



# WHITE MEXICANS

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*A short story about the hiring of a group of  
unlikely day-labourers in Los Angeles.*

Thursday was a spring morning in Los Angeles, golden and just a little cold.

“It’s just around the corner,” Jimmy said.

The Dodge seemed too big for the road on that quiet, hummingbird of a day – the three of us with plenty of room to spare in a two-tiered cab, the steel pick up wide and empty at our backs.

“Now I’m gonna break down the things you should know so we don’t get in a situation. We been over this, but I need to know 100% you can handle yourself.”

Jimmy Rooney was a big sunburnt outdoors guy with a lop-sided grin for life he struggled to keep down when the situation required.

I nodded and glanced in the rear view mirror at the man beside Jimmy. He was a Brit by the name of Lawrence McNair and he stared Jimmy’s words right back at me. McNair had been all business from day dot, drinking Diet Coke after Diet Coke on the dry runs and sucking down a factory line of Marlboros in total silence. He’d just light a new cigarette off what he still had going to keep himself in fumes at the wheel. My mom and dad don’t smoke and I guess I took against it early too.

Perhaps bag man would be a better description than driver – Jimmy told me McNair had been some advertising hotshot back in England. How he’d got caught up in this dirty racket was anyone’s guess, but you could say he was as far as brains went in this setup. McNair was taking orders like all of us though, make no mistake. No one gets up at 5am in Hollywood and drives other people to work who isn’t a worker himself.

“First thing,” Jimmy was turned around now and facing me, his big features between the headrests and up in my vision for emphasis. “These guys are desperate. Plain and simple. They got bills, they got cars to run, homes to insure, most have got at least a couple of ex-wives, or kids who wanted Playstations for Christmas and got gym socks. We don’t judge. We definitely don’t want to hear ‘em, we just want workers.”

“How do we know who’ll work?”

“I been over this. McNair here knows. He’s done the research. You and I bring them in.”

“You promise we ain’t gonna make them get in the truck?”

Jimmy looked pained at the suggestion and I was relieved though I could feel McNair’s eyes on me again in the mirror.

“Nothing like that man. Not at all. Absolutely not. It’s just, well you’ll see what I mean. These guys ain’t just any Mexicans. These are White Mexicans. They’ve got pride and it hurts them to be needing the work so bad. They don’t want to seem like they’re desperate and you better know in this town they’re good at faking it.”

McNair stopped at an intersection and looked around. Nothing coming through the open windows but perfect lawns and the hum of morning sprinklers in Silver Lake. The sun was a dusty LA circle low in the east behind us now.

“How come a strip mall in La Brea at this time? Just seems strange.”

McNair made to speak, I guess to shut me up – I can tell when a person does because I ask a lot of questions – but Jimmy got in there light as a feather.

“...strange it is. The times are strange. This business is strange. White Mex don’t want to be seen out with us. If they did, McNair here would be drinking scotch at the Chateau or the Sunset Marquis, putting pen to paper. They’re workers just like any others, White Mex have to get broken in to that kind of thinking from the start. That’s the reason we do the runs.”

At the time I nodded but I didn’t know what kind of fancy places he was talking about, being from Sacramento. I know a little more now, but you get the picture – that spring morning I was as green as green could be and trying not to be.

We kept driving for a while until we came out of the hills and hit Santa Monica Blvd. It seemed to be just us and other pickups on the road – taking garden and construction crews and their tools west: leaf blowers, shovels, power tools, cement bags and little flat bed trailers loaded with all kinds. Whenever we drew up beside one at a light, McNair looked sideways and raised a hand up, the way a bus driver waves to another going the other way. We’re all in this morning together, kind of thing.

We rolled through West Hollywood with nothing to say about it then south on LaBrea. Jimmy was taking the time to give me more pointers when McNair suddenly cut across the conversation with a hand. It aimed us forward.

“There they are.”

His Limey accent chilled me to my bones, knowing as I did why he was there, so far from home. I remember my gut tightening at the words and the excitement that whooshed up after like a hit. I don’t think I felt what we were doing was wrong. I doubt I thought about it at all at the time; I do now.

