

Heads

or,

Tales

from the Summer of Love

By

Lord Chester L. Baldwin II

All rights reserved

Copyright © 2007 by Lord Chester L. Baldwin II

This is a work of fiction. Any names, characters, places and incidents either are a product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, business establishments, events or locales are entirely coincidental.

**This book may not be reproduced in whole or in part,
by any means, without explicit permission from author.**

Volume One

The Coming Of Summer

Love-In at Griffith Park

A month of restriction went by surprisingly quick and Reuben with Chad had pretty much eradicated all of the weeds in the front yard and a third in the back. The boys were also fortunate that one of the weeks was filled with rain and overcast weather, making yard work a mess and almost impossible. They were given those days off, but were still required to stay in the yard or the house.

California is a kind of different climate where things grow all year long, and weeds, especially the sticker weeds, are especially difficult to get rid of. So unfortunately, even though the boys pulled the weeds out at the roots, there was no way the weeds would not come back unless certain pesticides were used, and Senior did not feel he would need chemicals to do the job his slave labor was already doing.

The target date was the weekend of the 18th of February. Reuben and Chad had already made plans to meet Danny and Mark to go to the skating rink on that Saturday. They had become lax, slackers to be sure, and they acquired the short-timers disease as their yard work and weed production fell drastically low. But what did they care? In a few days they would be free again. Or so they thought.

On Friday, two days after they should have officially been off of restriction, Reuben and Chad came home from school and immediately went to their room. Their mother was driving the late school bus and had still not returned home. Senior came home and after not seeing Reuben and Chad working out in the yard, blew a fuse and stormed into the house. They heard his heavy footsteps approach their bedroom but thought he was doing something else. There was no knock, just a swift entry as Senior stood there fuming, his face raging with anger as he said, “Why aren’t you both outside doing the yard work?”

“Our restriction was over three days ago.” Reuben answered cautiously.

“Who said it was?” He asked suspiciously, like they would make something like that up erroneously.

Reuben looked at his brother Chad who looked back at him, both wondering how to answer this problematic question. “I thought the restriction was for... for one month.” Reuben looked back and forth at Chad and Senior. “And it started on my birthday.” Reuben said. “Didn’t it?”

“When I tell you, then you’ll know.” Senior remarked. This was one of the old Navy sayings that he brought back from World War II that the boys could make little sense of but had to tolerate its presumed implication of total repression. Senior’s anger subsided a bit as he said, “You boys work until I tell you that you don’t have to work anymore.” He waited for some smart-aleck response to bury the boys. Again, Reuben looked at Chad in surprise and then both silently looked back at Senior, waiting, hoping for some leniency in further, kinder instructions. After a considerable amount of time passed, sufficient for Senior to realize no rebuttal was forthcoming, he finally said, “I think you boys need to work one more week to think about your taking liberties with my time.” And with that final decision and certain determination Senior walked backwards two steps, maintaining a searing eye-contact control, then shut the door and left.

“It’s not fair!” Chad cried to Reuben with anguish, in a voice almost under his breath. “It’s not like we didn’t do any work. And we did the time, it’s not fair.”

“I was going to meet Steve, Debbie and Shannon at the roller rink.” Reuben said, looking at the door that had just shut him and Chad into another restricted weekend. “I’d like to,…” Reuben stopped. He didn’t even dare to think out loud how he felt or more specifically what he would’ve liked to have done. Senior was a powerful adversary, a person capable of doing a lot of damage with little to no cause.

Reuben had a little brother and sister, both of whom were Senior’s true children, and, as Reuben’s mother would say, “the walls have ears,” and anything he said could possibly come back and haunt him at some other time. He looked over at Chad’s disappointed face and knew it reflected his own.

“I was supposed to go to the movies with Tom Brewer tonight. How are we gonna let anybody know what happened?” Chad asked. “I don’t want go out there and use the phone, he’ll be out there, just waiting for me, and’ll probably find some other work for both of us to do.” Chad glanced over and said, “You remember the last time we were on restriction?”

“The last time? Was it the board that broke on the back porch in the trailer park?”

“I forgot all about that one.” Chad said. “That was dumb too because we didn’t even break the board. I think it broke because Senior was too heavy. No, I think it was the dead cat that you pushed off the train bridge onto that lady’s car.”

“Oh yeah. That lady was really freaked out.”

“I got blamed with you and I wasn’t even there. I was over at the Farmington’s house.”

“And you know, I never knew who told the police it was me. I ran away and got home but someone told em it was me.”

“And you told the cops it was you;” Chad said with a weird grin, “stuuu-pid. Why didn’t you just lie?”

“I, I don’t know. I... They would a known it was me anyway and with Senior standing there I’d a got into even more trouble.” Reuben grimaced. “That was a really bad day. I got the whipping with the belt for that one, and he hit me in the head with the belt buckle, on purpose.”

“I think it was that spastic Greg,” Chad said with wrinkled brows. “That ratted on you, man. I think it was Greg. He always hated you for mimicking that thing he did with his arm.”

“I don’t know,” Reuben said. “No one was there to see me.”

“I wonder if anyone’s called yet.” Chad said looking to the doorway to the hallway.

“Well, don’t go out there.” Reuben said emphatically. “When we don’t show up tonight, they’ll call us, and if he answers the phone, and if they don’t hang up on him, he’ll let them know that we can’t talk on the phone and he’ll probably be an asshole and just hang up on em anyways. Besides, why you hanging around with Tom anyway?”

“He’s a nice guy.” Chad replied. “And I like him.”

“I was just kidding, Chad.” Reuben responded laughing. “Gimme a break.”

Reuben and Chad settled into their bedroom, listening to music on the radio. Seven o’clock rolled around, then seven thirty, then eight, but no phone rang. Finally, resigned to their fate and as the darkness overtook the room, they both let the evening go and fell asleep.

Late afternoon, Reuben and Chad were working on the side of the yard when, from the backyard, they heard a crashing sound of something breaking. They looked at each other with consternation before they both quickly and cautiously walked to the back to see what had happened.

“What was it?” Chad asked, looking around the yard.

“I don’t know.” Reuben answered. “I don’t see anything...”

At that moment, Reuben saw it. Next to the back door, the large multicolored ceramic platform bowl of the birdbath fixture, a beloved work of art that Reuben’s mother had brought back from Mexico, was no longer balanced on its cement pedestal, but was now lying in wet pieces on the ground at the base of the stand.

“What happened?” Chad asked, mildly concerned.

“I don’t know.” Reuben answered, looking both ways cautiously before adding, “Maybe a big bird.”

Chad laughed as he interjected, “A very big bird.”

As Chad stood and watched, Reuben knelt down and began gathering up the pieces of broken pottery. Reuben looked up, with a curious but annoyed face at Chad to indicate that Chad should give a helping hand, but when Reuben saw Chad frozen, he instinctively knew that Senior was standing behind him. Reuben, still stooped down on bended knees, turned slightly to look back at Senior with a casual smile, so as to let Senior know that he had quickly responded to the breakage and was now there to piously pick up the pieces.

Reuben no sooner made eye contact with Senior, when suddenly, a fist crashed into the left side of Reuben’s head, causing him to lose his balance and suddenly collide into the side of the house where he haphazardly slammed the right side of his head into the wall where his feet flew out from under him and he fell back to the ground in a sitting position; his hands gingerly holding both sides of his aching head.

“What happened here?” Senior roared angrily, positioning himself to hit Reuben again.

“I... I don’t know.” Reuben answered timorously, afraid to look Senior in the eyes but afraid no to in fears of getting broadsided again.

“We were working on the side of the house where you told us to.” Chad bravely explained, but with a noticeable terror in his eyes. “We heard a crash and came here and found this was broken.”

Senior continued to stare suspiciously at Reuben and asked, “Did you break this?”

“No.” Reuben answered submissively, “I wasn’t even back here.” His head pain fueled an internal anger that raged to get out, but outwardly he remained subservient.

Senior turned to look into the sliding glass doors to see if his wife had watched what he’d done. When

he saw there was no one there, he turned back to Reuben and said authoritatively, “Get this mess cleaned up.” Senior’s stern stare needed no words but said, “Your mother better not hear about this episode.” When he was sure they’d gotten the message, he grunted through both nostrils and turned and went back into the house.

Chad knelt down next to Reuben with empathetic eyes and questioned, “Are you all right?”

“Hell no, I’m not all right.” Reuben answered; anger seething from his face. “Why the hell didn’t you help me. If he’d seen us both, he might not,…” Reuben staggered as he got to his feet and realized as he tried to focus on Chad, that his vision was blurred. “Are my eyes crossed?” Reuben asked with a worried face.

Chad stepped close and examined Reuben’s face closely. “No.” Chad answered. “They look fine.”

