

BUNKER HILL BLUES  
(Ghosts of Bunker Hill II – A Howard Hamm Story)

by

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*Howard Hamm didn't believe in ghosts. At least that's what he'd been telling himself ever since he watched Poltergeist as a kid. On the other hand, if there are no such thing as ghosts or vampires or werewolves, his kid self would ask, why do we have words for them? He was still asking.*

*And if there were no such thing as ghosts how come he hadn't slept since he'd moved into his new house? Was he really hearing voices in the night or was it just the photos of that girl with the saucer eyes haunting him?*

*Strange thoughts to have as he watched the firefighters use the Jaws of Life to pull a man from his 2009 Toyota Tacoma pickup at 3<sup>rd</sup> and Hill, near the new Angels Flight funicular railway in the Bunker Hill section of L.A. Philip Marlowe had hit Angels Flight in The High Window, The Little Sister and The King in Yellow. And though it might sound silly, I hoped he was keeping an eye out for Howard now. In spirit if not in the flesh.*

*“Accident,” Detective Bowen said. She had called Howard, knowing he’d want to be there.*

*He wondered if it really was an accident. Accident or not, he thought he might have caused it to happen.*

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A week earlier, Howard had moved into his new house and was trying to reconcile the antique furnishings with his modern lifestyle. He circled the Victorian writing desk in the study, hot tea from the samovar on the credenza in one hand, Surface Pro in the other. He set the Surface down on the desk, next to the framed photo of the girl on the swing behind this very house—the girl whose eyes were haunting him. Glared at the Surface. It didn’t quite fit the antique décor left over from the previous owners. Something flitted by just outside the gauzy white curtains. Probably one of the neighbors walking in the fog-shrouded autumn air, maybe one of those damn film crew people from up the street. Or maybe a kid cutting across his lawn. He didn’t want to be that *old guy*—of thirty-three—chasing kids off his lawn.

He stepped to the window, watching a woman through the sheer curtains, wondering if she could see him there, whoever the hell she was. Hard to tell much about her even through the light fabric of the curtains. A middle aged white woman, in her fifties, maybe sixties. Attractive. Well put together. She seemed to have an inordinate interest in the house—maybe she was from the film crew. Maybe they wanted to film here? Or, maybe she was some uptight neighbor spying on the new black resident, even in L.A. In the olden days, when our house—Howard’s house—was built he wouldn’t have been welcome in this Carroll Avenue neighborhood, nor the Bunker Hill neighborhood where the house started life in the late 1800s. No, black people certainly would not have been welcomed on Bunker Hill till it went downhill after World War I.

Howard opened the front door, careful to step over the stain just outside on the porch. He could have had it removed by now. He'd chosen not to, at least not yet.

“Hello,” he said, eyeing the long caravan of movie trucks, honeywagons, caterers, grip trucks and motorhomes lining the street. “Can I help you?”

The woman startled from her reverie. She was well dressed, but not expensively so, JC Penney's not Nordstrom's.

“I'm sorry,” she said. “You must think I'm trespassing.”

Howard didn't say anything, still wondering if she was scoping out the new black guy on the block.

“Those movie people, they didn't want to let me through.”

“They're always filming something here, or so I'm told,” Howard said. “That TV series, *Charmed*, part of Michael Jackson's *Thriller* video. All sorts of things.” He shook his head. He'd been warned about the filming. Carroll Avenue was filled with vintage Victorian homes that had been moved from Bunker Hill. That made it a very desirable filming location right near downtown. Howard wondered how desirable that made it for him.

She looked past Howard to the house.

“They act like they own the place,” Howard said. He stared at her.

“Why are you looking at me like that?” she said.

Howard realized he'd been staring. “You look familiar.”

She walked across the lawn to the bottom of the stairs that led up to the porch. She looked up at him. “I used to live in this house.”

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Howard might not have believed in ghosts, but they were everywhere if you knew where to look for them: There are more things in heaven and earth, and all that jazz. Not creatures in white sheets like Casper, not malevolent apparitions like in *Poltergeist*. But ghosts of the past, ghosts of who we were and who we thought we wanted to be. Ghosts of our lost dreams. In some ways those ghosts are always gaining on us, aren't they?

And more ghosts, like the ghosts of Raymond Chandler and Philip Marlowe and John Fante and his alter ego Bandini. Ghosts of all the movies filmed here on Carroll Avenue and on Bunker Hill, film noirs like *Criss Cross* with Burt Lancaster, *Cry Danger* with Dick Powell. Movies that show what these places looked like back in the day.

Howard smiled. He *knew* this woman—sort of. The girl from the pictures that were haunting him, keeping him up at night—a *ghost*. He invited her inside. “Watch your step. Try to avoid that stain.”

The stain—the stain was me, or at least where I'd been shot—another *ghost*. My best friend, Howard, bought my house after I had no use for it anymore. Actually, he bought it from my wife, Nicole, lock, stock and vintage furniture, reproductions, paintings and *ghosts*, included at no extra charge. As well as several old photos I'd found in the walls of the house, left there from before it was moved.

The woman stepped over the port wine stain, stumbling on a medium-high heel. Howard caught her before she fell. Entering the foyer, her eyes opened wide—those same saucer eyes from the photos that were haunting him. A little older, a little crinkly around the edges. Laugh lines of course, because wrinkles are only the residuals of smiles, right? She drank everything in. “It's almost the same. The furnishings are different and you've spruced it up, but it's just about how I remember it.”

