

THE CAMPO SANTO
QUARTERLY
REVIEW

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the Campo Santo
Ombudsman*

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Written and Curated by Campo Santo Ombudsman Duncan Fyfe
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~ Acknowledgements ~

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A NOTE FROM THE CAMPO SANTO OMBUDSMAN

SUMMER IS HERE, and with it a special summer issue of the Campo Santo Quarterly Review. Summer is for going to the beach, fancy cocktails, and building a hot summer body, and by bringing together video game development and literary journals written by corporate Ombudsmen, I think we have a celebration of summer that would please even the great sun god Ra.

For Campo Santo, the summer has been busy, if low profile. The team has expanded, with the additions of engineer Patrick Ewing, programmer Paolo Surricchio and, working remotely from London, animator James Benson. Campo Santo has people in four cities now: San Francisco, Vancouver, London and Winchester, and the pattern that forms when you plot those disparate locations on a map is probably something to keep an eye on, for sure.

Jake Rodkin, Campo Santo's co-founder, told me that much of the team's recent focus has been on putting together a trailer for its first game, Firewatch. When the trailer is shown at the end of August, it'll be the most that the company has revealed of the game to date.

"I am equal parts excited and anxious," Mr Rodkin said to me. "We told people in March that we were making the game. That felt like something, but really we didn't say much. We didn't actually say anything at all, other than there is a game called Firewatch and it has a very pretty website. What the game actually IS -- what it looks like, what you even DO in it moment to moment -- we haven't shared with people; nobody knows."

Making a good first impression is important work, but not the only thing that the team has been up to this summer. Chris Remo and his girlfriend Sarah made plans to visit Disneyland. Jane Ng was drawn into a historic mystery of wolves and fire. You can read about the latter incident in this issue, as well as an examination of Firewatch writer Sean Vanaman, who talks about his process and reckons with his very nature.

There's even more in this globetrotting summer instalment of the Quarterly Review: the coronation of a princess, piracy and bull fights, a lost generation, and tales of seduction, arson, manslaughter, attempted murder, and murder.

Have a great summer, everyone. Hail Ra!

Duncan Fyfe
London, England
August 2014

A WOLF DESTROYED BY FIRE

FIFTY MILES NORTH of San Francisco, in the small town of Glen Ellen, lies the Wolf House. “We are heading up to Glen Ellen for a long weekend because there is this nice bed and breakfast my in-laws raved about,” Campo Santo’s Jane Ng told me about her plans for the summer. “The Wolf House is basically the only noteworthy thing in that super cute tiny town apparently.”

The Wolf House was gutted by fire in the summer of 1913, days before its owners, the American author Jack London and his wife Charmian, were to move in. London died three years later, the desecration of his dream home having extinguished something vital inside him. The truth behind the fire was never revealed in his lifetime.



THE VICTIM

In his life, Jack London had been homeless on the streets of San Francisco, incarcerated, a pilgrim on the Klondike Gold Rush and a war correspondent. But he was best known as a writer of adventure fiction. Notably, he wrote the novels *Call of the Wild*, *The Sea Wolf* and *White Fang*, but, all told, he produced over 21 novels, three memoirs, three plays, over a hundred short stories and an abundance of poetry, non-fiction and essays.

Often these were stories about wolves. London loved wolves, and dogs, and dogs who yearn to be wolves. *Call of the Wild* is written from the perspective of a domesticated

dog cast into the Alaskan wilderness, who reconnects with his savage ancestry and comes to lead a wolf pack. White Fang tells of a wolf-dog entering civilisation. Bâtard chronicles the hateful relationship between a wolf-dog and his abusive owner that ends in murder-suicide, and was published in a 1904 issue of Cosmopolitan. “You write so many books about wolves, we should call you the Wolf,” a friend of London’s once told him, demonstrating the least amount of imagination ever put into a nickname.

The Wolf had better luck with books than he did with houses. Years before Wolf House was in the picture, an attempt at building a barn went poorly, as London recalled in a 1906 essay. “The man who was a liar made beautiful stone walls. I used to stand alongside of them and love them. I caressed their massive strength with my hands. I thought about them in bed, before I went to sleep. And they were lies.

“They were beautiful, but they were not useful. Construction and decoration had been divorced. The walls were all decoration. They hadn’t any construction in them. ‘As God lets Satan live,’ I let that lying man live, but—I have built new walls from the foundation up.”

