

Chapter 1: The Introduction

There's not much heat around here in the cold. The sky was a version of gray and yellow blurs of black pasted across what I can only guess is a white sky. I couldn't tell if there were buildings on fire, or if the sun was setting. It wasn't rising, nothing really rose any more, things did often burn. These dark places—that we all know—often accompany the cold. It digs into some. It makes you feel alone. Some can find the cold here and make comfort in its warmth. I know there are those of you out there, cringing at such a precocious start. I don't desire to amuse, neither does the nature of this story's origin. My name is Henry Mansavage, and I would like to tell you how I came to this point in my life. I am going to have to die tomorrow. If you would have asked me 5 years ago, if I thought I would be sitting here before you, as I am—facing a death sentence, I am sure I would have laughed loudly and blown tufts of cigar smoke in your direction, but here I am. It's no wonder I didn't get here sooner. Given all that I will lay before you. The one question I can't help but ponder on like gnawing on gristle that will never go away. The one stick in the road, lodged in the center of my back is "Was it all worth it?" A tortuous five words piercing the forefront of my brain every second of everyday and I can't seem to get around it. Maybe by telling you this story so I can find some way to put a close to it all before the long sleep.

Being from Deadhorse, hate land of the great white, or what's left of it, after The Convergence . Between 2 Stones and a River rock stream, I spent most of my youth thinking. Not that it matters but I've had 2 fathers growing up. My mom ran out when I was 12 because of this very fact. I can't tell you what kind of impact that had on a boy growing up under the thunder of frost land of long nights and rising suicides.

After the War Over Oil and the Convergence that followed shortly after, Deadhorse was no longer Prudhoe Bay and its twenty-five billion barrels of oil. It was a hostage situation for anyone who transgressed against the Order. In case you didn't know, the Convergence brought with it, a total wild wild west mentality. Whoever held the oil, held the key. That didn't bode well for the locals in the area. Who were all families of generational oil men. They quickly saw their place of solitude turned into a Kasbah for religious extremists. The dirtiest deeds were done here. We were isolated, we were cut off. There was no one coming to our rescue. There was no UN, and no government aide. We had God, and his name was The Deacon.

Unfortunate for me, my mother was a junkie, and found Jesus burning inside a syringe. She would have died there if not for God. I have a stack of letters addressed from a nun's home in Chicago, I only open those she sends for my birthday. They are the only ones of any value, a silver dollar from the shadow of a spoon. All I can say is that I learned to grow up quick and I learned to grow up using my fist, with feet to match. If not for that, I am not quite sure I would be here before you today, hoping desperately for someone to hear my story. Now come to think of it, that might not have been such a horrible hypothetical. To have never lived, would mean to

have never experienced the failure that has brought you here, to me today. My days have been numbered and because of that, time has become my fleeting breath as I sit before you, stranger.

I'm not quite sure why you are here today or why your journey has brought you to mine. I only know that the world has changed dramatically since I was child, and it will continue to do so long after I'm gone. So here we are, forks in the road turned upside down. Coincidences never really appealed to my nature, nor did the importance of dreams. Plagued with the dark unconscious. It's no surprise that they have gotten me to this very point. In the beginning, the seizures seemed a fall into the most inconvenient of times. A quick blank, time lost. The tip of the iceberg is all I could really see in the beginning. What was beneath the surface, I wish would have stayed and died there, but it didn't here where I am. Philosophy and existentialism are both letters—letters better left for grade school children and the blind. Growing up in the wilderness, you learn a thing or two about denial. Things were always tougher than what was palatable and never as good as it could have been. The Convergence changed everything. It changed how we communicated, how we looked at one another. Denial and more suspicion was all that we could surmise. First there was The Fall, then The convergence. First the bombings, then The Purification and we still acted like it was anyone's fault but our own. I should have gone with Gloria, at least I would have died with her. It's still hard for me to believe she's gone. I've replayed that moment 10000 times over and I still feel like I swallowed a box of rusty nails, and blood hemorrhaging in the belly of my stomach. Even as I sit here with you, facing all of my life and impending death, that memory supersedes all present reality. Maybe I did die in that moment, under the bridge where she and I used to skip rocks on the creek where we lived and loved as children. Maybe I did die, that time on the train, between Argentan and Vimoutiers.

