

A Short and Contained Collection of Coincidences

Or,

The Squirrel, The Pilgrim and The Casino

PART ONE – *American Utopia*

Daniel B. Cooper, “The Ballad of Faith Creek,” *On The Run*, Columbus Records, 1969

Northern Texas, Faith Creek

In the desert, rode an outlaw one day

Folks are simple, far from being weak

Pray to an outlaw, forced to obey

Tumbling down with such vigour

To the place, of Faith Creek

Oh do save us, Mr. River

Victory will be sweet

The winds blow, red sand around

Folks walking up and down the dirt tracks

In the horizon, outlaws can be found

Bodies hit the ground when Jim River attacks

Tumbling down with such vigour

To the place, of Faith Creek

Oh do save us, Mr. River

Victory will be sweet

Marty “Red Nose” Anderson causing such grief

Shooting at all the good folks of Faith Creek

The devil in disguise and of his posse he’s the chief

Hooray Mr. River, Mr. River

Tumbling down with such vigour

To the place, of Faith Creek

Oh do save us, Mr. River

Victory will be sweet

Tumbling down with such vigour
To the place, of Faith Creek
Oh do save us, Mr. River
Victory will be sweet

To the place, of Faith Creek
To the place, of Faith Creek

“Well, you got any trouble at home Lenny?” Mr. Anderson said.

“Well, my neighbour is clinically insane. And...” Lenny Leopold Lancaster replied grasping his palms, it was his first job interview in some time. He was fond of international financing you see, he always said his inspiration in life was Monopoly, or foreign affairs. He had worked in document rooms before specifically at the offices of book publishers. Organising files and so on and so forth.

“... Well, you know. Hard to get to sleep sometimes. He yells at people leaving the subway, that’s what he does. And it echoes from his balcony to mine. You understand right Mr. Anderson? Sleep is quite important,” Lenny continued.

“Well, yes, yes. I understand, completely. I meditate every morning for example before breakfast. And please, Mr. Anderson was my father’s name. Call me Andy.”

Lenny was thoroughly confused. He stopped listening to the job interviewer and realised he would have to keep up this lie. He doesn’t live in an apartment block and he doesn’t have a clinically insane neighbour either. An Italian man did rent a room across the hall for some time, but that’s beside the point.

“Well, Lenny, I don’t think I have ever seen a more compelling resume before.” Andy Anderson stated. He was lying slightly; the job was fairly simple and he felt sorry for Lenny. He was collage friends with his father too.

“Well, thank you Mr. Anderson, I mean, Andy. Means a lot. I’ve been struggling to find work and I feel this is my year!”

“Well, you know what? I see a bit of myself in you son. Wide eyed and eager like an eagle! Promotion is written all over your face!” Andy stopped. “Well, stop me if you’ve heard this before, but are you aware of Jimmy John Jackson? Of course, you are. He knows your father Leopold.” He took a sip of water, “Well, he’s worked here as a janitor for - well as long as me!” Andy stopped again and looked at the glass he just sipped out of. It wasn’t water, it was brandy.

To clarify, Jimmy John Jackson did work as a janitor for a long time but not as long as Andy. Andy was still working; Jimmy John Jackson was deceased. He choked on a corndog at Disney World, Florida earlier that year. He was on vacation visiting his family. Mr. Anderson was unaware of this fact, he believed he was still working at the Trade Centre.

After Andy Anderson poured and drank three glasses of *Alexander Hamilton Brandy – Minnesota Winter Flavour*, he began talking again.

“Well, I see no reason you won’t make a valuable addition to our janitorial facility. Please, sign here,” Andy said handing the form to Lenny.

Lenny was ecstatic. He began signing the documents so fast that it looked like the pen barely touched the form. It was like time had frozen, as his movement was so fast that all laws of physics ceased to exist.

He stopped.

“Well, all done?” Andy Anderson questioned.

“Well, silly me. May I have the date?” Lenny asked.

“Well, let me check. Ah yes! It’s the tenth. September tenth.”

A fair bit north and a tad east towards Lake Michigan, in the suburbs of Perdido, Illinois, which borders the lake, on North Roosevelt Avenue, fairly close to Lou Boudreau Memorial Park, lived Leonard Loral. Leonard was the father to two sons Leroy and Louis, both of which he’d lost contact with. He has since divorced from his wife, Linda who has remarried and had a son, Lenny, who is deceased.

