



Seeing Blue: The kcam story



Written by kcam

Chapter I

I grew up an orphan in the slums of Mumbai raised by a prostitute with a heart of gold. Her name was Khat and her most frequent customer was an American ex-pat named “Whoover” with a nasty and prodigious heroin habit and the mien of a toad. In his opiate-induced haze, he would scream obscenities and ramble incoherently, constantly wailing mournfully, uttering two mysterious words, “The Blue!” Or he would tear off all his clothes and gnash his teeth, muttering, “Hawk” or “Pete.” Due to the diligent English tutoring of my protector, I was reasonably capable of understanding Whoover’s words, but not their meaning. Khat reassured me, “Don’t worry, it’s just smack talk.”

We came to understand that back in the U.S., Whoover had tried his hand at embezzling but got caught with a cabal of three or four other crooks. He escaped the U.S. with his state-funded retirement cash and somehow ended up in the exotic Sub Continent. I think it might have been the easy access to all the heroin. Nevertheless, Khat turned out to not only be more literate than her constant customer, but also a better thief as she would slip cash out of Whoover’s trousers each meeting besides overcharging him for his 30-second session. After time, she had saved plenty enough to send me to the states for a proper university education. I was very thankful and eager to escape the slum, but Whoover said that if I were to go to the U.S. to school, I must attend a school in a place he called “Moscow” in a distant state of “Idaho.” He assured me that I would feel right at home there with the open sewers and even tantalized my teenaged imagination with tales of students “flying” from upper story windows.

Intrigued I was, but I simply could not shake Whoover’s constant incantation of “The Blue.” What did it mean?

Chapter II

In time, Hoover stopped showing up. His absence coincided with the appearance of another American hick, Nolt. Nolt didn't care for "chasing the dragon" but showed a keen affinity for the bottle. He took up with Hoover, and they ended up spending a great deal of time together. Nolt's typical routine involved drinking himself comatose and dreaming of two wet tea bags resting on his upper lip below his nose. Hoover began exhibiting a wry smile each and every day.

Khat observed that I was getting restless and yearning to be free from the slum. She knew nothing, of course, about American colleges but as luck would have it, she had a distant relative who lived in the far-away place called Idaho. After contacting her cousin, he agreed to help me get settled in and hopefully get enrolled in a university there. I was most exhilarated at the thought, but I obsessed over Hoover's incessant words: The Blue. I knew I must find out for myself what these meant.

And so, my journey began. A journey of inquiry—into myself and into what I could not have known then: The Blue would come to fill my life in strange, mysterious and gratifying ways. But as all quests begin, one can never know the fateful twists that await.

As I boarded the train to the coast, Khat counseled me: "Sunrises and sunsets will guide you." These inscrutable words rang in my head as the train pulled out of the station.

Chapter III

I boarded the ship that was to sail me to the U.S. Even with Khat's generosity, I still had to watch my expenses, so I booked a berth on a Dubai-flagged oil tanker bound for the east coast.

When I got to my room, I found my soon-to-be cabin mate passed out in his berth. He was wearing a filthy black sweatshirt and had apparently puked up his lunch. The puke formed what looked like a large capital 'T' down the front of his chest that dribbled over the word, "vandals." I had no idea what it meant. He wasn't a small man to say the least—he had an enormously round, bald head atop a slovenly paunch and reeked of vomit and failed ambition. With my bag in hand, I fled the cabin for some fresh air. Just as I was leaving the room, a stranger caught my arm and held me back momentarily. He gave me a warning, "Be careful around the 'Testicle." I knew nothing of what he was saying. He continued, "That dude in your cabin, he's known as the 'Testicle, and you should stay away from him." But I protested, "That's my only place to sleep, and moreover, who are you?" He smiled, "I'm a historian of sorts. You can call me Scotty. I can find you another berth; just stay away from him." He led me to the deck just as the sun was setting in brilliant blue and orange swirls of high clouds.

I thanked my intercessor for his kindness. He asked where I was heading. I told him about trying to attend university in a place called Idaho. He stared at me with a sharp look.

"Idaho?"

I was puzzled. "Is there something wrong?" I asked.

"No," he chuckled, "It's just that I know a fair amount about the place."

Sensing an opportunity, I asked, "Do you know anything about The Blue?"

His eyes lit up with a knowing smile, but he said nothing.

Chapter IV

Scottie broke his gaze away. The brief flash through his eyes when I asked about “The Blue” was too obvious, and he knew it. He turned back to look at me and started to speak but then he paled as he looked over my shoulder. I wheeled around to see what had caught his eye: there were ten or eleven men pouring over the side railing onto the deck. Pirates! I froze, not knowing who they were or what they wanted but realizing we were considerably outnumbered. Then I saw that they were all wearing the same filthy sweatshirts as I had observed on the passed-out Testicle. Vandals!

Scottie let out a loud, piercing whistle. In seconds, 30 or more men and some righteously angry women emerged from below onto the deck wearing differing outfits hued of blue and orange. The vandals stopped in their tracks as Scottie whispered to me who they were, “These are the good guys. They’re all from the GUNBO tribe and hate the vandals with the heat of a thousand suns.”

The leader of the GUNBO tribe stepped forward towards the vandals and exclaimed, “What is it you want?”

Their leader, a bitter-looking tall man named Freez called out, “We’re trying to show our moral superiority and claim our lost mantle as the best in Idaho.”

“Idaho?” I mused silently.

The GUNBO leader, Klee, laughed uproariously, “You gotta be BWinning us. But in the interest of sportsmanship and to spare you another BW-kicking, we’ll give you the Testicle as way for you to save face and claim a tiny, insignificant victory. He was never with us in the first place.”

Freez’s men roared with approval as Klee directed them below to their prize. Testicle emerged onto the deck, a bloated face and a massive wedgie. Taking several men and considerable

effort, they heaved the Testicle overboard. We could hear him scream all the way down,
“Lukeheart!”

Chapter V

The sudden but brief standoff on the deck and its rapid denouement left me exhilarated and exhausted. Scotty caught the weariness in my face and suggested that, now that I had the cabin to myself, I should get some rest. I still had many questions but couldn't summon the will to pursue the answers from any of the GUNBO warriors or Scotty himself. Clearly there was a long journey still ahead, and I resigned myself to gleaning as much info as I could from whomever I could avail at the proper time.

