

ORLANDO: I THINK THAT'S ANDREW

Orlando, Florida—23 January 2017—Monday. Three days after Trump's inauguration. Two days after the Women's March on Washington and women's marches all over the world protesting Trump, including a spectacularly jubilant and high-spirited march around the perimeter of Lake Eola here in Orlando.

Ansley has had it. We've been making our way into homeless shelters and showing the receptionists a recent photograph of Andrew, a profile Ansley's brother Graham had taken. Andrew looks tall, powerful, handsome, stern. His expression is serious and blank. This has not been his expression for most of his life. He's tan, has inch-long hair—no longer the Marine shaved head—a sharply trimmed moustache and goatee, and he's looking straight ahead. He's down at the lake, trees and bushes in the background. He has a backpack slung over his shoulder, is wearing a dark blue sweatshirt with a fluorescent orange work vest over it, and baggy black carpenter jeans, spots of white paint splattered across the legs, and he's our son. We've been searching for him for three days and nights now.

Graham, who is only twelve years older than Andrew and has always been close to him, had been riding his bike around Orlando, trying to locate Andrew, asking homeless people about him, learning what he was doing, where he was living, all while not revealing himself; he didn't want to scare Andrew off. Over the telephone, before we flew down, Graham explained that late one afternoon,

standing behind a grove of trees, he'd discovered Andrew in a park by Lake Eola. "I took out a twenty-dollar bill, asked a homeless man to walk over and hand it to Andrew." Graham laughed. "The homeless man walked up to Andrew. I saw him hand Andrew the bill. Andrew threw the bill back at him. I couldn't believe it, Patrick. Just threw it at him." I thought this was a good sign. Andrew wasn't taking handouts. He had his pride. We'd find him. We'd find him and he still has that fire in his belly.

And now, it's over. After searching for three days and nights, it's time to go home. Our bags are packed and in the trunk. It's late morning. We have one hour left, max, before we must leave for the airport to catch our flight back to Maryland.

We've just revisited the Rescue Mission, where, two days earlier I'd been encouraged when the director told us he thought Andrew had not just one, but two jobs. We pushed on to Catholic Charities, and then, to still another shelter, all in the same five-block area. Our trip has been in vain. Days off from our schools. Flight down Friday, flight back Tuesday. Hundreds of dollars for the hotel room, the car, parking at the hotel, parking at the Baltimore airport, meals. High hopes.

On our first day, driving into Orlando in the early morning, I'd spotted a tall, long-legged, hatless man outside the library as we pulled up at a light. "That's Andrew! I think that's Andrew," I'd told Ansley.

"What're you doing?" she'd asked.

I was in the left lane and had just gone under the stoplight. I slowed. Cars were passing on our right. Cars were ganging up behind us. A steady stream—two lanes of traffic—was coming toward us on our left. I tried to get in the right lane so I could find a parking place. No one would let me over. I slowed further. "Patrick, what are you doing?" I was thinking of stopping the car right there in the midst of the traffic—that was my son and I had to get him!—but

that wouldn't be safe for Ansley. I saw a street on the left. There was an opening, a break in the oncoming traffic. I whipped the steering wheel to the left, mashed down on the accelerator—"Patrick!"—zipped across two lanes onto the side-street, parked, jumped out, and since Andrew had been pacing up the hill on the front side, I ran uphill, around the back of the block-wide library, and back down. I rushed toward a group milling around the front doors. Looked up and down the sidewalk. Quickstepped into the expansive foyer, looked in every direction, my excitement fizzling. Turned, began to trudge toward the car. Then, I saw a small park with some homeless people lying on benches, and across the park, there was a closed-off street. I could make out American flags and men in camouflage with camouflage backpacks. I jogged toward it.

Men and women, in their twenties and thirties. Men with no shirts on. All in sand-colored military boots. It was chilly—early morning: I was wearing a polo shirt, cashmere sweater and a blazer. I buttoned the blazer. Andrew might've been headed here! They were laughing and talking and adjusting their backpacks; the scene radiated goodwill and health and machismo. Rock n' roll playing. American flags flying. A sign proclaiming "March for Veterans."

Three policemen were leaning on their bikes by the entrance, cheerfully protecting the gathering that didn't need protection. A pub was open. Laughing and shirtless men were popping the tops on beers.