“Well they’re not working right.” Reuben complained. “I’m seeing double or fuzzy or something.”

Chad looked cautiously into the sliding glass doors to be sure Senior was gone before his face grew sullen and livid. “He broke your eyes?” Chad said with a pitiful whine. “What are we gonna do?”

“We better just get back to work.” Reuben answered. Seeing his brother’s concern and compassion, he turned to Chad When they got to the side of the house and said, “I’m sorry I got mad. It wasn’t your fault.”

“But what are you gonna do?” Chad asked, concerned.

“I’m okay,” Reuben lied, as both hands rubbed the sides of his head. “I’m better now.”

Later that night, Reuben was returning to his bedroom from the kitchen where he’d grabbed a small handful of aspirin, when his mother stopped him in the darkened hallway. “What are you doing out here?” She asked with a note of anxiety.

“I got a headache.” Reuben answered smiling good-naturedly.

“Oh.” She replied curtly as she looked down the hall to her room where Senior was. “You should get back,…” She paused as she looked intently into Reuben’s face and said, “What happened to you?”

Reuben looked back anxiously. He thought that the hat he was wearing had sufficiently hidden the two bruises and he wondered how he’d been found out. “Uh, what do you mean?” He replied innocently.

“What happened to your eyes?”

“My eyes?” Reuben repeated. “Is there something wrong with my eyes?”

“They’re,…” I don’t know, they look,…” She held onto his chin and gently pulled Reuben into the bathroom and turned on the light. She studied his eyes closely and said, “How long have you been like,…”

“I can see just fine.” Reuben quickly lied, gently pulling himself from his mother’s grasp and carefully pulled his hat down even more.

After silently studying Reuben’s face for a minute Reuben’s mother said, “I think we may need to have you see an eye doctor or something. This just doesn’t look right,…”

Reuben wanted to tell her about how he’d been misidentified and assumed to be the guilty person, and then punched in the head for a crime he didn’t commit. Buried deep inside his psyche, a furtive part of him that had suffered the injustice and was now crying for revenge or at least, restitution; that part wanted someone to feel sorry for him; wanted to let her how, since the injury, he’d been unsuccessful at getting rid of his terrible headaches and his secondary blurred vision. He wanted to get the foul secret out, to somehow hold Senior accountable for his dirty little sin, but Reuben knew that only more pain and suffering for everyone would ensue from Senior’s hands; that it would eventually be his mother who would suffer, and Reuben realized that that was too high a price to pay. “I’m just really tired.” Reuben lied as he began easing himself away from his mother and out from the light of the bathroom.

“Okay,” Reuben’s mother said forlornly with raised eyebrows, “I’ll take another look tomorrow.”

Reuben agreed and smiled amiably as he stepped backwards and away, knowing that the chances of his mother getting back to him the following evening with her driving the late activity bus, was slim to none.

Days later, Reuben was walking home from school when he heard a voice call out his name twice. Reuben scanned across the street, up and down but saw nobody familiar.

“Reuben,” the voice called out again, “over here.” His friend Jim pulled up alongside of him in a beat-up old car. Reuben smiled and said, “Hey Jim, so where did you get this piece of shit?”

“Hey, don’t you be talking about my Morris Minor Woody Wagon like that, man.” Jim laughed. “Do you want a ride or not?”

“Yeah, I guess so,.. Yeah,” Reuben answered, still laughing, “but let’s take the back roads, I don’t want anybody to see me in this piece of junk.”

“But really, man—what do you think?” Jim asked, smiling proudly as he leaned out the passenger window to talk, his large, beefy arm tightly hugging the door.

“So, whose car is this really?” Reuben asked.

“It’s mine.” Jim said, motioning for Reuben to get in. “I just got it this morning.”

Reuben struggled to open the passenger door, first from the outside and then from the inside but both with no success. “This reminds me of your last car.” Reuben said sardonically.

“No,” Jim said, defending his vehicle, “that door works; you just have to know how to do it.”

“Oh.” Reuben said, now hesitating doing anything for fear of breaking something.

Even though Jim was blocking traffic on the street, he put the shifter into neutral and pulled up the emergency brake, and then got out and walked around to where Reuben was standing.

Reuben stared back and said nothing.

“You gotta lift the door handle lever like this,” Jim said, “and then pull like this.” The door opened up and Reuben climbed in and sat down like Jim was his chauffeur. “Oh, and you gotta shut the door like this.” He said, lifting the door slightly and then pushing it in.

“Like I said,” Reuben said after Jim had gotten back in the car and started driving down the street, “this car is a lot like your last one, isn’t it?”

Jim’s friendly laughter subsided as he looked closely at Reuben. “What happened to you?”

“What do you mean?”

“You got a huge bruise on your face, man.” Jim said as his right hand shot out and touched Reuben’s face. “Right there, man.”

“Ow.” Reuben squealed on pain as he flinched away.

“Sorry man,” Jim said with surprise, “I was only trying to point it out.”

“Well you pointed it, all right.” Reuben said slightly angered.

“What happened? You get in a fight, or something?”

“Nah,” Reuben answered, “It was Senior, Yesterday.” Reuben then proceeded to tell the story of the mysteriously broken birdbath and the unfortunate aftermath.

“Freakin’ asshole.” Jim replied. “What,…”

“Morris Minor, huh?” Reuben said touching the dashboard. “What’s so special about this car?”

“This one’s got heart,.. I mean it.” Jim answered and smiled, looking out the windshield and then to both sides and continued, “You’ll never guess how much I got this for.” Jim hardly waited for Reuben to get comfortable before he peeled out and sharply turned the corner. “Guess how much I got it for?” Jim asked, with a look that told Reuben no matter how outrageous a figure he came up with, it would still be wrong.

“I don’t think I’ve ever heard of a Morris Minor before.” Reuben said, suppressing his need to laugh. “But, because this looks like it’s from Russia and you don’t have blood on your hands, I’m guessing, after seeing the quality paint job and this fabulous interior, oh, I’m gonna say maybe two hundred bucks.”

“Not even.” Jim answered. “Guess again.”

Reuben hated this guessing game thing. “A hundred bucks?” He said in a rather disoriented tone. Jim motioned with his hands for Reuben to guess again. “Okay, maybe 50 bucks?”

“I traded two Vespa straight across.” Jim said satisfyingly. “The car for two scooters. Can you believe it?”

“You’re kidding.” Reuben said. “Was one of em the one we used to have?”

“No.” Jim answered. “That’s still hanging in my garage. Well at least half of it is, you got the other half sitting outside in back.”

“Lot a good that’ll do me. You cut that thing down the middle with a torch and you got the side with the engine and you got the wheels, right?”

“Well, I guess.” Jim said and then drove in silence for a while before saying, “and it had a full tank of gas too. It has problems with the vacuum advance and jolts sometimes, but it doesn’t burn hardly any gas.”

“So, how did you find out about this?” Reuben asked.

“My brother told this guy, one of the office accountants at my mom’s work, a young guy named Gear, uh,.. I don’t really know what his real name is but anyway,..” Jim paused looking confused like his brain stopped working for a moment but then, like it all came back to him again, he continued, “So I had the other

Vespas, you know?” Jim said excitedly, moving his eyebrows up and down as he spoke. “Then he came over and wanted to buy one, but then I saw his car and, the rest is, like history, man.”

Reuben turned to Jim and nonchalantly asked, “So, hey man. You got any dope?”

Jim’s head jerked over and he looked at Reuben like he might if he’d seen fire shooting out of Reuben’s eyes. “You turned on, man?”

“Yeah.” Reuben answered curtly.

“When did that happen?”

“I been a “head” for a long time.” Reuben lied. “So, you holding or not?”

“No,” Jim answered sadly, but then instantly brightened up and said as he began to turn the car around, “Let’s go over to Russell’s and see if he’s holding.”

“Russell turns on?” Reuben asked with amazement.

“You’re kidding, right? He was the one that turned me on. Or did I turn him on? I can’t remember, but the answer is, yes. Russell is a “Head” since last Thanksgiving.”

“Well then,” Reuben said smiling, “by all means, lets go. But I gotta be home in an hour; I’m still on restriction for at least the rest of this week.”

When they arrived, it was hard for them to tell if Russell was home. Usually he left the garage door open and you could see his 1950 Nash Rambler convertible parked inside; the car that never left his house, but the garage door was shut and the house had been recently painted and the lawn was freshly mowed. “This doesn’t look like Russell’s place anymore.” Reuben said to Jim as they both got out of the car.

“You’re right.” Jim agreed looking around. “I think Russell’s dad is trying to sell the place, so he’s fixed it up. Wait’ll I show him my Morris Minor.” They stood on the porch and rang the bell four times, and even knocked and pounded on the door, but no one was home.

“I’m off restriction Friday.” Reuben said as they got back into the car. “But I guess we can go cruising for a while.”