Wolf House would be different. The 26-room mansion was under construction for three years in London’s 1200-acre Sonoma Valley ranch (which is like 120,000 acres in today’s acres) and meticulously designed by London to be beautiful and utile. It sported a sleeping tower, a grand library for London’s 15,000 books, a piano room for Charmian (or ‘Mate-Woman,’ her pet name) and the very best in modern amenities: electric lighting, refrigeration, vacuum cleaning, a reflecting pool, whatever a ‘milk room’ is. And its sturdy walls were made from stone and volcanic rock, built upon a concrete, earthquake-proof platform. “It will be a house of air and sunshine and laughter,” London resolved. “These three cannot be divorced. Laughter without air and sunshine becomes morbid, decadent, demoniac.

“It will be a usable house and a beautiful house,” he’d said, “...or else I’ll burn it down.”

On August 22, 1913, the interior of Wolf House mysteriously caught fire. The Londons were on the ranch at the time, half a mile away, but by the time they were reached the house was beyond saving. On horseback, London watched the Spanish tile roof collapse into the blaze and the flames reach up toward a red sky.

“The razing of his house killed something in Jack,” wrote Charmian, “and he never ceased to feel the tragic inner sense of loss.” London vowed to rebuild, but the insurance payout from the fire wasn’t nearly enough and he died three years later. He was 40. Wolf House was never restored.

SUSPECT #1: FRENCH FRANK

Arson was considered a possibility – but who would dare torch the dream mansion of a popular writer? Well, London was not always such.

London grew up borderline impoverished, and as a child he worked twelve-, eighteen-hour days in a cannery, before packing it in at thirteen to become an oyster pirate. He bought a sloop, the Razzle Dazzle, from a grizzled 50-year-old oyster pirate named French Frank, and made love to French Frank's girlfriend Mamie upon its deck. Within months, London was known as 'Prince of the Oyster Pirates,' with Mamie his adoring Queen – but he would betray his friends by leaving the pirate game and joining the California Fish Patrol, which hunted oyster pirates. After this he enrolled in high school.

French Frank resented the teenaged London for reasons that are fairly clear. He even tried to murder London once, ramming the Razzle Dazzle with his own pirate sloop in a pique of cuckolded rage. London later claimed that he kept French Frank at bay with shotgun fire while he steered the Razzle Dazzle with his feet, which can't possibly be true. In any case: motive.



SUSPECT #2: THEODORE ROOSEVELT

Life in 1907 was good for Jack London. He was rich, he was in a loving marriage with the sexually adventurous Mate-Woman, he had bought a ranch in Sonoma Valley where he was planning his dream house, and was sailing the world on the Snark, a yacht he built and paid for, and all the while a new enemy lurked in wait.

Although London's stories of the wild were fiction, truthfulness was as important to him there as it was in house walls. London's animal books weren't just about animals. They were about getting inside the minds of animals, and representing them truly. London

portrayed dogs and wolves as he believed them to be: not mindless automatons driven solely by instinct, but wild creatures capable of reason, foresight, cunning, and some basic version of what we know as human thought.

London was contemptuous of nature and fiction writers who portrayed animals with sentiment and without regard to realism. Writers who wanted to portray animals with human characteristics, individual personalities, and draw them with sympathy, romance and nobility. He thought of these writers as nature fakers. Nature fakers. Real pieces of shit. Not London: he was around dogs all his life, and held his writing to be accurate and truthful to the dog experience. But not everyone agreed.

The President of the United States couldn't stand Jack London. To Theodore Roosevelt, London was the real nature faker: a writer who feigned towards realism and justified his implausible tales of adventure with specious scientific observation. One evening around a log fire outside the White House, Roosevelt, himself an esteemed naturalist and hunter, shared this expert opinion with his friend Edward Clark. Clark, a journalist, suggested that they publish the President's thoughts.

"I don't believe in a minute," said Roosevelt in the 1907 article that followed, "that [these writers who] claim attention as realists because of their animal stories, have succeeded in learning the real secrets of the wilderness... [They] may have been in the wilds, but they don't know the wilds. They either have not seen at all, or they have seen superficially. Nature writing with them is no labor of love. Their readers in the main, persons who have never lived apart from the paved street, take the wildest flight of the imagination of these 'realists' as an inspired word from the gospel of nature. It is a false teaching."

Roosevelt specifically called out London for the novel *White Fang*: "London describes a great wolf-dog being torn in pieces by a lucivee, a northern lynx. This is about as sensible as to describe a tom cat tearing in pieces a thirty-pound bull terrier. Nobody who really knew anything about either... would write such nonsense."

As a diatribe from a sitting president against a popular fiction writer, Roosevelt's article was well covered by the press. It turned out, however, that the President had gotten the facts of London's story wrong. In *White Fang*, London's wolf-dog had in fact destroyed the lynx. London pointed this out in an essay for *Collier's*, where he labelled the President a "homocentric amateur."