A cluster of a dozen or so people, way too far off to make out, was standing rag-tag in a parking lot near some coloured billboards at the entrance that read chicken and dry cleaning and the usual noise. McNair slowed the Chevy right down and parked us up a couple of hundred yards short. I saw the tendons under Jimmy’s pink shoulders twisting like cable.

“We’re going in the wagon,” his voice was tight and I saw for the first time he was nervous just like me. McNair did too because he turned away from the both of us into another cigarette, putting distance between himself and the weakness. The man had ice in his veins. Like those Britishers in the black-and-white war films on TCM my Dad would sit me down and watch. The kind that cracks jokes while they put his severed arm in a leftovers bag to take home. Those fucking Limeys he used to say and chuckle, slapping himself all across the leg.

Jimmy and I stepped out and went around the sidewalk. He dropped the tailgate for me to hop in then pulled himself up with a grunt, yanked it back up and locked it. The bolt slid in like a heavy steel shot over the morning birdsong. He knocked on the rear window of the Dodge cab and McNair looked back.

“Give me a couple more minutes with the kid.”

McNair just shrugged and turned back to the road while we leaned over the Dodge roof and looked down it too.

“When they see us they scatter first. Real Mex come right up and take the hand off your arm. Not White Mex, no sir.”

Up ahead now I could make out the figures a little better: most were bunched in a main group but there were others on the sidewalk, a few in the empty car spaces, maybe a dozen or so in all just hanging out. Jimmy asked me how many so I squinted for a while and told him best I could.

“Great. You excited? First run I did took me days to get over. I’ll tell you two things now I know I told you already. Listenin’?”

I had my eyes screwed up wanting to know if I recognised any of them. Jimmy tapped me on the arm with the tenderness a gorilla shows sugar cane.

“I’m listening!”

“Remember it’s not enough to get ‘em in, wagon man’s gotta keep ‘em here. Now we can’t do that with both of us down on the ground. This ain’t no labour exchange, no one gets in line. This is UN negotiation time. I like how you calmed that prick back at base. That’s why you were hired. I wanna see that in the wagon when we get over there.”

The company had put a guy into our interview day to fuck with the applicants during a role-play exercise. We had all been wearing name badges and trying to take down a two-metre giant Jenga while McNair and Jimmy and some chubby bastard in a suit watched us like *X Factor* judges. None of us had known what the job was exactly. On the industry website it was described as a sales role for a major film and television studio. It didn’t say which one.

The fake they put in there with us was arguing each move like a professional pain-in-the-ass. I knew he wasn’t for real because no one’s that stupid. It was just part of the test. So I told the guy this was Jenga and he was shaking everyone up, which wasn’t a good idea and could he step away to get a better look at the tower. A little bit back, a little bit more, bit more, bit more, maybe just turn around and grab that door handle behind him, turn it and get the fuck on out. He’d shut up then. Jimmy said later the judges had all liked that, even McNair.

“Calm these fuckers down like we talked about. When the first or second’s up here is when it’s dangerous. He’ll feel exposed until more join. He may threaten to get down. Pander to that fucking ego till it can’t get pandered to no more. Wagon man keeps the workers on this fucking Dodge. It’s like music, it just takes one bum note for the rest to follow and you got a cluster-fuck for an orchestra.”

“What if they leave?”

“You gotta make that judgement. If he’s going for real don’t chase him. Let him go. That’s part of the game, as much as knowing when they’re bluffing. You’ll see. I know you’ll do fine. There’s more room folks, this dumbass has chickened his chance, that’s your line.”

“And the second thing?”

McNair pulled away from the kerb. Rookie’d been give enough time.

“Yeah, if they rush the truck don’t be afraid. It happens. Jump down and walk round behind them, when there’s enough in to be getting full and not a man less, you close the door and climb back up a rear wheel. They normally got some kind of plan for when we arrive. Looky here, game time...”

I peered closer at the lot now just a hundred yards away and I could see a shiver go through the main ball of men at the sight of our truck. There was a nervous energy to it, an angry current and the ball started firing out men: most hurried out to different parts of the lot, while the odd guy or duo moved slowly away like they hadn’t seen us or plain didn’t care.

“See how they’re splitting up? Right now, there’s groups promising each other that none of them are going to climb up in here. That kind of organisation takes less than a minute to break down once McNair revs up and pretends like we’re leaving. It’s every man for himself then. That’s the other thing White Mex ain’t like real Mex for, there isn’t a spit of loyalty in the whole damn bunch. They’d sell out their own Mama on the tit.”