Leonard was a bit of an enigma to his neighbours who lived on North Roosevelt Avenue. He didn’t go by Leonard anymore, he now went by Popolo, which was the name of a pizza he got in Detroit when moving out of New York City. He liked the word; the pizza wasn’t great.

The only time he interacted with the neighbourhood was when he’d walk his elderly dog named Bebop, which always would leave its excrement on the lawn of Paul Burgundy’s property. The exception to his isolation was when he had a friendship with his old neighbour Reginald D. B. Hooker. I never met Reginald so I have nothing to say there. the Leonard was friends with Reginald and Reginald despised Leonard. They were in their forties. Leonard served in the Vietnam War, but only for a few years before he managed to get out. Leonard’s experience during the war made the meat in his skull turn rancid and become a small

dollop of paste. Although Leonard found comfort in Reginald as they both suffered in the war, reality was that Reginald had not been to Vietnam - he escaped for Alaska instead.

Leopold was walking through the park after collecting some things for lunch. Mainly brandy, but also a variety of cheeses and dips. He didn't like the park too much, too many people he'd say. If I'm not mistaken, he did say that to me once. Leopold had a large build and he wore a suit. He was bald. Leopold didn't like being bald, the lack of hair made him feel inhuman, a subpar man or lover, (his words not mine). Leroy had a full head of brown hair, but he shaved it for the military. Lenny had a nice amount, combed and gelled. Louis had, well, I don't know what Louis did with his hair. When I last saw him, it looked like he'd never had a haircut. But it's been some time that any of the Loral family saw Louis. He may have a pompadour for all I know.

A squirrel was walking from tree branch to tree branch. The squirrel liked the park. Some days more than others. 'Too many people,' the squirrel may have said if it was capable of speech. The squirrel looked like a squirrel. Brown hair, legs, tail, head, teeth in its mouth, so on and so forth.

These two characters would cross paths which would be below a tree in the park. Here, Leopold stopped. So, did the squirrel. The squirrel stopped because it died. Choked on a nut or something. It doesn't matter. Leopold stopped because the sun was in his eyes. He stood there for some time. The squirrel's lifeless husk fell directly onto Leopold's head. Leopold didn't feel the animal falling onto his head, although, the smell of its corpse was pungent that he decided to go to the restroom. This smell must have been radiating from his pits he thought.

He walked into the bathroom. He urinated. He washed his hands after urinating. He looked up. He and the squirrel locked eyes with one another with Leopold heart stopping in shock. His eyes watered with joy and the squirrel's eyes stared blankly back at him. Leopold's imagined how he could contort the squirrel's body to imitate any hair style he wished. The squirrel couldn't imagine anything. It was dead.

He arrived at his house, a large house that was an iconic sight for New York City due to its circular, art deco window. A film was filmed there. I forget the film's name, the main character's name was Philip Python, who was a comic book character. A detective who had magical powers, and solved crimes across New York. The address was 58-60 Rivington Street.

Leopold and Linda would have a large lunch today, it was tradition as they go to bed too early to have a special dinner.

“Honey, what do you think? Do I look like Mr. Sinclair?” Leopold asked as he prepared the cheeses.

“It does suit you rather well. Where did you purchase the wig?” Linda asked.

Leopold stopped to think.

“The wig store,” he replied.

“The wig store?”

“The wig store.”

Louis Leonard Loral was twenty-three and was currently living in Boston. It was 2002, and he was at a bar named Ol’ Maloney’s. He sat in the bar alone, it was the afternoon and the people were fairly rowdy. Louis was fairly timid and ever so slightly drunk. He’d had many glasses of *Alexander Hamilton Brandy* up to this point and was considering leaving. But his body didn’t overly feel the need to move so he was listening to the conversation of two drunks beside him. These were the events that transpired:

“What are you on, Bobby “The Hunk” Williams wern’t from Vermont!” The one wearing a white shirt rambled.

“What are you... He born in Wisconsin he was! I know my baseballs!” the other retaliated. His shirt was covered with bloody stains.

“No! No! You’re wrong! It was Vermont! He was from Vermont!”

“Nope, born in Kentucky! K-E-N-T-U-K-Y!”

“You was just sayings Wisconsin! Where you get Kentucky from?”

“You’re both wrong. Ohio. He be from Ohio. Proud of my fellow Ohioan,” Charlie the bartender said, entering the fray.

“What are you on Charlie! Ohio?” the clean one questioned pulling another drink off the bar.