Roosevelt replied to the editor of *Collier's* to nitpick. "Get his book *White Fang* to which I am about to refer, and open it at the pages I shall mention, comparing them with my article on the page I have given you, and with his article in *Collier's*," he began, in the most boring thing ever written by a US president, before haughtily declaring himself above the debate. "I have not the slightest intention of entering into a controversy on this subject with London. I would as soon think of discussing seriously with him any social or political reform."

London emerged from the nature fakery controversy unscathed, probably because the public never cared at all. Roosevelt had been foiled this time, but would he let it pass?

SUSPECT #3: ROLLO

London's trial for nature fakery meant his dog bonafides were called into question, and obviously this couldn't stand. London knew dogs, and he proved it in his response to Roosevelt by telling the world about a dog named Rollo, and the special history they shared.

Rollo was London's pup when the writer was a young lad of nine. "Rollo and I did a great deal of rough romping," London recalled. "He nipped my legs, arms, and hands, often so hard that I yelled, while I rolled him and tumbled him and dragged him about, often so strenuously as to make him yelp. In the course of the play many variations arose."

London began to prank the dog. The boy would loudly pretend to greet a school friend or a bill collector, and at the prospect of playing with someone new, Rollo would drop what he was doing and race to find this non-existent person. "The laugh was on him, and he knew it, and I gave it to him, too."

Eventually Rollo wised up and ceased to fall for the boy London's tricks. London perceived how the dog had learned and changed its behaviour, and used this to justify his later portrayals of canines as intelligent and adaptive. But Rollo hated to be laughed at. And if he could learn this... what else could he learn to do?

WHO DID IT

If Rollo, Theodore Roosevelt or French Frank – acting either alone or together – played any part in the burning of Wolf House, it was never proven. Fittingly, perhaps, after surviving multiple attempts to destroy his life and career, the thing that finally broke Jack London was the thing he respected the most: Nature.

Eventually, the fire was put down to spontaneous combustion. It was generally agreed, and affirmed by a 1995 forensic investigation, that one of the Wolf House workmen idly threw an oily rag in the wrong part of the house, and a fire somehow resulted.

The ruin of Wolf House still stands today, as part of the Jack London State Historic Park in Glen Ellen. I got in touch with the volunteer docents at the Park, who told me how it has changed since London's time. "The house location itself, now deep within a redwood forest, has a tranquility and majesty to it that almost has a spiritual feel," wrote Rich and Susan Rodkin, who happen to be Jake Rodkin's parents. "Perhaps the loss of such a grand, magnificent structure is a metaphor for the early and tragic death of indisputably one of the all-time great American authors."

London's last years on the ranch were not remarkable. He dedicated this time, somewhat half-heartedly, to the rebuilding of Wolf House, but he had neither the money nor the respect of his workers. They viewed him as an alcoholic dilettante and bad manager, and Wolf House as a vanity project. London died in 1916, on a porch, with dysentery, uremia, alcohol and morphine all in his system, and Wolf House still and forever ruined. "The main hurt comes from the wanton despoiling of so much beauty," as he'd once said.

AFTERWORD

Jane Ng stood in the ruins of Wolf House. Here, she had learned of Jack London's attempt to grow spineless cacti to feed his cattle; that he planted 80,000 eucalyptus trees without knowing that their wood was useless; and that upon his ranch he presided over something called a 'pig palace.' It seems hard to look at Wolf House and not think of failure. But, as Jane could testify, if nothing else, the walls still stand. The stone walls are sturdy and thick in their construction and these walls, Jane thought, are no lies.

THE ART OF FICTION

IN IRELAND, the sixteenth of June is Bloomsday. It's a celebration of James Joyce and his modernist masterpiece, *Ulysses*: "the greatest Irish novel ever written," says Campo Santo's Sean Vanaman, "a 700 page multilexiconic epic broken up into 18 episodes but all set one day – June 16th." June 16 is also Sean's birthday. Like Joyce, Sean was born in Ireland, and is a writer, and there the coincidences sort of peter out.

Over the summer, I interviewed Sean for this magazine's 'The Art of Fiction' series: a series of interviews with writers about their craft which may not have a future beyond this issue. As our readers may know, Sean is the writer of Campo Santo's *Firewatch*, who previous to co-founding Campo Santo wrote a number of Telltale Games titles, including the award-winning *The Walking Dead*.

Of course, I thought our readers should know more about Sean than that. And so one day in June, I visited Cork, the city where Sean was born. I walked around, like the hero of *Ulysses* did, exploring the environment and culture that shaped the young Vanaman, and might even influence his work to this day.

It was exactly like *Ulysses*, except Sean was born in Cork, not Dublin, where *Ulysses* takes place. And I didn't go on June 16. I went on June 26, which is the birthday of Swedish chemist Georg Brandt, who discovered cobalt.

