanne to an hour on her knees over the toilet. At midnight I finally got her into one of my nightgowns and tucked her into the bed in the guest room. Sometime in the night she crawled into my bed where I found her when the light of day woke me.

I crept out to the kitchen and made coffee and I felt emotionally drained. First dad’s revelations had taken its toll on me and then a day and night with Maryanne who really needed my support. I loved her dearly but I wasn’t her mom. There was only so much I could do.

Larry would be home sometime that day and I had to tell him about Robert. I just couldn’t date his brother without letting him know. I had told Robert that I would be back

to the apartment Saturday afternoon and he said that he needed to talk to me. I wanted to crawl into a hole and hide.

---

## Good Friday – April 8<sup>th</sup>, 1938

### Larry

I was still a little dazed from my trip to Mexico with Molly. I couldn't believe that it had actually happened to me. Things like that were the source of college legends and they always happened to football players and big-men-on-campus.

I'd told Wanda that I'd take her to an early lunch and I had decided that I needed to tell her the hard facts that she needed to be seeing other guys. I hadn't seen much of her the entire school year but she kept talking about our future and what we were going to do when she graduated in June. I knew that I should have had that talk months before but I tried to ignore the problem.

It was after eleven that morning when I rang her door bell and I was surprised when she answered in her pajamas. She didn't look well at all. Her face was puffy and her hair was a mess.

"Sorry Wanda, did I get the time wrong?"

"I don't know, come in"

I didn't know what was happening. At first I thought that she was sick but then I thought that she was really angry.

"Wanda, what's wrong?"

"What's wrong? I'm god damned pregnant, that's what's wrong!"

"Pregnant? How could you be pregnant?"

"The usual way. It's not a god damned immaculate conception!"

"But we never ..."

"No, we didn't but someone did. Damn Larry, if you hadn't such a straight arrow this might of had a better outcome. I tried to get into your pants but no, you wanted to wait. It was my moms idea that I should push you a little. She wanted us to be engaged when you graduated. She said that a man needed a little incentive and that ... well, you know"

It was no surprise to me that she had been pushed by her mom. Wanda had hinted that if we were engaged then we could be a lot more ... loving. I would have liked that part but I wasn't willing to pay the price.

"So Wanda, how did this happen?"

"Oh it's a guy that I've known for years. You remember when I went to visit grandma in San Bernardino?"

"Sure, you went lots of times. You went for a week last Christmas"

"Well, the guy that lives next door to grandma has been a friend for years. He's the one that did this to me."

"So he ... seduced you at Christmas?"

"No Larry, he didn't seduce me, we just has sex."

"How long have you known him?"

"Since I was thirteen"

”But I met you when you were fourteen”

Yea, I know but we didn’t do-it until last thanksgiving. I just had my eighteenth birthday and I hadn’t seen you in three weeks and we just did-it”

“So you four months pregnant?”

“I’m not sure. We did it a lot at Christmas too”

---

I drove to the ranch in shock. I would have never guessed that my high school girlfriend wasn’t a virgin and now she was pregnant and she was going to marry a filling station attendant in San Bernardino.

When I drove by Laz’s house I saw her Packard in the driveway. Mrs. Ortiz greeted me with a hug and she told me that Laz had called. I was a little surprised and I dialed her number.

“Hello”

“Hi Laz, it’s Larry, happy Easter”

“It’s not Easter, it’s Good Friday” she said with a little laugh.

That was the little laugh that had haunted me ever since she pushed me away four years ago.

“Happy Good Friday and any other day that you like. What’s up?”

“Can I come see you now?”

“Sure, come for lunch”

“Ok, ten minutes”

---

Mrs. Ortiz served us a tuna salad and iced tea on the patio. The day was warm and the view of the ocean was as captivation as ever. We chatted about small things but Laz seemed distracted.

“Larry, who’s that guy working over there, he seems so angry and his look scares me a little?”

It took me a minute to recognize him.

“I think his name is Al, he only works here when the tuna cannery is shut down. Do you want me to ask his to work somewhere else now?”

“No, I guess that it’s ok, he’s not looking at me now”

We ate our salad and drank our tea and I knew by the way that she was fidgeting that she wanted to tell me something.

“Ok Laz, you might as well just tell me”

“I’m dating Robert”

“Robert who?”

“Your brother Robert”

“He’s a little old for you isn’t he” I said trying not to show my shock.

“No”

“Date who you like, why should I care”

*-God damn it Laz, I’d rather you dated Al the farm worker than my god damned brother-*

As she walked away I said something but she ignored me.

## **Good Friday lunch – 1938**

### **Laz**

I dreaded telling Larry about Robert. For as long as I could remember Robert had treated him like a kid and Larry had resented every minute of it. I was sure that Larry was still thinking about me but that wasn’t going to happen.

He called that morning and invited me to lunch on the Lee Ranch patio where Mrs. Ortiz was as pleased to see me as ever and she serves us a nice salad. Larry and I made small talk while we ate but I was put off a little when one of the workmen kept staring at me. I felt like my slip was showing or something and the guy looked angry. I guess it was my imagination because he eventually turned his back on me and kept doing his job.

I told Larry that I was dating his brother and I could tell that it really made him angry. I had expected him to put up a fight but he was very indifferent and said that I could date whoever I liked.

I thanked him for the nice lunch and then excused myself. As I walked toward the Packard, he shouted something strange,

“I just spent five days in Mexico with a beautiful girl!”

*-Why would he tell me that?-*

---

## Alejandro Vargas – Good Friday - 1938

Al Vargas was mad as hell. Everything about his life made him mad and not being able to change it made him madder but he intended to do something about that. He was weeding a patch of tomatoes while he watched two rich kids eat a leisurely lunch on the beautiful patio that overlooked the blue pacific. If he had his way they would soon be weeding tomatoes like everyone else. He looked at the slender boy who was talking animatedly with his hands. They was laughing and smiling. He looked at the girl with sinister eyes and wondered what color her panties were and if she felt the same inside as the Mexican girls that he knew. Suddenly she made eye contact with him and then she looked quickly away.

*-What the matter honey, do I scare you?-*

She said something to the boy and he turned and looked but Al turned his back on the kids and kept hoeing the tomatoes.

---

Life hadn't been easy for Al. He didn't remember his parents who died when he was very young and being raised by his money-grubbing aunt and uncle who hadn't really prepared him for a good life.

Aunt Sonya and Uncle Felix had kept Alejandro until the day that he turned sixteen. He should have started school when he was five but Sonya didn't want to buy him school clothes. The truant officer finally forced him into school a year later. By this time he was earning some money washing cars and running errands and Sonya found that she could keep him home two days a week without trouble from the school.

In the nine years that this went on Alejandro, now Al, found many ways to make a few dollars. His first victim was Sonya. He learned to skim money off of the top of what she expected. He became quite a good thief. He was a good card cheat and with his winning smile, curly black hair and flashing white teeth he could talk his way out of any bad situation.

There was a lot of vice in the Mexican community where gambling, booze and prostitution was quite common. At the age of thirteen he made an alliance with a twelve year old whore where she would get a man's pants off and pass his wallet to Al. This was after she had been paid of course. It became so profitable that another street girl who was nineteen came to him to see if they could run the same deal.

The day that he turned sixteen he quit school and informed Aunt Sonya and Uncle Felix that he was leaving and then he rented a room at another boarding house. He had two young prostitutes who were more or less working for him and he was recruiting a third but when he asked that girl for a sample of her work, she produced a badge and arrested him. He had no idea that she was an undercover police agent. There were no women police officers then but she was ready to testify in court that he had made her an illegal

offer and he was going to jail for a year. It cost him every penny that he had to bribe the woman and her police partner and, although he was still free, he was flat broke.

That afternoon he asked the Forman of the Rainbow Tuna Company for a job. While he still ran a few small scams, he worked for Rainbow for the next year. The tuna came in July and lasted until November or December. Rainbow canned tuna for grocery stores and made cat food from the scraps. The rest of the time he worked on a large ranch in the Palos Verdes hills for a boss named Ortiz.

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## **A Change of Attitude – Summer of 1937**

### **Al**

In the summer of 1937, a civil war broke out in Spain. The government had been in turmoil, political leaders were murdered, and strikes were called. The new left wing majority couldn't form a new government and on July the leader of the socialist party was murdered while services for the population and the power of the military were being reduced. Reforms that were to help the poor peasants were discarded and their lives were worse than ever. On July 17 of that year the Military revolted and declared that they were the new government of Spain. Within a few days the country was torn by war.

Many Spaniards living in California wanted to return to Spain immediately to fight what ever side that they supported. The Spanish community in San Pedro was split with most supporting the rebels and they would have nothing to do with their former friends. Al was caught up in the emotion of the minute and swore the he would leave for the war on the first ship.

After a few days he decided that he had no where near enough money to get to Spain and he also wanted to wait a while to see if the conflict would end by itself. He was, however passionate about the rebels cause. His own parents had lived under that cruel system that denied them the opportunity to own their land and guide their own lives.

He realized that he really knew nothing about his parents other then they had fled Spain seeking a better life. That's when he decided to visit Aunt Sonya and Uncle Felix and see if they could enlighten him.

---

He left Sonya's and Felix's house that night in a state of shock. He had no idea what his parents has been or done until now. At first he was ashamed of his mother but he started to understand the trap that she had been lead into. His dad was a hard worker but possibly little else. The more that he thought about it, the madder he got. It was the system and the society that led them to destruction.

It was the cursed government of Spain and then the same system here in America. They couldn't buy there own land because they couldn't earn enough money. His dad had absolutely no hope of ever doing anything other than working with his hands. His mother took the only way out of her situation and she may not have been a saint, she did her best. It was the god damned system that put her on her back in a whore house in Long Beach. That thought made him seethe with anger.

He vowed that he would save every penny that he earned until he could go to Spain and when justice was done there, he would return to see that justice was done in the good old USA.

---

## Good Friday evening – 1938

### Laz

It was ten in the evening when the phone rang. Maryann was taking a bath and I was reading the last of the morning paper. I thought that it might be Larry who wanted to argue about Robert but when I answered it was Chris.

“Hello”

“Hi Laz, it’s Chris, sorry to call so late but I just got home”

“Hello stranger, I thought you were locked in the LA jail or was that someone else?”

“Not the jail sweetheart, the Police Academy but it feels like jail. I’ve been there for five days and I have ten days to go”

“What are you learning? Vice?, Prostitution? Gambling?”

“Sure, try speeding, illegal left turn, beating a wife, or husband. It’s all the exciting stuff. Anyway, can I come over?”

“Just asking is a change, usually you just sit on my porch and wait for me to find you”

“I can do that”

“Not tonight, Maryanne is staying with me. Can you come in the morning about ten?”

“Maybe, you know that I don’t like long term commitments”

“Do it or don’t, its your choice”

---

Saturday morning I talked to Robert on the phone and I assured him that I would be back at the apartment by five. He said that we would go to the club for dinner so I needed to leave time to dress. He didn’t ask if I wanted to go to the club and I didn’t feel like bring that up.

Maryanne left around nine and she seemed like she had recovered from her night of booze and confessions. I took my time dressing and I really didn’t let Chris creep into my thoughts. I hadn’t seen him in months and I certainly hadn’t been alone with him since *that night*. The memory of prom night sent a stab of feelings through my belly.

*-NO! Get that out of your mind. Think about Robert and your job and the wrap party and your apartment, and ... and ...-*

The doorbell rang and there he was. He was dressed in gray slacks, a white shirt, a dark tie and sports coat and a fedora hat. He looked older and bigger and very handsome and appealing.

“You’ve changed Chris, come in”

“Changed? How?”

“I don’t know. How about some coffee?”

We sat on the patio and sipped our coffee and he talked about the Police and his training. I asked about friends from high school and, just like always, he knew everything that there was to know and then he dropped his latest little bomb.

“Wanda Clark is pregnant”

“Wanda?”

“Larry’s Wanda”

“Oh my god, is Larry the dad?”

“I don’t think so. I hear that it’s some guy in Riverside or San Bernardino or somewhere out there”

“How would you know that?”

“I’m a cop, remember”

“Why would the cops know that?”

“I saw her at the drugstore about three weeks ago and you would have to be blind not to know that she’s knocked up. One of the girls that works at the station, Alice Brady, do you remember her, she’s Wanda’s next door neighbor and let’s just say that the walls have ears”

“I wonder what Larry thinks about that?”

“I don’t think he knows or if he does I don’t think that he cares. He was through with her anyway but I don’t think he’s told her yet”

“I’ll be damned”

---

The conversation seemed to calm the feelings in my belly and I asked him to take me to lunch. We ate at a little diner on the north edge of town that overlooked the sand dunes near the beach. When we finished, Chris drove along the beach and parked near the dunes where we took off our shoes and walked on the wet sand.

“Look over there Laz, what do you think of that?”

“Think of what?” I said looking to see what he was talking about.

“That little house across the street.”

I saw a single house nestled between two sand dunes. If it had ever been painted, it had long since turned to shades of gray and I could just imagine what it would be like when the storms came and the waves were pounding across the sand.

“It’s picturesque in a way but I would hate to mow the lawn” There was no grass, just sand.

“It’s mine”

“Yours?”

“I bought it a month ago”

“Then I think it’s beautiful”

“Want to see it?”

“Sure”

*-Maybe I shouldn't have said that so fast. I have my emotions in check right now but, who knows how long that will last-*

It was nice, it was very clean but it did need a few pictures on the wall and a few doilies on the tables.

“Laz, do you mind if I change out of these dress-up clothes?”

“No, go ahead”

He went into the bedroom and closed the door. I looked around but the feelings in my belly were getting stronger. I tried to think all of my good thoughts but I thought all of the bad ones. I just pushed his bedroom door a little and it swung open.

“What took you so long?” he asked.

“I was going to brush my teeth but I couldn't find a tooth brush”

“Use mine”

---

It was late. I would never get to the apartment by five and Robert was never late. I stopped at a filling station in El Segundo and called him on a pay-phone but there was no answer.

*-Damn, he's left already -*

I called Maryanne and told her that Robert would be there at five and that I was late. She told me that he was already there.

---

It was ten until six when I open the door and Maryanne was in the flat alone.

“Where's Robert?”

“He's gone. He said that he would call for you in the morning at ten and that you should dress for brunch at the club”

“Was he pissed?”

“Oh yes”

*-Pampas bustard ... he could have waited-*

---

## Easter Sunday – 1938

### Laz

Robert was right on time which was no surprise. The country club brunch was usually very crowded but not that morning. Most of the good Bel Air Christians were making their biannual visit to the local church so there was plenty of room.

Sitting at a corner table well out of earshot of the other diners I expected a scolding for my tardiness the evening before but Robert was very proper and polite. We made small talk and then between the eggs-benedict and the crape suzette's he purposed to me.

Like the good lawyer that he was he listed all of the benefits of marriage and then he paid lip service to a few drawbacks. I was young but not too young. I had no education beyond high school but I was well spoken and he would help me overcome any difficulties that I might have. My father was 'well-off' so I wouldn't have any problem adapting to his life style. All in all he thought that we made an excellent fit.

*-He really means it. He's never said that he loves me. He's never tried to get into my fancy French knickers. He has actually never French kissed me. Come on Laska, you need to really think about this ... stall him-*

"Oh Robert what a wonderful surprise, I don't want to jump to a hasty decision so I would like to give you my answer in a few days"

He recognized my counter to his well thought-out plan. I was asking for a continuance.

"Well Laska, I think that you should study the matter and you should have an answer for me by Wednesday evening. I'll call for you at eight. Now would you like to see the ring?"

---

## **The rest of 1938**

### **Laz**

On June 4<sup>th</sup> I attended my father's wedding in Saint Michael's church in Santa Barbara and to the consternation of the priest and everyone else, I was the 'best daughter' and I walked down the aisle with my dad.

---

On New Years eve Robert and I were married in the Saint Margaret's Episcopal Church in Bel Air and my father gave me away. Maryanne was my Maid of honor and to my great disappointment, Larry didn't attend the Ceremony.

Again I defied convention when I informed the minister that I wouldn't be promising to 'obey' so he should leave that part out. Robert raised an objection pointing out that 'obey' had been part of the wedding ceremony for centuries. I said if he liked it so much then he should say it and that put an end to the discussion.

Both Robert and his mother weren't happy when my list of guests included Mr. and Mrs. Ortiz and Bobby. Mrs. Garcia and any guest that she wanted to bring. Eddy Fugimora and his parents although I doubted that they would attend and Cristiano Lucas Renaldo and any guest that he might bring. Mrs. Lee decided not to object when the same list of names was submitted my father, and the Ortiz and Fugimora families were requested by Roberts dad.

Two nights before the wedding, Chris called asking if I needed his help. I told him that I loved him, and that I would always love him, but I wouldn't need his special talents in the future.

My last words with Robert the night before the wedding was to reaffirm my position that there would be no children for us for at least the next two years. I said that I could weather the expected bombardment of requests for grandchildren from both of our parents but I wasn't going to spend the first year of my married life pregnant. He didn't like it but he knew better than to object.

---

## **Alejandro Vargas – Portugal and Spain - January, 1939**

It was cold and raining when the ship docked in Lisbon. Al had finally made his commitment to the Spanish Civil War and he had gone to Europe. It was a bazaar sight from the ship looking down at the dock.

At one end was a group of men with Spanish flags and a small band. They were shouting “Sign-up bonuses”. Next to this group was a contingency of Portuguese police and then there was a group of men with Spanish Rebel flags and they were shouting encouragement to join them. The police weren’t taking sides, they were just keeping order.

Alejandro went directly from customs to the rebels. There was no doubt in his mind which side he was joining. A man in a military uniform with sergeant’s strips on his sleeve told him that the Rebels were winning and that they needed men for a final push to victory. He hinted to Al that he should act quickly or he would miss the fighting all together.

After a ride in the back of a truck for a couple of hours, he was dropped at the gate of a large farm in what he believed was still Portugal. He was given his uniform which was a laugh. It was the white pants and shirt of the Spanish peasants and he wore a red bandana around his neck. After one day of training with a German army rifle which he was told was his, he was going to Spain that night in the dark.

The truck wound through bad mountain roads that were more suited for goats than a truck. When he asked why they didn’t drive on the highway he was told that the government patrolled the coast roads with airplanes.

“I thought that we were winning?”  
“We are, just not on the coast road”

After many hours in the truck they arrived at a camp that was near the large town of Ronda. Al went with the other newcomers to a trench that overlooked one end of the town and a sergeant gave each of them all of ammunition that they could carry.