We were at the intersection we needed to cross to turn right into the lot and I was close enough to feel familiar about one guy tying his shoe out by the laundromat. And another, one of a wary-looking pair over by a soda machine, smoke jutting through a hand held up higher and longer than it should have across his face.

I needed to talk my heart was going so fast.

“Remind me what you’re doing in this?”

“Fuck you kid, I’m doing my share, believe it. Some of those guys need pulling in, they want numbers, some wanna negotiate. Some say they won’t get in the truck and they want a car to come later when no one else is around. That’s what I deal with. McNair and I have it down perfect now, which is why you even get to come.”

McNair rolled across, just a few yards to go. All eyes in the lot on the Dodge like we were out-of-town suckers pulling into a pueblo. McNair took his time, aimed for a spot past the burger joint, the laundromat, the Subway and FedEx, rolling us ever so gently into a bay on the far side of the lot, not too far from where most of the men had ended up. Not too close either. The tailgate faced the way we’d come which was smart and he cut the engine. All was quiet in La Brea, every watching eye on the Dodge, even the ones carefully averted.

I recognised most of them. Some were suited, some in tees and shorts and sneakers, a linen blazer here, someone in sweat pants and a jersey. Middle-aged and older, most of them white like the name. None of them Mexican.

“They gotta get in the truck,” Jimmy’s voice was low as he got out of the truck. With a lot of grace for a big guy he stepped down from rear wheel to asphalt. He turned his back to all those watching eyes and dropped the tailgate still whispering.

“They want the dough, they leave with us. Up there in the wagon with you. Me and McNair riding up front. All the way back. That’s the deal. It’s gotta be seen. In the truck or no dough. Good luck, looks like you got a first customer.”

Jimmy headed off and I looked round. John Cusack had approached the tailgate, a tall guy he rested his elbows up on the steel tread plate. He was in a black suit, off the rail, nothing fancy, no tie with a white T-shirt, *Grosse Pointe Blank* style. He wore it well and acted nonchalant as he leant into the wagon, looking it over. I’d say he didn’t want to be there more than anyone else but Cusack’s always inquisitive and isn’t going to bore easy without looking sideways at something for fun. That much I learned later.

He made some crack that wasn’t for anyone but himself, something like well this is a strange place to be. At the time I agreed with him. Then I got a look from Jimmy walking across the yard towards the others and I remembered. That’s John Cusack and I’ve got to get him in the pickup.

“What are you shooting at the moment, Mr Cusack?”

His friendly, French-looking cartoon face fell suspicious like I was being shitty to him, which I wasn’t because I liked his movies, liked his character. If you think about it, when Cusack broke through in the Eighties he was one of the last coming-of-age anti-heroes who wasn’t a stoner or in a frat house. As an actor he was just a smart guy and funny because of it, what my Ma calls a sociable loner and I should know. Of all the actors who come to a run, I know John Cusack is the one who wants to fuck around with us most. Never gets in the truck but never misses a month. Some days, I can even be happy to see him.

Of course, at the time, what I said to Cusack came over like I was calling him outside. He just backed away from the Dodge all irritated and muttering at me. These guys were here because they *weren’t* shooting, plain and simple. At least nothing they’d want you to know about. Some of them had films going straight to video, some were on the never ending voiceover thing. At the beginning of the year most had TV pilots coming out their ears. There was so much *CSI* crap to fill that everyone here had enough work to keep the bad boys with bats from the door.

But *CSI* didn’t bring them the real big bucks that an advertising deal does. The kind John Goodman calls ‘fuck you money’ in *The Gambler*. The one with Mark Wahlberg in. ‘Fuck you money’ because once you have it, you can tell anybody anytime anywhere to take a jump on any damn thing. The Dodge is a one-stop train to that promised land as sure as towing a trailer of gold bars into the lot with a dollar sign painted on the side. If some of the workers don’t plan to come aboard, they sure as hell want to see what temptation looks like. Not John Goodman though, I’d go on record to say I never seen hide nor hair of that wonderful funny fat son of a bitch on a run, not ever.