Returning to my cabin, I opened the door and was relieved to find that with the Testicle gone, so was his malodorous stench. *Do all vandals smell like that?* I wondered. I tossed my bag near the unused berth and flopped down. I looked over what little belongings Testicle had left behind: empty booze bottles, half-eaten bags of Doritos, a tattered copy of Marx's *The Communist Manifesto*, soiled gay porn mags. I grabbed his bag and, using a clean towel to protect my hands, stuffed what remained of his BW into it, ran upstairs to the deck, and tossed it overboard. I quickly returned and lay down for what seemed like my first sleep in ages.

I fell into a deep slumber. After some time, I had an eerie sense that I was not alone. Opening my eyes, I peered into the semi-darkness and chided myself for such a delusion. Drifting off again, I awoke to find a bright, shifting aurora of blue and orange light. I sat up and watched the swirling colors get brighter and fill my cabin. A supernatural calm overtook me as I fascinated to the dancing ethereal light show. Presently, the colors seemed to start to form into the image of a man. Then the colors coalesced even tighter and I could discern his long (kind of fake-looking) beard, a cowboy hat, and I saw that he was carrying—could it be?—a blue Fender Stratocaster electric guitar with an orange fretboard with the words “Boise State” clearly painted onto it. A wonderment lit up my face. The apparition moved closer to me as I began to hear music that sounded like...ZZ Top?!? My calm remained as I summoned the strength to speak.

“Who ARE you?”

The ghost man spoke.

“I am TVMunson but you can me ‘Muns,’ ‘Munson,’ or my favorite, ‘counselor.’”

“Are you a famous guitarist?” I queried.

“I am now, son,” he replied.

And he vanished.

Chapter VI

Completely stunned, I sat on the bed attempting to come to grips with what just occurred. What the...?? “Munson??” “Counselor??” I could not make any sense of anything. Had it been a hallucination? Was I going mad? Fortunately, the calm remained as I attempted to sort out this weird but oddly compelling encounter. Not having much luck, I finally lay back and closed my eyes to sleep, having lost all conception of time and space. Eventually I fell into a coma-like sleep only to be awakened by a sharp knocking on my cabin door.

I stumbled to the door and opened it to find Scotty.

“Hungry?” he asked. Suddenly I realized I was famished. “Come with me,” as he led me down several corridors, stopped, and stepped into a large stateroom with me in tow.

The room was fit for royalty: the walls were draped with the finest blue silk I had ever seen; the lounges upholstered in fine orange velour; a large round table was replete with foodstuffs I had never seen. Approaching me, Klee offered me what looked like a frozen ice cream frappe with bits of dark chocolate cookie bits.

“We call this a ‘Blizzard.’ Try one.”

I eagerly accepted and started to dig in with abandon. Bad idea. In seconds my sinuses were pounding from the ingested coldstuff. “Slow down, man,” Klee smiled. I paused enough to take note of his company of lieutenants surrounding the table whom he introduced as Drewr and Nikkro who nodded amiably as they ate their churros and chased them down with Diet Mountain Dew.

“Where is everyone else, the rest of the GUNBO tribe?” I wondered out loud.

Klee responded, “They’ve already left ship and headed west. The Mountain West.”

“But what about the vandals, are they still around?”

Nikkro interjected, “Nah, they’re irrelevant now. I doubt very much if we’ll see much of them in the future. Losers, really. We’ll be joining the rest of the GUNBOs in a few days.” Changing subjects, he said, “Scotty tells us you are interested in The Blue. Any particular reasons why?”

Suddenly I realized how far my pursuit of the answers to my questions had taken me, and I struggled to explain why. If I started to recount my tale, how could they understand? How could *I* understand? I dare not tell them about the previous night’s surreal light show that spoke to me. So I responded a bit evasively.

“Well I have heard about The Blue but still don’t know who or what it is exactly.”

“Ah, yes,” Drewr nodded, “We all have known the same quixotic quest. But we don’t have enough time to talk now. Our aviso is pulling up to the ship very soon. You can come with us and we’ll help you. Go get your bag and meet us on deck in a quick ten minutes. Here, put this on.”

He handed me a blue jersey with the number 11 on it.

Events were moving faster than my mind could keep up as I raced to my cabin, showered quickly, grabbed my duffel and headed topside. I could see the four climbing on the ladder over the side of the ship. As I hurriedly made my way, something grabbed my leg. I stumbled down and rolled over as a dark figure stood over me and an acrid stench filled my nose.

I knew the man: Freez.

Chapter VII

Freez's face was pulsating with rage. "So you think you want to be a donkey, huh, kid? Back when I was in school we owned—OWNED—your pathetic junior college." He moved closer. I still had a hand on my duffel bag strap and pulled it a little closer to my head as I pondered my next move. Freez kept on, "Do you have any idea what a 'land grant' school is, donkey? I wasn't the smartest guy in college but I kind of, sort of, maybe knew it was a big thing and you know what? WE were the FLAGSHIP university. Boise State is a joke; Boise isn't even a state! Who do we hate? Boise State! You and your stupid blue tur..."

Freez was getting so incensed that he didn't realize I had slithered quite a ways away from him and gotten to my feet. I sprinted to the gunwale and peered over the edge. The GUNBO guys were looking up as I tossed my duffel down to them. As I started for the gangway, I turned to see Freez chasing toward me in a dead run.

"Alright, pal, time for this slumdog to get a little krav maga on your BW!" I roared.

Freez closed in. I tucked down, got my feet under me and let his weight and momentum come straight at me. As he collided into me, I rose with all my might and flipped him overboard. Hearing him crash into the water, I scrambled down the gangway to cheering GUNBOs and clamored aboard as the boat pulled away. We looked back and saw Freez flailing in the water and bobbing in the swells some 12 meters aft. The SeniorChief cut the engine and called out, "We can't leave him here, we're better than that." The GUNBOs started to grouse, but the boat idled. None of us quite knew what to do next: a tall dorsal fin knifed up through the sea; a taller tail fin followed. The shark closed in seconds on the doomed vandal...and violently yanked him under.

Too gobsmacked to speak, we all gazed over the now empty ocean.

