

The
Desert
has no
King

A Novel By
Frederiko Aguilar

Outskirts Press, Inc.
Denver, Colorado

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The Desert has no King
The Frankie Santos Story
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Outskirts Press
<http://www.outskirtspress.com>

ISBN-10: 1-59800-594-4
ISBN-13: 978-1-59800-594-3

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Printed in the United States of America

My Dedication

This book is dedicated to the memory of all my family and friends, living and deceased. We never know what is really ahead of us. However, we all have a beginning, a journey and destination. Life is only for a little while. There is no guarantee of how long we are here for. Each day is taken for granted, and many of us procrastinate pursuing our dreams. Who's to say that we will live long enough to join the elderly? We are given life for a reason. We will, in some way, influence everyone's future, as well as they will influence ours.

Any person you might have said hello to, or had a detrimental situation with, will also be influenced by you. If we have met, even for a second in this life, then I do have a memory of you. Doesn't matter what it is, or how old we were, you were part of my journey. For every friend I made and every girl I shared affection with, whether it was mutual or not, it will never be forgotten. You touched and influenced my life. Every one of us has families that we are proud of, or 'disgusted' with... but they influenced our future.

Many of us are afraid to succeed for fear of potential failure. We are afraid to fail for fear of ridicule from love ones or adversaries. I want to thank my family and friends for the support I have received since birth. Mom and Dad always seem to give the greatest support. It took me over 50 years to write this novel meaning; it's all about life. I found out it's never too late to pursue your dream. Whether my story is received as a failure, or a success, I can only be grateful and proud that

I had the support to finish my project. I can say... "I DID IT".

I hope you enjoy my novel and see, as well as understand the compassion and the spiritual minds of all my characters. Everyone has been influenced in their life by someone, who has left an everlasting impression. Thank you great, great, great, great Paternal and Maternal Grandparents for a beginning. We will do our best to make you proud.

Frederiko Frank Aguilar

Author

Acknowledgement

There are many individuals to thank in my life for helping me to get this novel written. Not only was there moral support, but financial support as well. Although this novel is fictitious, many of you are represented by the characters of this story. There is drama and humor in all our lives, and that's what I've inserted into my cast. Because of the people I must protect by not publishing their names, I can only name a few in my immediate family. However, you all have been remembered in the book...not only family, but especially my long time friends for nearly 50 years or more. The friends I have at the Screen Actors Guild; you know who you are, and I thank you. I want to thank my son, Frank, for being a good son, and a man who has always had respect for other people—especially for the older generation. His mother and I separated when he was four years old. As most children experience in that situation, it was a hard part of life for him. Today he is 33. He survived it because he was lucky to have family such as; Grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, and special friends to be there. Of course, his mom was always there also. Son, your future is in your control. You were given life for a reason. God gave you a gift...utilize it. Here is my special family acknowledgement.

Grandparents... Fred and Santos Aguilar — Frank and Guadalupe Mazon.

Parents... Fred F. and Mary M. Aguilar.

Sister... Linda Ann Aguilar Simpson.

Son... Fred ‘Frank’ Aguilar IV— His mother... Valerie Selenak. His maternal Grandparents... Charles and Vivian Selenak.

Nephews... Alex and Randall. My Grandniece Jazelle, and Grandnephew, Jaden.

God Parents (Nino and Nina)... Frank and Bertha Mazon. From all my Aunts, Uncles, Cousins—to the next generations of our extended family.

I want to thank my special friends, in Wallasey, England, who are considered family, for being the first to share my personal victory of announcing to them by phone, at 2:30 a.m. Pacific Standard Time, in Las Vegas, Nevada, that I just wrote the last line of my novel. I also want to acknowledge my friends at Caesars Palace Hotel and Casino, Las Vegas, Nevada— especially in the Sports Book and Sports Bar. You know who you are, and I thank you for making my place of social recreation, a comfortable one. A regular player at Caesars, John Tarbet, was the first friend I made when I moved to Las Vegas. John passed away before this novel was finished. He pushed me almost everyday to work on this book. My friend, Nana Barseghian, a cocktail waitress at Caesars Palace, and aspiring doctor now in residence, was on my case for nearly three years to get it written. I needed that. And last, but not least... all my friends I grew up with in Norwalk, California— from St. John of God Grammar school, class of 1962—to Excelsior Union High school, class of 1966. Our Alma Mater— “Onward and Upward”.

*This is dedicated to the memory of
Denise Hutton Viccari*

Dee, as she was referred to by many of her friends, past away on July 20, 2006. She was 51 years young. She had been diagnosed with cancer early in 2005. Dee had a zest for life, and I was able to share a little of that with her. She gave me one of the greatest gifts of my life. She made it possible for me to visit her home in the town of Wallasey, in her country of England on holiday. I was treated like a King by her and her family.

She will never be able to read this novel, and yet somehow, I will feel her spirit smiling upon me as I continue to write my next novel. She was also an inspiration for me to finish this story. I know she will be watching over her loved ones. I will never forget her as she is the love of my life.

Fred

The Scorpion

Scorpions are nocturnal. They often ambush their prey, lying in wait as they sense its approach. They capture their prey with their pedipalps, paralyzing them with their venom as well if necessary. The immobilized prey is then subjected to an acid spray that dissolves the tissues, allowing the scorpion to suck up the remains.

A Scorpio

Scorpio is the symbol of sex and Scorpions are passionate lovers, the most sensually energetic of all signs. For them, union with the beloved is a sacrament. They are a possessive lover. They need great self-discipline, because they are unable to recognize the qualities in themselves that make them different from other humans, and to know their utterly conventional natures can be used for greatness to another human...or enormous evil. They are deeply sensitive and easily moved by their emotions. They are like the volcano not far under the surface of a calm sea; it may burst into eruption at any moment. They are your best friend...or your worst Nightmare.

Traditional Traits

Determined and forceful — Emotional and intuitive
Powerful and passionate — Exciting and magnetic
Protector of Family — Protector of Friends

The Dark Side

Jealous and Resentful
Compulsive and Obsessive
Easily aroused to ferocious anger
Unforgiving

***“Gambling Stunts Your
Growth as a Person—
Especially When you Have
Something to Offer Life
With Your God Given Talents.”***

***...Frederiko Aguilar
Author***

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Epilogue

In the Beginning



Maternal Grandparents



Paternal Grandparents

Chapter 1

Desert Breeze

What can I say? I've had a good run. I'm riding blindfolded in a classy car with a babe that I've been banging to kingdom come, and, that I guess I've been in love with since I laid eyes on her. Now we're in the damn desert at three in the morning where lightning and thunder are having their way with each other. I can smell the rich scent of Opium perfume as Nina sits next to me. Tremors are going through her body as her blindfold soaks up a tear. I know the routine and this scene. Hey, this is Vegas!

It's funny how keen your senses become when you can't see a thing. I'm calm... I know the score! I hear the purring of the motor as we drive over bumps and slides of blowing sand. That damned thunder! I never could get used to it. We're stopping. I can feel Nina's body tighten. Front car doors open slowly as our escorts step out. A long minute goes by as I feel Nina's warm breath face me.

"Frankie?" I lean over and whisper to her very low and softly—

"Shhhh. Don't say anything, sweetheart."

"Frankie, I love you."

As I listen to her I know she wants me to say it back, and that this will probably be the last time that I have a chance to say it. I lean over and again smell her perfumed scent that reminds me of our wild,

passionate moments.

“Nina, I _____” The back car doors opened.

“Come on,” says a low, muffled voice as they grab us by the arms and pull us out.

“What do you want?!!!” Nina cries. Her shouts are ignored as the howling wind blows sharply through the cactus needles.

Our escorts walk us a few yards from the car. The thunder blasts continue, and all I notice now is an aroma from smoke that swirls in the air. Its scent is just like Benediction in church. Our blindfolds are still on, and the smell is so familiar. God, where are we?

With my eyes shut tightly, I have a flash of receiving my first Holy Communion. I am seven years old. Then another flash of myself at age 11, the first day of serving mass as an altar boy. My Father, Mother and Aunt Mary are watching proudly as they receive Holy Communion from the priest. I hold the round gold paten under their chins that keeps particles of the host from falling onto the floor as the school choir sings. Another flash and I am in seventh grade being confirmed by the Bishop as my uncle Amos stands beside me as my sponsor.

I can hear our abductors walking just a few feet away. With another flash of lightning and thunder, the sounds of guns start bursting with pops that echo across the mid-morning range. We can hear the revolution of bullets coming towards us as if they are in maximum slow motion. Nina is hit several times. She’s thrust to the ground by the powerful blow of bullets. Oh yes, my body is also being penetrated with flying lead, as my mind continues to skyrocket into my past.

Finally, I hit the dirt. My face slams against the half buried jagged stones as the sand continues to blow onto our bodies. All has stopped... is that it? It’s pretty quiet... and I don’t feel a thing as my body temperature begins to drop. Is this what is meant by the sound of silence? My eyes are still shut tight. I feel tired, drowsy, and thirsty. I think I’ll just lay here for a moment. I’m... falling asleep. Wow— the thunder has calmed down a little. I can barely hear the roar of the winds...



1st Communion - Aunt Lucy, Dad,
Grandma Santos, my sister Linda.



Altar boy at St. John of
God Church in Norwalk, CA.



Confirmation – Uncle Amos

Chapter 2

Where's the Action?

God I remember the first day I set foot into this town. I didn't come from very far; just a small beach town outside Los Angeles, California. Two of my closest uncles sent me to Las Vegas, Nevada, to lay low and out of sight for awhile. 1977 was supposed to be a great year for me and my horse booking business. I was twenty-eight years old and running from the God damn Mexican mob— and escaping to what? Well, here I am... dying in the fucking desert from living in the fast lane again. Hot Vegas women... drinking... gambling... and power got me here.

Even at St. John's Catholic school in Norwalk, where I grew up as a child, I was in the sixth grade when I brought my first deck of cards to school. I got a poker game started on the lunch grounds with kids that still were playing hopscotch, four square, and jump rope. Not only were they my cards, but I was the official gaming teacher. I was busted by one of the Nuns fresh in from Ireland, whom I figured didn't realize what kind of a card game we were playing.

"Frankie Santos! What kind of games are you playing?" A familiar inquisitive voice from an authority figure blurts out. At first I wasn't sure what to say.

"Well, Sister Mary Xavier, uh... This card is the Queen, which

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means that it's good if you get four of these because they represent our 'Holy Blessed Mother'. And the King represents God, and if you get four of these, you can win the game and a Rosary!"

Wow, I think I got out of this one, especially with that innocent smile of mine. All of a sudden I felt this big yank on my ear, and I was being dragged up the courtyard to Sister Superior's office. I wonder if they're still using those damn wooden yardsticks on school kids.

I remember going to the race track while I was still in high school. I was actually making a run for a couple of my teachers who loved betting the horses. I found out their bad habit and they found out mine. We ran into each other at the same track. Hush was the word. Anyway, I got some bums to make the bets for me since I wasn't of legal age. I couldn't even get inside because I wasn't old enough. At the time in California race tracks, you had to be 21 years of age. I got to know this guy named Patch. They called him that because he always wore a patch on his left eye. I would've called him dead eye, but I guess that would've been inappropriate. We became friends because he would make bets for people outside the wire fence who only had a couple of bucks, and didn't want to pay admission. Patch would make bets for them, bring them back their ticket, and if they won, they would give him a tip. He wouldn't run off with their money, because too many people knew him and he had been a race track bum for a lot of years. He really was a nice guy.

One day I hit the daily double for \$985 bucks, which was a ton of money for a high school kid in those days. I ran down to the far end of the track and jumped over the fence. Security guards didn't see me. I went looking for Patch. I found him pretty well sauced from too much wine. I wanted to cash the winning ticket and I knew the cashier would question my age. I hoped that Patch might be sober enough to cash it for me.

As I gave him the ticket, a security guard came up to me and asked for my I.D. I showed him my driver's license which read that I was only 16. As I was being dragged off the premises, I was yelling back at Patch to meet me outside the gate. He yelled back,

"Just wait for me and ____" Well, after an hour went by, I figured I got the screws, and the race events were over. I went home as a little depression set in. The next few days I kept going back to the racetrack

looking for Patch. He was nowhere to be found. I read in the sports page a couple of days later that they found a body in the racetrack parking lot in the middle of the night. But there was no description of the person.

**I'm still laying here with that damn sand blowing all over my body. I can hear that thunder again. I wonder how Nina is... She's pretty quiet. I hope she's alive. I can still smell that aroma in the air. It has a scent of smoke mixed with incense. I don't hear the car motor anymore... just the howling of the desert wind. So why am I here?*

I lived a life of risk. I always had a bet on what seemed to be a sure thing. When I did hit, I increased the risk. "Let it ride, Baby!!!" The adrenalin and the rush made life exciting. Then I get kicked in the nuts with a big loss, and I'm back to square one. I need to get a fast buck so I can make a fast buck! I had a lot of jobs, and got fired a lot because I didn't like being told what to do. I was surviving for the action anyway. At the age of 22, my wife couldn't handle it anymore, so she bailed out on me along with my only son. Seems she liked to take a bigger risk in life than I did— she married me...Ha! No, it's not very funny. We brought a child into the world and now he's out of my life. Hell, we were both only kids ourselves when she got pregnant. Seventeen is a crazy and wild age. Although I wasn't stupid, I did a lot of stupid things.

I have an uncle who's been a horse racing bookie most of his life. He always said, 'No man should take the same drugs he deals out'! Racehorse gambling was a drug. He was a racehorse player and a heavy bettor from the old days. He learned the hard way. He'd make a big score at the track on hitting the daily double, the exacta, or the trifecta, and walked around like a King for life. In the next couple of days, it would all be gone. That's enough to make anyone suicidal.

One day he decided to become the bank. Uncle Sonny wasn't interested in making a killing and living in luxury. He was out to make a few bucks and live in comfort. He also hated working for anyone. According to the astrological sign of our birthday, that's the way we Scorpios are. He saw that I had become a racehorse bum and losing my ass a lot. We all have the same symptoms. The big one is...

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borrowing money from any acquaintances, best friends, or hitting on relatives. That's a mortal sin in itself.

Uncle Sonny took me aside one day and said, "Enough! You're in debt and you owe too many people money. Now you're hitting on your grandmother for money!" I looked at him like I was innocent. But he wasn't buying it. He stared at me for a moment... "It's in your family blood. You're high-spirited and you want to live in the fast lane. I'm going to teach you to stop being a degenerate with the horses. You're going to be the bank, and you must promise me that you will never take your own poison," he says as he looked me firm in the eyes.

Of course I said, "Okay—"

He took me in as a junior partner and I paid close attention to everything he taught me. As he made his small profits, he was wise enough to invest in real estate. I on the other hand, had bigger dreams. I wanted the fast cars, the jewelry, and the stud duds! I was making money on the side without my uncle knowing because I knew he would be pissed.

We didn't see eye to eye on this business. I loved my uncle, but the money came so easy from the sucker horse players. I took in bigger bets than my Uncle Sonny did, and of course made bigger profits. I could lose a grand one day, and make it back with a little more profit the next. I also increased my clientele that had the big bucks. I really didn't need my uncle anymore as a partner. We were in two different worlds. He was a great guy, but at the age of pushing 60, he was settling for less than what I wanted. He got most of his clientele from local neighborhood bars in East L.A.

I picked up my customers from word of mouth anywhere from downtown Los Angeles to the beaches of Malibu. I also had the little bastards from beach area high schools by the balls. Many dudes were into dealing dope and acting like big shots in front of the chicks by playing the ponies. The best part of the deal was that I was getting my share of playing around with those little rich honeys. Hey, I checked their I.D's. Gee, a fake I.D. around Beverly Hills? Yeah...Right! The one vice I ain't getting into though is dope. No coke!! No snow! No ice! Whatever you want to call it.

One day, I decided to talk to my Uncle Sonny and break the news that I needed to split up with him. I couldn't tell him about the profits I was making behind his back because I didn't want to hurt his feelings. I walked into his favorite bar, the 'Mambo Club', where everybody knew his name. As I was approaching him, he seemed to be having a good time as he was pounding down his beer, telling jokes, and laughing with his buddies.

