

## CHAPTER THREE

448 Harvest Street sat on the corner of the forgotten neighborhood, wedged between the ghetto of East Salinas and the industrial park annex off Abbott Street. Layers of red paint, flaked and peeling, clung loosely to the old Victorian. Years of neglect mounted with the dust, looking like the dried skin of a shedding snake. The white trimmed double hung windows, dirty and cobwebbed, looked over a broken fence marred in Norteño graffiti; parts of the broken boards missing as it divided the sidewalk from the overgrown yard. A light breeze blew fallen maple leaves across the littered street.

Billy Thorton walked along the fence, shifting his gaze between the street and the graffiti. Nervous. NORTE reached from the sidewalk to the top of the fence. The letters spray painted red in Gothic style. Large and emboldened. Outlined in black. XIV. Lil Spooky. SEM. Written in black paint marker claimed the wall. X4. SK. Casper. The letters jumped out in contrast against the starkness of the

old wood. Some small. Six to ten inches tall. Others, large and bold. He looked back and forth across the street, turning to look behind him every couple of steps. His palms sweating.

Billy swam inside the black military flight jacket. The nylon shell covered in band pins and punk paraphernalia patches. The Ramones. The Cramps. Danzig. Dead Kennedys. A camel 100 cigarette dangled from his lips. Billy swaggered across the overgrown lawn in black 14-hole Doc Marten's. Rail thin and strung out. Working hard to avoid the piles of dog shit.

He climbed the front steps of the house, looking back again over his shoulder. Nothing. Billy turned around on the porch with the shake of his head and knocked loudly on the front door four times. He looked around the yard waiting for an answer. He removed the cigarette from his mouth and scratched the three inch scar at the base of his shaved head, just behind his left ear where the broken glass had cut in a few months back during his fight with three Sureños.

The front door flew open. Richard Allen Baker, A.K.A Rick Cannon, A.K.A Buck Knife, A.K.A Lil' Rick stepped out, towering over Billy by nearly half a foot. Rick pulled the chrome Smith & Wesson .357 pistol from behind his back, holding it down at his side. His eyes, piercing and uneasy, scanned back and forth between Billy and the front yard. Paranoid. A swastika wrapped in a circle of fire, with the letters NLR in Old English script began a tattoo sleeve that ran from his right forearm up underneath the sweat drenched white wifebeater t-shirt. A skeleton eagle tattoo, holding a laurel

wreath, with 88 in the center peeked out across his chest from beneath his shirt. A set of SS lightning bolts sat in the center of both well defined deltoids, with WHITE POWER in Old Norse runes running up both triceps. A portrait of Adolph Hitler ran down the inside of his left forearm.

“What's up, Rick?”, asked Billy in a cautious tone, transfixed on the gun. His hand shook as he took a drag off his cigarette

“What the fuck do you want?”

“Hey man, I just need to re-up some more shit.” Billy exhaled, raising his hands slowly in surrender. He looked in Rick's eyes, shaking his head slowly in submission.

“I told you call before you come over here. This ain't no fuckin' seven-'leven, man. Do I look like some kind of fuckin' nigger?” Rick put the pistol in his waistband behind his back, quickly scanning the yard one last time before stepping back into the house. “How much you got?”

“Seven-fitty.” Billy pulled the roll of cash from his pocket and handed it to Rick. Two hundreds. A single fifty. Eighteen twenties, four tens, three fives and thirty-five ones, all wrapped tight in a red rubber band from smallest denomination in the middle to hundreds on the outside.

“Wait here.”

Billy watched the young man disappear behind the door, catching a glimpse of the NLR tattoo on the back of his neck before turning away to take one last drag. He dropped his cigarette to the floor, grinding it into the painted wood and looked around the neighborhood from the porch.

“That last shit was pretty good, man. Clean.”, said Billy, reaching down to adjust the black and white checkered pants tucked into his boots.