He asked her to sit in the parlor—the living room. He returned a few moments later with one of the framed photographs of her as a young girl and two cups of tea. My favorite, the one of her on the swing in front of the house, being pushed by a middle-aged man. In the background, one of the new, tall office towers dwarfed the house, casting a long diagonal slice of shadow across the girl and the man. A neighboring house sat on roller-dollies, waiting to be moved to a new location. Workers in dungarees and men in suits stood by a '68 Dodge Charger with a black vinyl top, chatting, pointing to the girl's house, talking animatedly about something. Howard handed it to her. She just stared at it. And stared. And stared.

“That’s me,” she said, her voice cracking slightly, a wistful tear forming in the corner of her eye.

“I know,” he said.

“How can you tell?”

“The eyes. Same eyes.”

“I guess there’s some things that don’t ever change, even as you get older. You’re good.”

“I’m a private detective, I notice things.” He handed her a business card, sipped his tea.

“You’ve been keeping me up at night.”

“What?”

“Your pictures. There’s three in the house that I’ve found. They’ve been *haunting* me. I keep wondering who the girl in them is and what happened to her.”

“I guess that’s the detective in you.” She clutched the photo tighter. “We had to move out pretty quickly. I guess some things got left behind. This one was taken right before we moved. Right before the accident.”

“Accident?”

“My parents were killed by a drunk driver.”

“I’m sorry.”

“It was a long time ago.”

Howard set his tea cup down. “There’s more photos upstairs.”

“I’d like to see them if you don’t mind.”

Howard sprinted up the stairs two at a time. He brought two more framed photos back with him. One of the girl, younger than in the swing picture, with a boy, older than her, in front of the house in what seemed like better times. Smiles. Playing. The third was a portrait shot of the girl in three-quarter profile. Even from the side her eyes had a certain ethereal quality. She took them from him, stared at them lovingly. Now the tears streamed down her face. He pulled a pristine monogrammed HH show-handkerchief from his pocket, offering it to her. She took it, dabbing her cheeks.

“I’m sorry. I guess seeing the house, these pictures, it’s all very nostalgic. Very emotional. Brings back so many memories.”

“Who’re the other people in the photos?”

“The man pushing me on the swing is my father. And the boy in the other picture is my older brother, Larry. He was several years older than me.”

“When did you live in the house?” Mr. Detective talking.

“In the 1960s. They uprooted us so they could build that nightmare development they call the New Bunker Hill. Around 1969 I guess we were forced to move, but my parents died just before that. I had—have—fond memories of this house and our family in it. Those were the good times. After that—”

“What made you decide to come here today?” he said.

“Oh, I’ve been thinking about it for a long time. I knew they moved the house instead of tearing it down, but I didn’t know where till recently. I remember watching them hoist it with a humongous crane onto these big rolling things—”

“—Dollies.”

“—So they could haul it away. I think it was the last house standing. My dad didn’t want to sell. They thought he was holding out for more money. I don’t think so. I think he just loved the house, the location, everything about it—you could see City Hall from our back porch. But I’m not really sure. I was very young—just a kid. When my husband died recently I decided to track down where our old house had been moved to.” Her eyes looked past Howard, deep into the house. “Do you mind if I look around?”

Howard gave her a tour of the house. Or more accurately, she gave it to him.

“Oh, this was our playroom,” she said on entering Howard’s office at the back of the house. “My brother and I would play board games here. And build forts there. We scratched our names in the wood in that corner.” She walked to the corner, bent down. “I bet it’s been buffed over so many times now it’s long gone.”

She got down on her knees, brushing her fingers across the carved names in the floor. Across carved letters that read “Pamela and Larry.” I’d always thought they were boyfriend and girlfriend, not brother and sister. Either way, I never buffed it out.

“It’s still here,” she said, and you could see the excited little girl in her. “Do you mind if I take a picture?”

Howard nodded. She pulled out her iPhone, snapped three pictures of the corner of the room.

“I feel like I’m invading your privacy.”

“It’s okay, Mrs.—”

“Treadwell. But when I lived in the house it was Cardin.”

“Pamela Cardin?” He put two and two together from the name carved in the floor.

“Yes.” Pamela Cardin took a deep breath, held back a sob. “I’m sorry. It just brings back a lot of memories. Mostly good. It wasn’t long after the accident that we moved.”

“You and your brother?”

“Yes. But we went to different foster families and after a while we lost touch. I haven’t seen or heard from him in decades. I don’t even know if he’s still alive,” she said. “Can I see that picture again, the one of me on the swing?”

He handed it to her. Her eyes appraised it lovingly.

She finished her tea. “Well, I should be going. I’ve imposed on you long enough. Thank you so much.”

He walked her to the door, dodging unpacked boxes from his move. “Come back any time. Really.”

They stood on the porch. A loud crash up the street had them both turning toward the line of movie trucks.

“Mr. Hamm,” she said, haltingly. “I want to hire you.”

“What for?”

“To find my brother. I can pay, I’m not asking for any favors.”

Howard shifted his feet. “I’ll think about it.”

He walked her to a late model Honda Accord at the curb. She made a U-turn, as the far end of the street was blocked to through traffic by the filming. He was about to turn and go into the house when a man who’d been gardening across the street waved at him and jogged over.