"Sonny," I called out to him across the bar.

"Hey, it's my favorite nephew, Frankie. Look everybody, it's Frankie!" The crowd is friendly and in good spirits as they greet me. I'm sure most of them are on a buzz.

"Hey uncle, can I talk to you?"

"Sure Frankie, is everything okay?"

"Yeah— sure. Uh, can we talk over there?" I took him over to the corner and told him that I needed to move on. He looked at me for a long minute. I wasn't sure what he was going to say. "I'm sorry Uncle Sonny, but I need more." He continued his long stare at me. Finally—

"I know!" he says in a low tone. "This is your nature son. I've watched you grow up, and you always wanted the fast pace and the action. You are a lot like your dad, may his soul rest in peace. You like sexy ladies, fast cars, and plenty of cash has to go with that territory. You love the risk. I've always told you 'the greater the risk, the greater the return'. But Frankie, I gotta tell you, sometimes there's a great price to pay if you get careless." I just looked at him and said...

"I know Sonny... I know." My uncle just gave that gentle smile and yelled over to the bartender.

"Hey Henry...! Two more beers and a couple of shots of Cuervo Gold for my nephew Frankie and me. He's going on a long journey. He's going on a very long journey."

We had our shots of Tequila, and I gave my uncle a hug and told him I'd see him at the next family outing. I left the bar and stood outside next to my Mustang. I stared at it for a moment and decided I needed something a little flashier. I headed straight to the car dealership. I knew I would get a good deal on the 1965 model. I was in and out in a flash. When I see something I like, I'm get'n it!!! I felt like a million bucks with my new Porsche. It was only five years old, but it had class. It's my silver streak. I feel like a soaring eagle ready to conquer the world.



Family Poker Circa 1956



Sal, Denver, Henry, and Freddie at the Mambo



Sonny and Sisters...Maria and Margaret



Mambo Club weekend dance party. Far right is Dad and Aunt Lucy.
Directly in center with big smile is dad's brother, uncle Hector.



Mambo Club Owners
Sal and Freddie



Dad and Mom's wedding



Uncle John and Barbara's wedding.

Chapter 3

Let the Party Begin you Bastards

The next day I called up all my clients and notified them that my betting limits are up. I figured I'd get more action than the other local bookies. I was right. However my limits were still considered small to some, but I had to be careful not to go over my head. My action picked up and I was getting real busy, especially around the beach areas in Orange County. I always loved the beaches. What a great atmosphere. I had a lot of business in the L.A. area, but I found new life and great action along the coast. The problem was I had to do a lot of driving around when I collected from the losers. Driving from one end of the county to another was just too much.

I hired a couple of guys I've known for years as kids. We were like family back then. They had their lifestyle, and I had mine. They did their time in juvenile hall and a short time in the county jail for gang member activity. Leo Vidaurri and Mondo Mazon were out of work and hung around the Mambo Club, where my uncle did his business. I gave them a couple of "C" notes a week... in layman's terms, that's \$200 bucks a week, and they could still collect their unemployment, or welfare checks. All I wanted to do was collect from my loser clients. If they couldn't pay, the boys made sure they did. They didn't look like intimidating guys, but they were street fighters and former gang members as teenagers. They got a second chance in life by getting

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away from bad company. It was tough for them to get decent jobs because of their police records. So you do what you can to survive.

I was still considered small potatoes to many associates that knew me. But it was a growing business, and I couldn't keep working out of my apartment or car. I went to a nearby beach town, a few miles from where I grew up, to have lunch and a cold beer. I sat by the pier and stared out at the ocean as the sun was beating down on me. It felt so good. I slowly inhaled and exhaled the fresh salt air. I was thinking how great it would be to set up a small business here. A restaurant, bar, coffee house—just a good business and front for my enterprise.

I walked along the sidewalks of Seal Beach and found a vacant store for lease. I called the phone number on the sign. I met with the landlord to check the inside layout. I believe I've found my little sports bar and grill. I signed a lease, and I was in business. The 'Seaside Sports Bar & Grill' of Seal Beach was going to have a grand opening. I furnished this place with lots of sports memorabilia, and enough TV's for everyone to watch their favorite sport.

It was spring and a perfect time for both businesses. I had race horse player's action throughout Huntington Beach, Newport Beach, and Laguna Beach going south down to San Clemente. There's a nearby race track called Los Alamitos where there was year round horse racing. From thoroughbreds, quarter horses to harness racing, this was a daily event, and the gamblers couldn't always get there on time to bet their 'hot tip of the day'. I covered Santa Anita and Hollywood Park race tracks as well. A few times I would take action on races in Northern California at Bay Meadows race track. I'm at their convenience and will always be available to them. I've been pretty lucky. I haven't been tapped by the cops. I've managed to stay ahead of the game.

I had to get a manager for my bar and grill. You always get a beautiful chick to work the sports bar. It's a guy thing. They'll come automatically to eat and drink all day, and yell at their favorite team while eyeballing the honey that runs the bar. The best part about Michele being my manager is that she is 'Hot Looking', and a smart business person. She's around in her mid 20's and seems to run a tight ship with a warm friendly personality. The customers like her, and that's what it takes for the business to succeed. Yeah, I was attracted

to her, but I had to keep that to myself and not screw up the business. I noticed there was always some older looking rich dude visiting her. Maybe it wasn't any of my business. He always drove very expensive cars. He's probably a gangster. I have a weakness with women, especially with dolls like her. I always seem to be testing the waters with these babes.

It was the start of summer and almost a year has gone by. The beach weather was perfect. My sports bar was doing great, and my horse biz was even better. I was netting about two grand a week taking in bets. For a one man operation at my age, it was a great living. Leo and Mondo were still on my payroll, so to speak, and they have been loyal and great collectors. Leo likes to pack a pistol for protection. It's not my style and I try not to deal with clients of that nature. I just hope that they don't get busted by the cops.

Michele noticed the way I was living in style, and she couldn't believe it was all the income from the sports bar.

"So Frankie..." Michele gives me that curious suspicious look.

"Yeah, hot stuff," I said with a flirt. A small term of endearment I threw at her.

"I take off for a couple of days, and now I see a new Porsche in your parking spot."

"Well, I had that last one for a couple of years and it was used. So I thought it was time to step up." Michele looked at me like I was either out of my mind or I had hidden treasures. "You wanna sit in it and feel the moment?"

She developed a big smile that seemed to say 'I'm all yours big guy.' Or was that just my imagination? We stepped outside and I opened the car door for her on the driver's side. As she slipped onto my sheepskin covered seat ass first, she gave me that smile again. As she turned facing the steering wheel, her skirt scooted halfway up her tanned thighs. What could be more radiant or exciting than to see this voluptuous dream girl getting into my 'Babe Mobile'?

"Frankie, you know class." She comments with a mellow tone. My mind is starting to get creative like I'm on an Island with this chick.

"I'll take you for a spin later. Uh, how do you like the sheepskins?"

"They feel so good on my legs," she says in a confident seductive voice. I couldn't help but stare at those golden limbs. "Frankie!" she

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says in the same tone. I shook myself out of a trance.

“Oh yeah, I thought I saw a little dirt spot on them— I mean the sheepskins!” Again with that look that she gave me. God, don’t let me weaken.

We walked back into the sports bar. I glanced out the window and saw a shiny black and gold Lexus car pull in front. I recognized the man in the passenger side. He was a regular client of mine; a man who loves and has a max addiction for playing the ponies. What the hell is he doing here?! I don’t like my clients coming to my place of business.

I looked over to Michele, and she was entertaining the customers. I got a little concerned. Danny McCracken was an obese man who was in his mid-forties. Besides loving the ponies, he likes to play with the ladies of the evening and throw drug parties at his beach house where they all blew snow.

He made a little fortune building houses along the Orange County Coast. He was a heavy bettor compared to my usual clients. I didn’t mind losing a couple of grand to him in a week because I would eventually get it back in a short time. He just can’t stop betting the nags.

“Hey Mac, welcome to my humble sports bar and grill.”

“Looks like a nice set up you got here Frankie,” he says with an Irish accent. He’s always got to have a hard grip when he shakes your hand. It’s tough to put a hard grip on his somewhat callus fat hand.

“So Mac, what brings you out this way? How about a beer for you and uhhh... Brutus?” Just what I need visiting me, is another burly looking uneducated, unshaven and bored with the living, chump of a guy.

“The name is Bruno— and don’t mine if I have a cold one. Are they on ice?”

“The coldest Bruno— and sorry, I’m out of beer nuts!” Maybe I got a little sarcastic.

“Damn! Tanks anyway.” Bruno kept casing out the place. I gave him a stare with a small grin and moved on...

“Let’s go over here in my little corner, Mac. What can I do for you?” I gave Michele a wave for three schooners of beer.

“Well Frankie, I came to pick up the money from the exacta I hit at the track today.”

“Mac, I just got the results about an hour ago. I was going to come

by your office tomorrow.”

“I was in the neighborhood and I thought I’d save you the trouble of delivering it.” Mac was not the most impressionable guy in the world. He always wore sagging pants and shirt with different shades of paint drippings on them.

“Mac, I don’t have that kind of money here, and you know that I don’t have pony players hanging around to pay or collect from here.” I wondered if I said that too strong. And of course fucking Bruno was on cue with a snort.

“Where’s the brew?” I saw Michele looking and giving me the ‘I’ll be right over signal’.

“It’s coming Bruno.” He must think he’s at home with his old lady.

“Frankie, I had a good hit on the exacta and I really need the money right away. Fifty-eight hundred dollars is a lot of money; and I really do need it as soon as possible.”

“Mac, I just don’t carry that kind of money here. How about I bring it by tomorrow?”

As Mac casually looks around the bar uneasy, I see he has something on his mind.

“Looks like business is great, Frankie.”

“It’s okay Mac, but I can’t get you the money until tomorrow. You’re not worried about it, are you?” He gave me one of those long thinking looks.

“Here are your beers Frankie.” Michele seemed to time that right.

“Thanks Michele. Michele, this is Mac and Bruno. This is my manager, Michele.”

“Nice to meet you gentlemen. If you need anything else, just wave.” Both guys smiled and I could see what they were thinking.

“Thanks, Michele,” Mac says as he sips his beer and creates a foamy mustache on his upper lip.

“I’ll be in the office in a few minutes,” I said to Michele. As she walked away, I can see Mac and Bruno give her an eye shot as though they’ve been away in the state penitentiary for awhile.

“Who the fuck is that?!—and what times the ‘Wet T-shirt’ contest?”

“Down Bruno. He didn’t mean anything by that, Frankie.” Mac seemed to have little more manners than his stooge. I got us back on track on why Mac was here.

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“Yeah, well, I’ll bring the money in the morning. Okay?”

Mac thought for a split second... “Please Frankie, first thing in the a.m.”

“Sure thing Mac. Is there a problem?” He seemed edgy again.

“Nah..! Beer taste good,” he says as a little more foam dribbles down his chin.

Something was wrong. Well, I’m not going to worry the fuck about it. Everybody’s got their problems. I gotta pay the bastard the \$5,800 tomorrow. God, I hate parting with those bucks. They finally got the hell out of my bar. The one thing I haven’t told them is that I was getting hit hard by some heavy bettors. Yeah, I like living like a big shot. I lost about \$30 thousand bucks the last couple of weeks, and this week... about half of that. I know I’ll get it back. So Mac is hitting me up at a bad time. But I’m still able to pay him off.

“Your buddy’s eyes like to undress the women in this place.”

“So you noticed, huh Michele?”

“Who are those guys, Frankie?”

“Just a couple of bozos I’ve known for a while.” It seems that girls have a natural habit to be nosey about a guy and his acquaintances. Usually it means they’re interested in you and your personal life. As her body swayed away, I looked through the window and toward the ocean. I fell into a little trance...

**I’m still laying here in the sand and that sound of howling wind seems to be fading away. My mouth is so dry. “Nina... Nina.” I could barely hear my whisper as well as my thoughts. That damn thunder and lightning acting up again. Fucking sand is getting in my mouth and nose. Please God, why am I__? Wait— I hear some kind of music and voices? Yes. But I can’t get my eyes open... and damn, I’m thirsty. I can still smell the aroma of smoke and incense. I bet I’m in fucking hell and my body is burning! That’s it!*

“Stop that fucking thunder!!!!” My throat is sore and I can’t even hear myself anymore. Nina...Talk to me baby.

Chapter 4

Knowing Me and Knowing You

It was close to 11 p.m. and in this small town of Seal Beach, except for a couple of bars that have been in business for a few decades, it closes down pretty early during the week days. I saw Michele saying good night to one of our favorite customers and friends. She has a way with older men and making them feel good.

“Michele, it’s almost last call and I gotta finish some paper work in the office.”

“There’s a few people left Frankie and I’ll let you know when I’m ready to lock the door.” Michele was a good manager and knew how to end the day with people who still wanted to stay and keep drinking. Finally the last two customers were on their way out.

“Good night guys.” They had big smiles as Michele walked them to the door.

“Hey Michele, when we gonna run off to Rosarito Beach and get a real Mexican dinner and have a honeymoon?”

“Sorry Tuna melt. You’ve been working on that fishing boat too long. If I have a honeymoon with you, then we gotta get married... and our children will have to live on fish because I’ll be pregnant all the time and can’t work. I’m Catholic you know.”

“Ah, I’m 55, and can’t have children” slurs the old fisherman as he’s held by his pal.

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“Oh bummer... Make sure he gets home okay Ozzie, and I’ll see you guys tomorrow.”

“Okay sweetheart. Come on Tuna melt. You gotta get up at 3 a.m. and get that fishing boat of yours out on time to catch the big one.”

“I gotta big one for you to catch right now Ozzie— ha!” Tuna melt was feeling no pain for the night.

“Good night boys.” Michele closed and secured the door. She turned towards the bar room and let out a big sigh.

“Oh Frankie... The doors are locked, and I’m ready for a drink.”

“I’m ready for one myself.” It was the end of a good day for the sports bar and here we are winding down.

“How about a shot of tequila and a beer?” Michele pulls out the gold and I gave her one of those surprised looks.

“You do tequila shooters?”

“What do you think I am, a wussy girl?” Michele poured the shooters and a couple of schooners. “All right... bottoms up, Santos.”

We clicked our shooters and downed it. She gave me the impression this was a regular routine for her. We chased it with our beers. It reminded me of a chug-a-lug contest.

“Ready for one more?” she says. She really didn’t give me time to answer as she started to pour another round. I thought ‘what the hell, why not?’

“Okay, one more shooter, but that’s it. You and I have to drive home.” We clicked our shooters again, and down the hatch it went. We chased it with another beer. I started getting a pretty good buzz. Twenty minutes went by and I thought, ‘Should I bring up the older guy she’s been seeing and find out the stats on him, or leave it alone?’

“So tell me Michele, what’s the stats on this old man that comes to visit you?”

“What do you mean, ‘what’s the stats’ on this old man?!”

“Hey, I’m just concerned about you and I was wondering...uh, what your relationship with him is.” She stared at me for a moment... a very long moment.

“Are you prying into my personal life?” she says with wide eyes.

“No. I just wanted to know who he was.”

“You are prying!” she raises her voice with a touch of anger.

“Okay— Sorry. I think it’s the tequila talking.” I thought I’d better cool it. She pauses for a moment and then takes another sip of beer.

“His name is Randall.” She says it like it’s a big deal.

“Randall! Ha!” I said like a little kid.

“Ha! What’s so funny?”

“He doesn’t look like any Randall to me.”

“What does a Randall look like?” she asks with her eyes looking straight into mine.

“You know, he looks like uhhh... you know... uhhh...” I got speechless and pounded down another shot of Gold.

“I think you’re jealous!” she says like a snob. Why is it the babes always say it in a cocky way?

“I ain’t got no reason to be jealous over an old... old... man.”

“Are you crazy? He ain’t old, and he’s handsome... and he’s _____” Michele’s at a loss for words.

“He’s taking you for a ride, and I bet he’s married.” I said as I cut into her reasoning.

“What makes you say that?” she says as she becomes a little defensive.