“What’s happening?” he asked the man next to him.  
“At dawn we are going to take that police station.”  
“Is it heavily defended?”  
“Maybe, the town is ready to join us but as long as the government has the police here nothing will happen.”

At dawn Al could see the station just across a little ravine. It was in rifle range but it looked like a bank vault. The sergeant came by and said that they would attack with mortars first and then we would all storm the building.

In a few minutes he heard the 'thump' followed by the whistle of the mortar shells. The first explosion was fifty yards wide of its mark. After a few more misses the gunners found the range. The policemen was firing rifles and machine guns at the rebels but the mortars were taking their toll. There was a pall of smoke across the area and the rebels were using it as cover to move forward. The man next to him grabbed his arm and they ran for a better position. A small fire had started in the back of the station and Al and his companion were shooting into the barred windows. Several uniformed men ran from the building only to be cut down by the rebel fire.

The man next to Al was very excited now and he pulled Al forward across the ravine. They were no more than a hundred yards from the building when a white flag was waived from the door. All of the rebels were up and running and Al shouted at the man next to him,

"What do we do now?"

"Do now,? We kill them all."

"But they are surrendering"

"My family surrendered at Torres Del Mar and they were slaughtered. Two hundred rebels surrendered at San Juan de Cappa and not one came out alive. Hurry, we want to get there while there are some left for us."

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There were more fights like the one at Ronda. Some had the same outcome and some didn't. In one smoking village Alejandro found twenty-two dead rebels with their hands tied behind their backs. After that he never took a live government prisoner.

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## **Alejandro Vargas – South coast of Spain - June, 1939**

In June Al was near the city of Alicante on the south coast. This was the area where his parents had grown up and fled to America to escape the oppression of the big landholders. The sergeant told him to go to headquarters and report to the commandant.

“You wanted to see me comrade?”

“Are you American?”

“I am Spanish but I was born in America”

“Good enough, go to that building and see the man in the white suit”

Al had no idea what that was about but he found a small man in a dirty white suit and a battered Panama hat.

“Do you want to see me?” he asked and the man turned offering his hand and said in America English,

“Hi, I’m Bill Koch. I understand that you’re from California”

Al was surprised to meet a fellow American but he had his reservations. He had learned to not be too trusting of the unknown. General Franco was known to have his own spies looking for infiltrators and counter-revolutionaries. It wasn’t wise to always say what you thought.

“I’m Al Vargas from San Pedro, what can I do for you”

“Well Mr. Vargas, maybe I can do something for you”

---

Bill Koch was a German and he was here helping the Rebels. Germany had supplied almost all of the arms and ammunition for the rebellion. They had also supplied trucks, motorcycles and even airplanes. Without the help of the Germans the rebels wouldn’t have lasted long.

Al knew that despite the man’s outward friendliness, he wanted something. Al was invited to lunch in a private room of the building and they talked at great length about the USA. It didn’t take long for Alejandro’s animosity, over the conditions in San Pedro, to show. He was pleased at the way things were going in Spain and he hoped that the conditions of the workers in the US would follow the same lines.

“So Mr. Vargas, do you actually think that a workers uprising in America is possible?”

“I do. The people who work for a living are just trash beneath the feet of the big business men.”

“Do you think that these business men are like you and me?”

“No”

“Who are these business men?”

“They’re Jews. It’s the god damned Jews who are holding the workers back”

“Would you be interested in doing something about that?”

“God damned right”

“Hmm. Lets talking about San Pedro. Where did you work?”

---

Mr. Koch talked to Al several times during the next few weeks. Often it was about the details of the San Pedro-Redondo-Manhattan Beach area but sometimes it was about ways that Al could help. Several times Koch hinted that perhaps a job could be arranged for Al after the Spanish war ended.

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## **Peace in our times – Spanish style**

The Civil war did end in July and there was great celebration. Alejandro was hearing some disturbing rumors about the big landlords and land for the peasants. It seemed that General Franco had decided that if the landlords turned their money over to the new government then they would still be in charge of the big farms. After all, who was more qualified to run them? The peasants who expected to be given their own land were told that they would continue to work for the old landlords but they would be paid a little more.

One night, Alejandro was drinking in a local bar listening to a girl speaking out against the new government policy. He was more attracted to her low neckline and her flashing eyes then he was to her politics.

At three in the morning he was snuggled up to her warm and very naked body when the door was broken down and the new, secret police hauled them all off to jail as counter-revelations. He knew that counter-revolutionaries, once arrested, were never seen again.

Before dawn he whispered to a young guard and from his boot he had taken an American ten dollar bill and had torn it in half. He told the guard if he would send Senior Bill Koch to the jail that morning he would give him the other half of the bill.

That torn bill save his life. As his new friends were being shot the next day, Alejandro was on a train bound for Germany and a new job. It didn't matter what it was because it was much better then the alternative.

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## **Better times – fall, 1940**

### **Larry**

I started my last year at USC and the future never looked more confused. A war was being fought in Europe or at least in the skies over Britain. That was bad news for the Brit's but it was good news for the beleaguered American workers. After enduring ten years of a crushing depression, there was work building ships and airplanes for the English. President Roosevelt had promised arms for Britain for their fight with Germany while America maintained its neutrality.

There was a lot of sympathy for the United Kingdom and several of my frat brothers were looking into joining the Canadian Air Force so that they could fight to save England but I think that most Americans were very much against getting involved in another European war. There seemed to be new war about every twenty or thirty years and most of us really didn't have any preference for who won.

On a happier note, my school workload had dropped and my social life had improved. The frat parties seemed to bring out a fresh batch of pretty girls and I was able to latch onto a couple. These weren't the kind of girls that you took home to mother and that suited me just fine.

I think that once Laz married Robert I stopped thinking about her so much. I realized that she had always been on my mind and the unspoken question of 'what would Laz think' really effected the things that I did. Now, I just didn't care what she thought and she had no way of knowing what I was doing anyway.

I had talked to dad about my idea for a new type of upscale restaurant and he said that after graduation he would help me anyway that he could. Life couldn't have been any better.

I kept an eye out for Molly Malone but I never saw her again.

---

## **Same time**

### **Laz**

I suppose that I felt very grown up during that time. After our wedding, Robert had insisted that I quit my job. He said that it sent the wrong message to our social set if I looked like I needed to work. Mother Lee introduced me to many of her friends and soon I was doing charity work. I wouldn't have minded feeding starving children but that was beneath our social calling. I attended tea's and made posters, and made sure that I always looked like I cared.

The one bright spot was Maryanne's wedding. She was engaged to George-the-camera-man who always made me laugh. He was really nice and he was completely in love with her. He was a little older and she had grown up a lot in the past year. She still lived in the

flat at the Del Ray Arms and neither of them made a secret about him spending the night occasionally. Robert didn't like it if I spent too many evenings at her place but I did it anyway. Robert was spending a lot of time away at night and if it had been someone else I might have been suspicious but I just couldn't see him in a lover's bed.

I did get lonesome sometimes and I thought that I'd spend some time at the house in PV. I missed the sight of the ocean and at least I'd get to see Mrs. Ortiz and Miss Sata.

Larry was polite but very cool to me. I missed him and I wished that we were better friends. Maybe he'd come back to me someday. I saw Chris one day in Redondo and he looked very handsome in his khaki uniform.

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## **Thanksgiving – 1940**

### **Laz**

Robert was furious because I went to Dad's place in Santa Barbara the day after Thanksgiving. I did my wifely duty by helping Mother Lee with the family feast and Robert had made some social plans for us on the weekend. He'd just have to get over it. I don't get to see my dad as often as I would have like and Robert would have to plan around that.

I did get Larry into a private conversation after the big dinner and for twenty minutes we were good friends again. I wished that we could see Bobby and Eddy and Chris and not have all of our busy schedules and commitments and responsibilities.

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## **USC Graduation – June, 1941**

### **Larry.**

It was finally over. For twenty-one years I'd been preparing for life and now life was here. I received my diploma in Business Administration and I had a business plan for a new restaurant. Over the years I had collected so many recipes that I was seriously considering publishing a cookbook.

Dad was very generous giving me a 1941 Cadillac two door convertible for graduation. He had given Robert a similar car in 1931 when he graduated from USC and although I wasn't as impressed by cars as the rest of the family, I thought that it was very nice. Robert gave me a watch which surprised me because I didn't expect anything from him. Laz gave me a nice wallet and a kiss on the cheek. I missed not seeing her more often and I thought she might have come up with a niece or nephew for me but nothing so far.

---

## **Same time**

### **Laz**

Larry finally did it. He was a USC graduate and his old 1933 Chevy had gone to the junkyard. Papa Lee gave him a Cadillac which I think embarrassed him a little. He'd never been one to flaunt his wealth or family connection. Of course his older brother did it every chance that he got. With Robert it was all about appearances. The two biggest conflicts in our marriage were children and appearances. Despite the pressure that I get from both sides of the family, I wasn't having any children until I saw a lot more father-potential from Robert.

I saw Chris in the Redondo Drug Store that week and even though he was on duty he had time for a cup of coffee. What a nice guy.

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## **The restaurant business – June 24<sup>th</sup>, 1941**

### **Larry**

After graduation I talked to dad about my plans for a restaurant. We had discussed it often over the last couple of years and he had always said that when the time came he would do everything that he could to help me.

He studied my business plan, which was titled 'Larry's Seafood Grill', and made a few notes. He went back and reread part of it and made more notes then he looked at me but he didn't smile.

"Son, you've done a good job with your plan and you've covered every detail. You can open this business and maybe you will do well but I've got to tell you that you have no imagination"

*-Wow, that hurt-*

"Dad, I did a lot of research for that plan. It's based on the actual financial reports of some very successful restaurant chains"

"Son, it's a good plan and if you want to open another 'Clifton's' or 'Harvey House' this is the way to do it."

*-My dad made a fortune in this town with nothing more than his imagination, maybe I should listen-*

"Ok dad, what help can you give me?"

"Remember the first rule of business?"

"Sure, location, location, location"

"I have a lease with an option to buy on a Victorian house on Sunset Blvd in Hollywood. It sits back from the street and it's zoned for business. The house was build just three years ago even if it does look like turn-of-the-century. It was build by a guy who had planned to make it into a corporate office and it has a big room, several small rooms and a big kitchen. Off to the side is a patio and a very nicely landscaped back yard.

Ok, stay with me now, we put just eight tables in the big room that will seat up to six. We convert three of the small rooms into private dinning rooms seating up to eight and we put in a patio bar that will serve the coldest beer in California.

We only open three days a week. Friday dinner, Saturday and Sunday lunch and dinner. The menu is fixed price and only offers two choices, fish or steak. Oh yea, the prices will be outrageous"

Well I was stunned. His plan was very bold but it was filled with the opportunity to fail. The only part of my plan that he hadn't changed was the name.

“Oh another thing son, if you call it ‘Larry Lee’s Seafood Grill’ you’ll cash in on a very well known Hollywood name”

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## **Grand Opening – Larry Lee’s Seafood Grill – September 6<sup>th</sup>, 1941**

### **Larry**

I couldn’t believe it happened so fast. From the time that dad and I agreed on the new business until the Grand Opening was only a couple of months. Of course dad approached it the way that he did everything else. He used a stage designer to lay out the floor plan. Studio landscapers provided all of the plants and potted palms. A prop company supplied all of the tables and chairs and even the waiters and busboys were out of work actors who jumped at the chance to be seen by our Hollywood clientele.

The day before we were to open we had a dress rehearsal and dad played the director. When I came out from the kitchen in my white uniform and my tall chef’s hat he didn’t like it.

After we were through at the restaurant, he sent me to a costume designer at Paramount to see a young woman named Edith Head, who changed my appearance completely. What was left of me after her make-over was a guy in slightly rumpled whites with sleeves that ended just below my elbows and a red bandana around my neck and she made me promise that I would never wear the tall chef’s hat again.

Secretly, I liked the look and I thought that if I had a thin little mustache I would look like a young Clark Gable.

---

## **Same night**

### **Laz**

It was Larry’s night and the entire family turned out. Robert grouched the way that he usually did but I think he was as curious as the rest of us about this new venture.

“He’s just using dad’s name to bring in business. Why didn’t he call it Larry Lee Junior’s? That’s what it really is”

*-What an ass, why don’t you call your law practice Robert E. Lee’s law offices or do you want Yankee business too?-*

“Don’t fuss at your brother dear” his mother said.

We were seated at a table where we could see everyone arrive. Poppa Lee got lots of waves and nods but it was the last group to arrive caused the biggest stir.

Mai West, accompanied by a very young and very handsome actor, came in with a swirl of glitter and fur and her bosom was as impressive as always. Instead of following the hostess to her table she smiled and came to ours. The men stood and she kissed pop on the cheek.

“Get me a cup of coffee, Laz?” She said with a grin.

“I’m sorry Miss West but I’ve lost my union card”

Robert looked at me in disbelief. He had no Idea that Mai West would know my name.

“Linda, are you carrying your scissors?” She asked Mom Lee.

“Sorry Mai but Ma Ferguson took them away from me.”

The two women hugged and smiled.

“And who is this handsome fellow?” She asked looking at Robert.

“That my son Robert” Mom Lee said.

“Well Robert, why don’t you come and see me sometime” and with that famous line of hers ringing in Roberts ears she waved and sauntered off to her table.

Robert was still looking a little bewildered when he asked,

“Mother, what was that about scissors?”

“When I worked Mega Studios as a wardrobe girl, Mai would bring her costume to me every day and I would cut off the top three buttons. That afternoon after the days shoot, the head wardrobe lady, Ma Ferguson would sew them back on”

Robert looked a little confused,

“Why didn’t she just leave them unbuttoned?”

“She did the first day and some bluenose producer asked her to button them up so she made sure that after that she was wearing what the studio provided her”

I don’t think that Robert ever really understood.

---

## **Halloween in New York – 1941**

### **Laz**

Robert's Law practice specialized in the entertainment business, specifically the motion picture industry. He was often involved in the negotiation of contracts where he might represent a studio on one job and an actor or agent on the next. He had hired an associate to handle the details of high profile divorces which were so popular with the movie stars and so profitable to him. It might have been his associate who did all of the work but it was Robert who appeared in front of the News Reel cameras.

In the fall he had been working very hard on a case that involved a contract dispute between Mega Pictures and it's hottest actor. A company in New York claimed that the actor had signed a letter of intent for them to represent him and Mega claimed that he had signed a contract with them to be his sole agent. His new film was bringing in hundreds of thousands of dollars and neither side wanted to share it with the other. The suit was filed in a New York court and the Studio wanted Robert to go east, to assist their New York Law firm.

Robert submitted an estimate of his expenses that included all travel, lodging and costs for him and his wife. The Studio approved it and wanted him to leave immediately. The only thing left to do was to convince me to accompany him.

He explained that we would travel in a private train compartment and we would stay in a suite at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel where we would both have access to a car and driver. I surprised him by agreeing immediately. I had always wanted to see the Big Apple and I couldn't resist the opportunity for shopping.

It was October and the trip across the country was colorful and picturesque. Once we reached the mid-west the countryside looked like a Halloween postcard. The senior partner of Forester, Forester, and Finch met us at the train and drove us to our hotel in a chuffer driven limousine. I'm sure that I showed my west-coast naivety by gawking at the sky scrappers.

The first day of work for Robert was the first day of sightseeing for me. My driver was very patient and quite knowledgeable about the city and I had a very nice time.. That evening Robert told me that Saturday night we were going to dinner with the younger Forester and his wife. He was probably feeling a little overwhelmed by the city and the high stakes litigation because he told me that I should be polite but not to talk too much at the dinner. I made a snide remark about me not wanting to show the Foresters just how dumb I was.

Dinner was at the 21 Club and it was all that I had read about in the Hollywood gossip columns and I recognized several famous people at the other tables. Dan Forester was a handsome man in his late forties and his blond wife Tiffany was just a little older than me. I would have bet the farm that she had replaced a middle-aged wife that had raised

the Forester kids and now she had been traded in on a new model. They had a home in Connecticut and he commuted by train every day.

I personally thought that she was a twit. She waved her two caret diamond ring around and talked about their home in Connecticut like I was supposed to be impressed. Robert, on the other hand, ate it all up. In some way he was as bad as she was. He kept dropping Hollywood names, "I was talking to L.B. the other day..." he said drawing blank stares from the Forester's who wouldn't know Lewie B. Mayer at Metro from the man in the moon. I thought that it was all so much social bullshit.

After a dinner that probably cost a king's ransom there were several cocktails and dancing.

"Would like to dance Mrs. Lee?"

"Please call me Laska Mr. Forester"

"Then please call me Dan, now how about a dance"

Oh he was witty and charming. He pointed out a U.S. Senator and the Lieutenant Governor as we swung around the floor. He smiled and nodded and I smiled and tried to look graceful.

"Laska, would you like to join Tiffany and me for lunch at the Russian Tea Room tomorrow. I think that you will enjoy it?"

*-What the hell am I going to talk to her about?-*

"That would be lovely Dan, what time should I meet you?"

"I'll have my driver call for you at two"

*-Oh how nice, then we can all drive together-*

"That's very nice of you Dan. I'm looking forward to it"

---

Back in our hotel suite Robert was going on and on about how modern and cosmopolitan everything was in New York.

"I'm going to lunch with Tiffany and Dan tomorrow. Did he ask you to join us?"

"No but he knows that I'm in court all afternoon. Funny though, Tiffany didn't mention it"

*-Not so funny Bobby Lee, do you really think he's going to bring that airhead with him?-*

---

At precisely two, the doorman called our suite and summoned me to my appointment. Not to anyone's surprise, Dan Forester was standing in the lobby alone.

"Tiff send her regrets, she came down with a headache this morning. We can change our plans if you like and reschedule for another time"

*-He is very experienced at this little charade-*

"Well, we do need to eat and we might as well do it together"

---

I could see the wheels turning inside of his slightly gray, very distinguished head and I ordered a glass of Dom Perignon champagne and a caviar appetizer. If he was going to play his little game I was going to enjoy this part of it.

We chatted over delicate little finger food and I waited for his the next act in his little drama.

"The weather is so nice I thought that a carriage ride through Central Park with be pleasant."

And it was pleasant. The trees had turned to the autumn gold, red, and yellow that was unknown in California. The air was brisk and he was an excellent tour guide.

