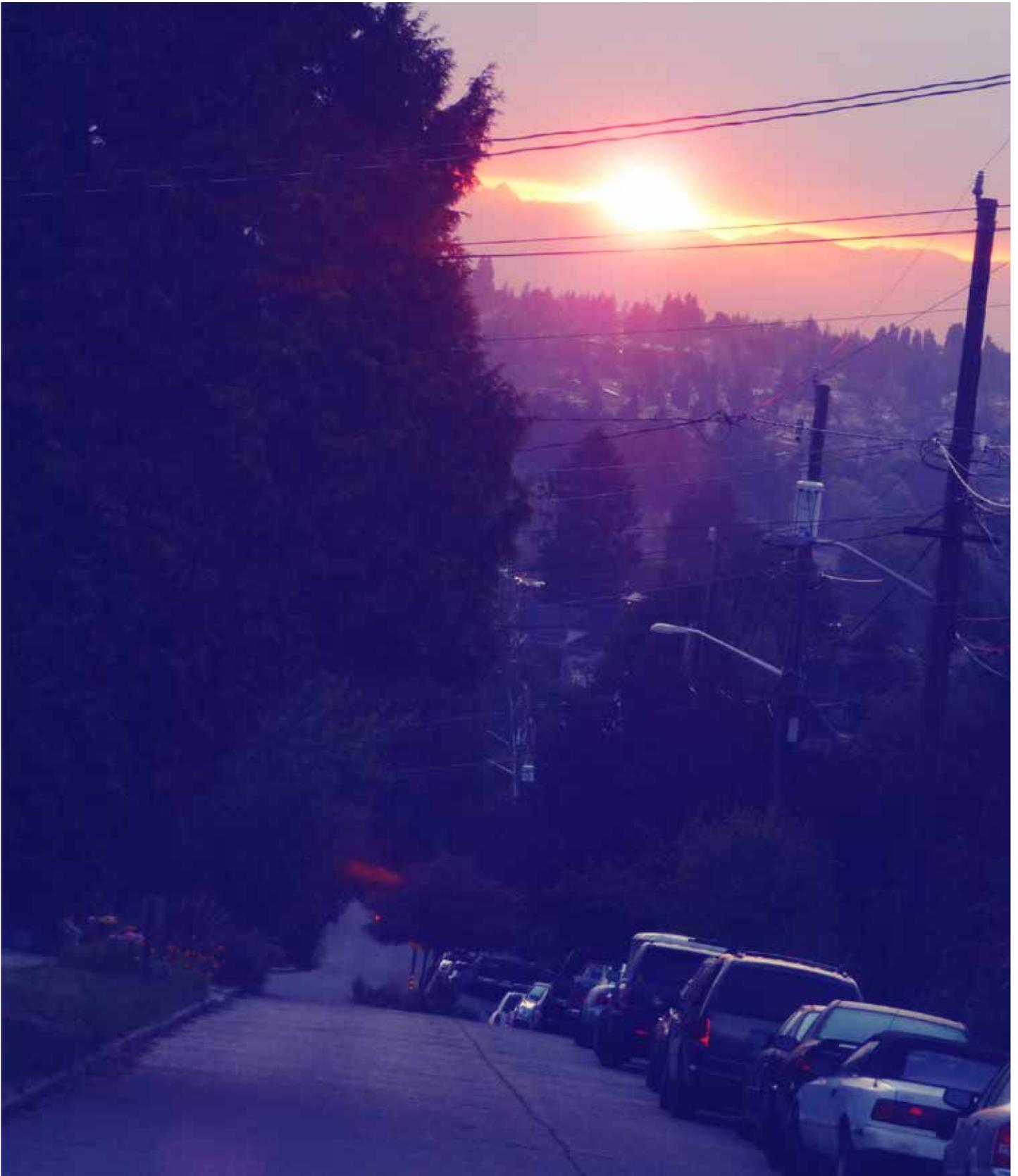


American Odyssey

by Jeremiah Karpowicz



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Prologue

A Beautiful Failure

I was at an amusing point in my life.

Amusing in the sense of, "this is absurd and I really don't know how this happened," as opposed to amusing in the "this is enjoyable" kind of way. Really though, I don't think the two are mutually exclusive.

I was in the grocery store trying to decide which raisin bran to buy. Normally I'd just buy whichever one I happened to notice first since



I was restocking the grocery supply for work so it didn't matter to me. The company was paying so it was free either way whenever I had a bowl of cereal. But Corey had told me in great



detail why he preferred the regular raisin over any other kind bran so I figured I should actually try to see what the difference was.

And that was why I had to smile. I was buying cereal for a living. The sum of my existence was determining which raisin bran to purchase. I was angry at the time, but in hindsight I'm glad Corey pulled me into his office to explain why he liked the regular raisin bran as opposed to whatever other ones I happened to buy from time to time. I wasn't really listening but the fact that he and everyone else there saw me as the guy who just got them food told me all I needed to know.

Hadn't I moved out to Los Angeles to accomplish something? Hadn't I been trying to make an impact in some way out here? At some point my life in LA had turned into just an existence. It wasn't something

I wanted to be doing it was just something I happened to be doing. And I wasn't okay with that.

It was my own fault though. A negative attitude crept into everything I was doing there because I resented my job for what it was and for the fact that I was still doing it. I goofed off when I was supposed to be working and rarely took my responsibilities seriously. Since I could barely muster the energy to take lunch orders they'd obviously never trust me with anything more important but I couldn't get excited about something stupid just because it might give me the chance to someday do something slightly less stupid.

Really though, I felt like there was nothing left for me in LA because for all intents and purposes I had failed. When I moved out here, I wanted to get involved in the entertainment industry even though I had no idea how I was going to do it. I knew it wasn't going to be easy but I believed that if I could just get people to see what I could do I'd be fine.

And...well...it's a typical enough story, I suppose. I tried to get in contact with talent agents and managers but they don't exactly welcome

welcome people whose only recent work in the industry was done in a student film.

I also found out fairly quickly that I had no desire to partake in the dog and pony shows





that are auditions because all you're doing is lining up in front of a bunch of people who are waiting to be impressed and I don't like having to perform on command.

So what exactly was I hanging onto out here? Being employed with a part-time girlfriend and living in an apartment that was crappy enough to be cheap but too crappy to be worth it wasn't exactly what I had envisioned for myself at this point in my life. I mean sure, I had a steady job that had room for advancement. I met a girl and started dating her. I got to know several people that became good





friends of mine. I went out and just enjoyed the people, places and things that made LA such a unique and exciting place.

But that wasn't why I moved out here. I don't remember exactly when, but at some point it became fairly evident that I wasn't going to accomplish what I wanted and that fact weighed down on me. Eventually I felt like I needed to move on and do something else even though I had no idea what. I just wanted to hit the road and go somewhere. And at this point, I didn't even care where.

I was hesitant though because while I may have hated the city at first, LA had actually grown on me. The fact is, nobody here talks about what they're actually doing. It's all about what they want to do, or what they can do, or what they will do. It's all about what they're

going to do and you could never escape that mentality, no matter where you went or what you were doing or who you were talking to. The whole concept made me smile and cringe at the same time.



In LA success is always just around the corner. Everyday could be the day somebody notices you and decides to make you a star. Everyday could be the day someone sees your stuff and decides you have what it takes.

I had been thinking about moving out here since I was in high school, even though at the time I had no idea what'd do here or even



why I wanted to come so badly. But it didn't matter to me and it didn't matter to everyone else who moves out here.

LA was where the action was, in more ways than one.

They made dreams here, after all. The studios, the beaches, the egos... all of it came together to form a mentality that made people believe in their dreams and that they could accomplish just about anything.

It was so big that there were people who were making a living off people who were chasing their dreams and it wasn't a bad living, considering how many businesses offered expensive headshots, how many



agents performed costly coverage and how many pricy acting classes were readily available. The only tricky part was in figuring out which places were legit and which were scams because there were plenty of both.

Evidently it had been like this forever since I remember going into rooms at talent agencies that had boxes completely filled with thousands of old resumes and headshots from people who had submitted themselves over the years and were no longer active. They were The Boxes of Broken Dreams, and now I was in there.



I had to wonder what happened to people who came out here and realized they weren't going to be able to do what they wanted to do. Did it ruin them? Did it give them a sense of peace? Did it drive them to do something they never would have done otherwise?

I couldn't even say what it had done to me. All I knew was that I didn't want to be out here pretending to be something I wasn't. I



didn't want to be continuing to chase a dream that had long since died.

And I didn't want to pick up any more lunch or cereal either.

Naturally I talked to my friends about all of this and their advice ranged from useless to slightly less useless. But at least they were trying.

Brian worked with me so he saw my general discomfort grow into a real dissatisfaction. It may have been a gradual transition, but since I wandered up to his office whenever I was bored, I suppose it was easy enough to see. He was the closest friend I had at the company but it was only after we started talking about this stuff did I realize how different we were.