“I noticed the wedding band on his finger when he’s been here.” She gave me a sharp look.

“I guess you have a habit of looking at guys fingers for a wedding band all the time?”

“No! Hey, I’m sorry. I’ve known you for about a year and I was just curious.”

Michele has been a great manager for my sports bar this past year and I always tried to keep my personal feelings to myself. Randall was an older guy, well, when I say older; he was probably in his mid 40’s, but older than me and her. He would occasionally come into the bar and seem to have a personal interest in her. I never asked her about him. Sometimes I would see her leave with him on her lunch breaks, and sometimes he would pick her up after work. I can tell he had a lot of money because he would drive a Ferrari or a Pantera sports car. I’ve wanted so bad to ask her about him. Hey, maybe he could be a potential client for betting the ponies. Michele was softening up and seemed like she really wanted to tell me something.

“Here Michele... Have another shot.” I thought I’d better pour a fast one.

“Are you trying to get me drunk, Santos? She was getting that mild high look.

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“So, what does he do?” I continued to needle her.

“Who..?”

“Randall. And what’s Randall’s last name?” Now I’m getting cocky.

“Okay. Since we’re talking, his name is ‘Randall De LaParra,’ and he’s into ‘Mortgage Banking’ sales.”

“What’s he selling in mortgage banking?” I was feeling like a private detective.

“He sells money. He makes loans to corporations and on commercial properties.”

“So he’s a loan shark!” I gave her another needle.

“Oh stop! He runs a big business on making legitimate loans to big corporations. And he’s going to train me to be a Loan Officer.”

“Okay Michele. Is his wife a loan officer?” I hope I wasn’t pushing it. I think it bothers her a little. Guess I’m still testing the waters. She was in a deep thought for a moment.

“I don’t know Frankie. Why are we talking about this anyway?” I think the topic or subject was about to change. “You know Frankie Santos. You’re always playing a mystery man.”

“What are you referring to?” I asked. Is she starting to pry into my life now?

“Well, the past few weeks, you always come and go and you never talk about the things you do.”

Is she trying to find out about me because she’s interested or is she just being herself and nosey?

“You know, you’re getting a little too nosey Ms. St. James.”

“All I’m saying is, a lot of times you aren’t here and you have these weird guys come here asking for you. They all look like they’re coming here to get something instead of a beer and a burger.” Now I really started getting pissed off.

“What weird guys?”

“Well, take your friends Crackers and Pluto. They look like a couple of loan sharks out of the Bronx in New York.”

“First of all, that’s McCracken and Bruno and it’s none of your fucking business!!!” All of a sudden she got that fire in the eyes look.

“Don’t talk to me that way, Santos! You got these assholes coming into our business and___” I can’t believe what I heard. I stopped her right there.

“What’s this, *our business*?! This ain’t our business!” I can see that

this whole thing is getting out of control. Michele took a deep breath.

“What I meant is that I do manage this place and I try to treat it like as if it were my place! And you can kiss my ass if you don’t like the way I run it! As the matter of fact, I’m getting the fuck out of here!!! Where’s my jacket!” She runs into the office and grabs her purse and jacket as I run after her.

“You know what else Santos? I quit! You don’t need me. You need a dumb bitch you can push around!”

“Why don’t you shut the fuck up and settle down!” Now, I’m doing the yelling.

Michele reared back and let me have one across my cheek. I wasn’t the type of guy who would hit a girl, but don’t challenge my temper. I picked her up and threw her on the leather chair. She popped back up like a raised hair cat and took another swing at me. This time I grab her arm and we started wrestling. I stopped her from slapping me but I couldn’t stop her from tearing at my new silk shirt. So I gave her a shot, and ripped her sleeve from her blouse. She just stared at me for a moment, and I froze. We were both huffing and puffing and I, as any guy would do in this situation, grabbed her and gave her the most wild passionate, wet and steamy tongue lashing kiss of her life. I let go and we looked into each others eyes. I smiled and went back to lay another big one on her and she reared back and whacked me across the chops. My face was not only sore, but bright red from her hand print, and the embarrassment.

“Now what the fuck are you doing?!” she yells as she’s still somewhat winded.

“Forget it! I got caught up in the moment and was pretending you were someone else!” I have my pride.

“No you weren’t. You want me! Admit it! You want me and you want me now!”

“What kind of perfume are you wearing?” I yelled. Oh crap... Where did that question come from?

“Opium! You want some?!” she says like a sarcastic bitch.

“Fuck off! I don’t need or want you.” Now I’m playing hard to get.

“So what your saying is, if I said ‘O.K. let’s do it now and right here!’ You wouldn’t do me!”

“That’s right! I get enough beautiful chicks anytime I want!” I said—again with pride.

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“So you’re saying I’m beautiful?” Her tone drops a notch.

I took a long look at her face and then she saw my eyes wander towards her breast and then to her bronzed thighs. She put her hand under my chin and raised me towards her and whispered.

“Don’t ever take me for granted, abuse or belittle me.” I looked into her eyes and whispered back.

“Okay.” Then she pulled me onto her body, and gave me a passionate kiss... and baby, let the trumpets sound. Like any other office affair, I threw everything off my desk and we began to... ‘Squeeze Oranges’. First I kissed her lips hard and she responded passionately. Then I went to the small tattoo on the back of her silk creamy texture shoulder, and softly licked and rubbed my lips around it. The beads of sweat started running down the sides of her cheeks. She started to get up as though she wanted to stop the whole thing. I looked at her deep into her eyes and threw her back onto my desk. I raised her mini skirt to her waist and yanked off her fuchsia silky G-string. She just stared at me as I raised and planted her feet onto the desk. Oh God— as I kissed and caressed her ankles and slowly went to her knees, I realized that my heart was rapidly beating. The sweat dripped from my lips onto her thighs. I knew that my life was about to change. I was falling in love with this girl. I continued to gently kiss her inner thighs and entered, if I may, ‘The Garden of God’s Paradise’.

Chapter 5

What Now My Love?

What do we say to each other now? I think we're both in a little shock as well as totally exhausted. We somehow ended up on the large velvet couch. We laid there next to each other for a few minutes just staring at the ceiling with our clothes practically ripped off.

"What now?" she says as her eyes are half mast.

"What do you mean what now?" I thought for a long two seconds. "It was pretty good, Babe."

Her eyes popped open. "Pretty good..?! What was this, another contest for you?!" She seemed like she was ready for another yelling match.

"What's bugging your ass now?!" I did my best to refrain from yelling. The girl is driving me crazy.

"Are you going to start talking rough and nasty to me now, Santos?"

"Why are you acting like we did something wrong?" I asked in a state of confusion.

"I'm not acting like something's wrong. You're just acting like... now that you fucked me; you have another victory under your belt!"

"Don't start talking smack. Besides, what about your old married man?"

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“That’s it! He’s not an old man and it’s none of your business who I fuck!” Now the situation is getting out of control again. I came right back...

“Oh yeah..? Who else are you fucking? She raised her hand and started to take a swing at me. Crap, here we go again.

“Damn you!” She says as more tears come down her cheeks. Michele tries another slap to my face. I grabbed her into a bear hug.

“I said stop it! Don’t cry... I’m sorry... I’m sorry.” I held her arms against her body so I wouldn’t be in the line of fire. “I love you! I love you!” I said as she calmed down. She froze for a minute and settled down. It was quite for a long few seconds.

“I love you too and I don’t know what to do.” She lays her head on my chest.

I didn’t realize the affair that she was having with her married friend was having such an effect on her. Randall De LaParra gave me the impression that he could buy anything and anyone. The fact is... I really don’t know the man. I believe Michele really doesn’t know the man either.

“Michele, I’m going to be in late tomorrow because I have some business to take care of. But I want to talk to you sometime tomorrow afternoon.”

“About what?” she asked in a calmer attitude.

“Just things... I fell into something here and I want to tell you things I think you should know.”

“You’re not going to tell me that you work for the CIA? I saw that movie.” I looked at her with a smile and we stared at one another for another moment. I think we are more comfortable with each other. I decided to tell her about my bookie business.

I felt I could trust her and we have been friends for a while. She has been good for the sports bar and business has been good. I went to get us a glass of wine. I started to tell her about my business with the horses and booking bets. I told her how I started and where I’m heading. She seemed to be focused on what I was telling her, and yet I wasn’t sure she comprehended on what I was saying. We talked all night into sunrise. Finally I finished and she was still around. She didn’t get upset and actually seemed intrigue and a little excited about what I was doing. We ended the conversation and it was going to take time to digest. We both decided that we were too tired to think straight and went home.

Chapter 6

A Whole New Businessman

I was so tired, that when I got back to my apartment, I crashed on the sofa and slept through the day. When I woke up, I realized that I over slept, and didn't open up the sports bar. I called the bar, and Robin, the assistant manager and bartender, answered the phone. She said that Michele came in and opened up, then left and went back home.

"Yeah Frankie, Michele said that she would be back around four o'clock. She'll work late today."

"Oh thanks Robin. You have everything under control?"

"Of course... By the way, you had a few strange phone calls this morning and the dude sounded kind of irate. Then he came into the bar looking for you, and I told him I wasn't sure when you would be in."

"Did he leave a name?" I had a hunch I knew who it was.

"Yeah, but I'm not sure of it. It sounded like crackers."

"Was he a big guy with some paint stains on his pants?"

"That's him all right. He had a bug up his ass about getting a hold of you. I told him you would be in later today."

"Okay... Thanks Robin, and I probably won't be in 'til late evening."

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I hung up the phone and wondered why McCracken was anxious to come in and see me. Sure I was late to take him the money early in the morning. There's something going on. I tried to call his office and all I got was his answering machine.

"Hey Mac, sorry I'm late. I'll bring the cash to your office around five o'clock. Talk to you later." I kept the message short. I was still tired from an unusually great night and I decided to give Michele a call.

"Hello... Hello." Michele sounded still asleep. "Hey Michele, this is Frankie. Are you still sleeping?"

"Yeeesss... I'm going into the bar in a while," she says with a yawn.

"Okay, I'll see you tonight. I have to go see McCracken."

"Be careful, Frankie... And I'm with you all the way."

Wow... She said the right thing and that made me feel great. We hung up and I had to get my day started. I called Leo and Mondo to make the rounds and pick up the cash that my regular pony players lost. They would also pay off the small time winners. I took care of anything over \$500 bucks.

I ran over to the Centennial Casino poker club near Montebello to withdraw some cash. I kept a bank roll there because no one has a record of it; like the Internal Revenue Service. It's called the 'Players Bank'. It's a convenient way for the gamblers in the casino to have quick access to their money 24 hours. It's a smart business courtesy of the house. Occasionally, I would get involved in a poker game whether it is 'Low Ball' or 'Stud'. Low Ball is the most popular now. I always had dreams of getting into the championship poker tournament at Binion's Horseshoe Casino in Las Vegas. But I ran into too many cheats and card sharks in legal poker houses. I played from central California to the southern tip. I found out there were too many partners everywhere I went.

Since I was ten years old, I watched my dad and uncles play poker at just about every family event. They played an honest game with each other. As the years rolled on, I studied and learned all the wild games of poker. I played it throughout my Navy hitch during the Vietnam War. I made a killing with the chumps. I always sent a few bucks home to my wife and baby. When I got out of the service, I continued to play in small underground backroom bars where poker

was popular. Then I decided to take on the big boys at the poker houses from Gardena, to Fresno in central California. Oh I won some nice games in the smaller limits. But I learned the hard way in the big games and got whacked financially. This didn't exactly help the marriage situation, especially with a child. I even found out from a poker friend that some of the boys like to carry a Saturday night special. I wasn't into carrying a gun, but if I had, I believe I would be in prison for plugging a few poker cheats.

Yeah, I saw a few winners leave the table with a lot of chips. Some knew when to quit. Unfortunately some were followed out to the parking lot and mugged. Everyone will hear about it because of the news on television or someone at your poker table knew the victim. I decided I didn't need the aggravation. That's when I decided to join my uncle on booking bets on the ponies. The one thing I learned is that poker was a way of life. But the card player will say it's 'Just Recreation'. And that's what the concept of legalized poker houses is; a '*Game of Recreation*.' The house pretty much doesn't care if you win or lose. They make their money on the rent of the poker table. Depending on the limit of your game, the house will charge you in most cases, by the half hour. And, when some houses have between 30 to 100 tables or more, and an average of eight players are at the tables for 24 hours, that's a lot of money for the recreation center of poker.

I had to pull out about two grand from the player's bank because I am starting to hurt financially now, and thank god I had more in my little vault at home. I had to get over to McCracken's office and give him his money. I met up with Leo and Mondo to make sure they didn't have any problems collecting from losers. They collected another \$1,700 net.

I needed to pick up the rest of the cash at my place. I brought the boys with me since I was carrying a lot of money. We got to my place and I told Leo and Mondo to wait outside. Sometimes you feel you're being followed, whether you are or not, and how everybody looks suspicious in this situation.

I have a small safe hidden inside the drywall in my garage behind the washing machine and dryer. I actually got photos of 'hot pin-up babes' on the walls of my garage where it catches the attention of anyone who walks in. It either makes for a conversation, or they start daydreaming and have a stupid fantasy. I pulled out the washer a little

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and then pulled out the camouflage piece of drywall. I started working the combination, and after a few turns, open my little bank. I usually keep between \$35 to \$50 thousand dollars in it. But I've been getting hit lately by the horse players. I have maybe around \$18 thousand left. Nobody would even think I had that kind of money around with the simple looking apartment where I live. It's a one bedroom place and I'm a couple of blocks from the beach. It's not the Ritz, but it's clean and quite.

I took out the amount that I needed to pay off McCracken. I put all the cash into a cheap looking brief case. It was getting late and I haven't heard from him yet. I went into my living room to give McCracken one more call. I still got the answering machine.

"Hey McCracken, for a man that wants his money ASAP, you haven't been in your office lately. I'm on my way over. It's about 7 p.m. Sorry for the delay but I had to do some running around. But I got the chocolate chip cookies for you. I'm on my way."

Mac knows about the meaning of chocolate chip. It's a common name for a five-thousand dollar chip in a Las Vegas casino, because of its primary color being part brown and part yellow or white. I went to get Leo and Mondo and we got into my Porsche and headed to McCracken's office in Huntington Beach. I was sure doing a lot of running around just to please this guy. I guess it's the best way to keep a sucker on the hook. I'll get it back soon enough.

Chapter 7

Who's The Big Boss?

We arrived at Mac's construction office about 7:45 p.m. It looked pretty dark on the inside. There seemed to be a small lamp on in the corner of the building.

"Leo, you and Mondo wait here. I'll take a look inside and see if McCracken's in there. Give me a few minutes, and then I'll signal you that everything's okay."

"Okay, Frankie... but are you sure you don't want one of us to come along?"

"No, I'll be all right."

I walked up slowly to the construction office carrying the brief case of money I owed Mac. I'm thinking he might have left, but Mac was anxious for me to bring him the money. I knocked on the door which was partially opened. There was a big foot print in the middle of the door which looked as if it was kicked in. I walked in and the secretary's desk lamp was still on. Not enough to brighten up the office.

"Anybody here?" I blurted out in a normal tone. I couldn't see the main switch for the office lights. I walked deeper into another part of the office, and I thought I heard something.

"Hello... Anybody around..?" I found a light switch and slowly flipped it on. It only lit a small part of the room. All of a sudden I

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heard a small groan coming from the corner.

“Hello... Mac...?” I said in a raised whisper. I looked over and saw Bruno lying in the corner with blood all over his chest. He was barely alive. I rushed over to him.

“Bruno! What happened?! Where’s Mac?!” He could barely speak.

“Frankie... They were beating him. I couldn’t stop them...and they shot me.”

“Who shot you and where’s Mac?!”

“Not sure, he’s here somewhere. See if he’s dead.” Bruno was trying his best to talk.

“I’ll call 911 Bruno and I’ll look for Mac.”

“No! Frankie, you can’t call the cops. There’s a package under the floor board in back of the fax machine. Get it to his brother, Neil.” Bruno was using his every ounce of strength to talk as he coughed up more blood.