While I was doing my best to offend every damn celebrity in earshot, Jimmy was hanging a big loop through the lot, like he was walking the dog without a care in the world. He never stopped, just namechecked people as he passed so everyone else heard the righteous roll call.

“Stan Tucci! You good? Need a water or something?”

“I’m fine, Jimmy!”

“Yes you are, Stan. Let it be said. Bill Paxton you son of a gun.”

“Jimmy!”

“Rockwell and Walken. It’s *Seven Psychopaths* all over again!”

He kept jawing away as he went; Jimmy had his ancestors’ gift for fast, empty talk. You couldn’t hate Jimmy even if you should; he carried a gold mint in his chest. He just pushed this good energy out, yammering like it was a Sunday barbecue. He raised a smile here and there, killed the silences and pulled the wallflowers off and in. When you first hit a lot you have to regroup the scattered workers, have to make sure the bodies compress up near the truck and get mixing and bitching and chatting as you put on your show. That’s key early in a run. What goes for selling five-dollar potato peelers on concession in Walmart goes for this kind of salesmanship. These guys may be out for themselves but they need someone else to make that final leap and get in the van before they do.

Once we get them to base and sort them, most don’t even have to fly out to the UK to film the commercial – they just shoot at one of the studio lots downtown. A guy like Cusack knows he’d make in a week what he could earn on three movies with two months of principal photography each, let alone the promo appearances, interviews and premieres he’d have to boomerang back for once they cut and released the thing a year later. That’s why he was leaning into temptation, getting the feel of it up close.

That morning, everyone in the lot knew there was a deal with a British brand waiting for them back at base if they only got up in the wagon. They don’t always know what exactly, they just know there’s that fuck you money at the end of the rainbow. And how do they know? Well that’s the work McNair and the suits put in before a run. To get the business going, they needed a bit of truth for the rumours. It all started with the first guys to go over the pond to London and do a big British campaign. Harvey Keitel and Kevin Bacon were the first to open it up. Mobile phones and car insurance were where the new age began. At the time there were bigger guys like Arnie and Stallone going British, but really Keitel and Bacon were key because they came back telling a whole mid-level class of cult Hollywood name that even they could really make bank with the Brits. Hell – it was even fun! Sell broadband and other stuff to the suckers being yourself and they’ll buy into it for the crazy ironic shit show it is. Everyone’s in on the joke, takes a week or two of work, easiest money you’ll ever make. Keitel and Bacon were both there on that first run.

Of course it doesn’t feel right for everyone. Cusack kept backing off and I had been too caught up to recognise Tim Robbins out by the laundromat until the two fell in together. I remembered they had been in a comedy together called *Tapeheads* in the Eighties, must have had each other’s back. Robbins had been the guy tying his shoelaces as we rolled up and he still looked shifty. Jimmy had seen it too.

“You get taller since last month, Tim? Jesus H. Christ. I didn’t know people did that at your age.”

Robbins just waved him away all glum and irritated and Jimmy laughed. I watched Robbins shuffle that long walk of his off down the kerb stage right of our ride. I guess I wanted to do my job and maybe even to talk *Shawshank*. I love that Coen brothers film he was in too – *The Hudsucker Proxy* – the one where he plays an idiot who gets made head of a manufacturing company as a scam to lower the share price but turns out to be a genius for inventing things and ruins it for the scamsters. Paul Newman being one of them. Man I love the Coen brothers, just love how people get it bad when they go greedy. One guy’ll get away with something and live to tell the tale, but not everyone. If I could write a story for someone to turn into pictures I would ask for the Coen brothers.

“Tim Robbins!”

I didn’t want to say hey or some mindless fan shit but it still came out stupid, plain and simple. He didn’t even break that loose stride with the lazy arms, just looked up at me in the wagon.

“No offense kid.”

There were fifteen guys in that lot on my first run, thirteen once Robbins had left with his buddy Cusack close behind. We average about twenty now. When McNair and Jimmy started there’d be only five or six waiting and they just drove back whoever they had in a Toyota Land Cruiser. The Dodge was base’s idea and the 2002 black Ram 3500 was one brave, shiny monster. It looked money, more Hummer than country pick-up and it could take 7,000 pounds of loading. There was space for ten men on the flatbed at a squeeze and I can tell you that straight because I tried it more than once. The Dodge is also higher than with your average Land Cruiser or Ford, which means psychologically a worker really has to get up there and when he does, he’s on show.