“Ohio, more like, Ohino!” His buddy shouted and went to high five but their hands went straight past one another.

The pair chuckled making the situation less awkward.

Louis didn’t know too much about baseball. He’d seen a few games and was pretty sure that Bobby “The Hunk” Williams was from Boston, because he saw a poster that morning.

“You three are wrong. He’s from here. He’s from Boston.” Louis attempted to say, but only came out as a slurred grunt. The drunks looked at Louis looked at him blankly, as if he wasn’t there.

“We know he plays for the Sox, but he ain’t from here!” The bartender said grabbing the drunk’s attention. They were pulled back into reality.

“Gotta be from Alabama, that’s what I says before.” The one with the stained shirt said.

“Can’t be, no accent!” The clean white shirt one said.

“Now you know what that is? That’s malarkey! Get outta here!” The bartender said jokingly to the one with the stained shirt. They cheered and high-fived one another. They noticed Louis was getting up and the two wouldn’t forgive him for the assumption he made about Bobby.

“Look at this clown!” The two friends said in unison and proceeded to pick up Louis and place him on the sidewalk.

“You know what?” The friend with the clean shirt said, “I reckon he might be from here. Boston.”

“Friend, he’s from Oregon. I’m right, you’re wrong, end of story.” The one with the stained shirt yelled and proceeded to stand up, and stumble or waddle towards Louis. Once reaching Louis he punched him in the face and his fist collided with his nose. Louis had lost his sense of smell for a moment and couldn’t smell the stench of alcohol and the patron’s lack of personal hygiene anymore. Another collision came and Louis lost his sight. Everything faded to black as Louis fell to the bar tiles.

“So you’re telling me they don’t have no aliens?” Allan asked, Leroy, the oldest of Leonard Loral boys. Allan was beside him and they were sitting at the counter of Judy Garvey’s Highway Café.

“What happens there is confidential. I cannot disclose any information.” Leroy replied.

The waitress turned around and began pouring coffee into their mugs.

After one sip, Allan started again.

“My fishing mate, Werner Wist, he’s a German. Well, reckons he saw you a UFO while fishing in Annapolis. Also reckons he spotted one in Highlands, Illinois, but between us...”

“Sir,” Leroy said interrupting him, “may you stop talking to me? I have to be getting to work soon. I do not know you. I am tired.”

There was a moment of silence where the duo sipped on their heated beverages. After maybe sixty-eight seconds of silence, Allan started again.

“May I ask, how do them aliens procreate?”

And this signified Leroy's exit. He left the diner and got into his car which he nicknamed Brenda.

Leroy knew the highway like the back of his hand, it was a highway after all. He'd been taking this trip fairly often as he rented a room behind Judy's. Before living there, he worked in a record shop in Seattle while his transfer was being completed and before that in a base in New Mexico. During his time in Washington, he tracked down his father, learning he lived in Perdido, Illinois. He also learned that Louis was living in Maine, although, this was false. At that particular moment of time Louis would have been in either New Hampshire or Indianapolis. It's hard to say.

He arrived at Area 51 at thirteen hundred hours, got out and entered the screening room. He filled out his psychological evaluation form. Everything was in order. Hadn't been drinking, wasn't overly stressed. After visiting the scanning room, he entered his post in the central intelligence room.

"Private Loral. We need you at your post pronto. We're about to deploy Airforce Nine from here to carry out their mission in Iraq." Sargent Sampson ordered.

The year 1956. Linda Bueller, the mother to the Loral and Lancaster boys was born. She was born in Idaho. That night as her mother rested, the Californian crime syndicate by the name of The Pistol Pythons would rob The West Virginia Casino in Las Vegas. The plan was simple. After successfully collecting all the funds, they would escape to Hawaii, and hide out - sipping on coconut milk in the mystical kingdom.

They had a man on the inside: Bobby Sinclair. The brawn: Jack Knox. The driver: Sammy Jones. The brains: Louis Jewells. It was all going to plan you see, the casino floor was less busy than usual because Elvis Presley was playing a show. This gave Louis and Bobby plenty of time to bag as much money as possible on a relatively empty casino floor. They had Jack on lookout for guards, armed with a pistol and a walkie talkie. Sammy sat in the car listening to the classic Blue Suede Shoes - what a song!