“I don’t know his brother. Let me look around for Mac!” I started searching for him. I went into all of his four office rooms, and no sign. For whatever reason, I opened the door to the bathroom and turned on the light. There he was with a thick twine wrapped around his neck and tied to his hands behind his back. His face looked like a piece of raw meat. What did I get myself into? I ran back into the main part of the office, where Bruno was lying on the floor.

“Bruno, Mac is dead! What the hell is going on here?”

“Frankie, get the package under the floor board and get it to his brother. Address is in the black book on his desk. Get it.”

“What’s in the package, Bruno?”

“If his brother doesn’t deliver it to the right people, the rest of Mac’s family will be hit.”

“Bruno! What the hell is this all about?”

“Go now Frankie and get the package... It’s in back of the fax machine, under the carpet,” he says with a raspy voice with weakness in his tone.

Still sitting in the car, Leo and Mondo were getting curious since they haven’t got the okay signal from Frankie. “Leo, what do you think? Should we check on Frankie?”

“Let’s wait another minute, Mondo... You pack your piece man?” Mondo started getting a little nervous. Coming from a rough

neighborhood in East L.A., they can usually sense things. They pulled out their guns and checked the chamber to make sure it was fully loaded. I wasn't into carrying guns. I've owned them, but if it came to throwing blows, I figured I could take care of myself. But Leo and Mondo came from more of a violent background. Although they're not into the gang thing anymore, they're still careful.

I went over to the fax machine on the Oakwood desk. I pulled it out, and saw there was little carpet swatches, somewhat camouflaged. I lifted it up and there was a loose piece of tile from the floor. I pulled it up...and there it was; five large plastic bags of powder, and I'm not sure of what, but I could take a guess. I took the bags out from the hole in the facade floor corner, and put them on the desk. I ran back over to Bruno. He was barely breathing.

"Bruno, I got the bags...What is it?"

"Frankie, take the bags to Mac's brother. Neil will take care of you. Get the black book on the desk. Call him first and tell him what happened. He'll know what to do. But he's got to have it now or his family will be wiped out. Go!"

I wasn't sure what I was getting into, but drugs ain't my thing. I ran over to the desk and found the companies black address book. I looked up Neil McCracken's phone number. I dialed...and once again, I get the answering machine. I wrote down his phone number and address on a note pad so I could call him again, or just go straight to his place.

"Hello Neil, this is Frank Santos, a friend of Mac's. Please call me on my mobile phone. Your brother's dead and I'm suppose to give you some packages. My number is 726-7746 or dial 'Scorpio', same area code—Hurry!" I looked over towards Bruno. "No one answers! What should I do? Bruno?" Damn... I think he either passed out or he's dead. I checked for a pulse on his wrist and neck. He still had one, but very weak. Now what do I do? I went over to the bags of powder. I didn't want to get caught carrying these things around, so I put them back into the hidden part under the floor board. I laid the piece of tile and carpet over it, and then pushed the desk back. I went over to the phone and tried to call Mac's brother again... Still no answer and the damn answering machine came on. I decided to call Michele to tell her I was going to be late. I dialed as fast as I could.

The Desert has no King

“Hello, Michele? Frankie... I’m over here at McCracken’s construction and___” Three large shadows were standing at the doorway staring at me. One voice came out soft, but deep.

“Calling a friend..? Put the phone down.” I stared for a moment... Again with a threatening low voice... “I asked you to put the phone down,” commands the man in an expensive pinstripe suit. I put the phone down very gently. “Okay, who are you?” He gives that overconfident eye piercing look to me.

“Just a customer of McCracken’s,” I said nervously, but I kept calm.

“You know Mr. McCracken and Bruno?” he asked as he nods his head slowly toward Bruno’s body on the floor.

“I found them this way. Mac and Bruno are dead.”

“How do you know they’re dead?” I guess this master of manners kind of a guy is the speaker of the group.

“I walked in here and found them this way with blood all over the place,” I said.

“Why are you here?” I thought this guy was getting a little boring.

“I just came over to see Mac about working on my house. He’s putting in a family room.” I hoped this Princeton drop out was buying my story.

“Check him!” Two thugs came over and started getting rough with me and thoroughly searching me all over my body. Luckily I keep my wallet in my car.

“Hey! What is this?!” I blurted with a little anger in my tone. They continued the search without a blink. Finally—

“He’s clean sir.” Wow, henchmen with strict manners, I thought.

“I’ll ask you once again, why are you here Mr. —?”

“Ferrato.., Robert.” Like I’d give him my real name. What a dick head.

“Mr. Ferrato... Well Mr. Ferrato, Why are you here?”

“I just came to deliver some papers to Mac so he could work on my house.”

“Are those the papers in that briefcase next to you by the phone?” I looked over toward the desk. There was my briefcase with \$58 hundred dollars in it. I wasn’t sure what to say.

“Uh no, I don’t know anything about that case. I had the papers in an envelope I put somewhere around here.”

“Well then, perhaps that case was for me to pick up. Bart, bring me the case.”

“Yes sir.”

I’m staring at this big brut, Bart, taking my money over to Mr. big sir. I looked at the black business phone book lying on the desk. The boss takes the bag and opens it up. He stares at it for a moment and then looks back at me. I just stared back.

“Well, it’s not what I was expecting, but it’s a start Mr. Ferrato.” Things seemed to become very tense. This time I thought I’d get his name...

“What were you expecting, Mr. uh? I’m sorry; I didn’t get your name.” The boss nods to Bart. Bart walks over to me and gives me a punch in the gut. I drop to the floor in pain. “What the fuck ya doing..?”

“Where’s the rest of the money and the items we came for, Mr. Ferrato?” he shouts.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about!” I was trying to get my breath. Bart picks me up and gives me another fucking shot in the gut. I’m lying on the floor in great pain. “I told you! I don’t know anything about any money!” Mondo and Leo were looking inside through the crack of the door that was left partially open.

“Mondo...” Leo whispers to him and gives him a signal to enter very quietly. They both have their pistols cocked.

“I’m beginning to lose my patience, Bobby!” says the mystery man with another threat in his voice. “There are two things I want now—the rest of the money, and the packages that Mr. McCracken was to deliver.”

“I don’t know anything about any money, damn it!”

“Then you must know about the packages? I looked up at him and his thugs. He gave Bart another signal to smack me again. Bart came over to me and raised his fist, and this time with a brass knuckler. I hadn’t seen those in years.

“OKAY!” I know where the packages are. But that’s all I know! I don’t know anything about any money.”

“I’m waiting.” The boss man speaks again with a calm tone in his voice.

“It’s over there in back of the oak desk under a loose piece of carpet.”

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The boss motions the two henchmen to go over and look for the packages. They pull out the desk and notice the loose carpet and find the powdered packages.

“Here it is sir.” Bart brings over the package and hands it to his boss. He opens it and checks to see if it’s the real thing.

“Put it in the black bag with the money. Very good Mr. Ferrato— Now the \$350 thousand dollars would make the evening complete.”

“I don’t know anything about any money I told you! — and that’s the truth!” The boss man picks up the phone and makes a call...

“Yes sir, I have the packages. However I do not have the money. He says he came by to drop off some papers to Mr. McCracken, but I don’t see anything. He says his name is Mr. Ferrato... Not quite sure... Yes they are, just as we left them. I thoroughly agree. Yes sir... I will be here waiting for you.” He hangs up the phone and stares at me for a moment.

“Well if you really don’t know about the money then, I guess I’ll have to look around myself. I won’t need you anymore, sir. Bart, show Mr. Robert Ferrato to the house of Jesus.” Bart pulls out a semi-automatic 9 mm Luger German pistol, and aims it at my head. I stared right into that mother fucker’s barrel. In one second, I figure I have nothing to lose. My heart rate was racing. I decided that this bastard is going to meet my maker with me. I started to make my move and like an instant flash... There’s a loud pistol shot. It came from the floor by the secretary’s desk. Bruno got off a shot as he lies in his own pool of blood. The bullet hits Bart in the leg. The other thug shoots Bruno with four rounds as Bart shoots wildly into the air. Leo and Mondo bust in through the doorway and begin to fire their pistols at Bart, his side kick, and the boss man. Bullets are ricocheting in every direction as I try to dodge the flying lead. Mondo is hit in the chest with a piercing bullet from the boss’ pistol... and drops to the floor. Leo turns and empties his chamber into the boss man and Bart. Without a second thought, I grabbed my briefcase with the dope and my money, and then yelled at Leo to get out of here. He is leaning over Mondo in shock. I grabbed his arm.

“Leo, get him and let’s go!!! Leo! Help me pick him up. Let’s go man!” Leo was in a trance for a moment seeing Mondo lie there barely breathing. He and Mondo have been like brothers since kids. Again I yelled, “Now! Leo, they’re coming!”

“Frankie... I think Mondo’s dead.”

“No Leo, grab him! He’s bleeding, but he’s still alive. Now let’s go!”

I remembered the black address book and looked for it somewhere on the desk by the phone. I thought that I might find some more names that I knew. I had a problem looking for it in all the rubble. The McCracken construction office looked as though a cyclone hit. There were five dead bodies in there. Either the cops or more of the mob was going to arrive any minute. My bet was that the wise guys would be here first.

Chapter 8

Another Big Guy...?

I got Mondo and Leo into the car. I was thinking about the \$350,000 that was supposed to be somewhere in the office.

“Frankie! Where you going?!” Leo shouts at me as I ran back toward the office. I already decided to look for the money.

“I’ll be back. Cover me, man.”

I went back into the office and was wondering where Mac would hide that money. I went towards the oak desk where the package of white powder was hidden. I’m wondering if there was another hidden spot under the carpet, or behind the wall. I rushed my search. I was getting nervous about someone showing up. I was tearing things apart. I went over to Mac’s body. I searched his pockets and they were all empty. I went into his desk to look for anything that would give me a lead on the cash. I tore the damn desk apart. I got pissed off and tossed the desk on its back. There is usually a hidden key under it. I saw nothing. I stopped for a moment. I looked around the room and time was running out.

The only thing that wasn’t shot up in here was the fish aquarium. Those damn fish must’ve cost a fortune. Fish that glow...a fish tank that must hold 75 gallons of water. Nice cedar wood holding that big tank. I stared a moment longer. I picked up a 2x4 piece of busted wood from the desk. I took an aim and swung hard against the glass tank.

The fish came pouring over with the flow of water onto the floor. I broke off the rest of the shattered glass and cleared the debris. My gut feeling was strong. I put my hand into the fish sand and dug through it. I felt a hinge. I dug through faster. I hurriedly cleared the sand and there was a small trapped door. I smashed the lock off and opened it... There it was— lots of wrapped up “C” notes all stacked up.

I grabbed an empty plastic bag from the trash can and began to fill it with the green backs. I was rapidly loading up and I can't believe the adrenaline rush that was going through my body. I've never held so much money at one time. It felt like it was more than \$350,000. I'm not sure if my thinking is rational right now, but I'm supposed to get this money to Mac's brother.

I heard a quick honk of the horn from my car. Leo was rushing me. I was taking all the cash since Mac didn't need it anymore. Anyway, that was my logic. I wrapped up the money and headed for the door... Now What..? Here comes a black and silver trim Rolls Royce to the front of the office. I don't have good vibes about this situation. I couldn't get out the front door, so I hid in one of the small offices. Two more well dressed guys in their mid thirties walked in with sawed off shot guns. Oh crap! I'm having a rough fucking night.

It was real quiet as they were looking in every direction. They saw the bodies of their associates. One guy went to the body of the boss man and checked to see if he was still alive. He also went to the other guys and was convinced that they were all dead. He slowly went over to Bruno's body, and he was definitely dead. He saw the fish tank all busted up. But I forgot to close the hidden door trap which was wide open, and stuck out like a sore thumb. He checked to see if there was anything in it. He pulled out a couple of money bands. He takes out his handkerchief and picks up the phone and dials.

“Yes sir... Mr. Shelton, Bart and Smitty are dead as well as Mr. McCracken's body guard. No sir... I'm searching for Mr. McCracken now. I did find a money band inside a trap door of the fish tank, but I didn't see any money. Yes sir... I will get back to you in one minute. Are you okay in the automobile sir..? Yes sir, I will.”

The two men started combing through the rubble in the office very slowly. I'm in a bad situation. I don't know if Leo is still out there. He must be... God am I sweatin'. They're getting closer. I looked around to see if there was any way out of here. There's a big office window

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I'm staring at. Oh Christ! Please don't make me jump through that. The wise guy walked into Mac's office and finds his body. He is still looking around for anything. He's getting too close to me.

"Hey Charlie... I found McCracken's body. It's like a fuck'n morgue around here. Did you find anything else?"

"Nah— Just a bunch of dead fish. You better let the boss know. See if he wants to come in and check things out."

"Okay." He gets on the phone again. "Yes sir, I found Mr. McCracken's body, and no sign of the packaged items or the money in question. Yes sir... No sir... I haven't found anything else. I see a black book on a desk here. A page that's open on Mr. McCracken's brother's name... a Neil McCracken. Yes sir, I have the number and address. I'll be right out sir."

"What's up Rico?" asked Charlie.

"De LaParra is pissed off about Shelton... And the packages are gone and no money in sight. We're going to make a house call. Let's go."

Now's my chance to get out of here, but damn! They got Mac's brother's address. I gotta call him. As they were walking out, I pushed the door open just a little more to see where they were at.

'Squeak'— Holy sh__ Rico turns around quickly with his pistol raised.

"What was that? Charlie stiffens for a second..."

"What? I didn't hear anything." Rico is looking very carefully at the whole office as he walks slowly towards the small offices. Charlie relaxes... "Let's go Rico. I don't see anything, and the bodies are pretty dead." Rico's eyes are with full concentration as he steps cautiously toward the office where I was hiding. Oh Jesus, this is it! I am so fucked! I looked at the big office window again. I think I'm going through it. I was hoping he wouldn't come any closer. Rico was getting closer and his gun was cocked. Fuck it... Here I go... I got up and took a running leap from the floor onto the desk and screamed—"HOLY GOD!!! JESUS, MARY, AND JOS____!" I jumped through the big glass window.

I felt my body hit the glass as though I skied into a mountain of snow. I heard loud pops of gunfire as glass shattered everywhere. I was airborne coming through the window which seemed like 20 floors up, but in reality was about six to eight feet. I hit the pavement and got

some minor bruises. What now, as I know more lead is going to start flying my way? Just then I heard the screeching of tires and a rived up engine. It was Leo coming in my Porsche. He pulled up about 15 yards away from me. I ran towards him as the car was on a roll, and I jumped into the opened window on the passenger side. There weren't any shots fired at us as we got out of firing range very fast.

Rico and Charlie ran outside to fire at them. Randall De LaParra was standing at the side of the Rolls staring at the tail of the Porsche as it sped away.

"Rico, Charlie! You fellows okay?" Rico felt like he failed De LaParra.

"Yes sir... I'm sorry sir." De LaParra looks over to him and Charlie.

"Not to worry... Rico, do a check on the license plate 'PAL N LVR'. Do it now..."

"Yes sir, right away!" Rico gets on the limos mobile phone and as quick as he can, makes a call.

My adrenalin was at its peak. "Leo, you saved my ass man! How's Mondo...?"

"I think he's still breathing Frankie."

"We gotta get him to a hospital Leo!"

"No man. He has a gunshot wound and they'll tell the cops!"

"Leo! If we don't get him to a doctor, he's going to die!" I was sweating badly.

"No Cops, Frankie!!! My aunt works at USC medical center. She'll help us."

"Okay Leo, hurry!"

We were on full speed and I just can't believe all this is happening. I got all this drug powder and money. I think I've really crossed the line without thinking. Who were those guys and what was Mac involved in?

"Oh my god..!" It just hit me as I was thinking out loud.

"What's the matter Frankie?"

"Oh my god, Leo..! De LaParra— That Rico guy said, De LaParra! I think we are in a world of shit. Hurry and get to your aunts place! I have to get to Michele's apartment."

"What's up Frankie?"

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“Leo, I can’t get into it now. Did you see the car in front of Mac’s place?”

“Yeah...”

“Did you see the license plate?”