"I have an apartment here in the city, Laska, and it has a wonderful view of the park. I thought that we might have coffee there before I return you to your hotel"

*-So here was the payoff. Should I simply decline or should I see what his final pitch is. I doubt that he would physically attack me and I'll always have the last word-*

"That would be nice Dan but it might be seen as inappropriate"

"No, not at all. You and Robert are my guests and no one would mistake my hospitality for misconduct. Everything will be fine"

*-Trust me! Why of course I do ... or maybe not-*

"Well I'm sure that your right. I forget that here in New York things are different. After all this isn't stuffy Los Angeles"

---

The view was magnificent. The apartment was spectacular and his coffee was good. He removed his jacket and sat beside me on the couch which looked out over the park. His arm was on the back of the couch and his hand was very close to my shoulder. He continued to talk about the history of the area and the sights that were before us and just as he scooted closer so he could touch me I asked,

“Dan, does this ever work?”

“What?”

“This seduction. Do women ever just take off their panties because you have hypnotized them with your charm?”

“Now just a minute ...”

“Why don’t you just ask me if I want to slip into your bed?”

*-Think about it Dan, it might work-*

“Would you go to bed with me?”

“No but thank you for the lovely lunch”

---

That evening Robert and I had a light supper in the hotel dining room. I had asked how his day went and then I listened for forty minute as he describer everything in minute detail. Finally it was my turn.

“I had lunch with Dan Forester today”

“Oh yes, Dan and Tiffany”

“No, just Dan, Tiffany had a headache and stayed home.”

“That’s nice, where did you go”

“We ate at the Russian Tea Room and then we went for a Carriage ride through Central Park and then we went to Dan’s apartment for coffee”

“Did you enjoy it?”

“It was fine”

“Good, Tomorrow I’m meeting with the ... ...”

*-I wonder if I said that I had screwed the junior partner at Forester, Forester, and Finch if it would have made any difference to him ... probably not-*

---

## **The Palos Verdes house – December 5<sup>th</sup>, 1941**

### **Laz**

The trip to New York left me with a great feeling of dissatisfaction and the coming and going of the Thanksgiving holiday did nothing to improve my outlook. I wanted to have a talk with Larry but he was totally evolved in his new restaurant venture. I tried to get some time with Maryanne but that didn’t work out. Finally I told Robert that I was going to the PV house for a few days alone. Of course he didn’t understand and he pointed out that the Christmas Party season had arrived and we already had several commitments including one at the club Sunday night. I went to Palos Verdes anyway and I wasn’t too concerned with his feelings. I told him that I’d be home Sunday afternoon in time for dinner at the club.

Friday I called the Redondo Police and left a short message for Chris. It just said “Lunch Saturday?”

At six-thirty I heard his steps on the porch. When I opened the door he smiled and said,  
“Sorry Laz, I don’t sleep with married women”  
“I don’t want to sleep with you, I want to bore you to death”

He waited for me to make the first move and I hugged him and gave him a very wet kiss on the cheek. We talked for hours or at least I talked for hours. He fussed around the kitchen and made me some scrambled eggs and he offered to ply me with liquor but I felt a little too vulnerable for that.

He sat beside me on the couch but never touched me. He listened and commented when I asked him to. It must have been after midnight when I realized that I was dropping off to sleep.

“It’s late Chris, you should go or you can stay in the guest room if you like”  
“What would your husband say to that, honey, I’m going. How about Breakfast tomorrow?”

“Sure, I’ll meet you at the diner at eleven”  
“Eleven’s not breakfast”  
“Good night Chris”

---

I felt much better the next day. All Chris had done was listen and give me a little advice but my attitude had really improved. We had a sandwich and then drove to San Pedro where I dragged him through several stores while I shopped. We had an early dinner overlooking the harbor and I was tucked into my own bed, alone, by ten o’clock.

His last words as he walked to his car that night were,  
“Don’t forget that I love you, Laska Lara Langtree Lee”

*-How could I ever forget?-*

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## **December 7<sup>th</sup>, 1941 – Where is Pearl Harbor anyway?**

### **Laska – The Lee Ranch – 11:30 am**

I locked the house and started to drive home when I decided to stop at the Lee Ranch to say hello to Mrs. Ortiz and Miss Sata. As I drove up to the house there was lots of commotion in the yard and Mrs. Ortiz looked flustered as I got out of the car.

“Oh Laska, come quick. The Japanese are bombing our Navy base at some harbor in the Pacific”

“What? When did it happen?”

“Right now. Come and listen”

I heard the grave voice of the announcer and all I could think about was Robert and Larry going to war. I picked up the telephone and tried to call Robert but the lines were jammed. The busy signal started when I dialed the second digit.

I ran to Miss Sata’s office and she was sitting at her desk. She didn’t show any emotion but I knew that was just her way. I put my hand on her shoulder and she looked at me.

“Miss Langtree, it’s nice to see you”

“Oh Miss Sata, what’s going to happen?”

“I’m afraid that there is going to be a war. The rulers of Japan will shout ‘Bonzi’ and show their toothy smiles and the people of America will use this incredible insult to mobilize an invincible army and millions of good and bad people will suffer. In the end this wonderful country will defeat the abomination of Imperial Japan but I’m not sure that I will survive.”

I put both hands on her shoulder and put my cheek against hers and tried to comfort her.

“Miss Sata, you’re American born and raised. Nothing will happen to you. You’ll be safe here in Palos Verdes with us.”

“I hope that you’re right dear, I hope that your right”

---

### **Larry – Larry’s Seafood Bar & Grill, Hollywood – 11:40 am**

I wondered where everyone was. We opened in twenty minutes and I was missing my hostess, a waiter and two busboys. What was going on? We were expecting a big crowd and if I didn’t get some help we were going to be in big trouble.

Pedro, the dishwasher came running into the dining room.

“Mr. Lee, Mr. Lee, the Japs have attacked Hawaii. I just heard it from the guy across the alley”

I ran to my office and turned on the Philco. It seemed like hours before it warmed up enough to hear.

The attack had come just after eight, Hawaii time, which was just forty five minutes before. The radio said that several waves of Jap planes had swept over the island, bombing ships and airfields and while there were no casualty reports yet, it must be in the thousands. There was an unconfirmed report that at least one Battleship had been sunk in the harbor.

I had two crazy thoughts. The first was what was I going to tell the diners when they arrives and the second was when I went into the army, I didn't want to be a cook.

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### **Linda Lee – Bel Air – 11:32**

Linda was addressing some last minute Christmas card when she heard the announcement on the radio,

“Ladies and Gentlemen we interrupt this program to bring you a special announcement”

Before she heard the next word an icy stab of fear went through her. She listened to the details and then, crying, she tried to phone her sons but the lines were already jammed. She remembered the Great War in her childhood and she feared for family.

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### **Larry Senior – Santa Monica office of Lawrence L. Lee Enterprises**

Larry Senior had heard the announcement at the same time that his wife did and he also found the phone lines jammed. He unlocked his file cabinet and took out a folder labeled ‘McMillan’. In the folder was the Lee family war plan.

In August, an Army officer, Colonel Chester McMillan had contacted him and had arranged a meeting. Larry laughed now when he remembered how the meeting started.

“Mr. Lee, I understand that you're a man who can get things done”

“That's right Colonel, what do you need?”

“Suppose I needed a train, could you get it?”

“When do you want it and will you want coal or will you supply your own?”

The officer laughed at that,

“Can you get workers?”

“Yes sir”

“Bakers and cooks”

“Yes”

“Girls”

“A thousand girls, young and old but if you want whores then get out of my office”

The colonel waved his hand to assure Larry that he had no need for ladies of the night.

“Mr. Lee, the army believes that a war may come soon. Oh we know that the Japs are in piece talks in Washington but who knows how that’ll come out. We do know that the Germans will eventual want to get rid of us but it might take them a while to figure a way to do it.

My job is to make sure that when and if a war comes, that Hollywood and the movie industry will lend their considerable influence to the military to help our cause. You know that propaganda is only bad when bad people use it. We need someone like you to guide the industry and to get things done.”

What followed were several days of hard negotiation and some give and take on both sides. The final agreement was that Larry Senior would be commissioned as a Lieutenant Colonel in the Army Reserve and would serve as the commanding officer of the Office of Internal Communication (Motion Picture Industry). Robert would be commissioned as a Major in the Army Reserve and would be the chief legal consul for the same office. The difficult position that required considerable wrangling was Larry Jr.

Because of his age and his lack of direct connections to the Movie business, it was decided that he would join the army and would be sent to regular officers basic training and at completion he would be commissioned a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant in the Army Reserve and he would receive orders attaching him to the Office of Internal Communication. Larry senior was warned that as a reserve officer, Larry Jr. could request a transfer at anytime.

The last bit of nuisance was that Larry Senior and Robert would be required to attend a two week training class where they would learn how things were done in the army. This was laughing called ‘knife and fork school’.

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## **Alejandro Vargas – Baden-Baden Germany – 8:22 pm**

Al was sitting in the bar of the Schwarzwald hotel when he heard an announcement over the radio. He knew just enough German to know that the Japanese and the Americans were fighting in Hawaii but he discounted the propaganda about the glories victory of the German's ally and the total defeat of the Americans. He thought that he heard that eight American Battleships were sunk.

*-What a bunch of bull-shit-*

Still, he was please. If it really was an attack, then the Americans would be in the war soon and he had been waiting and training for two years for this to happen. Soon he would be going to California and away from the goddamned German cold and snow. It was nice enough in the summer but he didn't like the people much.

He was nearly as white as they were but when they heard his accent he was treated like scum. The German girls wouldn't have anything to do with him and even the local prostitutes shunned him. He thought that he was going to become a monk when he met a Turkish woman who was ten years older. She was about as popular with the lilywhite locals as he was so, of course, they hit it off. Another problem arose when their only common language was English and using that in public always led to trouble.

But now there was going to be a war and he would be going to Redondo Beach to formant a revolution or at least to spread chaos and discontent.

*-Oh happy days-*

“Bartender, ine grosser bier bitter!”

---

## **WAR!**

### **Larry**

The war swept over all of us like a sudden storm. Some of the truth about Pearl Harbor was printed in the newspaper but we really didn't know what to believe. On Monday, December 8<sup>th</sup>, the lines at the army and navy recruiting offices stopped traffic in the streets. I had closed the restaurant until further notice because I was just as confused as the rest of the chaotic world.

Of course, my first thought was to enlist right away but dad told me not to do anything for a few days. He said that he had already set something in motion and I needed to be a little patient.

After a few days more, of the truth of the December 7<sup>th</sup> attack made it into the news and it was a disaster, no matter what the government would have us believe. The public hatred of the Japs was unbelievable. I was so afraid for Miss Sata's safety that I called and asked her to stay in the ranch house. I told her not to even go around the ranch workers. She thanked me for my call and assured me that she was safe.

The panic over our Japanese neighbors was being fanned by the local newspaper headlines.

**SUICIDE REVEALS SPY RING HERE.** Japanese Doctor Who Killed Self After Arrest Called Espionage Chief. (LA Times, Dec. 19, 1941)

If there was no news then scare stories appeared.

**WHAT TO DO IN CASE OF POISON GAS ATTACKS.** (LA Star News, Dec. 20, 1941)

Rumors were often printed as fact and years later they were exposed for what they were.

**JAP SUBS RAID CALIFORNIA SHIPS.** Steamers Under Fire. (Long Beach Press Telegram, Dec. 21, 1941)

The most frightening for many of our California neighbors was the call for their elimination.

**[U. S.] REPRESENTATIVE FORD WANTS ALL COAST JAPS IN CAMPS.** (LA Times, Jan. 22, 1942)

It was a terrible time for me, my family and for our country.

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## **Dad's Plan – Valentine's day, 1942**

### **Larry**

I had been staying at the ranch because I really didn't have anywhere else to go. Dad had told me to be patent but my patients was running out. Bobby Ortiz had already joined the Marine Corp and was training near San Diego. I wanted to do something and I wanted to do it soon. Finally Dad asked Robert and me to come to his office and he would tell us about the future.

### **Going into the Army**

Dad explained that we were all going into the army and it all sounded great until he got to the part about me being assigned to his office. I had no desire to serve my country by being his gofer. I told him that I would make my own plans. But he persisted.

“Look Son, this way you'll go through training and get your commission and then you can decide. I promise that if you work with us for a few months I'll approve a transfer to where ever you want to go”

“Why shouldn't I just go where they send me?”

“Well, with your business degree and your experience in the restaurant business, where do you think that they will send you?”

*-Damn, I guess that he's right, for now-*

“Ok Pop but I don't want to work for you for very long”

---

Of course dad and Robert got the special treatment. They were given physicals in a private doctors office and they were sent to the Mark Hopkins Hotel in San Francisco for a special Army indoctrination school. Most of their fellow students were bankers and shipping magnets. I was given an appointment for a physical at the induction center on Wall St. in LA.

---

After a humiliating morning of standing around in my underwear with my wallet and keys in a bag around my neck I finally got to sit down with the doctor. I had been poked and prodded and listen to and god knows what else. The grey haired doctor looked at my chart and frowned. He took an ice-cold stethoscope from his pocket and listened to my heart and then he reread my history from the form that I had filled out and then listened again.

“Mr. Lee, have you ever had heart problems?”

“No Sir, not that I know of”

“Are you ever short of breath?”

“I guess when I exert myself but nothing out of the normal”

“Did you play any sports in school?”

“Just regular PE”

“Mr. Lee, I think that you have a heart murmur. Do you know what that is?”

*-Damn-*

“No sir”

“It’s caused by a tiny hole in your heart. The murmur sound comes from blood flowing through the hole”

*-Oh god!-*

“Is it serious?”

“Yes and no. You have probably had it all of your life and it hasn’t bothered you very much. If you had played football or ran track you would have noticed it.”

“What does it mean to me now?”

“It means that you’re not going into the army. It could probably be repaired but if it hasn’t bothered before now, I think that I would leave it alone”

I’m sure that my mouth was hanging open when I watched him stamp a big **4F** on my Army application.

*-Goddamn it, what the hell am I going to do now?-*

---

## **Miss Sata's worst nightmare – February 19, 1942**

PRESIDENT ROOSEVELT SIGNS EXECUTIVE ORDER NO. 9066. Japs and other foreigners to be expelled from the west coast. (LA Times, February 19, 1942)

### **Larry**

Dad was still in San Francisco when he made a long distance phone call to Miss Sata. He told her that he would do everything that he could to see that she was left where she was. The Presidents order didn't even use the word 'Japanese' and he was sure that it wouldn't apply to a third generation person like Miss Sata. She thanked him for the call but she was sure that she was going to a concentration camp to probably be shot.

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## **Good Bye for a while – Lee Ranch – March 10<sup>th</sup>, 1942**

### **Larry**

Dad had spent the last couple of days doing what he could for his neighbors. He had met with Mr. Fugimora and offered to buy his strawberry crop that was still in the field. Mr. Fugimora and dad had known each other for many years and they had always been good neighbors. Mr. Fugimora insisted that his crop was of such poor quality that he would give it to dad who could try to salvage it or just leave it to rot.

Dad had insisted that the crop was of such a high quality that he would pay a premium for it. Mr. Fugimora knew that he had no choice and that his neighbor could simply take the crop and he greatly appreciated dad's concern. They agreed on a price which dad would deposit in his neighbor's bank account.

Mr. Fugimora then insisted on giving dad a five year lease on all of his land and equipment. Dad insisted on paying top dollar for the lease and in the end, the honor of both men was satisfied. Eddy and I just watched and he translated for both sides. Eddy and I hadn't talked much in several years and I saw a big change in him. He had become more Japanese than he had been in school and when we were finished he took me aside and told me how much he appreciated my dad's concern.

Dad spent March 9<sup>th</sup> with Miss Sata. He set up an escrow account for her and assured her that her pay would continue to be deposited in the new account. He insisted that she write to all of us if it was allowed and he assured her that he would continue to work for her return to us.

The next morning he offered to take her to Santa Anita Race track where all of the remaining Japanese were to report but she insisted on taking the army bus that was being sent for the remaining internees on the Palos Verdes peninsula. Mrs. Ortiz cried and dad and I tried to be stoic but it was very hard.

She turned and waved from the door and as the bus pulled away I could see Eddy and his parents sitting on the bus and staring straight ahead.

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## **Alejandro Vargas – Baden-Baden Germany – March 29, 1942**

Al's training was over and he had been passed to a handler who would brief him for his mission to the states. He felt that all of it was becoming very real. His new boss had spent a number of years in the LA area and he knew Redondo and San Pedro very well. His code name was Roberto although he wasn't Mexican or Spanish. What he had to tell Al was deadly serious.

"Al, we had a man in your area for a while but he recently was sent to another part of the states and you understand that I can't tell you where or why"

"Yes sir"

"Roberto, please call me Roberto"

"Yes Roberto"

"He has left you a car, a room, and some supplies. You will be provided with the necessary papers to secure these things. You do drive don't you?"

"Yes Roberto, I drive"

"Good, your job will be to contact another agent and to provide him with whatever help that he needs. You will find a small package that was left for you by my our other agent. Are you curious about how you are going to help defeat the USA in their efforts for world domination?"

"Sure"

"You're going to disrupt their food chain and hopefully start a panic that will reach from what they think is their very safe homeland to their military posts across the Pacific and this is how you're going to do it.

You have told us that you worked for several years for the Rainbow Tuna Company in San Pedro. We understand that the tuna are caught off of the coast of California and northern Mexico from approximately July until as late as November. It's April now so we still have some time. We have information that this year, all of the canned tuna that Rainbow processes has been sold to the military and that it will all be packed into containers like this one"

Roberto placed a common tuna can on the table but it wasn't what Al had seen before. It was olive-drab and in place of the colorful wrapper was painted the military description of the contents.

"Your mission is to poison some or all of the tuna that is processed during the first week of production this year. The poison that you will use is a very slow acting shellfish toxin that will be very hard for the Americans to detect. It will take them some time to trace the contaminant to the tuna and by that time it will be at most or all of their bases in the Pacific. Their food cycle will be disrupted, their hospital's will be filled with dying men and when the story is leaked to the newspapers it will cause panic around the fishing communities. "

"Will many people die from the toxin?" Al asked.

"Nearly all of them. Does that bother you?"