Chapter VIII

SC was the first to break the silence. “Huh. I guess it is true sharks will eat just about anything, no matter how disgusting.” Still, no one else spoke as the boat drifted in the open water. So he tried again. “He seemed like a good chum.” And, “Bait he won’t be bothering anyone else any time soon. Shame his career ended in such a deep mess. Hey, know what you call a shark who eats a vandal? In poor taste.” First Klee, then all of us, started to snicker. Drewr sighed, “Too bad that probably won’t be the last blowhard vandal we come across.” The Chief barked, “Alright, men, let’s get everything stowed. We’ll make the southeast coast of Florida by morning.”

The GUNBO guys showed me to my bunk. We were in a sturdy 70-meter white seafaring boat named “Pokey” that was trimmed out in tasteful blue and orange trim. Everyone put on various attire of blue and orange. The mood was convivial as Chief headed to the helm and throttled the boat into warmer waters. The ship’s cook, mack, whipped up a delicious fish dinner: grilled tandoori-rubbed Chilean sea bass served with light beurre blanc sauce, roasted rosemary yukon potatoes, and fresh vegetables viniagrette. He opened a chilled bottle of ‘01 Jean Marc Boillot Chassange-Montrachet and offered to pour. Most of the GUNBOs abstained, but I couldn’t resist. Despite my lowly upbringing in Mumbai, I had managed to befriend an elderly remnant of the British Raj who had let his love of food and wine rub off on me, and I came to thoroughly enjoy gustatory pleasures. Some would say I had become a bit of a wine snob.

After dinner, I went topside to behold a pastel pale blue and orange sunset as we headed west. The wine and the great meal left me feeling peacefully subdued. Suddenly, Scotty was standing next me, admiring the pale fire in the sky.

“Nice colors, huh?”

I nodded blissfully. “My benefactor in India told me before I left that sunsets and sunrises would guide me. Does that make any sense to you?”

He mused, “Does to me. In time it will to you. See you tomorrow.”

Chapter IX

I returned to my bunk ready for some rest and quickly fell asleep. Then the music started: quietly at first until I could unmistakably hear an awesome rendition of Clapton and Cream playing Crossroads. I sat up in bed to find the blue/orange munson apparition in full detail with cheap sunglasses on a tilted-back head, laying down some serious guitar riffs on his Strat.

Marveling, I enjoyed the show until he finished and spoke, “What’s up, son?” I stammered, “Well, I...uh...I’m...it’s just that...I’m...um...”

He interrupted, “Wondering what I’m all about and why I keep showing up?”

“Pretty much, yeah,” I said.

Unstrapping his axe, he sort of reclined on the other bunk, “It’s a long story, but when I found out about your search for The Blue, I’ve been kind of following your journey as an Ambassador of sorts.”

“But, how did you find out? I haven’t really told anyone, but I’ve been asking a lot of questions...”

He cut me off, “Don’t ask me how I know, I just do. You’ll have to take my word for it. Anyhoo, consider my joining up on your quest as a co-sojourner,” as he pushed his cowboy hat back on his head a bit.

“Sounds good to me,” I offered, “But where are we going and do you know of the GUNBO tribe?”

He laughed heartily, “The GUNBOs? I’m their patron saint! Don’t worry, we’ll show where you’re to go and I’ve got your back even if you can’t see me.”

As I started to speak, he disappeared.

Once again, I was a little nonplussed but felt better about my journey as things were getting busy on the boat. Chief informed us we'd pull into the Jacksonville, Florida, area but maybe not stay too long, "Kind of depends on our welcome. This isn't exactly friendly territory. Sure, these folks are polite but not too open to outsiders and Yankees."

The GUNBOs pulled me aside, "We have to talk. What do you know about football?" "Soccer?" I wondered. "No, American College Football." I knew a little from the studies of the U.S. that Khat had me learn, but had hardly considered the subject too much. Klee implored me, "It's important you learn not just about the game but what it means all across the nation. Believe me, college football is a mind-bending mixture of on-field athletic talent (or lack of it), coaching ability ranging from brilliant to horrible, inter-school rivalries, regional turf battles, and, in this part of the country and a few others, criminal activity and a university hierarchy so lawless and entrenched it would make the mafia blush. But mostly about money—a lot of it. Also, college football is kind of a religion here in the South. Throw in the alcohol, incest, inbreeding, and illiteracy, you've got to tread lightly." I nodded knowing that I really was not comprehending what he said.

Yet.

Chapter X

Chief guided the boat into the berth as the GUNBOs helped secure the mooring. One of the dock workers came down to the pier and, seeing all the blue and orange, broke into a wide grin, “Go Gators!”

All the GUNBOs rolled their eyes as Nikkro clarified, “We’re actually Boise State football fans.”

“Huh? Who?” he responded.

"Boise State Broncos," Drewr explained.

The blank look on the dock jockey’s face gave way to a glimmer of recognition, “Oh, yeah. Wait. Boise State, they’re in Iowa, right? Hell, I don’t know nothin’ much what happens outside of the SEC. No need to really. No one plays much good football anywheres else far as I’m a knowin’.”

We all silently exchanged glances; Klee asked, “So you’re a big Gator fan, huh?”

“Yup, been followin’ the Gators since I dropped out of high school and married my cousin. National champs; wife got a big ‘Tebow’ tramp stamp just above her lady parts for her sixteenth birthday. Had a ‘Urban’ tat on her left bun but tried to scrub it off with a mix of Bacardi 151 and Ajax when he left us. Didn’t work out too well. Kind of smeared the ink into a big mess. But it’s okay, after the blisters healed, she still thinks it looks a little bit like Jesus,” he beamed.

“You know that Florida hired your current offensive coordinator away from Boise State to come coach for your team, right?” Klee offered.

“Wut, huh?” his eyes narrowing to comprehend, “That don’t sound right to me. Ain’t no talent outside of the SEC that can coach seems to me. That Zook fella sure couldn’t.”

Sensing futility, Klee asked, “But you like what Urban Meyer did for your team, right? Did you know he was coaching for Utah before he came to Gainseville?”

“Utah?” he puzzled, “Where’s that at?”

“You know, Utah, that beat Alabama in the Sugar Bowl a few years ago?” Klee offered.

He squinted his eyes, trying to make sense of what Klee said, “That don’t sound right to me, neither. SEC teams just don’t lose ’cept to some of them other SEC teams.”