“The license plate was personalized. It said— ‘MARKER UP’. Why Frankie..?”

“Holy crap..! I think it has to be Michele’s older boyfriend, Randall De LaParra! He has something to do with Mac’s death. The packaged powder and all that money... Why are he and Mac acquainted? Hang on Mondo! We’re almost there.”

We got to East L.A. and went straight to Leo’s aunt Barbara’s house. Leo rushed to the door and said a few quick words to his aunt. They rushed back to my car. Barbara looked over to Leo and gave us that pissed off look.

“What happen, Leo? Another gang shooting?”

“No Tia, we we’re collecting a debt that was owed to us and these other guys tried to steal it, and it got out of control. Can we get Mondo inside Tia?”

“Hurry! Frankie, help Leo!” Barbara took over like a pro. Hard to believe Mondo was still alive. We carried him into the house and laid him onto the bed. Aunt Barbara had a lot of medical supplies; after all, she was a nurse who was always prepared, especially living in East L.A.

“Frankie, I’ve known your uncle Sonny and your mother Maria since we all were kids, and I don’t think either one taught you to be in this situation.”

“I know. I didn’t plan this Aunt Barbara. It just happened.” I replied as she throws the guilt trip on me.

“Leo, you and Mondo are like brothers. This is how you take care of each other?!!”

“Sorry Aunt Barbara. Please hurry and help him.” Leo felt like he was a little boy again as he was getting balled out. I thought I’d better jump in.

“Listen Leo, I gotta get going to Michele’s. Too much is happening all at once. I’ll get back with you. Just take care of Mondo. Come out to the car with me. Bye Aunt Barbara. I know you will take good care of him.”

“Be careful Frankie.” Aunt Barbara says as she continues to clean

his wounds.

"I will. Come on Leo." I walked Leo out to the car. "Leo, I want you to take this money. There's enough for you and Mondo, and stay out of sight for awhile. They don't know who you are and I'm not sure if they really know who I am."

"Frankie, how much is here?"

"Here's my briefcase with \$5800, but I think there's going to be trouble. I'll get back with you."

"Take care Frankie."

"Get Mondo well, man." I jumped back into the Porsche, shot down the street, and headed to Seal Beach.

Now I see why Michele's got a beautiful place in Naples. It's a section of Long Beach with beautiful homes that has that Italian style with canals of sail boats parked in front. I'm just blown away about Randall De LaParra involved in drugs and money and probably the porn game. I wondered if that's how he met Michele. Now I'm really getting pissed off. I figured De LaParra is footing the mortgage for her home. Michele mentioned that he lived in Laguna Beach. I'm sure this guy is married. An older man with a beautiful young hottie..? I called Michele from my mobile phone. Again with the answering machine!

"Michele, this is Frankie. A lot of crazy things have happened tonight. I'm not sure, but I think you're in danger. Get out of there and go to my apartment now! I gotta make a couple of stops and I'll meet you there. I love you, and hurry. I'll explain later." I headed to my sports bar in Seal Beach. It was 10:37 p.m. I called my night time manager, Robin.

"Hello, Robin? This is Frankie... Is everything okay? Any calls? Have you heard from Michele? If she calls tell her to call me immediately! Nothing's wrong! Just tell her to call me. How did we do tonight? Good. I want you to close early and take the rest of the night off... No reason! Just do it! I'm coming right over and _____. Hello! Hello! Robin! Are you there?" Damn, it's hard to get a good reception along the coast.

I tried to get to the bar as fast as I could. I had one more turn off to Seal Beach Blvd. "What the Fuck!" Red lights flashing behind me and here I am with a bag of drugs in my trunk, and a shit load of money. "I am so fucked!" I pulled over as I exited the off ramp. Again my heart

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starts pumping fast. It was the California Highway Patrol.

“Good evening sir. May I see your driver’s license, registration and insurance papers?”

Damn... I can’t believe he’s not asking for my passport— Ass hole.

“Here you are officer... Was I driving too fast?” He talks in a typical cop deep tone of voice as he looks over the information on my license.

“Mr. Santos... Is that really your name?” asked the cop as he looks over my car.

“Yes officer, that’s my real name. Ah, did I do something wrong?” I watched him checking out my back seats looking for anything.

“I noticed you weaving in and out of traffic and it seemed as though you might have been drinking. Have you been drinking, sir?”

“No sir. I was just in a hurry because I was late getting home to my family. I’m coming in from San Diego on business and I am simply just tired.” That should work.

“I can understand that Mr. Santos, but you need to be careful especially on this freeway. I just need to run your license as a formality and make sure there are no warrants.”

“Oh, there’s no warrants officer.”

“I’ll be a moment.” He really didn’t care if I said there were warrants or not. Shit! This guy is something else. Come on... Hurry, hurry... I slammed my fist on the dash board in frustration.

“Damn, that hurt!” I looked into my rearview mirror and saw him on the radio phone. All of a sudden he threw the phone onto his driver’s seat and rushed towards my car. I was thinking to myself, *‘Did I pay that fucking parking ticket?’* I’m fucked!!!

“Mr. Santos! Here’s your papers and drive careful!” Then he darted out like a bat out of hell, got into his patrol car and put the pedal to the metal... I’m home free! YES! I’m home free you stupid bastard! I headed to the Seaside bar and grill.

As I drove down Main St., I passed in front of my sports bar. It was closed like I wanted. I drove around the back alley and entered the premises through the kitchen door. I went right to the safe and took the cash and receipts for the night. It wasn’t a lot, but it was enough. I wasn’t sure what to do about the dope and cash I had in the car. I went back to the alley and sat in my car waiting for Michele to call. I was getting more nervous and tried to call her again. It just kept ringing,

and again the message machine comes on.

“Michele! Where are you? We gotta talk! It’s about your ex-old man, De LaParra. If he asks you anything about me, don’t tell him anything. Just get out of your house and go to my apartment. Call me on my mobile phone. Hurry!” That’s the second message I left her telling her to get out. I gotta get a hold of Mac’s brother and unload this shit. I stood staring at my Seaside Sports bar and grill lounge wondering if I’m going to have this very long. Do they know who I am? What is Randall De LaParra? He’s supposed to be a big mortgage banker. Maybe he is the ‘Big Guy’.

My mobile phone rang... “Hello! This is Santos... Neil?!!! What the hell is going on? Yes, I’m sure Mac is dead, as well as Bruno. Yeah, I got the packages and money. They didn’t get anything out of me. They saw the packages, but not the money. There’s a lot of money here... I appreciate that... I could use it... I really don’t know what they know. All I know is the big boss man’s name is De LaParra... Yeah, Randall... Where do you want me to meet you? Your place is on the Balboa peninsula in Newport? Yeah, I know it... Okay... The pool house... I’m on my way.”

I started to hang up and then it hit me... “OH MY GOD! Neil!!! Hello Neil!!!” Shit, he hung up. I forgot the wise guys got his address from the Mac’s black phone book. I tried calling back, but he’s not answering. I tried to call Michele again, and no answer. I left for Neil’s house. I pulled out onto Pacific Coast Highway and headed about 20 miles south to Newport Beach. It’s now past midnight and I still haven’t heard from Michele. I tried to call her again, and this time I’m not getting a signal on this stupid mobile phone. I’m driving along the coast and the signal barely comes in and then disappears. Finally, my phone rings.

“Hello! Michele! Where the hell you been?!!! It’s 12:30 in the morning!!! Sorry, I didn’t mean to yell. Get out of your house and go to the Seaside bar... Don’t ask me questions now. I’ll explain later... Has De LaParra tried to call you? Hello? Hello? Shit!!! This damn phone..!” No signal again.

I kept going as fast as I could to Neil’s house hoping I wouldn’t get busted by a cop again. There are light sprinkles of rain on the road. Oh hell. Now what? I see a lot of flashing red, yellow and blue lights.

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Damn... A car accident! I have no other way to go except along the coast. Bumper to bumper at 3 - 5 miles per hour. As usual, the cops have some teenagers in handcuffs next to the banged up cars with busted bottles of booze all over the road. The little shits!

I looked at my watch and it was a little after 1 a.m. and I finally made it to Mac's brother's street in Newport Beach. Wow, a lot of big homes. I know Mac was in construction but I wasn't sure about Neil. I was slowly driving down the street coming closer to the ocean water canals on the peninsula. There it was. The Mediterranean style house wasn't on a well lit street. The atmosphere was damp from the sea breeze. It looked like it was going to start raining a little more. I parked a few houses away and left the packages of dope and cash in the car until I saw Neil. I very carefully walked up the long driveway and the house appeared to be too dark inside. I didn't see any well lit rooms through the windows. I went around back towards the pool house. There was a red light flickering through the window. I thought that Neil would keep it low lit so as not to cause any attraction to his family or neighbors. The door was unlocked and I figured he left it opened for me to walk into and wait for him.

I slowly walked in and snooped around. The rich sure have it nice. This is a really nice little pool house with a bar and indoor Jacuzzi spa. What's this on the wall? Looks like whips and small chain links. Hey, this looks like one of those places you see in the porn movies. Oh man. This is a nice video camera. Wow, this looks like the size those TV shows use. Uhhh... I think I know what Neil's into.

As I looked around more, I saw a glass covered book shelf. There must have been at least 100 video cassettes in it. I looked outside towards the house, and still it was quiet. Just for kicks, I put a cassette into the VCR. Man, was I right. Porn city... Wow... I lost track of why I was here in the first place.

Where the hell is Neil? I had to take a piss and saw the bathroom. If he's not out here in the next few minutes, I'm leaving. I saw the small refrigerator on the way to the bathroom and opened it. I grabbed a beer and popped it open. I chugged a little down. That felt good. Now I really had to take a piss and rushed to the toilet. The door was a little jammed. I pushed it harder and apparently there was something keeping it from fully opening. I gave it a bigger shove because I was about to piss in my pants. Finally, I got it opened and it was dark as

hell. I felt for the light switch and hope the light wasn't going to be too bright. I turned it on... "FUCK!!! FUCK!!! OH MY FUCK'N GOD!!!"

I let out a scream that could be heard around the world. Parts of bodies piled together with severed heads in the toilet, all soaking in a bowl of blood. It had to be Neil since he did have a resemblance to Mac. What was more sickening is a woman's head next to it with her eyes wide open and burned cigarette marks on her face. The body parts were naked and it looked like they were butchered to pieces. The male forehead and face and throat were slashed with razor blades. I was going to barf...throw up...regurgitate. Whatever you wanted to call it!

I ran into the other bathroom next to it so I could puke in the toilet. I opened the door and again two more bodies. This time there were just bullet holes in their heads. They were two young children. I ran outside as it started to rain and leaned over the edge of the pool, and finally let all my guts out into the water. The thunder started rumbling along with the lightning as I just laid there with my eyes shut for a moment.

**Oh my god. I'm bleeding to death in the desert and it's raining. Nina, talk to me. Damn. My throat hurts and I can't talk loud. I'm trying very hard to open my eyes. The rain is pounding on the desert sand and splashing onto my face. I can see you dear. Get up. I'm getting sick of that smokey aroma. My eyes are open a little. I looked up and I believe I started to hallucinate. I see an old Indian with a bandana around his head staring at me.*

"Hey... Who are you? Why you staring at me? Am I dead?"

No answer, huh. I just closed my eyes and figured I was dead, and so is Nina. I had it all. I had it all. Good night sweetheart. You too... 'Chief'.

After I barfed half my guts out, I turned over on my back and opened my mouth wide and let the rainwater fall in. I spit out the garbage from inside my mouth. I feel like I had the wind kicked out of me. Finally I just got some air again. I keep having flashes of those bodies in the pool house. I gotta get out of here. I hate this thunder and rain. I better call the cops.... Fuck it! I'm out of here. I got back to my car all wet. At least I had a towel in my trunk. I cleaned up the best I could. I was going directly to my sports bar. Michele should be there by now.

Chapter 9

Where Are You Michele?

Michele was pretty shook up about Frankie's call and didn't know whether to take it seriously or not. She sat there for awhile and looked at her clock. It's been 20 minutes.

"Oh what the hell... I'll go to the Seaside bar. Frankie's shook up about something." Michele arrived at the sports bar and parked in front. There were a few people out late at night strolling on the sidewalks. There was loud music with people drinking up a storm and shooting pool at Francy's Irish bar. She opened the sports bar and went in and turned on a couple of lights. Got a glass of wine and waited for Frankie.

Randall de LaParra went to Michele's home. She told him earlier in the day that she was not going to be seeing him anymore. He wasn't going to let her go that easy. Although he had a number of mistresses, his sexual desire for her was the ultimate passion. He also had a temper and she was aware of it.

Randall knocked on the door of the beautiful little mansion on Naples Island. No one answered and De LaParra had his own key; he walked right in. He looked around for her, but sees that she's gone. He saw the phone answer machine light blinking and played back the messages. He heard Frank Santos voice on them.

Santos was leaving messages all night long and telling her to go to the Seaside sports bar to meet him there, and not to talk to De LaParra. Randall became real angry and figured that Santos had the money and packages of drugs perhaps hidden at the Seaside bar. He looked up the number to the sports bar in Michele's address book and dialed.

Michele answered, "Hello, Frankie? Frankie? Hello... Hello..." De LaParra stared, and then gently hung up the phone. He went back outside to his car and gave orders to Rico to drive to the Seaside bar in Seal Beach.

Michele was getting worried and pacing the floor. She would keep looking out the bar room window, but wasn't sure what she was waiting for except that Frankie was suppose to be here. Michele saw a familiar car passing in front of the bar. It looked liked Randall De LaParra's Rolls Royce. She got closer to the window to see who was in it. She then looked over at the clock and it was 12:53 a.m. The black and silver trim classic Rolls Royce pulled around back and parked in the alley way. Michele was curious, but stood at the bar looking out into the main street. All of a sudden Randall was at the front door knocking. Michele was startled at first. Randall looked through the bar window and gave her a smile. She opened the door.

"Randall, what are you doing here?"

"I was in the neighborhood my dear, and I thought you might be open and we would have a drink." Michele was a little suspicious.

"Randall... Why are your friends with you at this hour?"

"Well sweetheart, we were at a business function downtown Long Beach and we decided to visit you. Where's Mr. Santos?"

"I don't know. Why?"

"Well, we have some business with him and he has something of ours."

"What could Frankie possibly have of yours? You don't even know him except for knowing that he owns this place." Randall made himself at home as Rico and Charlie pulled the shades down on the front windows facing the street. Michele became frightened. "What's going on Randall?"

"Sit down my dear and make yourself comfortable. I understand you and Mr. Santos are lovers now. I'm sure that's the reason you called me today... to tell me that you and I are finished."

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"It's none of your business."

"Well, right now it is my business. You see, he has gotten into one of my business ventures that did not involve him. And now he is very involved. He has certain packages and a product of ours. Do you know where they are?"

"I don't know what you're talking about. Frankie has nothing to do with you!"

"We know he's been here this evening and we're getting back what we came for...and if you raise your voice to me again, I will knock you on your ass!" Randall bent over and tried to kiss her on the lips as Michele turned her face.

"Rico... Charlie... Look for what we came for." The two thugs started tearing up the place. They turned tables over, and then went into the kitchen and tossed the pots and pans in every direction as they cleared the cupboards. Michele began screaming at them.

"What are you looking for?! What do you want?!"

"Gentlemen, keep looking." De LaParra holds back his temper. Michele sat there as they continued to tear up the sports bar. She became very upset and started crying. Randall de LaParra also wandered around the office looking for a money safe or hideaways. All of a sudden the phone rings... Michele grabbed the phone as fast as she could.

"Hello Frankie? Frankie?!!! Randall's here destroying the bar and___" De LaParra grabbed the phone from her. He pushed her away and put the phone to his ear to see if it was Santos. He just listened quietly...

"Michele! Michele! What's going on?! Is that fucker De LaParra there?!"

"Yes Mr. Santos...The fucker is right here."

"You hurt her De LaParra and I'll break your fucking face!!!" Santos screams over the phone.

"Excuse me for yawning you little roach, but I believe you have something of ours." Randall's voice begins to tremble with anger.

