

Road to Baja

written by

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**FADE IN**

**EXT. PROVIDENCE COUNTY COURTHOUSE - DAY**

Foot traffic bustles under trees in autumn leaf.

MYJA BEECHAM, 22, parks his motorcycle, cuts the engine.

Myja sits there, doesn't remove his helmet, doesn't take his gloved hands off the bike's handlebars.

He just stares at the Georgian-style building that occupies an entire block of downtown Providence, Rhode Island.

Finally Myja dismounts, secures his gloves and helmet.

Myja closes his eyes for a long moment, opens them, wipes his palms on his leather jacket.

He takes a deep breath, heads inside the building.

**INT. PROVIDENCE COUNTY COURTHOUSE - CONTINUOUS**

Myja makes his way to Superior Court and slips in the door past the "Quiet - Court in Session" sign.

**INT. SUPERIOR COURT - MOMENTS LATER**

Myja stands just inside the door, scrutinizes Justice JAMES MYRON GUSTAFSON, 42.

James, from his perch on the bench, listens, a bit glassy-eyed, to A.D.A. MARY KRUPSKI question the DEFENDANT intently.

Attorney MATT MITCHELL sits up straight at the defense table.

Light from a window catches on the smoked glass in the door Myja had just entered.

James casually looks up, his crystal blue eyes widen as he stares at the young man staring back at him.

MATT MITCHELL

Your honor?

James keeps staring at Myja.

MATT MITCHELL

Your honor. I said I object.

JAMES  
(half to himself)  
So do I.

James blinks a couple of times, then looks down at the defense attorney.

JAMES  
What? Oh. Court will render its  
decision on motion when we  
reconvene at two o'clock.

James bangs his gavel.

JAMES  
Court stands in recess.

As the courtroom clears, James walks up to Myja, holds out his hand to the young man.

Myja impatiently wipes his hand on his jacket again, then accepts the man's hand, shakes it firmly.

James looks Myja up and down his 5'10" lean, athletic frame.

JAMES  
You look good. I knew the Beechams  
would take fine care of you.

MYJA  
You --

Myja's voice breaks, he clears his throat, tries to relax.

MYJA  
You know who I am.

James smiles.

JAMES  
Of course I know who you are, Myja.  
You are named after me, after all,  
in a manner of speaking.

James clears his throat.

JAMES  
Paulette's idea, not mine.

Myja crinkles his brows.

MYJA  
Why haven't we ever met then?

James glances around him, then hooks his thumb to indicate the door to the left of the bench.

JAMES

Let's continue in my chambers. I'll have a real nice lunch brought in.

Myja lets himself grin a bit.

MYJA

Sounds nice. Thanks.

JAMES

Nice jacket. Good quality. Goes well with the boots.

They start down the middle of the courtroom toward the bench.

Myja hooks his thumb over his shoulder.

MYJA

Goes with the motorcycle. Claire says, "You get the bike, you gotta get the uniform." I'm just gonna ditch the wheels in Baja.

JAMES

Oh, yeah? Who's out there?

MYJA

No one. Just always wanted to thumb my way from Baja to Barrow, Alaska. Work odd jobs, live off the land.

James chuckles.

JAMES

Reminds me that semester I spent in Sweden, a few years older than you.

James sighs with a sad grin on his handsome face.

JAMES

Man. Seems like a lifetime ago.

James shakes off the memory.

JAMES

Got that graduation money I sent.

Myja nods.

MYJA

I gave it to Dad towards a new rudder for the Paulette's Dream.

James, for just a moment, stiffens at the name.

JAMES

I meant that money for you. The motorbike, the clothes. Fishing's dead, isn't it?

MYJA

Everyone chipped in for the bike as a grad gift. The jacket and boots, I got. Fishin' was good this summer. Also bussed tables.

James opens the door to his outer office.

MYJA

So now I'm headed west. I thought I...Um...I...

Myja trails off, follows James inside.

**INT. JAMES'S OUTER OFFICE - CONTINUOUS**

TOMMY PRATT, 26, James's law clerk who looks like he should still be in high school, stands up from behind his desk.