And right then, no one in the lot was close to getting up. I was hanging in the breeze with two strikes to my name, less than two minutes through my first run. That’s how quick things move. I saw the guys looking at each other, angry and confused, pointing at Robbins and Cusack as they went down the road, hailed a cab and rolled out.

Though I didn’t know it at the time, we were close to a stampede. A big braying storm of ego and sweaty shouting, which hits such a pitch then passes it that no worker can leave with the money and look good. They all bleed away into big-name cars and you’re done for the month and base goes fucking apocalyptic. I’ve never seen it but Jimmy and McNair did a few times in the beginning when the routine was young. Jimmy said the weirdest thing about a stampede was how the White Mex acted the following run. When he and McNair rolled up a month later they got it real bad. All those workers had spent weeks without gravy wishing they had got in and in their version of reality somehow McNair and Jimmy had persuaded them not to. The whole thing is twisted.

You can see how on another day Cusack and Robbins could have been the thing that spooked the whole damn mess. Walken was saying something by the Subway to his buddy Rockwell. They were pointing at me up on the Dodge and judging by the head shaking going round the lot near him it wasn’t a good review. A few parking bays over, I saw Jimmy pass Harvey Keitel and exchange a few words before Jimmy moved on and boomed out.

“Robbins just got a call from his favourite Italian. They had his balls to go.”

There were a few laughs, not many, but I could see the lot adjusting to the loss and the bubbles of discussion simmer down a touch. Nothing could be made wholly right with the old vet Walken stirring it up. A bunch of White Mex can’t ignore that kind of talk from a legend like Walken. While he doesn’t project in a crowd the way other workers do – he actually has a real soft voice in real life – what he does say is steel sharp. Walken can sure put the knife in a neighbour’s hunger for the wagon and kill it dead.

But even Walken stopped whatever he was doing when Keitel started to cross the lot to the Dodge. It wasn’t far, only about twenty yards of no man’s land, but by the time he was halfway Keitel had the attention of every White Mex present. At the time he had a thin white moustache and beard going on. Tanned, in a dark pinstripe suit and open white shirt, he might have been a lawyer except for a rolling walk that was too streetwise for that side of the courtroom. I looked down at him like a dummy and got a fox-like stare back – Keitel has these intense eyes wide apart with a pair of flat eyebrows pushed down right on top of them. They just rolled on past the tailgate like I wasn’t there and came up to McNair’s window of the truck.

“How you doing, Tom? Got a cigarette?”

McNair gave him a cigarette. And a light.

The lot was totally still but even so I couldn’t make out what was being said and I was closer than anyone. I looked

back from the cab for some kind of signal from Jimmy, but Jimmy was waiting just like every other man there, straining to hear what was being said. Kevin Bacon nudged forward and the movement brought more shy workers at the back closer.

“Hey there, Harvey, what are you and my buddy cooking over there?” It was Jimmy.

Keitel didn’t look back, just kept talking at the window with McNair, their voices still too low for us to catch any of it.

Suddenly, a heavy freight tore through the morning along La Brea and at that precise point I saw Keitel hold the window with his hands and lean back laughing. He walked round the bonnet of the Dodge and climbed into Jimmy’s side of the cab. As the door clicked home, every White Mex present burst into yabbering.

“Would you look at that! He’s taken my seat.” Jimmy sounded incredulous.

“Jesus, well that’s good enough for me.”

“Fuck Keitel. He can’t ride up front. No one rides up front.”

“I never rode in front. Jimmy – we have to ride in the wagon, you said that.”

“I guess he ain’t working today, Harvey just wants to talk to McNair,” Jimmy raised his voice over the shouting.

I saw three guys in a huddle a few yards to my left, I recognised two of them but I could only put a name to Christian Slater. I was surprised at the time, because he was in a Netflix series doing pretty well and I considered Christian Slater a high-roller. Still do. He’s one of those actors who hasn’t been in much really famous, but everyone knows him. I can’t figure it; I guess he’s just that guy you wish was your best friend, the guy with all the moves and the jokes. *Broken Arrow* is a great action film and *True Romance* is a classic. I heard later the Brits wanted him bad – he was American royalty over there. The two boys with him were trying to make for the wagon but Slater was shaking his head and had a hand on each of them holding them back.

