



ROLLIN IN VEGAS

The rent was due and my wallet was on empty. It was time to get to work. I scraped up enough for the two tanks it would take to carry me and The Bastard across the two hundred and eighty miles of desert and the crisp Benjamin Franklin I would slap on the Table once I got there. The rest—gears in a Clock.

Caryn, a Stellar Swede with a passion for slow walkin drawl talkin long into the nite kinda men, was to meet me at the Mirage at precisely 11:11 PM. Something about the mirrored, palindromic, stand on your head sort of mystical qualities that that particular Time was supposed to possess. Hey, who was I to argue? This was a six-foot blonde with a tan and a pulse. And icing—if God was smiling on me that evening—said her sister Leeza might join us for the nite. Well Good Golly Miss Molly, I was hoping the Big Guy Upstairs would be grinning ear to ear with anticipation for me.

But I digress—I was there on Business. It was already Quarter to Eight, and the hour was late. Not much time to roll the dice, make the green, buy the smoke, return to LA and finance Life in Style for a little while longer. (And still allow for every precious minute with my Sister Swedes.)

So I headed for Old School Vegas—Downtown where it all began. Fremont Street. Cause when I'm there on Business, I want to hit the Tables, make my change and get outta there. Without all the glitz and glam, trimmings and trappings of New Vegas that can cloud your mind and fuck your focus. I had work to do. And the Golden Nugget's where I dug in.

Cover your bases. Back your odds. Press your Six and Eights. And with a little Luck (as in 'there's no such things as...') your Wad's a little bigger when you leave than when you came. There's no spot more exciting than the craps table at a casino. Dice are rollin'. Juices flowin'. People there are having a damn good time. True—the odds might be better at a game of Black Jack. But you aint gonna have near the Fun.

The biggest nobrainers (and one of the worst odds)—slots—aren't even what they used to be. The levers on the ol' One Arm Bandits are merely accessories now. Just shovel in your change and all you gotta do is press a button. Video poker, Keno—any of these coin games—got the deck pretty much stacked against ya. Sure, you'll win here and there and get the occasional bigguns. But for the most part, you won't walk away with what you could at the tables. That's where the Skill comes in.

What skill it takes to throw a couple of bones down a felt fairway, I'm not sure. But it's more fun than Black Jack. And that's a fact.

“Buenos Noches, Señor Hawkins.”

“¿Qué pasa?, Eduardo. How are the Dice rollin' this evening?”

“Ahh—only our good Savior knows, my friend.”

“Well, I hope he's got a big ol' fat grin on tonight. Cause I'm feeling Healthy.”

Before I even had a chance to lay down my first bet, came a cackle from across the Table.

“Hey Blondie!”

We've been doing it to gals for so long, when it comes back around it kinda shows us the ropes.

"Hey Lucky, why don't you come over here and blow on these."

Couple of white trash whores from Ohio out for a girls' weekend in Vegas without the Balls n' Chains. The set-up was too easy. I let it alone. Smiling ever so courteously, I sailed a kiss cross the table.

By Ten Fifteen, I had made the cash to buy the green to pay the piper for another day: Gambled Greenbacks to procure Illicit Drugs to Illegally Transport across State Lines to Feloniously Possess with Intent to Sell—all for the sake of FREEDOM.

Ahhhh—America.

Don't get me wrong. It's not that I'm against a little hard work. I've dug my share of ditches just like the next guy. Builds character, integrity... calluses. My beef's not with the work. It's with ol' Uncle Sam stripping a handful of dimes from each dollar I get for hoisting that shovel a thousand times a day.

Ten Fifteen. Time was of the essence. (I've always wanted to use that) Couldn't waste a precious Tick. Had to take care of Business, then dash on over to the Mirage by that crazy, magical, binary configured, fuck if I care, alliterated, but who am I to dicker with a sultry Scandinavian's, Special Time. Especially where a loving sister who was, God willing, to be with her was concerned. So, you can see how my mind was a little preoccupied.

Swoop—I was plunged into Darkness.

One problem with old Vegas is you can find yourself shuffling down a dark side street with not a lot of folks milling around. Throw in all those damn free drinks, watered down as they are, floating past you wearing a tight short skirt with a bunny's ass hanging out... Well, you can understand my impaired state.

Two guys—ugly. Wouldn't be gracing "People's" Sexiest any time soon. One of them was about my size. Alright, fine. But the other

dude—he was a big muther: Lyle Alzado before the Roids stripped him to the bone. Without even a ‘How do you do,’ I was getting my ass kicked all up and down the alley. Yeah, maybe I got a couple of shots in. No major damage, though. Thugs—Score. Hawk—Nil. I offered my face and body up to the gods of Luck gone bad. Donation Time: they relieved me of the Eight Hundred I had just won, my father’s watch and a bag or two of O neg.

What? No cookies and O,J? Bastards.

