

The Reset

“This rock is Eden. Shipwreck here.” – W.H. Auden

In the beginning, Diana Figueroa was whoring for an Armenian pimp named Mario Garabadian who held court in the Casito Del Corazon in East Hollywood. Lucas Mullins was especially cautious today as he waited for Mario outside the Corazon. It was just past eleven in the morning when Mario stepped out and saw Lucas standing there, up the block. He went to him.

“Mario. I need your help.” There was fear in Lucas’s eyes.

“My help? Up your ass, bro.”

Lucas, scared: “Hear me out, please.”

Mario, who’d just done a bump, had never seen the redneck this way. He knew that Lucas, a Kentucky pimp new to the L.A. track, was planning to steal Diana, his bottom bitch. His Salvadoran star. He’d been ready for Lucas to act like tough guy killer he made himself out to be during their past few encounters. Not this. “You’re lucky I don’t seriously have you killed.”

“Some guys took Diana.”

Mario sniffed. “The fuck you talking about? Who?”

“A Mexican gang from Echo Park. They just came out of nowhere. We were standing there on Sunset, D and me. In broad daylight. I turned to feed the parking meter for a second and they pulled up. This van full of bald, tattooed beaners. One stuck a gun in my face while two grabbed her, dragged her into a van and drove off. It was crazy.”

“This scared a tough guy like you?”

“It was like it wasn’t real. Like it didn’t really happen.”

Mario’s adrenaline went down. *This is going to be easy*, he thought. “You sound like a tourist, bro. You should be taking pictures of the ground at the Chinese theatre, not fucking with real pimps.”

“I know we had words and I went off the handle. I got a problem with that. But I don’t want anything bad happen to D and I think you feel the same way. L.A. ain’t my town. I need a fella that knows the score out here to help me get her free. What do you say?”

“What gang was it?”

“The Echo Park Maniacos. After they left I got into my car and drove after them until I found the van. They took her to this house on Glendale Boulevard. You know who I’m talking about, right?”

“I know the Maniacos.”

“She’s in there and we have to get her back. You want to see her again, don’t you?”

Mario reached to his side and patted it, touching the loaded snub nose .38 he was hiding. It was the one he kept under the bar, the gun Lucas didn’t know he was carrying. “Where’s your truck?”

Lucas shook his head. “They know it. Might get suspicious if they see me there too close. I don’t want them to do anything to her. Can we take yours?”

Mario thought about it. He said, “All right bro. We do this.”

They walked to the lot behind the Corazon and got in Mario’s white Cadillac. Mario drove toward Echo Park. Lucas, in the passenger seat, looked worried and resentful. Diana had spilled some details to Mario about Lucas: She said that, on top of pimping, Lucas planned to open a square bar in Echo Park soon and that he’d been an armed robber for a stretch, back in Kentucky. He had a crew of three guys who’d followed him out here. Mario didn’t know if Diana was lying or not.

Lucas made small talk: “Shit. You do this, maybe even that rich French guy Diana knows will give you a reward or something. The Frog?”

The Frog was a famous gangster and pimp that Diana’s aunt Lucia, a former whore, now retired and living it up in Hancock Park, had dated for years. Throughout their time together, Mario had often pressed Diana to arrange a meeting between him and the Frog but she’d never done it. This fact had always been a source of embarrassment for Mario. “There’s got to be a reason these guys when after Diana,” Mario said. “What is it?”

Lucas kept both hands on his kneecaps, as if he was afraid to touch anything inside Mario’s ride. “It was payback. One of my buddies tries to run down one of them down with his car.”

“What he do that for?”

Lucas rolled down his passenger side window. They were cruising east on Sunset toward Echo Park. “I’m getting a house started up in their hood. We had a disagreement and I flew of the handle. My buddy just did it without thinking.”

“You can say that again.”

“You said you know these Maniacos?”

The .38 was pressing against Mario’s side. He shifted in his seat as he drove. “Yeah. Their boss man wouldn’t steal a girl he knew was mine. I’ll be able set things straight.”

“That’s a relief.”

They hit Echo Park. Lucas directed Mario to Glendale and Cortez. “The real world ain’t so simple, is it cowboy?”

“I guess it ain’t.”

They got closer to the house. Mario turned toward Lucas. “Diana works for me. She’s been gaming you, for me.” Casually, at that moment, when Mario was clearly feeling especially confident, Lucas took out a pair of black leather gloves and put them on. “When we get her back, she’s mine. No more bullshit. Say it.”