* * *

DUNCAN FYFE

I want to ask you one of those very Paris Review questions about process: Where do you like to write?

SEAN VANAMAN

I generally like to write outside of the office and either with people around during the day or totally alone at night. I think the environment has less to do with it than my state of mind does. During the day being at a coffee shop or somewhere where there's a hum of human energy is good because I just sort of sit in the middle of it and leach off of the energy; which isn't a particularly romantic image, I guess. So, to answer your question: half the time I write I like to be in a position to covertly suck away on the discarded human energy that is a by-product of strangers' day-to-day lives. The other half of the time I like to just sit in my room or my office late at night. In those moments I don't second guess myself so much – being tired just lowers my personal inhibitions and while the quality usually isn't as high I feel like I produce better raw material.

FYFE

At this stage in development, how much of your time is spent just on writing?

VANAMAN

Not enough. This is usually the case though – I get a critical amount of stuff in so we can see if the game is what we want it to be and then I usually hate everything for a while while I'm figuring out the tone. And a lot of that is actually figuring out the actors, what their wheelhouse is, where they play their best, and then when all of THAT clicks, I sorta go crazy and write and write and write.

FYFE

Did you think, when you were a kid, that you wanted to work as a writer? Or that you wanted to work on video games?

VANAMAN

I didn't want to work on video games – I liked video games a LOT but I wasn't captivated by them the way I was by books and movies. The games I liked the most were StarCraft, Half-Life and multiplayer GoldenEye -- GoldenEye and StarCraft because I had to think about what was going on inside the mind of whoever I was playing and Half-Life because, well, it's fucking Half-Life. Walking around Black Mesa was – actually, there's nothing I can really say about it that hasn't been said better by other people, right? We all know what that felt like (if you responded to it) and I did. Looking at those things, plus the books I really loved, I guess I liked things that simultaneously made me hang out in the depths of my own mind while considering those of someone else.

I never said "I'm going to be a writer," outright, with any sort of confidence or determination or purpose, but I knew whatever I did would probably be about some of the things writing is about – interiority and trying to understand the lives of people. For a long while in college I was in Poli-Sci and International Relations and was obsessed with The West Wing so thought that maybe I'd like, be a speech writer or something. Games just kinda happened and I stuck with it because the potential to do something new was exciting. I didn't feel that way about movies or any other media. Books were and are different; I don't have that prodigy MFA Foster Wallace type of drive about them where I can let myself believe I'd be capable of doing anything new or different as an author – writing a book, to me, with my limited tools, would be more like choosing to run a marathon; something you want to do and feel like you could but would want to know you could. That'd be enough.

FYFE

How personal is your work?

VANAMAN

It's pretty personal in that it's always seeded with something that's going on in my life and then, because of whatever needs to happen in the plot, or simply because the characters are never exact replications of real people, things veer away from where they lived as personal moments in my head and become something different. Does that make sense? In *The Walking Dead* Season 1, Lee is struggling to understand his own history; how he could've let his really good life go so bad – he's trying to piece together his own history while living in a time where none of it really matters. I think about that a lot. When I'm exploring my own personal history I have these moments where I'm just dumbstruck because I've forgotten I did something, usually awful, and struggle to not build a narrative of awfulness out of those things. I think Lee forgives himself in the end of TWD S1 but that tragedy of that story, I think, is that he ever had to begin with. So, like, conversely, I've learned to not get down on myself, to not build that narrative of awful things (and then feel like I need redeeming), which is a place Lee never got to in the story but it started with the same inner conflict. I guess I'm just trying to illustrate that personal work isn't 1:1 – but that seeds have to come from somewhere and if they're not from within then I really have no idea.

Given that, *Firewatch* has to be personal – how much of me is in it I have no idea because it's a collaboration, we're all making it (the same as TWD S1). But when I think of what Henry goes through in his life before the story starts, it's an amalgam of hopes and fears I have, certainly. Who he is and how he deals with it is very different (and how he chooses to think about things in his life is up to the player quite a bit too). At the same time, I'll seed the "nouns" or actors of the story with things I care about. Henry's dog's name is a name my wife and I gave our future hypothetical dog. Clementine was a really personal name. Doug was straight-up a friend of ours and so was Omid (in that he also had to actually sign a release so I could use his likeness). Doing that just passively reminds me to treat these people like people even though they're cartoons in a game.

FYFE

I wanted to ask about something you said in the last Quarterly Review: that you set *Firewatch* in Wyoming on the one hand so you could just work on a game set in Wyoming, but also because there was something about the place you grew up and the people there that you wanted to explore. What interests you about Wyoming, as a writer? Has being from Wyoming influenced your work before?