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"I believe you do. You've seen what happened to Mr. McCracken and his brother; and of course the whole family... I want the packages and the money. The McCracken's took more than their share."

"You fuck'n animal!" Santos screams.

“Bring the merchandise here right away or the same thing will happen to Michele as Mrs. McCracken.”

“All right! I’ll have it for you within the hour.”

“You’ve got 30 minutes or Michele’s pretty face is gone.” De LaParra grabs Michele and puts her face on the phone. “Tell him!!!” Michele cries out loud...

“Frankie! Hurry!”

Randall gives Santos his final words... “Thirty minutes.” He cuts the phone off. De LaParra’s voice drops a few notches. “Apparently Mr. Santos has our merchandise sweetheart. Soon this will be all over.”

“What are you going to do to him?!”

“I’ll tell you my dear... Your new love interest has walked in on a mine field and he’s about to step on one.” Michele’s voice started trembling.

“What did he do?”

“Simply, being in the wrong place at the wrong time. Nevertheless my love, he is now considered out of your life and we’re going back to the way things were.”

“What are you talking about Randall? I don’t love you and I never did. You showered me with gifts and a house when I was vulnerable and yes, my life was lost while I was into drugs. You supplied me and I was yours. But I fell in love with Frankie and I stopped taking all drugs... Now you want to take him away from me?!”

“Sorry... Santos knows too much and he has to be disposed of.”

“Please Randall, don’t hurt him. I’m begging you!” Rico stares out the bar room window and notices a lot of commotion on the street.

“Excuse me Mr. De LaParra, there seems to be trouble on the street. There’s about half a dozen men having a little brawl. And here come the police.”

“Damn! How many police are there?”

“Not sure... But there are three squad cars.” De LaParra walks over to join Rico.

“What are those idiots fighting about?”

“Just some drunks coming out of that Irish bar, sir.” Charlie follows Randall to join Rico viewing the ruckus.

Michele looked around for a way to get out as she saw that Rico, Charlie, and De LaParra were occupied with the brawl outside.

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Michele looked towards the kitchen and figured she could make a dash to the back door. She took one more look at the thugs by the window, and then slowly tip toed towards the back. She made it to the bolted door and quietly began to open it. Just then the phone rang. The three men looked back and noticed Michele was gone. Michele panicked and rushed to unlock the back door. De LaParra rushed to the back door along with Rico while Charlie answered the phone. Michele almost had the door open and De LaParra grabbed her by the arm and flung her to the floor.

“What in the hell do you think you’re doing you silly little bitch?!” Randall finally lost control of his temper.

“Leave me alone! I hate you!” she screams as she picks herself up from the floor crying.

“Charlie..! Who was on the phone?”

“Sorry Mr. De LaParra, there was no answer. De LaParra reached for his pocket and pulled out a package of his favorite recipe... He called it ‘Angel Snow’.

“I think you’re due for a little present my love. You’ve been edgy since you decided to quit the best snow flake money could buy.” Michele looked up at him.

“NO!!! I won’t!!!”

“Ah, but you will... Hold her boys.” Rico and Charlie, without a flinch, held her down and pushed the powder up her nose and into the gums of her teeth. Michele started to scream and throw a tantrum. She started breathing heavy and beads of sweat starting rolling down her face. She started gasping for air as though she was suffocating. Randall started giving her a few smacks on her face to snap out of it.

“Come on Michele, you’re making a little too much of this... Let her arms go Rico.” Rico and Charlie looked a little worried about her.

“Excuse me Mr. De LaParra, but she don’t look too good.”

“Yes Charlie, but Michele can get a little dramatic. See what’s going on outside and if the police are still there. And be on the lookout for Mr. Santos. Rico, when he gets here I want you in the back under the counter. Then Charlie, make sure you get him back there and you both take care of that roach.”

Michele was lying on the floor seeming to be semi-unconscious. She opened her eyes a little and saw De LaParra was standing over her talking to Rico and Charlie. She was a born fighter and took a couple

of deep breaths. She jammed the point of her foot into the groin of De LaParra and he quickly went into pain. Rico and Charlie were stunned. They always liked Michele, but were very afraid of De LaParra because they know what a deranged brutal mind he has. He provides for them and pays them well. Randall gets up in pain screaming...

"You fucking little whore!" Michele just stared at him for a moment and started to get up. Randall reared back and slapped her as hard as he could. Michele flew across the table and chairs. De LaParra raised his hand again and gave her a punch on the left cheek bone. Rico and Charlie jumped in to help Randall get up. Michele was bleeding from the gash on her face.

"Mr. De LaParra, please calm down. Let Charlie and I handle her," roars Rico.

"Fuck you!!! Fuck you and Charlie!!! Fuck her! I've had it with her and that shit Santos!"

"Please Mr. De LaParra, Charlie and I are with you all the way, but this is Michele and you love her..." Randall hesitates and stares at her...

"Love her?! I want you to shoot her in the fucking skull now!"

"But Mr. De LaParra," Rico protesting and trying to keep his composure.

"Do it now with the silenced or I'll do you!" Michele was listening to all this as she laid there bleeding. This was it... Michele jumped up and grabbed the gun out of Charlie's hip belt, and as Charlie started to wrestle it away from her, it went off hitting Charlie in the thigh. As he went down to the floor, Rico jumped towards her and grabbed her wrist and got the gun away. Michele ran to the front door and tried to open it. The doors were locked. She turned around and looked at all of them.

As Rico turned to Charlie and looked like he was about to lose his best friend, De LaParra charged at Michele. She stepped back and threw a chair through the front window. The glass shattered creating a large jagged hole in the window frame. She screamed at the top of her lungs as she sticks her head through the broken window pane. — "HELP! THEY'RE GOING TO KILL ME!!!" The gang of fighters on the street, as well as the cops, came to a stand still. Once again in an instant split second, she began to give a screaming cry to anyone who could hear... "PLEASE HELP ME!!!"

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De LaParra yelled... “MICHELE!!!” He aimed his gun at her, and in a heat of passion, shot her in the back with three rounds. She froze as she stared towards Seal Beach’s Main St. — and with her last ounce of breath softly says...

“Frankie.... Frankie... I...” She fell partially over the window frame. Half her body hung over the walkway. There was such chaos in the street with the police caught off guard. The public ran in every direction.

The police officers had their guns drawn as they positioned themselves behind their squad cars for protection. De LaParra just stood there in shock as he sees half of Michele’s body hanging over the window frame, and the rest of her body in splattered with blood. After all, he really was in love with her. Rico rushed over and grabbed De LaParra.

“Come on Randall!!! The cops are out there and we gotta get Charlie out of here. Please, Mr. De LaParra.”

“Uh, yes Rico... I’ll get Michele.” Randall was in shock... then finally became aware of what he had done.

The police aimed their spot lights on the Seaside sports bar. Then shouted on the loud speaker— “This is the police... Put your weapons down and come out.”

Rico and De LaParra got Charlie and bolted to the back of the kitchen. The police didn’t get any answer from the direction of the sports bar. They waited for back up. Unfortunately the police force was about two to three miles away from old town. The city of Seal Beach isn’t accustomed to this kind of violence. But tonight was unusual. It was the first murder in Seal Beach in a decade; and it had to happen in a popular sports bar. A few more police cars arrived and the block of Main St. was filled with police, rescue trucks, and ambulances. Again the police shouted for the killers in the sports bar to come out. Michele was still laid over the window frame with a large amount of shattered glass covering the sidewalk.

A police officer rushed towards Francy’s Irish bar, which is next door, and took cover. He was a few feet from Michele’s body. He took a careful look through the first window and didn’t see any movement. He got closer to Michele as he carefully advanced towards her. The other cops had him covered. It was quiet inside. He slowly grabbed Michele and pulled her from the window windowpane onto the

Frederiko Aguilar

sidewalk. He could see now that she was dead. Sgt. Richard Poe was a much respected police officer in the community. He realizes that it was his friend Michele, the manager of Seaside sports bar and grill. He has eaten there with his family, and personally knew her from the little chats they had. Michele was a friendly person to him. Richard became a little emotional. He gently laid her down as his eyes began to tear. Then he gave the other police officers the signal that he was going in.

All the bright headlights from the police squad cars were aimed towards the inside of the sports bar. Sgt. Poe still didn't see anything, and then yelled through the broken window for their surrender. About four more police officers rushed towards the bar and joined Poe. He was going in. In a low whisper, "Are you men ready?" The other cops all gave thumbs up. He took a deep breath and jumped through the shattered window and came to the standard ready to shoot stance on one knee. "Everybody freeze!" he yells as the other officers simultaneously broke the main door down and rushed in. There was dead silence— there was no one in the sports bar. De LaParra and his hoods got away through the back door a long time ago.



Michele St. James of Seal Beach

Chapter 10

Santos' Turning Point

I rushed as fast as I could up Pacific Coast Highway to Seal Beach. I was angry and scared at the same time. I'm not sure how I'm going to handle De LaParra... that piece of garbage. If he hurts Michele— she's somebody I've been waiting for all my life. I turned into old town. I saw a lot of flashing lights from Seal Beach police cars, fire trucks, and an ambulance. As I got close to the end of Main St. going towards the pier, I was only cruising about 10 mph. I noticed all the people scattered throughout the street with their attention in the direction of my sports bar. I pulled into a parking stall near the bank, because the end of the street was blocked off by the police. It was safer that my car was parked further away since I had those damn drugs in the trunk.

I walked slowly toward my bar, and the outside of it looked like a cyclone hit it. I trotted quicker to see what happened. I got to the police line where the police activity yellow tape is marked off. As I tried to go through it, a cop stopped me.

"Just a minute sir... Get back behind the yellow tape!" a young cop says.

"My name is Frank Santos and I own the Seaside sports bar." I got real nervous.

"Wait here." He walked over to Officer Richard Poe and

whispered to him. Sgt. Poe was an acquaintance of mine. He and his family were frequent customers of the Seaside Sports Bar. He knew and liked Michele. He then looked over my way and came toward me.

I yelled to him, "Richard! What happened?" Then I went under the yellow ribbon and ran towards my bar.

"Frankie! Stop! Something seriously happened." He grabbed me along with the other police officer. I was just staring at my place as I got closer and saw a large blanket over someone in front of it.

"Where's Michele?! She's supposed to meet me here!" I started losing my composure.

Officer Poe looked me right in the eyes and said...

"Frankie, she's gone."

"What do you mean gone?!"

"Something happened. I don't know for sure... A robbery or something and it got out of control and they... killed her. They killed Michele."

"No— Oh God... Oh God! I gotta see her! Where is she?!" My body was shaking.

"Frankie, calm down... Please calm down."

"Where is she?!" Sgt. Poe took a deep breath...

"Alright... Come on, I do need an official identification." We walked over to the body that was covered with a blanket that had blood soaking through it. I just stared at it for a moment. Richard nodded to another police officer.

"Officer Shane, would you lift the cover please?" As he started to pull back the soiled blanket, my whole body stiffened.

There she was... A beautiful angel... Beautiful blond hair... Sleeping for the rest of her life... She came into my life by fate, and it seemed that we were going to be sharing a life together. We had an unforgettable moment of passion. She was young and charismatic. The community of Seal Beach always left with a smile after chatting with her, whether they came into the Seaside sports bar or just had a chat on sociable Main St. Now her life has been taken away in the most horrible execution of crime to the human being. God, how did you allow this to happen to one of your angels?

I gently put my head over hers and the tear drops rolled down my cheeks as I felt like shaking her to see if she would wake up. She was wearing the beautiful perfume smell of 'Opium'.... I shut my eyes and

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inhaled the scent. I took one last look at her... I noticed traces of powder on her blouse. I started to wipe it off.

"Frankie, please don't touch her. Forensics will be here any minute. Please come with me over here."

Sgt. Poe was a sensitive man. I held my head down as I was escorted to the squad car. I was too numb to yell, scream, or cry out loud. I went into deep thought about Randall De LaParra and his punks. *'I swear to you god, that vengeance is mine.'*

"Frankie... Frankie. Are you alright? Sgt. Poe put his arm on my shoulder.

"Yes... Yes, I am Richard."

"You said you were going to meet Michele here tonight? Why so late?" Richard asked.

Here goes the investigation. "Ah, I was in earlier and I noticed that we're short on some stock of liquor and certain foods. Michele was going to be on vacation for about 10 days and I wasn't sure what had to be ordered. She said she would come in and take inventory."

"So, you weren't here when she arrived?"

"No Richard. I had to deliver some papers out in... Balboa Island and I had dinner with a friend."

"Well, we'll find out if it was just a robbery or if there were other motives. You can't go into the Seaside Bar tonight because the Crime Scene Unit is on their way. I'll have the detectives give you a call in the morning."

"Yeah, okay Richard."

"You don't have any idea who might have done this? Maybe someone you had a run in with or any problems in the bar the last few days?"

"No. Everything has been just fine here. I'm not feeling so good. Can I go now?"

"Sure Frankie. Let me have your phone number to your home and the best time that the detectives can reach you."

I gave Officer Poe all the information as I looked on for the last time at Michele's body. The detectives arrived and went right to her body. They got more information from forensics and the coroner also arrived. Here it is at 3:48 in the morning and I can't believe all the people that are on Main St. viewing this.

I walked to the pier and sat on the bench to think things out. The sound of the waves slamming on the sand and pilings of the pier was very serene. The crest of the ocean seemed to glow through the mist as it hit the surf. All I could do is think of Michele and her feisty personality. She always knew how to make you feel good.

That mother fucker De LaParra!!! *I'm coming after you, you piece of shit! I've never killed anyone in my life and now... Now I feel I don't have a problem with it! And that's what I'm going to do. I got your money and fucking dope and now I'm getting you!*

I closed my eyes and took some deep breaths of the ocean air. How can I ever go back into the Seaside bar? I, as well as her friends, would be very sad to be there as it was a happy place to eat, drink, and have lots of laughs. And Michele was the cause for that to happen. Now I have a new path for my journey in life. I have a son who I may not see anymore. Somehow I will find a way to make it right for him.

Chapter 11

Is Vengeance a Reality?

I was going to look for Randall De LaParra. But I really didn't know where he lived. I decided to go to Michele's house in Naples and see if I could find her personal phone book, or anything with his address. As I drove back up Main St., I took a look at my Seaside sports bar. Michele's body is gone. I'm not sure if I'll ever return, especially now that De LaParra has been here, and we're out to kill each other. I got a hand wave from a couple of friends that were regulars at my bar. I just waved back to the sad look on their faces. I got back on Pacific Coast Highway and headed toward Long Beach. My guess is that De LaParra has been at Michele's or headed back to his place.

I got to Naples and drove over the small canal bridge that leads to her street. I parked a block away and walk to her house. It was pretty dark inside, but a small hall light was on. I looked through the window and didn't see anyone. I went to the door and it was unlocked. Michele always locked her door before she went anywhere. I opened it very slowly and tiptoed in. I didn't hear anything and went to her phone desk. I looked for her personal phone book. There it was open with my sports bar number on the page.

I saw the answering machine light blinking and played back the

messages. They were my messages and my guess is that De LaParra was here and heard them. I erased all the messages. I saw his address and I wrote it down. The fucker lives in the hills of Laguna Beach. I know this community. It's gated with about a dozen custom built little palaces facing the ocean. I took one last look at Michele's place and saw a picture of us in front of my Porsche, sitting on the mantel. It's 4:12 a.m. and I am totally exhausted. I need sleep. I'm pretty sure De LaParra doesn't know where I live. My car is registered to my address at the sports bar.

I headed back to my apartment. What was I going to do with the bag of money and drugs? I arrived to the street where I lived, and it was pretty quiet. I looked around to see if anything seemed suspicious. I was especially looking for De LaParra's car. There was no sign. I was cautious going into my apartment. Everything was okay. I went right to the refrigerator and opened a beer. I pounded down the first one pretty fast and got another. I sat in the dark and stared out into the street.

How in the hell did all this happen? One night Michele and I are making passionate love and the next, she's gone and I'm ready to go on a shooting spree. I went into the garage and got my .357 Magnum pistol. I've never fired it, but Leo and Mondo showed me how to handle it. I got the bullets and loaded it. I went back to my chair in the living room, and continued to stare into the darkness. What do I do? I need sleep... I fell asleep on my chair with the damn pistol in my hand.