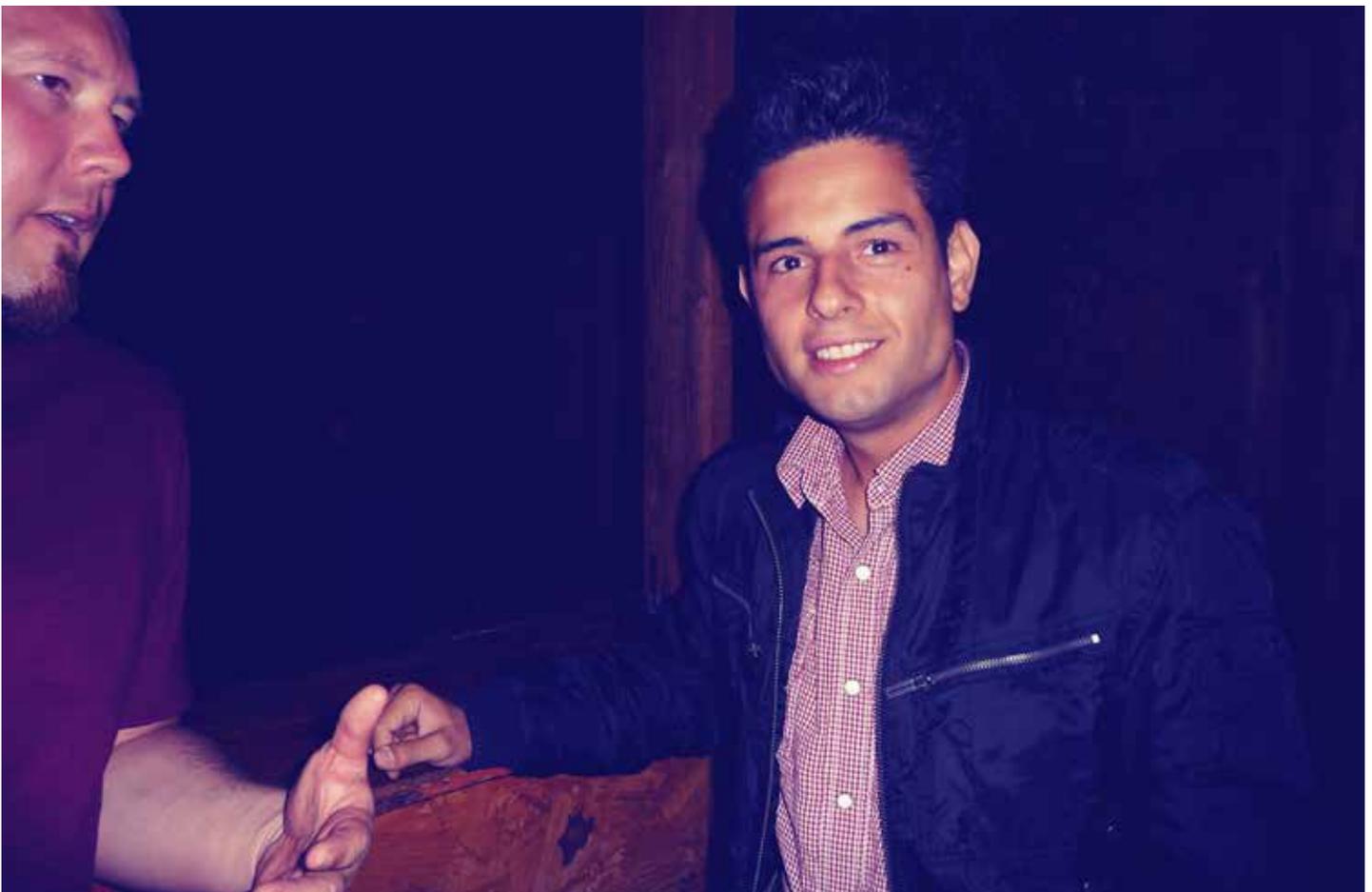
See, Brian was a girlfriend guy. For him security and familiarity were the most important things in his professional and personal life. He had been at the company a lot longer than me and had been with

the same girl for the last few years but that's not to say he was complacent or lazy, as some girlfriend guys are. He recently got a job at a big time talent agency which means he'll be well



on his way to...something. Even he didn't know what the future held, but he was confident he was on the right course.

Brian didn't understand my desire to leave anymore than I understood his willingness to stay and commit. I mean, how did he know this job was going to lead to anything? How did he know his girlfriend was even worth his time? Of course he had no idea but it didn't matter



to him. In truth, I wish I were more like him. But I think the deeper problem was that he knew what he wanted and I didn't.

Tony understood what I was going through though. He and I had often discussed our growing disillusionment with the fact that we both just seemed to be getting by. Recently, he had even been talking about teaching English in another country, which I thought was a great idea.

He was encouraging and enthusiastic about me getting out and doing something else but it surprised me to see he seemed to be resolved to stay in LA. I mean, I certainly didn't expect him to pack up his own life and take off because I happened to be thinking about doing something different. In fact it would be kind of weird if he did.

But based on our previous conversations I thought something like this would inspire him to do some of the things he had always talked about doing. That, however, wasn't the sense I got from him and he even said going overseas was no longer in his plans. It might have had to do with the fact that things were going so well with his girlfriend. And she was really cool because she was easy to hang out with. She was the type of girl where if everything didn't go exactly like she wanted

or the way she planned she didn't freak the hell out. Which is nice...I'd imagine.

He seemed to be happy and his desire to slow down and essentially settle down gave me



pause. Maybe leaving so abruptly wasn't such a good idea. I had picked up and moved on a whim before, but I was never giving up all that much. This time, there were things that I'd be giving up. It could be a mistake. A big mistake.

And really, just getting up and leaving would leave a bad taste in my mouth. Like coming out here had been for nothing. I wasn't a quitter,



but I also wasn't sure I still had the energy to pursue something out here. At least not the kind of energy Peter had since he was still doing whatever it took to succeed.

Peter was always looking to hear back from casting directors and agents so he was constantly on his phone, much to my annoyance. I swear, I don't know how this industry survived before cell phones but

but I imagine being inaccessible must have been nice once upon a time. On the other hand, when the call comes about a 2nd audition for Cop#3, you're pretty happy the casting director's



assistant's intern can instantly get a hold of you.

Funnily enough, he was the only guy I knew who would have no problem performing nude on stage but hated having his picture taken. It didn't matter what the situation was, he refused to pose or even be in any kind of picture if he could. You had to respect that kind of commitment.

I liked him though, partly because he was one of the few people to call me by my real name, rather than just Jeremy. I hated Jeremy. I also liked that much like myself, he didn't have much time for people who complained about things, especially people who lamented about how hard it was to work as an actor. But it also wasn't easy to be a doctor or an architect or something along those lines. He treated acting



seriously and because of that he found satisfaction in what he was doing.

What was it that kept his fires burning? Was he that much more talented? That much

more determined? Or was it simply a matter of being stubborn? Really it didn't matter because he was still eager to do whatever it took to succeed...although I'm sure being stubborn helped.

Regardless of the reason, Peter was committed to what he was doing and that was the key because there were always going to be people ready and willing to do what you weren't. Just like all those



people trying to be doctors and architects and just like all those people who showed up to audition or even people who showed up to open calls looking to get a job as a waiter. If you couldn't

commit to something you were going to get pushed aside for someone who would.

But what should I commit to? What could I commit to? Should I rededicate myself to my job? Go back out on auditions? Start writing again? I had already done all that.

Getting out and hitting the road though...that was appealing because there were new experiences out there. Places I had never seen and things I had never done. But with that comes the dangerous unknown. I didn't know what to do.

I was so all over the place that I even called up one of my oldest friends to vent and see what he had to say when I was supposed to be relaxing and getting away from everything. Of course, Adam was

the most useless of all but truthfully, none of them told me anything I didn't already know. It was just a question of whether or not I was ready to deal with such realities.