“You’re the new neighbor?”

“Howard Hamm.”

“Norris Bradley, I live right across the street.” He put his hand out. They shook. “I’m not much on baking cakes and such for new neighbors, especially since my wife passed. But let me be the first to welcome you to the neighborhood. And if you run out of Scotch, well I might be able to help you out there.”

“Thanks, Mr. Bradley.”

“Norris. If you need anything just bang on my door. I know how it is moving into a new place, you can’t find anything.” He pointed at his house across the road. He looked to be in his mid-seventies and had the craggy face of experience, like a well-aged politician. A full head of wind-blown, steel-gray hair, flopped down on his forehead. He brushed it off his face, revealing the echo of a scar. Howard figured him old enough for Viet Nam. “Gotta get back to my garden, but I’m sure we’ll be bumping into each other.”

“Sure thing.”

Howard slowly closed the door, the latch clicking into place. A huge table arrangement of multi-colored flowers had been left on the entry hall console by Amanda Reisner, the real estate agent. Howard ran his finger along the dust on top of the console, circling the flowers. Because of certain legal entanglements he’d had a long escrow—the house went on the market last spring and it was already October—so the place had a fine layer of dust on everything.

“Welcome home,” he said. “I hope this isn’t an unhappy house.”

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But the house had seen some unhappiness in the past, being uprooted from its foundations in Bunker Hill and carted over here to Carroll Avenue, along with several other old

Victorians. The murder of one of its previous owners—me. Hey if a dead William Holden can narrate *Sunset Boulevard*, I can narrate this tale. My wife—Nicole—and her boy-toy-friend are in jail, awaiting trial for that murder. And now Howard knew that another set of previous owners had died in a car accident.

He sat in the parlor’s Jean Dunand art deco chair. Tawny, warm golden hour sun streaked in, bathing the vase of roses on the small end table in a feverish light and ringing them with fire. He held the picture frame, stared at the girl in the photo. She stared back.

Time slipped away, like the disappearing blur of a dream. The light outside the window morphed from tawny to gray twilight and finally into total blackness, halos of light blossoming from the old-fashioned streetlamps and amber glows spilling from the windows of the neighbors.

Howard grabbed the Surface Pro, typed in “Larry Cardin.” No hits, at least not in the proper age range. “Lawrence Cardin.” Nothing.

“What the hell happened to you, buddy?”

He closed the Surface, reached over and turned on the light. Grabbed his smartphone, and, late as it was, texted Pamela Cardin: “I’ve decided to take the job. I’ll help you find your brother.”

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“Ghosts, I don’t believe in any damn ghosts,” Howard muttered, sitting across from LAPD Detective 1 Erin Bowen in the Angels Flight Café, next door to Angels Flight. Angels Flight wasn’t the real Angels Flight, having been moved here from its original location. And the Angels Flight Café wasn’t the original Angels Flight Café that you see in the movie *Cry Danger*. I’m sure neither Howard nor Bowen knew or cared. But I wondered if anything in L.A. was original anymore or was it all like some flimsy movie set, here today, only to be struck the next

day, moved somewhere else, repurposed or recycled. I wondered if the people were like that too. Was there anything real or original left in L.A.?

He'd called Bowen. Asked if she'd look up Larry Cardin for him, see if he had a sheet. He didn't really need to see her in person, but he wanted to. She wore her usual *uniform* of flat shoes and tailored pant suit. Howard hated pant suits, call him old fashioned. Even a chauvinist. But it looked good on her. Everything looked good on her, even her blue police uniform. Normally he would have asked her out by now. Something held him back. Maybe because of the way he'd met her—busting Nicole and her boyfriend together right here in this café—they'd just settled into this limbo of a relationship.

“You look uptight,” Bowen said, picking at her sourdough roll.

“It's the house.”

“Moving into a house where my best friend was killed would freak me too.”

“It's not just that. It's this.” He pulled out the picture of the girl on the swing, set it on the table so she could see it. “She knocked on my door yesterday.”

“Who is she?”

“She grew up in my new house. And she's the sister of the guy I asked you to look up.”

“Speaking of which...” Bowen pulled out a sheaf of stapled papers. “Your guy's criminal record. It's long and colorful.”

“Now maybe you can get me his address?”

“Sure. We're here to protect and serve. I guess this is the serving part.”

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Tyrone Gladis lived in the Dolphin Villa, a Section 8 Housing unit in Hawthorne, L.A.'s South Bay. Hawthorne's known as the home of the Beach Boys. Howard didn't think it looked

much like it had when they lived here. Gladis' unit was in the back, down a long, crumbling driveway. The stucco building with a cracked blue plexiglass dolphin on the front looked like some 1960s builder's romantic but cynical idea of L.A. That dream had burned out a long time ago.

“Tyrone Gladis?”

“Who wants to know?” someone said from behind a closed door, which was behind a steel security screen. Howard flashed his PI license at the peephole. Tyrone had come up on Larry's sheet as a Known Associate. And unlike Larry—who even Bowen hadn't been able to locate—Tyrone was easily found.

He opened the door. Tweaker eyes stared at Howard. He didn't invite Howard in. They stood on either side of the threshold, like two fighters waiting for the other to cross the line and start something.

“You remember a kid named Larry Cardin?”

