

LAY YOUR SLEEPING HEAD, EPISODE 4

6/29/18

## THEME MUSIC

### NARRATOR

Persigo Press presents The Henry Rios Mysteries Podcast.

Hello, this is Michael Nava, author of a series of crime novels, featuring Henry Rios, a gay, Mexican-American criminal defense lawyer, and the producer of this podcast.

Today, we present episode four of *Lay Your Sleeping Head*, the first novel in the series.

*Lay Your Sleeping* opens in the summer of 1982, in the fictional town of Linden, California, thirty miles south of San Francisco. Linden is the home of the prestigious university of the same name, founded in the nineteenth century by railroad tycoon, Grover Linden.

Henry Rios is a Public Defender, born and raised in a small town in California's central valley and from a working class, Mexican-American family. He is a graduate of Linden University and its top-ranked law school.

In 1982, there is no Internet, [beat] people smoke in bars and airplanes [beat] most gay men are closeted and no one has heard of AIDS [beat]. It's an America where 83 percent of the people identify as white, 85 percent as Christian and 83 percent say that homosexuality is morally wrong. [Beat] Ronald Wilson Reagan, who once declared that trees cause more pollution than automobiles, is the president of the United States.

In the last episode, Rios was visited in the middle of the night by Hugh Paris, the young man he first met at the jail where Hugh had been arrested on drug charges. The two men spend the night together and Hugh reveals some of his troubled past but then leaves, abruptly. In this episode, Rios realizes the depth and intensity of his attraction to Hugh. He tries to explain it to his skeptical, straight best friend, Aaron Gold, who warns him against pursuing the relationship. Just when Rios has given up hope of seeing Hugh again, he receives a letter.

[Few bars of theme music]

RIOS

A week passed and no call from Hugh. Then another week of silence. I knew he wasn't going call. It wasn't the first time someone had blown me off after a one-night stand, but this one . . . it hurt. I had too much time on my hands and too much of my own company, so when Gold called and asked me to meet him for a drink, I jumped at the chance.

[SX –Bar sounds. They continue softly behind the entire scene.]

Barney's was a yuppie bar for guys who missed their frat houses. Dark wood, smoky and reeking of booze. A rail along at the top of the walls held a collection of beer bottles and the walls were decorated with neon signs, license plates and stolen traffic signs. The floor was covered in peanut shells. Young guys in suits—lawyers, stockbrokers, bankers— perched on bar stools and drank expensive scotch and imported beers, mindlessly cheering whatever sporting event was on the TV above the bar. I never saw a woman in the place. I spotted Aaron in a booth cracking peanuts and working on a Jameson on the rocks. By the looks of him, I could tell it wasn't his first.

GOLD:

How's it hanging, counselor?

RIOS:

You know, Gold, there are never any women in this bar. Doesn't that seem a little gay to you?

GOLD:

You wish.

RIOS:

No, really, all we need is a disco ball and Gloria Gaynor on the jukebox singing *I Will Survive* and we'd be in business.

GOLD:

Yeah, I don't know what any of that means because I don't speak gay. Hey, bud, a refill on the Jameson for me and a Jack Daniel's for my friend

RIOS

Make it a double. I have some catching up to do.

GOLD

So, you quit the PD's office. About time. You were wasting your talents defending criminals.

RIOS

Innocent until proven guilty.

GOLD

Give me a fucking break. How many of your clients were actually innocent?

RIOS

The point was never whether someone committed the crime but who decides, the law or a lynch mob. When did you become such a reactionary? Gold. I seem to remember back in law school you called yourself a socialist.

GOLD

Everyone was something in law school. Socialist, feminist. Gay. Chalk it up to youthful indiscretion.

RIOS

It was more than that for some of us.

GOLD

Whatever. My folks were honest-to-God socialists. My dad lost his job teaching at Cal State LA because he wouldn't sign their loyalty oath and you know what happened to him? He ended up working on an assembly line at a Ford factory to keep us fed.

RIOS

I'd be proud of him if he were my dad.

WAITER:

Here you go, guys.

GOLD

L'chaim. [Sfx – clink of glasses] You wouldn't say that if you saw what it did to him. Turned him into a bitter, old man before his time, and what did his principles change? Not a fucking thing. The socialist paradise never arrived. Money still rules the world.

RIOS

So you figured, if you can't beat 'em, join 'em? Or are you plotting the revolution from within?

GOLD

My folks are in their seventies. I can't take care of them on what I'd make tilting at windmills for the ACLU or whatever. [Beat] I am in need of sustenance. Hey, waiter. An order of potato skins. So why did you quit?

RIOS

The system is gamed against my clients. I was just one more stop in the conveyor belt that dumped them with all the other garbage.

GOLD

Didn't you just lecture me about the rule of law?

RIOS

The law's only as good as the people who run it. It's only as unbiased as they are, and it turns out, they're pretty fucking biased. Sure, ninety-nine percent of my clients were guilty, but what were they really guilty of? Desperation. Poverty. Being the wrong color and the wrong class.

GOLD

Boo-fucking-hoo.