But it all went wrong. Elvis left for a time and was walking through the casino. He bumped into Jack, who was dressed as a guard. Elvis made Jack his unofficial bodyguard, keeping the adoring public away and giving the lonely King of Rock some company. The pair went backstage, where Elvis showed Jack his pistol and Jack showed Elvis his. Elvis had a love for firearms you see, and Jack's pistol was painted bright gold. Elvis signed Jack's pistol and it now sits in Elvis Presley's Graceland Mansion in Tennessee.

As their lookout was with Elvis, Bobby and Louis were unaware of the approaching guard who spotted them carrying their duffle bags.

“Aye, what yous twos up toos?” The guard asked.

“Eh?” Bobby mumbled.

“We’s were’s just taking Sharon’s luggage back to her room.” Louis bluffed.

“Sharon? Sharon who?” The guard asked.

“Sharon BOOM!” Bobby said, shooting the guard in the head.

The body fell making a loud crack sound on the tiles. Bobby dropped his bag and investigated the body finding the bullet’s exit point in the back of his head.

“Why yous dos that?” Louis asked Bobby, twitching anxiously.

“Doesn’t matters, let’s get outta heres.” Louis ordered and pulled Bobby to his feet.

The pair ducked and weaved between poker machines leaving a trail of cash. To the sound of jackpots being won, a swarm of guards followed getting nearer and nearer, firing towards Bobby and Louis. They got to the loading dock but there was no Sammy to be seen.

You see, Sammy found himself in a predicament as well: Another gang from California, The Highway Businessmen, had a few run-ins with The Pistol Pythons. A group of The Highway Businessmen were walking down to the loading dock. They knew about Louis’ plan and wanted to intercept it, and take the money for themselves. So when they saw Sammy, they popped a bullet and disposed of the body in a dumpster. They planned to wait near the car, but a guard spotted them and they scattered.

So, Bobby and Louis were arrested at the loading dock, Sammy’s body was fished out of the dumpster, and Jack started a new life, traveling across the U.S. with Elvis Presley, becoming his good friend and his official bodyguard.

And that was that.

PART TWO – Thanks For What Giving?

The following is a scene from a film named *Breaking Point 2: Back In The Habit*. A film that I enjoy immensely:

OFFICER GALLAGHER, *enters* LIEUTENANT WALLACE'S office with a cigar in his mouth. He is followed by OFFICER FRANZ, who's new to the force, after going on his first patrol with OFFICER GALLAGHER. The office is bare, with his desk full of articles such as files, a photo of his son's baseball team, a photo of his wife, a pistol and assorted pens. Behind the desk on the wall is a map of the city of Salt Lake City with Xs marked on top of seemingly random buildings.

LIEUTENANT WALLACE is seated at his desk with a cold look on his face. OFFICER GALLAGHER and OFFICER FRANZ stand still. FRANZ is stiff and concerned while GALLAGHER is relaxed and confident.

LIEUTENANT WALLACE You care to explain what happened this morning Gallagher?

OFFICER GALLAGHER Sir, I went out to train officer Franz here, and we found ourselves in the unruliest of situations.

LIEUTENANT WALLACE That's one way of putting it Officer. You, Franz, you care to tell me what you discovered in the warehouse downtown?

OFFICER GALLAGHER Lieutenant, I think we should keep Officer Franz out of this. They shot first and we retaliated.

LIEUTENANT WALLACE Officer Franz?

OFFICER FRANZ *surveys the room uncomfortably. He approaches the desk and sits down on the chair across from* LIEUTENANT WALLACE.

OFFICER FRANZ Well, Officer Gallagher was showing me the ropes as you instructed. We were on the east side of town,

driving and surveying the streets. Officer Gallagher brought me to a club, which was an establishment I'd never imagined I would find myself in.

LIEUTENANT WALLACE *leans forwards toward the pair standing before him.* OFFICER GALLAGHER *stands still as a wall, with a blank expression.*

OFFICER FRANZ After, visiting the establishment we found ourselves in this warehouse down yonder. We entered, as Officer Gallagher here believed illegal activity was being conducted. We, investigated and discovered the floor littered with men all armed and boxes full of illicit substances.

OFFICER FRANZ *takes a sip of water before continuing.*

OFFICER FRANZ Officer Gallagher opened fire on the men causing the “unruly situation” he mentioned earlier.

LIEUTENANT WALLACE *stands up from his seat, as fast as a speeding bullet and with force more powerful than a locomotive. He bangs the table in anger.* OFFICER FRANZ *looks away in fear and shock. Officer Gallagher remains still and unphased.*

LIEUTENANT WALLACE You're a loose cannon you know that Gallagher? You know that? Having you on the force is a danger to our integrity!