“Larry. We hung together.”

“Know where he is today?”

“Why?”

“His sister is trying to find him.”

“And she hired *you*?” Tyrone burned a look at Howard.

“This ain't the 1950s anymore, bro.”

Tyrone's eyes closed. He relaxed for a moment, taking a drive down memory lane.

“Maybe he don't want to be found.” The attitude returned, the cruise down memory lane was over.

Howard pulled out a computer printout, glanced at it, even though he knew what it said. “Looks like you and your homie got into some trouble back in the day. Petty theft. Burglary. Boostin’ cars.”

“Burglary, that was a bullshit beef. We broke into one of them houses on Bunker Hill that was going to be moved. Took some old brass and copper fittings to sell. No big deal.”

Tyrone grabbed at the paper. Howard snatched it back.

“I got your card. If Larry wants to call you he will.”

Howard headed back down the driveway. A chunk of the blue dolphin cracked and blew off in the wind. It looked like the Dolphin Villa would crumble into dust some day and not too far in the future.

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Howard and Pamela Cardin’s footsteps clicked and clacked on the paving bricks of Olvera Street, L.A.’s oldest street. Decorations for *Dia de los Muertos*, the Day of the Dead, were going up. Leering skulls, lots of them. Skull candy, skull beads. Plain old skulls. Howard hoped it wasn’t an omen.

He’d hung around outside Tyrone’s for a while, listening in on Tyrone’s phone conversations via a nifty little app for spying on cell calls. Just a few minutes after Howard had *left*, Tyrone called Larry. From there it was easy to get an address on the mysterious person at the far end of the line. Larry’s house was one of those ticky-tacky, low-slung fake stucco jobs on a couple acres of scrub, out in the far reaches of Lancaster, which was in the far reaches of L.A. County. The kind of remote place meth cookers liked. He hadn’t been happy to see Howard at his door.

“I’m so excited,” Pamela said.

“I don’t want to rain on your parade, but sometimes these reunions don’t always go as you might hope.”

“I’m not even convinced he’ll show up. But I have to think positively.”

It had taken some doing, but Howard had convinced Larry to meet his sister for the first time in decades. He agreed to meet in a very public place. They settled on Olvera Street. After a stint in the army, Larry had spent much of his time drifting, doing odd jobs and handyman work off the books. He went off the grid because he wanted to escape his past. Start new. And because he believed in every conspiracy there was, from black helicopters to the Masons taking over in the New World Order.

Pamela and Howard entered La Golondrina Mexican Café, taking a table on the patio. If Howard only knew the history of this restaurant. It’d been there forever. But more than that it was the location of several movies, including a scene from the ultimate film noir, *Double Indemnity*. Was that an omen too? How I wished I could let him know.

Pamela looked at her watch every ten seconds, at least it seemed that way to Howard.

Finally, a man entered the patio. Shoulder-length blonde hair going gray. Broad face, broader shoulders. A little paunchy but still powerful looking. Sunken eyes.

“Larry!” Pamela said, getting up, sprinting over to the man, throwing her arms around him. He cracked the smallest smile that slid into a full-fledged grin. He was more reticent about a full public display of affection, cutting the hugs short quickly.

After forty minutes of “Remember When” and “Remember So-and-So,” they were finally ready to order. It was a quick exercise so they could get back to reminiscing.

Pamela sipped her margarita, looked across the table at Larry. “Why didn’t you try looking me up?”

Larry rotated the margarita glass on his lips, taking in all the salt on the edge. He took a sip. “I wanted to leave the past behind.”

The sparkle in Pam’s eyes faded, as if someone slid a dimmer switch to low. But she rallied. Eventually the conversation turned to Bunker Hill. The waiter brought their food.

“If it wasn’t for the accident,” Pamela said, “we never would have been split up.”

“It wasn’t an accident,” Larry said. Everyone stopped eating mid-bite.

“What wasn’t an accident?” Pamela said.

“Mom and Dad.”

Pamela couldn’t talk. Howard said, “If it wasn’t an accident what was it?”

“Mom and Dad didn’t want to sell. Didn’t want to move. ”

“What’re you saying?” Pamela said.

“The property was eminent-domained. Mom and Dad wouldn’t sell. But the city couldn’t go ahead with their grandiose plans with our old Victorian house sitting plop in the middle of their shiny new development.”

“So you’re saying the city got rid of them?” Pamela said.

“Yeah, maybe.”

“Who?”

“I don’t know. Guy in charge was one of the mayor’s assistants, Glassman, something like that.”

“But it was an *accident*. A drunk driver,” Pamela said.

“That’s what they claimed.”

“But who, why? The city? They don’t do things like that.”

“Don’t be naïve,” Larry scoffed.

“Well, what difference does it make now anyway? It was almost fifty years ago.” Pamela looked over the table at her brother, who must have seemed familiar and a total stranger at the same time.

“Everyone thought I killed them. They brought me in for questioning, didn’t have enough to pin it on me. Had to let me go. Then they pinned it on that other guy, that Nam vet with the car, but it changed my life forever.” He crushed his water glass in his hand until it cracked.

“No wonder you disappeared,” Pamela said. “It’s hard to live with something like that hanging over you.”

Larry wouldn’t say much more. Maybe it was just another of his conspiracy theories. He made an excuse to leave, but not before he and Pamela made plans to meet up again. Howard walked her to her car.