“Yeah, well nobody stepped on it, yet.”, muttered Rick from behind the door.

“Whatcha tryin’ to say?”

“You know Stone's been wantin' to talk to you.”

Rick emerged from behind the door and walked out on the porch, forcing Billy to step back to the top of the stairs.

“About what?” Billy held out his hand.

Rick slapped a black film canister into his palm with smirk. “What do ya' think?”

“I don't know, man.” Billy popped open the top and eye balled the rocks of Meth before he slipped the canister into his pocket.

“Don't play stupid.”

“I didn't step on any shit, man. My shit's tight.”

“I ain't talkin' 'bout dope, peckerwood.” Rick crossed his arms, shifting his weight from side to side. “You gonna ride with us or not?”

Rick gestured with his right hand twisted up, fingers spread, enforcing the question with his body language.

“Hey man, no disrespect or anything, but I just like being anonymous, you know what I mean?”

“Look man, taxes are going up. There's a fuckin' war on out there. You ride with us and maybe Stone'll let it slide. Otherwise, the price of business is gonna be twenty..maybe even twenty-five percent.”

“I'm already kickin' up fifteen percent. I can't pay him anymore. Where's my profit?”

“Who the fuck else you gonna get your shit from then? It's time to choose sides, man. You see the score out there? How many white faces you see in this town anymore? It's fuckin' warfare out there, man.” Rick pointed out into the street, his face flushed. His voice booming. “These fuckin' niggers and spics don't give a fuck about smokin' some independent Wood. It's us or them, man. Did you forget where you came from?”

“Hey man, I ain't no fuckin' bitch.” Billy bristled.

“Maybe you need to separate your friends from your fiends, then?” Rick pointed at Billy, pacing back and forth, working up into a frenzy as he spoke. Emphasizing each point with a gesture. “You think those fuckin' kike lovin' college boys downtown think you're special down there, drinkin' your little lattes and shit? You think those fuckin' pus-sies got your back? You're just another fuckin' white trash drug dealer to those little rich boys. Shit, they'll throw your ass under the fuckin' bus and leave you to the wolves, man. You better just think about that.”

“Alright, man.”

Billy took a couple of steps backward, nodding his head. He looked down, wondering for just a moment if his friends really would betray him, then dismissed the thought. He turned and moved down the stairs. “I'll let you know.”

“Well don't take too long.”, grinned Rick with an ominous glare. “Stone don't deal too good with the word no.”

Billy looked back up the stairs at Rick with a nervous smile. His palms were sweating in the pockets of his jacket. He moved across the yard,

narrowly missing a large pile of dog shit. The low pitched rumble of approaching motorcycle exhaust drew his attention up the street to the three men on custom choppers speeding toward him.

James Luther Thompson, A.K.A Jimmy Lee, A.K.A Jack Thompson, A.K.A Stoneface, A.K.A Stone, stared from behind dark sunglasses. He advanced at the head of the riders on a chromed out Lamborghini black custom fat boy, the tank adorned with white flames inlaid with silver skulls. His time worn face, stern and menacing behind the thick, bushy grey goatee, showed no emotion. Broad and muscular, his tan middle aged body was a menacing testament to the daily work out regime adopted in nearly two decades of prison, providing him the strength and stamina of a man half his age. He was built for combat. His bald head, shaved clean, displayed a green shamrock on the back, superimposed with a swastika, the image created by the negative space of bare skin.

His long, muscular arms reached out from beneath his black leather jacket. He stretched up to the chromed ape hangers, partially exposing the swastika tattoo, wrapped in a circle of fire, with the letters NLR in Old English script around his right forearm. A patch on his back displayed the words NORSEMEN M.C. across the shoulders with the word CALIFORNIA across the small of his back. A fanged skull wearing a horned steel helmet rested in the center of his back.