“No sir, not at all”

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## **A big day for the Office of Internal Communication April 9<sup>th</sup>, 1942**

**Laz**

Robert had been excited for days over the coming trip. It was the first big effort for him and his dad and they had organized a War Bond tour of Hollywood people and some veterans of Pearl Harbor. The kickoff was to be a parade in Santa Barbara on Saturday the 11<sup>th</sup> followed by a similar event in San Louis Obispo the following day. The tour would hit a major town each day until the big finale in San Francisco in April 18<sup>th</sup>.

Most of the stars and workers were traveling by train but Colonel Lee had arranged to travel by an Army Air Corp twin engine plane. It was just like him to make a big splash wherever he went.

Robert had insisted that I go along although I had no interest in his playing soldier. He had become totally involved with his new position and I rarely saw him. He traveled all the time, he slept in his office and he was always in a hurry. I think that he saw himself as the heroic soldier in the recruiting poster at the post office. Poppa Lee was just the opposite. He was doing the same job that he had always done except he did it now for a fraction of the pay. He had a good attitude and he often chided Robert saying that he was bucking for a promotion.

When I first heard of the tour, I planned to spend a few days with my dad in Santa Barbara before it started but to my disappointment he and Mary Alice were away so I spent most of the week in the Palos Verdes house alone. It seemed that I was spending far too much time alone these days.

Robert wanted me at the Beverly Hills house Thursday night so we could go to Santa Monica airport Friday morning but I was just as adamant that I would stay in PV and I would meet him at the airport at nine am for the 9:30 flight. It was a problem for both of us and I wouldn't give in.

To make matters worse it rained, hard, all day Thursday and it was still raining Friday morning. It would take me nearly an hour to drive to the airport and I was ready to leave by eight o'clock. By that time Robert had already called me twice and I was in no mood to hurry.

I tossed my bag into the Packard and when I pushed the starter .‘CLICK!’

*-Damn-*

It took me twenty minutes to get someone from the Lee Ranch to give me a jump start and with a look at my watch I drove too fast down the hill and before I reached the bottom, I skidded, in a driving rain and the car went into the ditch. Things got worse after that.

When I finally found a telephone, Robert had already left the house for the airport and so had Poppa Lee. I called the airport and left the payphone number with a request for Robert to call me the minute he arrived. I was cold and wet and mad when the phone finally rang and I brushed aside his I-told-you-so comments and told him that I would take the Saturday morning train to San Louis Obispo and that I would be at the hotel when he arrived and that I wouldn't discuss it any farther.

When I was calm again I called Mrs. Ortiz and in twenty minutes Mr. Ortiz was there in his truck. He took me back to my house and said that he would take care of the Packard and that a driver would be at my door at eight the next morning to drive me to Union Station for the train trip north.

That evening, just after dark, there was a knock at the door and I thought that Mr. Ortiz had brought the Packard back but when I answered it was Larry.

"Larry, what brings you out in the rain?"

"Laz, there was an accident"

"Oh you mean the car, yea I was driving too fast ..."

"Laz, there was an accident at the airport. The plane ... their plane crashed ... you know ... in Santa Barbara"

*-What ... who's plane ... oh no!-*

"Larry?"

"They crashed Laz, there all gone. Pop and Robert are gone ... we thought that you were with them"

We stood holding each other for a long time.

## **Same day**

### **Larry**

Dad had asked me to drive him to Santa Monica that Friday morning. He was so busy that we had to grab time together when ever we could. It was still raining but it looked like it was letting up and we talked about several things. We had to make a decision about the restaurant soon because the lease had to be renewed or dropped. He had some ranch business questions and then we had a few minute to just talk.

He seemed to really be enjoying his new army roll but he confided in me that he thought it was going to Roberts head. I wanted to wait and watch them take off but he sent me on my way with a wave. As I drove away I saw Robert. I waved but he didn't acknowledge me.

I spent the afternoon with mom at the Bel Air house. While she made a dozen phone calls about her various charities, I went though the Ranch books. She had just made us a late lunch when the door bell rang. It was the young army lieutenant that worked for dad and he looked as white as a ghost when he told us about the crash.

It took mom an hour to stop crying and by that time I had given her two sleeping pills and two glasses of wine. I called her doctor and he told me not to give her anymore pills and that she would sleep for eight to ten hours. I asked the neighbor lady to watch after her and I drove back to the airport. The lieutenant that had brought us the bad news only knew what he had been told but I was able to find a major who knew the rest of the story. He confirmed that there were four dead.

“Four? Who were they?”

*-Doesn't he mean five dead?-*

“I've got the army telegram right here, a Colonel, a Major, and two lieutenants”

*-Where's Laz?-*

“What about the woman?”

“That's all the notice says”

“Where there any survivors?”

“Let me look ... no, no survivors”

*-Oh god ...oh god ... where is she?-*

---

My hand was shaking when I dialed the number at the ranch,

“Mrs. Ortiz, is Laz their?”

“No Larry, she's at her house but she's ok. Mr. Ortiz said that she wasn't hurt and there's not much damage to the car”

“What damage?”

“When she ran off of the road this morning when she was hurrying to the airport. She' ok now”

“She's home now?”

“Yes Larry, Mr. Ortiz took her home this morning and she doesn't have a car”

I was afraid to call her because I didn't know what I would have done if she didn't answer and besides, I needed to tell her about Robert and I didn't want to do it on the phone.

---

It was just after dark and the lights in the house were on. I knocked and there she was, surprised and smiling to see me. She always could melt me with that smile.

“Larry, what brings you out in the rain?”

*-Do I just say it?-*

“Laz, there was an accident”

“Oh you mean the car, yea I was driving too fast ...”

*-Just tell her ... don't make small talk-*

“Laz, there was an accident at the airport. The plane ... their plane crashed ... you know ... in Santa Barbara”

“Larry?”

“They crashed Laz, they're all gone. Pop and Robert are gone ... we thought that you were with them”

*-She's going to cry ... just hold her now ... just keep holding her-*

---

## **Beat the drum slowly**

### **Larry**

The next week was a blur. There were the arrangements to make and the funerals which for pop was a Hollywood event. There must have been four hundred people at forest lawn that warm April morning for an industry farewell to Lt. Colonel Lawrence Leland Lee Sr. He was eulogized by the heads of Paramount, Metro and MGM. Everyone claimed that they knew him from the beginning and I'm sure that some of them did.

Fifty year old Mae West sat beside the widow and displayed the most magnificent bosom in the crowd. Laska sat beside me and held my hand. She cried several times which surprised me because she hadn't shed a tear for Robert the day before.

The following week, Laz asked me to attend a meeting with Robert's lawyer where he read the will. I think that we were both surprised at how well my older brother had done. For some reason, he had acquired what, at the time, had been considered worthless stocks. Now with the war and the buildup of the defense programs there were many shares of General Motors, Ford, Lockheed, and several thousand shares of Coca-Cola. Based on these holdings alone, Laz was a very wealthy woman.

Since she was his only heir there was the question of what he had inherited from dad. The lawyer said that the courts would decide if Robert had died before dad.

“What difference would that make” I asked.

“If your father died first then whatever he left to Robert would be passed to his heirs. If Robert died first then naturally he wouldn't inherit anything from his father.”

I saw Laz turn away and try to put that grisly thought out of her mind. I was appalled that she might lose an inheritance on such a technicality. There couldn't possible be more than a fraction of a second between their demises. It didn't occur to me that if Robert didn't get the inheritance then it would probably go to me but that would have made no difference.

Two days later I sat in a similar meeting with Mom and dad's attorney. He left one half of his estate including the Bel Air house to mom. The rest was split equally between Robert and me. He stipulated that if Robert should pre-decease him then Roberts's lawful heirs would inherit.

*-Damn my pop was a smart man-*

When it was all over Mom put it all out of her mind. She dove back to her charity work and she assumed that she had been well provided for. It was left for me and the lawyer to figure out just what pop had owned.

---

## **Same time**

### **Laz**

I still felt numb. It had all happened so fast and there had been so much to do. Larry was a godsend. He had made the funeral arrangements and had gone to the attorney with me and he understood more about Roberts inheritance than I did. He said that he would make a list of the things that needed doing and that he would explain everything to me next week. Dad and Mary Alice had come down and were staying with me at the PV house.

I finally, when I had some time alone, I thought about Robert. I never admitted it to myself before but now I wondered why I ever married him. I suppose that I looked good on his arm and I suited his purposes at social functions. He was always polite to me and he went through the motions of showing affection but I don't think that he really loved me. At least he didn't love me the way I assume married people are supposed to love each other.

I knew that there's more than one kind of love. Mom and dad love, brother and sister love, what ever kind of love that Chris and I had for each other but then there's wild, crazy, over the moon love and I didn't have that for Robert and he didn't have it for me. I really don't know what we had for each other.

*-What about Larry?-*

---

## **The next day**

### **Larry**

I went to the house and chatted with Laz's dad and his wife, Mary Alice and then Laz and I talked business in the office.

"Ok Laz, here is a list of the things that we need to deal with"

I gave her the list of Roberts's law practice assets. His office was leased and he owned a car that was used just in his practice. There was also the '21 Caddy that dad had given him for his USC graduation. There were several outstanding accounts on his books that needed collecting. People don't pay a dead man unless someone asks for the money. The Beverly Hills house had a small mortgage on it that could easily be paid off from his other holdings.

The biggest issue was the Lee Ranch. Mom owned half of it and Laz and I each owned a quarter. It was a profitable investment but someone needed to run it. In the past that was done by dad and Miss Sata. Something needed to be done.

"What do you suggest Larry?" Laz asked.

"There are several options. First we could hire a manager and leave it the way it is. We could sell it and each take our share of the proceeds. You and I could buy mom's part and run it and finally. One of us could buy out the other two"

“Do you want to buy it?”

“I can’t really afford it”

“Let’s leave it the way that it is and hire a bookkeeper. Mr. Ortiz can run it and we will give him a raise”

“Ok Laz but let’s agree to review it every year, ok?”

“Ok partner”

I shook her hand and she kissed me on the cheek. I remembered her doing that when I was fourteen and it had caused a lot of problems.

---

## **The Lee fortune**

### **Larry**

It took days to go through dad's business dealings. Lawrence L. Lee Enterprises was finished because dad had made it up as he went along. No one could just step into his place and take over. He did, however, have some assets. There were some stocks and bonds and some real property. There was a great deal of leased property that was all tied to the movie industry in some way or another. It seems that dad would find a good piece of property for a movie set and then he would lease it and then sublease it to the studio. That was the way that he acquired the Ranch. Some of these leases would run for several years with options to buy. I would really have to study these to decide what to do.

The Ranch was free and clear as was the Bel Air house. He owned a full block of stores and apartments in Redondo Beach and he owned the building that sat next to the pier. The Lee Ranch business office was upstairs in that building over a small café.

When I finally got a handle on all of these holdings it looked like mom was set for life and Laz and I shared a sizable estate. It didn't make up for losing my pop but it did give me lots of options.

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## **Alejandro Vargas – Baden-Baden Germany – May 9th, 1942**

Al had all of the training that he could stand. He had been drilled and rehearsed until he could hardly remember his name. He had a new, old-suit, a new, old-trunk and he had completely memorized every aspect of the mission.

His new, old-things had come from the American Embassy in Brussels Belgium. When the German army had taken Belgium in 1940, the Embassy staff had been sent to neutral Sweden but some personnel possessions and most of the cash from the safe had been 'lost' in the transfer. ABWEHR, the German spy service, had all of these things in their possession.

Al had a worn, gray suit that had belonged to a janitor, a battered streamer trunk with all of the appropriated stickers and labels and workers jacket that still had a Montgomery Ward's label in it.

Roberto showed him two of the secrets. The trunk had a double ends that counseled five hundred dollars in used bills and there was a pair of scuffed black shoes with a hollow heel that contained a cyanide pill. Roberto emphasized that it would be far better to deny the enemy knowledge if he was captured. Al knew that countries hung spies but he wasn't sure he could take a suicide pill.

His contact man in San Pedro was Sonny Gibson, who was described as a Texas redneck. Al would find him at the Rainbow cannery. The password was 'Bullshit baloney'. The response was 'better then no baloney at all'. Al wondered who made up these things.

He was to sail from Lisbon to New York where he would spend ten days in Spanish Harlem learning enough of the city to convince people on the west coast that he had been in New York for the last year and a half.

On June 1<sup>st</sup> he would travel to LA by train and then make his way to Redondo Beach where he would find a small apartment above a garage. The key to the Apartment was hidden over the window on the left side of the door. Inside the apartment was a key to the padlock on the garage and a set of car keys. In the garage was a blue 1939 Plymouth Coupe. It was up on blocks and the battery was disconnected. There was a kid's little red wagon that he could use to take the battery to the gas station to be charged.

In the cupboard in the apartment were several cans of food, a opened paper bag of flour, another of sugar and a sealed, five pound bag of rice. The rice was from Rose Farms in Sacramento California. It was laced with the shellfish toxin. As long as the rice was dry it could be handled safely.

When the time came, Al was to prepare the toxin to give to Gibson. Under the sink was a large, metal saltshaker. In the cupboard was a two pound box of salt. In the drawer was a rolling pin. The rice would be crushed and mixed with the salt. The saltshaker was to be filled and placed in the thermos compartment of a metal lunch box that was on the

counter. The lunch box would be traded for a duplicate that Sonny Gibson would provide. Gibson would ... apply ... the salt to that days run of canned tuna. This process was to continue until the rice was gone.

The mornings after the job is complete, he was to blow out the pilot light on the stove and leave the coffee pot on the stove with a burner on but unlit. In the far end of the room, he was to place a washcloth on the floor and pour the contents of the bottle of vanilla that was in the cupboard and the contents of the vinegar bottle onto the cloth and then drive to work. The empty bottles should not be left in the apartment.

In about two hours the apartment would be completely destroyed. It is very important that him keep working as long as he could. If he left he would certainly be under suspicion. He was to just keep doing the job. In six months, he was to call the number that had memorized and he would be given a new assignment.

The last detail was Al's American passport that had been expertly altered to show that he had spent his last two years in Europe, in Spain and gave no indication that he had ever been to Germany.

There was one last thing. Because food and gas rationing had gone into effect after the ABWEHR agent had left the California location, it was necessary for Al to acquire a ration book and some black market gas capons before he got to Redondo. He was given the name of a grocery store near Union Station in LA where he was to find a man named Mark and Al was to tell him that he was a friend of Tony DeMarco's. Mark wasn't an agent, he was a petty gangster and he would sell Al what he needed.

“Good luck my friend. You are paving the way for a great German victory. Hiel Hitler!”

---

## Redondo Beach – July 11<sup>th</sup>, 1942

### Chris

I had waited a respectable time before I decided to visit Laz. I knew that she was staying at the house on the cliff but since she didn't call the number that she had for me I left her alone. Now I wanted to see her and I thought that she was ready to see me.

The summer sun was low on the horizon and the ocean was sparkling in the late afternoon light when I parked near the house and walked to the front porch swing. She would know I was there and if she was ready for company she would come out.

I thought of all the years that we had been friends. More than friends, I saw that little cherub face and her eight year old smile as we played on the cliff tops. There with Bobby and Eddy and Larry, of course, and Laz and me. She was always ready for a fight that she could never win but she wouldn't back down.

When she was ten, things were different. She was bigger and she could run faster than any of us. She didn't want to fight anymore although she could have probably beaten Larry. She was devilish and she could get us into trouble faster than you could think about it but she never got the blame.

Skinny dipping at the cove when we were eleven or twelve. It was just her and me with our clothes off shivering in the cold water. She was nicer to me then and we spent hours together talking and planning our futures. She was the first one that I told that I didn't want to be a fisherman like the rest of my family. At fourteen I was the first boy that ever kissed her and she was the first girl that I ever kissed. I tried not to think of Prom night which brought so much joy and later so much confusion.

I wanted to see my future with Laz but what I saw was different. There was Laz and me and a couple of kids but the kids called me Uncle Chris and there was someone else with us. Sometimes I thought it was Larry.

I heard the door open and she came and sat beside me. She didn't say anything but she put her head on my shoulder and held my hand. The sun touched the horizon and the sparkling water turned pink.

“Laz?”

“Chris, how have you been?”

“Good, I'm sorry about your husband”

“Thanks”

“Are you hungry?”

“Sure”

We drove inland to a Mexican cafe that sold take-out food. We walked through a smoky barroom where there wasn't a single white face. As we walked past a table with two young guys, one said in Spanish,

“Hey look at the ass on that one. She’s not much for tits but she could really shake that thing”

His buddy piped in,

“I could shake her ass and she would love it”

Laz didn’t change her expression even though she had understood every word. At a counter in the back, I ordered six taco’s, a side order of jalapeño peppers and six bottles of Mexican beer. The counter man said that the beer wasn’t cold but we took it anyway.

On the way out the young guys were snickering and as we walked past Laz said loudly in perfect Spanish,

“Look at that pretty boy, Chris. He’s so sweet I’ll bet all of the boys love him. I can’t say much for his friend though, judging by the tiny lump in the front of his pants he probably has to squat to pee”

When we walked through the front door the place was howling with laughter.

“You’re an evil woman Laska Langtree Lee”

“You’ve told me that before and maybe it’s true. Now, how are we going to make this beer get cold?”

A bag of crushed ice and a bucket from Laz’s shed solved the beer problem and we sat on her couch and ate the tacos and peppers from the coffee table.

---

## **Same time**

### **Laz**

I had been expecting Chris for a couple of days. I knew that if I didn’t call, he would wait at least three months after Roberts’s death before he came to see me. To him it would be the respectful thing to do.

The truth was that I was tired of mourning. Mom Lee expected me to spend a year in widows black and she disapproved if I laughed too loud or didn’t appear too solemn. She was very disappointed that I had given up my charity work and she invited me to lunch at the club every time that I talked to her. I had mentioned this to Larry but he said that he was being put through the same thing.

When I heard the steps on the porch and the squeak of the swing I knew that it was Chris. I was still dressed in the clothes that I wore while working in the flower beds that afternoon. I thought of changing but I knew that he would take me as I was.

We sat on the swing for a while and he asked about dinner. That was funny. We drove to A Mexican dive-bar to buy tacos and beer and a couple of kids made comments about me in Spanish. Chris didn’t say anything so when we were walking out I gave them a hard time in my Spanish and we escaped before a fight started. It was really funny and it

seemed to lift our somber mood. The beer was very cold and the tacos were really good but the peppers were so hot that I could only eat one. I guess the burning in my mouth caused me to drink my beer too fast because I realized that I had three while Chris was still on his first.