RIOS

You sound like a Reagan voter.

GOLD

I'm a cynic, not an asshole.

GOLD

Seriously, Henry, you had to know you couldn't change the world by doing criminal defense.

RIOS

I wasn't trying to change the world. I was trying to get a little bit of justice for some of the people in it.

GOLD

Well, we both know from law school how unrealistic your idea of justice is. What are you going to do now?

RIOS

Don't know. I didn't think I'd need a Plan B. [Beat.] Hey, do I drink too much?

GOLD

You're asking me? My liver wants to secede from my body. We both drink too much. It's a good man's weakness.

WAITER

Your skins, guys.

GOLD

Hmm, bacon, the forbidden fruit of Jews [Beat] What have you been doing with yourself since you quit?

RIOS

Running, drinking, following the Giants. When are we going to go to a game?

GOLD

You know I'm a Dodgers fan.

RIOS

Yeah, and I forgive you. [Beat] I saw Hugh Paris again.

GOLD

Hugh who? Wait, you mean that gay guy you talked to in the jail?

RIOS

He showed up at my place a couple of weeks ago.

GOLD

Don't tell me you—

RIOS

Yeah, I slept with him.

GOLD

A client, Henry!

RIOS

He wasn't my client.

GOLD

A criminal then. You're having sex with criminals.

RIOS

He's not a criminal. He wasn't charged much less convicted of anything.

GOLD

Don't split hairs, counselor. You met him in jail. You have to know how this looks.

RIOS

I don't care how it looks.

GOLD

Oy! [Thoughtful] Did you say his last name was Paris?

RIOS

Yeah. Why?

GOLD

[Dismissive] Nothing. [Beat] You should care how it looks if you're ever planning on practicing law again.

RIOS

Tell me something, Aaron. How old were you when you had your first girlfriend? Fifteen? Sixteen?

GOLD

Sixteen.

RIOS

You remember her name?

GOLD

Deb. Debbie Feinberg.

RIOS

I bet you held Debbie's hand when you walked her to algebra and made out with her in your family's rec room and you pinned a corsage on her and took her to the junior prom and everyone said what a cute couple you made.

GOLD

My family didn't have a rec room.

RIOS

Did you fuck her, Aaron?

GOLD

I think you've had one too many, my friend.

RIOS

Humor me, Gold. Did you lose your virginity to her?

GOLD

Yeah. Is there a point to this cross-examination?

RIOS

The point, counselor, is that that was how you learned the proper order of things. First love, then sex. My Debbie was a boy named Mark. He was my best friend, but I wanted him to be more than that. I wanted to hold his hand in the hallways between classes, hang out

with him in the senior quad after school, make out in the back seat of his car. But if I had so much as hinted any of that to him, he would have been beat the crap out of me. So, the first time I had sex was in a bathroom at the university where another freshman gave me a blow –

GOLD

Whoa! I don't need to hear this.

RIOS

[Agitated] If I have to hear about the size and shape of the tits of every *shiksa* you lust after and how what you really want is to meet a nice Jewish girl and settle down, you can hear me out for once.

GOLD

Calm down, counselor. [Beat.] So, you're saying you want to take this Hugh Paris to the junior prom?

RIOS

Fuck you, but yeah, something like that.

GOLD

I think that ship has sailed.

RIOS

[Laughs] Yeah, you're right. Anyway, Hugh isn't really prom material.

GOLD

You're not going to see him again, are you?

RIOS

He made it pretty clear it was one-night stand.

GOLD

Good to hear at least one of you was thinking with his big head.  
[Beat] You know what heals a broken heart?

RIOS

This I got to hear. What?

GOLD

Another round.

RIOS

Yeah, I'll drink to that.

SCENE TRANSITION MUSIC

RIOS

The next morning, I got myself into the bathroom, puked, rinsed my mouth and splashed my face with cold water. Then I swallowed four aspirin, brewed a pot of coffee and scalded my tongue on my first cup. None of it was working on the hang-over, so I decided to sweat the liquor out of my system and pulled on my running clothes. I gulped the last of the coffee, went outside and then set off at a slow pace toward the university.

MUSIC COMES UP BEHIND THIS MONOLOGUE

When I reached the stone entrance gates, I stopped, and threw up again, then sprinted down Palm Drive toward the Old Quad.

I jogged through the quad, where a busload of Japanese tourists wandered around taking pictures, and past the infamous toilet where I got my first blow job. I headed toward the foothills behind the campus, past the dorm where an Argentine engineering student had completed my sexual initiation. Ricardo. The first boy I ever kissed. I remember how puzzled I was when he told me to kneel on the bed between his legs and then lifted them to my shoulders. He reached over, took me in his hand and began to guide me inside him. My body shook with excitement and disbelief—was he really going to let me do this to him?

At the edge of campus, I crossed the road and reached the rolling, oak-tree covered hills behind the school. From the top, I saw the white buildings, bridges and spires of the city of San Francisco thirty miles north. Hugh Paris was somewhere in that town.

