**Audition 1**

The plates clinked and rattled as loud as the Spanish that was shouted in the kitchen. Each booth was filled, mostly with *viejos* in flannels and western shirts reading the bad news of the day, while their *esposas* looked at a different subset of the same. Steam, from the heat of the kitchen inside and the frigid air still lingering outside, settled on the large windows overlooking the plaza.

Billy sat at the counter alone, just him and his hunched shoulders, eyes steeped somewhere in his black cup of coffee. Not trusting to move them anywhere else, fearing if he did, he’d see every person in the diner looking right at him.

Billy remembered the fresh private – shaking hands over his ears as all color fled his face, experiencing his first shelling, explosion, battle – yelling *This is surreal!* And all the boys who heard the man’s last words respectfully laughing about it later. There was nothing in war that Billy thought was surreal. He’d seen enough violence back home, what humans were capable of. This was just on a larger scale.

And truth be told, he wasn’t even sure he what the fuck the word meant, until now. Everything was the same. The same hard round spinning stool under his *nalgas.* The same grease and chile scented air watering the *ojos*. Staring down at the same coffee-stained linoleum countertop peeling up around the cracks like the *Sangre de Cristo* Mountains wedging up around the Rio Grande. But now, Billy felt like he was watching a movie about a guy sitting in a café while everyone else stared at him. Is that what the poor articulate dead private meant?

“You want me to top you off, dear?” Mary Lou asked.

Billy sat unstirred watching *the pictures* flick in front of him.

“Billy?” Mary Lou said again. Billy's eyes moved up to the plump motherly looking waitress in her mid-50s. “*Mas cafe?”*

“Oh, yeah, please. *Mil gracias*,” he said with an absent smile. Mary Lou smiled back as she poured. “I uh forgot or never realized how good the coffee was here.”

“You mean for a shit diner?” Mary Lou asked with a certain draw.

“No, no, I don't mean like that.”

“I know sweetie, I'm just giving you a hard time, like I used to,” she said. “Your daddy was that way. Always had a great sense of humor, but then he would take something I said so literally and fall off his stool apologizing. *Por que so serio?* I would ask and he would laugh. That never got old.”

Billy snickered.

“It’s the cinnamon and a pinch of red chile,” Mary Lou said.

Billy looked up at her confused.

“In the coffee,” she said, placing her index finger to her lips like it was some big secret, as she walked away.

Billy laughed again and pulled out a smoke.

“Been lookin' all over for you,” a voice said.

Billy didn't even have a chance to light his smoke before turning to find Jude sitting on the stool next to him. Fawning over him like a Goddamn schoolgirl. Billy lit his smoke and pulled a drag. “Been sitting here,” he exhaled.

The more Jude’s eyes draped over him like a virgin puppy, the more Billy wanted to turn away. Maybe there were only two eyes after all, watching the man in the pictures, sitting at that diner, Billy thought.

Thankfully, Jude swung his stool toward the order line of the kitchen.

Both men looked straight ahead at steaming plates baking under the heat lights in front of them.

The food would come out of the oven blistering hot. Leaving you helplessly salivating while looking at the melted cheese plastered to the edges of the plate over scorched *frijoles* andcrispy tortillas, all smothered in bubbling red and green chile.Sitting in front of you untouchable for ten fucking minutes so what was the point of the heat lamp? Ever since he was a little kid, Billy always wondered that.

“Where's your friend?” Jude asked.

“Who Sid?”

“You’re an asshole, who ain’t got no other friends,” Jude said, hoping Billy would laugh.

He didn’t.

“Kept moving this morning.”

“I see. You order yet?”

“No, just coffee.”

“*Bueno*, we can head home for breakfast,” Jude said. “It's probably been a long time since you had a home-cooked meal.”

Billy sniffled and took another drag.

“Or maybe it hasn't, I don't know,” Jude said. “I guess I don't really know anything about the last...”

“...No, I'm just gonna have coffee...”

“Okay,” Jude said. He turned over his coffee mug and Mary Lou was already filling it before he could even take off his hat. “*Gracias*, Mary Lou.”

Mary Lou smiled, her eyes dancing between the two boys.