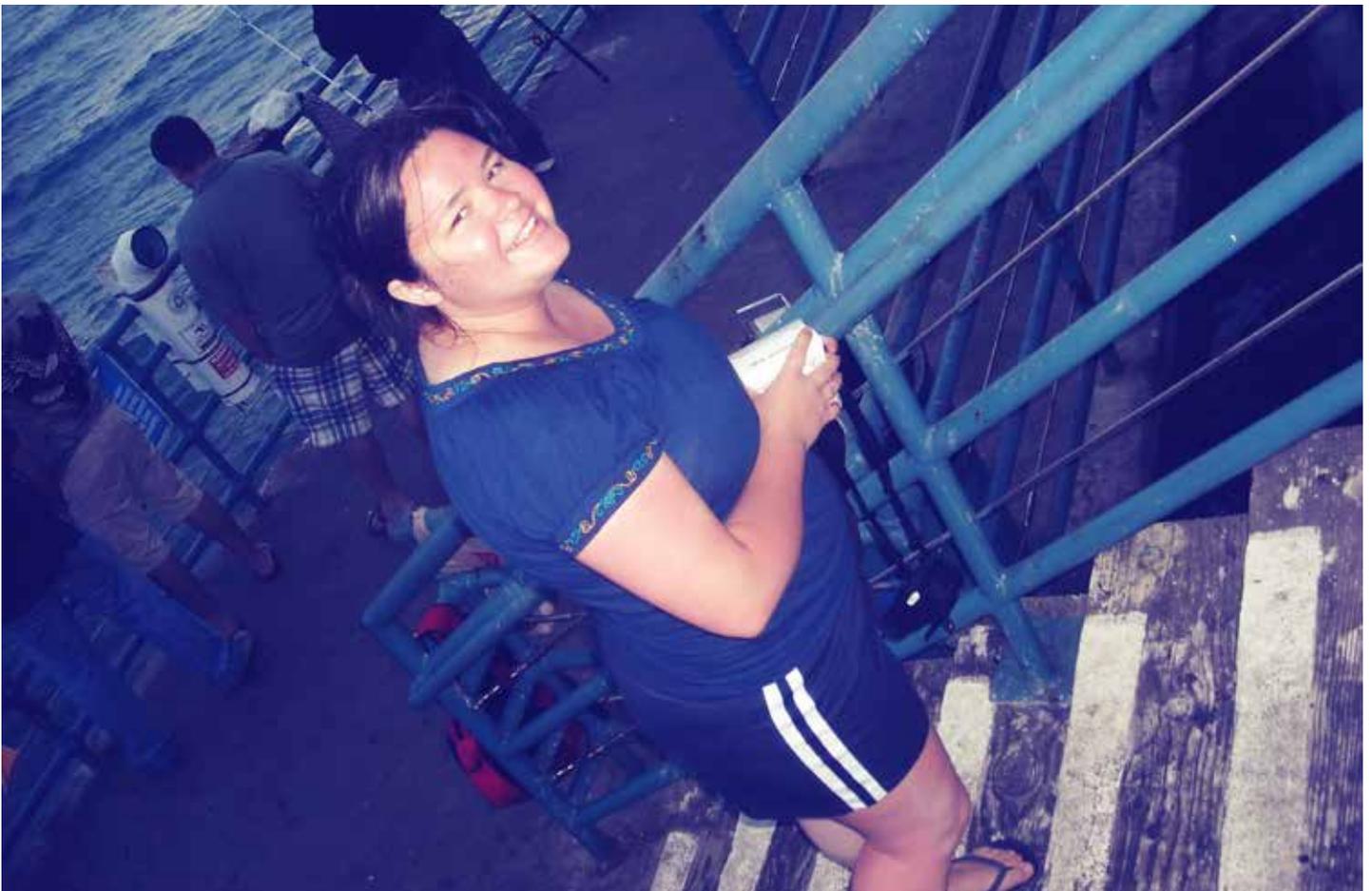
My biggest issue with leaving was that everywhere and anywhere else felt like such a step down. Los Angeles had so many different things to see and do. Important people lived here. There were famous landmarks and buildings everywhere you looked. Things happened here. Living in LA really makes you feel like you're a part of something special, even



if by definition, you aren't.

That was why my siblings came out to visit. Sure, seeing me was a part of it, but the reality is that Los Angeles was something to see and experience and they knew it. My sisters and brother had never been to California so they soaked in the atmosphere for all it was worth even as they were dealing with big events in their own lives.

My sister was still working out exactly what she wanted to do with herself. She was very private and like me in a lot of ways. I had a tendency to flip out and go a little bit nuts on various occasions for various reasons but I never saw her act like that. She was much sweeter and more even keeled than me yet the things that annoyed me about LA were the same reasons she said she could never live here and



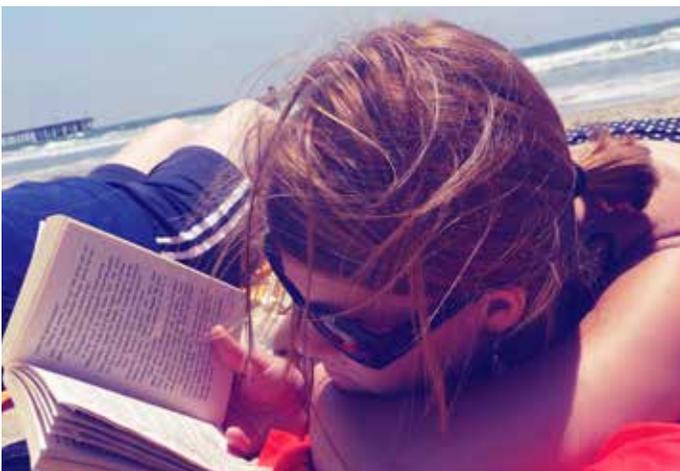
her skin burnt too easily to even think about it.

she had transferred a couple times in college and that along with the fact she hadn't really chosen a major really bothered my parents. she moved at her own pace and everyone either had to comply with that, completely cut her out of their life or go insane. My parents seemed to jump from one choice to the other on a regular basis but they always said she was too cute to stay angry at. If only that would have worked for me at her age.



My baby sister was entering her last year of college and as such had a lot on her mind. she was considering everything from where she was going to live to whether or not she was going to stay with her boyfriend that she had been dating for years. I had tried to get her to dump him in the hope of helping her experience someone new, but she never did. I suppose I can't really blame her. There are some real jerks out there.

she had been living in Chicago for school and had actually traveled



abroad so Los Angeles wasn't exactly the most exotic location she had ever been. She liked it here, although that might have had more to do with the beach than anything else.

It was good for her though. I think she enjoyed the scenery and the sun and just being here opened her eyes to the possibilities she would be facing when she was finished with school.

And my brother had only recently started college but he was fully enjoying the freedom and new experiences that came along with it. Which is to say he was smoking on a daily basis, skipping classes and



trying to score beer in any way possible. Not that I had a problem with any of that or did any differently when I was in college. Although I was more of a liquor guy.

He was social in a way that I never could be, and it might have been the only thing I was ever jealous of him about. I always rationalized that I was better off because I thought I was smarter,

but odds are he'll meet someone important, they'll take a liking to him and then hook him up with a great job or situation. Meanwhile I'll be consoling myself by telling him how many books I've read.



That's how he's always been though to the point that if face painting and pretending to be a caged animal was what he needed to do to make friends, he wouldn't think twice about doing it. My sister said she hated going anywhere with him back home because he always ran into someone he knew and had to have a whole conversation with them. She said it happened everywhere from the bank to the grocery store to the park which I had to admit was actually pretty impressive.

We were all very different, but my sisters shared similar goals and outlooks. I think they both would be happy as moms, but they wouldn't let that role define themselves. And my brother was too preoccupied with sleeping in until 1 in the afternoon to be considering anything long term. But that was part of his charm.



Being here allowed them to see up close and personal the kind of energy and mentality that LA had to offer and they were affected by it in different ways. My sister and brother were

a bit overwhelmed, but my baby sister enjoyed it to the point that she actually thought she might like to live out here. She would have stayed out shopping all day long if she could while



my brother was content to take a nap, probably because he knew he wasn't going to run into anyone he knew all the way out here. But both girls would have stayed on the beach all day if it was up to them. All girls like the sun.

Whether you were here for a day or a week or a year or forever, it was impossible to come here and not be affected by the city in one way or another. And that alone was a powerful thing because here the city was just as much a part of you as you were a part of it. Giving that up would be difficult, but giving it up for something so uncertain and possibly worse...that was indefensible.

My brother was ambivalent about my potential plans, but the girls were not thrilled to learn I was thinking about leaving. My sister was worried about my safety while my baby sister was concerned with how I would maintain myself if I quit my job. And they all brought up how our parents would deal with it which is to say not well. Not well at all.

I was still weighting my options, but I told them I had to do what I thought I needed to do regardless of the situation or details.



If you start worrying about what might happen you'd be living your life in fear. If you worried about what other people wanted you to do you'd be living a life full of regret. And I refused to do



either.

I think my sisters understood what I was saying. And I think they understood where I was coming from because they were dealing with similar pressures. But they still had a look of worry in their eyes.

My brother's were just glazed over.



socially, when I wasn't spending time with my girlfriend, pretty much all I did was go to bars and hang out with friends while drinking to various degrees. Just to do something different I started golfing...and hated it. I needed to clear my head though, so when KT called me to see if I wanted to play I was more than happy to go.

I was at an extra disadvantage because I was golfing with a set of right-handed clubs that my friend Chuck left behind when he moved and I'm a lefty. So needless to say I was pretty awful. But I didn't care. I'd be awful no matter what set of clubs I was using.

Really though, I wanted to go because going out with KT would allow me to get an objective opinion about what I should do with myself. Even though we had gone golfing a couple times and played

cards together we weren't exactly close. I didn't even know what KT stood for. But that would allow him to give me an honest opinion about what he thought I should do with myself since he wouldn't be concerned about things like my safety or sanity.

I laid out my options for him but he barely even glanced at me as he sized up his shots and only responded to say something about



his swing or why he was using a particular club. Not that it made any difference to me. I could barely tell one club from another.

When I talked about getting out and hitting the road in detail

he asked me why I was even thinking about doing something like that.

He told me about the two times he drove across the country and how there really was nothing out there. That is unless I wanted to see oddities such as the world's largest frying pan. He didn't recall exactly where it was though.

For me it wasn't about sightseeing or visiting the world's largest largest frying pan, exciting as that may be. I felt like I needed some perspective that I could only get by seeing what else was out there. Exactly how everything would work out I had





no idea but that wasn't the issue. All that mattered to me was that I'd be doing something that I wanted to be doing. And if nothing else, it certainly beat ordering and picking up lunch everyday.