** What's going on? I can't open my eyes and I can feel my body moving. Who's moving me? I hear voices. Sound like foreigners. I can't recognize it. They're fading in and out. I'm so tired and I don't care anymore. I try to talk, but I'm very weak. I still hear the thunder and I'm still moving like I'm being carried away.*

I woke up all of a sudden not thinking where I was at. I looked at the clock on the wall. It was 7:34 a.m. The rising sunlight was peeking through my window. I had a very bad nightmare. The problem is... it was real. I got up from my chair and put the gun on the table. I went to the bathroom and washed up. The phone rang. I answered and I didn't say anything, and waited to see who was on the line... finally a voice, "Frankie?"

"Hello... Oh Leo... What? It's on the news? Yeah, it was De

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LaParra. I'm going after him Leo... No, you should look after Mondo... How's he doing? Good... I don't want you involved any more in this. I'm going after De LaParra tonight. I'm sure he's looking for me... I don't know, Leo... Mondo got shot and I can't have that happened to you. Yeah, but this is my vengeance man... All right... All right I said! I'll call you later... He lives in Laguna Beach. Yeah... Okay, I'll call you. The detectives will be calling me today for a statement. I'll call you tonight... We'll do it late tonight... Yeah, I got the .357... I'm going to make myself scarce today. I don't want anyone bugging me. I'll let you know. Bye man and tell your Aunt Barbara thanks for taking care of Mondo.”

I turned on the TV local news and they were just wrapping up the story on the shooting in Seal Beach. They must've got the photo of Michele from the sports bar wall. It looked really good. But now they're showing the coroner taking her body away. I turned it off and got out another beer. I had to get my head together.

I called my sister, Linda, and explained to her what happened. I needed her to handle the business end of the Seaside bar and grill, and close it down for good. I might not be around for awhile. I kept it short and simple. I told her I would call her on my future plans...whatever that was. She didn't ask too many questions. She knows the kind of lifestyle I've lived. She likes the simple life with her husband and kids. I'm sure that De LaParra doesn't know anything about her.

I finished my beer and took a shower. As I was in the shower, I kept thinking of all that happened the past few days. I just let the hot steaming water hit the top of my head and flow all over my body. It felt like a good cleansing. After about 20 minutes, I turned off the water and dried off. The phone rang. It was 9:12 a.m. and who could that be?

I talked in a very low tone. “Hello... Who's calling? Yes detective, how can I help? Yes, I can. About 10:30? Why do you want to interview me at the Seaside bar? I see... Well, I'm really not feeling good about being there... Okay... I understand... I'll see you there at 10:30. Good bye.”

I had laid down in my bed for a moment. I feel there's going to be changes in my future. But I'm going to take care of that bastard De LaParra. I can't call my uncle Sonny and tell him what happened.

He'll tell me to hand over De LaParra to the cops... I think... Maybe not... And with the kind of money and connections he has, that's senseless. The phone rings again.

"Hello... Hello!" There was silence on the other end. I waited to see if I could hear anything. Someone was breathing on the mouthpiece. I listened for a moment and then hung up. It was time to go meet the detectives at the sports bar.

Once again I turned from PCH onto Main St. in old town. There's nothing like returning to the scene of the crime. I cruised about five mph towards the pier. I see a lot of people that are giving me a glance and a small nod. As I pulled into the parking stall in front of my sports bar, the detectives were already inside looking around. I walked in and just stared at all the mess. Tables and chairs were thrown everywhere.

"Hello Mr. Santos. I'm Detective Bedola and this is my partner Detective Twomey." I extended my hand and acknowledged them.

"Yes. Well, this is a fuck'n mess." I was starting to become angry.

"I'm sorry for calling you down here, but I don't understand this. There's no sign of breaking in, and what was your manager, uh..., Michele St. James, doing here way after closing hours?

"I... was supposed to meet her here for some inventory because she was going on vacation for about 10 days."

"Do you know where she was going?"

"No Det. Twomey. Where she was going doesn't have anything to do with this, does it?"

"I don't know Mr. Santos, but it might give us some lead if she was traveling with a friend." I just wasn't sure what to say as I carefully took a few steps around...

"I think she was going to visit some friends in Florida. Actually, I believe she has a sister living there."

"Can we reach her?"

"I don't even know her, detective. I think her name is Katherine or Kathleen. That's all I know."

"Was any money missing?" asked Det. Bedola. The two detectives were acting a little strange on their questioning.

"No there wasn't."

"How would you know Mr. Santos? You haven't been in here

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since the shooting.”

These guys are starting to bug me. “Det. Bedola, I was in earlier last night and took the entire cash and receipts home with me.”

“So you were in here earlier... What time?”

“I guess about 10:30 p.m. or so.”

“Don’t you close normally about 11?”

“Well, Det. Twomey, I called my assistant manager, and she said it was a little slow. So I told her to go home early.”

“What’s her name?” This detective has a way of needling you.

“Her name is Robin!”

“Robin what..?”

“I’ll get you her full name and phone number and anything else. Let me get her application in my desk. Just a minute.”

“And get me the files on all your employees, Mr. Santos.” Both detectives were trying to pry something out of me.

I went to my desk filing drawer and got what the detectives wanted. I’m getting nervous just being here and thinking that De LaParra and his hoods might be driving by. Although... I don’t think the bastard has the balls.

“Det. Bedola, is there anything else because I have to get to the insurance company and put in a claim?”

“Just one more... What was your relationship with Ms. St. James?” I froze...

“We were just good friends. She was a good manager and the town of Seal Beach loved her.”

“Do you know if she was on drugs?” asked Det. Twomey. I gave him a look...

“No! She wasn’t!

“We’re going to talk to some of the other witnesses that were here last night and we’ll be in touch. I believe we have your home number.”

“You can reach me at home anytime, detectives.”

“Thanks for your cooperation Mr. Santos, and we’re sorry for the loss of Ms. St. James.”

“Yeah... Thanks. I see the police have bordered up the windows and put a pad lock on the door.”

“Yes sir, as soon as your insurance company pays you on your claim, you’ll be back in business,” cracks Det. Bedola with a grin.

“Yes, well again, thanks. I gotta run.”

“Oh by the way Mr. Santos, did you know a Mr. Daniel McCracken?”

What the fuck is this? I got caught off guard. “I don’t think so detective...why?”

“Well he was killed last night in Huntington Beach at his place of business. It was just probably a coincidence.”

“Well, why would I know him?” I asked as I let out another sigh.

“The Huntington Beach police saw a book of matches that had your sports bar name printed on it,” says Bedola with a squint left eye.

“Uh, no detective... I don’t remember meeting him.” My thoughts were bad news.

“Well Mr. Santos, it was just a thought. Too many beach killings in one night is tough luck.” Det. Bedola seems to love his job. I didn’t want to talk anymore.

“Good afternoon detectives.” I got the hell out of there. I took one last look for sure. I didn’t have any insurance on the place; besides, it was just broken furniture and windows. As for my horse booking business, that’s down the toilet for now.

I left the Seaside sports bar and walked to the pier, perhaps for the final time. I always had serenity sitting on the Seal Beach pier and smelling the fresh salt air. I would close my eyes and let the sun shine on my face.

‘Too many beach killings last night,’ says the detective... Maybe just one more... Soon this will be over. 15 minutes went by and I left. Again, I drove up Main St. and took a last look for sure of old town in the daylight. I didn’t feel like seeing anyone right now.

I decided to go the Los Alamitos race track. That always was my big escape. I just wanted to make a couple of small bets on the horses while I think. I sat there for about five races. I was thinking I had a lot of money in the bag that I got from Mac’s place, and that dope I gotta get rid of. I’m not even sure what kind it is. It could be cocaine, heroin, or even crack. I just don’t know. It was getting to be sundown.

I left the race track and headed to the bar across the street. I had to have a beer with a shot of bourbon. I’m carrying a ton of money, dope, and a .357 magnum pistol in my car. If the cops stopped me now, I’m going away for a long time.

I arrived at my apartment about 6:30 p.m. The sun was about to

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disappear. I parked in front of my place and went up stairs. Something wasn't right. My blinds were closed and the front door mat was tossed aside. I tried to look through the window, but couldn't see anything. I opened the door slowly. I saw that my place was ransacked and in shambles. Everything was torn from one end to the other and all my kitchen appliances were thrown on the floor. My bedroom was ripped in pieces like someone took a very big knife to it.

It had to be Randall De LaParra. That's it! You want a war you mother fucker?! I shouted. Then I got on the phone and dialed Leo's number.

"Hello, Leo? Yeah... Are you ready? We're not going to hit De LaParra 'til around midnight, but I want you to meet me. You still know that guy who knows all about dope? Well, we need to meet with him... I need him to tell me what this shit is. Okay, I'll pick you up at Stevens Steak House restaurant off Atlantic and Eastern in about an hour. You trust that friend of yours not to fuck us over? Well, you can't always trust your cousins that deal in dope... See you in an hour."

I hung up and I knew that I had to get out of here fast. All my personal stuff was thrown all over the place. I went into the garage and got all my money from the hiding place. There wasn't much left and I gotta still count the money in the bag that I got from Mac's construction office. It's got to be De LaParra's. That'll make it easier for me to take. I grabbed some personal stuff and went into the living room. I looked outside to see if anyone was out there. It seemed clear. I closed my door and went to my car. I had to find a secluded place to count the money in the bag. I went over to Sunset Beach, just south of Seal. It was low lit and not many people out on the beach at this hour. I pulled out the bag and started counting it... Finally after about 35 minutes, I was finished. I never seen this much money at one time in my life. I can see it clearly now on what the fuss is about. Somehow Mac was part of Randall De LaParra's mob. But why? There's \$425 thousand dollars in this bag. Well... I don't think De LaParra will need it now. I left to meet Leo in the city of Commerce.

I drove up to the steak house and Leo was out there in front with someone. I honked at them as I drove past the front of the restaurant. I turned around the corner where the street had no street lights. I turned

the engine off, and Leo and his cousin got into the car.

“Hey Frankie, I want you to meet my cousin Louie.”

“Whatta you say, Louie.” I was still being cautious of Louie. He looked like he’d be in this kind of business. Maybe he wanted some of the goods for himself.

“Hey Frankie,” says Louie with a big grin. “So what do you got, man?” Louie looked pretty happy to see this. I pulled out the packages of powder and handed a small portion to him. He grabbed a plastic container from his inside pocket along with test tubes. He then put the powder in one empty tube and then poured some drops of chemicals in it.

I had to ask.

“What are you doing, Louie?”

“I have to wait a minute and see what color it turns to. It looks like it could be cocaine mixed with something else.” About forty-five seconds went by, and I was beginning to lose my patience.

“Come on Louie!” I said with my nerves starting to show.

“Wow man... I’m not sure, but this looks powerful.”

“Why don’t you try a sniff Louie?” asked Leo.

“Fuck you man! What the Fuck... I ain’t fuck’n stupid, man,” Louie says.

“That’s okay Louie. I think I get the idea of what it is,” I said with anger.

“Hey Frankie, why don’t you let Louie take a little bit with him and see if he can find out more of what it might be?”

“Yeah, sure Leo... Take some Louie and let us know if you can dissect it.”

“Sure thing, Frankie.” Louie continues to have a bigger grin while looking at the test tube change colors.

“Okay, we gotta get going Leo,” I said as I was non stop on thinking what to do.

“Right... Okay Louie, call me as soon as you find out.”

“Okay, primo. Later dudes.” Louie left the car and faded into the dark.

“This is it Leo. You can still back out. I’m going after De LaParra.”

“Hey man. His monkeys shot Mondo, so I have a stake in this!”

“Okay man... Let’s rock.” We headed to Laguna Beach which was about an hour going south on Interstate 5, the Santa Ana freeway. I

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kept thinking to myself about Michele. The more I thought, the angrier I got. That mob shit doesn't scare me.

"You got your piece, Leo?"

"Yeah man... You..?"

"Yeah... What a fuck'n last few days."

We arrived in Laguna Beach about 10:45 p.m. I stopped at a liquor store and got a couple of beers. Leo and I parked along coast highway and talked about what the plan was. We sat in the car and popped open the brew. I got out my map of Laguna and found the street where De LaParra lives. It's high on the hill with narrow streets.

"You ready Leo?"

"Let's go man." Leo seemed more anxious about this than me.

"Hey Frankie, I know I haven't said anything about Michele, but... I'm sorry."

"Yeah... Thanks Leo... Be careful tonight." We drove about a mile down the coast and turned up Laguna Hills canyon. I followed the directions on the map and there were a lot of dark roads going up the hill. The ocean skyline was beautiful from high on the hill. After a few minutes, we came within a block of the secluded guarded gate. We could see some big homes from our car as I parked under a tree. There was a security guard in a shack between the entrance and exit gate. I had to think for a minute...

"Leo, I don't know if De LaParra is home. I got two strange calls today. Both times when I answered, they just breathed slowly on the phone, and then hung up."

"Do you think it was De LaParra?"

"Not sure. If it was, he could be out looking for me. Let's wait a little while to see if he comes through the gate. Too many people are still awake. Look at all the lights in the houses."

"Okay Frankie." Leo just sat back and rested, and I kept an eye on the guard shack.

It was 12:47 a.m. Leo had dozed off a little. It seemed most of the neighborhoods lights were out. No cars have come in or out.

"Leo, wake up... It's almost one in the morning."

"Did he get here already?" Leo was trying to come fully awake.

"I didn't see him. There were a couple of cars that went inside and

came out. The guard checks them in, but you don't need to check with him to come out. There's an electric gate that opens when a car comes near the exit... I'm ready to go in now. Maybe we should walk further up the street and jump over the fence."

"Let's go Frankie."

"Okay... Here's his address." We wore dark clothing so it wasn't easy for anyone to see us. We walked the path of the fence looking for a spot that was easy enough for us to jump over. It was a high brick wall with steel bars on top. It seemed as though it was going to be rough getting in there.

"The hell with this Leo, we're going to knock out the guard and go in."

"Let's do it!"

We walked back toward the entrance gate. We stood out of the street lights. I watched the security guard for a moment. We started to approach and all of a sudden here comes two cars. One is entering and the other is exiting. The security glanced at the car that was exiting, and then went to the car that was entering. Both gates opened at the same time. Leo and I were along the side of the exit gate fence as the gate fully opened. As the car exited, we made a fast move and entered. We then jumped into the bushes, and lay on the ground. The security guard looked over and came out of his shack. He had a flash light in his hand aimed our way. He walked in our direction very slowly.

"Leo... Put the gun down. You're not going to shoot him." I whispered as low as I could. The security was about 12 yards away from us and still taking small steps as he points his flash light in every direction. Just then a car approached the entrance. The security guard went back to the shack to let them in. It was a black and silver Rolls Royce. De LaParra was greeting the security guard and laughing as if life was great. There were a couple of other people with him, but I couldn't tell who they were. They didn't look like guys. Maybe it's his wife?

The guard finally said his good byes after his small chit chat, and De LaParra entered into his neighborhood. Leo and I walked toward his street and in a few minutes we located his house. Like I said, they were little palaces. Front yard fountains. Houses were on at least an acre or more. Not being close too your next door neighbor was a big plus. There were some lights on, but we didn't know the layout of the house.

"Leo... Let's get to the back yard and see if we can get in."

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Although there was a brick wall that surrounded it, the backyard gate was open. We walked in and noticed an Olympic size pool surrounded by tall pine trees and jungle plants all over. It was beautiful for a bastard that could only afford this with dirty money. We looked up towards the second story of the house. There were red lights beaming through the drapes of the window. You could also hear loud music and laughing. It sounded like a party. I thought for a second. He can't be with his wife. Who parties with their wife with red lights and loud music?

"Whatta we going to do Frankie?"

"We need to check if any of the doors are open. There are steps going up to the bedroom balcony. Let's go, and walk quietly."

We started walking towards the house. There were a lot of bushes, so we stayed close to them. The near full moon gave a bright glow over Laguna Beach.