“Can’t. I gotta work.” Jim said as he waited for a reaction that he knew he would get.

“What? You got a job? Where you working?”

“I’m working at the bicycle factory that my mother works for.”

“That guy got you a job?”

“No, my mom did, but it,…”

“Do you think you could get me a job there?”

“Nepotism, that’s what is all about.” Jim retorted with a smile.

“What’s that?”

“When you get help from someone you know? That’s nepotism. There’s no way I would’ve ever gotten a job there if my mother didn’t already work there and know Beef Cranston in the main office.” Jim looked away for a moment. “It means you get hired by a friend or relative, usually your father-in-law who doesn’t want the rest of the family to know his daughter is married to an idiot so he hires him to work in the back and then hopefully promotes him in the company after a while to keep appearances up and to help his son in law get a better position and, you know, more money to support his daughter. That’s how it’s done, man.”

“I could really use a job.” Reuben said, “I could get away from Senior and make money, and,…”

“You know what?” Jim said kindly, “my brother Richard was working there for awhile and then he quit, and they needed somebody right away, so I went there. But my brother decided to come back from Arizona and he wanted his job back but by now they had me on the books and I was doing okay so they let me stay and hired my brother back too. But then I was sure to take off this Saturday, man.”

“What about Saturday?” Reuben asked.

“Saturday is the deal, man.” Jim answered with a sly look.

“What’s happening?”

“What’s happening? What’s happening?” Jim repeated loudly. “The Love-In, man.”

“What’s a Love-In?” Reuben asked coyly, not wanting to sound too out of it.

“Wow man, it’s where a lot of dudes and chicks get together and like, have a huge party, man.”

“Where’s this Love-In gonna be?” Reuben asked, highly interested.

“Not gonna be, man,..” Jim scolded. “Happening. It’s gonna happen at Griffith Park, man.”

“So, you driving there, Jim?”

“Yeah, but I ain’t taking nobody that knocks my car.” Jim pulled over at a street above Reuben’s. He knew Senior did not like him and that Reuben might get in trouble if Senior saw Reuben with him, even if it was just to get a ride home from school. “You wanna go, man?”

“I don’t see why not.” Reuben answered. “My mother promised me and Chad that we were gonna be off restriction by Friday night.”

“Really?”

“So, what time we leaving?” Reuben questioned in a matter-of-fact tone.

“Whole thing starts about ten, but I heard its gonna be real wild and lots of people’ll be there, so I’m thinking, let’s leave at eight so we can have a good place to park and start cruising for chicks early.”

“Hey, I can dig it.” Reuben said as he hopped out and shut the door. “Do you have room for my brother Chad?”

“Yeah, that’s cool.”

“Where we gonna meet?” Reuben knew that Jim was not well received. Reuben’s mother was always criticizing Jim’s overweight problem and Senior just didn’t like him; and that was a problem because besides Chad, Jim was Reuben’s best friend and even more so than Chad, Jim knew some secrets in Reuben’s life that Reuben never told anyone. Jim was a year and a half older than Reuben and had been around the block—that is to say, Jim had supposedly gotten laid a couple months earlier. Thoughts of girls were on Reuben’s mind all the time. Maybe it was because Chad was his little brother or because Chad was special to him, but Reuben just couldn’t talk to Chad about sex; It just felt too weird. Jim on the other hand, a seasoned sailor so to speak, had done it; and even better, was willing to share whatever learned secrets he had experienced with Reuben.

“How about right here around eight?” Jim asked.

Reuben nodded his head in agreement. “Catch you later.” He said as he struggled to shut the door.

That night Chad got excited hearing about their possible Saturday destination. “What should we wear?” He asked sitting up on his bed, staring into the dark in Reuben’s direction.

“I don’t know.” Reuben answered. “But why worry about it until then?” Reuben knew that Chad liked having things prepared, spelled out, without any surprises so he could have the illusion that he had some control over the circumstances that he was dealing with. Reuben watched Chad get up, turn on the light, rifle through the closet, under his bed, and through his dresser looking for just the right clothing to wear at a Love-In, but he had no idea what was fashionable for the occasion.

That Saturday morning, Reuben and Chad quietly left the house, kind of sneaking out, and they made their escape while everyone was still in bed and asleep. They raced up to the rendezvous point and waited. By a quarter to nine both of them started getting nervous. “Maybe we should go back in the house and call him.” Chad said, implying the “we” to mean Reuben.

“I’m not going back in there.” Reuben said with a wild look in his eyes. “Tell you what, you wait here and I’m going up to the little grocery store. If he comes take that road there, it’s the one I’ll be walking back on.” Reuben felt a sense of urgency like, if he got there to the Love-In too late, there would be no chance that he would meet someone—that special someone, to have the opportunity to get laid. He ran all the way to the grocery store up on Route 66, made the phone call but after no one answered, he ran all the way back. “There’s no answer.” He said heaving for air, “we better just go.”

“You know how to get there?” Chad asked with wrinkled eyebrows.

“No, not really.” Reuben answered. “But I guess we can ask on the way.”

“But which way do we start?”

“I don’t know., but let’s just get going anyway.”

Their first stop was the little grocery store that Reuben had been at a couple minutes earlier. The clerk, a man inside named, “Snickers,” looked it up on a map and gave some directions that Reuben wrote down, and then Chad and Reuben stood off the curb facing the oncoming traffic of Highway 66 hitchhiking for a ride out of town. They didn’t wait longer than five minutes before a truck pulled over and took them to the outskirts of Pasadena.

There were gas stations on three of the four corners, all with maps, all with attendants giving different directions on how to get to the Griffith Park. Even though they found from all of the conversations that there was an observatory and an extensive park not too far from where they were, from the excitement and

confusion, Reuben and Chad still found themselves lost. They were at a crossroad where, in less than half an hour, they could easily have gotten more lost and eventually end up far away from their destination. But as fate interceded, they decided to put out their thumbs down a different road; a road that had an easy access for cars to pull over for hitchhikers.

Not watching his footing, Chad tripped over a small boulder and had an embarrassing moment. He said, “Why do we have to walk backwards? It seems to me it would be better if we just stuck out our left thumbs and walked down the road so we can see where we’re going.”

“But people that pick up hitchhikers want to see their faces.” Reuben quipped. “They want to know if they can trust the person they’re going to pick out. I think it’s a small price to pay for a free ride. Anyway, it also gives us a chance to see if they’re gonna do something weird like throw something out the window at us.”

“I think we’re still lost.” Chad complained.

“We could be here a while,” Reuben yelled to be heard over the traffic din. “Let’s play that game where you name the cars that are coming and see who’s right.”

“I’m not very good at that, Rube and you know it.” Chad complained. “Besides it’s boring.”

“You got any other ideas?”

“Okay, 62 Chevy Nova.”

“Well, it’s a Chevy Nova,” Reuben agreed, “but I’m thinking it’s 1960. But we won’t know until it gets here. I gotta look at the back tail lights.”

“Well it’s turning down there.” Chad said frustrated. “We’ll never know.”

This could have gone on for a lot longer but just then a red, 58 Edsel station wagon full of young, giggling, excited girls pulled over. Unfortunately there was no room on the seats that were occupied by all the girls in the front and back so Reuben and Chad squeezed into the far back compartment of the Bermuda station wagon, scrunched between wooden boxes of tools and bags of newly purchased groceries.

The girls looked at each other like they knew the secret that we had been searching for our whole lives, and that they would gladly give us the answers if we only asked the right questions.

“Where you guys going?” A short, blue-eyed, long blonde haired girl asked enthusiastically.

“We’re going to Griffith Park.” Reuben and Chad both raced each other to answer.

“To the Love-In.” Reuben added.

“That’s cool.” Another girl from the front seat said. “That’s where we’re headed right now.”

“Far out!” Reuben said with excitement.

“Right on!” Chad added.

One of the two girls that sat in the middle of the back seat turned around and asked, “Do you guys turn on?” She smiled as she repositioned the red bandanna that had fallen slightly out of her hair. The sparkle in her bright, blue eyes and her inviting smile caused Reuben to feel a surge of burning within, and he wished that she might be the answer to his loneliness.

“Yeah,” Reuben finally answered, shaking his head as he looked at his brother for confirmation.

Chad looked back dumbfounded, either because he didn’t know what “turn on,” meant, or in utter disbelief that his brother would insinuate that they might have anything to do with drugs.

“But we’re not carrying.” Reuben added. “You know, we’re hitchhiking out there on the street, and we gotta be careful with the man, you know?”

The girl next to the bandanna girl, who looked suspiciously like she might have been her sister, said, “Oh, that’s cool.” She looked lazily from side to side and said, “We were just going to light up.”