The events that lead here still don't make sense to me at all, stranger. I haven't had a seizure in 6 years. My memory has all but gone. I have new memories now, that are not mine but feel as real as if I lived it myself. I wasn't here to be honest with myself or come to some holy understanding of it all. I am here to share with you a story so that in case you are faced with the same similar events that you change the outcome. I was not able, but maybe you can. If you are here for me, that means one of two things: You have either found the book or you have found Gloria. It is doubtful that you could have accomplished both. If you had the book there would not be much use for keeping me around, so it's not that.

But there is no way you have Gloria, there is no way she would allow you blokes to catch her. It took me 12 years to catch up with her, and even then I couldn't get anything but a shadow.

There is just no way you caught Gloria.

Chapter 2:

Gloria Miriam Clotilde, the broad-faced daughter of a baker and priest. Not just any priest, but Deacon of The Order, transplanted after The Purification. Our meet should have

been our last. I was lucky it wasn't so. Looking back on things, maybe "lucky" wasn't the right word. I was never really good with details or the incidentals. You would have to ask Gloria about those, but there's no sense worrying about that now. She and I were the unlikeliest of friends. Her father was the head of the Order, the faction that was guaranteed a place in heaven, while the rest suffered the faith of having to be ruled. My father and Mike, were no secret amongst loved ones of the families. As much as my father tried, he couldn't keep his love for Mike any secret. One thing folk hated more than the conspirators were the Order. So we had that going for us thankfully. It didn't make my dad feel any safer though. Keeping things hush, in our hateland was hard enough as it is. I kept the lie as long as I could but the fear outweighed the benefit for my father.

Gloria and I heard my fathers fighting the day Mike disappeared. It wasn't clear if they were fighting over me, or whether to stay, but it was apparent that Mike was not afraid to fight, or afraid to run. My dad was. He was smart and knew that the moment they left would be to admit guilt to something he would surely have to die for. That was one thing we shared in common, was troublesome fathers. Gloria's mother, from what I can remember, was a wonderfully strong woman. A quiet force that she never failed to see in the light of shame. Maybe because she felt her mother could do more, but how could she sitting in the shadow of a demon, like the deacon.

"I wish she would just leave him."

"And do what? Go on the run for the rest of her life, your lives? That hardly sounds like the safe thing to do."

"I wouldn't expect a scared little shit like you to understand."

"What the fuck is tha supposed to mean?"

I never cussed as much as I did around Gloria. I knew it was ridiculous, but I would have done anything she asked to be quite honest. She knew she had that power over me, but I didn't care. Much like her mother, what else could I do. She was my only friend here in the darklands of the alaskan line. Love was not easy to come by out here. Survival was number one. Living past 35 was a feat in and of itself.

"You sound like my mother right now, and that is bothering the hell out of me."

Our friendship always seemed on the verge of explosion. Meeting eye to eye, didn't seem to bother us much, to tell you the truth. I am not sure what our friendship was about, if it was out of necessity or bad luck. It was the friendship that almost wasn't or maybe that shouldn't have been. Either way, these strange times had a way of just being, without any reason to it other than that. Our origin story was no different.

All I can remember is the slingshot, the rock, and the pain that brought us together. When I was a young buck and not fighting for the pride of my gay father, I spent heated

summers hunting for Nazis and rabbits with a customized sling shot Mike made for me. Mike is my father's husband or Conspirator—as they are called now. Creeping steadily low timbered hush and rush peer through the bush, glancing at a distance at the torch and open end of all that was before me as a child. I knew my target would take me to the higher reaches of love and sensitive light. This reaction became my sight and ears of all that was the beginning of such a reason to forget, that forgiving is an easy thing to remember when hip deep in the brush. Leaves were dancing shadows on my thin skin and I believe anything could have been my ease of silence, an ending, the flick with a silent touch on any that I have named my kill. I've torched all reason to give up at this point. Becoming the inference of sorted request and blanket color lust of foliage and green wood, I can smell the jasmine and buttercups reaching up for the same old sky. Isn't that the adjustment made to quiet the storm of movement. The shuffle appears before me, I make freezing still, my open stance and the love of the death to my child man instantly propels me into the art of war and the push begins. Sweat stinging like salt mines opening wounds, but this Nazi had to die, or so I thought. I was determined to make it so. The sun shine speckled shatters all on my temporal lobe and makes the pulse dance and jump into the mind masking any guilt a child would have taking a life. I was going to strike down the culprit. I stretched out my extended hand, and pulled back my trigger. Aimed and poised, deadly and damaging as any young child can be aimed at anticipation for the crumb snatch and the death cloud blood spray. The rock, slow and steady rushes toward the tangible target—with the hopes of connecting and intertwining into the blood stream of justice. Pull, aim and release—pull, aim and release.

