

Chapter 8: Rock Climbing

Aug drove west along I-96. The October sun burned in his eyes. He had his shades off as he drove along looking dead into the orb. The windows were open and so was the sun roof but he had the heat on too. Joe Walsh sang to him of an *Indian Summer* but there was no rain or thunder. The air smelled so fresh and warm. Not Florida warm; odd fall Michigan warm. It was the type of Michigan warm that doesn't last past sunset. The Indian Summer warm would become crisp in a few hours. He didn't hear the thunder. But at least the temperature made it to the sixties and it wouldn't get all the way to freezing.

He decided to exit in Portland and drive along East Grand River Avenue. He drove his Ford past some farms with spotted maples already showing orange and intense red colors. Nature's annual acid trip of seeing colors was peaking in the area. He saw the merge with Klotz road coming up. A large old truck with migrant looking people inside came down Klotz. He sped up a little to get on Grand River before the truck so that he wouldn't be stuck behind it.

The intersection at 66 came up. A worn billboard for the Ionia Free Fair caught his eye. It was another year of not returning to it. He was now forty years old. He was 66 at 66. When he was a kid he had come over and seen REO play. Nothing had been free except fair entrance. Everything else from parking to rides to the concert all cost a lot. Everything but the young girls they had met and had fun with. But, in a way, they also cost money too. They just didn't have a sign out front advertising a cost. The Ionia Free Fair had been good preparation for life.

It felt funny that...so many years later...he was driving past by the past. So many years later and so many big shows later many groups like REO Speedwagon end up back at places like the Ionia Free Fair. They climbed the mountain and descended. Moving back was moving on but somehow it sure wasn't the same. If he came back to the Ionia Free Fair some day it wouldn't be the same.

He remembered the cheesy "History of Torture" Chamber that he had wasted a few bucks on. The tape playing overhead advertised that *You can see the agony on their faces! You can smell the burning flesh!* The only burning smell was the burn in his pocket from the money that burned through.

He drove along idly thinking other thoughts that single male drivers will think. Thoughts like of a car drive he once had. One hand was on the wheel while the other hand was busy steering. Back in the distance of the rear view he saw a blur zip around the truck he left behind. He wasn't cruising too fast; it shouldn't be the Noid coming to pop him. Maybe it was Terrible Ted taking a Vette out for a spin? The vehicle was humming closer.

A semi loomed ahead along the straightway between the farms. Aug decided he could pass it before the...it looked like a tinted window Tranny...caught up. He pulled out in the far

lane a little and pulled back. A vehicle approached in the other lane. He slid back behind the semi. The Trans Am pulled right up on his bumper annoying him. The other lane vehicle cleared past the semi. Sammy Hagar had dropped back behind him. Should he go? He wanted the annoying driver to fly by first but they had erratically fallen back.

He pulled left to see if he could clear the semi before the other traffic came. The Tranny blew up along his right bumping him over into the other lane. Traffic was coming. *Eff You Asshole!* he thought. He figured he would slow up and let the Tranny clear and he would drop behind. The Tranny PIT'ed him instead. He started to lose control of the 300. The back of his car swung out. The oncoming traffic was near the front of the semi. The Tranny had dropped back after tapping him into a ramming position. Aug floored it cranking the wheel right and left to gain control.

The Tranny missed barely him. He found himself plowing through a corn field hearing ears of corn THUMP THUM THUMP off the body of the car before he could stop.

GRRR! he thought. He slammed his hands on the steering wheel. *What an Ass!* He calmed down a bit thinking about what had just happened. *Was that an Accident...or an Intentional?* he wondered. He decided to chill out for a little before heading back to the road.

It took a little rocking to get the Caddy out of the field and back out to Grand River. He took a look before booking back out but he didn't see anything untoward toward him. He slowly headed west. Jordan Lake passed. Bliss passed. He started feeling calmer and cruised back up to doing fifty five. He passed Jackson and the road bend started.

