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VAN-ISLE VIDEO

TREVOR'S FATHER OWNED A CHAIN OF VIDEO RENTAL OUTLETS called Van-Isle Video. Before Blockbuster, it was the largest such venture on the Mid-Island, more or less dominating the Nanaimo rental market through the 1980s and early 1990s. By the time Trevor and I left high school, most of Van-Isle's interests had folded or been bought out by larger chains—a collapse that was aided by a personal failure that was rarely discussed in the family. What happened was that his father, Rod, had conceived of Van-Isle as a sanctuary for die-hard cinephiles—a place where you could find just about anything, no matter how out-there. This business model was such a success at Van-Isle's downtown anchor store that, ten years later, much of the family fortune was tied up in obscure VHS tapes, which the customers at their seven satellite locations didn't have much appetite for. Then came DVDs, which brought the whole groaning enterprise down like a tipped gumball machine. Rod dismissed the format early on as “yuppie bullshit” that was bound to go the way of the LaserDisc—another format he remembered well and had also been wary of. Against every omen, every market forecast, he held fast to those heavy black slabs that formed the brickwork of his empire.

Trevor and I would hang out at his place most days to take advantage of the fact that his parents were managing the last two Van-Isle stores and were rarely home before seven. When Rod finally walked in the door, Trevor and I would exchange glances, worried that the house smelled like weed or my dad's home brew. But he never said anything or made any sound at all, really. He just stood in the foyer doing I'm not sure what. Sometimes I pictured him leaning with his back against the door and his eyes closed, his body worn from labouring under the weight of it all. Once or twice, these moments stretched to such uncomfortable lengths that I saw Trevor cut a sharp look toward the front door, like he could peer through walls and disapproved of what he saw there.

“Dad?”

“Yeah, right here.”

Then we heard shuffling sounds as he took off his shoes and jacket. It was like he'd been woken from a trance, and in these moments the mask of Trevor's teenage cool gave way to something else—something sour that I think was always bubbling beneath the surface. He'd grimace and shake his head as his father trudged silently up the creaking staircase to his room, leaning heavily on the banister of a house he'd paid for in sunnier times.

In the end it was a short headline tucked into the back pages of the *Nanaimo News Bulletin* that sent Rod over the edge: “Walmart, Other Retailers to Phase-Out VHS Format by Year's End.” When Rod came home that day, he marched straight into the living room in his sneakers and threw the paper on the coffee table between us, toppling an empty mug.

“Can you believe that? Can you fucking *believe* it?”

Trevor glanced up at his father, who was still wearing his black polo shirt with the “Van-Isle Video” logo stitched over the breast. His hair was streaked white near the temples and messed in places, like he'd had his hands in it, and he smelled of beer, which he often did.

“What's this?” Trevor asked, exhaling and smoothing the paper flat with both hands.

Rod didn't seem to register the question. “I bend over backwards building something, and what do they do? Sneak up from behind and fuck me like it never mattered. Nothing's sacred to these suits—these *bean counters*. They sign some papers and then go to their damn cottages for the weekend. Did I ever take a weekend off?”

Trevor's eyes moved as he scanned the article. Then he rubbed his nose and leaned back on the couch.

“Yeah, that's fucked,” he said, eyes falling back on the television screen.

Rod stood a moment with his hands on his hips, incredulous. He was swollen around the middle, and the polo looked small on him, its short sleeves hitching up almost to his shoulders.

“Yeah, well, what d'you expect? It's all about the bottom line—the almighty dollar,” he muttered as a kind of final thought, scooping up the paper and making for the stairs. “I've got some calls to make.”

Trevor turned over the upturned mug, picked up the remote, and started flipping channels. Eventually, his attention came to rest on *Field of Dreams*,

the Q-13 Tacoma Thursday Night Feature Presentation. We watched it in the gravity of a heavy silence, Trevor's jaw clenching in the light flashing from the set in the dusk.

The next morning Trevor picked me up in his dad's old '87 Tempo, and we drove to Northfield Academy—an adjusted learning school that was renting floor space behind a strip mall on Bowen Road. Instead of classes there were “learning modules” that you worked through on your own time at bullpen computer terminals, and students would idle in groups in the parking lot, smoking and dropping archipelagos of spit between their bulky skate shoes. It was the kind of place where deadbeats like us went to finish school. Neither of us liked going, but we were eighteen and nineteen now, and it was better than paying rent.

On the way back, Trevor drove with both hands on the wheel and a cigarette in his mouth.