OFFICER GALLAGHER *is silent.*

LIEUTENANT WALLACE Well? You're not going to say anything son?

OFFICER GALLAGHER *takes off his aviator sunglasses and proceeds to spit at LIEUTENANT WALLACE. He walks out followed by OFFICER FRANZ.*

TITLE CARD

Breaking Point 2: Back In The Habit

When serving his sentence at Folsom State Prison, California, Bobby Sinclair watched Johnny Cash perform. It struck a note in his heart you could say, and only a few months after that, he'd escaped and went from state to state performing country ballads under the alias *Daniel B. Cooper*.

Bobby travelled sporadically, escaping the police that were on his tail since his initial escape. He performed in small clubs and bars to raise funds before skipping town for the next establishment. Georgia, to Arkansas, to Kansas, to Missouri, to Nebraska. He made a bit of a name for himself, an infamous, secretive blues singer.

It was in the late 1970s, in Memphis, Tennessee, he crossed paths with his old friend, Jack Knox who was still good friends with Elvis Presley. Bobby was invited to an exclusive Thanksgiving party at Elvis' Graceland Mansion. Everyone wanted in. It was here he met his soon to be wife, Ruth Dubois, a French painter. Bobby and Ruth spent the night with one another, dancing and singing, until tragedy occurred.

Elvis had guns littered across the mansion. One pistol was in fact in the bathroom and a party guest, who I will not mention their name, found this firearm and accidentally fired it, wounding another guest. The police were called as well as an ambulance to sort out the commotion. Bobby was recognised and brought into court as his escape was still being investigated.

The trial wasn't looking good. Bobby was being hounded for his escapades and it was looking like he would be in jail for the rest of his life if not for the following divine intervention:

Elvis strolled in, followed by Jack Knox and stated smoothly, "You ain't locking up this jailbird".

"And who might you be?" asked the judge.

Elvis took off his sunglasses. The whole court gasped in shock.

"Friends," Elvis started, "Ambition is a dream with a V8 Engine. This man here has a dream and you are not getting his foot off that pedal."

The court was silent. Each word sounded like poetry.

"Truth, truth is like sun, you can shut it out for a time, but it ain't going anywhere. And friends, this man did do something wrong, we all know that, but haven't we all done something wrong? And haven't we all learned from that?"

The court remained quiet with sobs in the backrow echoing.

Bobby didn't go back to jail and thanks to his new friend Elvis Presley's compelling speech, the jury concluded he was a reformed man. He married Ruth a few months after that and lived in France for a time. They returned to the US and moved to 601 Martin Luther King Boulevard, Newark, New Jersey. I tell you all this, because they are my parents. I am Marcel Sinclair, a short story author - the son of both a painter and Californian criminal turned blues musician.

Louis had been wandering, hitchhiking from state on a spiritual pilgrimage to save the world from the incoming apocalypse. He found himself on the side of highways collecting flowers, hoping to later make them into a brew of some sorts. He wore a trench coat and a green hat with the state of Virginia plastered onto it.

It was on the highway between Wyoming and Montana when I spotted the pilgrim. Yes, I do live in New York, I was interstate to visit an old family friend, Elvis Knox, the son of Jack Knox and Priscilla Knox. I'm personally not too fond of Elvis Knox, always banging on about how his father was best friends with Elvis Presley. Elvis this, Elvis that, it's all I hear about.

I was driving a red pickup that I rented from a guy in Montana. I was returning it and then the next day be catching a plane back to New York. I saw Louis, who flagged me down and I let him on board.

"Namaste friend. I am Louis Loral," he said getting into the passenger seat.

"Marcel," I responded.

"Nice truck you have my friend."

"Thank you, rented it for the day. Where you off to?"

"Here, there and everywhere."

"Well, I'm going to Helena and catching a plane from there to New York tomorrow. If here, there and everywhere is Helena, then we'll be there in no time."

"New York. I was raised there. Then I went to Boston," Louis started.

I turned the radio off. Enough Ray Charles for a day I thought to myself.

"And then Wyoming?" I asked.