KT was focused on his shots and getting birdy, or whatever it's called, but my mind was racing. I was concerned about doing something like this because I figured I would grow tired of it at some point. I was worried that I would regret leaving my life here. I was apprehensive about just getting up and going since I had never done anything like this in my life. But my biggest issue was that I couldn't



help but think that even after all this, even after going and doing what I said I wanted to do, that I wouldn't find any of the satisfaction that I envisioned.

At some point I started thinking out loud but I wasn't even sure if KT was listening because the whole time I was talking he was sizing up another shot and he certainly didn't look like he was listening. Eventually he said he heard everything I was saying and that none of it mattered. He said the fact that I was even considering leaving meant that this was something I wanted, and ultimately needed, to do.

I wasn't sure if he was being serious or just trying to change the subject but he was right. Now that this was in my head my biggest regret would be if I ended up not doing it and spent the rest of my life wondering how things would have been different if I had followed through. I would spend the rest of my life regretting something I didn't do because I was too afraid of the consequences and that was completely unacceptable.

Still, it was easy enough for him to say since the only time I ever saw him was when he was trying to take my money or when nobody else would go golfing with him.



Broom, on the other hand, had been getting drunk phone calls from me for years so for better or worse, he knew me as well as anybody. I hadn't actually seen him

since college but I knew he found himself asking similar questions about his job and life, although thankfully for him it didn't involve raisin bran.



Maybe that was just something that happened to people once they were out of their parents homes or out of school and in the real world for a little while. They started working and got to see what the rest of their lives were going to look like and they were not happy with what they saw.

Of course, people choose degrees or even careers based on what they want to do or what they like to do in order to help avoid such a scenario, but unfortunately for people like Broom, things don't always work out that way.

He was a nerd so he got his degree in history and just about the only two things you can do with that is be a professor or write a book. He was about fifty years too young to be a professor and he hated writing so he just took the first job that he found and decisions like



that never lead to anything pleasant.

What I loved about him was that even when we met in college Broom was already an old man. And he was proud of that fact.

He liked his cheap beer and early bedtimes while he hated loud music and extended trips in the car. One of the first things he did when he got here was complain about the traffic so it was good to see things hadn't changed.

He had never been to LA so I took him out to experience the energy and fun that LA had to offer. And, much like my siblings, I think



he enjoyed it because it was something totally different and new and worthwhile to experience. Just being able to go into the ocean and grab a seashell was a big deal when the largest body of water where you grew up was a lake or river.

And I realized I was jealous of that. I remembered when I felt that way about the ocean and even just being out here. But now I

didn't really care one way or another. That sense of wonder was gone and everything seemed old and tired. I wanted that feeling back though and what better way to recapture it by going somewhere new?

Since he knew the reckless side of me he wasn't surprised to find out that I was thinking about moving on a whim. After all, this was a guy I called at 6 in the morning on New Year's Day to tell him I was getting it together. He was still in college and on the way to class when I called him after being out all night and told him to put his professor on the phone so I could "tell him the score." I told him I had bitten a homeless person and infected them with rabies. He knew that I was prone to acts of rashness in every way imaginable but he also knew that I could handle myself.



He admitted it might be foolish to give up a life that was safe and secure for one that was risky and potentially dangerous. But since when had I been concerned about such things? Maybe I was the one getting old.



Really though, I don't know why I was even asking him or anyone else about what I should do when I already knew the answer. Staying in LA would force

me to become someone who led their life out of necessity rather than choice. And that was a scary thought.

There's such a dichotomy to Los Angeles. So much to love and so much to hate. Things appear one way in but in reality are completely opposite. The place looks like it's paradise but that's all an illusion. Everything from the palm trees to the regular trees that grow out here are an elaborate fantasy because LA is essentially built on top of a desert.

But the fakeness goes much deeper than the landscape and it's mostly because of the influence of Hollywood. For as long as it has existed, the city has taken entertainers of every trade and made them



stars. The fame and notoriety that Hollywood has created for its product is its greatest success and most endearing quality.

Of course it's all an illusion. They make these stars out to be larger than life but obviously they were just like anyone else although no one seemed to care. Everyone from the stars themselves to the people who paid good money to see them bought into the illusion and they couldn't get enough. Out here you'd have an easier time selling fame than you did selling food. People came from all over the world just to get a taste of Hollywood and it could be overwhelming. But just being able to take your picture in front of something you had seen and heard about your whole life was invigorating.

Such things contributed to the influx of people who were trying



to work here. Making progress in such a field was a tedious process because there were so many people following their dreams no matter how crazy or improbably they were. Because of that you had to get involved in all kinds of ridiculousness to give yourself the best chance at success.



Much to my chagrin, there were plenty of people like Nathan who were willing to partake in such insanity. Even though he was primarily a writer he was a member of a bunch of different improv groups and took various acting and film workshops to improve his craft but really



he just wanted to get involved with the people who were or would be making the decisions.

That was the name of the game because when everyone is trying to do the same thing the

the people inside get to choose who they want...and they want people they like...and they like people they know. So it was all about networking. Big wigs in the industry also sat in on these things all the time so just being there participating could be all it took to get in with the right people. Granted, sometimes that meant dealing with people who were either crazy or awful, but either group has just as much a chance of

succeeding in Hollywood as a talented person. I was never sure whether that fact was depressing or inspiring



We sat and chatted about such realities and even though he

was hopeful about the things he was doing and the people he was meeting I couldn't hide my disgust for the whole process and system.

I hated that success was so contingent upon who you met and whether or not they liked you which would then determine whether or not you got a job or position. I hated having to schmooze with people because then that's all anybody does and nobody can actually have a conversation.

Even worse though was that it seemed like the only reason anyone was interested in talking to you was because of what you might be able to do for them and once they find out you can't or won't help them they stop talking to you or they propositioned you. Either way, I didn't like it since having those conversations or that mentality is not what I wanted.

But maybe that's just what untalented people had to tell themselves. People like me who instead of actually getting something done just said they were actors but all that really means is that they go to an occasional audition between shifts at a bar or restaurant where they're making their actual living...if you were lucky.

otherwise you'd end up catering and working at rich people's parties or Bar Mitzvahs where you'd spend most of the evening avoiding a bunch of Jewish children because you accidentally lied to them and told them the food was kosher...or finding an empty room and taking a nap in a car seat.



or you can just hope you get noticed at a coffee shop or working as an extra. If I was going to rely on that I think I'd stick to the lotto, but stranger things have happened out here.

That was the amazing dichotomy of it all though because the



biggest illusion in Hollywood isn't even an illusion. Hollywood has created the notion that anyone can become a star out here. People look up to the big screen and see actors and directors and writer and producers and think they can create or be a part of such endeavors in the same way. And there are plenty of stories about people who did just that.

Of course, it really isn't true in the strictest sense because there are so many walls that keep everyone, talented or not, out. It certainly makes sense because if there was an open door policy throughout the town nothing would ever get done because every single production would constantly get deluged by everyone who was out here... and most of them aren't good anyway.

It was the ultimate illusion because it was based in fact and



reality. It certainly was possible to become an overnight success...it just wasn't very likely. Everyone always heard about those people who did while they didn't heard about the countless others who did not.

Such realities didn't deter people like Carl though. Much like Peter, he had been out here scraping away doing whatever it took to pay his rent while going to auditions and workshops in his spare time so he was certainly putting in the effort.

Of course, he also hung out at plenty of coffee shops and he didn't even like coffee.

He still partied like he was in college but he knew when he

needed to get serious and get to work. Between staying on top of bills and trying to get something going with his career, there actually wasn't that much time to do anything else anyway. Lucky for him he got in enough partying during one night to last for several weeks.

He was an optimist, but I wanted to ask him realistically what he thought his prospects to become successful out here were and told



me in no uncertain terms that he had gone through some pretty tough times just to keep living out here. His successes so far were limited to appearing in promotional pieces that had little



chance of ever going anywhere.

That wasn't even the worst of it though. He had to deal with endless auditions, agent calls, sending out resumes, updated headshots, going to call-backs, getting in contact with anyone who might be remotely interested in you...it turned into a rant and actually made my head hurt.

It was a dangerous game to play. If you're not careful



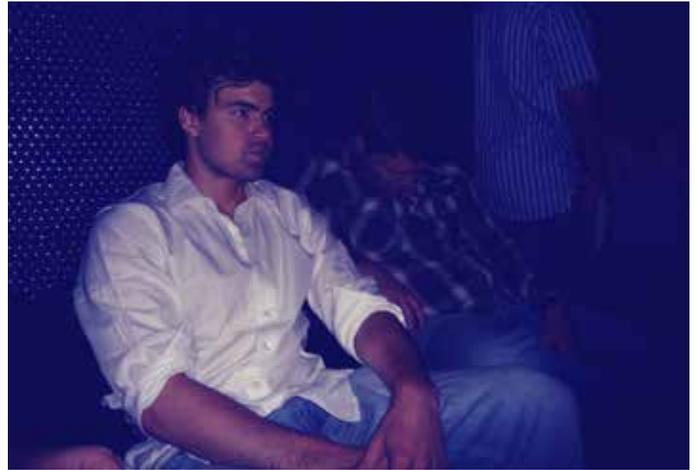
eventually you turn into someone content to look forward to something that was never going to happen. And that's not to say that's what Carl or anyone else was doing here. I had just seen

too many people who had let their dreams pass them by but stayed here because they didn't know what else to do. I didn't want to turn into someone who spends their whole life trying to do something while actually doing nothing.