VANAMAN

I mean, most of my interest stems from that's where I grew up. I moved there as a foreigner – and I mean that kind of in the literal (I was born in Ireland) but also in the fact that if you're not a native Wyomingite (it's WYOMINGITE! isn't that sensational?!?) one of my favorite t-shirts I own is from campaigning for Pres. Obama and it says Wyomingites for Obama. My dad, a Republican, was quick to point out that they probably only had to make one of them) anyway, if you're not native you're instantly held at a distance – you are a foreigner – and then one day, totally out of your control,

you just aren't anymore. That isn't that people are rude or whatever; I'm from northwestern Wyoming – Cody – which is a tourist hotbed because of Yellowstone, so people are incredibly kind to visitors, but I'll never shake the feeling of "you're not from here," that I experienced growing up. At one point, honestly I think it's when I moved away at 18, that that feeling went away and I go back and I feel like I'm considered from there.

I think I want to explore that feeling of otherness but, honestly, as I'm still writing, I'm not sure there's a place for it in the game. It's getting in there and maybe something will click as I keep working but it's not there right now. So we'll see. I try not force stuff like that. But I think because Wyoming has so few people, and it's one of only of a few states that still has all of its native big predators, there's something still so wild feeling about it. I've been on pack trips up near Yellowstone (very close to where the game is set) and have seen BISON IN THE WILD. That's crazy! Wyoming is one of the places that it's difficult to remember exists in modern hyper-connected, cosmopolitan America. I love Yosemite here in California. I was instantly enchanted by the Yosemite Valley and am sure I'll return often throughout my life, but because of the way the US came to be, the wildness is gone. There are bears but they aren't Grizzlies. There are coyotes but not wolves. I dunno – this is probably more of my feelings than biological fact – but I just don't feel small anywhere else, like the land or something living on it can kill me. In Wyoming, away from town, out in the middle of nowhere I feel small and like I could die and that's a very intense feeling that I like very much.

Being from Wyoming hasn't really influenced my work, specifically. Having lived in lots of places – Ireland, Ohio, Texas, Wyoming, Los Angeles, Shanghai, San Francisco – I think the totality of that experience has influenced my ability to just sit with a character who isn't like me and think about what makes them operate, being from Wyoming has yet to really impact anything I've worked on in any recognizable way.

FYFE

How young were you when you left Ireland? Do you have any strong impressions of it like you do with Wyoming?

VANAMAN

I was really young when I left Ireland – just three years old. But because my mom is Irish and we've gone back so often, it feels as much like home to me as Wyoming (in that it's been a constant fixture in my life despite moving around and traveling). Most of those strong impressions are from the people; the way Irish people talk and tell stories; the way they interact with strangers, etc. I feel more comfortable in Ireland or with my buddies from there than just about anywhere else.

FYFE

Have you ever observed a Bloomsday?

VANAMAN

You mean the Christmas in June? I do observe Bloomsday in that every year, on my birthday, I cast a furtive glance to my copy of Ulysses, its spine showing about 1/8" of tiny creases towards the cover, the remaining two inches completely unblemished, and remind myself that another year has passed and I haven't read or even tried to read it. To observe Bloomsday, for me, is to celebrate my inadequacy.

Another fact – my mother, a true Dubliner, and consequently a Joyce mega-fan, birthed me at 12:02am on June 16th. I believe, although it has never been shared, that I ought've been born a day earlier, but my mom, dead set on having a Bloomsbaby, held me in until it was certain that her first son would be cosmically tied to the date.

FYFE

What is it about the way that Irish people tell stories?

VANAMAN

I think there are just some cultures that are natural storytellers and the Irish are one of them. Narratives seem like a methodology in pursuit of a worldview, in pursuit of education and most importantly, entertainment. Friends from Jewish cultures are similar, in that regard. Maybe it's because of the weather, maybe it's from spending a few thousand years on a cold, wet rock, but so much about Irish culture, in my experience, is sitting around in-doors talking and entertaining each other. I love it. The thing I love about an Irish storyteller (not that this is true for me) but it's that he or she knows where their moment is – they're building towards that punchline, to that whiz-bam AND THEN, and you're sitting there, as a listener, just waiting for it because you know it's coming. The most innocuous story is going to have something for you right at the very end because you can trust the person wouldn't be telling it if it didn't.

* * *

I experienced Irish storytelling for myself when I went to Cork on June 26. At the Cork Butter Museum, I learned about the modernisation of the Irish butter industry and that, way back in pagan days, “women were seen as being better able to engage with the magical forces whose cooperation was needed to ensure the successful transformation of cream into butter.”

