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REB DID HIS best to ignore the ticking of the wall clock as Dr. Yoon studied the readout from the tonometer, a marvel of twenty-first century medical technology that shot puffs of air against the eyeball to measure the intraocular pressure. Like most Americans, Reb hated waiting, especially this doctor kind of waiting. For him it was a club people joined as they got older, whether they wanted to or not; a sort of bargain-basement Club Med where, instead of lolling away pleasant hours under the Caribbean sun drinking Pink Flamingos, its members sat glumly in examination rooms under the indifferent glare of florescent lights, or paced nervously back and forth at home waiting for the telephone to ring with test results that would foretell their fate. Good news and life went on pretty much as it had; bad news—and judging by the ophthalmologist's somber expression the news was bad—then what? Keep his chin up and play the dutiful patient? Get a second opinion? And what about the cost? Would Blue Shield live up to its commitments, or would the ravenous appetite of the medical industrial complex devour his life savings, as it had so many others? Reb tried to think of a joke to drive these depressing thoughts from his mind. There was the one about the Irishman who was dying of cancer but told his friends it was AIDS, because he didn't want any of them sleeping with his wife after he was dead. Or the patient who had both his feet amputated and—

He was interrupted by the sound of Dr. Yoon's voice.

“Your pressures are increasing,” the doctor said, holding out the strip of paper in the way a detective at a murder scene might offer a spent shell casing to his partner. Reb made no effort to take it.

“What about the eye drops?” he asked.

Dr. Yoon shook his head. “They no longer seem to be effective. Your right eye is forty; your left eye is thirty-eight. And there appears to be damage to the optical nerve.”

“Permanent damage?”

“I’m afraid so.”

Reb thought about his grandmother Libby who went blind from glaucoma in her eighties and had to be put in a nursing home. He would bring her audio books from the library and sometimes he read to her. Now here *he* was, only fifty-three, and already doing the glaucoma shuffle.

“What’s the next step?” he asked.

“Laser surgery.”

“What will that do?”

“Open up the small filtering area in the eyeball. That will allow the fluid to drain, which should reduce the pressure.”

“Will it keep me from going blind?”

Concern softened the ophthalmologist’s features.

“We’ve made great strides in treating glaucoma in recent years, Mr. Morgan, but your condition is unusually aggressive. The medicated drops should have helped, but they haven’t. Surgery is the next step.” A slight pause as he searched for words. “Unfortunately, we will have no way of knowing for sure whether it will lower the pressures until after the procedure. You should prepare yourself.”

Right, Reb thought. Prepare myself.

THE SKY WAS dark with waiting rain as he made his way out to the parking lot—dark and brooding like his mood. A woman pulling a crying child by the arm hurried past as he unlocked the door to his car and felt the first sprinkles on the back of his hand. Five minutes later he was on Business I-80 heading west

toward Sacramento, the rain so heavy it was like driving through a car wash at fifty-miles-an-hour. He strained to see ahead, the wipers of his 1967 Volvo 800S unable to keep up with the deluge. He considered pulling over and sitting out the downpour, but he wanted to get home. He had a lot to think about. The last three years had been a disaster. First there was the break up of his marriage. He and Kate had been married a long time and raised a child together. Brendan was now in graduate school in Virginia and would receive his doctorate soon. Once a week they talked on the telephone and discussed basketball or the latest article in the *New Yorker*; the divorce was never mentioned.

Then the early morning phone call from Mrs. Throckton in New Jersey. His father was in the hospital, she told him. He'd had a massive stroke and the doctors didn't expect him to last long. This was followed by a hurried flight to Newark and a cab ride to the hospital where they said their good-byes with Reb doing all the talking, and his father, unable to speak, clutching his son's hand and peering over the edge of oblivion with moist, tired eyes.

And now, if Dr. Yoon was to be believed, his glaucoma was out of control confirming the old adage that troubles came in threes. Reb turned the defroster fan knob up to full but still had to wipe the inside of the windshield repeatedly with an old undershirt he kept under the seat. The taillights in front glittered through the rain like fairy jewels, flashing now and again as someone touched a brake pedal. He took several long breaths to center himself and calm his emotions. Trouble was a mountain canyon, dark and steep, and time was the river that ran through it, bumping and churning among the boulders. But eventually time would find its way out again into open country and sunshine. The trick was to keep the heart in the center of the current, otherwise it could circle back into eddies of anger and regret. He'd known his share of hearts trapped in those eddies, or worse, sucked into everlasting holes of despair. That wasn't for him; he would trust time to carry him safely through.