Billy's shoulders remained stooped, a barrier between his brother's glowing visage, and his head low. His eyes did catch Jude's attire, however. “You wearing a tie underneath your jacket?” Billy asked.

Jude looked down at his cowhide, and the tie peeking out from it. “*Si*.”

Billy took a fuller look at his brother. “Where's your badge?”

Jude's eyes remained on his chest. “I don't wear a badge anymore.”

“Jesus Christ, it finally happened huh?” Billy asked. “Was it just like Pop said?”

“Did what happen?”

“That temper got the best of you, and you killed a man.”

“What?”

“That's why they took your badge and gun.”

“Jesus Christ, no,” Jude said, shaking his head. “I'm still a civil servant, just not a sheriff anymore.”

“What are you then? A fucking mailman?”

“A mailman? We don’t even have… No, I’m not a mailman.”

“Well then, what are you?”

“I traded in my badge and gun for a tie and a J.D.”

Billy took a long drag of his smoke waiting for a real answer.

“A J.D. I'm an attorney now. Assistant District Attorney.”

Billy sat back on his stool, taking a grander survey of his brother. “You're a Goddamn lawyer?”

“Assistant District Attorney. Yea.”

Billy blinked hard. “*Un pinche abogado*?” he almost whispered.

“*Un pinche abogado*,” Jude smiled, watching the gears trying to turn in his little brother's head. “Instead of chasing bad guys down, now I'm in charge of lockin' em up.”

Billy frowned and scratched his head with the same hand that held his smoke. “You loved being a sheriff. You were a fucking asshole, but you loved being a sheriff. And a marshal. You were good.”

“Well, there are other things I love too. And those things became more important.”

Billy tapped his finger on the counter and nodded slightly, as if he finally figured it all out.

“I guess some things have changed since you've been gone,” Jude said.

“I guess so,” said Billy.

“You got any plans now?”

“Yea, gonna see Adeline.”

Jude smiled. “And some things never change.”

Billy met Jude's eyes and grinned back.

“She write you when you were over there?” Jude asked.

“I don't know.”

“You don't know?”

Billy snubbed out his cigarette and frowned. “Yea, I don't know.”

**Audition 2**

Billy shook his head and gritted his teeth, knowing his brother wasn't going to relent. “I went to that party tonight with Adeline. I asked her to go to California with me and she said no, and then I said I had to think about some things. I was out the door, gathering my thoughts on the porch, minding my own fucking business and that son of a bitch comes out after me. I was just trying to leave...”

Jude's face broadened. “And?..”

“He sucker-punched me. I hit him back...” Billy's gaze teetered off, as if he was watching two strangers reenact the scene before his very eyes.

“Billy,” Jude said calmly. “*Entonces*?”

“I was leaving, Jude. Goddamnit I was leaving. The miserable son of a bitch was never gonna see my face again until…”

“Until? ...”

Billy’s bloodied hands answered Jude’s question. “*Jodido* stuck me in the back. In the Goddamn back as I was walking away.” He keeled over wincing in pain again. “And then we started tussling. He threw me into the window, or I threw him. I heard it break and I reckon that’s what caused the crowd. At some point he lost the knife and I picked it up. He had a gun in his waistband, maybe he reached for it and that’s when I stuck him. Next thing I knew, there was a crowd of fucking people all around me. I saw Darcy and that son of a bitch, Camilo, coming out with a 12 gauge. I pulled Edwin’s pistol and fired in the air to clear everyone out and that’s when I ran.”

Jude blinked as hard as he grinded his mustache into his upper lip. “You sure he's dead?” Jude asked after a long moment.

“He was bleeding out like a damn geyser.” Billy blinked, as if the curtains from the scene had now closed. “He's dead, Jude, he's dead.”

Billy looked at Jude and Jude looked at Billy. *Nothin left to ask. Nothin left to say.*

Jude paced in a short circle replaying it all in his head. “Were there any witnesses?”

“Shit yeah. Half the fucking party by the end.”

“Seeing Edwin stab you first?”

“Maybe. They saw me bleeding out of my back and him whole.”

“Anyone see Edwin follow you out?”

“I mean I left, so I don' know what other fuckin people saw. I ain’t got eyes in the back of my head.”