The museum has a couple stories about these magical forces. Once, a man noticed that his cows had no milk. Thinking that someone else was milking these cows while he slept, he grabbed a rifle and hid outside one night. When he saw a hare coming towards him, he shot it, and in the morning it turned out that this was a woman who could change herself into a hare. She was stealing the milk.

Also, one time, two men were wandering around at three in the morning when they saw a house that they had never seen before in the day. They peered through the window, and there was a woman inside. She was making butter.



I guess those are pretty good stories. I decided to leave the museum after that, and at the exit I noticed a placard explaining something called Princess Kay of the Milky Way. Each year since 1954, this title is bestowed upon a young woman selected by the Minnesota Dairy Association to serve as goodwill ambassador for the Minnesota dairy industry.

The Princess Kay is crowned at the Minnesota State Fair in August. After her coronation she must enter a refrigerated glass chamber and sit for her likeness to be made into a 90-pound butter sculpture. Later, the head is removed and eaten by the community.

Sometimes the head is preserved for sentimental reasons. "It would be equivalent to tearing up a picture of your daughter," Laura Olson told the Wall Street Journal in 2010. Olson has had three daughters crowned Princess Kay of the Milky Way, and thus now has three life-size butter sculptures of her daughters' heads stuffed in her freezer.

"Thanks for that," I said to the guy behind the desk on my way out, and he nodded back, like, of course.

COCKTAILS AT PAMPLONA

AFTER THE WAR Roberto took a job tending the bar at a café in Pamplona. It was not a good job or a very good café, but the owner was wealthy and stupid, and spent large sums of money on wasteful things, including a good salary for Roberto. Roberto would remind himself of that whenever he was miserable, which was often.

It was afternoon on a Thursday, in the time that the shifts of Roberto and the older bartender Agustin overlapped. Roberto had only one customer, a young man like him, who said he was a visitor from Madrid. The customer sat and drummed his fingers nervously on the bar. He had ordered *la behotz* in a small voice.

"I heard about this in Madrid," the customer said. "Do many people come in and order this?"

"Yes. Some." Roberto set a clean glass on the bar top. "Seventy *pesetas for la behotz*."

"Seventy, are you serious?"

"Well, it is a special experience, you know? A special price for a special experience, and a special... Well, just that. A special price for a special experience." Roberto uncorked the bottle of *patxaran* from the high shelf and poured a double measure into the glass. He thought it was a shame to waste the *patxaran* like this. Then, in a sequence of steps filling him progressively with nausea, he took the key hanging around his neck, unlocked the padlocked steel ice bucket underneath the bar, unwrapped the small plastic bag lying on the ice, and, with a pair of tongs, removed a perfectly preserved human toe. Delicately he deposited the blackened toe, replete with yellowed and manicured nail, into the drink. The customer raised the glass and muttered something to himself in *castellano*. Wincing, he tipped the *patxaran* back toward his barely open mouth. It was the middle toe: long and not wide. The toe slid down the glass and stopped against his lips like a dredge, the rest of the red liquid draining past the toe and running into his throat. This is disgusting, Roberto thought. This is really bad.

"I did it!" said the customer when the glass was empty but for the wet toe. "I have done it, it is done."

"Congratulations," said Roberto, replacing the toe in its plastic wrapper. "How do you feel?"

"Brave."

"Do you feel different?"

"I think... yes. Yes, I feel different now."

"How so?"

"I cannot say. Just, something has changed."

The customer watched Roberto count away his seventy pesetas. "Anything else for you? A beer?"

"No. No, I do not think so. I do not want anything."

The customer left in what looked to Roberto like a thoughtful haze. Above the door was a bell that rang any time a customer left or entered. After the man who drank *la behotz* there were no more customers for a long time. Agustin joined Roberto at the bar.

“Did you tell him the story?” the older man asked.

“What story?”

“The story of *la behotz*. Of where the toe came from. To whom the toe belonged.”

“No. There is a story?”

“Of course! Did you think that it came from nowhere? You must tell them the story. You would want to know whose toe it was that you were drinking, would you not?”

“No. I would not.”

“That toe belonged to an American. A friend of Ernest Hemingway, the American writer. You see? Already this is fascinating.”

“The fact that the toe belonged to a friend of Ernest Hemingway does not make me want to touch the toe with my mouth.”

“Show respect. This toe is going to make you very rich. And you must know the story so you can tell the customers.”