TOMMY

Justice Gustafson, sir, Matt Mitchell's on the line, screaming his head off about his objection being left hanging.

JAMES

Matt Mitchell is an officious prick. Hang up.

TOMMY

Sir?

JAMES

Hang up the phone.

Tommy looks down at the phone, then hovers his finger over the blinking "Line 2" button.

JAMES

It's not a bomb, Tommy. Hang up.

Tommy punches the button, looks up with a growing smile.

TOMMY

I didn't know you could do that to  
an attorney

JAMES

You can today.

James watches Tommy look from him to Myja and back.

JAMES

Have lunch sent in from Hemenway's  
to my chambers, then take the rest  
of the day off.

TOMMY

The rest of the day?!

JAMES

Tommy, I'm not a slave driver.

TOMMY

Yes, sir, but you've never let me  
take a whole afternoon before.

James narrows his eyes at his clerk.

JAMES

Lunch from Hemenway's, then go  
home. Walk the dog, nail your  
fiancée to the wall, just do  
something that isn't here.

Tommy picks up the receiver.

TOMMY

Yes, sir!

Tommy starts to dial, then stops.

TOMMY

Oh, yeah. Charlie called. Mrs.  
Gustafson got that appointment  
after all, so he's delivering her  
downtown then coming over here to  
discuss those papers with you.

James shoots a glance at Myja, looks back to Tommy.

JAMES

Call him back, tell him no can do.

TOMMY

I think, sir, they've already left  
the house.

JAMES

Then do whatever you need to do to  
get a message to him.

Tommy stares at his boss.

TOMMY

Yes, sir, Justice Gustafson.

JAMES

As in, now!

Tommy sits and quickly starts dialing.

**INT. JAMES'S CHAMBERS - CONTINUOUS**

James ushers Myja into the oak-paneled, book-lined,  
handsomely-decorated office. James solidly closes the door.

MYJA

Wow.

James tosses his robe aside, then strides around the massive  
mahogany desk and plants himself in his fine leather chair.

JAMES

Take your jacket off.

MYJA

No thanks, if it's all the same.

JAMES

Sorry 'bout that out there. It's  
just that --

MYJA

Just that you don't want anyone to  
know I'm your bastard son from a  
one-weekend fuck fest with my mom.

Myja sniffs, swallows hard.

Father and son stare at each other as silence fills the room.

JAMES

Oh, I see. You're waiting for some  
big fuckin' reaction from me.

Myja darts his eyes away from James continuing his stare.

MYJA

I -- I -- I don't know. I guess.  
Yeah. Maybe.

JAMES

Listen, it's the best for everyone.

MYJA

Not for me. I've got a brother and a sister I want to get to know.

JAMES

That is not going to happen.

MYJA

And you, I mean, you're my...my father. Do you know how much you don't know about me?

With deliberate slowness James sits back in his throne-like chair and pyramids his fingers.

JAMES

You and me, okay, that's fine. Letters, occasional phone calls. But absolutely no visits. This is the last time we meet in person.

MYJA

What? How can we get to know each other over letters and phone calls?

JAMES

No visits, then no risk of you ever meeting Charlie and Caroline, which I promise you is never happening.

Myja breathes hard as he narrows his eyes at James.

MYJA

You don't want to get to know me.

James takes in a long, deep breath, lets it out slowly.

JAMES

Myja, it was twenty-three years ago. It was the late sixties, it's what people did. People thought nothing about banging each other, married to someone else or not.

Myja bites down onto his lower lip, sniffs, wipes at his brimming eyes.

MYJA

"Nothing"? Well, sorry if I kinda think of myself as something.



James opens his mouth to, maybe, try to correct him, shrugs.

JAMES

You and me, we're strangers.

MYJA

But I don't want us to be.

James just stares at him, his expression blank.

James leans forward, opens a drawer, and places a ledger of checks on the desk. He opens it and picks up a gold pen.