“One day I'll come get you, and we'll blow straight past Northfield and just keep fuckin' driving 'til we hit Edmonton.”

“What'll we do in Edmonton?”

“Find a place, work, sell weed. It's our life to live, bud. Jenner tells me his brother got a job up there finishing concrete.”

“Sounds like paradise.”

“Compared to circling the drain here in Junkie Junction?”

At the time Trevor and I were snorting OxyContin. We weren't doing it everyday yet—that would come later—but it was cheap, easy, and still too new to have much stigma attached to it. You just had to know someone with the right kind of doctor and some acting chops.

It was the chance of maybe copping 40mg that occupied us for the rest of the drive to Van-Isle Video. Trevor thought his dad might have a twenty in the till he could part with, but when we got there the store was closed.

“The fuck is this?” Trevor said. The engine sounded an octave higher.

Back at the house we found Rod sitting at the kitchen table wearing the same clothes he'd been wearing the day before but with darker shadows on his face. He'd been drinking, of course, and he was hoisting a dented can of Wildcat Strong as we came in, his face warped in a kind of mock Popeye grimace.

“Why aren't you at the shop?” Trevor asked.

Rod tilted his chin up and smiled a rascal's smile, squinting. Then he

gripped the chair back with one hand, lifted himself to his feet, and walked with an exaggerated straight-leg shuffle to the fridge, like his legs were asleep.

“You must think your old man’s a pretty sorry specimen, huh?” Rod opened the door and smirked back at his son. “Okay, fine. That’s what I’d think if I were you too.” He plucked out a fresh Wildcat before shambling back towards his chair. “But one day life’ll teach you how fast it can all turn to *dogshit*.” Rod’s hand, still clutching the beer, swept the room in a wide crescent, referring to the house or maybe the world at large—I wasn’t sure.

“So what, that’s it? You’re just finished?” Trevor’s voice sounded wounded, and I flinched at the thought that he might cry—something I’d never seen him do.

Rod’s eyes tunnelled into Trevor’s for a second, and then he threw his hands up in a show of surrender. “Top hat is empty, kid. Nothing to leverage. None of it’s worth anything anymore—not a goddamn dime.”

Trevor was watching Rod with an anguished, quivering look—a look of loathing, despair, or possibly both. I’d never known there to be much resemblance between them, but as I watched them stare each other down from opposite ends of the kitchen it suddenly dawned on me how similar they looked, both of them sleep-deprived and dishevelled with the same wild, tear-choked eyes, like cornered prey.

Later that evening Rod fell asleep on the basement hide-a-bed, and Trevor and I went out to the back patio to smoke and watch the rain wet the lawn. Trevor drew quick, anxious puffs, looking out over the concrete swimming pool filled with a goulash of leaves and brown water and the half-court Rod installed when he was little, its net torn, dirty, and clinging to the downward canting hoop. The whole rotting plaza looked like an abandoned fairground.

“Ever think how it would be if you stopped trying to impress everyone all the time and just said ‘fuck it’?” Trevor asked me out of nowhere and for no reason I could fathom.

“What, you mean like stop shaving and wearing deodorant and shit?”

“I mean like wreaking havoc—total fucking carnage.”

“I don’t know if I follow.” I didn’t.

Trevor inhaled, pausing a moment to collect his thoughts.

“I mean what if you and me made a big move, did something we couldn’t ever undo, and then just fucked off for good. People would hate us, but we’d

be gone, and they'd be here. It'd only be a big deal if *we* made it one, right?" He spoke slowly, like he'd given this some thought, and I wasn't surprised when he told me he had something specific in mind. Then he looked straight out into the dark and laid out his plan, like he was addressing an invisible audience.

For years he'd been helping his father move Van-Isle's sprawling tape collection into storage as franchises closed and Rod was forced to make concessions in the way of DVD shelf space. Now there were mountains of VHS tapes sitting in an industrial park near the docks, where Rod had a small warehouse abutting the trainyards. The bottom might have fallen out of the wholesale market, but Trevor knew for a fact that most pawn shops in the Mid-Island were still buying smaller lots at around fifty cents a tape. Then there were the posters and other promotional materials sent to Van-Isle over the years by distributors, some of which were now collector's items that could fetch a mint on eBay, of which Rod knew nothing. With a little luck and some driving, we could clear thousands before he even noticed his warehouse was emptying, and by then we'd be long gone to Edmonton.

The whole scheme sounded fairly simple and low-risk. Honestly, I didn't understand why Trevor was acting so dramatic about it. We'd done worse things for money, or anyway more dangerous things, and stealing what was probably destined for a landfill sounded like a victimless crime to me. We agreed that we'd start the following week.