---

## **Same time**

### **Chris**

She was throwing down the beer and her voice was a little slurred. I had seen her do this before when she had something to tell me but she needed to get rid of her inhibitions first.

“You know, Robert was a nice guy. He was always polite and he gave me anything that I wanted. He was ok. Poppa Lee was wonderful to me. He treated me like his daughter and he always spoiled me. He gave me little presents and told me not to tell Robert. I really miss him”

“Why didn’t he want Robert to know?” I asked.

“Oh, because Robert could be a jerk sometimes. He thought that if his dad gave me something it was because he hadn’t done it first. Poppa gave me a nice pair of gloves once and when Robert found out he bought me five pair and told me that they were much better than the pair that his dad had given me. What an ass.”

I just listened while she let go of things that she had been holding inside.

“He always wanted to know where I was and where I was going. If I went out to lunch with Maryanne he wanted to know where we went and who else was there. Who the hell did he think that I was out with? In New York an attorney that he was working with tried to get me into bed and I all but told Robert about it but, do you know what, he ignored it. That was too real, it wasn’t one of his little fantasies. If I was really screwing someone he didn’t want to face it.”

I waited while she opened another bottle.

“He was jealous of everyone. You know that he never got along with Larry but he continually asked me if we dated in high school. I think that he thought that we were doing it. When I started staying here at the house alone he was obsessed with Larry’s whereabouts. What a bunch of crap. If he was so concerned with who was in my bed, why didn’t he spend more time in it. Hell even if he was in it, he hardly ever did anything about it.”

“What?” That got my attention.

“Sex, he didn’t really like sex. He was always mad that I made him use a rubber and he always talked about having kids but Chris, I wasn’t going to have a baby with him because I knew that he would have made a terrible dad.

Oh damn, I guess I made a terrible wife. You know that I didn’t promise to ‘obey’ at our wedding. I did every thing that I did promise. Well I did some of them. Here let’s make me a marriage report card. Is there any more beer?”

She fumbled in her purse and found her lipstick. She pushed the things off of the glass top of the coffee table and started to write the grades her marriage.

“Let’s see, ‘Love’ and ‘Cherish’. Well I did love him a little at the beginning so that a ‘C’ but there wasn’t much cherishing so that’s a ‘D’. Ok, ‘Sickness and Health’. That was ok I guess its two ‘Cs’. ‘Richer and Poorer’, well we were rich so that’s an ‘A’ but we were never poor so that an ‘F’. ‘Till death do us part’ that’s an ‘A+’. Is there anymore?”

“What about the fidelity thing?”

“Oh I was never unfaithful, I never even thought about but if we had been together for years and years I don’t know how long that would have lasted.”

“So it’s an ‘A’?”

“An ‘A’ or an ‘F’ depending on how you look at it”

The beer and the tacos and the hot peppers were taking their toll on her. She was past tipsy now and she was looking vary pale.

“Laz lets wash your face and get you ready for bed. Would you like some coffee?”

I helped her to her feet and we started towards the bathroom. She got as far as the door when it all came up. For the next twenty minutes she sat with her head over the toilet and I was helpless to help her.

When she was finally quiet I washed her face and hands and then tried to get her to change into her nightgown but she was incoherent. I couldn’t leave her in her wet and filthy clothes so I just did the best that I could. I sat her on the bed and I got the shoes and slacks off. I unbuttoned and removed her wet blouse and while I was looking through the dresser for her nightgown she removed her bra and tossed it through the bedroom door.

When I got her tucked in I used a wet washcloth one more time on her face and she seemed to drift off to sleep. I emptied the bucket that the ice was in and sat it by her bed and then I went into the bathroom and did my best to clean it up. I stayed until after midnight and she was sleeping soundly when I left her alone. All the way home I worried that it had been a mistake to leave her but it was done now. I wondered how much she would remember or would want to remember in the morning.

**July 12<sup>th</sup> - 8'00 am.**

**Laz.**

I woke before I opened my eyes and I lay listening for any sounds but I decided that I was alone. I opened my eyes and the light struck me like a sharp knife. The memories of last night came suddenly back to me and I remembered the beer and sitting with my head in the toilet. I had never actually had a hang-over but I had heard of them.

*-Where is he, he must be here?-*

“Chris!” I called but no one came.

*-Maybe he's asleep-*

It took me a while but I finally sat up and put my feet on the floor. I was wearing my nightgown and my panties but no bra. I still had on socks but no shoes. My hands and face appeared to be clean but my mouth tasted awful.

“Chris!”

*-He's not here-*

There was still no answer. Soon I realized that I needed to pee and I went into the bathroom. It was fairly clean but it didn't smell very good. On the floor beside the bedroom door was my wet and foul smelling bra.

I went into the kitchen and made a pot of coffee that I took to the couch. There on the glass was the report card that I now remembered doing the night before. In the corner of the glass above the 'As' 'and Fs' written in my lipstick were two words, 'Don't Forget'.

A tear came into my eye. 'Don't Forget' ... 'Don't Forget that I love you'.

*-I won't forget Chris-*

---

After I had some breakfast I cleaned the bathroom and bedroom from top to bottom and finally I worked on the glass on the coffee table. There on the floor was a cardboard tube about a foot long. I remembered that I got it in the post office yesterday from two girls who were putting up posters. They laughed because I was wearing a blue shirt and my hair was up in a red bandana and they gave me a poster for a souvenir.

I took it out of the tube and thumbtacked it to the wall of the living room and it was just what I needed to get me going that morning.



Before noon the next day I applied for a job at the Douglas Aircraft Company on Sepulveda Blvd and later in the week I spent four days learning how to rivet sheets of metal together.

Within a week I had my own workstation where I followed a very precise pattern making, what my forewoman told me was, an elevator for a dive bomber.

Some of the girls kidded me that my work clothes looked like they came from Saks but I assured them that soon I would be as dirty as the rest of them.

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## **Alejandro Vargas – Redondo Beach – July 13th, 1942**

**AI**

I thought that the tuna might have already started their run and that I was too late to get a job at the cannery but it was still ok. I had problems in New York with the immigration people because I had been out of the country for so long. They told me not to leave town before they heard from the State Department and I wasn't sure how good ABWEHR really was at covering my past but it turned out that they did this all the time to young guys that had been away for a while. They were looking for draft dodgers. They held my passport until I registered with Selective Service and showed them my draft card. They said that I would have to file a Change-of-Address form when I got to LA.

It took a few days to learn enough about New York so I could talk about working there to people in California. The first thing that I learned was that Spanish Harlem had nothing to do with people from Spain. It was full of Porto Ricans. The next surprise that ABWEHR didn't know that there was a weeks wait to get the transcontinental train. I really thought that my assault on America was off to a terrible start.

When I arrived at Union Station in LA I went to the grocery store to find Mark. After I had my ration books I was supposed to take the Pacific Electric straight to Redondo Beach but I made a little detour. On a back street three blocks away I found a pawn shop and I asked about a pistol. The seedy character behind the counter opened a drawer and put a very poor looking .38 caliber revolver on the counter and asked for fifteen dollars.

I asked for something better and the next one was much better. It was a Smith and Wesson model 1907 hammerless .38. The guy told me that these were called Lemon Squeezer but he didn't say why. That was ok because I knew. My Lieutenant in the Spanish war had carried this same pistol and it was called that because of the way it opened from the top.

“How much”

“\$25”

I laid the money on the counter and he put a printed form and a pen in front of me.

“Just fill out the registration for the police and sign at the bottom”

I laid another ten dollar bill on the counter and he picked up the form.

“Thank you very much sir. Do you need any ammunition?”

---

Things looked about the same in Redondo as I walked from the PE station. The apartment was just across the street from the pier and would have had a view of the ocean except for the two story building across the street. The apartment house landlord's office was in that building above 'Charley's Diner'. The garage for the apartment was on the street and there was a staircase up to the front door. There were two other identical apartments in the same building. My instructions had been to go to the landlord's office first.

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## Larry – Charley’s Diner – July 13th, 1942

From where I was eating my lunch I saw a guy go up the stairs of the apartment on the end of the building across the street. At first I thought that he would just knock on the door and find no one home but he reached above the windowsill and found a key.

‘Hey Charley, do you remember Joe Morris who lived across the street for a while?’

“Yea I guess, he ate his meals here for quite a while”

“Is that him?” I pointed at the apartment.

“No, that guy’s too big to be Morris”

*-He could be a burglar but he did know where the key was hidden-*

I walked over and I guess that he heard me on the stairs because he came out to meet me. He looked familiar but I couldn’t place him.

“Are you the landlord?” he asked.

“Yes, I’m Larry Lee. What are you doing in that apartment?”

“Oh Mr. Lee, I used to work at the Lee Ranch. Are you the same Lee?”

“Yea, now why are you in there?”

The guy smiled and handed me an envelope. It was addressed to Lawrence L. Lee Enterprises and the return address was J. Morris and some P.O. Box in New York. Inside was a hand written letter.

Mr. Lee.

The bearer of this letter is my employee, Al Vargas. He is returning to his home in Redondo Beach California and I have sub-leased my Apartment at 107 1<sup>st</sup> Street Apt A to him and I have sold him the 1939 Plymouth that is stored in the garage. If you need any farther information please write to me.

Joe Morris

“Ok Mr. Vargas, this looks ok. Do you have the key to the garage?”

“I think so. There is a key lying on the counter in the kitchen”

“You say that you worked at the Ranch, how long have you been gone?”

“I left in 1938 to go to Spain ... you know... the civil war. My parents were from Spain but I grew up in San Pedro. I was in Spain until the war ended in 1939 when I came back to the states and I’ve been working in New York. I lived in Spanish Harlem. That where I met Mr. Morris but I always wanted to come back to California. I used to work at Rainbow Tuna in San Pedro and I think that they will hire me again”

*-Why did he tell me all of that? Is he nervous?-*

“Ok Vargas but the lease only goes until October so you should decide if you want to renew”

---

Back in the office I found the original lease the Morris had signed. Comparing it to the letter I couldn't decide if the handwriting matched or not. I did remember Vargas now but this guy was polite and pleasant. The guy that I remembered was surely and always seemed angry. I think the thing that seemed wrong to me was how much information he volunteered for no reason. When I dropped the lease and the letter back into the file folder, I saw the duplicate key to the apartment front door.

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### **Alejandro Vargas – Redondo Beach – July 14th, 1942**

The Plymouth had been stored up on blocks and it took me a while to get it back on the floor. The tires were a little low but I would stop later at a gas station and air them up. The battery was dead so I loaded it into the little red wagon and found a station that charged it. I used my black market gas coupons to fill the tank and then I drove to the Rainbow Tuna Company in San Pedro. I was relieved to see the dock was empty of fishing boats. If the fish were here they would be lined up to unload.

In the office I saw the same guy that had ran the place when I worked there before.

“Hi Mr. Swartz, I need a job”

“Who are you?”

“Al Vargas, I used to work for you”

“Vargas? Yea I guess I remember you. Where have you been?”

“New York but I'm back now”

“What did you work on before?”

“Everything, clean it, cook it, can it, seal it, ship it. Anything that you want”

“Ok Vargas, see Abby and she'll sign you up. We got no work now but they're coming. This morning a boat unloaded a hold full of albacore at Starkest. Everyone's out on the 209 spot and they'll be here in two days. Call tomorrow and see how we're doing.”

*-Right on time-*

---

After I got my badge I walked through the cannery. The maintenance men were getting the machines ready and there was boxes of the military labeled cans stacked high at the ends of the production lines. In the cooking area, the big ovens were being cleaned by guys in dirty white coveralls.

“Is Sonny around?” I asked a worker.

“Back there”

The guy back there had his butt sticking out of a cold oven and was fumbling for a flashlight that he'd dropped on the floor. I wasn't sure that was him so I called out,

“Hey Gibson”

“Yea”

“What kind of bullshit baloney is this?”

Gibson pulled his head out of the oven and looked me in the eyes.

“Better then no baloney at all”.

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## **Larry - Lawrence L. Lee Enterprises office - July 14th, 1942**

I watched the garage from my office window that morning and I still thought that something was wrong. I saw Al open the garage door and labor to get the Plymouth down off of the jacks. Then he put the battery in the little red wagon and walk south towards the Texaco station.

*-Why would Joe Morris have a kid's wagon in his garage?-*

After a while Al came back and started the car. He backed out, locked the garage and drove away. I tried to forget all of my suspicions but an uneasy feeling had got the best of me. I took the duplicate apartment key and walked across the street. Vargas had been gone for an hour so I figured that he wasn't just down at the grocery store.

I unlocked the apartment and took a look around. It place looked nearly unchanged from the last time that I had seen it. There was still nothing in the ice box and nothing new in the cupboard. The sitting room looked untouched so I checked the bedroom. The bed had been slept in and hadn't been made that morning.

There was a small metal trunk sitting on the floor that I tried to open but it was locked. There was some dirty underwear and socks on the floor and a light jacket was hanging in the closet.

*-If this guy worked in New York where is his winter jacket?-*

On the floor of the closet was a pair of dirty, black shoes that were badly scuffed. Out of curiosity I picked them up and looked inside. I was surprise that they were lined with soft leather and there was a **44** inside the heel. I put them back and looked closer at the trunk. It was a better quality then I first thought. I wondered why a good piece of luggage like that had been so poorly treated. I wrote down the company name that was on the lock and then I went back to my office.

*-Something is wrong with this guy. He might have bought the shoes and the trunk at a second store in New York but it just didn't add up-*

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## **Officer Cristiano Renaldo- RBPB -July 14th, 1942**

### **Chris**

At first I had enjoyed this new assignment. It had taken me out of the patrol car and had got me back the day shift. The problem was that I wasn't seeing any results. The public was being encouraged to report any and all suspicious activities but seven months after Pearl Harbor they were seeing spies everywhere. At first it had been every Japanese landscaper, gardener and farmer. Now that they had all been sent away from the coast, the police department was getting dozens of calls reporting neighbors spying on neighbors.

One woman claimed that her teenage neighbor was looking in her window at night. That call turned out to be true although it had nothing to do with national security. Another said there were suspicious late night meetings in a local garage. These turned out to be a regular Friday night poker game that had been going on for years.

There was a stack of papers on my desk and I was trying to decide if I should start at the top or the bottom.

"Hey Renaldo, you've got a customer!"

I looked towards the door and there was my old buddy Larry Lee looking a little sheepish.

"Hey Larry what's up?"

"Oh, I just thought that I'd drop by for a visit."

"Great, do you want some very bad coffee?"

"No thanks"

He was fidgeting and looking a little embarrassed. I just waited for him decide what to do. Anyway, it was better the wading through the crap on my desk.

"So how's your mother these days?" I asked being polite.

"Good, she's adjusting to the dad's passing"

"... And your sister-in-law, what's-her-name?"

"You know her name. She's good I guess but I never see her"

"You live next door to her, why don't you see her?"

"I never know when she'll be home. Sometimes she there in the afternoon, and sometimes in the evening. I see her car at the house but I never see her."

"You mean that you never try to see her. Why not, hell, we all grew up together. You used to have her on your mind all the time. Stop and say 'Hi', she'd probably like it"

"Chris, do you ever see her?"

"Sure, I saw her a couple of days ago. We had tacos and beer for dinner"

"You took her to the Prom, do you ever ..."

"Larry, why did you come in this morning?"

He told me all of his suspicions. He talked about the guy's shoes and his jacket and his luggage and the little red wagon and the letter from New York and there was no single thing that seemed out of line. A few things did bother me. Why had he told Larry his life story when it wasn't necessary, why did he have good shoes with a metric size stamped in the heel and why did he have such a good trunk?

I asked Larry for the name that he had copied from the trunk and I looked it up in a Police Lock Reference Manual. Cops often needed to open locks and this book told us how. What I found surprised me and I guess that I was talking out loud.

"Damn, it's Swiss"

"What?" Larry said.

"The trunk was made in Switzerland. I guess that he could have got it from a pawn shop in New York but ..."

I went back to the book and then went to a large toolbox in the store room. Checking the reference again I found a lock-pick that would open the lock.

"Larry I need the apartment key, I'm going to have a look inside of the trunk"

"Don't you need a warrant or something?"

"God damn it Larry, its wartime, I can do any god damned thing that I want to. I'm the Cops, remember"

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## **Alejandro Vargas – Afternoon - July 14th, 1942**

Gibson thought that the tuna might arrive as soon as tonight and he wanted to be ready. He said that I should prepare the first batch of special salt and bring it to him in the morning. The day shift started work at eight and he would meet me at the back door at 7:45.

I could sense the excitement in his voice. I really thought that he was a psycho killer and he was getting real thrill thinking about the death that were to come. He laughed and said that it was too bad that we wouldn't get to actually see the people die.

I left the cannery with a sick feeling in my belly. I knew that I was working to make things better for the poor workers of America but Sonny was insane.

*-How the hell did ABWEHR ever recruit a maniac like him?-*

When I drove away from Rainbow Cannery I took a side trip through the harbor. The channel was filled with ships and what had been small boat yards when I left now were shipyards with tankers and freighters and destroyers and cruisers on their slipways. There were huge new parking lots of graded and oiled dirt. There were thousands and thousands of cars in these lots. It was lunch time and I could see the workers on and around the ships eating their sandwiches and laughing with each other. From a distance they all

looked alike in their blue coveralls and kaki work clothes. They all wore hardhats but when I looked closer I saw that at least half of them were women. One of the things that impressed me the most was the almost a total lack of security. In Germany it was impossible to travel anywhere without being stopped and asked for your papers. Spain after the war was the same. The government didn't trust their own people to just move about.

I took the long way back to Redondo and I was surprised that the road along the cliff tops had been paved. It was dirt when I left in '38. The Jap farms were in various states of neglect. Some had crops that were still growing from the little water that they got from the fog and dew and some were neat and tended by the new workers who had taken over after their owners had been taken away. I wondered if the rumors that I had heard in New York were true. They thought that the Japs had been taken to the desert and killed.

I noticed that the fields that had workers in them were lined with cars. Why were these cars here? I stopped and asked directions from a Mexican working with a hoe.

"Hey senior is this the road to Redondo?"

"Si" he said pointing the way that I was going.

"Senior, who owns all of these cars?"

"We do"

"These are your cars?"