“But there were witnesses that saw Edwin stick *you* with *his* knife first?”

“I don’t know. The knife has his damn initials engraved in it. I saw it on the handle before I dropped the son of a bitch and took off.”

Jude ceased his pacing and shifted to mash his mustache with his forefinger further. The gears in his head were now lubricated with the proper and necessary information and started turning faster and faster. “Well,” Jude finally said, “I think you're gonna be all right.”

“All right? What the fuck do you mean all right?”

“Billy, it was self-defense.”

“That don't matter.”

“If it was self-defense like you say, then the law allows...”

“The law ain't got nothing to do with this. Them rich sons of bitches are gonna string me up.”

“That's not how it works.”

“What country do you live in? That's exactly how it works.”

“Listen, Billy. I know you probably saw a lot of things in the last few years that made the world seem upside down but there's still an order here in this land.”

“Yea, and in case you don't know it, *carnal*, we're at the bottom of it.”

“Billy, you gotta trust me on this.”

“It ain't you that I don't trust.”

“Phillip got fat off the good ole boys through and through but he's still an honorable man and a damn fine district attorney. It's up to him to press charges, and if it happened like...”

“What do you mean *if*? You don't fucking believe me?”

“I believe you, Billy. I just mean, that sometimes in these situations when the blood gets boiling people's recollection of the incident is not entirely...accurate.”

“Well Goddamn, you are a chicken shit attorney now, aren't ya?”

Jude bolted at Billy. With one hand, he grabbed Billy by all the loose fabric of his uniform and slammed him up against the door. “Whatever high and mighty white fucking horse you rode in on, you better jump the fuck off,” Jude hissed. “Now, I'm asking you these things because I’m trying to help you. Somewhere in my soul, I’m terrified you don’t even want help, but I'll be damned if I ain't gonna try.”

Billy's eyes broadened to the size of silver dollars, no different than when Billy's hand was literally caught in the cookie jar as a child. They told Jude everything he needed to know.

Jude relaxed his grip and stepped back. “Okay, first things first. I need you to think for a minute. If it didn't go down the way you say, you gotta run, and I'll help you. If it did go down the way you say, we got other options.”

Billy glared back at Jude, no longer the little boy again, his ego returning.

Jude twisted his head slightly, and his eyes challenged Billy saying, *Don't fucking start again.*

Billy rubbed his face with all ten fingers. He only put on an aftershave two hours ago, but his face was already dry and cracked. He forgot how ravaging the thin desiccated air was in the high desert. He ran his fingers through his hair, the greasy pomade thick and soft like candle wax, and he paced. He palmed his hair behind his ears and sat on a wooden chair, his shoulders hunched over and his elbows on his knees.

He pursed his lips and nodded his head slightly with his eyes closed. His eyes opened and he sat straight up in his chair. “It went down like I said.”

Jude looked at his brother. “Okay. We'll bring you in.”

Billy stood and straightened his ruffled shirt.

Jude put his arm around his brother's shoulder.

Billy turned to Jude.

“Down to my bones, this feels like a mistake.”

“You gotta trust me on this, *hermanito*.” Jude said, snapping the chamber of his gun, ensuring all six rounds were loaded.

Audition 3

The homemade explosives worked fine, just like Billy promised.

The building shook.

The windows shattered.

And in the same moment, Christian was slammed in the face with a scorching wave of heat, almost knocking him off his feet, as he bolted across the street.

Along with the rich familiar scent of gunpowder and war, he smelled his own burnt hair. The smart-ass thought Christian only shaved his beard out of some silly sniper lore. Yes, some of his reason was based in puerile tradition, but Christian also saw the amount of gunpowder and dynamite and materials that go BOOM and set things on fire and he figured the less burnable particles on his face, such as hair, the better.

As they assumed, the moment Jude and Lee stepped through the front door of the Pinkerton Agency, the guerilla and his two cohorts closed off the whole block out front. No suspicious strollers or looky-loos to mind, also ensuring no innocent bystanders would fall victim to the initial blast.

Thick gray smoke billowed from the building as the frenzied mass stampeded like white-tail deer through the fog, and for a moment, Christian thought he was dashing through the cobblestone streets of Germany, not Chicago’s blacktop.