The GUNBOs turned back to the boat and kept busy. Mack, the ship’s cook grabbed my arm and asked me to help him as he went to the market for some more provisions. Still wondering what had just transpired with the local guy, I was eager to help and get onshore for the first time in a long time. Mack and I headed into town, and he quickly found the market. My mouth was agape as we entered the biggest green grocery, meat, and fish market I had ever seen. I was flabbergasted at the immense variety and plentiful foodstuffs. Mack seemed to gravitate towards the wine section as I tagged along. The man at the counter saw my blue and orange attire and sniffed, “Pfft, you Gators ain’t gettin’ by my Tide this year either.” Clearly, I was in for long education about college football...

Chapter XI

Mack finally pulled himself from the wine section with a few cases and we proceeded to wander around the market filling our cart with provisions to restock the boat. I followed him around like a puppy; the sheer variety and volume of foodstuffs in the market simply overwhelmed me. Our last stop was at some sort of checkout line where a somewhat surly young woman reeking of stale tobacco and crystal meth kept referring to us as “y’all.” I wasn’t familiar with this particular idiom but marveled at its primitive versatility among all the other patrons of the market. Having completed the checkout with payment, we wheeled our cart out the front doors that magically opened as we approached and closed behind with a swishing sound.

We started rolling through a sizable parking lot and proceeded down a sidewalk as we noticed a middle-aged woman in a crimson jogging suit walking a dog coming in the opposite direction. As we neared, we could see she wore her hair high in a bouffant with lots of makeup and even more jewelry hanging from her earlobes and on her neck and wrists. The dog leading her in front on a leash was an obese white bulldog waddling to and fro, jowls swinging in rhythm, drool flinging from side to side. We were just about to pass when Mack doffed his Boise State hat and uttered a polite, “ma’am.” Suddenly, the dog viciously lunged for Mack’s ankle and chomped hard; Mack cried out in startled and visible pain. I was too dumbstruck to move but peered hard at the woman’s face. She never once looked down at the dog but stared at us with a steely, hard set visage. Her eyes narrowed and her mouth formed into a tight smirk, the edges of her lips curled into a smug, righteous slit with red lipstick. She spoke, again without once looking down at the dog.

“Oh my, Beaugard, what’s gotten into y’all?”

Her voice dripped with condescension and dirision.

“Call your dog off!” Mack yelled.

She said nothing and made no effort.

Finally, Mack roared, “Kellen Moore!” The dog instantly disengaged and rolled over onto his belly, whimpering loudly. Mack inspected his ankle: no blood had been drawn but there were bruises starting to show. He glared at the woman then returned a smirk at the sight of her prostrate canine, “Even a bulldog knows when he’s beat, huh?” She glowered as we pushed past.

Chapter XII

After some distance, I bleated, “What was that all about?! Why was that woman so rude? Who is Kellen Moore?”

Mack was limping a bit but a smile came to his face in spite of it, “Obviously, the woman was a Georgia fan and she apparently doesn’t care for the BSU Broncos.”

“But that seemed a little uncalled for, didn’t it?” I asked.

“Not in this neck of the woods. This is SEC country, and they don’t like any upstart schools like us to come into their territory and give them a beatdown like we did a few years ago. Kellen was our quarterback then and carved up their defense like a Christmas goose. Our defensive line poured through their O-line like a sieve. Seems she hasn’t gotten over it,” Mack ventured. This college football business was a lot more serious than I first thought, in spite of what the GUNBOs had warned me.

We rolled up to the boat and started to unload. The GUNBOs were in a deep, serious discussion. Drewr was making his case, “I think we should get the heck out of here and head up East.” Some heads nodded in agreement as Nikkro countered, “No, forget about the East, it isn’t that big of a deal. Let’s just stay with our plan for the West.”

Chief broke in, “Right now it doesn’t matter, for some reason unknown to me, we can’t get fuel until tomorrow so we’ll have to wait it out one more night right here. Let’s get these provisions stowed...uh, Mack? You alright?”

“Yeah, I’m fine. A bulldog accosted me on the way from the store. Her pet wasn’t much easier on me,” he sighed. Everyone chuckled but I wasn’t sure I got the joke.

Later, the sun was setting as we gathered for another of Mack's great meals. Again he opened a great bottle of wine: a 2008 California cult Cabernet, Scarecrow. I was hanging back with him down in the galley, sipping the most sumptuous red wine I'd ever tasted as the GUNBOs sat at a table on the back deck taking in the pleasant evening. Mack was chopping up some celery root when he suddenly stopped, knife in midair. "You hear that?" he looked at me. We moved closer to the portal window and could clearly hear some voices: two men were snickering, "Wait'll these damn Yankees get a load of this welcome package." "Damn foreigners need to know their place."

The two men were on the dock directly adjacent to the boat in the darkening shadows. Mack held his finger up to his lip signalling quiet. We could here both of the men giggling uncontrollably until one called out, "Let's heave her up there, Jimbo!"

Suddenly a big, heavy burlap bundle came over the side of the boat directly behind the GUNBOs table with a loud thud. The giggling off the side of the boat got louder. In a few seconds, a live alligator nosed his head out of the bag and started to wiggle free.

Chapter XIII

Mack wasted no time: grabbing his sidearm he barked out, “Get that grease trap from below the stove.” He dashed upside as I opened the lower cabinet and found about a five gallon rectangular metal bin almost full of cooking grease and food waste. I grabbed the handle, unlatched the stay, slid it out, and followed him topside, struggling with the bulky weight.

The GUNBOs were terribly startled with the arrival of the alligator package and had all stood up and backed toward the cabin. The reptile slowly but deliberately shed the bag and started towards the table, smelling a meal. Chief saw me coming up with the grease bin and rushed over to grab the other handle. If Mack was surprised about the creature on the deck, he didn’t hesitate: he inched steadily—the Glock held firmly with both hands—towards the gator, and as it started to turn to him, he blasted five successive hollow point rounds from the .45 in a deafening staccato squarely into the gator’s head.

He spun around quickly and yelled, “Empty that bin over the starboard side!” We hoisted it and let the filthy grease pour out. The two giggling rednecks never saw it coming: they both looked up right as the slime hit their heads and shoulders and sloshed onto the dock. A litany of swear words echoed through the marina as they both lost their footing and slipped.

