

Dotted Eyes

Christ—pronounced like Chris with a T at the end and short for Christian but saving him the pain of pronouncing both syllables—knew more about the roadways of Montana than any scholar or map ever would. From Roundup to Helena, take the north route, unless you're on the bike not the '52, in which case go the south route but cut across Eagle Branch creek and follow the trail back to the dirt road that will spit you out on the highway just east of town. Stop by Mom's for a cookie from the jar and do it quiet enough that she doesn't wake up from her chair. The same went for his 1952 Ford pickup, his greasy hand and mind were unmatched by any technicians manual he or anyone else in Forsyth had ever seen. He carried a two-sided wrench in his back left pocket—all he needed for most repairs. Stuck in second gear? Pump the clutch in, let it halfway out, make love just a little to the gas but don't rev the engine and shove the stick up harder than you have to when you get stuck in fourth.

When trucks pull up at his shop off 94 to fill up the tank, and the '52 doesn't need any repairs, Christ wanders around the back and spills knowledge from between his loose lips in the form of pointed questions and jovial answers. What comes out is slurred, accented and mostly dribbles down his chin like verbal drool, but it's happened so slowly over his 74 years that he hasn't noticed that it's no longer the Bozeman educated language it once was. He hadn't finished, just most of one semester, but who needs it, really?

His eyes turned black with age, his pupils fading from black dots on blue sky to dark center of a deep hole. Beneath his eyes his face sagged at nearly the same

rate as his teeth ran away from each other, some making it all the way out of the gums entirely and getting lost in the coins of the register. Some yellowed and some browned. They still did everything Christ needed them for, and the only mirror in his life being the scratched and tarnished silver top on the 1970's soda fountain he's been meaning to fix up but forgot about despite it being on the working surface of his tool bench, Christ rarely took notice of his changing facial features.

A blue car this time. Humming it's way into the lot. The sorry excuse for a vehicle, straight from Asia, no doubt, was no match for the Lolo Woods it was making a beeline for. With nothing else to bother him inside though, Christ sauntered out the door to the half-man, baby faced and confused putting what was priced as "premium" into the plastic tank.

"Wurto?" Christ asked, concisely.

The baby-man cowered, glancing from the wrench dangling past Christ's side, to his teeth, and back again. "Portland."

"Ahhhrit bittuh go'un up 'round, ay?"

"Oh. Yes. You think? Sure." Replacing the pump, reaching quickly towards the door handle.