JAMES

Ten thousand dollars will finance  
that trek of yours out west or  
wherever the hell you're going.

MYJA

You think I'm here for your money?

JAMES

Frankly? Yes. That's all you  
Beechams have ever wanted out of  
me.

James starts to write a check.

JAMES

Twenty thousand. That will keep you  
the hell away from us forever.

James looks up, rakes Myja up and down with a sneer.

JAMES

Everyone's got a price.

A tear drops down Myja's cheek.

MYJA

I came 'cause I'm going to be far  
away for a long while and who knows  
what could happen.

JAMES

So? Who cares? I promise, I don't.

James flares his signature at the bottom of the check, then slides the check across the desk.

Myja looks down at it, then back up at James.

MYJA

You can take that check, Judge --

JAMES

That's "Justice" to you, young man.

Myja snorts and shoves the check back across the desk.

MYJA

You can take that check and shove  
it up your ass.

Myja turns to leave.

JAMES

You probably stole that jacket.  
Bike, too.

Myja stops, slowly turns back around. His jaw muscles flex  
underneath his skin as his dark eyes continue to brim.

James stands, leans forward.

JAMES

You ever try to go anywhere near my  
children --

MYJA

Take a good look in the mirror, --  
(sneers)  
-- "Dad".

JAMES

You ever try to go anywhere near my  
children, rest assured it will be  
the biggest mistake in your life.

Myja snorts.

MYJA

Really?

JAMES

I will make these next few years  
for you a pure living hell.

Myja turns, storms out of the office, past his half-brother  
CHARLIE GUSTAFSON, 17.

Charlie jumps aside, his hand still on the door knob.

Charlie, captain of his school's swim team, could be a male  
model. James, still handsome and fit, makes beautiful sons.

Charlie watches Myja disappear, then walks up to his father's  
grand desk.

CHARLIE

Who was that, Dad? Some lost cousin  
or something?

James finishes tearing up the check, puts the pieces in his  
breast pocket. He stares out the door for a long moment, then  
returns his attention to Charlie.

JAMES

Absolutely nobody.

Charlie shrugs.

CHARLIE

Whatever.

Tommy brings in the Hemenway's sacs of lunch.

JAMES

Hey, look! Lunch!

CHARLIE

You okay, Dad? I'm just here for  
the Platinum AmEx.

JAMES

What about those papers we need to  
discuss about your summer program?

Charlie rolls his eyes, waves this aside.

CHARLIE

I got better things to do. And I  
sure don't want to have lunch with  
you. Brad and the guys are waiting  
for me at Antonio's.

James reaches for his wallet.

JAMES

Well, I would like to have lunch  
with you.

Charlie laughs derisively.

CHARLIE

Funny, Dad. A real laugh riot.

Charlie takes the card, leaves without so much as a thanks, a  
wave, or a goodbye.

James walks over, closes the door, stands in his office.

Alone.

**EXT. PROVIDENCE COUNTY COURTHOUSE - SHORT TIME LATER**

Myja fumbles with the helmet lock.

He darts his eyes at passersby.

Myja slams his helmet on over his head, jams his hands into his gloves.

He guns the motorcycle's engine, squeals the tires as he backs out of the space.

A car honks at him.

**EXT. SOMEWHERE ON MERRITT PKWY, CONNECTICUT - LATER**

Myja, back straight, head held high, taps his finger on the throttle to a tune in his head, he speeds down the country highway, passes a hitchhiker.

He cranes his head when he notices the traffic slowing down up ahead. Soon, he's stopped along with everyone else.

Myja hears laughter. He glances to his left, watches a TEENAGE BOY and his DAD as they share an easy laugh at some story the son animatedly relates.

Myja clenches his hand into a fist and surprises even himself when he pounds it against the throttle.

He takes a deep breath.

Myja twists at the waist and gazes long and hard back the way he'd come. He turns back around.

His shoulders sag, and Myja shakes his head.

Slowly, he turns the motorcycle around, starts back east down the gravel shoulder.