On Monday Trevor borrowed the Tempo to go to Northfield but instead picked me up from my mom's and drove us to Rod's warehouse—a cube of blue cinder block about the size of an auto shop. He backed the Ford up the loading ramp and threw the bolt on the bay door with one of Rod's keys.

"You sure about this?" I asked—for Trevor's sake—once we were inside. He'd been near dead silent on the drive, and I wondered if he'd just been blowing steam the other night.

He pushed his hair back and took off his jacket. He was wearing one of his father's Van-Isle polos, which he said was to put pawnbrokers at ease. Without answering my question, he hoisted a cardboard box labelled "*The Sixth Sense*" into the trunk. "Grab the near ones first, and then we'll work our way back."

That first day we pulled in nearly \$200 and on the way home copped two green 80mg pills and a bottle of Golden Wedding to wash them down.

We toasted youth and the spirit of industry.

For the next few months we practically lived in the Tempo, smoking and talking about what everyone from high school would think when they heard about the money we'd be making in Edmonton. Carrying on once, Trevor mentioned that his mom had an older brother in Edmonton who'd hated Rod ever since he'd lit out west with his baby sister. Once he heard how bad his brother-in-law was fucking up, Trevor was sure he'd help us out with a place to stay and a job at his floor tiling company.

"What about your dad?" I asked.

"I don't think he's coming back from this," Trevor replied.

From his tone it was clear we were done talking.

By this time Rod had taken to spending daylight hours in the basement rec room, which had been converted to storage space over the years, as Trevor grew up and his parents entertained less. In a corner by the pool table—now closed in on either side by an accretion of forgotten junk—sat a brown floral couch facing a Zenith television-VCR combo. On days I woke up in Trevor's room, we'd listen for the sound of Rod padding down the staircase and cracking the basement door softly, like a secret. Then the earth would just open up and swallow him. We knew he'd stay down there, drunk, for most of the day—the low, hissing tones of the television carrying upstairs—and we could sneak out of the house without any questions. As far as I could tell, Trevor had hardly spoken a word to him since the day in the kitchen.

His mom also thought it best if Trevor stayed clear of the house—of the sinkhole Rod's presence had opened beneath the place. My parents didn't talk much either, living way out on opposite ends of town. I showed my face once or twice a week at each place, and they took me on my word when I said I was staying at the other one. Really, though, I was at Trevor's almost every night, just like how it had been since we left school, only now we had something to do during the day that was worth getting up for.

And our new business was booming. The most sought-after titles were what Trevor called "depth copies," which were blockbuster releases, like *Jerry Maguire* and *Jurassic Park*, that were bought in bulk to meet demand. Trevor had been stacking boxes of them near the warehouse's bay door for who knows how long, and it took us less than two weeks to clear

them out. Then came the real work: hours spent sitting on milk crates on the shop floor sorting through mixed boxes and assembling the newest titles for quick sale. To simplify things, we started selling only hit movies in bulk for twenty-five bucks a box. We didn't sell anything pre-1997 except Disney clamshells, which flew off the racks of downtown pawnshops like Harley-Davidson jewellery. We bought out Jenner's dad for his Oxy script, hoping to turn it over and make a few extra dollars, but then didn't. The next month, we bought him out again.

The nearby shops gradually had their fill, so our drives got longer—to towns I'd heard of but never visited and a couple I'd never even known were there. We started waking up in the dark to make the highway before the sun burned away the pre-dawn fog that hung over the sea like a low smoke.

As the weeks went by, Trevor seemed more determined than ever to ransack his family's assets despite the fact that nearly every cent we made went towards Oxy and gas—expenses that rose a little each week even as sales dwindled. It was like he was racing his father to the bottom of some gulch or something—a netherworld neither of them could ever hope to escape.

Then one morning we made an upsetting discovery. Rolling up the loading bay door before daybreak, we found ourselves suddenly washed in light. Someone had been there—might still be there—and they'd left the lights on.

For a few seconds we just stood there blinking on the ramp.

“Was that us?”

“I don't know. I don't think it was.”

I thought back to the night before. We'd been high, but not so much we'd have missed that—not in the dark.

Trevor gestured for me to stay put and walked quietly through the door, a silhouette centred in a cold square of light. “Hello?” he called out. When there was no answer, he turned and disappeared in the direction of some utility rooms and an office in the back. I lit a cigarette and sat on the Tempo, adrenaline mixing with the Oxy I'd snorted off a CD case in Trevor's room.