“Oww—what the fuck?!”

Long legs and just a forehead seemed to rise up out over the green was a death trap beauty and a simple love fiend I became so easily. It was apparent my hands were tied by the mistakably pretentious hues, blood feuds must have started like this. Easy misunderstanding on an emotional arm rest, where I refused to wait for it to make sense before traveling and catching up with my own shadow. It seemed that I had a reason to live all of a sudden. Doubtful that whisp of a conjure headstrong bag of bones that received my stone bullet of love wouldn't and didn't think of it in such beauty at the time. We often crossed paths at the opposite ends of the right side of the same coin. I never got her name. I did hear quite a it of names coming out of her mouth when I hit her with that rock, doubtful any of them belonged to her. I did manage to piss her off 5 more times before actually getting her name. I never knew such an individual can have such a fucking dirty mouth. Maybe it was her upbringing or the crazy way she walked that added a sharpooon at the end of her tongues. I used to try and stare at her mouth really hard to catch a glimpse of that forked tool she used for swallowing and rested pleasingly in her jaw, unhinged or not, she knew the slithering side. The maybe and the dark, she had no reflection as far as I was concerned. I couldn't help but look anyway, couldn't help but lean in a little closer for her to snake me into a dream or some scene from where she shed her scales. Her hair was the color of salt crusted skin, from either sweating too much or swimming in the ocean. She should have been a doctor or a mathematician the way she recognized detail. I was excellent in neither and I knew then, we were both doomed and

somehow we both maintained the glance that we held hope that the other would survive. Fuck if I knew, that's just the way we saw it, so that's how we lived it.

She was hellfire, and that is exactly how I wanted it. Not easily tamed, plenty of finger burns and soul starts that could find the frost on the inside of a volcano. She was winterburn and the safeside of never. Needless to say I followed her like the great moon follows the sun. Most of my time spent wondering about the times before the Purge, What her hair looked like under a different sun, more loving and forgivable one. If her smile could silence the waves the way it did for me every day. She was the only ounce of color in this whole dark place and she hated every minute of it. She knew I stared at her helplessly. She was my safety net in all this. I latched on and I latched on hard. This was no secret. Ultimately its probably what got me in the first place, stranger. Its what has brought you here to me as we speak. Its why you still havent told me, if you have found her or not.

Chapter 3:

Most of our childhood we spent skipping rocks, staring at the glad-daisies making nice with the summer air. I don't remember her mother much. Her father left dead memories behind every waking step he took and with every waking step he took more lives. Gloria was really the only friend I had, so because of that fact my loyalty was as deep as the earth. She fought me every second, tried to lose me every day but I wouldn't let it happen. I refused to let go. I remember eating lunch with her one Saturday during the winter of lies. That's what the news headlines read on ever stoop. "The winter of lies is upon us, are you ready?" Fear was the only thing the grown folks could hold onto. It was the only thing that kept the sheeple at bay. Knowledge was synonymous with punishment, and disobedience. That lunch we shared, I saw something shift in Gloria's eyes. Something told me she found her mother, but she would never say. She would just stay cold.

"Whats up with you today? Gloria?"

"..."

I could tell right there. No profanity to ring my ears loud. Only her stare, without blinking, without chewing. I knew it wasn't right. But I hadn't the word or the inclination to make anything or make any sense of where her head was at. I just knew it wasn't with me.

" I asked you a question. What in the hell is wrong with you?"