Leroy DeWayne Russel, A.K.A Leroy Floyd, A.K.A Thumper, a fat, repugnant waste of human DNA, rode to the left of Stone adorned with a black leather Norsemen vest with the word PROSPECT

written in white across his lower back and a fourteen inch Bowie knife sheathed at his hip. His baby faced mass engulfed the 1979 Shovelhead, with white and silver flames painted over a candy apple red custom gas tank, with a straight handle bar, attached to a raked triple tree, leading down chromed forks to the solid billet wheels. A large black duffle bag laid across the top of his gas tank.

Montey Mossoels, A.K.A Luca Mossimo A.K.A Montey the Midget (because of his short stature), A.K.A Faust, followed from behind on a stretched 1974 Iron Head Sportster. The gas tank was powder coated black with a woodland camouflage with custom duffle bag seat and a blacked out Sugar Bear springer, rims and spokes. Faust rode to the right of Stone with a large black duffle bag strapped to his back, covering his Norsemen vest. His face was a permanent expression of anger with dark eyes that possessed a quality of hate that couldn't be defined. He personified violence. Brutal and sadistic. A California Youth Authority reject with a Napoleon complex sent down to Chino for five years after his eighteenth birthday for beating of a seventeen year old with a sock and a lock that nearly killed the boy.

Billy continued down the street with his head bowed in submission, trying to avoid eye contact. The sound of exhaust roared louder and louder. The bikers drew closer. He looked up briefly just before Stone passed. Their gaze met. Contact. Billy gave a quick nod in acknowledgement and disappeared around the corner. Stone and the other bikers pulled in front of the house, shutting off their bikes. Silence returned for a moment to the neighborhood.

“What's up Stone?, smiled Rick, descending the steps of the porch.

“I got a surprise for you, brother.”, said Stone, pulling his leg off the bike before he moved across the yard, while Thumper and Faust unstrapped their cargo.

“Oh, yeah? Whatcha got old man?”

Rick moved in to clasp hands with Stone followed by a quick shoulder embrace.

“I thought you might like some new toys to add to the collection.” Stone released Rick from his grip and stepped back. “Show him.”

The fat man carried both bags across the lawn, placing them at Rick's feet.

Faust bent down, unzipping one of the bags. He pulled a pistol grip riot shotgun out and tossed it to Rick.

“Nice, man.” Rick pumped the lever on the shotgun and raised it up to his shoulder, looking down the sights. “What else you got in there?”

“We got another batch of shit from Carmel Valley.”, said Faust, pulling out a handful of small plastic baggies filled with white powder.

“Oughtta make those fuckin' river niggers think about a new line of business.”, snickered Thumper. “Fuckin' border jumpers ain't got shit on us.”

“So what did young blood have to say?” Stone threw a playful headlock on Thumper as the fat teenager bent down and pulled out a second gallon size ziplock bag of crank.

“He's gonna let us know.”, mocked Rick.

Stone laughed with a wicked grin and let go of Thumper. He moved silently past Rick up the steps of the porch into the house. Faust and Thumper



tossed the crank back into the bags and zipped them up while Rick followed Stone inside.

“So where's you're old lady, man?”, asked Thumper. “I'm fuckin' starving.”

The two young men plodded up the stairs with the heavy bags.

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The parking lot of Golden Star Market bustled with high end sedans and SUVs. A Range Rover and Z3 jockeyed for position with an Escalade and Tahoe, waiting for an open space. The Salinas elite entered and exited through the front doors of the grocery store in an endless stream of flowing congestion, followed by hurried bag boys dressed in white shirts and green aprons chasing with shopping carts. The afternoon rush formed a swirling rotation of human movement.

A silver Mercedes S500 and a black Navigator pulled out from their parking spaces. A red Volvo wagon suddenly darted between the Z3 and the Range Rover, cutting off the Escalade. It came to a stop in the stall just in front of the coin operated carousel horse, pulling into the stall just as the black Navigator pulled out. The shrill howl of the Escalade's horn bellowed from behind. A long delicate middle finger, with manicured nails painted Revlon red, thrust out the driver side window of the Volvo.