A veteran walked over, asked if he could help. I explained I was looking for my son, a Marine vet, two tours in Iraq. I felt the pride for Andrew rising up in my chest, and then it was mixed with something else—was it loss, was it grief, was it a feeling of powerlessness? I struggled to not choke up as I stated that he now had PTSD and might be on the streets.

"We're having a march to support veterans, to get veterans out working together," he told me. "Twenty-two a day commit suicide. So we march through town, twenty-two kilometers, raising awareness, lifting the spirits of veterans, stopping at pubs, and we have a

beer or two along the way. We want veterans to know there's another choice. We've all been through it, and they can join us. We'll support them. We'll help them."

"What's in the backpacks?" I asked

"Twenty-two kilograms of weight."

I ran back, got Ansley, returned. This could be a healing experience. Why wasn't he here? A hundred of them bunched up at the start, laughing and joking. A young woman who could not have weighed more than one hundred and twenty-five pounds approached us. Shouldering her fifty-pound pack, standing with perfect erect posture, she inquired how we were doing.

She gave us a card: March for Veterans. Told us to urge Andrew to contact them. I asked about the shorts the men were wearing. "Silkies," she laughed. "Those are the Marine silkies."

Off they went, spectators applauding, a mom beside me cheering on her son who was dwarfed by the large bizarre-looking, mascot-like horse head he was wearing. I asked about him. "Yes," she said smiling. "Yes, he has problems." She laughed as he danced around a circle, reared up, pawed the air and galloped out with the rest of the procession. "He was in Afghanistan and Iraq. He came home and couldn't hold down a job. He was a mess. He wouldn't listen to anything we said. But he's getting better now. This group is really helping."

Auspicious—vocabulary word from *To Kill a Mockingbird*, which I was teaching my eighth graders. AUSPICIOUS, I thought, picturing it printed in large letters up on my whiteboard with definition "providing a favorable omen," and "fr. n. auspice: fr. Greek, *avis*—bird + *specere*—to look." We'll find him.

We fed the parking meter and started searching. Of the 43,000 homeless in Florida, 2,074 of them were in this Central Florida area—Orange, Osceola, Seminole Counties—and one of them was Andrew.

And now, our Orlando search is almost over. We have to fly back to the farm, to our schools in Maryland. Early this morning, Ansley had tracked down the most recent lawyer Andrew had hired to sue us. Andrew had feared we were withholding millions of dollars that his grandfather, a successful cardiologist who had died two years ago, had left him. We were worth \$100 million! We'd received multiple phone calls explaining that a complaint was being filed against us and that a uniformed officer from the Civil Litigation Department would be appearing at our front door: "Andrew Coston Smithwick has served a notice for you to appear in court ... " The calls came at night. The visits came weekends, odd times—8:00 a.m. Saturday, *KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK*, on our front door and I'd have to sign a receipt of a summons. Pressure mounted as Attorney A in Kansas, representing Andrew, began emailing the attorney who had drawn up Dr. Dickinson's will, Attorney B in Winter Park, Florida, insisting that Andrew be given a copy of his grandfather's will. Back and forth emails boomeranged from Attorney A to B to Ansley (trustee), racking up quite a bill. Recently, Andrew had renewed his quest for this "inheritance" through his new lawyer, Attorney C, based in Orlando. Andrew also thought we were constantly spying on him, interfering in his life, sending his acquaintances damning videos, calling up his employers and slandering him, calling the police, texting his girlfriends.

"Let's go," Ansley says, surprising me as I steer in and out of the disjointed late Monday morning traffic on Orange Avenue one last time, searching the sidewalks, slowing and looking up the alleys. "I can't do this anymore, Sweetheart. Let's go to the airport."

"What's the point of getting there so early? We can look a little longer."

"I can't do this anymore."

I drive past our hip hotel, the Grand Bohemian, on the corner, take a left on Magnolia, pass the Dr. Phillips Center for the Performing Arts on our right, down to Rosalind, take a left. I know this route. We pass a bustling construction site in its early stages—heavy

equipment beeping and roaring back and forth, the kind Andrew had been trained and licensed to operate, and had run for the Marines at the base at Twentynine Palms as well as in Iraq. “Look at the workers, see if you can spot him,” I say.

We reach Central. “Look into the 7-Eleven.” I nod to our right. “I went in there a little while ago but look again.” I turn to my left. “I’ll look up by the library.”