From his left from a small factory drive came the Tranny. The car seemed to roar out of the oaks and maples. The vehicle hopped on his bumper. It rode him off the road and up an incline straight into an oak.

BAM! CRASH!

The air bag exploded into his face as red and scarlet leaves wafted down over his hood. Aug heard the Caddy crunch. POOF! The bag deflated. Aug sat there thinking about how it wasn't an accident. It definitely was an intentional.

Aug hopped out of the vehicle. He walked around to the front to inspect the damage. The front end was crunched a bit but he didn't see liquids escaping anywhere underneath. He drummed his fingers along the hood of the car. He heard a vehicle approaching. The migrant looking people passed by looking at him look at them. *How simple their life is* he thought. *No damn Van Hagar wannabe will ever run any of them off the road!*

He walked back to the vehicle. It fired up. He backed down onto the road maneuvering the wheel with the exploded skirt in the way.. The turn north on Morrison Lake Road came up. He followed the road as it wound through country eventually changing into South Bridge Street and then across Division Street into North Bridge Street. Joe's Place came up on his right. He pulled around into a back parking lot. He closed up the 300 and went inside.

The local bar restaurant didn't have many patrons inside. Aug recognized the body sitting in a chair with an arm shoulder cast extending from the left shoulder in an extended manner. A pitcher of beer sat on the table as well as an appetizer of beer battered gizzards. Aug didn't see the other expected body around. He wickedly smiled to himself.

Steve champion sat at the table enjoying the view on the tube. A jiggle girl was on some TV News show. She became joined by another jiggle girl on another segment of the TV news show. Angus dominated the ambience of the bar with some *High Voltage*. Steve liked that. If he had to listen to what they were saying he would be annoyed. Now he was thinking about a threesome. *There's some high voltage for ya!* he thought. After breaking his collarbone he felt he deserved it.

"OOOWWW!!" Steve exclaimed. He felt a nogie being knuckled into his head. He involuntarily swung his casted arm around. "OOOWWW!!" Steve exclaimed. The movement hurt like hell. He heard laughter behind him as his hair and skull continued to be knuckled. Alternating "STOP IT!" & "OOOWWW!"s rang out across the bar.

Aug loved it. Rarely had he ever had such an opportunity in his life. Either Mike or Steve always seemed to be there to help the other. He had an opportunity and he took full advantage of it. Steve was helpless.

Steve knew he was helpless. He could Aug laughing. Being Steve he happened to have a Bowie knife strapped to his leg for just because. While Aug rapped his head Steve used his good arm to free the knife. He knew it would be very painful but he hopped upturning his body with the knife out going after Aug.

SPLASH!

Steve took out the pitcher of beer on the table as he rose up. He brought the blade up towards Aug's throat. Aug saw him coming so he let go of Steve's head. Steve had no leverage. He kept spinning around. CRASH! Steve banged around into the table.

Aug laughed heartily at Steve's buffoonery. "Hey Hey!" he offered. "Look at the town drunk! Better cut that man off!"

Steve righted himself. He thought about what to do with the knife. He wanted to bury it in either the table or Aug and he momentarily made threatening motions to do either. He finally did neither and let the blade go harmlessly to the table. "Dipschitz!" Steve exclaimed. "Good to see ya again!"

"You too, cripple!" Aug exclaimed. They wanted to hug each other but they looked like Moe and Curly trying to figure out how to make it happen around Steve's cast. "Aww, fuck it!" Aug said. "Have a seat; I'll get another pitcher. What 'er we havin?"

Steve grinned. "Whatever yer buyin'!"

Aug didn't make it to the bar before the waitress greeted him. She carried wet towels asking "What the hell are you boys doin' over there to my nice clean table!"

Aug laughed. "Hey! What can I say? My buddy's a lightweight! He can't handle a little beer in him."

"Yeah, right" she said rolling her eyes passing him and leading the way back to the table. She started cleaning up the mess noting the knife. "Put that thing away! Geez! Are you guys *tryin'* ta get tossed outta here? Ya know, closin' time is a few hours away. We don't usually toss people for a few hours from now!"