Or worse...I didn't want to end up in a line where you're not even waiting to audition but just waiting to get something to eat. I'm sure some of those people had also come out here to pursue their dreams only things didn't work out the way they thought it would either.

Carl was determined though. He was driven. And that...that was the mentality you had to have out here and anywhere really. Anybody who didn't have the energy or the drive to make themselves a success at whatever they were doing should be doing something else.

But I already knew all of that. I hadn't wanted to admit it to myself but I knew I didn't have the energy to pursue a career here. I knew I didn't have the drive to commit myself to this Hollywood lifestyle and mentality. And I made no secret of the fact that I hated schmoozing.



I certainly had no regrets about moving to and living in Los Angeles because I enjoyed a lot of different things about being here. But no matter how you looked at it my whole experience in LA had been nothing more than a beautiful failure. And it was time to accept that.

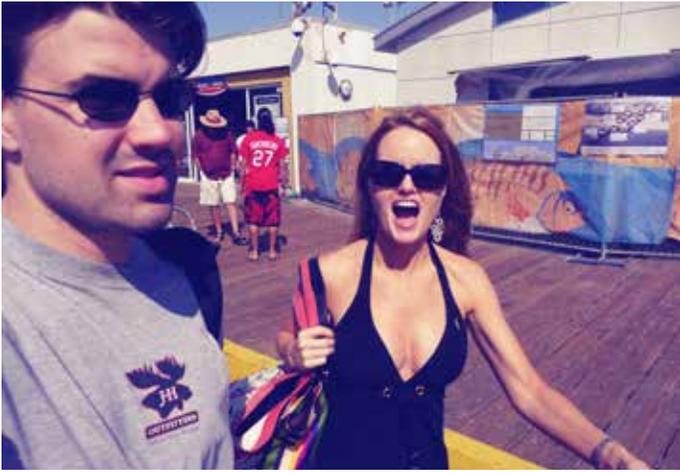


Michelle though...I didn't even know what to do about Michelle.

She and I had met at a bar one night when she approached me because she and her friends wanted to sit at the table I was at. Since I was a few drinks in and feeling pretty confrontational, I told her no. She's not the kind of girl that takes no for an answer.

That encounter somehow led to us getting a ride in the trunk of her friend's car and I have to say, anytime you've been in a trunk with someone it gives you a connection like no other. But it was more than just drunken fun. I loved spending time with her in every sense. She was smart, sharp and very funny. She and I had a lot of things in common which allowed us to keep each other on our toes. And I loved her.





At least said I loved her. My actions didn't always line up with those words since I would stop talking to her from time to time and flat out refused to compromise on various issues.

We butted heads over stupid stuff because we had different ideas about how a relationship should work. It went deeper than her yelling at me because I was late or me being annoyed that she wanted to talk on the phone for hours at a time though. She expected things to go the way she wanted them to go regardless of what I thought or how I felt. I can't stand that sense of entitlement and often made it a point to show her that her thoughts and feelings weren't more important than mine because we were equals in a relationship, right? It was just as much about me as it was about her, right? She didn't seem to agree, so that created some tension.

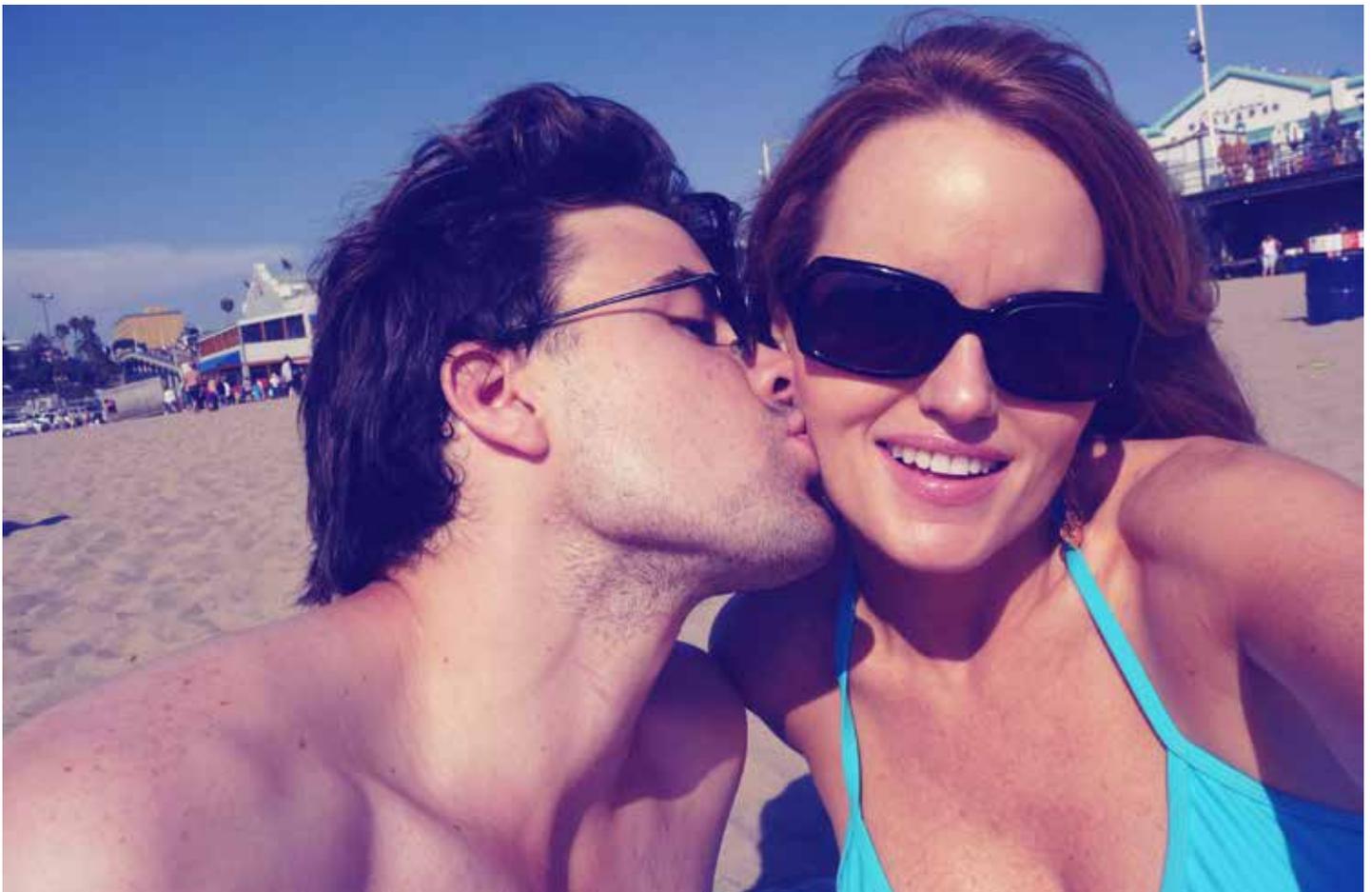


But what relationship doesn't have its issues? The fact is we had a very real chemistry which isn't something you find everyday. I loved just spending time with her. Of course it helped that she was gorgeous but just being physically attractive only takes a person so far. I've met plenty beautiful girls that I didn't even want to have an extended

conversation with, much less a relationship.



We also had a similar sense of humor. Her love of toilet jokes and frequent use of third grade insults always brought a smile to my face, even if it was directed at me. You'd be surprised how someone calling you a poophead can totally change a casual conversation or even an argument. And when your response is to say "your mom", things just keep escalating in ways you didn't think were possible. It wasn't always fun but we never lost interest in each other and that's saying something for two people who get bored easily.



We both moved to LA at similar times so we were always anxious to get out and see what the city had to offer. We went to the beach, baseball games and out to eat on a regular basis. We took trips to Las Vegas and San Diego and had fun when all we did was hang out and watch a movie. And it was all a blast. I went out with her and my friends for my most recent birthday and because of her it was my favorite birthday of all time.