My memories of our night together got tangled up with my memories of the boy in the toilet stall and Ricardo lying naked on his back. Why this trip down memory lane? What did it have to do with Hugh? A voice in my head hinted, *They were all your firsts*: first sexual encounter, first time making love. What did that leave? The same voice suggested, *first time in love*?

“That’s ridiculous,” I said aloud. “I barely know the guy and I’ll probably never see him again.”

But the thought had entered my head – I was falling in love with Hugh – and now that it was there, I could not dislodge it, no matter how fast and hard I ran.

### MUSIC FADES OUT

I got home and checked my mail box. Inside was a letter. San Francisco postmark. No return address. I knew immediately who had sent it. I tore it open and began to read:

### PARIS

Querido Henry, Did I get that right? I took a semester of Spanish in prep school and I think querido means beloved but if it doesn’t, that’s what I wanted to say. I was never much of a student. Never much of anything, really. Another junkie from a rich family called me a “wastrel.” We were up in a shooting gallery in Harlem waiting for our connection, exchanging life stories. “You’re a wastrel,” he said, when I finished mine. I had to look up the word. It means someone who is good for nothing, who has wasted his potential. Old-fashioned word, but it fit. I heard that guy died of an overdose. I’ve overdosed, too, more than once, but I lived. I wasn’t always happy that I did.

### MUSIC COMES UP BEHIND THE REST OF THE LETTER

There was another time back in New York when I’d run out of money and needed a fix. You know what that feels like? Your whole body is throbbing and aching. Your mind is running like a hamster on a wheel, and your skin crawls, and you’re one breath away from a panic attack. I was walking around the Village, desperate for money, and I remembered the piers. I don’t know if you know New York, but there are some abandoned piers on the Hudson at the edge of the Village where all the gay guys cruise. Some of them were hustlers and I thought maybe I could turn a quick trick. It was the dead of winter, Henry, the piers were deserted. I wandered around, freezing and sick from withdrawal. Finally, I walked to the edge of a pier and looked at the river and thought, I should jump in; it was so cold I knew I’d be dead in minutes. But then a guy tapped me on the shoulder, big guy, middle-aged, not a clone, some closeted blue-collar worker wanting to get off. He handed me twenty dollars and I let him fuck me, standing against a rotting wall in a dark corner of a pier. It was so cold we didn’t undress. He unzipped and I pulled down my pants and briefs, just enough to let him in. He spit on his dick and slammed me

against the wall and came in ten grunts, then left me there, the money for the fix in my pocket, his come running down my leg.

This is who I was—a wastrel, a junkie, a whore. I'm trying to be a different person, a better person, but it's hard. Every day I have fight against getting pulled back into that black hole inside of me that nothing ever filled except heroin. Every morning I have to decide whether I want to live.

When we were in your bed, I looked into your eyes. I saw myself in them and I felt forgiven. I know that doesn't make any sense. How could you forgive me for things you didn't know I'd done? Why would you forgive me if you did know? But the feeling was so powerful, I thought it must be real and not just my imagination. Then, afterwards, when you said you wanted to know me better, I panicked. I knew if you did know me, knew everything about me, you wouldn't look at me that way again. So, I ran.

I haven't been able to stop thinking about you, Henry. I want to see you again but you need to know who I am. Now you do. If you still want to call me, here's my phone number. Also, because I wasn't always a junkie whore, here's a picture of me before any of that started. I am 14 in this picture. I was confused and sad but a good kid. Someone who might have grown up to be a good man. I want to think I still can. Love, Hugh

RIOS

I looked at the snapshot that had come with the letter. Two boys standing against an ivy-covered wall dressed in blue blazers and gray flannel trousers. Prep school uniforms. One of the boys looked about sixteen, dark-haired, broad shouldered, his face already settling into its adult lines. He had his arm protectively around the other boy who was shorter, slighter and paler. Hugh at fourteen, his features soft, delicate and unformed. On the back of the photo, Hugh had scrawled, "*Grant and me*" and a date twelve years earlier

SFX: PHONE BEING DIALED

PARIS

Hello.

RIOS

It's Henry. I got your letter. I'm waiting for you.

## PARIS

I'll be there in an hour.

## THEME MUSIC

You've been listening to episode four of *Lay Your Sleeping Head*, a Henry Rios mystery, starring Armando Rey as Henry Rios, Cameron La Brie as Hugh Paris and Dene Larson as Aaron Gold. Our director is Russell Kaltschmidt. Our sound engineer is Dave Peck. Music and sound effects were composed by Josh DeRosa. This episode was written and produced by Michael Nava.

If you enjoyed this episode, please spread the word on social media. We depend upon your support to continue this series.

For behind the scene extras visit us at our Facebook page, The Henry Rios Mysteries, or at [michaelnavawriter.com](http://michaelnavawriter.com) under the podcast tab. We'd also love to hear from you. Message us on Facebook or e-mail us at [persigopress@gmail.com](mailto:persigopress@gmail.com). That's P-e-r-s-i-g-o p-r-e-s-s @ gmail.com.

This is an abridged version of the novel *Lay Your Sleeping Head*. You can buy the complete novel at Amazon.

This is Michael Nava. Thank you for listening.