Ansley is drained. Four weeks ago, the Head of Oldfields School had been ordered by the trustees to step down. The next day Ansley had become Head of the prestigious, 150-year-old all-girls boarding school in Glencoe, Maryland. Meanwhile, there was no replacement for her former position, which was Associate Head and included all the responsibilities of an academic dean. She had been doing both jobs—working every day of the week; writing letters and answering emails at 5:00 in the morning; going to her office and holding meetings, giving talks to the students, putting out fires, right up to presiding over dinner at the cafeteria at 6:00, then talking to parents and teachers and trustees until 10:00 p.m. On this morning, when I had gone out into the chilly breeze to the hotel pool, she’d been on the phone with the business manager, working on the budget for the upcoming year before she’d walked to Attorney C’s office—a visit I was relieved she did not insist I make. It was her strong suit. She had the entire chain of legal maneuvers—the court summonses, the letters from Andrew’s first lawyer, his second lawyer, the wording in her father’s will, *clickety-click*—in her head. She was a master of detail and would want every specific item from this new lawyer pinned down.

“I can’t see into the 7-Eleven; it’s too dark.”

It is eerie out. The wind is blasting down Rosalind. The palm trees are whipping back and forth. On the sidewalks, people are bundled up, one hand holding onto their hats. Overhead stoplights are askew, leaning to the left and bouncing up and down on their cables. The gusts noisily bang against our little rental car, making it stagger down the street. Where the hell did Andrew sleep last night?

“OK,” I say, “let’s compromise. We’ll park by the lake, get out and look around, then go straight to the airport.”

“Where do you think you’re going to find a parking place?”

“I know a spot.”

I pull into the same space where I’d parked forty-five minutes ago when she’d called me from the lawyer’s office.

Lake Eola is fifty yards to our right. I open the door. The wind catches it, almost blows it out of my hand. In the center of a flat treeless area, a homeless man is seated, legs crossed like a yogi, reading a book. I’d seen him when I’d walked through here earlier. He’s down low, and the sun’s rays are bright and strong. “Why would he pick that spot?” I rhetorically ask Ansley. Must not be that much wind, down low, on the ground, I’m thinking; this is what I’ve been doing for three days, following Atticus Finch’s advice in *To Kill a Mockingbird*: “You never really understand a person until you . . . climb into his skin.” I’ve been getting into the skin of homeless men. Pulling their sleeping bags up around my torso. Training myself to think like a young Marine vet with two tours of Iraq under his belt who has the schizophrenic paranoia of PTSD, who is blaming all his troubles on his parents and family—particularly on his father—who has ghosts in his head telling him terrible things. He needs time, expert treatment, intense therapy and a peaceful environment along with the correct medications to defeat these ghosts.

First, Ansley and I walk around the big pavilion—the roofed-over structure like a snail’s shell—to the leeward side where the homeless positioned themselves. I’d patrolled through this area earlier. I had approached the narrowing of the cement steps by the lake’s edge. A few homeless men had been on either side, and one emaciated, non-stop talking homeless woman had been walking purposefully back and forth, pumping her arms. I had thought about diverting my path so that I wouldn’t have to proceed through this gauntlet but the woman had me in her sights and two of the men had looked

up and seen me coming. I'd walked toward them, the men's eyes connecting with mine, then falling, the woman stopping, staring me blazingly in the eye, calling out loudly, enunciating each word, *Good - morn - ing!* and, *how - are - you - to - day?* then, before I could answer, turning back to the men, strutting away from me as if she were on a stage, putting on a show, switching to Spanish, *Buenos dias, señor ...*

Ansley and I walk past the woman, now waving to me, calling out in Spanish, and doing a pirouette. We head up, into the wind, along the lake's edge past a few other homeless hangouts that I know well.

Fifty yards away, on a patch of white beach, a tall man is joking around, gesticulating, showing off to three young women. The way he moves looks a little young for Andrew. Still, he is tall, does not have a hat on, has short hair and is white.

I point to the energetic young man. "Let's walk to there."

It's been three days of spotting tall white men with a habit of leaning forward, three days of getting closer and closer, focusing on the face, on the shape of the body, on the height, walking toward the figure, focus sharpening, then—click: *No*. Immediate letdown. Where is Andrew who used to sit in my lap as we drove the pickup full of firewood through the blizzards to the farm, to his grandmother's, to Dee Dee's.