Jimmy had seen it quicker than me and was doing his Irish circle, still wisecracking, but he had his target and the lot was squawking now. He was in his element. He knew it was all coming good: the whispers at parties in the hills about this thing they got going over in West Hollywood, tales told in the lobbies of all the big agencies about how this big truck rolls in and you better get your man on it. McNair sank hooks on enough line for the town to play itself. I guess whatever gets a worker down – a debt, a foghorn of shitty advice – it doesn’t matter. Once you’re in the lot on the back of a Dodge Black Ram 3500 and a scene is going down beneath you like the one I saw the day Keitel got in up front, you understand what a sick herd looks like.

But you also see hope. You see a man like Slater understanding the dance for what it is and not getting in even though he wants to. We’re talking hundreds of thousands of dollars here. What’s a little principle compared to six figures of fuck you money, more to come if you do it right and the Brits renew next year? And still some people say no. That’s the strange thing about a run. The range of humanity on show.

After two years on this job I’ve thought about it more than anyone maybe. I see it clearer than most of the workers in the lot, better than base who’ve never even been on a run to see men pull on each other to get in the truck and lose their dignity. Or Jimmy having to go toe-to-toe with genuine Hollywood hard men and back them the fuck down. When things get bad and I feel terrible about the job, I look back in my mind’s eye and see Slater trying to hold his boys back from chasing Keitel into the wagon.

See, I remember watching Slater in *The Name of the Rose*, one of his first ever films back in the Eighties. The story’s set way-back-when in Italy and Sean Connery and him are monks. Connery is called in to investigate murders in a remote monastery and Slater is his apprentice. Obi-Wan style, they even wear cloaks like *Star Wars*. Connery’s character used to be a soldier, he’s wicked smart, a bit of a badass and his bosses don’t trust him but he works out what’s going down at the monastery. Slater learns a lot, gets some titty and nearly killed and the whole thing they’re investigating becomes a primitive, sweaty nastiness from nose to tail. There are deformed monks and dwarf monks and mad monks, monks that jerk off, kill, fuck and everyone’s yabbering Latin like Boyle Heights on a Sunday. But in that hell on earth, Sean Connery still has him learning. And I reckon he still does in a way. When Jimmy went over, Slater knew the game was up and he walked away. I never saw him again on a run, not ever.

Jimmy was good in the chaos, letting the tension build. While Robbins leaving had spooked people, no one seemed bothered about Slater, it was all about Keitel now. When the shouting got to where no one could be heard clearly, there was a commotion and I saw Kevin Bacon make a break for the truck. The man was actually running.

“Cody,” Jimmy shouted.

That's me. I leaned down gripping the side of the truck and held out my other arm. Bacon grabbed it by the elbow and I pulled him up. He was flush with the excitement of it all and stayed standing beside me above the madness as the rest of the workers surged across the lot after him.

"Kevin, you loading up again this month?" said someone.

"You already got a piece," shouted Bill Paxton.

"Well I'm gonna take another," Bacon said.

"Fucking sell out!" said someone else.

"Fuck you right back choirboy. That's why we're here." Bacon didn't even look angry as he said it, just pulled some strange looking candy from a bag.

"Flying saucers. Limeys love 'em. I do too. Weirdest things. Try one?"

"Nah I'm good Mr Bacon..."

"Coming up!"

I looked back, Jimmy was walking someone over. One of the guys Slater had been holding back. Up close I recognised him – James Van Der Beek or Dawson from *Dawson's Creek*. I was kind of shocked: he was still youngish, maybe late thirties, at least a decade younger than the other guys. He looked a bit shaken up, like he was taking a ride in a part of town he didn't like or trust. This wasn't climbing a ladder through Katie Holmes' window. Bacon was still yacking in my ear about British candy and Jimmy leaned over Van Der Beek pointing him up to me in the cab. I realised then what a big guy Jimmy was and how someone could take a point like that as an order.