Although Reuben was still new to this scene, and he was paranoid with the aspects of smoking a joint with total strangers, going down the road, somewhere in Los Angeles, he took a hit off of the joint.

Chad shook his head unwaveringly in refusal as Reuben tried to hand the number to him, but his abstinence did not prevent him from watching with wide eyes, his brother and all the girls passing around the illegal cigarette.

After the third or fourth time around, the ride for Reuben became more enjoyable and the wooden boxes of tools that were eating into his back seemed to somehow disappear. And then there was a new element to getting high that Reuben had never experienced—music. Even the AM radio with Andy Williams singing “Born Free” sounded fabulous. After a few more hits from the third joint and Reuben didn’t care if they ever even made it to Griffith Park. Reuben thought that maybe he could just hang with these girls for the

rest of the day and he would've been happy to just cruise around all day with this wonderful company.

The air in the confined seating compartment was filled with a hazy fog and Reuben wondered if Chad would end up getting stoned from the residual smoke. Chad's head was leaned up against the back passenger window, less than three or four inches from the girl in front of him, and the two of them carried on their own conversation, oblivious to what everybody else was saying or doing. And Chad's face was far more animated than Reuben had ever seen before, but when Chad started laughing funny, in a snorting, 'let it all hang out' sort of way, Reuben knew that he was to some degree, indeed stoned.

The driver appeared disoriented, looking this way and that, apparently lost, but she didn't seem to be too upset. The car weirdly moved to an intersection that, those coherent enough to be paying attention, knew they had passes through not more than five minutes earlier.

“Oh oh!” The dark haired, suntanned girl sitting in the middle of the front seat said calmly. She was the copilot and pseudo navigator that seemed rather distant from the rest of the girls. “We're coming up on some motorcycle fuzz.” She said almost nonchalantly. She turned around and looking at the girls in the back seat said, “Roll down the windows and clear out the smoke.” A funny thing was, nobody freaked out, not even Chad who was first timing it. Reuben felt perfectly comfortable sitting in the back of that station wagon filled with girls and thought, “So what if we get pulled over, they'll think me to be young Hugh Hefner.”

“Everybody hold on.” The driver said as she took a hard right. Everyone was thrown to one side as the car skidded sideways and the tires squealed. Suddenly, as if they were transported to another road, the occupants were magically off of the heavy trafficked road, the police were gone and the red, 58 Edsel station wagon had slowed down to a cruising speed moving up a narrow mountain-like road. Almost as quickly, the car pulled over to the side of the road and parked behind a yellow Buick.

“Is this it?” Chad asked, almost disappointed that he had lost his companion.

“It's up at the end of his road around the corner and through that long pathway that you'll find there.” The girl navigator said with an assurance that led everyone to believe that she had been there before.

Reuben and Chad cheerfully volunteered to carry the food and supplies for the girls and the nine of them moved towards the entrance of the Park. After walking a couple blocks, other people, mostly boys and girls in brightly colored attire, seemed to appear from out of nowhere, in front of and behind them, all moving with expectations towards the happening.

When they finally got to the Park gates there were over 60 people standing at the entrance, some of them handing out leaflets and flowers, others just smiling, greeting the newcomers as they came in. Reuben looked for the reactions on the other guy's faces as he and Chad walked in with seven girls. To his surprise or maybe dismay, there was no reaction, but only joy that they were all entering to become a part of something he couldn't quite grasp at the moment. And then, as quickly as it began, their association with the troop of girls discontinued and with smiles, they took their bags of groceries and drugs and parted company. Reuben wanted to stay with them—Reuben wanted to make it with any one or all of them, but they had their own plans that did not include Reuben or Chad. They did leave a glimmer of hope and invited both of them to ride back with them after the ceremonies, and the two boys promised they would try to be there.

After passing through a small set of paths going in different directions and then back into dense woods, Reuben and Chad came into a clearing where there were thousands of people, mostly teenagers, sprawled out on the grass, sharing food and smoking marijuana. There were groups divided up in small camps; with happy people in all of them engaged in mutual recreation. One group was playing rudimentary drums, or harmonicas or kazoos, while another large group of girls and boys of all ages were holding hands, danced in circles while they moved over the open fields, weightless and feathery, like they were floating on air. Chad and Reuben, caught up in the festivities, lost track of each other; one dancing to the South, the other to the east. After intense minutes of circling and holding girl's hands, Reuben and the majority of his dancing troop felt to the earth in content exhaustion.

Reuben laid face down, his nose buried in the grass and he breathed in the fragrance of the earth and green grass. He opened his eyes and pondered what it would be like to be a little man of maybe, one inch tall, walking through this huge jungle of green foliage. He rolled back over and discovered people next to him smoking a cigar-sized joint. He no sooner sat up than the number was passed to him to partake. He took a deep hit but found the smoke to be extremely harsh and powerfully strong. He fought with his lungs to hold its

exquisite goodness in, but it was too powerful and like 1000 tiny fingernails scratching on the inside of his chest, he finally submitted and coughed its spirit out.

A tall, longhaired, full-bearded guy in his late 20s or early 30s with purple granny glasses retrieved the heavy number. There was something odd or just off that Reuben couldn't quite figure out about this guy that looked too much the role of the stereotypical hippie, almost like he was there watching, participating, but that he didn't really belong. With his newly purchased leather vest covering a perfectly pressed polka-dotted shirt, Reuben began to feel that maybe this guy was a “narc,” (a Federal, State or Local Narcotics agent), but Reuben knew he was stoned and passed it off as just being paranoid. Something inside seemed to tell Reuben he needed to get away, and trusting that special feeling, Reuben instinctively got up and started to move away.

“Wow man,” the narc-like man said, watching Reuben. “Are you getting freaked out or something?”

Reuben shook his head but still maintained an enmity as he said, “I guess I'm just getting too stoned.” Reuben stood up to slowly move away but the other man also stood up, quickly facing him.

“Why are you here?” The narc-like man said in an uncomfortable, almost confrontational tone. “Do you know what this Love-In is all about?”

Reuben frowned at him and replied, “Who are you?”

The narc-like man, perhaps realizing that he'd crossed a line and had come on too strong to someone he didn't know, smiled and said, “Oh, sorry. I thought you were my friend, Bill.”

“Oh.” Reuben said, slightly letting down his guard.

“But,” The narc-like man said in a calm voice, “why do you think it is that everybody is here?”

“Well, I think a lot of people are here for a lot of different reasons.”

“There's a war going on over in Vietnam right now.” The man said mildly apprehensive. “You know anything about that?”

“Well, I...” Reuben began.

“There's a lot of people dying.” The narc-like man interrupted, his tone growing anxious. “Corporate America is capitalizing on the death of people in Vietnam.” The narc-like man seemed to get angrier as he continued speaking. “President Nixon doesn't want to stop the war, he wants to keep sending us to our doom.”

“You know?” Reuben said. “There's not much I can do, I'm just one kid trying to find...”

“I know where you're going, man. That's a copout. Everybody can make a difference when everybody stands together to make that difference.”

Just ten feet away Reuben could see thousands of people in the park running around, dancing to the driving beat of people pounding on sticks, African drums, tin cans lunch pails, playing all sorts of instruments from flutes, trumpets and saxophones to autoharps and guitars, the new hippies were sitting up in the trees, lounging all over the grassy hills, happily communicating with each other, sharing flowers, sharing food, sharing drugs, and there he was with someone on a real downer, talking about the politics of a war that Reuben knew nothing about. And then, almost like the intervention of the gods, a voice from far off called, “Reuben. Reuben...” His younger brother Chad, who had gotten separated from him, had finally found him but was aggravated. “Hey, man, where did you go?”

“I got lost.” Reuben replied, turning to the narc-like man and motioning his departure. Reuben turned around to face his brother Chad but in that split second that he had turned away from the narc-like man, Reuben caught sight of the butt of a small handgun tucked into narc-like man's pants, mostly covered by his vest. Reuben had an urge to turn back around, but something inside told him to get away, so he grabbed his brother by the arm and quickly walked away.

After distance and hundreds of people were between them and the narc-like man, Reuben said, “I don't know who the hell that guy was, but he was carrying a gun.”

“Are you sure?” Chad asked.

“Yeah. And that guy was freaked out too. He was an antiwar radical,... or pretending to be.”

“You think he's here to shoot people?”

“I don't know,” Reuben answered looking back over his shoulder. “But I just want to get as far away from him as fast as I can. Besides, he was bumming me out.”

“I gotta take a leak.” Chad said, looking around with anxiety.

“Me too!” Reuben said, “let's go find a bathroom.” They waded through a multitude of dancers and wanderers all in a hurry looking like they had somewhere to go.