“No my friend. You see, after Boston I went to Pennsylvania. I lived with a fortune-teller named Grace. Oh, you’ve never met a woman like Grace. I loved her with all my heart. Until she read my fortune and said that I had a mission from the highest order. The world will end tomorrow on Thanksgiving Marcel.” He picked up my water bottle which actually contained *Alexander Hamilton Brandy – Minnesota Winter Flavour*. He took a swig and I began to reconsider my life decisions.

“So, my friend. It was in Delaware when I learned of the reality of mission. Up to this point, all Grace had said my mission was one of self-discovery. But here, when watching the musical, *Oklahoma*, all made sense. I was to go to Oklahoma and then Wyoming. In Yellowstone I lived in the behind Theodore Roosevelt’s cabin. I know so much about that man now. Did you know his wife and mother died on the same day within an hour of one another? That’s going to happen to all of us if I don’t get the Colorado.”

“Why Colorado?”

“Denver Airport is satanic. I just know that unknowable evil lives there. The omen was a blue horse. That was on my tarot card. The blue horse will bring the end of the world, and that blue steed is guarding the airport.”

He rambled more, but that’s all I can remember. I wished him farewell and got on the plane back to New York the next day from Montana. There was a brief pitstop in North or South Dakota for refuelling. The airport was nice. A woman from Rhode Island gave me peanuts.

Leopold sat at the large dining room table with a significant distance between him and his wife, Linda. They sat and ate the Thanksgiving lunch in silence, peering at one another in slight disgust. Leopold wasn’t too big of a fan of turkey and Linda had been aware for a month or so now that on his head was in fact a decaying squirrel. She wanted to say something but struggled to articulate the phrase. It was about time she mentioned something.

“Honey,” Linda started, “I like what you’ve done with your hair today.”

“Thanks doll” Leopold said and fixing the carcass a bit. He feared she had worked out the truth of the squirrel as it was the first time she’d mentioned his hair of her own accord.

They continued to eat in near silence. The only sound was chewing and sipping and cutting.

“We’ll have leftovers, won’t we?” Leopold said

“What was that?” Linda asked.

“Leftovers.”

“Oh yes.”

Silence.

“Did you see the news this morning?” Leopold began again.

“Of course, we watched it in bed.” Linda responded.

“You remember how that pig in North Carolina saved that goat?”

“It was South Carolina honey.”

“Same thing.”

“Same thing? You know what isn’t the same thing?” Linda said now angered.

Leopold silent.

“A wig and a squirrel’s rancid, rotting body aren’t one in the same!”

Leopold opened his mouth but was interrupted. The squirrel’s jaw dropped in shock, although, it was unaware of the drama as it was dead.

“Don’t try to defend yourself. Do you think your father would use a squirrel’s body as an article of clothing? Do you think any man we think highly of would do that? Hm?”

Leopold stopped as he was thinking deeply. He took a sip of his *Alexander Hamilton Brandy*. He thought of Mount Rushmore.

“George Washington maybe? No, his hair was definitely hair, as was Lincoln, but you can never be sure. Theodore Roosevelt had quite a nice cut.” Leopold said aloud, but believed he said it was but a thought.

Silence resumed until there was a knock on the door. The knock was loud and echoed through their property. Leopold knew it was his job to answer so he approached the door and was greeted by yours truly. Me, Marcel Sinclair.

I’d only been back in New York for an hour or so from my trip to Wyoming and meeting Louis. I had work to do still though. I’m a door to door salesman, selling vacuum cleaners, just for the time being.

“Hello,” I started, “I know it’s Thanksgiving, but may I interest you in...”

I was prepared for the door to be slammed as it often is, but Leopold took this as a chance to escape from Linda.

“Oh yes, yes, please, sit. Let’s talk” he said eagerly.

“Okay. Um, how are you?”

“Good, good.”

It was small talk at first, but we spoke more and more and our conversation became more and more complex. I stopped trying to sell my product and just listened to Leopold’s rambles.

“What do you think of the park? I myself enjoy having little picnics,” I said at one point.

“Oh, you know. I don’t like the park. Too many people.” He responded.

“Really? I mean, you do have a squirrel on your head. I’d thought otherwise.”

He grew self-conscious.

“You could tell?”

“That I could.”

He cried and I gave him a tissue.

“I just want hair!” He mumbled through his tears.

I put my arm around him for and after a good few minutes until he’d calmed down a bit.

“You know, the lack of hair makes me feel inhuman, a subpar man. Without my hair, I feel like a poor lover.” Leopold rambled through his tears. I didn’t know how to respond so I looked around the street and the steps we sat on.