She hardly noticed the mosquito swelling up on her calf. I was sure it was going to die from drinking her poison, but she never flinched. A car, stopped because of Old Lady Diana taking her usual time to cross the crosswalk, honked four times before Gloria looked up at me. The history that followed this question, would be the change no one would ever seek out. Time has stopped, now all that was left was the incessant honking of an extremely pissed off motorist. The sky was grey as ever that day, and I remember because that was the day of the hangings or the executions over by the bridge. Where she and I met. Its where the Deacon liked to take

the transgressors of the week and put on a show. First sermon, then the executions. Every Wednesday, Gloria would wake me from my bedroom window and ask me, "Is this the day?"

It was her sick way of welcoming the hangings. It was one of the few times I saw her smile. Not sure what made her so happy about it. Some part of me thinks she wishes she were the one leaving. The one finding a way out. "They are the real heroes," she would say, as we would gather our lunches in our wicker baskets her mom weaved for us. We would gather us 6 eggs, and 8 strips of bacon and 3 slabs of rye and 2 oats and peppercorn loaf her mom would bake the day before. We could never get the fresh loaves, that was for goons after they finished Gods work.

This particularly day, all strange things seemed to converge on this very point. This is what crux of it all, the change-beginnings, that alter courses from years to come. This is when the seizures first appeared, this is the brutal beginning of story, stranger. I will recall the events as I remember them, and all objects are closer than they appear. So as I was saying, Gloria was acting rather strange and not her usual irritated self.

"Why don't you mind your business?"

"you asked me to be here, Gloria. If you wanted to sit by yourself, you should have just said so. There are shit ton of things I could be doing right now."

"Like Watching the lower grade girls sell cookies to the Priest?"

"Yeah, exactly like that. You are fucked, you know that?"

"Yeah, about as fucked as your dad."

"Just like your mom."

I felt a cold trickle and copper sting slide into mouth. Grit, dirt, blood, it was easy to know what happened at that moment. I just didn't think she would use a brick. An eye for an eye, yes, but a brick? Pain at this proximity doesn't really feel like pain at all. It feels more like your brain is forcefully being removed from its living room and thrust into a padded room, where the floor is lava, and there is no way out but to go to sleep. So I do. My eyes close and to top it all off, I can still hear the sound of the horn, but this time, someone is annoyingly laying on the horn, instead of pulsing it and it's as if they are inside my head with me. I only knew that I was inside my own head because the temperature never changed. I was neither hot nor cold only present of the fact that my internal temperature never changed,. This was an odd detail to take away from it all but there you have it.

She must have hit me with it rather than thrown it at me. But I felt like cold steel in my membrane and lost senses. I couldn't tell if she was still there or she had left, but I could hear her voice echoing off the trees. I could hear sirens, and people laughing. Smiles began to rush

up to me. Things got black and then white. Purple and then not and then white again. I woke up in the hospital. With a police officer and what appeared to be a nun, but no Gloria. Imagine that. This was my first introduction to the seizures. To the dangers of traveling inside my head. I never where I was going or what I was going to see when I got there. There was always the trickle of blood, then the meeting of my face and the ground. The seizures never scared me, it was the instances that brought them on, and the seconds after the blood that always had me wondering and confused as to what it was all about. Each jump made one thing certain: that there were secrets hidden behind my skulled walls, and the constructs of my own mind, I could hide information. Most importantly I could hide information from myself. Which is what happened more often than not. It was a messy adventure, hell bent on my cognitive destruction.

At first I couldn't move. I am sure there was time needed to adjust, but most likely I was didn't move because I didn't want to. I was hoping that it would all go away, and that this was the closest to a near death experience as one would have. Immediately I saw a door ahead of me, open. There was no actual door but more of the just the frame leading to a room, that I could tell was white from here. A distinct odor began to permeate and I thought of the woods, and the blossoms I used to see as a child, that would open up under the clear skies of spring. Love began to creep its way into my body, youth and hopefulness were both words on the tip of my tongue at this point. However, I knew that things were wrong. The world wasn't as hopeful as you would have liked it to be. This was the south, things never were as satisfying as you would hope.