"Si, they belong to these workers"

I drove on into Redondo but instead of stopping I drove towards LA. I remembered Sepulveda Boulevard as a good road that the trucks used to bring goods from LA but now it was lined with huge new factories. This was the war industry and it was running full blast. Again, the new parking lots filled with workers cars, Women in coveralls with bandana's around their hair. Smiling faces and laughing people.

Back in Redondo I stopped at the A&P and bought a few groceries. I needed to be up early tomorrow to get ready for my big day. Tomorrow I would start a revolution that would change the face of America. Of course that line of bullshit had been repeated to me over and over by my ABWEHR trainers.

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## **Larry and Chris – Charley’s Diner – Evening - July 14th, 1942**

“So what’s our plan?” Larry asked.

“There is no ‘our’ Larry. I’m taking over your investigation and you’re going home”

“Ok, what’s your plan?”

“Well, I was going to have a look inside but he’s obviously in there and he doesn’t look like he’s leaving so I’ll have to wait”

“Why don’t you just knock on his door and tell him that your going to look around. After all, you are the Cops”

“Oh sure. Then if he’s a good guy, he’ll complain to my boss and I’ll have to stand in the corner. If he’s a bad guy, he’ll shoot me before I can draw my gun and then I’ll be really pissed at you”

Larry laughed.

“Look Larry, you can help me. If you’ll watch the apartment in the morning and give me a call when it looks like he’s leaving, I can get what we need but we have to do it my way, understand?”

“Sure Chris but you have to tell me what your doing, I’m your childhood buddy remember. Please don’t treat me like any guy off of the street.”

“Agreed. Tomorrow, my partner, Joe Beck and I will each have a radio car. When Vargas leaves in the morning, Joe will follow him and keep me informed. I’ll take a look at the apartment and the garage. Joe will let me know if Vargas is coming back.

It I don’t find anything, I’ll tell Joe and we’ll let this guy get back to his life and you’ll go back to yours. If he looks suspicious, we’ll watch him and let the FBI know so they can do more checking on his background. If he’s a bad guy, we’ll arrest him and throw him in the slammer.”

“Can I go with you?”

“God damn it Larry ... oh alright little boy but if I say run then you run like hell”

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## **Larry - Lawrence L. Lee Enterprises office – 5:45 am, July 15th, 1942**

I was too excited to sleep and I came to the office very early. I noticed Laz’s car in her driveway and I thought about what Chris had said about me making an effort to see her. It was already light when I looked across the street at the apartment. I had even brought a pair of very good binoculars with me but now I felt a little foolish using them.

The light in the apartment surprised me and I looked at my watch to confirm how early it was. I could see Vargas moving around the kitchen. I assumed that he was making breakfast but he never sat down. Whatever he was doing, he was doing it while standing at the counter.

I waited until 6:00 am before I called Chris. I was surprised when he answered on the first ring.

“Renaldo”

“Chris it’s me”

“Good morning sunshine, did you sleep late this morning?”

“What?”

“Ok, Joe’s around the corner from you and I’ve already driven by to check on our guy. I saw his light come on at 4:30 but you’re doing a good job Larry”

“Thanks, I think”

“You’re ok Larry, your doing exactly what I asked you to do. Call me back when he starts to move but it may not be for hours, ok?”

“Ok, bye”

At twenty ‘til seven the light in the kitchen went off. I was dialing Chris when Vargas came out and locked the front door.

“Renaldo”

“He’s moving. It looks like he’s going to work because he has his hardhat and he’s carrying his lunch box.”

“Joe’s got him. I’ll be there in five”

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### **Officer Cristiano Renaldo- RBPD – 6:45 am - July 15th, 1942**

Larry was standing in the street when I drove up to the apartment. I waved and went up the stairs. I was trusting Larry that there was no other occupant of the apartment and I opened the door with the duplicate key.

I was careful not to disturbed things and I went straight to the bedroom. I debated whether to turn the light on or not but I finally did. I checked the closet and found the black shoes and the trunk. Using the lock pick, I took several tries to get it open but finally the smooth click testified to the high quality of the Swiss made lock.

The inside looked completely normal. There were several pairs of underwear and socks. Four clean shirts and pair of dark gray pants. There were no papers of any sort. No passport, draft card, nothing. I checked the labels on the clothes and saw that they were all from Gimbals department store in New York. That was odd that all of his clothes were bought at the same place and by the looks of them they were all bought at the same time.

I looked carefully at the trunk for any hidden compartments. I used the tape measure that I had brought and I found two hidden compartments. My first inclination was to rip it open but I still didn’t have enough evidence to do that so I took several minutes looking for latches. Pushing a little nub under the trunk lining by the left hinge cause the end panel to pop open.

Inside I found about three hundred dollars in used bills. That, in it’s self, wasn’t a crime. Lots of people hid money. I pushed the nub beside the right hinge and that popped open. The only thing inside was Vargas passport. I looked through the visas and stamps to see when he left the country and when he returned. He had told Larry that he came back from

Spain over a year ago. The smudged US Customs stamp seemed to confirm that but it didn't look right. Part of the ink seemed to be a little different color. I wet my finger and rubbed the stamp. Some ink came off on my finger and I saw the actual date of his reentry. It was just four weeks ago.

I closed and locked the trunk and I looked at the shoes. I had seen a demonstration in a training seminar on hiding things in shoes. I looked for a hidden compartment in the toe, a pocket along the sides and finally I twisted the heels. One opened to reveal a compartment and inside there was a small blue pill. I recognized it from the training. It was a cyanide pill. This guy was a spy.

I knew that Joe would have him under surveillance so I wasn't worried about him getting away. I went to the kitchen and saw something frightening. The smooth counter top was covered with little bits of what looked like broken rice and there was lots of salt everywhere. There was an open bag of rice with about a third of it missing. There was a big box of table salt with about the same amount missing.

*-Damn, you don't mix salt and rice at five in the morning for no reason. This had to be some bad shit-*

I was just going out the door when I saw something on the floor. I picked up the torn corner of a small cardboard box. Vargas must have torn it off while trying to open something. The piece was green with just part of a large yellow letter showing.

I knew what it was because I had a box just like it in my desk. It was the top of a box of Remington bullets. Vargas was carrying a gun.

---

## **Larry – 7:08 am**

Chris came out in a hurry and didn't close the door.

"Chris, you left ..."

"Leave it. If you're coming with me then let's go but remember to do as I say!"

As we sped away, Chris turned the big Police radio on and nervously drummed his fingers on the microphone waiting for it to warm up. When we heard static crackle through the speaker he called the cops.

"RB Dispatch ... car 10"

Nothing

"RB Dispatch ... car 10 ... come in"

"RB Dispatch ... go ahead car 10 ..."

I knew that anyone with a mobile radio receiver could eavesdrop so the police spoke in code.

“RB ... Probable code 66 and code 11 ... have Sheriffs meet me code 2 at Rainbow Cannery San Pedro ... wait for contact ... inform feds ... inform car 9 ... confirm”

The last thing that Chris did was to tell the dispatcher to get the crime lab guys over to the apartment and take pictures and get samples of the salt and rice in the kitchen.

The dispatcher read back Chris’s message and signed off. I looked baffled and Chris smile at me.

“You did good work Boy Scout, this guys a bad one.”

“What was all of the radio stuff?”

“Code 66 is national security, code 11 is suspect is armed, I asked the dispatcher to call the LA County Sheriff department and have them send a car without a red light and siren to the cannery and to wait until I’m there before they do anything. Because all national security belongs to the FBI I told him to let them know. Usually it takes them several days to respond to anything. Car 9 is Joe. I wanted to let him know that the gloves were off with this guy”

---

### **Chris – 7:36 am**

We pulled into the Rainbow Cannery parking lot and I could see Joe waving to me.

“He’s just gone inside. He waited in his car until a big guy in white coveralls got here. What do you want to do?”

“Are the Sheriffs here yet?”

“Haven’t seen them”

“It’s a joke but are the Feds here”

“Sure, maybe their hiding in the bushes”

“Ok let’s take a look. Larry you wait by the door and send the Sheriffs in when they get here”

“I rather go with you”

“God damn it Larry, do as you’re told!”

Joe and I were both in plain clothes and we hung our badges on chains around our necks. We went through the wide double doors and he went left and I went right. There were several workers with hardhats standing and talking when I saw Vargas and the guy in the white coveralls. They were talking as Vargas handed the guy his lunchbox.

*-That’s the handoff. We’ve got to get these guys now!-*

Joe was moving fast down the left side when the guy in white saw him. He made a move towards his hip and I shouted.

“POLICE! HANDS UP!”

He hadn’t seen me as he concentrated on Joe and I saw his gun come out,

“GUN! GUN!” I shouted.

The guys talking by the door dove for the floor, Joe fired a shot and the other guy fired a shot at me as I saw Vargas jump behind a big post. I didn't hear the next shot but something hit my left forearm like a baseball bat.

*-DAMN THAT HURT!-*

Two more shots and something slaps my right ear. All that I could feel then was a real fear of dying. I was trying to get behind something, anything, but my left arm wasn't working. I got my gun up and shot until it was out of bullets. A round ricochets off the floor near me and I look up to see if I was his target. I'm so full of adrenaline by then that I didn't feel the pain. I saw the bad guys head look a little lopsided and then a spray of red fog came out of his ear. He hit the floor like a rag doll and I knew that he's done.

The doors behind me slammed open and I heard more cops,

“SHERIFFS! HANDS UP!

A gun came bouncing out onto the floor from behind the big post and Joe had Vargas on his face and was putting on the handcuffs. A Deputy helped me to my feet and he hollered to his partner to call an ambulance. I looked around the room and there, sitting on the floor with his legs spread apart was Larry.

His face was as white as a sheet and I started to laugh when I realize that his shirt was covered with blood. The Deputy and I got on our knees in front of him and blood was spurting from a bullet wound in his chest. The Deputy didn't know what to do, I don't know what to do and my buddy was bleeding to death in front of me. I guess, like the little Dutch Boy, I did the instinctive thing and I stuck my finger into the bleeding hole. That scared hell out of me because I could feel his heart beating with the end of my finger and I thought I had stuck it in too far.

There were people screaming and running, Vargas was laying face down in a big puddle of his partner's blood. I could hear the scream of the ambulance siren and in the door comes two men in expensive suits holding big pistols and shouting,

“FBI HANDS UP!”

*-Thank god, the Feds had come to save us all-*

---

**Linda Lee – Bel Air – 8:32 am  
Mom**

I wondered who was calling so early.

“Mrs. Lee, this is the admitting desk at Harbor General Hospital in Wilmington. Your son Lawrence Lee has been admitted with a gun shot to his chest. The heart team in with him now and you probably should come right away”

*-Oh my god-*

My first thought was to get the best doctor that I could think of.

“Call Dr Nate Silverstein at Cedars-Sinai, he knows all there is to know about my son. I’ll be there as soon as possible”

I called Laska and told her what had happened and then I drove to Wilmington.

---

**Laska Lee – the Palos Verdes house – 8:36**

My shift at Douglas didn’t start until four so I had plenty of time and I was still in my pajamas when the phone rang,

“Laz, Larry’s been shot, he’s at Harbor General, I’m leaving now bye”

*-What? Shot? My god. Hurry ... wait ... got’ta get dressed ... HURRY!-*

---

**Chris – Harbor General – 9:37**

We went screaming to the hospital with Larry on a stretcher and me with my finger stuck in his chest. He had been unconscious when we went into the ambulance but after he lay down for a few minutes his eyelids were fluttering and he tried to sit up. The medic held him down and I tried to keep my finger still. He opened his eyes and saw me and for an instant he looked like he smiled. His lips were moving and I leaned forward to listen.

The ambulance screeched to a stop, the doors flew open and we all ran for the Emergency Room. When the heart team was ready they eased my finger from his chest and I was pushed from the room. It took a while before anyone noticed that I was shot in the arm but I understood there confusion.

I had a broken left forearm and a missing earlobe. That was the slap that I felt when a bullet passed a half inch from my head. I went into surgery and watched while they cleaned up the shattered remains of my arm bone. I wasn’t brave enough to do it without

medication but they used nova-cane like they do on a tooth. Joe came in and we talked while the doctor set my arm and put it into a plaster cast.

“How’s Larry?” I asked.

“Don’t know, he’s been upstairs ever since we got here. An Ambulance from Cedars-Sinai came screaming in a few minutes ago and three guys in green scrubs went upstairs”

“Are any of the family here yet?”

“Yea, looks like his mother and wife or sister or something. His mom’s really upset and the sister looks grim but she also looks tough”

“So what happened in the shoot-out Joe?”

“Hell, Renaldo you were there”

“I had my head down ducking bullets”

“Yea when you hollered at the guy he forgot about me. Thanks”

“Your welcome, so was it you that got him?”

“No it was your guy. What’s his name? Vargas”

“Vargas shot him?”

“Oh yea, in one ear and out the other”

“Do we have him now?”

“Oh no, not us lowly local cops. The Fed’s have him and we’ll never hear from him again”

“Ok, thanks Joe, I’ll be out as soon as they fix me up”

---

I went straight to Mrs. Lee and gave her a hug. She was quiet by now and thanked me for being there. She had known me for years but I wasn’t sure that she knew who I was. Laz looked shaken and her face was gray. When I got to her she put her arms around me and kind of collapsed against me. I took her to some seats in the back of the waiting room and we sat together.

I had my arm around her with her head on my shoulder when she saw the cast on my arm.

“Chris your hurt”

“Yea”

“Were you with Larry when he was ... injured?”

“Yes”

“What happened?”

I gave her the quick story and told her how I had told Larry to stay outside. I didn’t want to believe that it was my fault that he had been shot. I wanted to believe that it was just bad luck.

*-Stop lying to her Renaldo ... it was your fault-*

“Laz it was my fault. I should have never taken him with me.”

“It’s not your fault”

“It is”

“Chris, it’s not your fault”

She snuggled against me and said nothing. Mrs. Lee had gone somewhere and the waiting room was empty. Just Laz and me holding each other, holding our breath and holding on. She started to cry. Laz had hardly ever cried in all of the time that I had known her and I had known her for our whole lives.

---

### **Laz - Harbor General – 10:21 am**

Chris held me and tried to comfort me. He told me the story of the shooting and he felt guilty for taking Larry with him but I knew what Larry could be like when he was obsessed. There was no way that Chris was going to go without him.

Suddenly, I had the feeling that Larry was going to die. I felt the tears come into my eyes and I tried to hold them back.

*-He’s going to die-*

*-NO! HE’S NOT!-*

*-Robert died, Larry’s going to die’*

*‘-STOP! – He’s going to live!-*

*-Poppa Lee died-*

*-NO!-*

*-Chris nearly died-*

*-No! Chris is strong and tough and he can run fast and jump high and he’s not afraid of anything-*

*-Everyone’s afraid of something-*

*-Chris isn’t ... he can climb down the cliff and swim way out and catch abalone with his bare hands-*

*-Where’s Bobby Ortiz now? People die in war-*

*-Bobby’s fine his mother said that he was in San Diego-*

*-he wont be in San Diego for long-*

*-STOP! he’s fine-*

*-Where is Eddy?-*

*-I don’t know where he is and I worry about him-*

*-Larry’s going to die-*

“He’s not going to die!” I said out loud.

“Of course not” Chris said and he held me tighter.

---

### **Larry - Harbor General – 12:40 pm**

I still had my eyes closed but I could hear noise from somewhere. I was just starting to realize that I could feel and hear. I had absolutely no memory of the last hours. It wasn’t like being asleep, it was like being dead.

I shifted a little,

*-DAMN! That hurt-*

I heard footsteps and a woman's voice say,  
"He's waking up ..."

I felt a pinprick in my arm and the light faded.

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### **The waiting room - Harbor General – 2:35 pm**

A distinguished man with grey hair and wearing green scrubs walked into the room and held his arms out to Linda Lee. He kissed her on the cheek and then addressed everyone.

"I'm Dr Silverstein and I've just left Lawrence Lee. He's in stable condition although he's still sedated. He was hit in the chest by bullet fragments that probably ricocheted off of a floor. There were three fragments, one of which penetrated the wall of his heart. That has been removed and the damage repaired. He is out of danger from the wound but the risk of infection remains high. He will be in the ICU for several days and I'm afraid that you will only be able to see him through a glass window. Linda, you can go inside but you will have to scrub and wear a gown and mask. I have to ask that you don't touch him.

Now do you have any questions?"

---

### **Laz - Harbor General – 6:15 pm - July 15th, 1942**

July 15<sup>th</sup> was the longest day of my life. I had lived on the precipice until we heard that he was alive. His mother spent a long time with him and then I saw him through the window. He was dopy and at times he seemed glad to see me and at times he looked confused.

Chris was with me for most of the day and he looked exhausted. I didn't know how I was going to drive home and I told Chris that I needed a ride. We drove in silence and we were nearly home when I realized that he couldn't use his left arm to hold the steering wheel. He would hold the wheel still with his knee when he shifted gears.

At the house I went straight to my bedroom and changed into my pajamas, robe and slippers. When I came out I could smell bacon and eggs cooking in the kitchen and there was a glass of wine sitting on the table in the breakfast nook. I laughed a little for the first time that day watching Chris doing his one-armed act.

We both felt better after some dinner and the wine started to relax me. Chris hadn't said a word for a long time but he poured himself a glass of wine and started to talk.

"You know he did a really good job sniffing this guy out. If he hadn't get suspicious we wouldn't have got him until he had done a lot of bad things. Larry did good. I told him that he couldn't go with me but you know how he is"

Chris sat for a while saying nothing and then he continued.

"He was supposed to stay outside and send the Sheriff 's in when they got there but I guess that he heard the shots and came to help me. He was always trying to help me and you and Eddy and Bobby. He was a pain in the ass sometimes but how could you not like a guy that would do anything for you. He was so in love with you that he couldn't think of anything else. We were all in love with you Laz. Bobby, Eddy, me and especially Larry.

When I saw him inside the cannery he was sitting on the floor, flat on his butt with this look of surprise. I laughed when I saw him. I thought that he had just had the crap scared out of him and he was trying to get his thoughts together.

Then I saw the blood and his gray face and I was afraid that he was dead. I got the bleeding slowed down and we were in the ambulance and the siren was screaming and he said something to me. I leaned forwards and he whispered in my ear."

"What did he say" I asked.

"He said ... tell Laska ... tell Laska that I love her ..."