Topside, Mack and the GUNBOs hastily wrapped the dead gator back up in the bag and tossed it overboard on top of the greasy rednecks as they struggled to get up. The weight of the gator knocked them both down again.

Senior wasted no time, “Alright guys, we’re outta here. Cast off the bow mooring ropes,” as he headed to the up to the helm.

Scottie called after him, “What about the fuel?”

“We’ve got enough to get us up the coast, possibly as far as Virginia. Get moving!”

The GUNBOs sprinted to the bow as we heard the engines firing up. In no time, Chief was deftly backing the boat out of the berth and turning out towards the seawall and the open ocean.

As Chief cruised the boat back out into the deeper waters, the rest of us flopped down in the main cabin. Drewr spoke, “Well, it looks like we’re going to try the East for a little while...”

Klee agreed, “Let’s give it some time. We can still head West when we need to.”

Mack and I decided the best plan was to finish the wine and get some food going. It looked as if we’d be asea for a few more days.

Chapter XIV

I felt like I'd been hit by a truck. The actions of the day left me utterly and completely exhausted, so I turned in. The boat was motoring smoothly up the East coast of the U.S., but I was seriously questioning my sanity in my search for The Blue. It seemed as far away and elusive as if I'd never left Mumbai. I greatly appreciated the GUNBOs with their generosity to me and their loyalty to their school, but I couldn't grasp all the animosity from fans of the other schools—especially vandals.

In a deep sleep, I dreamt: I was soaring high above the earth on a peaceful loft. I could see the ground below in quite vivid detail even as it seemed I was too high to be able to discern. Suddenly, I was falling rapidly; I could do nothing to stop the descent. Faster, farther, plummeting helplessly to the ground. I awoke with a start and sat up: there was Munson silently grinning from ear to ear, lightly noodling on this Strat.

“Bad dream?” he wondered.

“I was flying and, uh...um, then I started to fall...” I mumbled.

“No worries, son. You didn't hit the turf, as they say, right? Pull yourself together, we're heading west soon enough and your journey will be over: you'll find The Blue in grand fashion. We have some unfinished business to take care of but you'll be fine,” he offered. Like the other times, he vanished into the air before I could respond.

I fell back to sleep and awoke in the morning to a beautiful blue and orange sunrise off the starboard side. Chief soon slowed the boat and was steering toward land. The GUNBOs were already up working the front end for eventual docking. Chief called out, “We're pulling in for fuel and then heading for New York. You guys will be picking up a bus to head west from there.”

Sounded good to me; my seafaring had been more than I'd anticipated...

Chapter XV

Chief powered down as we inched closer to the fuel dock. An amiable guy was wearing a purple cap with a stylized “VT” on it. Seeing the colors of the boat and our attire he drawled, “Boise State? They don’t play nobody.”

All at once, the GUNBOs responded: “Scoreboard!”

It wasn’t clear if the fuel dock guy understood, but he seemed resigned as he went about his business. Chief gathered us up, “It’ll take a good thirty minutes to get her completely fueled so just kick back for a while.” The GUNBOs were all in loose spirits so I decided to make my move on clearing up what had lead us to this particular moment. As we all flopped down in the large stateroom, I wondered out loud, "You guys have never told me why we got off the oil tanker and onto this boat."

They all looked at each other for a few seconds before Kikkro responded, “We were to hook up with Chief and Mack in the Mediterranean as they were delivering this boat from an Italian boat builder to a wealthy Bronco fan in the New York area. The timing was a bit off because of...” he drifted off as all the GUNBOs were looking at each other again.

Scottie continued, “Remember when the vandals came over the top of the ship?” I nodded. He said, “We kind of knew they were coming. Truth be told, all of those other GUNBOs that night weren’t really some of us but dressed like us to fool the vandals. Most of them were Interpol types trying to bust pirate rings around the African coast. Those vandals are part of a human trafficking gang that kidnaps men and women to be sold as slaves in Northern Africa. They usually book one of their members on a ship with the intent of scouting possible prey. In that case it was the Testicle. He must have radioed the rest of the gang when you boarded...” I felt a slight chill down my back as Scottie finished, “When they saw they were outnumbered by us, we gave them Testicle, but he

was already a gang member. They grabbed him in a show and made a big deal of it. Freez must have split off when they went below, waiting for you. You saved yourself a lot of trouble throwing him overboard, to say the least.”

I tried to let this sink in but I still had more questions, “Well, what were YOU doing on the ship?”

Klee spoke, “We were in Dubai talking with some financial guys, working on a potential global deal for launching our media network. Our talks went well, but some excitable mideastern dudes closed the airport before we could get off the ground. Didn’t have anything to do with us but complicated our coming back. One of the Swiss bankers got us out on one of his ships. Didn’t hurt that he is a big Bronco fan. Came through the Suez canal. That where you got on?” I nodded. “Makes sense. That’s where the vandals work out of,” he concluded. “But we could hardly leave you behind on the ship when you started inquiring about The Blue. It’s important to all of us.”

They all took turns getting me up to speed: Chief and Mack were big BSU fans and former U.S. Navy who worked on spec delivering boats from Italy to the U.S. Both of them may or may not have been Navy SEALs; the guys never asked and they never offered up too much more of their background, but there were clear signs that they wouldn’t back down from much. The return plan was to get ashore on U.S. ground and then fly back to Idaho, but it turned out that another wealthy Bronco backer offered up his luxury bus to let the GUNBOs tour back on the ground. We’d deliver “Pokey” to New York in a day or so and get to motoring west.

I felt awash in relief and gratitude to these GUNBOs; they had saved my life, that was clear. But I still had one enormous question that I grappled with. There was no way I could not ask them about the apparition.

“There’s...um, something I really have to get off my chest, guys,” I stammered.

They all turned to look at me at once. “Go on,” Drewr urged.

“I, uh...it’s just that...um, ever since I boarded the ship, I’ve experienced these...” They peered at me more intently. “I can’t explain it and I’m afraid you’ll think I’m full blown crazy, here,” I begged. “The first night after the vandals left, I woke in the middle of the night to the sound of rock music and this...oh, man, you’re not going to believe me, but this GUY showed up in my

cabin. He was a...guy but not really human form. He was just a shifting shape in blue and orange light playing on...an electric guitar. Look, I'm terribly uncomfortable here trying to explain this but I know it was real: he spoke to me. He's been back around even after I got on this boat. Always with some awesome rock guitar stuff, every time. He just shows up, says something cryptic, wails on his guitar and then...vanishes."