“Could he have done it?” Pamela said.

“He’s got a record, nothing violent though.” Howard opened the car door for her.

“They say people start small and progress...”

“You okay to drive home?”

“I’ll be fine, Mr. Hamm. And thanks for everything.” She gave him a peck on the cheek.

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Howard watched firefighters use the Jaws of Life to pull Larry Cardin from his truck at the corner of 3<sup>rd</sup> and Hill. Angels Flight glared at them in the distance.

On the phone, Bowen had said it was an accident. She knew he’d want to be there since he’d had her look up Larry’s arrest record.

Howard didn’t believe in coincidences and he didn’t think it was an accident. He did think he might have had a hand causing it to happen, stirring up the past. Maybe he shouldn’t



have pulled Larry out of his seclusion. Maybe he shouldn't have dragged him back into the real world.

"I'm sorry," Howard said when Pamela pulled up. He had called her in her car, got her before she'd arrived home.

Pamela charged toward Larry's truck. A uniformed officer moved to stop her. Howard took her arm.

"It can't be. I just— Not after all these years. I'll never get to know him now."

Howard shook his head. "The police say it's an accident."

"Two car accidents?" Pamela said, holding back tears. "My parents and now Larry—right after I look him up? Too much coincidence." Her face went hard. She stared Howard in the eyes, "I want to hire you to find his killer."

"The cops think he skidded to avoid something in the road and lost control of the truck."

"And I want to hire you to find the man who killed my parents."

"Assuming your parents' deaths weren't an accident, whoever did it would probably be so old by now... If they're even still alive," Howard said. He saw the look of disappointment on Pamela's face. "It's just so long ago. Gonna be hard to find out what happened."

"I don't care."

"And what if it turns out to be Larry?"

"Wherever it goes it goes," Pamela said.

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How do you deal with a nearly fifty year old case? Howard would start with the past, the death of the parents. Maybe that would lead to Larry's death. Maybe it was all connected somehow. Maybe not. He went to the library, also checked out the public records for L.A.

Looked up old L.A. Times articles about the accident. Mr. and Mrs. Cardin were hit by a blue 1968 Dodge Charger with a black vinyl roof. The Times had a couple of pictures in the archives of a '68 Dodge Charger with a cracked windshield and its owner, Walter O'Neil, being taken into custody. Howard had seen that Charger before, at least he thought he had. In the photo of Pamela being pushed on the swing by her father.

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Howard drove to the Montego Arms Hotel on Spring Street in downtown L.A. The area was gentrifying, but there were still homeless sleeping in the doorways and SROs for the poor. The Montego Arms started life as a luxury hotel, as evidenced by its once-grand marble entry with sweeping staircases on either side. *Ghosts* of that glorious past haunted it, even if those days were long gone.

Howard rode an ancient elevator up. Knocked on the door of room 721. The door opened a crack.

“Walter O'Neil?” Howard flashed his PI license. O'Neil barely resembled the guy in the Times photo—age and booze had taken their toll. Ratty long hair streaked with gray had replaced once-shiny brown hair and surrounded a puffy, red face. O'Neil gestured for him to come in. He filled him in on why he'd come. The carpet wasn't the only threadbare thing in the small unit. O'Neil didn't have much. An old tube TV, some books. And hopefully no gun hiding under a tattered couch cushion.

“I hope you don't mind my being blunt, Mr. O'Neil,” Howard said. “You were accused of killing Mr. and Mrs. Lawrence Cardin, Senior.”

“Yeah, I was convicted of it.” O'Neil's tone fell flat. He seemed resigned to his fate and he didn't mind talking.

“Are you saying you didn’t do it?”

“I did it, yeah. I just don’t remember any of it. I don’t remember anything when I’m drinking. I never remembered hitting those people, even the next day when they arrested me.”

O’Neil grabbed a beat up guitar that had no strings. He set it across his lap. Maybe he needed it for security.

“You were convicted and sent to jail for six months.”

“Six months. Not much time for killing two folks. You’d think it’d be longer.” He fingered the guitar’s fretboard.

“But you did own the ’68 Dodge Charger that hit the Cardins?” Howard pulled out the photo of Pamela on the swing, her dad, the workers and the Charger in the background.

O’Neil stared at it. “That’s my car.”

Howard pulled out another set of pictures, from after the *accident* that killed the Cardins. The same ’68 Charger, now with a dent in the front end and a cracked windshield.

“And the dent is from the accident?” he said.

“Yeah. Those are the police photos, right?”

“You remember them?”

“I was sober when I saw them. Yeah I remember.” O’Neil stared at the photos. “Long time ago, different world back then. I was a different person—I had hopes and dreams, a few anyway.” He thumped the guitar, handed the photos back to Howard. Howard pulled out O’Neil’s booking photo that Bowen had given him.

“My mug shot.” O’Neil laughed.

Howard looked at it. “How long after the accident was this taken?”

“I don’t remember. Not long. Next day, day after.”

“You didn’t even have a cut on your face or a busted arm. Were you hurt?”

“Not much.”

“Looks like a pretty good smash up and two people were killed.”

“Well, I was drunk. They say drunks don’t get hurt as much ’cause they don’t tense up. We just sort of go limp so not too much gets busted up. You know what they say, ‘God looks out for fools and drunks.’”