---

I cried more and I drank more wine and Chris said nothing. Finally he got up to leave.  
"I'll pick you up in the morning. I'll take you to the hospital and after you see him you can drive your car home. What time should I come for you?"  
"Nine, nine would be good. Do you want to stay here tonight?"

He thought a while and then said,

"No but I do want to ask you for something"

"What?"

"Laska, I want you to marry Larry"

---

Redondo Beach Police Department – July 16<sup>th</sup>, 1942

# Los Angeles Times

July 16th, 1942

## FBI Cracks Spy Ring on Waterfront

San Pedro:

In a bold early morning raid, federal agents aided by local law enforcement, confronted enemy saboteurs in a waterfront factory yesterday in San Pedro. A gunfight ensued and the two suspected men were killed. One innocent bystander was wounded but his name and condition was not released to protect his privacy.

“What a bunch of crap”

“At least we were mentioned as ‘Local law enforcement’ usually they claim all the credit”

“It says that both guys were killed, that’s not right”

“Since when has ‘right’ and ‘FBI’ gone together. They don’t want the Kraut’s or the Jap’s know that they have one of their guys.”

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**VARIETY.**

**Larry Lee Jr. Wounded in a Bazaar Accident.**

**Dateline Hollywood July 15, 1942**

**Larry Lee Jr., son of the late Hollywood entrepreneur Lawrence L. Lee was injured yesterday in a freak accident that has left him in critical condition. Lee was in San Pedro on business when he inadvertently walked in on an FBI raid and he was shot in the chest by a stray bullet.**

**Lee was rushed to Harbor General Hospital where he was treated by the famous Doctor-to-the-stars and longtime family friend Nathaniel Silverstein. Dr. Silverstein issued a statement saying that Mr. Lee was in guarded condition.**

## **Officer Cristiano Renaldo- RBPD – 7:45 am - July 20th, 1942**

“So what good are you to me?” the captain asked me.

“I can keep taking the ‘suspicious character’ complaints”

“Yea but you can’t follow up on them. Hell, I can’t let you drive with one hand”

“I guess that I can answer phones”

“Well I’m glad that you see it that way because if I had mentioned it first you would have pitched a fit”

“It’s only six weeks and then the cast comes off”

“Sure and another two weeks of rehab. You’re in the office for the summer Renaldo so get used to it. Now, listen here, you and your partner did a hell of a job on that Vargas thing. The feds took all of the credit but I’m putting a letter in your records and telling it like it is.”

“Thanks Captain, did we find out any more about the guy?”

“The feds took everything. They even cleaned out the apartment including all of the furniture. Mac in the lab had a roll of film that he took and they got that.”

“So we got nothing?”

“Not exactly, he had the samples of the rice and salt in his pocket. He sent it to the LAPD lab and he got the results Friday. The salt was salt and the rice on the counter was rice but the rice in the cupboard was laced with some exotic toxin that the lab though could kill a herd of elephants. It is really some bad shit.”

“So Captain, Vargas had the poison but didn’t give it to his partner and when they got into a shootout with us, he shot his own guy. What do you make of that?”

“It sounds like he changed his mind. He had the poisoned rice in his kitchen but the lab guy found a grocery receipt in his trash that confirmed that he bought a new bag of rice the night before. He went through the process of mixing the rice with salt and giving it to his partner at the cannery. The big guy, Sonny something, must have thought that he had something very incriminating in his hand that morning or he wouldn’t have shot at you. I think that Vargas shot Sonny because he wanted to change sides and he may have gotten away with it. Instead of being hung as a spy, he may be making a deal with the fed’s right now to help catch other spies but that, we will never know. Anyway, it’s the feds problem now”

“Captain when the cast comes off I want to enlist in the army”

“Just submit the request form on the first of the month and the chief will let you know”

“I’ve submitted the form on the first of every month since Pearl Harbor and he’s turned me down every time”

“So what’s your point? Redondo needs cops. We haven’t had a single new recruit since the Japs attacked. You and the rest of the young guys will get your release when the department is fully staffed and we have some guarantee that it will stay that way. Now, pick up that pencil and charge out to your desk and attack the phones”

## **Laz - Palos Verdes Hills– Summer of 1942**

I went to see Larry every day that he was at Harbor General. I visited in the morning and built dive bombers in the afternoon. His mother visited in the afternoon and Chris often dropped by in the evening. After the danger of infection passed Larry was moved to a private room and we could actually touch each other.

He was always so glad to see me and if I was late he worried. When I sat beside his bed he would reach for my hand. I suppose in the back of my mind I was thinking about Chris's request that I should marry Larry. He certainly made no effort to hide his affection towards me and I had let down my defenses towards him. When we were kids he had been so pushy that I was put off and I got in the habit of pushing him away. Now I just let things go.

When he could go for short walks I put my arm around him to steady him. When I sat next to his bed he held my hand. It just became normal to touch him and I included him in my thoughts. After a while it didn't occur to me to not see him. If I had something else to do I always let him know and I tried to make it up to him.

Chris came by to see me one evening and I spent all of my time telling him about Larry. Maybe I was just taking the easy way out and I knew that I would have to make a decision someday.

I had some good news and some bad news that summer and Mrs. Ortiz delivered both. The bad news was that Bobby was fighting on the island of Guadalcanal. The papers were filled with the story of the battle but we were never sure what was truth and what was propaganda. I knew that despite anything that the papers said, my friend Bobby was in deadly danger.

The good news was in a letter from Miss Sata. She hadn't been shot and her body dumped into a mass grave. She was in the Manzanar Relocation Camp in the California desert. She wrote that the camp was primitive but adequate. She lived in a dormitory with other single woman and she spent part of her day teaching school. She said that they could order things from the Sears Roebuck Catalog and they got some news from the Lone Pine Gazette. She knew that the Fujimora's were in the same camp but she hasn't talked to them. It became apparent from her letter that she didn't know about the deaths of Poppa Lee or Robert. Mrs. Ortiz gave her my address and I promised that I would write soon.

Larry came home from the hospital with orders to take life easy for a while. He had arranged to see Dr. Silverstein for a final checkup and he asked me to go with him.

That visit changed his life.

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## **Office of Dr. Nathaniel Silverstein – September 28, 1942**

### **Larry**

Laz and I drove my Cadillac to Dr. Silverstein's office on Wilshire Blvd. and I couldn't skip seeing the house where Larry's Sea Food Grill had been. Although the restaurant had closed I had decided to renew the lease and the building was bringing in a tidy sum of money.

The Doctor office was elegant and I asked Laz if she wanted to go in with me but she chose to read a magazine. Nat had been a close friend of Pop's and he and his wife were quite active in the Bel Air Country Club.

He listened to my heart and then he had an assistant wire me up for an EKG. When that was over I sat in his office and he gave me the results.

“Larry you have recovered very well and I can't hear even a trace of the heart murmur.”

I was confused,

“Why would getting shot change my heart murmur?”

He looked at me with a little smile and a little confusion.

“Didn't the Harbor Hospital Doctor tell you that I fixed it?”

“No one said anything”

“Larry, when I repaired the bullet damage to your heart, I also fixed the hole in the heart-wall that was causing the murmur.”

“So what does that mean?”

“It means that your heart is normal.”

“So I can do anything that anyone else can?”

“Well if you couldn't play the piano before than you probably still can't” he said with a chuckle.

“Can I join the army?”

“I'm sure that you can pass the physical but I doubt if they would take you with your history, not to mention that big scar on your chest”

“But I could pass the physical?”

“Yes”

“Hmm ... damn ... damn damn damn... thank you Doctor, Mom says she wants to have you and your wife over for dinner”

---

### **Laz – Same day**

Larry was acting strange when he came out of the doctor's office. He had a quizzical look on his face and I could tell that his mind was going a thousand miles an hour.

“What did he say?” I asked.

“He said I was fine”

“Just ‘fine’?”

“Let’s go to Zardys for lunch”

“Do you think that we’re dressed for it?”

“Sure, it lunch, besides the name ‘Larry Lee’ still opens doors in Hollywood”

---

Larry was right, the place was crowded but the owner came out and shook Larry’s hand and talked about how well he had known pop. We got a nice table by the window and Larry ordered a bottle of red wine.

“You’ll have drink most of this Laz, you know how I do with wine”

Something was wrong and I just waited. He looked so smug but I wouldn’t ask, knowing that he could never keep anything to himself for very long.

“The doctor said that I am perfectly fine. So fine that I can pass an army physical”

“What?”

“That what he said. He said that he fixed my heart murmur and now I’m as good as anyone else”

“Larry, you can’t go into the army. You’ve been shot and you’ve had open heart surgery”

“What looks good for lunch?” he said with the same smug look on his face.

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## **Laz – Winter of 1943**

Larry wanted so much to be in the military and they didn’t want him. Chris wanted to be in the military and the Redondo Police wouldn’t release him. Why did the guys in my life want to go to war? It must have been a guy thing because I wanted both of them to be home and safe.

Larry tried the army and they were sympathetic but wouldn’t take him, the Navy and the Marines didn’t want him. He even tried the coast Guard but it was the same story. With each rejection he became more determined.

Finally, he was desperate and contacted Colonel McMillan at the Office of Internal Communication (Motion Picture Industry). His dad and brother had been given army commissions for little more than who they were and who they knew. After all, he was Larry Lee Jr. and the army owed him something.

To my surprise and Larry’s surprise and anyone else who cared, McMillan took him. He was commissioned a 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant (Restricted duty) in the army reserves and was assigned to the Office of Internal Communication (Motion Picture Industry)

Larry was ecstatic and savored every minute of 'knife and fork school'. His office was on Wilshire Blvd where he was the aid-de-camp of Lt. Colonel Orvin Moore who was also a vice president at Metro Pictures.

The first few days Larry learned a lot about these special soldiers. For one thing, everyone was from Hollywood and nearly all were still working at the regular job in one way or another. The office had a schedule of Bond Tours and USO shows that would go somewhere during 1943. Larry was responsible for securing talent for these shows. This almost always meant dancing girls and comedians. He realized that his work load was light and scheduled deadlines were a long way away.

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That summer while I kept building dive bombers, Larry accompanied a Bond Tour across that country. His stars were five wounded and decorated Marines from the battle on Guadalcanal. He was happy to be doing something for the war effort but he found the Marines difficult to work with. Three of them were so depressed that he thought that they should be in a hospital. The other two were hopeless alcoholics. He constantly worried about the physical and mental health of Bobby Ortiz. His experience on Guadalcanal would have been the same as the men on his tour.

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## Laz – Christmas 1943

A week before Christmas, Larry got a few days leave and my boss gave me three days off. Larry and I had become very close and I thought that it was time for a more ... intimate relationship. We already kissed often, we held hands, he called me everyday, we probably ate half of our meals together and on occasion we made out. We did everything that boyfriends and girlfriends did except act like we were in love.

We acted like we had been married for years. We were comfortable with each other. I really needed to know where this relationship was going. Larry had been in my life for nearly all of it and I had always alternated between liking him and loving him. When we started high school I pushed him away because he seemed so young and I was ready for something or someone new. I suppose that that was one of the reason that I married Robert.

After that period of my life ended I went back to what I knew best and that was Chris and Larry. Chris would always be in my heart but not as my husband or soul-mate. He would just always be there for me. Larry was different now. He was more grownup and I had to admit that life without him was not possible. I really had fallen in love with him and I needed for him to decide if we were going to go forward together. If he was going to break my heart I wanted him to do it soon so I could get started with the healing. If he felt the same way that I did then we needed it to get more ... intimate.

I had a friend from Beverly hills that owned a very nice and very romantic cabin at Lake Arrowhead and I had spent a weekend there with a bunch of people when I worked at Paramount. I called her and asked if I could use the cabin for a couple of days and she kidded me about some secret love tryst. I told her that it wasn't a secret and it needed a kick in the rear.

I told Larry more than asked him what my plans were. He was doubtful and full of questions.

“Just the two of us, alone?” He asked

“Yep, just the two of us”

“Well, won't people talk?”

“I don't care”

“Are there separate bedrooms?”

“Eight or nine of them”

“Ok, I guess that it's alright”

*-If your counting the bedrooms fella, maybe I've got the wrong guy-*

My friend had assured me that the cupboard was full of canned goods and that there was plenty of booze, wine and beer. Then she laughed and wished me luck.

Tuesday morning, Larry showed up with a car full of coats and stocking hats and gloves. I guess a guy from the coast thought anyplace that it might have snow was near the arctic. We pooled our gas ration coupons and set off for the mountains. It was a beautiful clear day and we drove for miles through farm land and orange grooves. We stopped for lunch in the not-so-picturesque town of San Bernardino.

The road up to Arrowhead was narrow and at times scary. It was called the Rim-of-the-World highway and the problem was the edge of the rim was on my side of the car. Other than that, the forest and the views were beautiful.

The 'cabin' was as I remembered. It was a rambling two story Swiss cottage that was hidden in the pines and sat at the edge of the lake. When I had been there in the summer there had been a sailboat moored at the private dock but now the little pier was covered with ice.

Larry looked nervous as he unlocked the front door. I had this funny image in my mind of him going into a motel room with a girl and he was afraid that someone would see him.

"Where do you want the cases?" he asked.

"Just leave then there, we'll decide later. Build a fire in the fireplace and I'll find us some wine"

It was nearly dark when the fire was glowing and we were sitting close on a big leather sofa. We were on our second glass of wine and Larry was more relaxed.

"Larry, where do you see us going?"

"I guess we will drive around and look at the lake. Tomorrow we can find a nice place of dinner"

"Oh, you are so sweet, you really know how to impress a girl"

"Do I sense sarcasm?"

"No honey, I just want to sit here and wait for the right man to come and sweep me off of my feet"

"I'm not much of a foot-sweeper am I?"

"You could be if you tried. You used to be like Tom Sawyer trying to impress Becky Thatcher but that went away"

"Laz, these are such unsettled times. I didn't think that you would want to make any big decisions while our future was so uncertain."

"Why not. What shall we wait for? The end of the war? The end of the decade, Halley's Comet? How about the end of the Century? Oh, I know what we can wait for. How about waiting for you to decide what to do next"

Larry got up and refilled our wine glasses. I thought that he was looking for some courage.

"I have always thought that someday we would be married and raise a family. That image was shattered when you married my older brother, my much older brother. I really didn't understand why you married him. I thought that you were too good for him but then I

decided that I was wrong. I decided that it was my vision of the future that was wrong. Just hoping for things didn't make them come true.

After you were married for a while, I had some really bad thoughts. I hoped that you would leave him. I thought that you would get tired of his pettiness and his ego driven life and you would go to Reno and get a divorce. When he was killed I was torn by the guilt of my thoughts about my brother and by the secret relief that you were free. I'm an awful person Laz. I was glad that he was gone and you were free"

"Why didn't you make more of an effort to get me honey?"

"Guilt, shame, insecurity, fear, all of those things and then something happened. After I was shot you seemed to change. You became nicer ... no, that's not the word ... you became more available to me."

"Yes I did"

"Why"

"Because I realized that you were nearly taken from me. Chris held me in his arms in the hospital waiting room and all I could think of was how empty my life was going to be when you died and I knew that you were going to die. I didn't want Robert to die and he died. I didn't want Poppa Lee to die and he died, I didn't want you to die and you were very near death.

And then you came back. I had another chance. You were going to live and we were going to be together. Then you were obsessed with joining the army. You wanted to go off on some big white hoarse and be a hero, a knight in shining armor. You were going to get your ass shot off on some godforsaken island in the Pacific. God-damn-it Larry Lee, when are you going to make up your mind about your life?"

"We could get married"

"What?"

"We could get married, you and me, will you marry me?"

"When?"

"Well, when the war is ... no, how ... how about next Christmas?"

"How about tomorrow?"

"We can't ..."

"Why not?"

"Mom would never forgive us if she couldn't plan the wedding"

"Hmm ... your right. How long will that take?"

"Thanksgiving"

"You might marry someone on Thanksgiving but it wont be me. How about Easter?"

"When is Easter of 1944?"

"Just a minute" I looked at the calendar on my check book in my purse.

"April 9<sup>th</sup>"

"Laska Lara Langtree Lee, will you marry me on April 9<sup>th</sup>, 1944?"

"Will that make me Laska Lara Langtree Lee Lee?"

"I think so"

"Ok, now snuggle up and give me a fiancée kiss"

So we cuddled on the couch in the dark and I waited for some passion. The kissing and touching was nice but he was still pretty restrained and I had enough of self-denial.

“Larry, you do you know that women, especially women who have had regular ... marital relations ... have certain needs?”

“Sure, I guess”

“And do you know how these needs are satisfied?”

It was too dark to see him blush but I felt his face get warm.

Larry was fidgeting around and I knew that he was trying to be diplomatic.

“Laska, I know that you are an adult woman and you have had your own ... social life. You know that I have my own life and I experienced many things while I was living in the frat house at USC. We should just put all of that behind us as part of our private lives and you and I should start new together”

Wow, he was about to do something special. I thought that he might make some grand gesture like sweeping me up in his arms and carrying me up the stairs. I could see tragedy in that so I just stood and pulled him towards the bedroom.

“You would be surprised if you knew the things that I’ve done” he said

I had my doubts but in the dark in the big feather bed I was pleasantly surprised that he had learned some tricks and he performed them very well.

---

It was very pleasant to wake up with the bright winter sun streaking through the bedroom window. Larry looked so peaceful laying beside me and I tickled his nose until his eyes opened. I hoped that he would smile and he did. After considerable more cuddling I had to go to the bathroom. I tossed off the covers and watched his face as he saw me without my clothes for the first time since we were ten years old.

---

The stay at the cabin ended too soon and while we were driving down the mountain I knew that he wanted to confess something. He had said that what we had done in our previous lives should remain private but I knew that he was dying to tell me about his exploits.

With just a tiny bit of encouragement he told me the story of his week in Mexico with ‘Molly Malone’. Part of the time he was blushing and part of the time he was bragging. Of course when he told me that our past lives were private I knew that eventually he would tell me everything. He had never been able to keep a secret from me.

When he was finished, he waited for me to tell him something but I didn’t give him any details. He asked about my high school boyfriend and I told him the truth which was that

nothing permanent happened. He asked about my time at Paramount and I told him several stories about the movie industry but again, the truth was nothing really happened. We didn't discuss Robert but he asked me about Chris.

"You went to the Prom with Chris"

"You know, you were there"

"Did you and Chris date much?"

"Not many dates but we saw each other often"

"Did you ... get close ..."

