

Jimmy wistfully misremembered having shown immense promise as he grew up in not inconsiderable privilege in Samuelson, on the Bellham County coast. He did not pause to consider his spotty recollections' fuzzed edges, filtered through neural pathways which inventively had adapted to his ingestion of a variety of hallucinogens.

That he did not even recall having begun to experiment with controlled substances until he was almost thirteen confirmed their adverse and lasting effects, augmented by daily alcohol use that began even earlier. His dependencies had been facilitated both by his parents' casually prolific on-hand cash and an extraordinary growth spurt that left him a solid 6' tall by the time he was twelve, his blocky face already so settled between glower and grimace that his ID and other bona fides were rarely sought outside the context of being booked.

Whether Jimmy had ever in fact evidenced potential for a MacArthur Genius Grant—objectively, he had not—it did not occur to him that he had played any role in his fall from the grace in which his imagination continued to hold him. In the haze of memory his youthful athletic vigor and popularity had been unparalleled, and his abrupt departure from the path to a high school diploma remained mysterious.

By the time he had completed his first state prison stint, while still of tender age, he had attributed all his woes not to any non-sterling personal quality, but solely to his abject bad luck in the pitiless neighboring town of Adams.

In 1792, the Town of Adams splintered off from its objectively better half. It threw a fit of what was even then economy-defying pique, the source of which was not convincingly recorded. In its huff it severed itself from Samuelson and its somehow even more delightful enclave of Samuelson-on-the-Sea. The latter true jewels of Bellham County already were hallowed repositories of the remains of colonial heroes aplenty. In contrast, Adams would remain the resting place for a sprinkling of creatively tried and promptly sentenced and dispatched witches. In that respect, too, another seaside town—this one located on Essex County's sublime North Shore—would get all the glory, along with the perpetually flowing October tourist dollars.

Technically, Adams was at best a stage name. The Town's impulsive decision to divorce itself from sea-hugging Samuelson as "Port Adams" gave no thought to the name's obvious ill fit once it was reborn entirely inland. Nor did anyone in Port Adams timely learn that a small farming village to the west, originally labeled Township Number One, had in 1778 already secured the exclusive right to incorporate itself as the Town of Adams within both the colony of Massachusetts and the formerly independent colony of Maine. The latter had been gifted to Massachusetts thanks to the Crown's 1691 besting of its own previous treachery in the region. Suffice it to say that Massachusetts' treatment of the once and future independent Maine—from selling off its breathtaking public lands to pay the Bay State's pre-existing war debts to ignoring its pleas to send its militia and leaving Castine to be sacked in the War of 1812—earned it no glory, either. But that is a tale for another day.

When Port Adams became landlocked, it also neglected to shed the regalia of its former seaside glory, including a town crest that has remained intact into the 21st Century. Only the most impractically laser-focused dissertation or obsessively picky inquisitor about local history might have pursued the curiosity: beyond the left shoulder of an acutely questionable etching of a Native American, a crescent moon rises. On closer inspection and with the benefit of magnification, a viewer might detect that the crest's horizon line is composed of Port Adams' absent ocean waves, and the silvery moon is in fact the sodden underbelly of a sacred cod in improbably exaggerated mid-leap. Of course, not a single such specimen was to be found within Adams' enduringly uninspected inland water sources. Its laissez-faire approach to public health had declared itself remarkably early in the game.

Nor had anyone paused to decipher the Latin phrase that adorns the town crest and remains upon official documentation in both estranged municipalities to this day: *Sub voluntatem Dei et visum recta ad mare et florent*, roughly translating to, "Under the will of God and a straight sightline to the sea we flourish."

By the time any thought belatedly was given to the matter of maintaining two different towns with the same name, in two widely distant Counties, it was easier for Port Adams' Town Fathers (no Town Mothers having appeared by then or since) to quietly drop any reference to its absent port and simply conduct itself as if it were the true and only Town of Adams.

It had since remained a pretender to the throne.

In any event, given Adams's subsequent history, such artifacts of its decision to go it alone would have been cause for only slight added mortification. Were its 17th and 18th Century ghosts to rise from under their now teenager-battered and toppled granite grave markers, the townspeople would have bigger things to answer for.

By the turn of the 20th Century, Adams had largely given up its yearning to be as fondly regarded for its own native sons as celebrated Samuelson. This may have been at least in part due to what a local librarian learned while researching a Centennial project. She discovered that of the forty-five states then freshly reassembled into the Union, Adams' fewer than forty square miles was the statistically improbable locus of the birthplaces of the most per capita convicted killers of more than one person anywhere from sea to shining sea.

The term "serial killer" would not be coined for nearly seven decades. By then, the ingrained infamy of that additional unfortunate dark secret had somehow transmuted through the souls of generations more of Adams' townspeople. Some might conclude the town's long history of shame had not only contributed to its insular identity, but also played a part in profoundly irregular record-keeping when it came to secrets the municipality wished closely to hold.

That atmosphere had significantly worsened by the turn of the next century.