There was this new thing called ‘the peace sign’ where a person raised his pointer finger and his middle finger up together to form a sort of “V” for victory. During the Second World War, to many, this ‘V’ sign signified a unified victory towards peace. Later the ‘V’ sign came to symbolize no more war in Viet Nam. There at the Love-In, it was like a flag that was waved, identifying people as being part of the beautiful people that wanted to end the war.

Reuben had never really felt very comfortable using the hand gesture before; it felt too contrived, too Winston Churchillish, but now at this special gathering, it not only seemed appropriate but almost necessary. Someone would wave the peace sign to Reuben as if to say, “Hey, I’m hip to the movement and what’s happening, and I know what’s going on,” and then Reuben would wave back in confirmation, as if to say, “Yeah, I’m hip.” Reuben’s smile would seem to add, “I’m also one of the enlightened ones, and I do get stoned.”

Reuben found himself waving the peace sign to everyone and receiving it back from almost everyone, but that didn’t help his quest to go to find a bathroom, and after a while, he and Chad found some semi secluded bushes up on one of the hills, and they were about to go when the bushes next to them started to rustle. Into a hollow, between bushes, two couples were making out in between passing around a pipe.

A young kid of fifteen or so, wearing a bright red long-sleeve, collarless tee shirt with multiple strands of beads around his neck, looked up and asked while holding up a small brass pipe, “You guys turn on?”

“You bet.” Reuben answered smiling as he peered into the concealed, fort-like area within the bushes.

“Yeah.” Chad reaffirmed, looking anxiously to his big brother for approval.

Reuben looked back at Chad disconcertedly. He had felt somewhat justified in his own varied steps to turn on with grass, and a part of him wanted his brother to share in the new discoveries of enlightenment, but a part of him did not want his brother to partake; a part of him wanted Chad to abstain from any such activity and remain clean and innocent. Still, Chad had already inadvertently partaken of the forbidden fruit; the osmosis occurring in the red, 58 Edsel station wagon with Reuben and the car full of girls. And now, even though it was through second-hand smoke, Chad had partaken; and as he looked almost pleadingly back to his big brother, not only for approval, but for authorization, acceptance and a personal acknowledgment to this rites of passage, Reuben couldn’t help but feel he would be selfish to deny Chad the right to choose this path.

“Yeah.” Reuben finally said; his arm wrapping around Chad’s shoulders. “We’re brothers, man.”

Chad’s face lit up with excitement; not just for the permission, but for the special camaraderie.

“We got us some righteous hashish here.” The girl in the thin brown paisley cotton dress said. She was shoeless, braless, apparently had no underwear on and Reuben caught himself staring through her revealing, see-through dress. Her long, semi-curly red hair covered most of a scar, perhaps an old burn on her left shoulder and part of her back. She wasn’t extremely good-looking, but there was something in her smile and her eyes that testified of a wonderful person, and her special aura seemed to draw Reuben to her and made him want to know more about her.

“I’ve never done hash before.” Reuben admitted, positioning himself next to the girl.

“Me neither.” Chad said, sitting down across from Reuben.

The girl in the paisley dress handed Reuben the pipe but held her thumb over the opening. “Okay, here’s what you do.” She said kind of laughing with a smile that seemed to make Reuben high just being there with her. Her accepting eyes looked deeply into his as she said, “okay now, I’m gonna put a match to this,…” she looked solemn, “and when I do, you take a big hit,…” And I’ll cover it up again.” She looked at Reuben seriously for a second and said, “Be careful, this is strong shit. It’s gonna knock your head off.” She lit a match and moved so close to Reuben that he could smell her body. Not perfume or a masking spray to mask her sweaty body odor, but there was something else; something earthly, and it excited Reuben. “Okay, now,” She said with caution, “just,…”

Reuben filled his lungs with the burning smoke, trying to hold it in while everything in his body screamed to let it out. Reuben thought he had control and she pulled the pipe away, but seconds later, his lungs gave way and he involuntarily coughed it all out.

The girl in the paisley dress wrapped her arm around Reuben, hugged him like she really knew him and said, “you did good,…” really.”

Between the strong hashish and the paisley cotton dress girl’s friendly advances, Reuben floated into

the psychedelic space on the eighth plane. He smiled with delighted approval at Chad who was poised with the pipe in his mouth, about to get his first dose of the monster smoke. “You’re gonna dig this.” Reuben said and laughed when the girl in the paisley dress smiled knowingly back at him.

After five minutes and a few more tokes, Reuben and Chad were ready to return to the valley below, forgetting what it was that they had come up there earlier to do. As Reuben stood there, poised and ready to leave, he felt a heavy, deep-rooted yearning; an emptiness in his soul that he knew needed to somehow be filled. He had only known the girl in the paisley dress for ten minutes, and he knew nothing of her past or present life, but he knew he could be with her forever. Maybe this was just something sexual calling, maybe one of those two guys with her was her boyfriend, maybe she was just nice because he was so stoned, or maybe all of his perceptions were warped because he was so wiped out; maybe it was a combination of any or all of these things, but Reuben knew how he felt and he knew he had to take a chance.

“So,...” Reuben said, eyeing the girl in the paisley dress who seemed disconnected to everything around her including him. “So, um,... Hi, um, I was just wondering... uh, my name is Reuben and uh... This is my brother Chad, and um, I was just wondering if you um, if you, or what you were gonna do, or um, maybe later or something...”

“Hey Gwen,” the guy with the beads next to her said. “I think he’s trying to scope you out.”

Gwen looked up at Reuben and asked with a curious, almost distant look, “you hitting on me?”

Reuben was dumbfounded. In his mind he fumbled for the right words to say but nothing came to him. He wanted to be brave, to be forthright and say, “yes!” But instead his eyes went from hers to the ground and in embarrassment he turned away.

“Hey, that’s cool, Reuben.” She said in a reassuring, melodic voice that seemed positively angelic. She reached into her purse and pulled out a small piece of a pencil and a torn piece of a grocery receipt and wrote down her name and phone number and then included her address. “Later, I’ll be down by the bands. I heard the ‘Doors’ are playing this afternoon and I love Morrison.”

She moved in close, well within Reuben’s space and handed him the paper. She moved her face close to his ear like she was going to whisper something and then suddenly kissed him on the cheek. She smiled and maintained a mesmerizing eye contact with Reuben as she seemed to float effortlessly backwards and back down into a sitting position next to the man with the beads.

Reuben looked at Chad like he had just won the contest. He folded the already small piece of paper three or four times and crammed it safely into the deepest reservoir of his left pants pocket. Not wanting to create any ill feelings, he said to the two guys sitting by the big tree, “Hey, man. I’m not trying to beat out anybody’s time...”

“You’re cool man.” The guy with the beads said. “Gwen’s my sister and I’m with Sheila here. Bob’s just here for the trip, man. He wanted someone to guide him on his first acid trip so here we’re at this cool Love-In.”

“You’re on acid?” Reuben asked, surprised.

“Oh yeah.” Bob said slowly and carefully.

Reuben realized that Bob never did smoke any hash; he just seemed to groove. “Well, I hope you have good trip.” Reuben said waving the peace sign.

“It’s happening right now, man.” Bob said smiling. “It’s happening right here.”

As Reuben and Chad started to move down a path, the four hash smokers got up and moved down behind them. Reuben kept looking behind, greeted by Gwen’s warm smile, her paisley skirt swaying from side to side, gently kissed by a cool breeze. After the third time Reuben looked back, Gwen cast an inviting glance that kind of said, “don’t worry, you go on out there in that love in and play, we’ll get together later on.”

Reuben turned around surveying the park, now filled with thousands of kids like he and his brother, all seemingly deciding just where to go next. Reuben knew exactly where he would want to be a little later on, but for now, he was wiped out, floating inches off the ground and in the best of spirits that he could possibly ever have remembered being. He glanced one more time behind him, but to his surprise, the four had vanished somewhere into the huge crowd. A small sadness came over him but he reassured himself that he would hook up with her later on, and besides, he had her number.

As he and Chad negotiated through huge groups of people, traveling from all directions to all directions, Reuben realized that the stereotype of San Francisco hippies were not the majority; most of the

other guys there were not too unlike Reuben and his brother, in white T-shirts, blue jeans, short to moderate cut hair, and little to no facial hair.

Reuben realized that most of these kids, boys and girls, like him, were still in high school and had come there to find out what a Love-In was all about. Most of them knew very little about the power struggle going on in Vietnam, but many were like Reuben, and felt that the senseless killing in a crazy war was wrong, and even Chad who was just a sophomore knew something about corporate interests and puppet leaderships, but there and then, especially at that special event, the whole picture was neither understood nor important.