Howard slipped the mug shot back in the envelope. Showed O’Neil the girl-on-the-swing pic again. “Who else is in this photo?”

“It’s so long ago and I was drunk even on the job half the time. I don’t remember.”

“You were drinking a lot then?”

“Ever since I got back from Nam. Ever since the accident.”

“But you don’t remember the latter.”

“Don’t remember the latter, wish I could forget the former.”

“The bottle doesn’t help.”

“It used to.”

Howard shoved the picture of Pamela on the swing back in O’Neil’s face. “Who are these other people in this photo?”

O’Neil examined it, thinking. “Well, that’s me. And that’s Mr. Glasgow from the mayor’s office. I forget the other guy’s name. But he worked for the developer, that much I do remember.”

Howard put the photo away. Handed a twenty to O’Neil. “Get some guitar strings.”

Shards of light from the gleaming office towers blinded him as he drove up Figueroa through Bunker Hill.

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Howard knocked on the massive wooden door of a massive Tudor mansion in Hancock Park. Hancock Park reeked old money L.A., though that wasn't quite as true as it used to be. New money was moving in all the time. Still, the grass was a deeper, more expensive shade of green than the rest of L.A., even during the drought. Everything neatly manicured from the hedges to the people. He rang the bell. A Hispanic woman answered the door.

“Yes?”

“I'd like to see Terrence Glasgow.” Glasgow had been easy to find in this age of computers and internet. He wasn't hiding from anyone like Larry had been.

“You have an appointment?” the woman said.

An elderly gentleman with a spray of cloud white hair, in full Brooks Brothers three piece suit and tie, came up behind her. “What can I do for you?” He spoke with the authority of someone used to being in charge. He eyed Howard up and down.

“It's my understanding you were a deputy mayor of L.A. in the late Sixties.”

“And damn proud of it.”

“You oversaw the Bunker Hill redevelopment.”

“Are you doing a story about it?” It was an assumption on Glasgow's part that Howard let stand. Glasgow invited him into the house, but not too far in. They sat on silk brocade chairs in a lavish two story entry hall of Italian marble. Howard could only imagine what the rest of the house was like.

“I'm a PI investigating some accidental deaths that happened to conveniently benefit the Bunker Hill redevelopment.” Howard thought being direct might put Glasgow off balance, get him to spill something he might not have otherwise.

“You led me to believe this was an interview for the paper. I don’t appreciate being misled this way.”

“I apologize for the deception, I didn’t think you’d want to talk to me, but I thought once you heard what it was about you’d want to cooperate.”

“In the old days, young man, I could have had you—”

“What, run over?”

“What’re you accusing me of?”

Now Howard knew he’d never get to see the rest of this magnificent house, unless he was here when Bowen arrested the old man. “Do you remember the Cardins? They lived on Bunker Hill. You needed their land for your precious redevelopment plans. Someone ran them over with a car.”

“Yes, that someone was a drunk worker. Not me.”

Howard spun on his heel, leaving a nice black smudge on Glasgow’s highly polished marble floor.

“Hey, you want to see who killed those folks, check on their son, Lonnie, if you don’t believe the guy who was convicted is guilty. Lonnie was one crazy S-O-B. His dad came down on him hard, real hardass. The kid hated his father.”

Lonnie was close enough to Larry for Howard. “You saying he did it?”

“I don’t know. I’m saying he could have. I always thought him and his dad were going to kill each other. Sides, he spent half his childhood in juvie for one thing or another.”

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“What’re the three top reasons for murder?” Howard said to Bowen, sitting at his kitchen island, over a cup of orange spice tea. He wasn’t sure if she was on or off duty. Either way, he was glad to see her. He was always glad to see her.

“Love. Revenge. Money,” she said.

“I think it’s all about money. They were tearing down Bunker Hill. Had this grandiose vision of a new downtown. What does that boil down to?” He sipped his tea.

“Money.” Bowen drummed her fingers on the counter.

“The Cardins wouldn’t move. Were holding up the whole damn project. Wouldn’t be bought off. Were ready to fight the eminent domain in court. The city or the developer, somebody, couldn’t be sittin’ on their butts paying interest on their loans for all that time. They ended it quickly. Car accident. Bam. House sold, kids moved out. Land cleared. Welcome to the New Los Angeles.”

“You think Walt O’Neil’s good for it?”

“I’m not so sure about that either,” Howard said. “O’Neil doesn’t remember doing it.”

“He’s a drunk, he doesn’t remember much.”

“Why would he, what was his motive? Unless he was paid to do it. Just back from Viet Nam. Kind of aimless. He might have needed money.”

“Okay,” Bowen said. “That’s O’Neil’s motive. And we know most people who’re arrested are guilty. So, maybe Glasgow paid him to do it. What about Larry?”

“Don’t think so. No motive. He might have been a hothead but it takes a lot to kill your folks.”

“It happens, believe me,” Bowen said. “I’ve seen it more often than you think.”

“Okay, so we won’t take him off the list quite yet.”

“Then there’s Glasgow.” Bowen began to pace. “He might have paid O’Neil to do it, to get the project going.”

“Or have done it himself.”

“Doubtful, the deputy mayor.”

“Citizen above suspicion. I bet he was never even questioned.”

“I don’t think he was, if I recall the reports correctly.”