Myja rides a short distance, then slows when he sees BEN TRUSSEL, 24, standing in his way as Ben thumbs for a ride.

Myja comes to a stop, and he cuts the engine.

Ben, who seems as if he's wearing hand-me-downs from some bigger, older brother, walks over to Myja.

Ben holds out his hand. Myja shakes it.

MYJA

Know what's turned Merritt into a parking lot?

BEN

One of those double tractor  
trailers jack-knifed and flipped,  
straight across all four lanes.

Myja looks Ben up and down.

MYJA

Hey, you okay?

Ben nods.

BEN

Give me a ride, man?

MYJA

Sorry to say, I'm headed back east.

BEN

Anywhere's fine.

MYJA

I don't have a second helmet.

Ben grins, shrugs.

Ben verifies the straps of his backpack are secure over his bony shoulders, slips on the seat behind Myja.

Myja roars the motorcycle to life, continues down the shoulder.

Myja, at one point, has to pull them off onto the grass.

Ben death-grips Myja's shoulders during the bumpy ride.

Myja glances over his shoulder as Ben jerks and pokes at him.

Myja pulls back up onto the shoulder just before where the topography slopes down to the Silvermine River.

Ben practically falls off the bike, wavers towards the river. Ben, halfway down the slight slope, drops to his hands and knees and vomits. He stands, moves over to the river's edge.

Myja, the bike and helmet behind him, walks up beside Ben.

Ben returns a medicine bottle to his backpack and, getting on his haunches, gulps down a pill with a handful of water.

Ben splashes his face.

Myja gets down on his own haunches beside Ben.

MYJA  
Which cancer you got?

Ben darts his eyes at him.

BEN  
Astrocytoma.

MYJA  
A real vicious bitch of a leukemia  
took my mom.

BEN  
Sorry, man.

Myja shrugs. He stands, Ben lets him give him a hand.

They both move to halfway up the slight slope, where they  
take a seat beside each other.

Ben, despite his thick sweater, shivers. He folds his legs  
against his chest, wraps his arms around them.

Myja shrugs out of his jacket and drapes it around Ben's  
shoulders. Myja narrows his eyes at Ben.

MYJA  
Not really any of my business, but  
you sure you should be hitchhiking?  
With whatcha got and all?

BEN  
I don't do it now then when?

MYJA  
That bad, huh? Nothing's working?

Ben looks up, takes in a deep shuddering breath. He shakes  
his head.

Ben wipes the corner of his mouth, musters a smile.

BEN  
So, where you headed? Back home?  
Your accent. Rhode Island, right?

Myja chuckles.

MYJA  
Yours. Vermont? New Hampshire?

BEN  
Vermont.

MYJA

I was headed to California, but,  
some things happened, and, well,...

Myja rams his fingers through his hair, tips his head back.

MYJA

Fuck!

Myja calms down, looks at Ben.

MYJA

What you're dealing with, and look  
what I'm complaining about.

BEN

Hey, I appreciate the distraction.  
So, which one is it? Parent or  
girlfriend. That worked up, it's  
one or the other. Me, it's always  
the 'rents.

MYJA

Parent. Parents, actually. My dads.  
Well, my dad, the man who raised  
me, and my father.

Ben blinks at him.

BEN

Sounds complicated.

Myja nods.

MYJA

I rode down to Providence. Dad told  
me not to, but I didn't listen, of  
course I didn't. James Gustafson is  
this mucky-muck judge -- excuse me,  
"justice"...

**EXT. BANK OF THE SILVERMINE RIVER - A WHILE LATER**

MYJA

...and that sonofabitch is my  
biological father.

BEN

Wow, man. What an asshole.

Myja tears at some grass.

MYJA

I've never quit anything in my life. God, I am such a loser.

Ben stares at his hands.

BEN

This time next year I'm gonna be dead. I have no choice but to quit.

Ben looks at Myja.

BEN

You don't. But, hey, man, slink back home with your tail between your legs.

MYJA

I'm not slinking anywhere. Fuck you already. Who the fuck are you? Some loser on the side of the road with his fucking thumb out.