That was not to say that Reuben wouldn't have wished that his parents could have been liberal enough to allow him to be one of the long haired freaks out in the crowds, but at Glendora High, only well-kept jeans were allowed, otherwise slacks were the dress code and the girls had to wear dresses, and students weren't allowed to have sideburns below their ear lobes, there were no mustaches allowed, nor for that matter, facial hair of any kind, and though things were changing, at that moment, a guy's hair could be no longer than two inches below the bottom of their ears. Reuben wondered what school the rest of these kids were going to that allowed them such wild freedoms. He also wondered what it would be like to have parents that might judge their children by their actions, not by their physical looks.

“You know, Rube.” Chad said walking funny from too much hash. “This happening is a gas. Everybody is cool. I seen some older people that brought their children. Think what mother would do if she was here. And the cool thing is, man, they don't need any police. Everybody is cool.”

“If mother was here, man, than we wouldn't be.” Reuben reminded his over-stoned brother. “But whatever, man. Peace.”

Another parade of people, holding hands and moving in waves, approached, and a girl grabbed Chad's hand in passing, pulling him into the procession. Chad reached over and grabbed Reuben, and off they went, no particular direction chanting, “Hare Krishna,” stepping to the beat of a bongo and a tambourine.

When they let go or were let go, the two of them found themselves in front of a huge merry-go-round with large, colorfully painted animals. There was a calliope playing loud circus-like music with an assembly of a massive automatronic orchestra playing loud circus music in the center of the merry-go-round. The two brothers stood there almost in disbelief to the wonderful psychedelic merry-go-round. After looking around and finding no one apparently in charge, the both of them jumped onto the moving platform and each picked a favorite animal to sit on. Happy teenagers passed out flowers and uprooted bits of shrubbery as they passed the stationary people that watched them go on the merry-go-round. As the music continued and the merry-go-round circled endlessly, Reuben's eyes were fixed on the mechanical instruments that played all by themselves like there were invisible people manning the mechanical instruments.

Their time of simple, easeful happiness was halted as Reuben realized it might be time for his rendezvous with Gwen. “Chad, what time do you think it is?” He asked excitedly.

“No idea.” Chad answered as he continued to pretend that he was in a race and his horse was in the lead. “But, but who cares?”

“We gotta go.” Reuben insisted.

“What?” Chad asked, annoyed. “Why?”

“I gotta to meet Gwen by the stage.” Reuben said, jumping off the merry-go-round. “You coming?”

Chad was having a good time; he was sure that riding on the merry-go-round enhanced his psychic abilities and he imagined that he could read other people's minds as he went by them. Still, he had already lost Reuben once that day and he didn't want to repeat that annoyance of trying to find him again. “Okay, let's go.” He said reluctantly. Chad looked back with longing eyes like he was leaving Disneyland.

Lost and unsure of the exact destination of the stage, Reuben made the mistake of assuming that the other people that were giving him instructions knew what they were talking about. Walking in circles, Reuben and Chad found themselves further away from the stage than they could even know. After hearing echoes of loud music coming from all over, they managed to somehow follow those traces of sound to the front of the stage.

Reuben looked everywhere; at and through the crowds, on both sides of the stage as well as in front of and behind it, but no Gwen. Onstage was a group that seemed inexperienced; out of sync, not at all together. But somewhere between the drummer's steady beat and the quick fingers of the organ player, they rose out of

their noise and started playing together. People remained sitting around the stage and on the grassy hills with the rumor that Donovan might be taking the stage later that evening.

As much as Reuben loved Donovan’s music, he knew he would have to be home before dark. “Do you see her?” Reuben asked Chad, who was spacing out staring at a girl that was wearing a wet tie-dyed T-shirt that stuck to her body and gave the appearance that the top part of her body had been psychedelically painted. “Chad,” Reuben called out anxiously, “do you see her anywhere?”

“No.” Chad answered, still staring at the psychedelic girl. Chad turned to face his brother, “Hey Rube,” He said, “I don’t even remember what she looks like.”

Reuben looked annoyed for a second until he realized that he wasn’t too sure anymore either. Still, he walked around the crowd looking for her with hopes that maybe she might just recognize him.

“Hey,” Reuben said to a large, tall guy next to him, staring up at the stage. “Do you know when the Doors, come on?”

“This is the Doors, man.” He said without looking down to Reuben.

“She must be here then somewhere.” Reuben thought to himself. He walked slowly back and forth, but was halted by the crowd of people—close to a thousand peaceful boys and girls, that had moved in to hear Los Angeles’s own new rock band. The crowd was moving Reuben away from his brother Chad who stood there staring at the stage. It was late; Reuben realized there was no way he was going to be able to find the girl in such a large crowd, so instead, he eventually maneuvered his way back to his brother.

“Chad, I think we gotta go.”

No answer.

“Chad, I think we better go.” Reuben yelled. “It’s starting to get late.”

No answer.

“Chad, can you hear me?” Reuben yelled as he reached up and pulled on his brother’s shoulder.

Chad woke up out of his mesmerized dream and said, “What?”

“Chad, I think it’s time to go.” Reuben said loudly and slowly.

“Oh, you want to go?”

“No, I don’t.” Reuben answered, annoyed. “I don’t want to go, but we better go.” Reuben gave Chad a down-to-earth serious look.

Like Reuben, Chad knew that they were both on a short leash and so, without hesitation or argument Chad turned to his brother and said, “Okay, let’s go.”

Neither of them knew exactly what time it was, only, from where the sun seemed to be behind the clouds, they knew that it would be dark soon. They made a few short stops on their way out as people shared a couple hits here and there, and eventually they stumbled down the road they had come into the park on. As they continued to the main road, they found that the Edsel station wagon was still parked in the same spot.

Reuben thought of how hitchhiking on Saturday afternoons had a psychology all to itself as he watched Chad anxiously looking both directions. “I hope we get a ride pretty soon.” Chad said anxious.

“I wonder what time it is.” Reuben said looking at the sky that appeared to be growing darker.

“We might just get a ride right off.” Chad said trying to muster up as much hope from the bleak situation as he could.

“All we need is just one good ride.” Reuben replied optimistically. “You know, this country, here in 1967 is divided into two camps, many camps really, but mostly there is this battle between the “hippies” and the “rednecks.”

“Oh, great philosopher!” Chad said sarcastically. “What does that have to do with us getting home?”

“Well, ..” Reuben paused for a moment to collect his spaced out thoughts. “You and I, we’re definitely of the mindset of the hippie but we’re dressed and appear to be in the camp of the rednecks.”

“I’m no redneck.” Chad insisted.

“No, but you look more like one of them than a hippie. Well, especially if you take off that scarf you have wrapped around your head. But, Saturday, a lot of the traffic is shoppers driving around.”

“Yeah?” Chad questioned as he removed the scarf and put it in his back pocket. “So what?”

“Well, this usually means we get rides with shorter distances, and you know, even moms with their kids sometimes stop. Why? Because we are two non-threatening kids just trying to get home. Right?”

“Yeah, so?”

“To get back to Glendora we need longer rides so instead of this road, we need to aim for one of the main highways that has fewer stops in between so we might get closer to our destination.”

“okay, let’s do it.”

This strategy was logical to both of them, but it still took them three rides just to get to the end of Pasadena where they stood stagnant for twenty minutes. Reuben, feeling nervous and knowing Chad to be worse said, “Let’s play that game we played on the way up here.”

“No. I hate that game.” Chad returned. “And you know I hate it.”

“Come on, you go first; you do fine.”

“You’re just saying that because I’m not good at it and you are.”

“No, you’re good at this.” Reuben lied thinking the diversion might ease the tension of them possibly being late and then getting into trouble. Reuben had a good buzz that he wanted to keep; a good positive feeling and optimistic hope was always good for the high. “So, do you want to just walk along in silence?” “Yeah.” Chad answered curtly.

“Hey look,” Reuben said pointing down the highway, “A 58 caddy convertible coming—just like Perry Mason used to drive.”

“Maybe it is Perry Mason.” Chad said sourly. “I don’t want to play.”

“Okay,.. but here comes a British Racing Green 65 Ford Falcon sedan.” Reuben persisted, almost taunting Chad with an easy one to get him involved.

No comment.

They walked for over an hour with their thumbs out, and as the time whet by, Reuben lost his high, became depressed with worry and gave up trying to maintain a good positive attitude. Like Chad, he knew they were now in trouble and if they did not get home soon, Senior, who went out of his way to find any reason at all to discipline them, would have good reason to punish them severely.

“1958 convertible Porsche.” Reuben said, seeing the car from far off. “Banana yellow with the ragtop up; expecting rain.”

“I don’t,.. want,.. to play.” Chad said with slow angered words.

“I know,” Reuben said as his eyes watched the car pass them and then slow down and pull over. “But I think it’s gonna stop,.. Hey, it is stopping! That car stopped! Come on, Chad, let’s go.”

They both ran up to the car, but as they got closer to it, the car quickly jumped forward.

Chad slowed down and said with frustration, “There wasn’t enough room for us to fit into it anyway.”