We'd been careful to clean up after ourselves each night in case Rod paid a surprise visit like this. But had he noticed the yawning patch of bare floor around the loading bay? Would he care? Maybe he'd just laugh and thank us for clearing out his trash. It seemed like a reasonable enough way to react.

Trevor rounded a corner inside and stood staring at me through the loading door. He looked pale. He shouted something I couldn't hear and waved me inside.

As I crossed the warehouse floor, everything looked like how we'd left it. It wasn't until I followed Trevor down the hallway to Rod's office that I noticed the office door was open. It was normally locked with a separate key Trevor hadn't managed to pilfer, but now he was standing at the threshold, one hand buried in his hair and the other supporting his weight on the door-frame.

"This is fucked," he said as I looked in.

The office contained a steel tanker desk like our old shop teacher's, and a row of three filing cabinets were lined up against a far wall. Every surface was a graveyard of empty Wildcats, and strewn around the desktop was a clipboard and a jumble of dismantled tapes with which Rod had been tinkering.

Even more bizarre was that there were personal items piled haphazardly in corners and against walls: children's toys, sports trophies, boxes of old photos and jewellery. From a hook on the door panel hung a tuxedo and a wedding dress, and in a nearby corner sat a box labelled "baby clothes," its contents ruffled and upset. Next to it were several larger boxes labelled "rare," filled with tapes I couldn't make out. A row of five family photographs also adorned the far wall, like crime scene evidence. I could see that the closest one depicted a smiling Rod with his arm around Trevor. It had been taken a few years back by the looks of it.

"Most of this shit is from the basement at my place. He's been bringing it over here."

"Why?"

"Guy's fuckin' losing it is why. Have a look."

Trevor pushed open the door to a large storage closet containing ten or more clear garbage bags loaded with Wildcat empties as well as several empty bottles of golden rum—a favourite of Rod's from his youth on Cape Breton.

"He's been coming here nights to get shit-faced. Looks like he had a few too many last night and forgot to close up right."

"What if he comes back?"

Trevor ambled into the office, dropped into his father's chair, and reclined up and down. "Then we'll rush him—you and me. We'll thump him

the fuck out.”

A reverent kind of look came over him, like he'd mounted a summit and needed a moment to take in the valley below. Then he dug into his cargo pants, came up with a red pencil box, and took out a syringe that was a quarter full of cloudy liquid.

“The fuck's that?” I asked, knowing the answer.

“Jenner's dad showed me. Look.”

Trevor started blackening the rig's chamber with a Bic lighter, heating the water and ground Oxy in it. Then he flattened his hand, fingers splayed, and banged the whole mix near the crotch of his thumb and forefinger.

“Jesus, Trev.”

He cleared his throat and reclined, tossing the hypo on the desk and letting his eyelids sag a second as he exhaled.

He caught me staring and gestured toward the charred gear. “Go for broke. There's a Dasani in the Ford, but you gotta filter it or it'll jam the rig. I'll show you.”

“Fuck that.”

He smiled, and I noticed that one of his eyes was droopier than the other. He cleared his throat again, swivelled, and lobbed a rocket of phlegm at the nearest wall.

“Suit yourself, but don't try and hit me up for rails later. Shit's a waste.” He wiped his mouth and nose with his sleeve. “Now let's get to work. We've got a lot of driving to do.”

Northbound on the Old Island Highway, I thought of the clipboard on Rod's desk. It was an inventory list of the tapes in his office. These were the rarest titles in Van-Isle's collection. They'd been kept on a special shelf behind the counter and required hefty deposits from renters wanting to take them home. In the margins, next to the absurd sums he'd paid for them, Rod had scribbled notes on their quality: “*Solaris* (1972), Serial no. 159875: 93 mins 41 secs. 289.99\$ USD [1991]. Tracking problems 52:12 to 54:03.”

Trevor and I had checked the message boards, and we knew that these tapes—all of them—were utterly worthless. The well-heeled aficionados Rod once catered to had moved on to digital, and it went without saying that the pawn shop crowd wasn't buying Tarkovsky. The tapes were worth less than the empty beer cans in the next room.

Trevor figured Rod had made the clipboard entries in the hours he

spent alone in the basement. Just as he'd been moving family mementos to the warehouse, he'd also been bringing tapes home to play on the house's last VCR, as if preparing for the day some bean counter would execute a document and the value would come rushing back into his prized collection like water into a tub. Nothing about it made sense. Some deeper play of feelings was controlling Rod now—something that didn't answer to reason and that I'd never been allowed to see.