“Well, I know it might not fix your hair, but your wife may appreciate a new vacuum cleaner?”

“How far does it extend?”

“Thirty-five feet and it has up to .45 gallons of storage.”

I left making my only sale for that day. Leopold went inside less broken and with a new vacuum cleaner. The squirrel laid still on the steps of the house and that’s where it would stay for a week. Until it mysteriously disappeared and for Leopold, this was a sign.

I arrived in my cramped New York apartment above a *Big Joel’s Burger Joint* fairly quickly after spending the day speaking with Leopold. I got changed and picked up the movie tickets for the reshowing of the nostalgic classic, *Breaking Point 2: Back In The Habit*. It being Thanksgiving, I deduce that the cinema will be relatively empty.

Leonard had been living in Connecticut since his dog Bebob’s death. He still owned an array of properties across the country thanks to the family company’s enormous wealth, so leaving Illinois wasn’t difficult. His home was made of marble and sat near a quarry.

In Little Italy I had a small dinner at *Miss Isippi’s Bar and Grill*. before the film. At the *Big Joel’s* under my apartment, Leonard was eating a burger before going to see the same film. We both finished our food around the same time and proceeded to the cinema which was empty. We were the only two people in the theatre watching the film so we ended chatting. Initially, we spoke trading trivia facts, a competition of sorts.

“He improvised that line,” Leonard stated.

“Eliot Jacque was going to play Dwayne but he didn’t get the role apparently” I’d later retort.

“That was the director’s own car that blew up there.” Leonard would add when, you guessed it, the car exploded. And it was when the fifteenth car blew up in that scene our attitudes shifted. No longer were we attempting to one up one another with trivia, we were now friends who were as thick as thieves. Like Gallagher and Franz by the end of the film.

“So my wife is married to my old buddy from college.” Leonard rambled.

“Is she now?” I responded.

“Sure is. And they still live in my house. And they had a kid and everything.”

“Did they now?”

“Sure did.”

Leonard stopped and watched the screen. This is the scene that caught his attention:

OFFICER FRANZ You’ll never get away from this you sick bugger you!

VINCE SERPENTINE I sure will! I will manipulate the police department to think it was your partner Gallagher who killed the police chief. They know he’s a loose cannon, he can’t be trusted. And they wouldn’t believe anything you say because you’re only a rookie.

OFFICER FRANZ My God, you’ve thought of it all!

“You know my father was an oil tycoon in Texas. I was named after him. Hah! Unlike my brother! He’s dead. My brother and father. Both.” Leonard said as the credits rolled and *Salt Lake City* by The Beach Boys played. “Yeah, brother died in war, my father drowned in a fishing accident. I wonder how I’ll go out.”

“No clue.”

“Don’t sass me.”

And that was that.

January 7, 2022

Dear Mr. Sinclair,

It was precisely a year ago to the day I believe, you sent us a short story titled A SHORT AND CONTAINED COLLECTION OF COINCIDENCES OR, THE SQUIRREL, THE PILGRIM AND THE CASINO. My colleagues here at Wild Bird Books LTD were unaware of the submission and were somewhat shocked as we've published your work before and they've been moderately successful. Do I like them? No, I don't care for you or your stories. Do I care for this one? No, I didn't like it and I wish I didn't have to read it. That's just the way it is I suppose. Let's get this over and done with:

“I write to regrettably inform you we will not be publishing (BLANK). It's just not what we're looking for.”

If it were up to me, that would mark the end of this letter and I'd thus resume drinking a coffee watching the snow outside. But to my frustration, I've been instructed to continue and by all accounts, not offend your family or dynasty.

The reason your story was rejected to my knowledge comes down to slander. You see, people don't want to think that the man they do Zumba with has a dead squirrel on his head. People don't want to think Elvis Presley helped a notorious criminal get out of life sentence. And of course, it's worth mentioning Leonard Loral, whose escapades across the Midwest are so abhorrent they bring a tear to my eye. Sidenote, I'd hate to be his mother. Poor woman.

What are your motives? Are you poking fun at the people you've met, are you constructing fictional scenarios, or are you burning every bridge you've built in recent times? Ultimately, I don't care to know these answers. So please return with something that won't force me to scratch my head and you can return to that moderate success you're known for.

Best regards,

Greg Valium, Wild Bird Books LTD.

P.S. My wife made this relationship that I was dying to get rid of. So, do what you wish with it.