Eventually though, things began to deteriorate. She had a good job but she hated working there while I was unhappy with what my life in LA had turned into so we ended up taking out our frustrations on each other. We did have a lot in common but that worked against us since we could both be selfish and unwilling to compromise. She was a



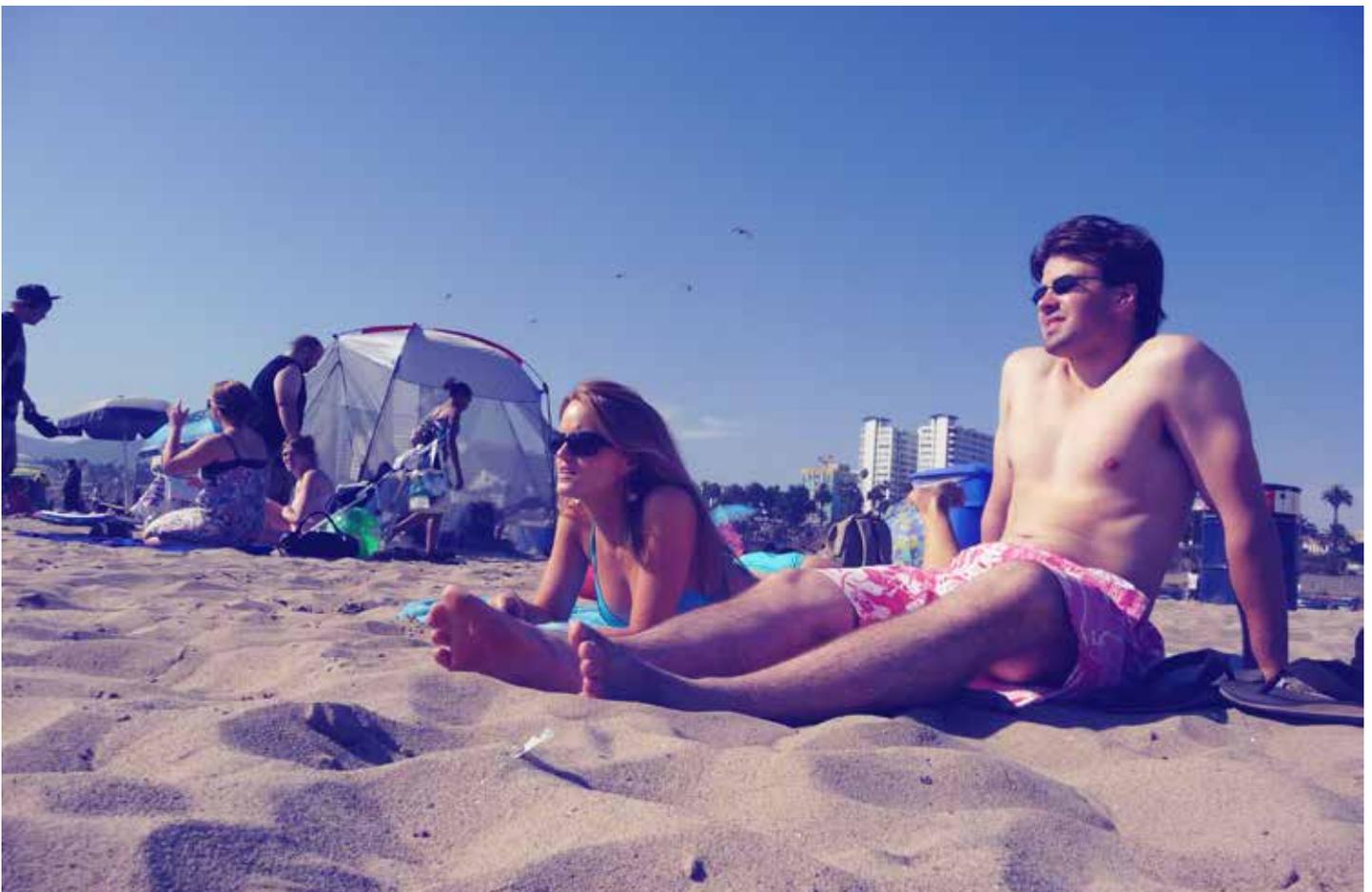
master manipulator and I would often say or do things just to see what her reaction would be which led to a battle of wits to see who would outsmart who. It could be more intense than sex

but rarely as rewarding.

Somehow though, and in some way, I think it underscored the passion we had for each other because no matter what we said or did to each other we both kept coming back for more. It was clear something wasn't working but neither of us knew what to do as we constantly fought and made up in what quickly became a tedious cycle.

one night, long after we started having issues, her roommate told me I should propose to her and it completely floored me because she was sure Michelle would say yes. The fact that I was even considering it stunned me even more. Despite all of our personal problems and all of the issues we had with our relationship, we had something special. When I told her I loved her, I meant it. And I think she did too. At this point in our lives though, that wasn't going to be enough for either of us.

When I first told her about leaving she reacted in typical enough fashion. She was an emotional person and when she was overwhelmed she would let loose without thinking about what she was saying. She unleashed a stream of insults that really wasn't one of her better outbursts and I had seen plenty to compare it to. It certainly didn't top her yelling



yelling at the transvestite who tried to hit on me. That one was backed by anger though, and she seemed to be more upset this time. Anger always leads to better fights.

Eventually she calmed down and voiced her concerns. She was worried about my going from place to place with no set area to stay. She was also concerned about whether or not I'd really gain anything from the experience. She really did care about me.

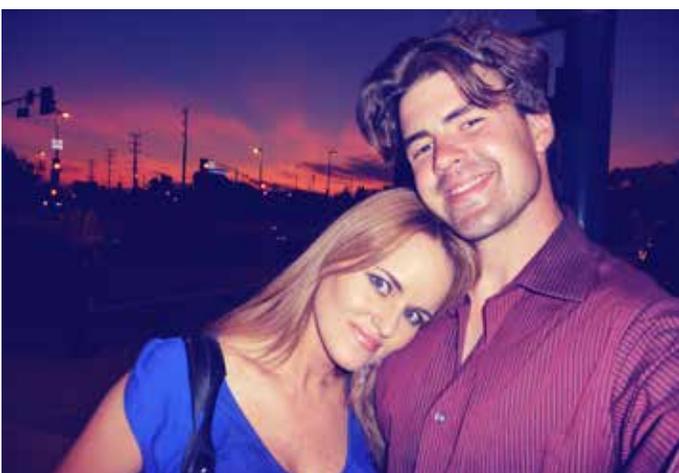
We had a complicated relationship because we both had such strong feelings for each other but there was always



something holding us back. There was something that kept us from fully giving ourselves to one another which meant that's we'd never get what we wanted and needed from each other.

I think in an ideal world we would have built a life together. But she was just as unfulfilled with everything as I was, so there was no point in lying to ourselves. She didn't want to lose me and I didn't want to lose her, but we both knew it was inevitable. I had to go.

Everything has a beginning and an ending and there's no sense denying or fighting it. It was time





for me to move on and see what else was out there. Everyone had a different reaction to my decision to leave but of all the people I talked to about what I was doing and planning to do, I think my father was the most nervous. He was always a worrier, and I asked him how his heart was doing before I ever brought it up. If he had told me he was having health problems I wouldn't have even said anything. Not sure how I would justify that he'd have to send things for me to other people, but I'm good at making things up on the fly.

He wasn't okay with me leaving like this or with what I was planning on doing but he learned awhile ago that he had to make peace with a decision I had made, even if he didn't agree with it. He was the one who single handedly tried to convince me to stay and finish college...

to no avail.

He made some good points about what I had for myself here, and the truth was that living here really did make an impact in my life. I'll never forget how



I thought moving here would be the end all be all. I planned on being out here forever because there was opportunity here that no other place in the world can compete with. Even though things hadn't worked out the way I envisioned, LA was a place where anything was possible. And I would miss that.

I would also miss the elation I still got every time I stepped



onto a studio lot. I would miss the friends I had made. I would miss the sense of self-importance that oozed out of the entire city. I would miss the Pacific time zone, where everything happened

last. I would miss knowing that at the end of the day, I was living somewhere that almost everyone wanted to be for one reason or another. And no matter what our past meant or what our future held, I would miss Michelle.

My father didn't understand why I would want to give up what I had here but I think he was just trying to give me reasons to stay

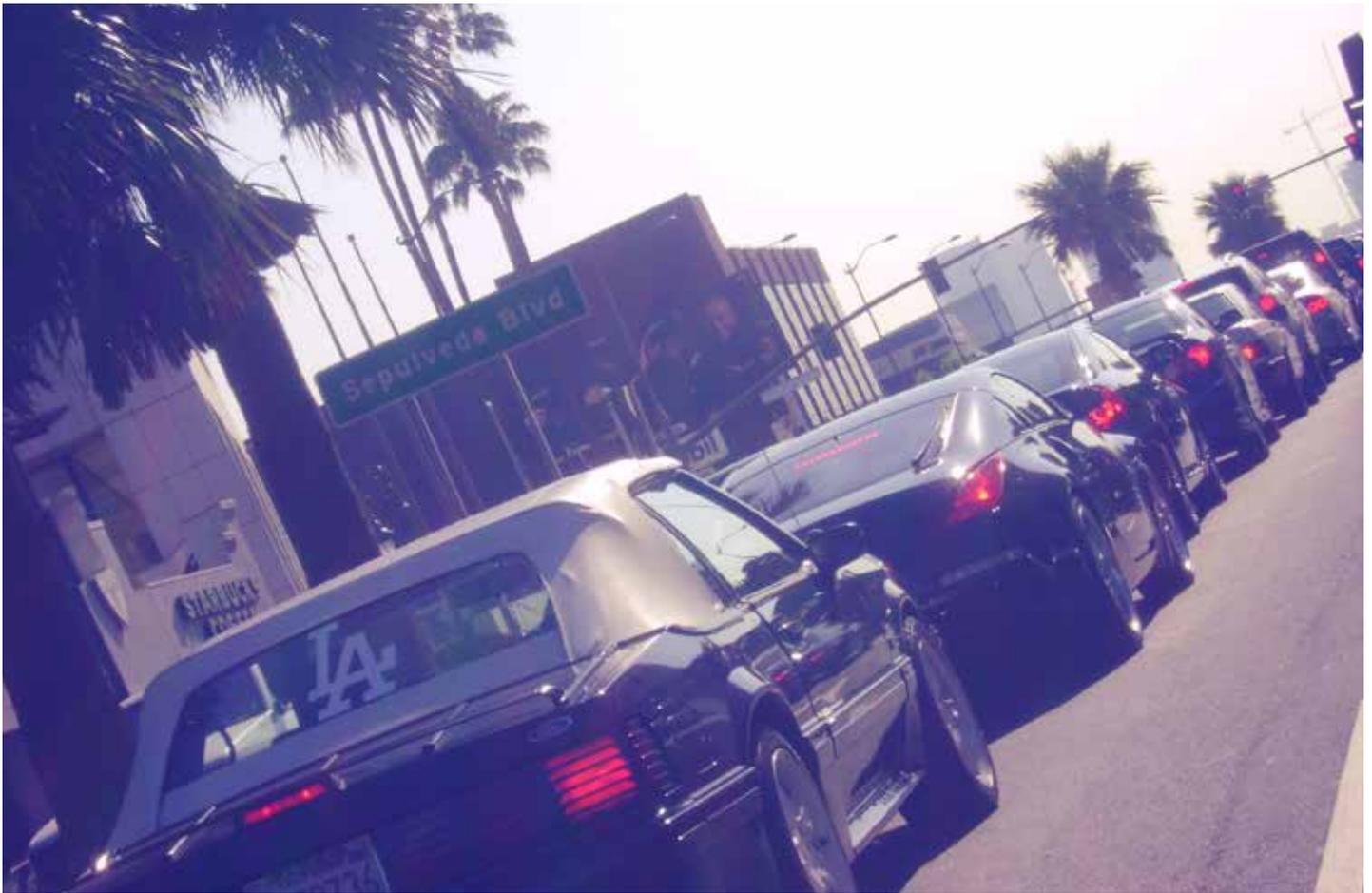
because he was concerned about what would happen to me if I left. Of course, even some of the things I did that he knew about were worse than this particular venture so I really didn't understand what he was so worried about. I guess it was just his nature.

