

CHAPTER 1

A WONDERFUL DAY FOR FISHING AND REFLECTION

Hunter Jordan started his day off, just as he had so many days of his first fifty plus years of walking the Earth. Perhaps he was on the wrong track. Perhaps, the wrong planet. Only time will tell. While he knew he had a funeral to attend, he started his day by heading to the beach with the prospect of catching dinner, foremost in his mind. Along with Mud, his best and perhaps only friend, Hunter strolls along a deserted beach, in search of the perfect rock. The rock upon which he would perch and reflect upon his life, while at the same time, be able to keep a close eye on his nearby fishing rod.

Mud, Hunter's eight year old Labrador retriever and constant companion, while attentive to Hunter's every whim, had his own agenda to attend to, while visiting their favorite stretch of beach.

First off, there were Seagulls and various other Seabirds to chase and disrupt, as he scampered playfully in the surf. While he was fully aware that he would never catch one, he knew that God had placed them on his and Hunter's stretch of beach, for their amusement. Aside from that, what possible function could they possibly have?

Secondly, he needed to keep an eye on Hunter's fishing rod in case there is a strike. God knows Hunter's mind is prone to wandering and if Mud doesn't bark when there's a strike, they'd both miss out on a freshly caught dinner.

Being on the left coast of this wonderful country, the sun was just coming up over the hills that run parallel to the beach when Hunter and Mud had arrived.

Both Hunter and Mud would have definitely preferred to watch it rise up from out of the Pacific Ocean. Never the less, they settled for watching it appear above the hills, through an orange glow created by the sunrise, filtering through an early morning mist.

A great majority of days for the twosome started in this manner, although the northern California mornings weren't always this misty. It would seem, however, that the sun would always rise at the appropriate time and Hunter and Mud would often greet its arrival. Relatively simple by the modern standards set forth for the modern day inhabitants of twenty first century, coastal

California. further, this was the life they had chosen to live. And, as a result, they were forced to bear the burden of their choices.

For Mud, this was simple. Hell, he was of course, only a dog and therefore there were no false expectations placed upon him to do anything other than frolic in the surf and chase after the elusive seabirds. Now, that's a pretty decent lot in life.

Hunter, on the other hand was a man and therefore had spent the majority of his fifty plus years attempting to live up to the expectations of others. To make matter's worse; Hunter's father was a career Army officer and expected great things from his first child and only son.

While Hunter had loved his father as a youngster, his own life seemed cursed by his father's expectations and accomplishments. Despite these expectations, or perhaps due to them, Hunter had made the choice at an early age, to become a photographer. An artist if you will. To say the least, this was a decision that didn't set well with the Colonel. From the day that Hunter had informed his father of his decision, they had rarely; if ever, spoken to one another.

Nearly all communications from that day forward became the responsibility of Hunter's mother.

So now, an aging and disillusioned hippie throwback sits before us in jeans, a tweed jacket and a fedora. He sports a graying ponytail and several days of salt and pepper scruff, obscuring his weather and age-worn face. His idealism appears nearly as faded as the blue jeans he sports. His only concern at present, catch a few fish and make it to a funeral on time. Not much of a challenge, but sometimes life hands us distractions and challenges that we had better learn to deal with. The failure to do so can be at the root of far too many otherwise avoidable sources of aggravation.

While we were getting acquainted with Hunter and Mud, Hunter has reclined on his favorite rock, as he mused over the sight of Mud frolicking in the surf and chasing after the elusive seabirds. Of course, this wasn't nearly enough to occupy Hunter's time. He had to supplement that activity with blankly gazing across the broad Pacific Ocean and reflecting over his past fifty plus years and how disappointed his father must have been. Whew. Now, that makes for a pretty fulfilling morning's work. At least it has served Hunter's needs.

Oh, I almost forgot, Hunter landed several fish during this time and me, I choose not to bore you with any further details of this days catch.

I'm quite certain that you are wondering why Hunter was reflecting upon how he had disappointed his father. First off, we all do that from time to time. Also, remember that earlier, I mentioned the funeral that Hunter was supposed to attend. Well, as it turns out, it is his father's funeral and Hunter and Mud are about to head off in that general direction.

Unfortunately, we often wait until it's too late, before we consider how our choices have affected others. Sometimes that choice is purposeful, at other times, simply selfish or forgetful. Hunter

spent his time trying to sort out which was which and perhaps even why things had turned out as they had.

While I promise not to attempt to moralize too often, it is my thought that it just might provide some insight into Hunter's predicament and perhaps my limited number of readers may be burdened with similar circumstances that might bring them pause. Regardless, I will do this from time to time.

The cemetery is located across the highway from the beach and only a short walk from the very rock, upon which Hunter is currently perched upon.

Hunter strings his morning catch and places the stringer in Mud's mouth. He places his rods across his shoulder and off they go.

The sun is now well above the hills, running alongside the beach. The mist is not nearly as heavy as it was when they reached their fishing spot, but this is northern California and there is nearly always mist lingering in the air until well into the morning.

Despite the coolness and overall dismal feel of the morning, there were probably about fifty people gathered around the grave site, when Hunter and Mud arrive.

Hunter retrieves the morning catch from Mud and places it at the base of a nearby rock. He leans his rods against a tree and kneels near another rock, as he looks out over the somber proceedings.

Many of the attendees are in Military uniforms, a combination of officers and noncommissioned officers stand sharply around the grave site. Sprinkled amongst them, several older women mill about.

A Minister approaches the gathering, as Hunter and Mud find a certain degree of camouflage within a small stand of nearby trees. The Minister scans the gathering of mourners and opens a Bible. He reads several passages from the book of Psalms, as the mourners look on and listen. Upon completing his readings, many of the mourners step forward and place roses and toss handfuls of dirt upon the casket, before it is lowered into the cold ground.

While many among the mourners are from the military, this is by no means a military funeral. No rifles are being fired and no flag is neatly folded and placed upon the casket or handed to the grieving widow. The casket is simply lowered into the grave.

Following ceremony, Hunter stands and disappears without a word to any of the other mourners. Mud follows Hunter into the nearby woods and together they disappear.

Around the grave site, numerous mourners mingle and talk to one another. One elderly woman looks around, seemingly searching the area for someone.

Several other women gather around her and they embrace. This represents our first opportunity to meet Hunter's mother, but most definitely, not our last. For she is now and has always been a major influence upon Hunter's life. Quite possibly, his most ardent supporter.

Hunter, hidden amongst the stand of trees, glances at his father's grave a final time. He sees his mother, then turns and walks deeper into the woods. As he walks through the heavy foliage, you can see by the wrinkle of his brow and the narrowness of his eyes that he has not finished reflecting upon the terrible disappointment he believes he has been to his family. He walks further into the dense forest.