It's been three days of *No, it's an older man*. The man looks worried, in pain, desperate, embarrassed. His eyes meet mine. Why am I staring at him? He seems to know. He knows I am searching and that I'm disappointed in finding him. He knows I want somebody else.

Three days of coming closer, closer, and then, *No, he's too heavy!*

We approach the tall figure. How I wish this were Andrew. Having fun. He's in shorts. A light-skinned African American. I knew, really, from the distance that it wasn't Andrew. White shorts. Andrew would never wear those. And he was moving too much like a teenager, which is what this figure is: a happy, handsome, tall teenager performing crisp breakdance moves in front of these spellbound

girls. He is Andrew ten years ago, before Iraq, before the drugs, before the PTSD; he's Andrew celebrating every moment of being alive.

We continue walking on the asphalt path. The wind is sweeping across the lake. The sun is strong. Glistening white caps on blue-black waves.

The night before there'd been tornado and hail warnings as we had sat in our rental car on Central Avenue five car lengths down from the main door to the Rescue Mission watching a homeless man gather up his belongings at the far end of the building. He rolled a shopping cart through the pouring rain toward us, past the main door, to another doorway recessed into the wall. He parked his shopping cart there, out of sight, walked back, away from us, and pulled two office chairs on wheels, one loaded with bags and clothes, to the alcove. Once set up, he stepped out, held his hand up as if gripping a microphone, and sang, the concrete sidewalk his stage, the bleak, empty asphalt street his audience.

"If he's not here by now, he's not coming," I told Ansley.

"I'm waiting until 11:00."

We'd been lucky that afternoon to meet the helpful director of the Rescue Mission who informed us that they closed and locked the door at 11:00 p.m.; if one of the men missed a night, he could not return for four weeks. Andrew usually arrived at 10:00, which was just after the mandatory church service. I'd laughed when I'd heard this; it was reassuring; he was being his old self—making the best of the situation. "He leaves early every morning, wearing his work clothes," the director said, "and never returns before 10:00. We think he's working two jobs, one construction, one painting."

We strained our eyes through the water-streaked window. A man holding a newspaper over his head slogged across the street, up onto the sidewalk. I was ready to jump out. Flicked on the head lights. Shielding his eyes from the beams with the newspaper, he knocked

on the door of the Rescue Mission. Not tall enough.

I wanted to leave. No way he was coming this late.

“I am waiting until 11:00.”

I closed my eyes, let Ansley be the lookout, the wipers whipping back and forth, the air-conditioner on, the rain battering the car.

Where was he spending the night? Under a bridge? In the apartment of someone he'd befriended? We worried and wondered as we drove back to our hotel at 11:30, the rain turning to hail—hailstones bouncing off the windshield.

We walked into the swank lobby, passed the bar, took the elevator up six flights.

Guilt swarmed over me. Was he sleeping under a bridge as cars and trucks sped by overhead on I-4 and the wind and hail ravaged the area? And did this mean he would be banned from staying at the mission for four weeks? While I lay in a dark, quiet, safe room, on a big, soft bed with a comforter and puffy pillows, my arm around Ansley's waist, thinking of the files of Andrew's papers I'd sorted through the day before our flight, including the security guard questionnaire which had the question, “Is there anyone you love who you would give your life for?” And Andrew's answer: “Yes, my father.”

Ansley, face into the wind, shoulder-length light brown hair blowing behind her, showing signs of resuscitation, falls into a quick, rhythmical pace on the asphalt path as we pass the teenage break-dancer. “How long would it take us to walk around the lake?” She can somehow walk very fast, covering a great deal of ground, while looking as if she is casually strolling.

“Twenty minutes,” I lie.

“OK,” she smiles, “around the lake and then to the airport.”

I'm relieved. One last chance.

No homeless people on this side of the lake. The road is tight on our left, the lake tight to our right.

We cross a quaint, white wooden bridge. The path continues

meandering around the lake. There is a long bike rack on our left and then an open stretch—half the size of a soccer field—that is out of the wind. Bright sunlight reflects off the golden-green grass. This is where Andrew paced and raged and cussed as he talked to Ansley on his cell four days ago—Graham had found him and by the greatest of coincidences was watching him at the exact moment Andrew was speaking to Ansley.

I survey the open space, spot a series of forms in sleeping bags lying in a row—each ten feet from the other—on the edge of the lawn, their heads close to the bushes and flowers. Ansley walks on.