I limped my sorry ass over to the Rainbow, grabbed my duffel bag and slipped out the back. You win some, you lose some—that’s part of the game. I accept that. (Even if the losing is at the hands of a couple of unattractive thieving magpies.) However, I was none too *winsome* at this particular moment. Money comes and goes; blood again will flow. But my father’s watch I cannot replace. It’s the only thing I have of his (that doesn’t leak oil) to remind me of that bastard’s punctual departure from my life. I throttled the aging Sportster to the East side of town. This was no time to be alone.

The plaque beside the door said it all—“If this Trailer is a Rockin’ Don’t bother Knockin’ Come on in.” Stevie Ray licked a riff, then smiled. The inviting aroma of Marijuana masked by incense with a hint of Chanel No. 5 and Ben-Gay filled the room.

“Johnny! What the hell? You look like shit.”

“Thanks. It seems I had an unscheduled business meeting concerning an outstanding balance I was unaware of. A couple of gentlemen helped me to remember.”

“Aw, shit. You got rolled. They get everything?”

“And a pint of blood.”

“Dammit, Johnny.”

“Thanks for your concern, Angel.”

“Aw, come here Honey. I’m not all business.”

She pulled me into those nurturing arms that had nurtured their share of misfits over the years and kissed me gently on the forehead.

“Mama’ll make it better.”

Angel drew me a hot bath, made a couple of ice packs and loaded up the bong. Punch the clock out Tough Guy. You have now entered The Pamper Zone.

Ahhh—Paradise.

I watched the last snake of diluted crimson slither down the drain as Angel patted me dry. Next stop—Coagulationville. After an hour of eternity in the tub, the bleeding had pretty much stopped. The towel drying became more playful as the Pulse in the trailer quickened. Punch your card back in, Son. Time to go to work.

Angel, a showgirl from the 70s when the Mob still ruled the Strip and people dressed up to be seen, was just another lost soul on a Quest for Stardom. The 80s sent her hookin while the 90s just changed the Product. A few too many miles and a few too many pounds. But these are things you tend to overlook when you’re racked with pain and looking for nurturing. She had been around more than one block in that town, and she was an expert in the Field—even if it was no longer green.

Batter up!

Just as Angel and I were finishing up our session, came a knock at the door. Ol’ Dirt Road Donna—cause she likes it in the Can—had seen The Bastard out front and knew the Hawk had come to roost. Angel threw on a threadbare kimono, a gift from one of her many *friends*, and let the aging beauty queen in. An old showgirl and compadre of my hostess from back in the day, D.R. was still out looking for kicks.

After the love-thumpin I received from Hans and Franz earlier in the evening, I really had no business engaging in any lovin of my own (much less pulling double duty with Angel and the Dirt Road Queen herself). But as it was once written, so shall it be done.

So the three of us settle in all cozy-like in front of the 13" Tube, with Satellite. And dive into three, four (oh God no more) bottles of Boone's Farm Strawberry. And after about an hour or so of chit chat, bong hits and two dollar sorry excuses for wine later, ol' D.R. was ready to ride.

God Save the Queen.

I waited for the heat of the day to die out into the after hours (or as much as would limp off into the desert nite) and left at four. Looping North above the city, I decided to cut South straight down the Blvd. See what was shaking on the Strip in the late hours of a Saturday nite. Secrets and lies; bloodshot eyes; stumbling, staggering, sticky-sweet thighs.

Angel sent me off with a pound of the good stuff and fronted me gas money for the ride home. I assured her she'd be hearing from Western Union soon. As The Bastard and I took a leisurely stroll, I thought, 'what could it hurt to take one last roll.' The Dice were calling, and I had a Fifty burning a hole.

Bypassing Old Town, I opted for opulence and decadence—The Mirage. I'm sure a case could be made for any one of these fine hotels, but this is where the Harley pulled in. I told the Valet I'd only be ten minutes and slipped him an 'eighth' for his troubles.

I made a beeline for the nearest Craps Table showing some action. Threw down my bill, flagged down a waitress for my Bourbon, just in time to hear that beautiful accent. "Johnny! Vat the hell happened to you?"

Collecting my chips, I looked cross the table to spy the stunning half of the Sisters' Swede. "Hey, Caryn... Seems as though I was unavoidably detained. My apologies."

"Are you okay?" she asked, sounding sincere.

"Yeah, thanks. Who's your friend?" Knowing damn well it was her sibling in Crime.

"This is my sister, Leeza."

And Passion. Looks like I'll be staying a little longer than ten minutes.

"And this is Victor and Andre. We met them here last night. They said we look like we need company."

"New Shooter!" came the bark from the dealer.

Andre grabbed the pitted cubes and let Caryn blow her Luck o' the Swedish on them, then let em sail down the Green. He let his left hand hang in the air while waiting for the resulting roll. Just hanging in the air. Taunting me. I couldn't resist.

"Hey, Andre. What time ya got?"

Yeah. Looks like I'll definitely be staying a little longer than ten minutes.