"Ok Larry darling, lets be clear about Chris. I love him, I always have and I always will but not the way that I love you. I don't love him like a brother either. I love him like a friend that holds onto my heart. It's funny that he has actually touched your heart with his finger. Larry, don't ever be jealous of Chris and never question his love and commitment to me. That just the way that it is and has been all of our lives and it will be for the rest of our lives. Understand?"

"No but I can accept that. I think that I'll ask him to be my best man"

Larry laughed and said,

"I'll ask him to be my best man if you don't want him to be your maid-of-honor"

---

Friday morning I was up early because I had dive bombers to build. I was just out of bed when I heard the porch swing squeak.

*-The bee has come to check on the flower-*

I stuck my head out into the cold morning air and saw Chris sitting there,

"Come in quick before we both freeze"

I was still barefoot and in my nightgown when I gave him a quick kiss and sent him into the kitchen to make coffee.

"So how did the trip to the mountains go?" he shouted as I scrambled into my work coveralls.

"Good"

He brought a cup of coffee into the bedroom while I brushed my hair.

"Just good?"

"Good enough" I said sipping my coffee.

"Are you going to tell me?"

"A lady never tells but you might deduce something by the smile on my face"

"Good for you honey, what else"

I held up my left hand and pointed at my bare finger,

"Something's coming here soon"

For that I got a big hug and a kiss on the cheek. For years Chris had always kissed me on my lips except when I was engaged or married. Now I got the kiss on the cheek. It was his way of showing respect.

I was just about ready to leave for work when I told him one last secret,  
“Larry told me about his one big affair in college and then he waited for me to tell him about my ... experiences”

“Did you tell his about us?” he asked.

“Hell no, I’m not stupid. Got to go, I love you, sweetie”

I kissed him on the cheek on the way out the door.

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## **The Wedding Planning**

### **Laz**

I had already had my big, white wedding with Robert and I told Larry that I didn't have the emotional energy to go through the planning and all that went with it. I said that I would marry him on Easter Saturday if he would tell me the time and place. I knew that mom Lee would go overboard for Larry's wedding the way that she had for Robert, and I just couldn't go through that again.

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### **Larry**

I told my mother that Laz and I wanted something small with just close friends and family. I suggested that we do it at the Bel Air house or at the ranch. She agreed and asked each of us for our guest list.

*-This isn't going to be so hard-*

A few days after New Year, we had dinner with mom and with our after-dinner drinks she gave us a copy of the guest list. There were over two hundred names on her list. I'm sure that my mouth dropped open and Laz just stared off into space. She had erected her defense mechanism against any wedding planning and she was just ignoring everything.

"Mom, how could we have so many close friends and family?"

"Now Larry, if you really want to exclude any of these people just remember that they all love you or at least they all love me and your dad and I can't hurt their feelings."

"Let me look at your names ... who is Abraham Greenberg?"

"Why dear, Ethel and Abe Greenberg might as well be your aunt and uncle. He was one of your father's closest friends. You've met them, he's Louie B. Mayer's CFO. He's the money man at MGM."

After I looked at her list I realized that it would be impossible to reduce it. What I decided to do was to change the focus of the wedding. By this time mom knew that the back yard at the Bel Air house was hopelessly too small and she was amenable to change.

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## **Easter Saturday of '44**

### **Laz**

I really never thought that Larry and mom Lee could pull off the biggest Hollywood wedding of the year but they did. The ceremony was held on a set at Paramount Studios.

They had wrapped up a film just a few days before and they agreed to leave the set intact for our nuptials. They even arranged for the wedding guests to use a side gate and to park near the ceremony.

Larry and I were married by a California Supreme Court Justice on the band stand pavilion in the town square of a farm town in Iowa, at least it looked like Iowa. The guests sat on folding chairs in the street and after the ceremony was over, the stage crew took twenty minutes to convert the square into a dance floor with a hundred cocktail tables.

There were over three hundred guests including a bus load of Rosie-the-Riveters dressed in blue coveralls. These special people had worked the graveyard shift building dive bombers and now they were toasting one of their own with very good Champagne.

It was the damndest wedding that anyone could remember.

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## **The rest of 1944**

### **Laz**

By the end of 1944 Douglas Aircraft didn't need as many dive bombers and I retired knowing that I had done my absolute best to win the war. Like millions of my fellow Rosie-the-riveter's, I simply got on with my life.

Larry was still very busy with the army but we had talked about a new venture for after the war. Between the two of us, we planned a new subsidiary of Lawrence L. Lee Enterprise called 'Larry Lee Home Builders'. Larry would be the CEO and I would be the President of the new company.

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## **1945 filled with bad news and good**

### **Larry**

I had waited what seemed like years for the good news that Miss Sata was released from the Manzanar Relocation Camp on January 11<sup>th</sup> 1945. Although I'm sure that she didn't want us to go to any bother for her, Laz and I were in the parking lot of Santa Anita Race Track when she stepped off of the government bus. She seemed a little older but she had lost none of her quiet dignity. She didn't hug Laz or me but she did shake my hand.

She was quiet as we drove to the ranch where she found her room unchanged. Mrs. Ortiz wouldn't settle for a handshake and she took the slender woman into her arms and kissed her on the cheek. After a dinner of Mrs. Ortiz's best cooking Miss Sata gave us the news that Mr. Fugimora had died in the august heat of a heart attack. Eddy had joined the army and served in the Nisei Battalion, the famous 100<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the 442<sup>nd</sup> Infantry. He had spent most of 1944 fighting in Italy and then was sent to Southern France where he was killed in action in November. Laz and Mrs. Ortiz cried openly and I really felt the loss. I can't say that I was surprised but I was very angry that he gave his life for a country that seemed to want no part of him.

Miss Sata told us that Mrs. Fugimora, would be released the following week and she planned to emigrate to Peru to live with her sister. She asked Miss Sata to pass on her request that we exercise our option to buy the Fugimora farm.

Miss Sata saved the good news for last,

"I know that this will surprised you. I am engaged to be married."

"That's wonderful" Laz exclaimed.

"Tell us about this man, I hope that he doesn't plan to sprit you away from us"

For the first time since she stepped off of the bus at Santa Anita, Miss Sata smiled.

“No Lawrence, I don’t plan to be spirited away very far. My Fiancé is a fellow internee named Mikio Saki. He will be returning to his home in Gardena next week. He is an accountant with a degree from UCLA. Before the war he had a good accounting practice in Gardena and he hopes to resume that business.”

“Will you be moving away from the ranch?”

“Yes but Gardena isn’t very far”

---

After dinner Laz and I took Miss Sata to the office where we talked to her at great lengths about the plans to incorporate Lawrence L. Lee Enterprise and to form a subsidiary called ‘Larry Lee Home Builders’. I asked Miss Sata or the future Mrs. Saki to become the Chief Financial Officer of the new company.

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### **Chris – March 1945**

On the first of every month, I gave the chief my request to be released from the Police Department so I could join the army and every month I was turned down. By March, the Germans were on their last legs and we all expected that the war in Europe would be over in just a few days. The war in the Pacific wasn’t going so well so I persisted with my requests.

Near the end of the month the chief called me into his office for what I assumed to be my monthly refusal. I was wrong.

“Renaldo, I have a job offer that might interest you. The State Department wants to borrow you for two years to go to Germany and help organize a new police force. The Nazi’s will probably surrender within a month and the only police that will be available are the army MP’s. The State Department doesn’t want to leave the Nazi’s in charge so they need a new civilian PD. You’ve been after me to send you to war for the three years so get your ass over there and make the Redondo Beach PD proud”

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## **The Summer of '45**

### **Larry**

The war in Europe was over but the Japanese were fighting as hard as ever. The Office of Internal Communication (Motion Picture Industry) had delayed their planned USO tour to the Pacific bases from May until June in hopes that Japan might see the inevitable end to the war. There was no indication, however that they wouldn't still be fighting in 1950 so the tour was on.

I was going with the tour and my job was to make sure everything ran smoothly and to stay out of the way of the entertainers. We would be at several rear area bases for a day or two and we would never get anywhere near the actually fighting.

I had been on one other tour of Pacific bases and it had deeply embarrassed me. It was one thing for me to wear my army uniform in the states but it was entirely different to be around real warriors. I know when they looked at me they saw a young, healthy, guy with a feather bed job. They had seen the horrors of real war and I had seen the comfort of a safe spot surrounded by pretty girls. I wanted to show them the bullet scar on my chest but that would have been a joke. They had scars that made mine look like a skinned knee. The one base that was on the schedule was the one that worried me the most. It was the B-29 bomber base on Tinian. Between shows, these guys would fly to Japan and all of them wouldn't come back.

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The tour went well and the troops really made the USO people feel welcome. I stayed out of sight as much as possible. We flew to our last base, the bomber base on Tinian, on August 3, 1945.

I sat in the front row of seats in our C-54 aircraft and I could see the pilot and co-pilot through the open cockpit door. With about an hour to go the sergeant in charge of the passenger compartment asked me if I wanted to visit the cockpit. I didn't want to feel embarrassed but the guys flying the plane looked like middle-aged airline pilots so I went up and introduced myself.

I got the quick tour and then the pilot twisted some dials on the radio.

“Lets see what's happening up at the Empire this morning.”

“What's that?” I asked.

“The Empire, you know, the Empire of Japan. We can hear the bombers talking on the radio”

I liked that idea but all I heard was static.

“That's odd, usually we hear lots of chatter but nothing today. Maybe the weather's bad over the targets.”

The base was comprised of raw dirt with hundreds of tents. There was a two mile long runway and hundreds of parked bombers but the only thing flying was us. Our first show went well but I noticed that none of the troops housed in the tent city at the far end of the runway attended the show. I checked the schedule to see if they were scheduled for their own show but I found nothing.

When I asked the local service officer about the missing troops he just smiled and showed me a sign that was nailed to a post near the base road. I didn't understand it but all of the locals smiled when they saw it.

**NOBODY KNOWS**

**INTO THE AIR THE SECRET ROSE,  
WHERE THEY'RE GOING, NOBODY KNOWS.  
TOMORROW THEY'LL RETURN AGAIN,  
BUT WE'LL NEVER KNOW WHERE THEY'VE BEEN.  
DON'T ASK US ABOUT RESULTS OR SUCH,  
UNLESS YOU WANT TO GET IN DUTCH.  
BUT TAKE IT FROM ONE WHO IS SURE OF THE SCORE,  
THE 509TH IS WINNING THE WAR.**

**WHEN THE OTHER GROUPS ARE READY TO GO,  
WE HAVE A PROGRAM OF THE WHOLE DAMNED SHOW.  
AND WHEN HALSEY'S 5TH SHELLS NIPPON'S SHORE,  
WHY, SHUCKS, WE HEAR ABOUT IT THE DAY BEFORE.  
AND MACARTHUR AND DOOLITTLE GIVE OUT IN ADVANCE,  
BUT WITH THIS NEW BUNCH WE HAVEN'T A CHANCE.  
WE SHOULD HAVE BEEN HOME A MONTH OR MORE,  
FOR THE 509TH IS WINNING THE WAR.**

We gave our last show on the 5<sup>th</sup> and we were scheduled to fly to Hawaii the next afternoon. The morning of August 6<sup>th</sup> was one of the strangest that I have ever lived through. There was a feeling of excitement and dread in the air. I had breakfast in the Officers club and all I heard was speculation about the 509<sup>th</sup>.

Every B-29 on the base sat in it's parking spot. There was no one flying from any squadron except maybe the 509<sup>th</sup>. Our flight was pushed back until five but three bombers landed in mid afternoon. They taxied to the end of the runway and parked at the 509<sup>th</sup>.

Within twenty minutes rumors were flying. The Jap's had attacked our planes with a death ray. We had attacked the Japs with a death ray. The 509<sup>th</sup> was dropping bombs filled with the bubonic plague on Japan. The one that we liked the most was the three planes had landed in Tokyo and had brought back the Jap Emperor to surrender.

The time came for us to leave and I don't think that anyone noticed. I was as filled with curiosity as thy were but we left for Hawaii knowing nothing.

When we landed in Hawaii we learned of the two Atomic bombs that the 509<sup>th</sup> had dropped on Japan and when we landed in San Francisco we learned that the war was over.

Laska met me the next day at Union Station in LA. She said that the Office of Internal Communication (Motion Picture Industry) had called to say that after I turned in my final report and expense invoice I was being transferred to the army inactive reserve. Effectively I had been fired.

That night we had a great dinner at the ranch and we drank a bottle of wine. I dug into my suit case and showed her the souvenir that I had brought back from my last tour.

It was a caricature of me done by an artist who painted all of those naughty pictures on the nose of the bombers. It was me leaning over looking backwards through my legs the way a football center looks back at the quarterback. There on my bare butt were two big tattoos. On my left cheek was my army nametag and on the right cheek was another nametag proclaiming,

Captain Lawrence L. Lee, USAR  
*Rear Echelon Weenie.*

*Wally Matthews 509<sup>th</sup> CG*

## **And what of the rest**

Bobby Ortiz survived the battles at Tarawa, Iwo Jima and Okinawa and in January 1946 he started college at USC on the GI Bill. He became an attorney and worked in Labor law until 1956 when he was elected as the California Assemblyman from Torrance.

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In February 1946 while working in Munich, Chris met an English girl, who was a newly graduated attorney that was there to help sit up the new court system. In April, 1947, in St. Margaret's church in Leicester England, Cristiano Renaldo married Miss Ginny Bois. They returned to Redondo and bought a home in the Palos Verdes hills where they raised three daughters and remained the Lee's best friends.

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'Larry Lee Home Builders' became a reality in late 1946 and Laz looked all over California for suitable land to buy. Her best pick was several thousand acres of alfalfa fields along the San Gabriel River east of Long Beach airport. Although there wasn't a drop of water for miles around she named the project 'Lakewood'.

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When Larry and Laz's son was born in 1947 they agreed that he should have a name that connected him to friends and family. After some discussion he was named Lavern Lucas Lee. Larry didn't question her choice of Chris's middle name. He had long since stopped worrying about the connection between his wife and his best friend.

In 1949, Lara Lynn Langtree Lee was born and the world was never quite the same.

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## Authors Notes

The inspiration for this story comes from a few distant memories that I have of World War II in Southern California. My family arrived from Texas in late 1942. They came for the war work and to wait for my dad to be drafted. I suppose, that at five years old, all I have are a few memories for that first year but I have many of the three years between our arrival and the end of the war.

All of the characters in this story are fictitious but I have borrowed names from past friends and acquaintances. For example, my two best friends when I was fifteen were Eddy and Mikio who was Japanese. In this story, the character named Eddy is Japanese.

Mikio and his family had been interned during the war so his memories of that time were of a roasting hot or freezing barracks surrounded by barbed wire, somewhere in Oklahoma. He did have relatives who served in the Nisei Battalion, the famous 100<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the 442<sup>nd</sup> Infantry. How he turned out to be such a good and normal kid is still a mystery to me.

The Redondo Beach area was a special place of my parents. Raised in central Texas, they were drawn to the ocean. We lived inland a few miles but they never missed an opportunity to stand on the old fishing pier and look at the blue Pacific.

The Palos Verdes hills are a peninsula that form the square corner of the Los Angeles megalopolis. Now they are completely covered by upscale and very upscale homes. The original development was Palos Verdes Estates that was started in the late '20's and early '30's. The upper left of the square is Redondo Beach. The lower right side is San Pedro. The left and bottom of the square are towering cliffs leading to the ocean. It can be one of the most spectacular sights in California.

When I first saw them in 1943 they were covered mostly by abandoned Japanese farms. There was a dirt road along the cliff-tops leading from Redondo to San Pedro. It was forbidden for civilians to use that road at night. There were several large gun emplacements to guard against any unannounced enemy that might sail up with an invasion fleet.

The small abandoned farmhouses had been overrun with the remains of flower gardens that had been so dear to their interred owners. The lilac colored bougainvillea that had been patently tended before the war had ran wild and provided a beautiful display as it devoured the old houses. In the spring the hills were completely covered with wildflowers. It was a beautiful sight that obscured the tragedy that they hid. Of course there was no sympathy at all for the 'dirty Japs' that had been hauled off somewhere so the world would be safe for us 'real Americans'.

The pier in Redondo was a special place for me. It was there that an old man, who was like my adopted grandfather, took me fishing. I should mention that the 'old man' was probably in his early forties but in the eyes of a little boy, everyone looked older.

On the street beside the pier was a café called Larry's. There was a story that went with the place. The café was only open for dinner on Friday and Saturday nights. There were four or five booths and several counter stools. The customers had no choice of menu. They had to eat what Larry fixed. Reservations were made by writing your name onto a calendar that was nailed to the front door. Customers learned to write in ink so no one could erase their reservation and write in their own. My mother and father waited for weeks for the opportunity to eat fried halibut and green beans but they said that the wait was worth it.

My dad worked in the aircraft factories and the ship yards in San Pedro and he was never drafted. My mother and her sister raised me and my cousin Peggy and we all spent hours on the beach at Redondo.

My mother was raised on a Texas farm with four brothers and three sisters. My grandparents were great readers and they passed this on to their children. They all read the classics and any of them could recite Shelly and Lord Byron and Longfellow by heart.

A somewhat strange memory I have of my mother and my aunt Claire is the two of them standing at the end of the Redondo Beach pier facing a howling wind and watching a angry gray sea while taking turns quoting lines of poetry.

The lines that they quoted are etched in my memory forever,

*I remember the black wharves and the slips  
And the sea-tides tossing free  
And the Spanish sailors with bearded lips  
And the beauty and mystery of the ships  
And the magic of the sea*

H.W. Longfellow

Laska was one of my mother's favorite poems and by the time I was six I could recite it by heart.

So here is a story from fragments of my boyhood memories and lots of my imagination. I wanted the characters to be strong and weak, good and bad, filled with confidence and racked by inner doubts and fears. In other words, I wanted them to be like most of us.

You may be curious about the plethora of names that start with the letter 'L'. When I returned from the Air Force with my new English wife, our neighbors were a couple with five little daughters. All seven of them had first, middle, and last names that started with the letter 'L'. I thought that it was so odd that I decided to use it in this story.

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The last line of the story mentions the birth of Lara Lynn Langtree Lee. I like this little girl and her parents, so I left a little teaser about her impact on the future. Perhaps someday she will be a fictional astronaut or senator or bank robber or the first woman on Mars. Whatever she becomes, she will, as the Chinese philosopher says, live in interesting times.

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