I step over a low fence onto the perfectly mowed green, amble down the line of men. Study them—

First: Too short.

Second: Hair too long, too dark.

Third: Black. Middle aged. His blood-shot, hopeless eyes connect with my eyes.

Fourth: Older. Unshaven.

Next: Young, too young. His eyes lock into mine. Scared. Looks like a kid! I should do something ...

Almost at the last: Black man. Gray whiskers. Old pro. Confident. Has a nice sleeping bag, head propped up on pillow. He nods to me.

A few more: No. No. No.

I walk to Ansley, toward the restrooms and the crowded playground.

I'm in the shade now and still wearing dark glasses. My eyes haven't adjusted. Another group of homeless men. More active. They are still in their sleeping bags but sitting up, reading, eating. I approach. Check each one. Each time, our eyes connect for an instant.

Ansley has walked past the restroom building, and is heading toward the fenced-in playground, parents watching their children swing and climb and seesaw. Yes, maybe Andrew would have a seat on a bench inside the fence and watch the action. That's a positive sign—that Sweetheart would think Andrew might be there.

Wouldn't it be upbeat if he were relaxing, watching the children, contemplating childhood, innocence? Wouldn't a positive note creep into his mind about his own childhood? Would he remember that picture I took of him and Paddy on the seesaw late one afternoon, practicing with my new telephoto lens from work, Paddy nine, Andrew four, Paddy carefully holding his little brother on the board? In my mind, I see it hanging in our den, a black and white with intense depth of field, a textured feeling: you can feel the taut muscles of Paddy's shoulders; it makes you want to put your hand on Andrew's head and muss his blond hair.

I focus on the people in the playground, Ansley a few steps ahead of me, the wide trunk of an oak between us.

"Patrick,"—she rarely calls me Patrick—"there he is," she says in a low voice. "There's Andrew." It shocks me. It takes my breath. She is looking toward the lake path. I look. The tree blocks my view. I step forward.

Here comes a tall, tan man in orange construction helmet, orange work-vest, black pants splattered with splotches of white paint, a goatee sharpening his face, accentuating the bone structure. My son. Unbelievably. These last moments in Orlando.

He's practically on top of us. He's walking toward the restroom. Ansley is still, immobile. Stunned. Staring at him.

"Andrew!" I call out. "Andrew!"

He leaps back as if hit by an electric shock, then continues walking straight to the restroom entrance. I approach him. He veers away. "Who are you?" he asks, staring at me, jerking his head back. "I don't know who you are."

"Come on Andrew," I say.

"I don't know who you are. You want a dollar?"

He goes into the restroom. Am I going to have to go in there and talk to him outside a stall door? He might just stay in there. What the hell will I do? I hear a toilet flush.

Out he comes, without a glance at us. We walk alongside. "Who are you? Leave me alone."

He gets ahead of us. We follow.

“Andrew! Come on. We’ve been looking for you for three straight days.”

He keeps walking. I’m a few steps behind. Ansley is a few steps behind me.

“Stop following me.”

I stick to him. Have a feeling Ansley is concerned about my safety. Don’t care about my safety. This is it.

Instead of continuing on the walkway around the lake back to town, he cuts left. I catch up. I’m just off his left elbow. “Patrick, Patrick!” Ansley calls.

We’re crossing a long, wide, stone-paved causeway, the mosaic of stones glistening, fracturing in the bright-angled sunlight. Not another soul here.

Then, we’re on the sidewalk of Central Avenue. By now I know Central. It leads straight through downtown, out across the railroad tracks, under I-4, to the Rescue Mission.

A large group of business-suited men has exited a restaurant after having a few drinks. They’re joking and laughing a little too loudly as they approach their parked cars.

“Patrick! Patrick!” I hear. He must hear it too.

“Andrew, stop! Let’s talk. We’re losing your mother. We have to leave in just an hour.”

He slows in front of the businessmen, looks back at me. “You want money?” he yells. “Stop following me!”

Every one of the businessmen stares at me. I don’t give a damn.

We pass them. Andrew stops, turns, takes a step toward me. “Get lost! Get the fuck away!”

I hold my ground. He walks. I follow. We approach the 7-Eleven. “Andrew, we know you go to this 7-Eleven. We know you are staying at the Rescue Mission. We know you have a job. What job is it? What are you doing?”