The yellow Porsche shifted in reverse and swiftly backed up to Reuben and Chad.

“Maybe you should go and,..” Reuben began, suggesting they split up so at least one of them would not be in trouble.

He was interrupted as the passenger door opened up and his friend Jim peeked his head out and said, “you guys need a ride?”

“I don’t think we’ll fit,” Reuben began, “but maybe if you don’t mind, one of us could,..”

“We can get you both in.” An annoyed voice from the driver’s side said.

Jim climbed out and pulled back the seat, which opened up a small, 18 inches by three or four foot space. Chad looked at Reuben and smiled as he squished in behind the driver. Reuben followed him and tangled his legs with Chad’s to fit in the remaining open area behind the front seats. Jim jumped back in, shutting the door to finalize the transition. The driver wasted no time shifting the Porsche into gear and rocketing back into the flow of the highway, causing Reuben and Chad to lose their already precarious balances and they both slam their heads against the ribbing of the canvas.

“You guys going to Glendora?” The driver asked.

“Yeah, if you’re going that far.” Reuben answered with a note of apprehension in his voice.

“These guys live just by the high school.” Jim interjected. “Rube, this here’s my friend, Hank. He lives just about a mile up from Snicker’s Grocery Store, across Highway 66 in upper Pomona suburbia.”

Hank leaned slightly back with his head cocked to one side and nodded. He was a little man with long, Brylcreem -greasy hair that was combed straight back. He was dressed in tattered jeans; an old dirty white T-shirt covered partially by a cut-off sleeveless, jean jacket and high-leg motorcycle boots.

Reuben tried to ignore it, but couldn’t help but feel a bit uncomfortable from the suspicious or

ominous look that Hank gave him through the rear-view mirror. It was the same look that Reuben felt dogs gave him just before they realized that he was afraid of them and then, that they had the upper hand.

“So what happened to you, Jim?” Reuben asked trying to lighten up. “We were out there early this morning waiting for you and I even called, but nobody answered the phone.”

“The Morris Minor died on me this morning on my way over.” Jim said, leaning back, trying unsuccessfully to look Reuben in the eyes. “So I did the same thing you did, I hitchhiked there. Wasn’t that a blast?”

“Oh wow, man, it was just so freaking out a sight, man.” Reuben answered.

Reuben and Chad’s heads and bodies knocked against each other continually; especially every time the car hit a bump in the road or every time Hank made a sudden move as he quickly weaved around cars and through the heavy traffic. Still, Reuben and Chad felt it was a small price to pay for them to get home on time.

“Anyway,” Jim continued. “I was looking for my friends and found Hank who offered to give me a ride home.”

“Well Hank,” Reuben said enthusiastically. “You’re saving our ass. Chad and I have the stepfather from hell who looks for any reason for us to get into trouble so that he can punish us.”

“It’s okay,” Hank returned, looking back to Reuben for a moment and then turning back to the road, “we were going this way anyway.” The lines and expressions on Hank’s face along with his sun-darkened skin revealed someone that had spent a lot of time outside, yet because of his small frame and miniature features, to Reuben, Hank almost looked too small to be driving, especially this cool Porsche.

“You guys holding?” Jim asked, turning around to face Reuben and Chad.

“Nah,” Reuben answered. “We were lucky though, there was smoke everywhere at the Love-In and we got ridiculously stoned on hash.”

“You mean, righteously stoned?” Jim asked, laughing and looking over at Hank.

“Yeah, I guess.” Reuben postured. “But we were out on that highway where you guys picked us up for over an hour.”

“Sounds to me like you boys need a little pick me up.” Hank said, pulling a joint off of his left ear.

“Jim, get this started up.”

“Yeah.” Jim responded. With the click of his Zippo lighter, the interior of the Porsche was filled with the essence of the burning weed.

It was excellent weed and after Reuben was stoned again and a little more complacent, he said to Hank, “Hey man, this is a really cool car.”

“Porsche.” Hank returned curtly.

“Yeah,” Reuben corrected himself, “Porsche, but it’s really cool.”

“It’s a 1958 Porsche.” Hank returned, perhaps feeling a little more comfortable because he too was stoned. “356 Carrera Speedster. It was the year that Porsche started using the new 1600 CC engine to improve the performance. Only 48 of these were made in 1958 and 1959. It kind of just called out to me. Said, “Hank? We could be friends; you and I.””

“Wow.” Chad said, impressed with the ride they were squished in. “Is this yours, or your folks?”

Hank looked over at Jim and the both of them began laughing. “I guess you could say neither.” Hanks said without turning his head. “It’s just kind a... borrowed.” Hank and Jim began laughing again.

Suddenly, like they had been standing still before, Hank found some hidden power and the Speedster seemed to shoot up the highway even faster, like a bullet, passing cars from the left and right. Reuben was not too stoned to feel comfortable with this crazy driving, but he was after all, just another passenger on his way home. Five minutes later they were in their neighborhood.

“You guys want me to drop you off in front of your house?” Hank asked.

“No.” Reuben answered with noticeable anxiety. “Uh, we need to walk a little bit to air off, you know what I mean?”

“Yeah.” Hank answered as his car swiftly pulled over and halted, causing Reuben and Chad to lurch forward and Chad bumped his head into Hank’s. Hank’s face turned angry for a quick moment as Jim got out.

“Hey, well, thanks for the ride.” Reuben said enthusiastically. “You saved our lives.”

Jim climbed back in, rolled down the window and said; “we’ll see you dudes later.” His words taking on the Doppler effect as Hank shoved the Porsche into gear as he peeled out and disappeared around a corner.

“That was really cool.” Chad said to Reuben. “But I’m really glad to be out of that squished area.”

“Me too.” Reuben agreed.

“Yeah,” Chad said looking all around, “and that guy was kind a scary.”

“Yeah, to me too.”

“I thought when I bumped into his head he was gonna get out of the car and kill me.”

“I was worried too,” Reuben said as he stopped and began brushing his clothes off like he was covered with cat hair.

“What are you doing?” Chad asked, perplexed.

“I’m getting all the smoke out of my clothes.” Reuben answered. “Even though Senior and mother smoke, I don’t want them to smell all this pot on me.”

Chad followed his lead and brushed out his clothes too. “Do you think,” Chad asked as he hastily continued brushing while he walked, “this, “just borrowed” thing meant that it,…”

“Was stolen?” Reuben interrupted and smiled. “Well,.. Yeah!” He said dim-wittedly.

Both of them laughed together as they walked up to the front door. “Funny thing is,” Reuben said as he turned around with a confidential whisper, “it was my first time to every ride in a Porsche, I’d kind a like to know what it’s like to ride in one of the seats.”

Reuben and Chad both laughed again as they went into the house and went immediately to their room.

“Did you smell what was for dinner?” Chad asked.

“What ever it is,” Reuben answered. “I’m ready for it. What do you think it is?”

“Not think, I know, it’s tacos.” Chad said.”

While maintaining a low-profile in their room, both of them changed their clothes and washed their hands and faces to remove all traces of their extracurricular activities.

Their mother came in a couple minutes later with plates of food and a smile. “So, where did you both go to today?”

“We went to a Love-In at Griffith Park.” Reuben said with a smile. “It was a blast. There was bands playing and an amusement park that was free and there was hundreds no, maybe thousands of other kids from high schools all over.”

Reuben’s inclusion of high schools all over left the impression that he and his brother were just hanging out with a bunch of other high school kids, kind of like a band and music competition fair or a large regional wrestling match, either way Reuben got the effect he was looking for and his mother smiled and said, “That’s nice.” She hesitated in their room smelling something and said, “You boys need to get your laundry out of here and washed, it stinks in here.” She laughed and left while Reuben and Chad looked each other in the eyes but said nothing.

Two hours later, as Reuben and Chad were laying down in their room watching TV, they heard the raised voice of Senior, yelling something inaudibly at somebody out in the kitchen. They heard it a second time. All of a sudden their door crashed open and Senior burst in. “Didn’t you hear me calling you?” He screamed loudly, out of breath like he’d just finished running a mile.

Reuben and Chad, startled and scared, stood up but backed away from the obvious confrontation. “No,” Reuben answered, not knowing why they were being singled out. “We didn’t know you wanted us.”

Senior stood there with his angry look on his face, breathing heavily and quickly through his nose. Both Reuben and Chad knew this was not a good sign. Still, they had gotten back in time and there was no way that either of them would admit that they had been smoking some illegal substance. Senior seemed to be struggling with the right word or phrase to use, like it might even matter, but then said, “you boys come in the living room right now.”

He stood there waiting for the boys to start moving but they didn’t want Senior walking behind them and were waiting for him to go first. He interpreted this hesitation as disobedience and said, “didn’t you understand what I just said?” They both moved quickly to the door and out into the hallway where their mother, worried about what was happening, interceded and walked with them into the living room.