The traffic eased as the rain let up, and he found himself stuck

behind a UPS semi-trailer. He checked the lane to his left and pulled out to pass. A car horn blasted in his ear and he had to jerk the car back behind the truck again, his heart pounding, as a silver BMW swept past, the driver shaking his head with disgust.

Suddenly the full impact of recent events came crashing down on him. He hadn't seen the car. Was it the rain or was his peripheral vision going to hell? If the latter, then he was a menace to others as well as himself. He would have to give up driving. What would he do then? Take public transportation? Get a Seeing-Eye dog? A white-tipped cane?

He felt the challenges piling up in front of him, the first of which was how he would make a living. Photography had been his passion and career since leaving college. Not only did it nurture his creative imagination, it allowed him to work for himself. Given his problematic relationship with authority over the years, this was probably a good thing. But photography was also a cobbled-together livelihood. There were art shows and galleries for his fine art photographs and weddings and portraits when money was tight, with the occasional assignment for the local newspaper thrown in if the regular photographer was on vacation or out sick. That would all end, of course, if his eyes went south on him. Beethoven had managed to continue composing even after he lost his hearing, but a blind photographer? Reb didn't think he had the genius to pull it off.

"You need cheering up, son," he said out loud and switched on KVMR-FM in Nevada City. KVMR was a non-commercial, community radio station located in the Sierra foothills and the only one he listened to anymore. They featured a wide range of music including reggae, folk, rhythm and blues, jazz, and women's music. They also broadcast left-of-center call-in talk shows, astrology readings, political debates, lectures by leading progressives, live reports from environmental conferences, and a community swap shop. Program directors at mainstream public radio stations called it "patchwork programming," a pejorative term because, to their way of thinking, such eclectic programming hurt station "branding." Reb enjoyed the variety. He also appreciated the fact

that the DJs were all unpaid volunteers. They would come in at two in the morning just so they could share their favorite Ani DiFranco CD or bootleg recording of the Grateful Dead.

He caught the end of Amy Goodman's *Democracy Now* as he took the Midtown-J Street exit. He had moved into a one bedroom apartment on the top floor of an older home soon after the divorce. He liked the neighborhood's mix of ethnic restaurants and shops. He was particularly fond of the art-house movie theater and late-night cafe over on Broadway.

The local news had an extended piece about the upcoming election in Nevada County and how outside Republican operatives were once again pouring buckets of campaign money into the county to gain control of the Board of Supervisors.

What is it with these Republicans? Reb thought to himself as he pulled into his driveway. They drape themselves in the mantle of small town American virtues, and then they play the pimp for every developer and multinational corporation that comes along looking for a good time. Whatever happened to the party of Lincoln and La Follette? He was about to switch off the engine when the station's program manager interrupted his thoughts.

"Have you ever dreamed about working in radio as a news reporter? Well, here's your chance. KVMR is hiring three interns for our news department. These are full-time paid positions where you will learn how to cover local and regional news as part of a great team of dedicated news hounds. For job description and application call 530-555-KVMR, or visit our web site at KVMR.org. KVMR is an equal opportunity employer."

Reb switched off the car but didn't get out. Radio. He let the word ramble about awhile inside his head until it began to kick up the dust of memory. Soon after arriving at college he had joined the radio club. There were only a dozen or so members and he was given his own Thursday evening music show. He played a lot of Jefferson Airplane and Joni Mitchell. Dylan and the Band too.

The memory was bittersweet because being part of the radio club meant a great deal to him. But then sometime during his sophomore year, his thoughts shifted away from college to the

streets where the anti-war movement was coming into its own and the hippies were stirring up their own kind of trouble. College suddenly felt like a prison, and so he left and never looked back.

He got out of the car and climbed the stairs to his apartment. He grabbed a yogurt and a package of smoked salmon from the refrigerator. He thought about calling Brendan with the news about his eyes but decided to wait. Instead, he dialed the number for KVMR.