By the time a still comparatively fresh-faced, albeit beard-stubbed James "Jimmy" Sawyer had graduated from the misdemeanor menu which would have made dispositions short of state prison feasible, it was with a touch of nostalgia—heavier on the *nostos* of homecoming than the *algos* of pain—that he found himself back in Samuelson one chilly autumn night.

He occupied the first six of the seventy-two hours during which a Bellham Superior Court trial judge had surprised no one more than Jimmy's own counsel by granting his motion to allow young James to remain free while getting his uncomplicated affairs in order before reporting to commence serving his freshly imposed sentence. A Superior Court ADA had strenuously objected to the stay. The judge's response ("That and a dime will get you to Sullivan Square, Miss Hinkle") revealed more about his antiquity and inattention to his geographical surroundings—not to mention decades of fare hikes on the T—than the acumen of her objection. His infuriating largesse permitted Jimmy's already long-suffering parents to post an eye-popping bond to secure his appearance to be re-entrusted to MCI-Shelby's custody three days later.

Once home in Samuelson, Jimmy hit the road.

He had somehow cajoled his father, who had shed his last vestige of prematurely gray hair during his son's first confinement as an adult offender, into not only letting him back into his parents' palatial Samuelson home during his remaining free hours, but also letting him take just one spin in his father's true pride and joy: a restored Cadillac convertible that glowed in high-gloss Pompano red.

For Jimmy, it would be one more catastrophic triumph of inattention over experience.

As his aggressively aging parents sat together in their primary seaside home unironically watching the final season of "Breaking Bad" upon their only child's recommendation, and within minutes of breathing in the glorious lightly salted evening air his exhaled puffs initially beclouded, Jimmy obliviously crossed over the Samuelson line.

He soon heard the siren, and did his best to maintain control of the Cadillac and pull over to wait for the cop to approach.

A palpable cloud of marijuana smoke seemed to crystallize and undulate in the evening air around him.

Even in Jimmy's diminished state of clarity—and although he had some difficulty remembering how to turn the key in the ignition—his muscle memory immediately locked his immense hands where the officer could see them as he approached.

Jimmy had not previously made the acquaintance of this particular APD officer, but he also had not long been available in the immediate area to do so.

The officer's boots crunched as they approached Jimmy's father's sparkling freshly-waxed door.

“You know how fast you were going, sir?” The officer asked, heavy sarcasm attending the “sir.”

Jimmy beamed. He was tickled to be called “sir.”

The officer frowned deeply. The odor of burning marijuana remained, as arrest reports are wont to note, “very strong,” notwithstanding its rapid dissipation into the night as the Cadillac’s top lay elegantly folded down.

“Uh....” Jimmy was not quite able to process whether there was any available clue to the speed limit that could help guide his answer. In a reaction possibly related to the vapor that soon diminished to a lingering stratum visible only to Jimmy, his dilated eyes scanned the Lotus cream Sierra grain leather interior as if he would find the answer tastefully inscribed there.

Despite his outsized relaxation—especially for a repeat felon who had enhanced the effects of the blunt still precariously smoldering atop the flammable console by ingesting a gummi edible he had washed down with a few swigs of his father’s Dufftown Warehouse 1937 Glenfiddich before being caught red-handed on the road—Jimmy was very careful not to antagonize the officer. He kept his hands strictly at two and ten o’clock, neither moving a muscle nor considering such things might have changed during his most recent sojourn under lock and key. (In fact, the kids these days were being indoctrinated to keep their hands at four and eight o’clock.)

Jimmy sluggishly considered what number he could offer to plausibly understate his speed.

The officer waited, tapping a booted foot, working his jaw as if he were chewing rock-hard bubble gum while he hungrily looked over every inch of the convertible.

Jimmy kept staring at the dashboard.

“Fifty miles here, sir. The posted speed limit is fifty miles an hour.” His impatience was lost on Jimmy.

Jimmy mightily tried to concentrate before responding.

“Officer, I mean sir.”

The four words’ sibilance yielded a slurred jumble, as if Jimmy were trying to say “Irish wristwatch” three times fast.

He gave it one more try, focusing hard on each word and eliminating all the unmanageable chaff, including anything over two syllables and the suddenly challenging letter “t.”

“Maybe couple miles over fifty?”

The officer looked at him, humorless.

“You were going eleven.”

Even as Jimmy’s perceptions and recall were reconfigured by hard time and the stream of decent-quality contraband he remained able to secure upon his return to MCI-Shelby, he believed he had known in that single moment that his life path had been set, in an unerringly downhill direction. He thereby saved himself no small amount of regret for and agency in his life choices both before and after that fateful encounter.

To avoid new charges which threatened to leave him with a sentencing enhancement from which he would not emerge until he, like his father, resembled Benjamin Button, Jimmy’s joy ride had necessitated cleaning out his mother’s jewelry safe and on-hand cash to deliver to the officer who had pulled him over.

Jimmy had returned to his parents’ home, where he waited to do the deed until they were raptly attentive to the “Ozymandias” episode.