Ben snorts.

BEN

Yep. Your dad pegged you right.

MYJA

James Gustafson is not my "dad"!

BEN

Prove it. Make your real dad proud.

MYJA

Dad is proud of me. Everyone is.

BEN

Your dad told you not to go see this guy.

Ben pokes Myja hard in the chest.

BEN

You did it specifically looking for an excuse. Tell me I'm wrong. Tell me to go fuck myself.

MYJA

Go fuck yourself. You don't know shit about me. A little bit of cancer, and you think you can see into everyone's soul.



BEN

No, but I don't have time anymore for bullshit, and I know bullshit when I hear it. Just go back, you quitter.

MYJA

I told you: I'm no quitter!

Myja jumps to his feet.

MYJA

I'll show you. I'll show James, and Dad, and all of them.

Ben grins, chuckles.

BEN

Add an extra "Fuck you!" from me while you're at it, will ya, man?

Myja's fists are clenched and his chest heaves. Finally, he lets out a huff and sags his shoulders as he watches Ben tug viciously at some grass.

MYJA

You scared? You think my mom was?

Ben looks at Myja.

BEN

Yeah. And probably.

Ben's eyes start to brim.

BEN

I don't want to die. I'm only twenty-four years old.

Ben gulps hard.

BEN

I had it all. I was in graduate school, I had an incredible girlfriend. Then, one day I haul off and slap her. Hard. She left me, of course. Pretty soon I don't have friends left, and every other phone convo, I'm screaming at my parents about how they've never loved me and never wanted me. All the while I've got these headaches I can't begin to describe.

Ben gulps again.

BEN

Nobody but nobody had better  
parents or a better childhood than  
my sister and me.

Ben starts hitting himself on the head.

BEN

I hate this fucking thing inside my  
head! It's ruined everything!

MYJA

Hey, hey, hey!

Myja grabs Ben's wrists and pulls Ben to his feet.

MYJA

Now who's the quitter? Man?

When Ben calms down, Myja lets him go. Myja hooks his thumb  
over his shoulder.

MYJA

Come with me.

BEN

Yeah, but to where? Oh, yeah.

Ben starts to slip the jacket off his shoulders.

MYJA

Keep it. I'll just be ditching it  
in California.

Ben regards Myja and grins.

BEN

California. I thought you were  
crawling your sorry quitter loser  
ass back to Rhode Island.

MYJA

Fuck you.

Ben flips Myja the bird, puts the leather jacket all the way  
on, zips it up the front.

BEN

Nice. Warm. Thanks, man.

Myja hooks his thumb over his shoulder again.

MYJA

Up for the adventure of a lifetime?

BEN

I'm already on that. But it's gotta be mine.

Myja nods.

MYJA

I can respect that. But, hey, I can't just leave you out here like this. At least let me phone your folks.

BEN

I talk to Mom and Dad at least every other night. Listen, I'm not running away. Can you say that?

Myja chuckles.

MYJA

You don't fuckin' let up, do you?

BEN

Nope. Everyone says it's my most annoying character trait. My sister tells me it ranks right up there with me dying on her. She's really, like really pissed about all this. I love her, but that's one of the reasons I had to get away.

Myja pulls Ben into an embrace.

MYJA

Good luck.

Myja lets Ben go, and Ben holds out his hand. They shake.

Myja walks up the slight hill and mounts his bike. He slips his helmet on, cinches it under his chin. He guns the engine and starts to roll off.

Myja stops on the bridge crossing the Silvermine. He slips off his helmet and looks down at Ben, who looks back at him.

Myja hooks his thumb over his shoulder one last time.

Ben shakes his head.

Myja relaxes his shoulders. He raises his hands and crosses his fingers. He waves at Ben.

Ben, beaming a wide smile, waves back. He makes the hand gesture of "You, too!".

Myja takes a deep breath and looks up, letting the sun warm his face. He puts his helmet back on and accidentally continues his adventure of a lifetime, his voyage of discovery of Myja Beecham.

**FADE OUT**