Reuben and Chad stood in the living room for a few moments as Senior and their mother talked out in the hallway. Without words they looked each other in the eyes questioning each other what they might have done to cause this action, but each returned a look of confusion and doubt. They could only sit there and fear

that one of their dark secrets had been revealed and that they would now pay dearly for it. Senior stepped quickly into the room and motioned for them to sit on the couch.

“You boys,…” Senior began with a note of disdain, “were at that, what the hell is it called, Ruth?”

“A Love-In.” She answered sheepishly.

“Yeah, a Love-In.” Senior said, looking with determined scrutiny at Reuben and Chad to see if their eyes might reveal something else—something more. “You boys went to this,…” love-in today?”

“Yeah?” Reuben answered for both of them. “We were there with lots of other kids and they weren’t doing anything bad.” Reuben wasn’t sure exactly what the problem was but he certainly would not compound it with the knowledge of teenagers doing drugs. The truth, at least from a semantics perspective, was that there were a large number of kids at the gathering that neither took drugs nor drank anything but water. They truly were there to listen to the music or protest the war.

“Do either of you know what this so-called, “Love-In” thing is all about?” He asked with an angry tone to intimidate Reuben, Chad and Reuben’s mother.

“Well,” Chad said, glancing at his mother and Reuben, and then back to Senior. “It’s a celebration of life. And the coming of spring.” Chad felt satisfied that he had hit the nail on the head, for after all, aside from the drugs, that’s really what he got out of it.

“That’s not what a Love-In is about.” Senior returned, disregarding and probably not even hearing what Chad had said. “Chad,…” Reuben?” He chided angrily. “This, “Love-In” thing that you went to today is an anti-American gathering tool for Communists and reds to infiltrate our nation and break down the fiber of our country.”

Reuben looked back incredulously. He could hardly believe that Senior could be serious; and just where would he come up with such information? If Senior had only been there he would have seen 6000 kids dancing, playing music, getting stoned, but nowhere did Reuben see anyone standing on a platform with swastikas on their arms preaching the downfall of America—that just wasn’t what it was all about. “We weren’t doing anything like that.” Reuben said in his and Chad’s defense. “We were there to have a good time and listen to the bands that were playing on the stages.”

“Your brother Henry is over in Vietnam right now, fighting the gooks; defending our country against communist groups and red organizations that are trying to destroy the American way of life. The Russians have sent in Spies to infiltrate our country and brainwash teenagers just like you two to go against the fiber of the country.”

“But it was nothing like that.” Reuben said in desperation. He could see where this was going and worse, he knew what he was rebutting was not even being heard.

“I just watched some of this ‘love-in’ shit on the news.” Senior said on edge, with a bubbling fury as he gasped for air. With him feeling like there was too much to say, Senior threw out his words without any consideration, which caused his speech to come out choppy; sounding retarded. “I saw kids dancing around like idiots, saying anti-war things and carrying signs.” Senior paused to catch his breath, waiting for either of the boys to say the next wrong word so that he might ambush them and shoot them down. Reuben and Chad were wise to this maneuver and did not fall into his trap.

Reuben and Chad remained silent, looking back expectantly, both careful to avoid eye contact.

The nostrils of Senior’s nose flared as he breathed in heavily, staring down at them; ready to strike at them for the next thing said or done. When he soon realized they were not going to speak, Senior said, “Your brother Henry is fighting for his life in Vietnam and when you do something like this, it’s a slap in his face for all he’s doing, and to all the servicemen that keep our country free, and it’s a slap in the face of America.”

Senior stopped talking, hesitating like he was unsure how to conclude his particular dissertation, but finally said, “This is a serious thing and you need to understand what you did today was wrong.”

“But they didn’t understand what they were doing?” Their mother said in quiet defense.

Instantly the knuckled end of Senior’s right hand hit their mother’s cheek and she fell over, onto the floor. In a devastating shock, all of her children gazed at their mother’s unmoving body lying in front of them on the floor. “Don’t you ever interrupt me when I’m disciplining the boys.” Senior said to the unconscious form on the floor.

Hearing the sound their mother’s quick scream, and then seeing her fall to the floor, Dominic and Christina were both terrified, but Dominic still knelt down next to her lifeless form.

Senior blinked quickly three or four times then turned back to the Reuben and Chad who stood horrified at the sight of their fallen mother, unsure what to say or do. Senior seemed to delight in the shocked reaction he received from Reuben and Chad, but not wanting to have Dominic and Christina involved anymore, he said, “You two go back to your rooms.”

“But mother’s hurt.” Dominic said as he stroked her disheveled hair.

“Go back to your room.” Senior demanded, this time grabbing Dominic by the arm forcefully and throwing him towards the hallway. Dominic, confused, looked first at his father and then took his sister’s hand and led her out of the room; both of them crying as they left.

Perhaps the sounds of her distressed children reached down and into Reuben’s mother’s unconscious realm, for she woke up groggily, slowly got up, and walked over to defiantly stand in front of Reuben and Chad to shield them. By now, her bright-red face was puffed out and her left eye was swelling shut, but her resolve was concrete. “Stop it.” She demanded, staring back at Senior, daring him to try to hit her again.

Seeing her resolve, knowing he wouldn’t be able to catch her off guard again, Senior stood quiet and motionless, staring back at her with a burning fire in his eyes. He was glad to see she’d regained consciousness for he had a fear that he might have had to call for an ambulance to have her brought to a hospital and having all the neighbors gather and gossip while they wheeled her out was something he did not want.

Senior knew that he had carried this thing too far and he did not want to escalate this confrontation anymore. “You boys will be on restriction for the next six months.” He said determined.

Reuben, Chad and their mother all looked back in disbelief but no one said a word. Instead, they all stared back at the monster who would not be negotiated with.

Senior, feeling the conversation was over and that he had gotten his point across, left the room, but waited just outside the living room in the hallway for them to dismiss, forcing them to pass by him as they went to their rooms; thus watching and waiting, maybe even hoping for someone to say or do anything out of line so that he might react in a timely manner.

With sorrowful concern on his face and a heavy weight of guilt in his heart, Reuben stood by his mother and asked, “Are you alright?”

“Don’t talk right now.” She said seriously, almost angrily with a wild look in her eyes.

The three of them ushered out of the room, Reuben and Chad, fearful of any further reprisal, stared at the floor avoiding any eye-contact with anyone as they walked past Senior and then moved quickly to their bedrooms. Their mother hastily stepped into Dominic’s room and then Christina’s, reassuring them that she was alright before she went into her own bedroom.

In the silence of the obscure shadows of the darkness, Reuben and Chad laid there on their beds staring into the blackness of their room. When Reuben closed his eyes he could see his mother’s bruised face and felt the anguish and guilt on his thoughtless actions. He felt guilt knowing that if he had not gone to the Love-In, this whole thing wouldn’t have happened. He felt guilt knowing he did nothing to come to the aid of his mother, but instead, left her lying there, beaten and unconscious on the floor.

Yet, another thing confused his mind and he kind of believed or tried to convince himself that because of Senior’s disposition, if this “Love-In” thing had not happened, something else eventually would have and it would not have mattered who’s fault it was.

This small justification brought little to no comfort to Reuben as he laid awake waiting for the second confrontation that he now felt would happen—the confrontation between his mother and his stepfather that would escalate into another fight. Reuben felt that his mother’s love for her children and her continued defiance to Senior would not be tolerated and that sometime later, she would have to be punished for making him the bad guy, and for that, Reuben knew that Senior would need to put his wife in her place.

Reuben found himself silently crying and praying to God to protect his mother. He prayed with great sorrow for forgiveness, repentant for this unfortunate incident that he was responsible for. He prayed that Senior’s heart would be softened and that all of this might somehow just ease down.

He laid awake all night long, thinking, or moreover, resolving that if or when he did hear his mother crying out in the night from Senior beating her up, that he would go down the hall and stand between her and him like she had done for him. He even bravely opened his door to be sure to be able to hear things more clearly, but when Reuben saw the light of the new morning coming through the windows, he knew that the

second confrontation was not going to happen.

That morning, being Sunday, Reuben went to church with his mother, Chad, Dom and Christina. They drove the six or seven blocks in silence. Reuben’s mother, who wore a wide-brimmed hat with a heavy black veil over her partially bruised face, seemed surprisingly upbeat as she interacted with other parishioners while they found seats in the back row of the Church.

As Mass commenced, Reuben stared up at the compellingly commanding figure of Jesus on the cross, and Reuben thought about the torment the crucifixion must have been. He thought about and correlated the sacrifice and love of his own mother with the sacrifice and love of Jesus; and then Reuben said a prayer of thanksgiving to God for and in behalf of his prayers having been answered for his mother’s deliverance.