We pulled up to a place called CA\$H CONVER\$ION in Courtenay, where Rod had briefly opened a Van-Isle shop in the 1990s. A sandwich board outside announced "PAWN\$. PAYDAY LOAN\$. CHEQUE\$ CA\$HED. WE TRADE \$\$\$ FOR GOLD!!!"

Trevor checked his list of North Island cold calls as he finished a cigarette. "When we get in there, just follow my lead. We'll start at forty a box, so when we settle at twenty-five they'll think it's a bargain."

"Why are we here?" I asked. "We aren't even really making money anymore. It's fucking stupid."

Trevor exhaled a plume of blue smoke, and it mushroomed on the windshield. "I'm not making money 'cause it's all going up *your* nose," he said. "You've been mooching off me all winter, and now you want to call me stupid. Fuck you."

"Call *you* stupid? I wasn't . . ." But he was already out the door and heading for the trunk.

Inside, the broker leaned on the display counter and tapped a ballpoint on the glass top. "I can't sell these," he said. "Not enough old folks come in here."

"Who around here'll take them?" Trevor asked, annoyed.

The broker snorted. He had a thick gold chain on his wrist, flame tattoos on his forearms, and a nametag that read "Eddie."

"You try the dump?" he said. "It's 2004, man. Who do you know still has a VCR?" He turned his eyes to a computer monitor, chuckling.

Without saying a word, Trevor turned and stormed out of the shop, wrenching open the door so the bell rang violently. Eddie looked up, and I smiled consolingly as I slid the box off the counter and followed.

Outside, Trevor patted his jeans, checking for the smokes I knew were in the Ford. Then he swore, booted the sandwich board clear off the sidewalk, and marched the length of the store's window front with both middle fingers up before climbing into the Ford and slamming the door.

In Comox, we parked in a dirt lot behind a shop called Pete's Collateral. Neither of us had said much of anything since Courtenay. Trevor took out the pencil box and unsnapped it.

"Where's the other one?" he asked, taking out a clean hypo.

"Huh?"

"I brought a breakfast one and a lunch one. Where's the other one?"

"You must have left it on the desk. We'll get it later."

Trevor shrugged and started prepping the second rig. "Not like it matters. Drunk old fuck probably wouldn't even notice." His voice sounded shaky.

Pete turned us away flat when he saw that Trevor's eyes were droopy and glassed over, one of them almost completely shut. His hand was also bleeding, and he'd managed to smear some of the blood on his chin and nose, which he kept rubbing and pulling. Pawnbrokers know an intravenous user when they see one, even in Comox.

Afterwards, Trevor wanted to push up the coast to Campbell River, where he thought we'd find a less pretentious class of pawnshop, but by the time he negotiated the Ford up the on-ramp to Highway 19 it was clear he was in no condition to drive. As the car listed across the double line, I shouted "Jesus!" and grabbed the wheel, steering us towards the shoulder, where we came to a rolling stop.

"Try the fucking *dump*?" Trevor garbled, striking his palm on the steering wheel. The transmission caught, and the car jerked forward, stalling. Trevor flung the driver's door open, and a decaled work truck blasted its horn and swerved as he leaned out and vomited loudly. Half falling, half stumbling onto the blacktop, he collapsed on his hands and knees before staggering around to the front of the car and vomiting again into a ditch. He'd lost a shoe somewhere.

When I exited the passenger side, Trevor was doubled over, hands planted on his knees. A rope of phlegm hung from his lips, blown sideways by the wind.

"You need help, man? You want me to call someone? An ambulance?"

Trevor was silent except for a low groan coming from somewhere deep in his throat.

I reached out and patted his shoulder, trying to comfort him. "It's alright, man. I'm here for you. I'm right here."

Then he wheeled around like a ballet dancer and clocked me. A flash

of light swallowed me up for a moment, and a shock of pain shot down my back. I suddenly realized I was sitting in gravel, and my jaw hurt.

I'd been hit like that before, but never just out of the blue. Trevor had also gone down, unable to control the follow-through. He was lying on his back moaning now, his legs hanging into the ditch.

I stood, gong chimes still sounding in my ears, and dusted off my jeans. Trevor wasn't moaning anymore.

"You fucking *loser!*" I shouted, kicking gravel towards him. "You're a bigger fuck-up than your old man!" It was like speaking through a mouth full of raw meat. I tasted blood.