The horn continued for a few moments before the Escalade finally pulled away. The hand slowly receded into the confines of the car and the window rolled up. Leanne Harrison stepped out of the Volvo into the parking lot, her long beautiful legs accen-

tuated by the tall black leather high heel boots that ran up to her knees. A bright blue and green dragonfly tattoo stretched across her lower back, spreading its graceful wings wide. The tail disappeared down her spine into the faded denim mini skirt that hugged her hips closely. She was a beautiful girl of nineteen, in a tight white half shirt that exposed her belly button ring and showed off her curvaceous bust line.

It was an exceptionally hot day for October. Her tan skin glistened in the sun with a light misting of sweat. Her body was luscious and statuesque. She stood tall, looking slowly around the parking with a criminal smile, amused by the dramatic scene she had caused. She exuded sexuality with the absence of class or good taste that was intended to discomfort and disgrace her family. She looked like a small town porn star that had lost her way from the San Fernando Valley and had ended up in Smallville. Her long blond hair cascaded down past her shoulders, framing her face. She walked toward the front doors with her red leather Prada bag in hand. Her complexion showed the scars of something sinister buried beneath the heavy make up and dark sunglasses, the delicate and subtle visions of substance abuse.

The air conditioned howled above the front doors behind her. Leanne leaned down to grab the hand basket from the floor. She stretched her right arm down, exposing the bottom of her devil girl tattoo beneath her sleeve. She turned around and smiled, catching the Produce Clerk in the act of checking her out from behind. The older man quickly looked away, flushed with embarrassment. He fumbled

with the cantaloupes he was trying to stack. She slowly turned and strutted towards him, her hips moving side to side. She worked her way down the aisle, watching him. He looked nervously from the corner of his eye to check her progress.

“Are these bananas fresh?”, said Leanne.

She stood uncomfortably close to him, holding one of the phallic fruit gently in her hand. She began to peel it slowly, watching his expression as he squirmed.

“Do you mind if I try one?”

He shook his head no in utter shock, unable to respond verbally. Little beads of sweat formed on his brow and upper lip. She moved the banana slowly to her lips. She smiled at him playfully, placing the fruit deep in her mouth. She felt it with her tongue before taking a bite, moaning as she chewed.

“Oh God, this is so good. You really should try this.” Leanne placed the bananas in her basket.

The man could only shake his head in objection. He looked around to see if anyone had noticed their interaction, wiping the moisture from his brow to conceal his shame.

“Thank you.”

Leanne walked away smiling, placing random items in her basket.

Check-out stands one through five bustled with lines of restless customers. Cashiers feverishly scanned items in an almost mechanical repetition beneath the soft glow of fluorescent lights. The baggers feverishly loaded the goods into brown paper bags and returned them to their carts, offering to help the customers outside with a friendly smile. As one bagger disappeared out the front doors pushing

a customer's cart another was arriving in front of the check stand, ready to continue the monotony.

Josh Kohen stood at the end of check stand one, quickly bagging grocery items as they rolled toward him on the conveyor belt. He was lanky young man, with a rockabilly style and wholesome good looks. He glanced up briefly at the smiling face of Mrs. Woznitski in line; her fat swollen cheeks beaming beneath her glasses as she ogled him. The recently widowed school teacher stalked his line daily for her supply of Double Stuf Oreo cookies and Bush's Baked Beans. He smiled back at her with a rehearsed plastic grin, languishing in silence. The endless supply of canned goods, produce and stupid people made their way to his hands. His bright blue eyes could not mask his good nature, though he often wished he could conceal himself better as he waited anxiously for the end of his shift.