I feel my body picking up energy. I add, “Actually, the man at the Rescue Mission said you have two jobs.”

At the 7-Eleven, I stand on the curb beside him, an arm's length away. Awkward. Others crowd around us, waiting for the light to change. I hear Ansley calling me. Standing there, as the cars whoosh past, I imagine Andrew grabbing me and throwing me in front of one. The fact that I am having this thought envelopes me in shame. Still, my body is ready, tensed, prepared.

Safely crossing the street, I'm beside him. "At the mission they said you have two jobs," I reiterate. He surges ahead. I stare at the back of his construction helmet. DDP ... DDP ... Or is it PPD? I try to memorize it.

No longer do I hear Ansley calling. We're on our own. It is the two of us. In the moment. Nothing else exists—no other time, no other place, no other activity—but this walking with Andrew.

We're passing the library. On our first day, a Saturday, Ansley and I had searched every room.

"Mom talked to your lawyer today, the one you hired to sue us. You know Andrew, we don't have \$100 million. We do not have all this money you think we have."

"Go away. I don't know who you are."

"I'm your father, Andrew. Drop this pretense. Your mother's behind us. You just called her and talked to her on the phone four days ago. That's why we're here."

"I don't know you."

He continues, fast, up the hill. On the left is the busy construction site. On our right, people bunched up against the entrance of the library.

"No!" he yells. "No, I don't want to go back to the hotel and have sex with you!" he hollers, waving me away.

Library patrons stop and stare. We're going uphill—he has this advantage—and besides he's four inches taller.

Walking toward us is a young, healthy-looking, homeless man, with a week's beard, wearing a soiled mountain parka, flip flops, and shouldering a bulky L.L. Bean backpack like the ones my students use. He eyes me with wariness and takes a wide path around me.

I don't give a shit. I picture this scene through the eyes of the library patrons, the young homeless man, and I wonder what they think, then, I shut that out; I concentrate on bringing Andrew around.

We pass the construction site. We're walking fast up the incline. I'm an arm's length behind. He whips around, pushes my shoulder, knocks me back. His eyes burn into mine. "Get lost! Go fuck yourself. Kill yourself! I don't care." He turns and walks on.

I follow.

"We want to help you, Andrew. Why don't we stop in one of these restaurants and have a steak dinner ... Where are you staying now? We waited and waited outside the Rescue Mission in the damn tornado last night and you never came back ... Where're you going to stay tonight? We'd like to set you up in a motel ... "

I am talking to his back.

"I don't know you."

"OK Andrew, how many times do you walk down a sidewalk and someone says they want to help you?"

His shoulders tighten; his stride is off. Maybe I'm getting to him. He whips around, pushes my shoulder again, not hard. He's right on top of me. What's that? He has a new scar. A scar above his right eyebrow. Finger length. A line of raised skin. It worries me. He takes a step away, glaring at me. "Get lost. Leave me alone."

I'd like to go back to Ansley. I'd like to yell out, "Go to hell Andrew!" But I cannot stop here.

Across the railroad tracks.

Under I-4.

Out toward the homeless shelters. On our right, the solid impersonal authoritarian wall of the Court House, four or five stories, one long, vast concrete building with no windows. No doors. No people. A wall. Third Reichian. We walk along it, down an empty, twenty-foot-wide concrete sidewalk. No tall buildings to our left now to block the wind. It slashes into us. There's a long chain link fence, then a gate opening to a sort of holding area for the Rescue

Mission. A half-dozen men sit on benches, out of the wind and in the sun, along the wall of the Mission, their grocery carts overflowing with clothes and supplies. One man steps out of the huddle, walks out to the edge of the sidewalk; he stares, recognizes me and waves. It's the polite man who'd told us he'd seen Andrew. He must realize what's going on: that I've found my son. I wave back. He watches us intently.

I tell Andrew again how we waited in the car by the Mission the night before. I want to know where he stayed, but I don't ask.

He takes a left. We're walking straight into the wind. "We haven't gone this way," I say.

We're moving fast down a wide concrete sidewalk in front of a nondescript glass-and-concrete office building. No cars. No pedestrians. No office workers going in or out of the building.

He stops. Turns. "I ought to hit you. I ought to knock the shit out of you but I'm not going to."

We stare into each other's eyes. He's inches away. I get a close-up look at the scar above his right eye. I hold my ground. "Andrew, you're not a Marine at war anymore. You're a civilian. It's time to realize that violence is not the answer."

