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Thirty Days in Camelot

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Thirty Days in Camelot is a noir-style murder mystery, and a story of personal loss and recovery. It is the story of Michael Milano's unhinged quest to solve the mystery of his brother's life, while an LAPD Homicide detective, Travis Carl, attempts to solve the mystery of his death. It is fundamentally Michael's story, and it is told from his point of view, in the first person. While Detective Carl methodically interviews witnesses and sifts through evidence, Michael meanders through the underbelly of the Los Angeles where his brother lived, battered by his indecisive memories and emotions. In the end, Detective Carl gets his arrest, and Michael gets a bit of redemption for the sins of an inattentive life.

Synopsis: *Thirty Days in Camelot* By Gary Campanella

Michael Milano wakes up from a deep sleep disoriented. He finds himself at a desert campsite, and he is not alone. The girl asleep across the campsite is the girlfriend of his brother Jeff, who had been murdered the previous month. Toni, a young Latina girl, has a troubled past. Michael tells us that he has driven to Los Angeles from his home outside Boston, Massachusetts to claim his brother's body, clean up his affairs and possessions, and meet with the detective who is handling the murder investigation. When he learns that Toni is missing, he travels out to the Mojave Desert to find her, finds her, and then gets lost.

Michael is consumed by both the recent losses in his life, and by his lack of passion for anything remaining in his life. His career has floundered. He tells us how his mother died from lung cancer almost a year before his brother, how his father was never much of a presence in his life, and how he became withdrawn from his wife and job after his mother's passing. He tells us how his wife left him six months later, and how he has been floating through his job and his routines ever since.

The news of his brother's death is a catalyst. He left his job and drove to California for some answers about who he lost in Jeff, and what it all might mean for him and the rest of his life. Michael Milan is in his early forties.

Toni is sleeping or silent for most of the first two chapters, as Michael tells us about himself and his past. Toni eventually opens up about her past, and the two agree to

return to the San Fernando Valley apartment that she shared with Jeff to take care of affairs and figure out what is next for each of them.

Meanwhile, Detective Travis Carl has begun working the murder case, which feels a lot like a robbery or drug deal gone really badly. Michael meets with Detective Carl and learns the basic facts of the murder: It took place on the front steps of an Echo Park boarding house called "The Camelot," that Jeff was coming to visit a friend, Kenny, who was staying there, that he had never made it inside, and that no witnesses had yet come forward. Michael and Detective Carl eventually develop a rapport.

With Toni in tow, Michael meets Kenny and learns more about Jeff's life. He meets other friends as well. Michael temporarily moves into Jeff's apartment with Toni while he takes care of things and learns more about Jeff. He realizes, to some extent, that he is "putting on Jeff's life" in his efforts to get to know who he was.

Toni, meanwhile, displays her resiliency by finding a job at a local supermarket and restarting her life.

Detective Carl continues his investigation and eventually turns up a few facts related to Kenny that do not add up. He also identifies another potential suspect from the boarding house.

Michael has his own suspicions about Kenny, and he is a little of afraid of him. He also learns that an immigration attorney that Kenny and Jeff had both been doing work for was an important influence on Jeff. The attorney, Carmine Egleston, or "Eagle," lives in southern Oregon, and so Michael drives up to meet him. Typically, Michael is introspective during the drive.

Eagle is 65ish. He is an ex-hippie, a practicing attorney, and he sports a big personality and a passion for helping immigrants get green cards, citizenship, and public services. He practices in California, keeps a residence at the Camelot, but lives in Ashland, Oregon. Eagle explains that his work is more than filling out forms, and that Jeff was great at helping with the nitty-gritty work of engaging with families and helping with logistics. Eagle has a wife, Lori, a free spirit in her mid-thirties, and a toddler son. Michael admires and envies Eagle and laments the emptiness of his own life on his drive back to Los Angeles. He stops at a remote truck stop in Northern California, can't get a cell signal, and calls his ex-wife from a payphone. They speak only briefly, but she is concerned for him and he senses something like forgiveness in her tone.

While Michael is driving back, Detective Carl interrogates his suspect and learns that the man, a Mexican national who speaks no English, was actually a witness to the murder.

Also while Michael is driving back, Toni's grief, which has been deferred, finally engulfs her, and she swallows a bottle of pills. After his conversation with his ex-wife, Michael

thinks about something other than his own misery for the first time, and realizes that Toni, being alone for the first time in the apartment that she and Jeff shared, was probably feeling too much for her tough exterior to hold back. He races the last few miles home and finds her just in time to save her.

A few days pass while Detective Carl works with Oregon police to question Eagle, who was identified by Carl's witness as the murderer. His case is weak. He has one unreliable witness and no physical evidence, and so he really needs a confession. Eagle senses this and toys with the detective.

Meanwhile, Michael stays with Toni at the hospital and gets her set up for a two-day inpatient psych evaluation. Feeling different, but disoriented, he drives to the Camelot to see, again, the place where his brother died. He goes inside for the first time and, on impulse, rents a room. Leaving to visit Toni, he runs into Lori, Eagle's wife, and their child. Lori has been beaten up by Eagle and has run away from him. Lori confesses details of Eagle's abuse, and then impulsively reveals her knowledge of Jeff's murderer. She provides additional details, and the murder weapon.

Events and characters then converge at the Camelot, where Michael needs to face both his own fears and the man who killed his brother, and where Detective Carl finally gets his man.