He wiped the sweat from his forehead with the rolled up sleeve of his white starched oxford shirt, temporarily exposing the bottom of the Pot Leaf tattoo on his sinewy upper forearm, before quickly pushing the sleeve back down to conceal his ink. He continued to bag her goods. Focusing on each item as he grabbed it from the conveyor and placed in the bag without looking, trying to ignore her. He carefully placed each item where it needed to be with the ease and subtlety of seasoned veteran of the grocery industry.

"Would you like some help out with that?" he asked, flashing his tedious grin. He placed the last bag in the empty child seat of the basket.

"Thank you Josh.", smiled Mrs. Woznitski. "That would be nice."

Josh reached for the front of the cart, pulling it slowly out of the lane.

A short teenager in a Golden Star apron suddenly walked around the corner with cropped black hair.

“Daniel here will be happy to help you out to your car with that Mrs. Woznitski” Josh directed the car towards Daniel and stepped out of the way.

Mrs. Woznitski shook her head in refusal and pushed the cart forward, accidentally hitting the edge of the check stand as she rounded the corner, glaring at Josh. Josh smirked at Daniel. He watched the woman waddle from the store, before he turned his attention back to the check stand.

Josh looked up to smile at his next customer in line, locking in on Leanne’s gaze. His grin faded instantly. She approached slowly, placing a basket of grocery items on the check stand. His head dropped down in disgust. He sighed deeply.

“Fuck.”, he muttered to himself, wiping his forehead with his sleeve one last time before mustering up his customer service skills and returning an uncomfortable counterfeit smile.

She smiled back, pushing her sunglasses up onto her head. She looked into his eyes with a seductive longing.

“Did you find everything alright?”, said Karen Simmons with a smile, reaching into the basket. Karen had been a cashier at Golden Star Market since the summer before her senior year of high school. A part time job that turned into a permanent full time position after her father had been shot in their home during a home invasion robbery. Paralyzed from the neck down, her mother and her took turns after work caring for him. She scanned

three cans of Stag chili, a loaf of Santa Cruz Bakery sourdough, two pounds of ground beef, six forty ounce bottles of Budweiser and a large bunch of Dole bananas.

“Hey Josh, long time no see.” Leanne ignored the cashier, staring at Josh with her best Gwen Stephanie impression. “Whatcha been up to?”

“About Six feet.”

He waited impatiently for the chili and bread to move down the conveyor belt, trying to ignore her stare.

“You're lookin' good. All cleaned up and respectable. I like your hair short.”

Leanne leaned on the check stand, looking at his short brown hair, shaved in the back and sides, but finger tip length on the top. She looked him up and down. Watched him place the chili and bottles of beer in the brown paper bag. Always making certain to return to his eyes. “I like that apron. The green really brings out the blue in your eyes.”

“Yeah, well at least it's a job.” Josh tossed the bread on top and grabbed a new bag, shaking it open with a flick of his wrist. Golden Star Market written in bold green ink parachuted out. The letters centered over the five point star in the middle of the bag.

“So you wanna hang out sometime, like we used to?” Leanne moved closer to him, biting the edge of her lip. “Maybe go for a little drive an...” She touched his arm.

“I don't think your old man would like that too much, do you?” Josh cut her off, moving away from her. He carefully placed the ground beef and bananas in the brown paper bag.

“The total is eighteen twenty-three.”, said Karen in a huffy tone.

Leanne reached into her wallet and pulled out a twenty dollar bill, handing it to Karen without so much as a glance. Her attention fully focused on Josh.

“He doesn't own me.”

“Yeah, well I don't need the bullshit, Leanne.” Josh handed her the bags of groceries.

“What? You scared you might still like it?”

She stroked his hand teasingly as she took the bag from him, her lips pouted in a seductive grin.

“Look, I got my shit together now. I don't need you coming around here stirring things up. What happened between us was a long time ago. Why don't you just leave it in the past?”

“Because I can't, Josh.”

Leanne ran her hand across his crotch.

“I'll see ya' around.”, she whispered, staring deep into his eyes as she passed him with her groceries and walked out of the store.