Lucas held up his gloved hands in surrender. “She’s yours,” he said.

They hit Cortez. Lucas pointed up the street. “The house is right around the corner. You should park here. See the van?” Lucas asked, pointing.

Mario parked and looked ahead. He couldn’t see the van. “Where’s the van? I can’t see it.”

Lucas got out of the car and shut his door behind him. Mario looked confused. Lucas, wearing his gloves, drew a .357 with a taped handle and trigger from his own waistband. He pointed through the rolled down window at Mario. While looking down the barrel of the gun, Mario thought about all the times Diana had given him a blowjob. Lucas shot Mario twice in the head.

Blood sprayed. Brain matter splattered. Dogs started barking up the street. Mario slumped over the steering wheel. Lucas shot Mario twice more in the back of the head. A car alarm blared. Lucas dropped his gun onto the passenger seat and stepped back. He pulled a towel from his coat and wiped the outside handle of the passenger side door.

A green Blazer with Kentucky license plates pulled up. Lucas’ man William Whelan, looking hung but still focused, was driving. He opened his passenger side door from the inside. Lucas got in and William drove off onto Glendale and got lost in the traffic.

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Diana went to her nightstand drawer where she kept her marijuana. Beside the weed container sat a mints case. She opened it and took out a plastic baggie with some small paper tabs of LSD inside it. She went back to her kitchen.

There, Lucas sat at the table with copy of the *L.A. Times* in front of him. There was glowing review of Lucas' recently opened bar, The Turkey Jowl West, printed in today's issue. Lucas had just gotten off the phone with the Frog's lawyer. Their conversation had gone well and the plan was for Lucas to meet the Frog personally at his Brentwood mansion during a party he was throwing there next week. The Frog was looking forward to meeting The Bluegrass Kid.

Diana sat. "Do you remember what I said, about this time for us?" she asked.

"That this is our rebirth, yes."

"Today, I think we should commemorate that with a ritual. Hold out your hand." Lucas held his hand out. Diana placed a tab of LSD onto it.

"Put it on your tongue," Diana said evenly.

"Don't think I won't."

Diana took her tab and put it on her on tongue. "You've never fucked on psychedelics. I can tell."

Lucas put it on his tongue. Diana smiled.

"Here goes nothing," Lucas said.

They went to Echo Park Lake. Lucas bought a stick of elote from a man pushing a cart.

They walked around the path.

"Nothing's happening," Lucas said. He took a bite of elote.

"Give it time. How come you don't like drugs?"

"My Dad said to steer clear. Women should be enough, he taught."

"That's a nice thought but it doesn't work for me. I'm already a woman."

Lucas had not yet put Diana to work as his whore. He'd been so focused on opening the bar and starting a relationship with the Frog that he'd postponed that. Diana had been off the track for too long.

A large white duck crossed their path. It turned toward them and quacked. The quack reverberated

across the park. Lucas dropped his half-finished elote stick on the ground, wondering for a moment how that quack hadn't shattered his own eardrums.

"Something's happening," Lucas said.

Diana sensed his worry. "Everything's all right," she said.

She took his hand and they kept walking. Diana took out her phone and called a car. It arrived quickly. She directed it toward Descanso Gardens.

Lucas looked out at the streets as they passed. They gave him the sense that he was looking at a completed puzzle. His pupils widened and his consciousness appeared to fall into the widening black pool in the center of his own eyes. He traveled backwards through time.

He was in the Turkey Jowl, his father's place. It was the 90s. He was cleaning glasses behind the bar. His father Clarence was yelling in the back room. Lucas saw him emerge. Clarence was a tall, formidable man with long gray hair. The Marine related tattoos on his arms were always peaking out of his short-sleeved hippie tunics. Clarence was holding a plastic bag of cocaine and dragging a scared woman toward the front door by her arm. Her blond hair was greasy and the top button on her acid wash jeans was undone. Lucas knew a lot of the women that worked for his father but he couldn't remember this one's name. Lucas was still young here, barbacking. This was before he'd been allowed unfettered access to his father's women. The woman was crying.

"I said if I caught you again you'd be out on the street!"

"I'll call the cops on you if you kick me out!" The woman said.

Clarence stopped. He smacked her across the cheek. She fell to her knees, defeated. Lucas watched silently. Two of Clarence's men dragged her out the rest of the way.

Later, Lucas and Clarence watched as the men drove the girl off.

"Where they takin' her?" Lucas asked.

Clarence said, "Drugs are a dirty business. Stay away, son. Drugs, what the drug dealer sells, his contribution to life, doesn't populate the world. Sex, what we sell, does. Don't mix what we do with what they do."