The group stood there looking at me for what seemed like an eternity. I wanted to flee; it felt ridiculous telling them such a wild tale. But I had to; it was all too real to me and I had to get some answers in spite of my discomfort. Ever so slowly, each one of the GUNBOs broke into a wide grin and then outright laughter. [BW!—I KNEW I shouldn't have brought this up: they're laughing at me!] Suddenly they all crowded around me, slapping me on the back and high-fiving me and each other as they roared in unison: MUNSON!!!

Chapter XVI

““**Y**ou KNOW of Munson?” I shrieked. I was elated to learn that I wasn’t going mad or seeing things but their familiarity with the apparition left me nonplussed. Scottie: “Of course! Munson is near and dear to our hearts, us GUNBOs.”

“But he’s a ghost, right?” I probed.

“He is, I guess, but he’s more than that. He’s a free spirit, floating around; pops up when he feels like it, Strat in hand and lays down some serious rock riffs. He passed away a couple of years ago but refuses to go along with the conventional life/death paradigm the rest of us do,” Scottie said with noticeable pride. “Large in life, indomitable in death, as they say right, guys?”

The GUNBOs cheered again.

“It seems Munson keeps an eye out for potential fans of The Blue and shepherds them to epic fandom,” Drewr offered. From my perspective, considering all I’d witnessed on my journey so far, I could hardly disagree with this notion.

“But you have to know this: you can’t summon him. He won’t come if you beckon, that’s for sure,” Klee advised. “Much as he was in life, he’s all on his own terms, maybe even more so.”

We all felt the boat engines firing to life and the GUNBOS headed topside as Chief eased “Pokey” away from the fuel station and steered out through the buoys. Trying to absorb the idea of this Munson spirit, I sank back into a lounge chair, pondering the imponderable: he certainly made his presence known to me and he certainly displayed an ethereal insouciance. Klee’s last admonition stuck in my head: “You can’t summon him...”

Chapter XVII

The cruise to New York was smooth and uneventful (save Mack and I drinking a bottle of 1998 Soldera Riserva Brunello di Montalcino that was to die for), and I awoke the next morning as Chief was making preparations to sail into the harbor. He let us know that a harbor authority boat would be delivering a pilot to navigate between the huge traffic of ferry boats; we'd get off on this delivery boat for shore.

Streaming into the harbor I could clearly see The Statue...on the left.

I could hardly hold back my emotions as we eased our way inland. My home seemed even farther away than I could have imagined before I left, but my heart swelled as I let the idea of arriving in the U.S.—and finally getting off the sea—sink in. Eager to get started west, I gathered my bag and met the rest of the GUNBOs to board the harbor dispatch. Chief and Mack would stay to finalize delivery of “Pokey” to their client before flying west. We all piled onto the boat; the crew immediately recognized the BSU attire and cheerfully helped us. One of them started chatting, “Hey, Boise State! I’m a big fan. Grew up in Idaho but ended up marrying a New York gal. I try to stay current with the football team. Petersen is like a godparent to my young twins!” A second one piped up, “I’ll never forget the ’07 Fiesta Bowl. Out-BWing-standing!” The friendliness of the crew found me a little perplexed—we hadn’t gotten anything like this in the south—but I loved the conviviality nonetheless. The GUNBOs excitedly engaged the crew in talking all things Boise State. It was clear they loved the interaction. Me? I couldn’t take my eyes off the magnificent skyline of Manhattan.

We actually got to shore in New Jersey, and as we made our way from the dock to an enormous parking lot, the door of an enormous custom built bus swung open. The driver, sporting a well-worn blue cap with an orange ‘B’ on it and chomping on an unlit cigar, grinned broadly, “Hop

in, we've been waiting for you!" A couple of other guys in blue caps grabbed our bags and stowed them below.

Entering the bus felt like walking into the most luxurious room on the planet. It was outfitted with wood and leather, flat panel TVs, a generous seating area, sleeping bunks, a bathroom with a shower, generous amounts of liquor, food, and beverages. All the GUNBOs seemed to know the crew of three, but the driver introduced himself as KevB and the other two as KevA and KevC. KevB beamed, "We just got down here from Bristol, Connecticut. Found Mark May's house and emptied the bus sewer tank on his driveway! So we're good to go." He looked at Scottie, "Who's the new guy?"

Not expecting the attention, I stammered, "You can call me kcam."

Chapter XVIII

KevB bellowed, “Alright then, kcam, let’s get saddled up!” We all piled into the bus as he pulled out of the lot and onto a larger street that led to an even larger street that led to a very congested expressway. All the GUNBOs got in a relaxed state as someone started playing video of past BSU games on the flat screens. Everyone had their own stories, tales, anecdotes, and vandal jokes. It was odd for me as I knew next to nothing about what animated each and every one of them—Boise State football—but I felt myself pulled into their enthusiasm and fervor. Intentionally or not, no one ever actually gave me the history as one long overview; instead I found myself piecing together the narrative of a remarkable story that still seemed sort of unbelievable.

I soon found out that the plan was to drive nonstop across the U.S. with the Kevs taking turns at the wheel—they estimated it would take three days. I was more than content to merely be along for the ride, but I simply couldn’t fathom just how far we’d be travelling and the vastness of the country. KevC helpfully pulled out a map and showed me the route we’d be taking and how many statelines we would cross before arriving in Idaho; it was exciting to anticipate.

So the cross country trek ensued. We had plenty of food and drink for the crew. KevA (who later told me it wasn’t really his name) found we had similar interests in wine and conversed a great deal between all the football lore and speculation for the coming season. We only stopped for fuel and were generally received by the locals with a mixture of curiosity and diffidence. By this time I had learned how feverish fans were about their teams and protective of their turf—especially the south for some reason. Somewhere in the Midwest we stopped for fuel, and a couple of the attendants, noticing our attire, got a little testy about something called the Fiesta Bowl. Klee filled me in, “Oklahoma Sooner fans. BSU beat them in 2007 in what is regarded as perhaps the greatest college football game ever played.”

“That’s some lofty praise. You’re not pulling my leg, are you?” I asked.

“I never joke about such things, kcam,” he stated flatly.