Agustin told Roberto that the American’s name was Charlie Douglas. Charlie Douglas was an American from Chicago who met Ernest Hemingway and his wife Hadley while visiting Paris. On Hemingway’s invitation, Charlie Douglas travelled with Hemingway to Pamplona in the summer, for San Fermin. This was many years ago, Agustin said, before so many English and Americans came for San Fermin every year. This time Ernest Hemingway came with his wife and Charlie Douglas and their English and American friends. They were all writers, or they did nothing, because they had money. Hemingway then was a writer but he was not famous. Charlie Douglas was a writer but he was not famous either. He had written one book in America. It was a book on a theory of medieval history and Hemingway had read it and thought it was not very good. Charlie Douglas had read Hemingway’s stories and thought they were not very good. Hemingway had brought everyone to Pamplona to show them *la corrida*. In the heat of the afternoon they would watch the bulls, barely held together by rage and carnal ferocity, be run through with swords and slip down the shaft of the blade into true death. The men sat in the bars and outside the cafés while it was still hot and drank cold beer and glasses of Pernod, an imitation absinthe to which Hemingway had introduced Charlie Douglas. On other days, the men would hike east of Pamplona with wine, cheese and sausage, and sit to fish in the river. On those nights, the men would bring back what they had caught and have a café prepare it for them, and bring them several bottles of red wine. Dinner was at *Bar Txoko*. The owner’s daughter was a Basque girl who served them the wine. She would flatter Charlie Douglas by winking at him over Hadley’s shoulder. When she walked out from behind the bar Charlie Douglas noticed her legs.

“I like that piece from the bar,” said Charlie Douglas in the country the next day.

“What do you think about her?”

“Have a Pernod with me, and we’ll talk about the girl,” said Ernest Hemingway.

That night he introduced himself to her and said that he was a writer. “And I’m going to write a novel, I’ve decided. It’ll be about how young men live their lives.”

The Basque girl listened with interest and poured them both cups of wine. “Will you read to me something that you have written?”

Charlie Douglas did not do that but went with her to her room upstairs. All the days and nights were agreeably long and for Charlie Douglas the week in Pamplona had been the only significant one in his life. In Chicago he had a fiancée who he was afraid of and a job at a college that made him sad. When the group’s week in Pamplona was over,

Charlie Douglas had a glass of Pernod in his hand and told Hemingway that he would not be going back with them or going back at all.

“You’re a damned fool,” Hemingway said. “Pack your bags and come home with us.”

“Don’t be sore, Hemingway. That’s a rotten thing to say. Anyway, it’s nothing to do with you.”

“You’re a damned fool.”

“I’m telling you, don’t say that.”

“You’re tight, and so you’re being a fool about it. You can’t live here.”

“And why shouldn’t I?”

“Damn it, Charlie, if you were straight you’d see it. I know it’s been nice, but you can’t be on vacation all the time, you have to work. You’re a guest. You don’t even speak the language. They don’t want you here, you know. Not even that girl really does.”

“You’re wrong about that.”

“I’m not wrong about anything.”

In the end, Hemingway returned to Paris with his wife and the others. He told Charlie Douglas that he was likely to come for San Fermin next year, and that Charlie Douglas should better have come to his senses by then. Charlie Douglas raised a glass and closed the door.

The rest of the summer was very good. The days were still hot and Charlie Douglas would walk the countryside and have picnics by the river. Though he did not speak the language he would greet the few Spanish and the Basque that he saw on the roads and they were friendly. At night he would wait for the Basque girl in her father’s bar and read the papers, which he did not understand, and she would serve him food and wine while she worked. He began to drink in the afternoons. The cafés and bars did not have Pernod – Hemingway had brought it to Pamplona in the first place – and so he developed a taste for *patxaran*, a red Basque liqueur made from sloe berries, and had the taste of aniseed like the Pernod. He had it served with ice that melted quickly in the sun, so he would drink the *patxaran* quickly while it was still chilled. It was the Basque girl who introduced him to the *patxaran*. He would sit in the bar and ask her to have a drink with him, and when they were the only ones in the bar, pull her close to kiss her. Of course, the money ran out. He received urgent telegrams from Chicago that he decided not to read. He wrote to Chicago only to ask for the money that he had in the American banks to be wired to him in Pamplona. No money ever came, and Charlie Douglas made debts for himself in every bar and café in Pamplona. He said that he would write another book and then he would be able to pay back double what he owed. But over time the mounting debts became unacceptable and there was no evidence of Charlie Douglas writing anything, and he was thrown out of his villa. He went to Bar Txoko with his bags and waited on a chair for the Basque girl, and got tight in the meantime. She appeared in the evening as usual, and Charlie Douglas put a hand around her arm.

“They’re all vultures in this town. To hell with them. You’re the only one of the lot who’s worth a damn. I don’t love anyone but you. Christ, I loved you that first night at dinner when you winked at me. It’s a lousy thing you did, you know, to wink at a man like that. I’m nothing now. There is no me now. I am you, you are everything. You’re all I’ve got. Come away with me, we’re going to have such a beautiful life.”