Over the terrified shrieking and mass hysteria, Christian heard gunshots rattling off in the building. That meant the boys were still alive and fighting.

The shotgun strapped to his shoulder jingled, bouncing up and down, dodging the spooked herd while running full steam.

He made his way across the street and through the mist of strife, and he saw what remained of three henchmen, charred, and unfurled on the sidewalk.

As Christian approached what was left of the door, an agent burst out, in a coughing fit with his forearm over his face. He never saw Christian raise his Glock. Maybe there was an instant when he heard the two rounds before there was only black, then God.

The agent dropped halfway in the door.

Without breaking stride, Christian hopped over him, firing one more in his head for good measure.

Muzzle poised straight ahead he scampered through the debris, pieces of shattered glass cracking beneath his boots. Shifting through the gray haze, he felt his eyes burn, his ears ring and his senses sharpen, and Christian’s mind dislocated, swearing he was back in Germany again.

Ash sifted around him like falling snow, and there were no shadows because there was no light.

Outside was bright, inside was lightless.

As Christian passed an overturned desk, an agent popped up from behind still lost to what happened.

Both men startled the other.

Christian regained composure first and swung the butt of this Glock into the man’s nose.

The agent toppled over the desk and Christian fired hot pieces of lead into him.

Through the ringing in his ears, Christian heard footsteps near. He turned toward the sound, light glowing down the stairwell as if a portal from God. He knew it was not St. Michael barreling down those stairs.

He raised his gun, readying his aim about to send some poor soul back where he came from.

Finally an agent appeared, breathing hard, fear and anger beating from his face, a large machine gun in hand, clumsily rumbling down the stairs.

As he got to the bottom, he noticed Christian. “Shit!” he yelled, losing his footing in panic.

Christian fired three rounds, all too high.

The agent winced as bullets exploded in the wood stairs around him. Still on his back, he pulled up his machine gun, rattling off rounds.

Christian dived behind the desk, landing on the previous fallen soldier. He stuffed the corpse between him and the desk as machine gun bullets shredded through the table and the flesh of the human shield. He coiled behind both, reloading his Glock, tightening up his entire body, trying to get as small as possible, waiting out the assault.

The blizzard ceased, hearing the magazine click empty.

Christian bolted up, firing.

The agent frantically fumbled with a new clip before a bullet sailed into his leg. “Shit! Shit!” he shrieked again.

Giving up on the clip, the agent turned and scampered back up the stairs out of Christian’s line of sight.

Christian gave chase, making his way to the stairwell, catching the agent in his sights, scurrying halfway up the steps with his wounded leg.

Perhaps sensing Christian behind him, the agent turned, and the two men’s sights collided. The agent’s eyes widened like spilt paint recognizing Christian’s face was the last thing he would ever see. His jaw almost slackened like he was giving up, almost leaving Christian too much time to fire two shots into the man’s chest and one in the head.

Instantly, the agent dropped, sprawled out like a snow angel, the machine gun resting on his lap, his face already blank.

Christian dropped the Glock and unsheathed the shotgun.

The long barrel slowly towed him up the stairs toward the sound of mayhem. A machine gun rattled off, and in between, sounds of a pistol. Maybe Jude’s.

When he reached the top of the stairs, he quickly shot his head around the corner.

In one brief glance, he could see two men held up down the hall, flanked on each corner of a four-way intersection, firing off into Pinkerton’s office. The men wouldn’t be spilling their rounds at Pinkerton or Dahl meaning at least one of the boys was still on hind legs sucking air.

Fighting.

Christian leaned his back against the wall, stilling his breathing, then he heard the sweetest sound to pass by his ears since his wife had last whispered in them – Jude’s Winchester revolver firing.

Even in the hellacious chaos, a little grin reared at the corners of Christian’s mouth.

Jude was one obstinate son of a bitch.

“I’ll take a gun that fires six bullets every time rather than one that fires ninety-nine out of one hundred,” he said, as the three men discussed what tools to use for the job.

“I’m pretty sure you ain’t fired anything else in your life but that six-shooter,” said Billy.

“And I’m pretty sure it’s kept me good and whole so far,” said Jude.