The day was just about fully dawned as I reached down for him. When I turned to yank the guy up with me and Bacon, I could see McNair with Keitel outside the truck a few yards over in the empty parking spaces near the laundromat; Keitel was doing stretches that McNair was imitating, Fucking yoga while we hauled the workers in.

I did nine runs that first year. We averaged about six workers a run. Some runs we got four or five, others nine or ten. In the two years on the job I've done twenty, total. When I think of the money I've bagged for some son of a bitch downtown behind a desk, and all the shit I've seen and the tales I've had told to me in the wagon about why some White Mex is back again just one last time, well if I'd known all that on my first drive with Jimmy and McNair, I would not have got in that truck. No sir.

Two things. When Keitel was done with his stretching he got back in front with McNair. That was the only time he ever got in the truck. But I saw him again at a ton of other drives in a ton of other lots. I'm not saying all, but most. He never got in the wagon. When we had five men loaded Jimmy started shouting, hustling and shoving the others off, enough for me to pull the gate up like a drawbridge and lock it back. I guess he and McNair didn't mind so much about the Mex we were leaving behind.

The real horror of the thing was also the second thing. I was green but I wasn't dumb. Bacon came right past me as I was about to lock in the workers we had and muttered something real offhand, not like the first in and smiling pleased-to-know-you bullshit he'd been giving me before.

"Damn I totally forgot, my old lady..."

And I saw Jimmy make room for him. And the suckers pushing past Bacon as he scooted down off the Dodge and split, who thought it was one in and one out and this was their day. Five became seven before I got the bolt home. With Jimmy safely in my spot in the cab behind McNair and Keitel, the Dodge backed up and the angry faces we were leaving behind slammed the sides with their fists. Those in the wagon squatted quietly under the screams of rage being thrown over the wagon. Like they were condemned and heading out to the hangman not El Dorado.

I tried to shut my ears to the cussing but it wasn't easy. When you're above a heap of angry faces and a voice from your childhood is screaming how you're a sneaky fucking weasel and how he's personally setting his mind to make hell for you this coming lifetime and the next, that's a memory that stays with you.

A couple of the Mex that got left followed the Dodge all the way to the exit. The others melted away to their cars. I sat down like the rest of the workers in the wagon, my back to the cab's rear window looking back at the horseshoe of silent men. Keitel and McNair were staring out behind me through the glass so I guess we all saw the situation the same way that day.

And that's another thing I'd like to say here. You don't have to stay away from a run as an actor to be OK by me. Like a bullfight, I think a run has to be seen to be believed, let alone walked away from. But that doesn't mean I give a pass to the Mex who get up in the wagon and take the ride. A run isn't the answer to anyone's problems, else they'd never come back. And no one I know has ever got up in the Dodge once. Which means not one of those seven boys who came back with me that first time said fuck you in the two years after. They said, fuck saying no to the money.

Nowadays I can't watch films without seeing the lot: those that get up, those that don't, those who it's just a matter of time for until they cave. When I walk down the hallway of my block and I hear the TV dinners going on behind each door, I give a shudder when I hear a voice I know. I'm just like my old man now, living in the past searching for black-and-white faces on cable. Streaming my shit with Adblock to avoid the commercials.

The business is so twisted they got rid of Jimmy last September for acting too nice in the lot. For months, I had Oscar nominees asking me "where's Jimmy" when we rolled up. Now I do his job working the lot and we have a new kid in the wagon with a degree in bullshit who knows how to handle the workers better than I ever did up there. I guess I know my time's coming soon, like Jimmy, and I can write this down because I got nothing left to lose and it's all true.

Later on that first run, when we stopped at a light I saw McNair writing something in a notebook at the wheel. Jimmy had his face by the glass and gave me a nod and mouthed *wagon man*. He began calling all the faces through the back window for McNair, naming everyone. McNair was writing them down quickly before the lights changed. Once McNair gets a name in the book, it's confirmed even if the Mex jumps out before the holding studio. "Get 'em in the book. But first get them in the truck." Jimmy would say it all the time. Now he's gone, I say it too. Just me and McNair now. And an e-Cigarette.

And like every run since, nothing was said in the wagon the whole way back. The Dodge weaved east then north keeping off the highway, taking quiet residential streets that were waking up door by door as we passed. We moved in and out of the other crews heading up through West Hollywood, all eyes down with the day being born.