My mother on the other hand didn't seem to be quite as concerned, for various reasons. For one I had often told her the things I didn't like about living here, and the traffic was at the top of that list. I often felt like exploding when I was sitting in traffic and whenever she called me I would rant to her about such things so I don't think she was that surprised to hear I was leaving.



I think she was happy to hear I was doing something I wanted to be doing but her motherly intuitions forced her to tell me that she didn't like the idea of me not knowing where I was going to sleep on a particular night. But she wasn't too worried because she still thought she could take care of me no matter where I was or what I was doing. After all, I have yet to buy socks or underwear and I haven't even lived at home in years.

She was much more carefree and positive than my father so while I called him to talk about investment and bail money I called her to make me feel better about whatever was bothering me. And as she



reminded me, there were a lot of things that bothered me about living here.

I mean, just the logistics of getting away from the traffic and the ranchero music that seemed to be constantly playing outside my window was reason enough to go. But leaving also meant I wouldn't have to deal with the heat anymore. I wouldn't have to order and



pick up lunch everyday. And I wouldn't have to drive across the city three different times in one night because everything is 20 miles from everything else which nobody ever seems to mind. I

wouldn't miss that mindset either.

But it went deeper than just the logistics. Leaving LA would also free me from the mentality of the city, which for better or worse was all inclusive. Whether you were a famous actor or a lowly janitor you would never be too far removed from the entertainment industry and there were constant reminders of that fact. Getting away from it all would be good for me. I think. I guess the real reason I was doing this was because I was worried I'd still be in this same position a year from now. I'd be working the same job, going back and forth with Michelle, pretending like I was trying to do something with my career. And then I'd still be doing it the year after that. And then 5 years down the line. And even 10 years down the line. And I wasn't going to let that happen.

Sometimes people don't change unless they force themselves to change, no matter how bad they need to. Whether a change this drastic was necessary was debatable, but I didn't want to wake up one day and wonder why I was still doing the same thing I had been doing ever since I got to LA. So I decided to change my entire life.



I wanted that change to be reflected in everything, including my appearance. I talked a friend of mine into giving me a pretty radical haircut to top everything off. He was a professional though so he knew