Point taken, I mused to myself as the bus headed west into a vibrant blue evening sky.

Chapter XIX

I found myself enjoying my newfound comrades even more than I'd thought. Over the three day trip, I'd learned much about their various backgrounds even if I were somewhat reticent about my own. The reluctance wasn't borne out of anything more than the idea that reciting it would elicit howls of disbelief, I was certain. All of the road warriors didn't press me too hard and I was all the more grateful for it. Some of *their* stories were pretty interesting anyway. I was amused when KevC told me how he ended up being part of the bus crew to the New York area: turns out he was the agent for a transaction of a \$110 million dollar sale of a vintage midget erotic art collection. The discreet buyer was the mayor of New York.

Soon enough, we crossed the state line into Idaho, and I could feel my excitement rising. I was getting closer to my dream of finding The Blue than I'd ever been. KevB was driving and announced that our bus tour would end in a place called Twin Falls. The crew seemed a little let down until he continued, "Don't worry, guys. We're flying into Boise on a chartered plane. It'll be grand!" Everyone perked up except me: I had never flown before, and the thought of it filled me with trepidation.

KevA was watching me, "You don't seem to like that bit of news, partner."

"I'm not thrilled about it; it will be a first for me," I mumbled.

He smiled broadly, "Considering the bits of information you've given us about your trip so far, this will be a snap, kcam. We'll be up and down in no more than 30 minutes. You'll love it! We should be on ground just in time for the game."

"Game?" I wondered.

"Sure," he said, "you get to see your first Boise State football game tomorrow, champ!" That was the first I'd heard of this, and it cheered me considerably.

I wended my way back to the back of the bus and found a bunk. Dark was settling, and I needed time alone to ponder the next day. Pulling the curtain across the berth, I lay back, and before I knew it, I was asleep. But not for long: Munson showed up but just his visage, no guitar, and no rock music. "So...big day tomorrow, huh, kid?" he grinned. "Don't worry, Ole' Munsie's got your back."

His face floated above me.

"What does that mean, exactly?" I asked.

"You'll know tomorrow. Rest up. Big day and all."

Then he vanished...again.

Chapter XX

The bus rolled into a small airport in Twin Falls and right up to a pretty good-sized twin prop plane that looked to hold about twenty people. KevB stopped the bus, killed the engine, and popped open the door as we all piled out. To my surprise, there were two women standing aft of the wing who Klee indentified as Livity and BeeBee. Everyone seemed to know them as Klee introduced me, "We picked up a new member of the GUNBOs across the ocean. This is kcam."

They both smiled and offered to help me with my stuff. BeeBee said, "We're always welcome to new members and Bronco fans. You ready to take off?"

"I, um...I'm a little scared, actually. I've never flown before," I stammered.

Livity popped up, "You'll be fine. We've done this flight dozens of times."

"We?" I asked.

"Yeah, BeeBee and I are your 'flight ninjas'. We help get everyone situated and go over emergency stuff if something goes wrong," she assured me. I wasn't feeling assured in the least. "We're also here to kick ass if need be," she followed rather cryptically. "Come on, let's get what you want stowed below."

I grabbed my bag, headed to the cargo door while everyone started tossing their stuff in. We were all aft of the wings and a bit under the fuselage. There was lots of joking and kidding around as we got things stowed. No one saw the stranger climb into the plane.

Inside the cockpit, our pilot, Gunny, was going through his pre-flight routine when he heard the cockpit door click closed behind him. Turning around, he found himself looking straight into the barrel of a revolver. The stranger spoke, "Don't say a word and no one gets hurt."

Gunny winced at the gun but also how bad the stranger smelled. The stranger locked the cockpit door and settled into a small jump seat behind and to the right of Gunny, "Just get this plane to Boise and y'all will be fine. Looks like you got yourself a plane full of donkeys. Never liked the donkeys much. Y'all think you're sumthin' but you ain't no land grant school..." he trailed off. He had a strange, stupid gleam in his eyes as Gunny turned back around and faced forward to continue—but mostly because the stranger's breath was so bad—as he wondered what the hell was going on. Years in the USAF and private aviation and he'd never been in a situation like this before.

We all started to board as BeeBee rapped on the cockpit door, "Everything okay in there, Gunny?"

He hesitated but called out, "I'm fine, get everyone seated and we're off. Already got tower clearance."

As we got in our seats, Livity got on the intercom, "Alright, people, you know the drill. Seatbelts on. Parachutes in the space above. Toss your carry-ons below or above, wherever you can find room. This is a short hop as you know. Should be on the ground in Boise in about 30." The plane started to taxi out on to the runway. I heard all the words she was saying but could only remember one: parachutes.

Chapter XXI

The whine of the turboprops grew louder as we turned onto the runway then grew to a roar as the plane accelerated, gradually lifting the nose and then the rest of the plane into the air. My stomach churned a bit as we lifted off and rapidly gained altitude. I nervously watch the ground fall away then turned to find BeeBee's gaze. "You okay?" she asked. I actually wasn't as tense as I probably looked, "I'm doing fine, I guess." "Good, this will be over in no time," she said and turned away.

Ahead in the cockpit, Gunny was playing it cool but the stranger wouldn't stop talking: "I know y'all think your dinky school is hot BW, but you're just going to be a flash in the pan. Donkeys don't have a hundred plus years to claim as their heritage. Only the flagship school, University of Idaho, will be here in the long haul. Y'all are nothin' but a junior college. All the great people in Idaho are vandals..." Gunny piped up, "You mean, like, Larry Craig?" The stranger paused, "Who?" Gunny said nothing but tried to concentrate on piloting, muttering to himself, "Damn, this dude smells bad!" The stranger kept up his rant, "We've got vandal pride, y'all! What've you donkeys got, a truck-driving school? Boise isn't even a state. Idaho has better academics..." And so it went: Gunny pulled the plane to cruising altitude and activated auto.

Livty got on the intercom, "Alright everybody, sit tight, we've leveled off. Kick back and I'll let you know when we're approaching Boise." Turning forward, she rapped on the cockpit door first and tried the handle finding it locked. "Hey, Gunny, the door's locked. Everything okay in there?" She paused as she could hear a loud voice behind the door. The loud, steady hum of the engines kept her from hearing precisely what was being said, but the voice she didn't recognize sounded pretty animated and loud. She called out again, "Gunny, dude. What's going on in there? Open the door."