Lucas got sucked back to the present.

He blinked and he was in the car beside Diana. Everything was silent. The sun shining in through

the window made Diana glow. Sounds began to reach him. The car radio was turned to the news.

“I can play music if you want. Any requests?” the driver, aware of the focus Lucas was putting on the radio, said.

“Turn up the volume,” Lucas said.

The driver turned it up. Lucas and Diana listened closely to a news story. The newscaster said, “Hackers who stole sensitive customer information from the cheating website SkyeDaniels.com appear to have made good on their threat to post the data online. A data dump was posted Tuesday to the dark web. The files appear to include details and logins for some 32 million users of the social networking site, touted at the premier site for married individuals seeking partners for affairs.”

Lucas looked to Diana. The number seemed like too much to comprehend, like looking into a black hole. “32 million,” he said.

“Next, we’re going to hear about suicides,” Diana said.

Lucas thought about. He realized Diana was right.

They arrived at Descanso Gardens. Lucas paid for their tickets. They began walking through the flowers.

“When I was young, in El Salvador, bad things happened to me,” Diana said.

Lucas heard the song *Brown Girl In The Rain* playing in his head. His voice did not speak, but he thought: *Bad things?*

Lucas wasn’t sure if they were communicating telepathically, but it didn’t matter. She heard him. “There were dark years before I met my husband and moved here to L.A. Then my future came to me in a dream. What I am.”

You are a beautiful person. You are the only person alive who can read my thoughts.

“I’m talking about sex. Connecting with other bodies, breaking down the walls between people. It’s why I get up in the morning. I like fucking and won’t apologize for it.”

Wait. Can you read my thoughts?

Diana took Lucas’ hand.

“Yes,” she said.

They continued walking through the flowers. The God-like voice of Clarence boomed down from

the sky. "D.H. Lawrence says 'that is the myth of America.'"

Lucas looked up. Diana hadn't heard the voice. Lucas looked around at the flowers. The voice of his father once again reigned down on him. "'She starts old, old, wrinkling, and writhing in an old skin. And there is a gradual sloughing off of the old skin, towards a new youth.'"

Diana picked up a red rose. While focused on its blooming center, Lucas returned to Kentucky in the 90s. The wintertime. Lucas was young and he sat by the fireplace, looking back at Clarence as he sat in his recliner. Clarence's hair was braided like Willie Nelson's. He wore a maroon sweater. Their Christmas tree was lit up. Clarence's bookshelf rested behind his head. He looked at Lucas, his young son.

"'It is the myth of America,'" Clarence said. "Lawrence may be right, son. It may very well be nothing but a myth. But I'm telling you to never give up on that myth. No matter how bad things get. If you wish it, be reborn like the phoenix."

Lucas returned to the present. He was back in the garden, naked. Diana was lying down in the grass. Wild flowers of all colors decorated her long, flowing hair. Like him, she was also naked. Everyone else in the garden but them had disappeared. They were the only ones here.

Lucas said, "I promise you, wherever this goes, I'll never hit you."

"You better not," Diana said.

The driver let them out in front of the Turkey Jowl West. Brisa, the pupusa lady who parked her cart in front of his bar, had a line of customers. A homeless man asked people for change. Lucas placed both his feet on the ground. He recognized the scent of eucalyptus in the air, mixing in with Brisa's pupusas. He looked at his feet for a very long time.

"You know what this is beneath my feet? This is my turf now," Lucas said.

They walked upstairs to the bar's private second floor and laid down in his bed that they'd been sleeping in together. It was ninety minutes until the Turkey Jowl West was scheduled to open. Lucas felt ready for it.

"I feel ready for anything," he said.

"I needed you to understand."

"I do now."

They laid there silently, Diana with her hand atop Lucas' beating heart. After a long, wordless stretch, Lucas began to feel the first inkling that the acid was preparing to leave him and that his brain was turning back to its normal patterns. He wondered if he really meant it when he promised that he would never hit Diana.

"This room looks nice, don't you think?" Diana said.

"All the bedrooms are ready. We'll let the weekend go by, but once we get a slower night, we'll do a test run. You ready for that?"

Diana sighed. "If it's possible, make them cute."

If I keep on letting her talk that way I'll end up like Mario, Lucas thought. "What time is it?" he asked.

"I think we have to open soon."

"I can still feel it in my brain."

"Then there's just one more thing to do."

Diana began unbuckling Lucas' belt.