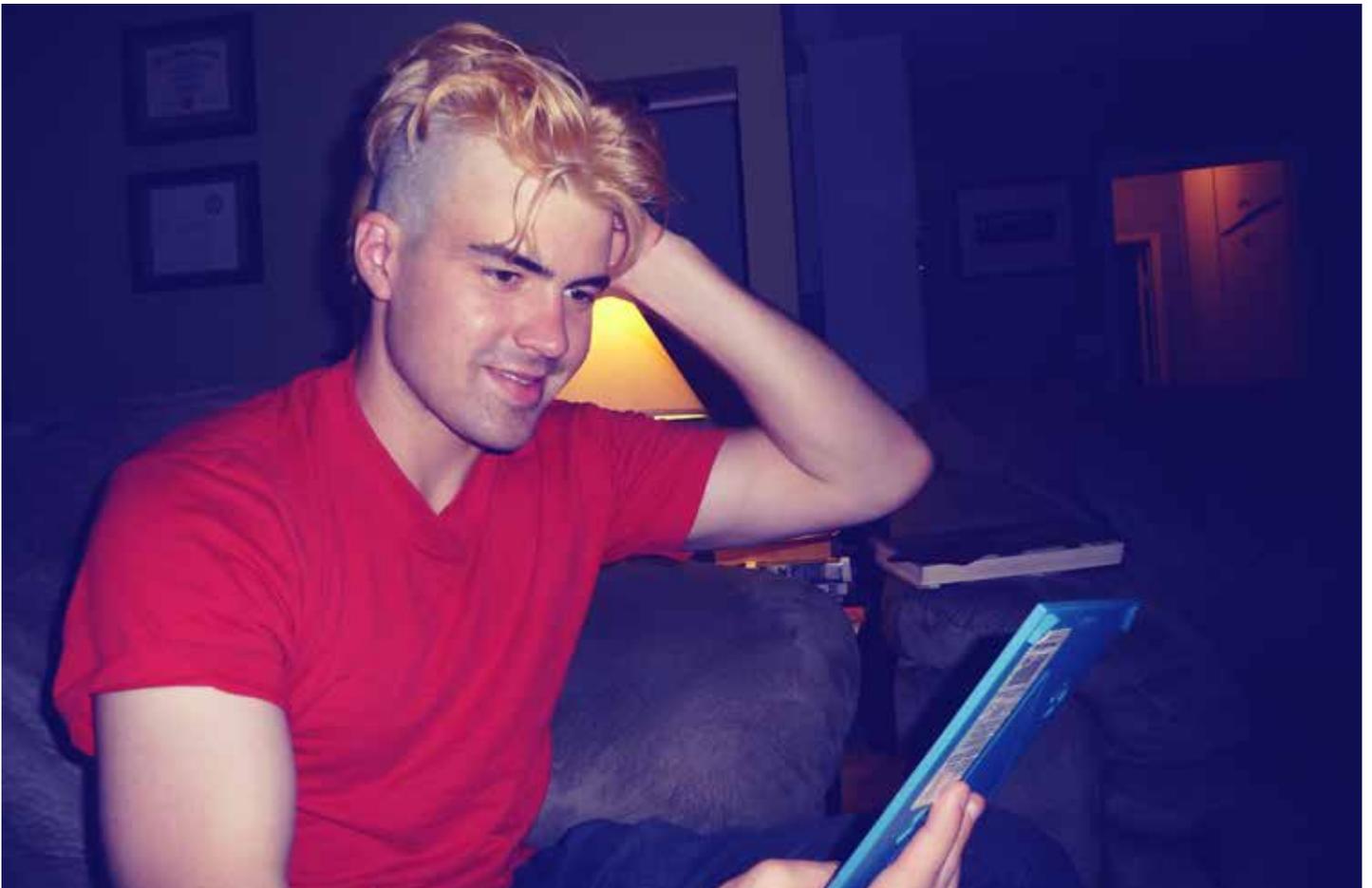


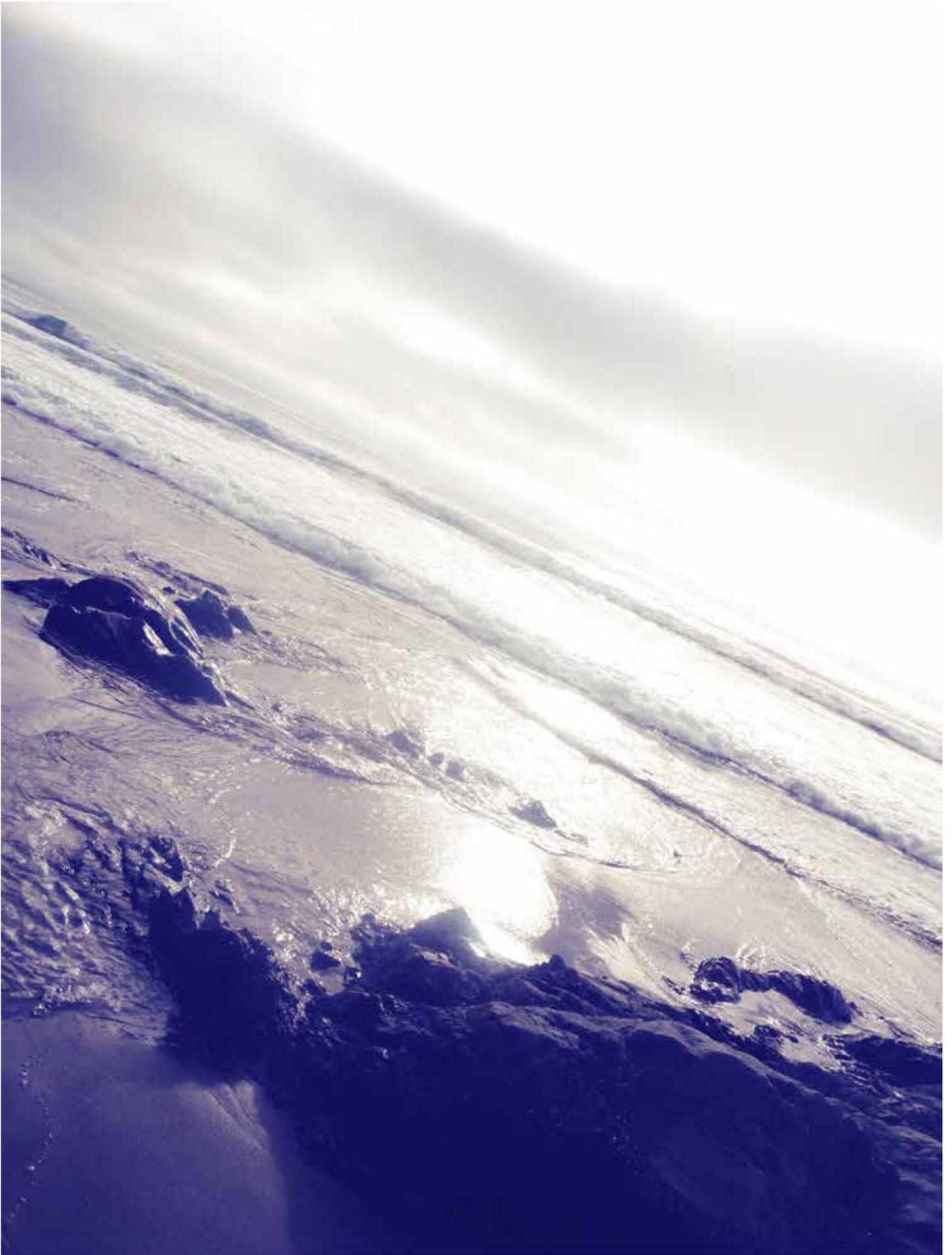
knew what he was doing and he was living proof that mohawks are awesome.

Even after all that soul searching and deliberation I still I didn't know exactly what I

was going to do with myself. If nothing else I had Chuck's golf clubs only he lived in Oregon now. I think.

It seemed like as good a place as any to start.





Chapter 1

California Dreamers

Moving isn't just about packing up your stuff. You have to figure out what you're keeping, what you're getting rid of, where it's going, how you're going to transport it and so on. Fortunately for me, the answer to all of these questions involved the trunk of my car in one way or another, so it wasn't that big of a deal.

Still, anytime you move you're forced you to look over everything



you have, especially stuff you don't look at every day. Old birthday cards...mementoes of everything from baseball games to concerts...old love letters...things that are or were relevant in your

life. The past, present and the future seemed to come together in a weird collection of seemingly irrelevant junk.

But that lewd birthday card reminds you of the awesome time you had with your girlfriend on your birthday. The postcard from Rome reminds you of the time your little sister took to write and send it. The announcement your uncle sent you from his award winning art show reminds you of how important it actually made you feel. You look at it all and realize that none of it is irrelevant. Quite the opposite, in fact.

I had packed pretty much everything I wanted to take with me into the trunk of my car but I couldn't believe how much stuff I had, and I'm a guy who doesn't even have a bed or a couch. Although the golf clubs took up more room than I would have liked.



There's something odd about packing all your possession up though. Even if I had just been moving to another apartment looking at everything you own is almost surreal, as if it's a physical indicator of how much you've accomplished. And if those were the terms I hadn't accomplished much since my possessions boiled down to some clothes and some books. At the moment though, I was happy about that fact since it made for a pretty painless packing experience.

What was also fairly painless was saying goodbye to everyone, which was actually kind of surprising. I mean, I had quit

my job and moved out of my apartment. I was actually doing this. I was just picking up and going. I didn't really know where I was going or if I'd even be back. I figured people would be telling me how they thought it was a bad idea or thought it was the coolest thing in the world or thought I'd be killed in some grisly manner...all of which were legitimate arguments.



For the most part though people didn't have too much to say. Everyone came out for one or several last drinks, but my bar friends just treated it like it was a formality. Like I just



bought a house in the suburbs and wouldn't be seeing people as much anymore. My work friends were a bit more curious about what I was going to be doing with myself but whenever people from work get together eventually all everybody talks about is how screwed up work is and how much everyone wanted to leave. And they did. Well, except for me of course. I was just there to drink so I had a good time.

Nonetheless, it was good to see everyone and even though they didn't seem to think too much of it the whole thing meant a lot to me. Because I knew that regardless of what happened in the immediate and distant future, things were never going to be like they were right here, right now, ever again.

I was disappointed Michelle wasn't there, even though I expected



as much. I knew she was mad but I thought she would at least come and say goodbye. However, it quickly became apparent that wasn't going to happen.

I guess she thought I was abandoning our relationship, which even though that's an oversimplification I could see why she felt that way. Then again, I don't know how much of a relationship there was to abandon anyway.

At first I was okay with just leaving things like that but seeing everyone really made me feel like I wanted to go out on better terms with her. I really did care about her but telling someone how you feel after several drinks is never a good idea. And trying to do it so none of your friends noticed just makes it sound insincere and pathetic, especially when you get caught.



It didn't matter though. At this point I knew there really wasn't anything I could do about Michelle. It hurt me more than I thought it would, but I believed I was doing the right thing and nothing was going to change that.

But when the time came to actually get in my car and go, a wave of anxiety came over me like never before. If I had been a bit

younger, I think it would have crippled me and I would have done a complete 180 right there. Not knowing where I was going---not knowing where I'd be sleeping---not knowing what I was doing---it



would have been too much. And my car already had a ton of miles on it, so it staying together wasn't exactly a sure thing.

I took a few deep breaths to reassure myself and the feeling quickly passed which was good since I really didn't have a choice now that I had quit my job and moved out of my apartment. Besides which, Broom said he would make fun of me for the rest of my life if I



didn't go for it, and there was no way I could put up with that.

As much as it amazed me to say though, I was actually going to miss Los Angeles. Because I did like living in here. Well, more to

the point, I liked telling people I lived here. Living in Los Angeles, but really anywhere in California, was a big deal to everyone who didn't live here. It carried a certain mystique that nowhere else could match.

And sure, Hollywood was part of that. But it went deeper than people who were just trying to be famous and people who already were famous. It was about a phony sense of importance that people who lived



out here had. It was about being able to go to the beach at almost any time of the year. It was about people who dreamed of reaching the stars and then for better or worse acted on those dreams. More so than any other state or any other place, California is a place for dreamers in every sense of the word.

Whatever the reality, when people think about California they think of the sun, the beach and never ending parties. A place where people go to hang out and relax and nothing is ever all that serious. Whatever else in life you want, who wouldn't dream of that? That's why it was and always would be a place for dreamers.

Driving out of the city actually made me nostalgic for the place and I hadn't even left yet. Sure, anytime you live somewhere you're

going to grow attached to it in one way or another, but living here went beyond the particular details of the city.



I can remember when I first arrived here and I took this very road through downtown and into the city. I was moving out here without knowing anyone or even having a place to stay. Downtown seemed so huge and mysterious and I was ecstatic that Gus had called me back and told me he might have room for me in his one room studio.

A lot of things had changed since then. I couldn't live in such a cramped situation now because I knew I needed my space. There's no way I could put up with living on top of another person anymore because I was just done living like that.

I also didn't feel the same way about downtown either since now it didn't seem to be quite as big and certainly not as mysterious, especially because I knew getting around downtown LA was a logistical nightmare. I guess those kinds of personal changes are the only things

you can rely on to stay the same.

Leaving the same way I arrived seemed to tie everything up though. As if this part of my life was now complete and I could go and not have to worry about



ever coming back.

And that was good. Because coming back was the last thing on my mind.

People who live in LA will often say they make a conscious effort to get out of the city because if you don't the city will just consume



your entire life. Your only reality becomes the city itself, and in a place where so many people are pushing and trying to do the same thing, it was an easy trap to fall into. I suppose it's true enough anywhere, but it seemed to be especially true in LA. Well, LA and Vegas. But if your reality becomes Vegas, it consumes you in about a week, at best.

Regardless, I had fallen into the LA trap too. All I thought about

was work and about what exactly I was doing with myself to succeed in some way shape or form in the entertainment industry. Which lately wasn't all that much, but still.

After getting outside the city all that stuff melted away pretty though. It was easy to forget that there was an entire state outside of LA, but once you were actually outside the city it was inescapable. California really is a beautiful place. The rolling hills and ocean views are breathtaking and seem to stretch far off into the horizon. On a clear day it looks like the beauty spreads forever.

What really got me was seeing the beaches out here. Of course there are beaches in LA but the beaches up and along the coast were a completely different experience. These beaches weren't crowded or