Fights. He doesn't mind a fight. Early in his Marine career, back from his first tour in Iraq, he was still naïve about soldiers being targeted by locals. His head was shaved. He was tall, fit, hardened. He looked military all over. On leave from 29 Stumps one weekend, in mufti, he was in a bar and mentioned to the guy beside him that he missed his younger sister and looked forward to seeing her soon at her graduation from high school. A local smart ass overheard this. Surrounded by his buddies, he made a comment. Big Mistake. He had another beer and a shot, walked out, got in his car, drove off alone. Andrew followed, forced him off the side of the road, pulled him out of the car. The police came. Andrew told them what had happened, and that he was a Marine just back from Iraq. They peeled the local boy up off the ground. Yes, the beaten man said, Andrew had told the truth. No, he didn't want to press charges.

WAR'S OVER, COME HOME



Andrew gives his beloved sister Eliza a hug on January 16, 2013 in the parking lot of a California mall after not seeing her for three years. Andrew had a steady job working security. He was making good money, had his own apartment.

But then later, there was some trouble. The police had given Andrew a traffic violation ticket. The beaten man had changed his mind, was charging Andrew with assault and battery. Andrew had to go to court. He needed a lawyer. He explained to us what had happened. I lectured him. "You could have seriously injured this man. You could go to prison for this sort of thing."

"Oh Dad, he shouldn't have talked that way about Eliza. I went into a rage. I don't even remember it."

He was a bundle of nerves. He was jumpy.

He was back from being shot at. Back from seeing friends blown away. Back from picking up body parts. Back from having to decide when to pull the trigger, which one of these bastards is trying to kill me, which one is fighting for me?

We resume walking toward Central. "Pull out your wallet, Andrew." I could see it in his back pocket, thick and on an angle, as he always had it. "Pull out your wallet. Let's compare your veteran's card with my license and see if we don't have the same name." He continues walking, fast. "You probably don't have a wallet," I say peevishly.

"I'm going into the 'hood now," he says confidently, like his old self. "You don't want to go," he adds, sounding for the first time as if he is talking to *me*.

"How about you?"

"I know how to handle myself. You don't."

We're approaching a block where a large group of homeless men and women are gathered. It's near another homeless shelter. They are milling around, their blankets and sleeping bags draped over the twelve-foot fence along the sidewalk. At least, unlike Andrew's military base in Iraq, there is none of the razor-sharp concertina wire to keep out the Iraqis—or was it the Sunnis or the Shiites or Al-Qaeda?—the wire that did nothing to stop the enemy from racing a pickup within range of the base and launching a few grenades.

He stops. Sets rucksack on the ground. I think of the Marine backpack in the attic. I see it, the desert camouflage pattern. I can

feel it, the coarseness of the canvas. Last fall, on a camping trip with the sixth grade, I had used it in Andrew's honor. As I swung it into the belly of the school bus along with the kid's bags, I'd thought of Andrew ducking low under *whoop-whoop-whooping* blades and tossing it into the belly of the helicopter about to transport him to Iraq's northwestern border with Syria, where he was stationed for six weeks of guard duty: sixteen hours on, eight off, day after day. Heat: 125 degrees. No showers. Sores, rashes, raw spots all over. Lost thirty pounds. That was the trip that had elicited the phone call. It had been a Sunday afternoon. June 22, 2008. Andrew's birthday. He was turning twenty-four. He said he was preparing for a new mission. He couldn't say where. But he wouldn't be able to call. It'd be four weeks, six weeks. Depended. We might read about it. There was that lag time on the telephone. Long pauses. He didn't say it. But he was telling me he might not make it back. He was saying goodbye. He ended with, "I love you."