The Basque girl looked down at him. “Do you know I am not her? I am not that woman who winked at you in the bar. She does not work here anymore. You are thinking of someone else.”

“What – what is your name?”

“I will not tell you that.”

Charlie Douglas removed his hand from her arm and then put it back. “Come away with me.”

“No.”

“Come on. I’m telling you to come with me.”

“You should go home. Everyone is bored of you.”

He stood up. “Don’t talk to me like that, alright?”

“Why not? You are a stupid drunk who bullies women. Nothing about you is interesting.”

He let her go again and hoisted his pack over his shoulder. She crossed her arms and waited for him to leave. Charlie Douglas paused in the open doorway and turned back to the girl.

“I am someone,” he said. He stepped back, slipped on the crumbling threshold, and broke his neck on the small steps.

“They buried the American in the graveyard here,” Agustin told Roberto, “but, of course, we have his toe.”

Roberto glanced under the bar at the ice bucket. “And this is the toe of Charlie Douglas?”

“Yes.”

“Truly, do you want me to tell that story to all the customers? I still do not want to have that toe near my mouth. I would not delight in that. He was a sad man and I pity him.”

“Of course you should tell the customers. It is a good story, and it has a moral. The moral is that you must realise when the holiday is over, or else you will end up with your toe in a drink. But I do not complain. That is a very profitable drink, and a very valuable toe.”

“And is that story even true? I feel that I have heard parts of it before, in different places.”

“Well, who can say? It is the story I have heard. What does it matter whether it is true or not? It is a good story and it has a good moral. Why not tell it?”

So perhaps that was the real moral, Roberto thought. That the truth matters less than what one believes. And money matters more than either than them. Perhaps money is all that truly matters.

Roberto was still pondering the lesson of Agustin when the bell above the door sounded and interrupted his thoughts. This new customer was a white man, large, with a great white beard. There was aging and scarring plain upon his face and it was quite clear to Roberto – and it seemed clear to Agustin, as well – that this man was Ernest Hemingway. Roberto did not know what to say.

“*Hola, señor,*” Agustin called out. He carried on in English. “What can I get for you? A beer?”

Ernest Hemingway stopped at the bar. “*Si, una cerveza,*” he said in a halting American drawl.

Agustin opened a beer for Hemingway and set it down on the bar with a felt pad underneath. Hemingway did not look at it. Agustin waited for the man to break eye contact.

“Is there anything else for you, señor?”

“*La behotz.*”

Agustin did not immediately respond and appeared to be unsure what to think. “Vale,” he acquiesced, at last.

Roberto watched as Agustin went through the ritual of preparing *la behotz*. Agustin found the bottle of *patxaran*, which was not chilled, and poured Hemingway something more than a double measure. Agustin had a key of his own that he took from his pocket. The older man was frowning as he unlocked the padlock on the steel bucket.

“Roberto, where are my tongs?”

“Qué?”

“Where did you put the tongs?”

Roberto handed Agustin the tongs from where he had left them.

“You must put them in the correct place,” Agustin admonished him quietly. He unwrapped the plastic and used the tongs to pick up the blackened toe of Charlie Douglas. Without glancing at Hemingway he placed the toe gingerly in the liquid.

“*La behotz,*” Agustin said, and stepped back from the scene.

Roberto watched closely as Hemingway examined the drink. Roberto looked at the drink too, and noticed for the first time how the toe glided across the surface of the red liqueur like a lily. Hemingway lifted the drink from the bar with his right hand, which was thick and meaty and almost broke the small glass in its grip. For a moment, nothing happened. Then Hemingway took the glass of *patxaran* with the toe of Charlie Douglas and drank from it. He drank from it quickly, with a great thirst, and this made Roberto wince once more. When Hemingway set the glass back down on the bar, the toe was gone.

“Where's the toe?” asked Agustin, suddenly peeved.

“I swallowed it,” said Ernest Hemingway, and took the beer as a chaser.

“*You... hijo de puta!*” Agustin exploded. “There is – that is our property!” Hemingway put a hundred pesetas on the bar. He took another drink of the beer and left. The bell above the door rang again.

“*Vete a la mierda!*” Agustin grabbed the money off the bar. “That is a fortune we lost,” he snapped at Roberto. Agustin said he would bring this matter to the owner of the café at once. Roberto said that the owner was upstairs, but sleeping. Agustin was incredulous but said he would go to wake him up.

“*This is not the end of this,*” Agustin insisted. Roberto watched the older man run up the stairs in a panic, shouting for the owner. As he did so, Roberto found himself gripped by a kind of serenity, instead, and he thought to himself that in time, there would be new toes, and new stories to tell.