“Eenie, meenie, minie, moe, which one of them offed the Cardins? My vote’s for Glasgow. He wanted to move the project ahead.”

“I think you’re right,” Bowen said. “Even if he didn’t drive the car, my bet’s on him being the mastermind.”

Howard’s mind drifted—not on the case anymore. He wanted to ask her out, but he couldn’t do it. He’d never been this gutless before. He enjoyed talking with her. Enjoyed her company. Call it chemistry. He just liked hanging with her. She made him feel like a goofy teenager with a crush; he hadn’t felt like that in ages. He wondered if she felt the same or if it was strictly business with her?

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An aura of emptiness filled the house after Bowen left. Howard poured single malt into a lead crystal snifter. Sat in the Victorian parlor chair in the study, sipped slowly. The liquid burned his throat, but soon the liquor crawled its way through his body, warming him from the inside out. He could still smell Bowen’s perfume wafting through the house. Did cops wear perfume on the job?

He finished the glass, poured another. Leaned his head back against the chair. The room seemed to spin. He thought he saw a blue Dodge Charger parked on the street. He made his way



to the window, there was nothing outside. He noticed the picture of Pamela on the swing, the tall building looming ominously in the background. The Dodge Charger and the men talking next to it and leaning against it.

He stared at the picture. Shook his head to clear it. Grabbed a pearl-handled magnifying glass from the desk, laid it over the photo. And stared. Just stared. Something was percolating inside him.

Howard took the photo to his office, the former playroom, put it on his flatbed scanner. Scanned it at four thousand dpi. He saved the picture, then pulled it up in Photoshop, magnifying one portion of it. He stared again, leaning into the monitor.

A young Walt O'Neil leaned jauntily against his car. Blown up, Howard could see the license was the same as the car that had killed the Cardins. Walt had clearly identified Glasgow as one of the men in the picture. O'Neil was talking to another man, who looked like a foreman.

Howard returned to the parlor, drifted off. He woke an hour later, the effects of the Scotch gone except for a mild headache. Thought he saw someone outside the window; no one there. He headed to his car. His neighbor, Norris, doing yardwork waved at him. Howard waved back. He called Amanda Reisner, the real estate agent on the way to her office in the Bradbury Building on Figueroa.

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Leaving the Bradbury Building with a printout from Amanda, Howard drove up Figueroa, through Bunker Hill. The same streets that John Fante and Bandini and Raymond Chandler and Philip Marlowe had walked, real and fictional characters. I wonder if he felt Marlowe's presence over his shoulder? Or mine?

He parked in front of his house, stood in the street a moment, glaring at the film crew a few houses up.

Norris jogged across the street. “What’s the matter, neighbor? You look all in.”

“It’s just this case I’m working on. Cold case, everything’s so old even the dust has dust.”

“Maybe I can help you out. I like playing detective, at least when I watch TV.” Norris sounded eager.

“I could use some help, that’s for sure. There was this family, standard issue lower middle class, mom, dad, two kids, brother and sister. The parents got murdered.”

“Y’know I watch all these *murder shows* on TV. Seems to happen all the time and it’s never who they suspect at first.”

“No, it isn’t. ’Cause the cops like to go after the most obvious suspect.”

“Too many doughnuts.” Norris laughed. “Speaking of which, I was just about to have some coffee. Got enough for two.”

They sat at a bay window in Norris’ front parlor, facing Howard’s house across the street. Norris handed him a cup of coffee, sipped one himself.

Howard noticed a photo of Norris and a woman. “Your wife?”

“Yes, a very long time ago.” Norris’ voice cracked.

Howard picked up the photo, stared at it. Norris looked pretty much the same in the old picture, except that his hair was darker and the scar on his forehead was more pronounced and raw looking, even in the faded Kodachrome photo.

Howard filled him in on the case, then said, “Yeah, so they nailed this Viet Nam vet. It was easy. Everybody *knew* Nam vets were all crazy in those days.”

“War does something to you.”

Howard looked up and down the street.

“It’s a lovely street, isn’t it? We were so happy moving here. Lucky to get it,” Norris said. “In fact, we were stakeholders. Among the first to live here after they moved the houses from Bunker Hill.”

“Like an oasis in the middle of the big city.” Howard set his coffee on a small table. “I heard almost all these houses on our street used to be up on Bunker Hill.”

“Sure, most of them started there. Were moved here when the city was redeveloping The Hill in the late Sixties.”

“Yeah, that’s what I heard. I was wondering about the history of my house. The previous owner left these haunting pictures of a little girl and boy playing in front of it before it was moved here. I keep wondering what happened to them.”

“That was almost fifty years ago. I’m sure they’ve lived good, happy lives by now.”

“One of them came to see me a few days ago.”

Norris stopped sipping his coffee. Looked at Howard.

“You okay?”

“I, uh, swallowed down the wrong tube,” Norris said.

“Yeah, guilt’ll do that to you.”

“What’re you talking about?”

“You killed the Cardins.”

“You’re crazy.”

“Either you killed them or you had them killed. It works either way.”

“Get outta my house.”

“You were the foreman for Trans Angeles Construction. You needed the Cardins off their land or you’d lose incentive bonuses. You just made it happen a little faster. You have a scar on your forehead from hitting your head on the windshield of Walter O’Neil’s car that you *borrowed* for a night. In the picture with your wife it’s much more pronounced. And it’s you in this picture of Pamela Cardin on her swing. You’re the third man—there’s Walt O’Neil, Deputy Mayor Glasgow and you.” Howard shoved a copy of the photo into Norris’ hand.