Aug looked at Steve and then the waitress. "You're in luck. Numbnuts here doesn't usually toss chunks til a few hours from now anyway."

Steve laughed. He blew Aug kisses. "Mmm but for you kissy face I'll make an exception."

"Serious?" Aug asked.

"Serious, Lover Boy" Steve answered.

The waitress finished wiping the table down and resetting the appetizer. "OK, none a that now here! We run a straight establishment here. There's a rest are over in Lake Odessa if you boys wanna go drive through and see whatcha find there!"

"Oh, really?" Aug rhetorically remarked. He turned to Steve asking "Hey Steve, where's your monkey kissin' brother?"

"He's on the throne" Steve answered. "HEY! Come to think of it, he *has* been in there quite a while. You don't suppose...?"

Noises were heard coming from the Men's room as the door opened outwards. Mike Champion and another man came walking out. Mike held his hands about two feet extended from each other saying to the other gentleman "Oh My God it was like this big. And then when we ate it was like really salty tasting. It actually tasted really good."

"Really?" the guy asked Mike.

"Oh yeah" Mike said. "If you're looking for somethin' different sometime you might give it a try."

The man told Mike "I'll keep that in mind. Thanks." The man took off towards the back exiting out the door Aug had entered the restaurant from.

Mike turned to the table. "Auggie! Hey you Schnitzelbanger! It's nice a you ta finally show up!" He came to give Aug a hug but Aug backed off smiling and looking at Steve and the waitress. They were all looking at Mike with silly grins.

Aug said "Um, nice to see you too Mike." He slowly extended his hand for a shake saying "I hope you washed up after handling whatever big salty thing you were just talking about."

"Oh" Mike said "We were just talking about some curry food recipes. You can take a big carp and make it Bengali style with a bunch of chili and potatoes and other stuff and you get a huge dish that tastes really good."

"And Big and salty" the waitress said.

"It makes a whopper of a tasty meal" Mike said. "You can..." he noticed the gut splitting laughs everyone had. "Hey! What are you sayin?"

"We ain't sayin' nothing!" Aug said. "You're the one coming out of the men's room talkin' bout how you like a big salty tasty meal." He grabbed himself saying "If you're still hungry, ya know, we can leave Steve here with a pitcher for a little while..."

Mike laughed. "Yeah it's nice to see you too, Mother fucker!" He laughed some more. "The only place I'll take you is to take you out back and kick yer fuckin' ass you butt muncher."

"Are you boys gonna ride on up to the rest area or are you gonna order something?" The waitress asked. "I do got other customers here ya know."

Aug answered "Bring us a pitcher of...oh I don't know, ya got Blue on Tap?"

"Sure do, Hon" she replied.

"Alright...Menu's, a pitcher of Blue, Another pitcher of Blue, Three shots of Jack, beer glasses, and some regular drinking glasses" Aug said.

"Two pitchers of blue, three shots of Jack, and glasses. And menus." the waitress. "When do ya want a cab called?"

"Yeah, right" Mike said. "Just get us our drinks, will ya?"

"Is this all one tab?" she asked.

Mike and Steve pointed at Aug speaking in unison. "He's buying." Aug shrugged; they all sat down.

Aug looked at Steve. His facial swelling had gone down but the bruising was still well evident. "Holy Shit Steve! You look better than I've ever seen you!"

"Yeah up yours too!" was Steve's reply. "You haven't always been so hot looking yerself! It's a good thing you're a righty cuz that claw of yer's ain't gonna be cuttin' it takin' care of biznezz."

Aug laughed. "Ya got that right!" He eyed Steve up and down. "I betcha that ain't too much fun yerself."

Steve moved his free arm to the top of Aug's head. "Yeah well why don'tcha help me out down there." Steve pressed down. "You owe me one ya know. I'll take a down payment."

Aug backed away, laughingly. "Watch it know. I do'n wanna hurt a cripple, ya know."