His eyes were open, but only the whites were showing. He started throwing up again in his mouth, gurgling it.

"Holy shit. Are you dying?"

Rushing over, I kneeled down and turned him on his side. A rivulet of frothy puke poured from his throat. He coughed and then started snoring. I darted to the Ford and dug under the driver's seat for the Dasani, which I dumped on his face. He came to, moaning, and I propped him into a sitting position, giving him the rest of the water to wash his mouth.

"I'm sorry, bud. I'm sorry," he kept mumbling, rocking on his tailbone. "Can you just take me home?"

I fetched his shoe from the shoulder and managed to corral him into the car. He slumped against the passenger side window, eyes closed, and I snapped my fingers in his face. "Stay awake, dude! Where's the nearest hospital?"

I looked at the oncoming traffic and knew it was only a matter of time before someone called the cops.

I fetched Trevor's shoe from the shoulder and managed to corral him into the Ford. Grinding it into first, then second, I navigated down a side road and into a campground parking lot. It was the first time I'd ever driven stick, and Nanaimo was at least an hour and a half away.

Trevor was slumped against the passenger side window, eyes closed. I snapped my fingers in his face. "Stay up, dude. Stay awake. Where's the hospital around here?"

"No! My dad'll kill me. I just need some time," he croaked, reclining his seat. It smelled like he'd pissed himself, which he had.

To keep him awake and talking I spent the next couple hours asking him about stuff that happened when we were younger, getting him to describe it

to me in cinematic detail. The exercise made him weirdly lucid. Curled on his side in the passenger seat, eyes closed, he took me hour-by-hour through the time in grade nine when our basketball team came second in provincials and his parents threw a barbecue to celebrate. At one point Rod executed a tight cannonball from a corner of the roof, splashing water on every paper plate in a twenty-foot radius.

By the time Trevor felt well enough to drive, all the light was sucking out of the day. Then we hit a bad accident near Qualicum, as a logging truck's payload spilled over the southbound lanes of the new highway, and traffic was backed up halfway to Bowser. An hour and a half stretched to two, and two pushed closer to three. By the time we cleared the jam and hit the section of highway skirting Nanoose Bay, the sky was dark. Trevor was drumming his thumbs restlessly on the steering wheel, his mind on the other syringe on Rod's desk.

We slowed down as we approached the warehouse, checking to see if the lights were on.

"Looks clear," Trevor said, angling into the parking lot. Backing up to the loading ramp, he pulled the emergency break and left the engine running. Then he sat there for a second, quiet and intent, like he was trying to conjure something out of the silence.

"You did right by me today," he said slowly. "You could've just left me by the side of the highway. I deserved it. Fuck."

I rolled my eyes. "You're my ride."

He extended his palm, and I slapped it, gripping his hand. It could've been the most honest moment we ever shared.

"Just chill here a second, okay? I won't be long."

Trevor exited the Tempo, slid the steel bay door up its runners, opened the trunk, and started unloading our unsold boxes into the warehouse. It was pitch dark inside, and the Ford's taillights threw a cone of red some distance through the entrance.

I reached into the centre console for the cigarettes and came up empty-handed. Then, flicking on the interior light, I spotted the capped syringe on the floor. The memory of Trevor tossing it into the console that morning suddenly caught up to me.

Chuckling, I reached up and turned off the interior light. "Hey! It's in here!" I shouted.

That's when I saw the spectre of Rod materialize in the passenger-side

mirror. Cast in red light and set back a stretch from Trevor, he wore a crushed velvet tuxedo jacket several sizes too small with a silk ruffled bib—the same tuxedo we'd seen hanging in his office earlier that day.

Trevor, his back to Rod, looked in my direction and cupped a hand to his ear, oblivious. He moved for the light switch inside.

Just as Trevor stepped in the direction of the switch, Rod dropped his shoulders like a bull and broke into a gallop, gaining the bare patch of floor around the loading bay as he bore down on Trevor. His legs pumping in great, powerful strokes, he leapt over a box with the precision of a track and field athlete, never breaking stride and moving with more speed and grace than I thought possible for a man his age.

The instant Trevor's hand found the switch and the fluorescent overheads flickered to life, Rod launched himself clear into the air, diving headlong towards his son, coattails flapping behind him like a cape.

Even after all these years I still remember the moment of impact, the expression on Rod's face as he realized—fully airborne—that the rogue he was about to tackle to the shop floor was his own flesh and blood, and Trevor turning just in time to see his father's shocked face barreling towards him like a cannonball. But it was too late to change course.