“Get out.”

“I had a title search done on your property. This house—your house—was moved from Bunker Hill and you got a sweetheart deal. Why? Because you solved the Cardin problem of them not wanting to sell.”

Norris got up, stood over Howard. Howard didn’t flinch. He liked Norris, or could have if he hadn’t been a killer. He probably hadn’t done anything like that before or since. It was just expeditious.

“And you lived happily ever after...till now.”

“You crazy—” Norris cut his sentence short. Howard knew where he was going.

“I’ve been called worse,” Howard said.

“Hell, even if you’re right, it was fifty years ago, you have no way of proving it.”

“I have the photo with you in it.”

“What does that prove? I was all over that site day and night.”

There was a knock on the front door. “Come in, Walt,” Howard said. Walt O’Neil came inside, into the parlor.

“Mr. Bradley.”

“Walter?” Norris’ voice stumbled.

“Mr. Bradley, long time no see.”

Norris’ face went white. Howard thought he might keel over right there.

“I wasn’t driving the car that night was I?”

Norris sat down at the small table, defeated. Head in his hands. There was no fight in him. Whatever ambition he’d had as a younger man that made him do what he did was gone now. “How did you know?”

“Besides the scar on your forehead?” Howard said. “Walt here had no scar and I’m sure he would have if he’d hit that windshield hard enough to kill two people.”

“Why me?” O’Neil said.

Knowing he’d lost, Norris looked up. “We had to keep the project going. Cardin was standing in the way.”

“But why me?”

“I just needed a car.”

“So you let me be the fall guy.” O’Neil looked around. “Nice house. You must have had a very nice life. I might have had a nice life too...”

Howard looked out the bay window. Norris did too. Bowen and two uniformed officers headed up the walk to the front door.

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“How did you figure it out?” Pamela said. Howard had invited her to be in on the arrest. Bowen had her wait on Howard’s porch across the street in case Norris gave them any trouble. Now she, Bowen, O’Neil and Howard stood on his porch, watching an LAPD black and white drive off, with Norris in the backseat.

“I was buzzed—sometimes you see things more clearly with a little alcohol,” Howard said. “I was staring at the photo of you on the swing and noticed the men standing by the Charger in the background. I thought one of them looked like my neighbor, Norris.” Howard followed the police car with his eyes. “Same stocky build. I thought I was hallucinating or at least having an alcohol-fueled fantasy. But I got up and stared at it with the magnifying glass and blew it up in the computer. Then I looked him up. He was a foreman on the Bunker Hill redev project.”

“Ancient and modern technology working together.” Bowen laughed.

“I live that kind of life now that I’ve moved to Carroll Avenue. Anyway, I sobered up a little and still thought the guy looked like Norris. So I went over and got him to *help* me solve the case.”

Pamela sat down on the porch steps. “So, what really happened to my parents?”

“Your folks’ house was one of the last houses standing on Bunker Hill and they didn’t want to sell. The city tried to eminent domain them but your dad was a fighter. Norris helped it along, helped his career along too. Walt O’Neil here, who’s also in the photo, owned the Charger that hit them. Norris *borrowed* his car and killed your folks, putting the blame on him—the crazy Nam vet.”

“So, how did Norris end up here?”

“I had Amanda, my real estate agent, look up his house. He got title to it a month after the accident. I don’t think that was a coincidence. He got one of the houses they moved here from Bunker Hill as a reward for getting the project back on schedule.”

“And how did you get him to confess?”

“I had Walt here drop by. That was too much for Norris. He confessed.”

“Then I *dropped* by...,” Bowen said. “His bad luck you moved in across the street and Pamela came to visit.”

“What about Mr. Glasgow?” Pamela said.

“Glasgow claims he wasn’t aware of any of it. He only cared that the project went through and never saw any reason to question the coincidental death of your folks and there’s really no way to prove otherwise at this point.” Howard leaned against the porch column, watching the film crew up the street.

“And Larry?”

“Larry’s death was just an accident. He lost control of the truck. A tragic coincidence.” Howard looked to Bowen for confirmation. She nodded.

“I thought you didn’t believe in coincidences,” Pamela said.

“I guess there wouldn’t be a word for it if it didn’t happen sometimes.”

Pamela hugged Howard. “Thank you.”

“I’m sorry about your brother.”

“At least we had a few minutes together.” Pamela hugged him again, thanked Bowen and O’Neil. “I’ll be in touch.”

Howard handed her the original prints of her childhood pictures. He’d also made copies for himself. She kissed him, headed for her car.

“You wouldn’t be heading downtown, would you?” O’Neil said.

“No, but I’d be glad to take you.” Pamela gave him a warm smile. They walked to her car, leaving Bowen and Howard alone.

“Come in for a drink,” Howard said. They went into the parlor, sitting across from each other.

“I have a question for you,” Bowen said. “And I hope you don’t think I’m being too forward.”

“Shoot.”

“Are you ever going to ask me out?”

Howard smiled, leaned back. The house was silent. The city outside, silent. And he hoped that now the ghosts of the house on Carroll Avenue would be silent too.

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