Inside, the stranger kept up his rant as if he hadn't heard the rap on the door. "I'm proud to be a vandal. Damn proud. We'll always have our pride. And our academics. And our pride. And..." Gunny started to feel light headed from the stench of the stranger and his bloviating and calmly redirected his air vent more to his face. "Gotta keep my senses. Can't believe how bad it smells in here. This loser won't stop yammering." The stranger seemed to come to his senses and realized someone was behind the cockpit door and paused, throwing his head back and over his shoulder, signaling to Gunny to respond. "I'm fine. The door lock must be jammed. Nothing I can do about it until we land. Starting our initial descent in about five. Get everyone set."

I watched Livity standing by the door but I didn't have clue what was going on. Looking around, I noticed no one else seemed too concerned. I leaned back and started to close my eyes. Just then I saw a small flash of orange and blue light just in front of my face but it vanished just as quickly. "Must be the altitude," I mused to myself. Closing my eyes again, it flashed again. I glanced around: no one seemed to see it but me. Everyone was quietly reading or had their eyes shut, drifting to the drone of the engines. I must have dozed off for a short spell but awoke as I could simultaneously feel the plane start to slow and descend. Livity stood back up and everyone could see the serious concern on her face as she came to the middle of the plane and spoke, "Listen, guys, something is not right up in that cockpit. I could hear two voices and I don't recognize one. We leaned closer as she continued, "I don't know what the hell is going on but I don't like it. The door's locked. I trust Gunny with my life but we've maybe got a situation on our hands here..." Suddenly, the plane lurched downward. Livity grabbed the top of a seat and held her footing. "Oh crap. I don't like this at all!"

Gunny was laboring to maintain his faculties. His vision blurred as he gasped for air. The stranger would not stop talking and the noxious gas-like breath he exhaled was turning the small cockpit into smelly sauna. He suddenly realized he had let the nose of the plane dip and quickly righted it into a controlled descent but he was more afraid he was about to pass out.

Livity found her way back to the cockpit door and rapped as loudly as possible, calling out, "Gunny! What the hell was that?!" The plane again suddenly dropped violently and threw her to the floor. She got up and peered out the cabin door window, "Holy crap, we're losing altitude fast!" Unexpectedly, the intercom from the flight deck came on, a man's voice in loud rant: "Who do we hate? Boise State! I always liked that one. One of our drunken frat boys stayed up all night coming

up with that one. I wouldn't mind if Boise State ceased to exist. Not really a real school anyhow..." Stunned, we all stared at each other, struggling to make sense of what was going on. BeeBee and Livity barked out, "Get those parachutes on. NOW!" I froze: my first time on a plane and I'd have to jump out of it? The GUNBOs jumped into action. Klee saw the sheer terror in my eyes, "kcam, we don't have time to waste. This is just a precaution." "I've never done this. I don't know how to use a...parachute!" He climbed into his gear and showed me the ripcord, "If we have to jump, pull this metal ring as soon as you can. If that doesn't work, here's the auxiliary chute pull. Once again the plane lurched but we all stayed standing. "Come on, man," Klee pleaded, "get this thing on. It may save your life!" I sort of snapped out of my fear and got rigged.

Gunny was losing it. He knew it. "Must...maintain control..." Then he passed out. The stranger jumped into the copilot chair and pulled back on the wheel halting the descent to the west and banked north climbing in altitude and headed for...Bronco Stadium.

"What the..." Klee shouted. Everyone on the plane knew how dangerous our position was but no one said anything. With the plane gaining altitude BeeBee and Livity held everyone back, "If we have to jump, we need some airtime, guys. We have to wait a little bit longer." Everyone could feel the plane wasn't being piloted correctly and the wait was beyond agonizing. Suddenly, they pushed to the back and...opened the aft door. The air rushed into the cabin as they screamed, "GET OUT!"

The Stadium was packed. Just 15 minutes before kickoff and everyone in the stadium looked and cheered the flyby. All of a sudden, parachutes appeared and the crowd roared with delight. A dozen or so parachutists had jumped to delight the crowd with some pre-game entertainment.

The GUNBOs wasted no time. Klee and I were last before the flight ninjas. "Pull that ring as soon as you jump! We don't have much elevation!" I hesitated. Klee and the two women came up close behind and shrieked, "Jump." I stepped off the plane...into midair.

In the cockpit, the stranger was cackling in demonic glee. He seemed not to notice the blue and orange light that filled the small space. He never saw the fire extinguisher unclipped from the wall. And the last thing he saw as he turned his head back was a bearded, cowboy-hatted, sunglasses-wearing apparition swing the metal canister across his jaw, knocking him cold. The cockpit door suddenly swung open and the blast of air jolted Gunny awake. He grabbed the controls and pulled

back gaining more altitude. "What the hell happened?" He screamed to no one. He saw the stranger slumped to his left and could see his dislocated jaw turning a sickly gold color.

I was falling. I could see the other parachutes billow open with fast rushing air. Time seemed to stop. I could think of my instructions but I couldn't find the strength to pull the ring. All I could see below was a giant field of...Blue. Blue. I was literally falling into The Blue. The GUNBOs split directions: some headed to the east side parking lot and I could see Klee, Drewr, Nikkro, and Scottie heading to the top of a big stadium structure on the west. I pulled the ring: nothing happened. Panicked, I yanked on the auxiliary ring: nothing happened.

Gunny radioed the airport and requested another landing. Glancing aft he saw nothing but an empty plane and a wide open aft door. "What the...?"

I knew I was dead. I closed my eyes and thought of my home ten million miles away. Galaxies away. Light years. I succumbed. In that moment, I stopped falling and started to float slowly to the earth. Slower and slower as I was going to land on top of the press box structure in a whirling cloud of blue and orange light. Then the rock music started. My eyes popped open in utter disbelief: I had landed with the GUNBOs! They were all clapping me on the back as they shed the parachute gear. "What happened?!?" I screamed. They paused and in unison yelled out: MUNSON! I turned around to see Munson, blue and orange Strat dangling from his shoulder, grinning ear to ear. Nearly breaking down in wonderment, relief and gratitude, I blurted out, "Munson, you saved my life! How can I ever repay you?"

He paused for a moment and then said, "How about a rec?"

FIN