A week later, I was rushing to work. I wanted a fresh cup of coffee. I stopped at a bagel shop, ordered a cup-to-go, and a ham, cheese and egg bagel. The television was on. The news. Twenty of us jammed into the shop. No one was listening or looking. I looked up. There was a man on crutches with two artificial legs taking his first steps. There was a man in a hospital bed with no right arm. He was being interviewed. Then, it showed him a few weeks later, lifting a cup of coffee with his artificial hand. A photograph flashed onto the screen: Five or six grinning men from the same platoon on base in the U.S.A.—pre-explosion. They had all been in the same Humvee. The one with the artificial hand and the one with the artificial legs were the only survivors. Switch—to Dover Air Force Base. Shots of body bags. I started trembling. Customers walked in and out, paying no attention to the news. Did they know we were at war? Got my coffee and bagel. Set cash on the counter. Did not wait for change. Walked to the car. Trembling. Drank the coffee. Ate the bagel. Tears poured. Drove to the school where I was teaching. It was a Catholic school. Every morning, I sat in my trailer with my

advisees. We said the Lord's Prayer together. We recited the Pledge of Allegiance together. And we had a quiet moment, when anyone could mention someone. You could just say a name. Or you could say the name and give an explanation of what the person's difficulty was. Then we would silently pray for that individual. The students had no idea I had a son in Iraq. I gave his name, his rank. We were quiet. We prayed, and that—those girls at Maryvale School, led by the strong, wise, empathetic, spiritual Sister Shawn—brought me around so I could pull myself together, teach the next period, make it through the day.

And now he's here beside me on the sidewalk in America. He pulls off his orange work vest. He crosses his arms behind his back and snatches off two sweatshirts in one motion, leaving a T-shirt. His baggy pants hang down, red-checked boxers showing. He slips the orange vest back over his head, ties the bottom string in a bow.

"This is it, Andrew. I've got to go back to your mother." I didn't think to tell him—"Pull up your T-shirt Andrew!" That's what I should've said. When he was taking off his sweatshirt. I should've grabbed him, pulled it up myself: "There it is, the tattoo! Dee Dee—your grandmother. And her death date!" What would have happened? Would he have broken down? In a movie, he would have. The earlier narrative would've been developed with plenty of flashbacks showing his close relationship to his grandmother—that would be the one thing, the catalyst, that would break him. He would give up, throw his arms around me.

But here, on this sidewalk, in this desolate area, the wind blowing his T-shirt up to where I am shocked and worried to see his pronounced ribs, he sets his hard hat on his head, stuffs the sweatshirts in the rucksack.

"This is it, Andrew. Stop playing this game."

"I don't know you."

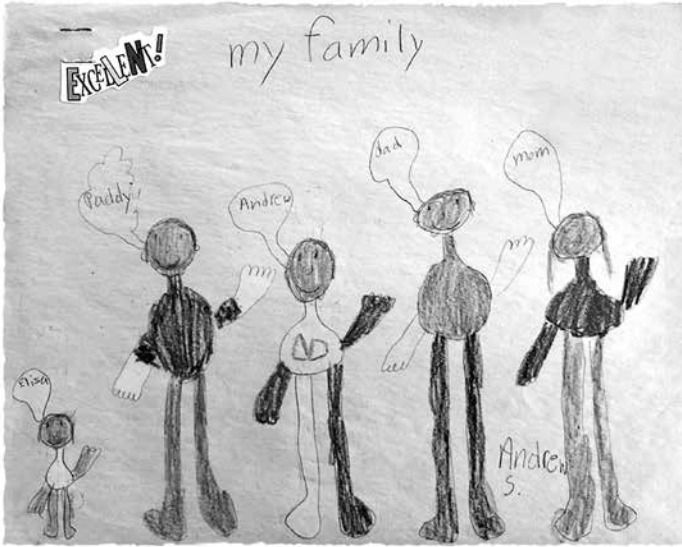
He walks away from me toward the construction site in the

WAR'S OVER, COME HOME

distance. There's a page-wire fence on his right, and one on his left, each topped off with concertina wire. He ambles down the narrowing chute. He stops, takes a quick look over his shoulder—sees me watching him—and marches on.



Andrew had a special relationship with his grandmother, Suzie Smithwick, who, as you can see, did not enjoy having her picture taken. Andrew and “Dee Dee” drove together, skied together, rode together, and—at the races—gambled together. He trusted her and she was by his side, no matter what. When she died from kidney failure, a pillar of support was pulled out from under Andrew, who was seventeen.



Top, Andrew as a child loved everything about being a part of the family; hence, his kindergarten drawing.

Bottom, Private First Class Andrew Coston Smithwick on the day of his first major success as a Marine: graduation from Marine Corps Boot Camp at Parris Island on October 22, 2004 as a member of Platoon 2089, 3rd Battalion L Co. About one especially arduous training test, Andrew wrote to me: "To tell the truth, Dad, I love it." Left to right: Eliza, Ansley, Andrew, me, Paddy.