I can hear voices coming from the room and the smell has turned from floral to the smell of wood, something was burning and there was really no way for me to find out what. The voices start to become succinct instead of warbled goo, as though you were stepping on a speaker made of human parts. Inside the room there appeared to be two more rooms. In the center there was little girl, a tall and slender man, with a strange mustache and dark skin. He was strangely clean, and wore what appeared to be a curtain. At the table there was another man, who seemed to noticed me there, but I couldn't tell. The other two were oblivious, as they kept their gaze fixed on the man at the table. The young man at the table seem all but to call out my name. Nothing was making sense at the moment. There was a lady in the room, apart and aside from the other three. She appeared to be a nun with a tall demeanor and edgy face that could cut glass whenever she wanted. At this point I noticed, that my stomach was upset and I was really missing that lunch we had made right about now. At the table, there was a book. The book must have been special, no one was touching it but they all seemed concerned with it. Suddenly without notice there was an extreme beeping that felt like it was piercing the air itself. My focus began to veer uncontrollably and I was somewhere else.

Chapter: 4

"Son, you know where you are?" The officer asked. He had a gimp lip, that seemed to tremble every time he spoke, as if he were an alcoholic or something. I wouldn't be able to understand him, if not for how slow his lips moved.

"Yeah, I am not at home. I know that much." I knew that we were in the hospital, but the thought of cooperating with a police officer was not the first thing on my mind when I woke up.

"Where is she?"

"Who?"

"The girl, I was with. Where is she?"

"There was no one with you when we found you."

I couldn't believe it at the time. That bitch stone cold hit me, then left me there to bleed. I didn't understand it. I didn't like it, and it hardly made any sense to me. I am still not sure what happened, or why. I knew one thing, I didn't want to be hear staring at the dumb lip, and the penguin lady.

"We wanted to ask you a few questions before turning you over to Lady Diana."

"Questions about what? I was eating lunch with my friend. Then I woke up here. Pretty easy Copper-Tone"

"Look, son I don't wanna be here any more than you do, but I have to ask you these questions. Otherwise its both of our asses. You can cooperate or I can get someone who will make you cooperate. Its up to you."

I knew why I was there being questioned but I didnt want to admit it. He was questioning me because something else must have happened after she hit me. The room was cold again, hospital cold, and dark for being a place where would yo utake those with an emergency. At that moment I wish I had the brick that Gloria hit me with. I looked around for it, but all I could hear are beeping machines, and blinking lights that seemed like my heartbeat. I could see shadows dancing on the other side of the door. All adults whisping by for one reason or another. Shadows dancing underneath the door. Stopping and going, and sometimes not stopping at all. Definitely a hospital, but I didn't think it would be this clean. I always pictured them as being pretty gross. I guess with all the bodies being strung up in the trees, its easy to keep this place pretty kosher clean. This must be where they send the detainees before questioning. I could feel cold leather on my wrist and my feet. Didn't make much sense to me, why I was being held as such. Or why this blue hat insisted on questioning me. I could still taste the blood, I could smell it dried inside my nostrils. Its seems they didn't bother to clean me up. My ribs were sore, maybe it was from falling down the stone steps I was sitting on. I desperately tried to piece together the last moments before waking up. Well the last moments before feeling how warm my body's blood temperature felt.

The thought crossed my mind to let those two wait it out—the officer and the nun, but I had no way of knowing what was going to happen to me if I did. I had maybe seen that officer once or twice, the nun was not the same nun that was in my vision. I certainly didn't think anyone came to the hospital anymore. If it weren't for the large chalkboard behind them, I wouldn't have known I was in one of the old classrooms. This would explain the restraints, didn't seem very hospital like. That and the dried blood. Things weren't making much sense to me at the moment, not going to lie. I couldn't let them see my confusion though. I had to make sense of it first.

“Son?”

Why does he keep calling me that and why hasn't Lady Diana said anything about Gloria. I know she saw her there with me. The car, the honking, her trying to cross the street. The black, everything went black. Lady Diana hands him a clipboard. It was lying there at my feet the whole time. I tried to kick it off, which is when I realized my feet were restrained to.

“Don't try and move to much.” She said to me finally. “You took quite a fall. When I found you there you were having a seizure.”

“A what?”

“A seizure. You don't have a history of seizures? Have you ever had one?”

“Of course I know what seizure is, lady.”