"Frankie... Look... There's a camera on top of the patio. Oh crap...and one over there."

"Yeah Leo, I see it."

Randall De LaParra had been drinking before he got home and brought two female whores with him. They started drinking and smoking hash. De LaParra was accustomed to having the best of drugs in his house. Although Randall was in his early 40's, he liked the young chicks. But tonight, these chicks were 16 years old.

"Come here sweeties." De LaParra pulled out a music box of powder. "This is my best candy, and I want to share it with you." Bella and Cherry were giggly and loved the company of an older man. Bella approaches Randall as he is holding out to her, the snowy white powder.

"Gee Randy, my mother always told me never take candy from a stranger...hee, hee."

Randall slowly put down the music box, and grabbed Bella by the throat... And in a very low threatening tone, "Don't ever call me Randy... Do you understand? Never... You may call me Randall, or Mr. De LaParra." He gives just a hint of a tighter squeeze. Bella began a hint of choking as her face turned red.

"Yes... Please Randall...you're hurting me." De LaParra lets her go and kisses her on the neck, and then licks her chest gently. Cherry runs

over and sensually lays her hand on Randall's shoulder.

"Randall... Please let me have some of the candy."

"Of course my dear... Bella?" He hands her the powder, and as she begins to sniff it, inserts a small portion inside her mouth, and rubs it into her gums as did Cherry. De LaParra took a big sniff of Angel Snow, and then put on some up tempo dance music, and the three were back into the party spirit.

They began to dance and teasingly tear off each others clothes while drinking the best champagne and continued smoking hash. They were all of a sudden laughing hard and the 'Ménage a trois' had begun in the king size circular bed. Bella and Cherry were very experienced in the sexual acts, for high school kids. Cherry began to light candles in the bedroom as Randall sodomized Bella. She turned the red lights out and all there was is an illumination of candle light. She also put on very erotic sounding music and joined them.

"Leo, did you see the red lights go out?" We made it to the balcony without any problems.

"Yeah Frankie... How many rooms they got up here?"

"Shh... The music is low and I see flickering candle light through the drapes over here."

"There doesn't seem to be anyone over here Frankie." There was a sliding glass patio door from De LaParra's bedroom to the veranda. I walked slowly to where Leo was; watching out for the camera's scanning the grounds. We checked to see if any windows were open and... no luck. I was still afraid there was an alarm system. If the alarm system went off, the whole Laguna Beach police force would probably be on the front lawn in minutes.

"Girls... How about skinny dipping in my nice heated pool? There are also high-powered jets in the spa." The girls giggled then—

"Randall, can we have some more snow candy?" Cherry's eyes were glowing as she inhaled more powder.

"Take all you want my little diamond girls. By the way, the correct term is, 'Angel Snow'." Cherry took another hit, as did Bella. Then she ran towards the sliding door and tried to open it.

"Randall, the door doesn't open!"

"Wait sweetheart, the alarm is activated." Randall walked over to

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the alarm system and deactivated it. "Now you can go out side."

He opened the drapes and pulled open the sliding screen door and then the sliding glass door. Cherry excitedly ran out to the veranda... down the staircase, and jumped into the heated swimming pool. There were no backyard patio lights on, as the moon was still shining bright. De LaParra went into his bathroom and got a bottle from his medicine cabinet. They were 'Yohimba' capsules. They are from African tree leaves, that give a male a boost for sexual strength; sort of an aphrodisiac. He took one earlier before the fun play began and now he feels he needs another 100 milligrams.

Bella looked to see if Randall was busy in the bathroom. She went to get the music box that holds the power drug, and took a few more hits. She didn't know what it was except it was giving her the biggest high she's ever been on. Bella then swiftly ran out the veranda and joined Cherry in the pool. The two were splashing water at one another and laughing. They began their little intimacy. At that age it was more of an experimental act than being considered lesbians.

"Hey Frankie..? Look!" Leo and I were on the other end of the estate watching the girls in the pool. "Those girls are doing weird stuff."

"Look Leo, the sliding door is open."

"Where's De LaParra?" Leo asked as he continues to watch the side show.

"My guess is that he was either fucked to death, or just passed out." Leo's eyes lit up.

"Mother fucker... What a way to go. Look at those honeys now. Look what they're doing... Oh man."

"Quiet Leo... I think he's coming."

"I know *I'm* about too," he says with continued humor in his voice. Frankie and Leo pull out their guns and stayed in the shadow.

Randall De LaParra stood at the open sliding door from his room and stared at the girls for a moment while they were fondling one another. He wanted some more of them and he knew at his age, and drinking a lot, he would need at least another 45 minutes to get that erection. He now walked into the moon lit night and walked slowly down the staircase to the pool. The pool's light was a royal blue color, and the heat from the water rose in a steamy fashion. De LaParra sat on the lounge chair and continued to watch the girls. Bella's mind was

becoming more out of control as she talked and laughed a loud. Cherry continued giggling as she splashed at Bella.

“Girls, girls...quiet down a little. All I need is the neighbors to wake up and see my little ladies, and then tell my wife.” He starts to laugh lightly and stays with a grin on his face.

“Come on Randall... Jump in with us,” Cherry yells out with a lot of energy.

“In a few minutes my love,” as he takes another hit on hash.

“Randall, we’re going to the Jacuzzi now.” Bella’s eyes were dilated as she and Cherry ran to the hot tub.

“I will be right there as soon as I finish this, my little whores...” De LaParra took one more hit of his Angel Snow. He was getting high on his own merchandise.

“Leo... This is it... Are you ready?” The adrenalin is starting to rush in my body.

“Man, I’ve been ready for Fuck’n three days!” Leo whispers. We each have the guns squeezed tightly in our hands. We start to walk very quietly from the veranda to the staircase. De LaParra’s eye lids seem to be getting heavier. The girls are in the hot tub overheating their bodies. Its 2:23 a.m. De LaParra is very relaxed and exhausted. Frankie walks up behind him. Puts the .357 magnum to his head and cocks it. Randall's eyes popped wide open without moving his head.

“Move and I'll blow your fucking head off right here!” I walked slowly in front of him and kept the barrel aimed at his head.

“Well Mr. Santos, so we come face to face,” says Randall in a low soft tone.

“You fucking piece of shit! You killed Michele!”

He stared at me and kept in silence for a moment. “No I didn't... You did!”

“Fuck you asshole! How do you figure I killed her?”

“You stuck your nose into my business.” Randall kept his eyes pinned on Frankie’s.

“I had nothing to do with you!”

“Just shoot his ass Frankie!” Leo was losing his patience.

“Shut up Leo!” How did I get into your business?”

“Obviously you know about my business. Mac was a runner for my operation and he got a little greedy. He was skimming from the

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organization. He and his brother were both in on it. We found out through a source that Mac bought a ticket back to Ireland. He was going to wire the money to the IRA. That was my money!”

“Go on!” Frankie was intensely listening.

“You owed him money from the ponies and he was collecting from anyone that owed him a buck. You were at the wrong place at the wrong time. You were also fucking my Michele.”

“Why did you have to kill her?” Frankie’s temper flares. Randall pauses for a moment...

“I loved her and she betrayed me. I had no intentions of killing her, but she wouldn’t come back to me.”

“So you fucking killed her?!”

“She ran... She tried to run out of the bar and screamed for the police.”

“God damn you!!! God damn you Randall!!!”

“Frankie, shoot his ass man!” Leo shouts with no more patience. Frankie stares at De LaParra as he’s ready to pull the trigger.

“Who are those broads in the Jacuzzi?” A smile came to Randall’s face.

“Those are my lovely ladies, Cherry and Bella... You want them?”

“Shut your fucking mouth! Why were you out to kill me?”

“We had too,” De LaParra says calmly.

“Why?”

“You have my money and valuable merchandise.”

“What’s the fuck’n merchandise?!” Frankie tries to keep his cool.

De LaParra hesitates... “It’s top quality ‘Angel Snow’.”

“What the fuck is that?!” Randall was reluctant to say at first...

“What’s it to you? I understand you’re not into drugs.”

“How do you know?”

“Because Michele was heavy into it and I wanted her to recruit you and increase my clientele. I heard you were into making a ton of money and it sure wasn’t from the Seaside grill.”

“Michele wasn’t on drugs!” Frankie threw daggers with his eyes.

“Santos... Michele found me. I supplied her college friends and they introduced her to me. Why do you think I came for an occasional visit to your place of business?”

“Just fuck’n shoot him Frankie, and let’s get the fuck out of here!” Leo yells. I took a look back at the girls in the Jacuzzi, and it was

pretty quiet.

He went to the Jacuzzi and saw Cherry in a kneeling position staring at the moon. "Hey girly... Hey you..." Cherry just kept staring in a stone face. Leo stands in front of her.

"Hey! Do you know that you're naked? Hey, how old are you? You look pretty young man...Where's your friend?" She just continued to stare breathless.

"Leo! What's keeping you? Frankie yells as he still has his .357 pointed at De LaParra's head. Leo yells back across the pool.

"This naked girl is spaced out man. I'm looking for the other one."

"Hurry up, man!" Randall tries to soften up Santos with a .357 in his face.

"Why don't you take these girls Santos? You don't really want to kill me."

"Shut the fuck up!"

Leo looks for the other girl and doesn't see her. He walks over by the dark area of the spa. The steam from the jets creates a mist. All of a sudden, he sees Bella at the bottom of the Jacuzzi, as her body twists in a circular motion.

"Hey!!! Hey Girl!!!" Leo jumps in and struggles to pull her out. Her hair is being sucked down by the pressure from the drain. He yanks on her very hard and pulls her out of the Jacuzzi. He lays her on the flagstone deck. "Hey!!! Hey!!! Wake up! Wake up!!! Hey Frankie! I think she drowned!"

"What Leo? What?"

"I think the girl's dead man... and the other is spaced out!" Frankie looked at De LaParra.

"What did you do to those girls?!"

"They're party girls Santos." Randall had no compassion for the whores. Leo continued to try to revive Bella as her body lay there naked

"Come on girly...Come on!" Leo slapped her in the face and shook her several times. He then rushed to Cherry who was unconscious and then back to Bella. It was no use. She was dead... Leo was a compassionate person even with a rough background in the streets of East L.A. He closed his eyes for a minute. He was thinking of his 15 year old daughter, who he hasn't seen in the last three years. He got up and rushed back to where Frankie was with De LaParra.

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“She’s dead Frankie! She’s dead and she can’t be more than 15 years old!!!”

Randall looks at Leo in the eyes... “She’s actually 16, Leo.”

“You mother fucker!!! Meet your maker you bastard!!!” Leo aims the gun at De LaParra’s head.

Frankie knocks Leo’s hand down trying to calm him. De LaParra saw an opportunity to get away and ran towards the staircase and to his bedroom. Frankie ran after him and caught him on the stairs. He pistol whipped De LaParra on the head and face. Randall was hurting and crying for Santos to stop. Leo followed Frankie and got to De LaParra and started kicking him all over the body. De LaParra laid there like a wounded dog that took a beating. They dragged him to his bedroom and Randall just laid there as Leo started kicking him again.

Frankie pulled back Leo. “Leo... Look at this pathetic piece of shit... ‘My, How the Mighty King hath fallen’. Randall De LaParra, the 43 year old bastard, just laid there crying like a baby with blood dripping from his nose and mouth.

“Do him Frankie! He killed Michele and that little girl and the other one is all fucked up.” No compassion from Leo. De LaParra looked up and started begging...

“Stop! Look Santos! You kill me and there’ll be others after you. They all know about you. I have bigger people to answer to. You let me go and you can keep the money. It’s my money, but they won’t stop looking for you until they have the Angel Snow.”

Frankie pauses... “What the fuck is in that Angel Snow, you fuck head!”

“I can’t tell you!” says Randall as the snot and blood from his nose continues running down to his mouth.

“Oh, you can’t tell me?!” Frank Santos cocks his .357 and puts the barrel on his lips.

“You can’t kill me!” yells De LaParra as he continues to sob.

“Open your mouth! Open!” De LaParra opens his mouth wide. Frankie sticks the barrel of the gun to the inside of his mouth and points it to the left side of his face.

“I’m going to blow the left side of your mouth and face off... And I’m going to make sure you live to feel the god forsaken greatest pain in Hell! De LaParra froze. Leo notices water on the carpet.

“Hey Frankie, what the fuck is that?!”

"I believe the wimpy fucker is pissing on the carpet, Leo."

"Why don't you just shoot his dick off for starters?" says Leo as he laughs. De LaParra tries to talk with the gun in his mouth. He mumbles to Santos.

"What..?! You're mumbling! Talk straight to me." Randall could only mumble. Frankie takes the gun out of his mouth.

"What?" Randall gasps for air.

"Heroin mixed with cocaine... Peyote and a little crystal meth... I don't know the final ingredient. It's done in Peru."

"I found some powder on Michele's body. Did you give her some the night you killed her?" Randall paused for a moment...

"She wanted some, so I gave it to her."

"You're a lying sack of shit! She wasn't on anything you bastard. She was there to meet me!" Frankie gives him another smack on the head with the butt of his gun.

"Stop..! Okay! I forced it on her. I forced her to take it because I wanted her back!"

Frankie stood back for a moment... "Leo... Go out and bring the car inside the gate. I'm going to give Mr. Randall De LaParra back his Angel Snow."

"Frankie..." Leo didn't want to go a long with it.

"Go Leo! And bring the bags!"

"What about the security guard?"

"Do what you have to do to get out the gate and get back in."

"Yeah... Sure Frankie." Leo takes another look at De LaParra and gives him a kick on the leg.

"Go now Leo."

It was 2:41 a.m. and Leo ran back to the front gate of the community estates. He was going to wait for a car to exit so he could get out. But it was the middle of the night and Leo didn't have the patience. He walked up to the guard shack.

"Hi ya Mr. Security guard..." The security guard was a retired police officer about in his late 60's. He had his retirement pension and is making a few extra bucks working part time.

"Who the hell are you? And what are you doing here at this hour?" he asked.

"Oh, I work for Mr. Randall De LaParra and I was walking his

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dog. He ran off and I'm looking for him... Have you seen him?"

"I didn't know Mr. De LaParra had a dog. Let me give him a call on the phone."

"Sure go ahead... Hey, how do you guys make that gate open man? It always seems to open real nice and easy." The guard gives him another look.

"Just a minute, I will call Mr. De LaParra and verify your employment." The guard picked up the phone and turned his back to Leo. Leo took a glance at what the guard was dialing. He was dialing 911. Leo pulled out his gun and stepped into the shack. The guard turned around and sees Leo had the gun pointed at him and he slowly hung up the phone.

"Why did you dial 911, Mr. Security guard?" The guard just stood there in silence. "All right... Get down on your knees and face the wall." The guard went to his knees and started to beg Leo not to kill him.

"Please, I have a wife that's handicapped... Don't kill me."

"Okay, I won't kill you if you tell me where some rope is."

"I don't have any rope" says the security guard with a shaky voice.

"Then I have to kill you." Leo had no intentions of killing him. He always had respect for older people.

"Please! There is some duct tape in the cabinet."

"Where... I don't see it."

"In the far cabinet..." The security guard thinks his life is about to end. Leo finds it and starts to tape up the guard.

"What's your name?"

"Orville."

"Orville?! What the fuck'n kind of name is that?" Leo is making conversation as he begins to tape the guard's hands behind his back.

"I was named after my dad and his dad before him."

Leo started taping his feet together. "Hell... Didn't your father like you, and didn't his father like your father?" Orville started to answer Leo...

"My great grand____." Leo taped his mouth shut.

"What? Oh, sorry I have to go. Have you got a handkerchief?" The old guard mutters...

"What? Just nod if you do." Orville nods and Leo reaches for his back pocket and pulls one out.

"Okay, I got it and I'm going to put it over your eyes and don't

worry, I'm just going to leave you here. You understand? You'll be okay... Man, did you use this thing already to blow your nose?" Leo tied it around Orville's eyes. Leo looked at the gate switches and saw the button to press to open.

"You stay here and count to 3, 582. Okay? And count slowly." The security guard blinks his eyes as his body is still trembling.

Leo ran out of the guard's shack and down the street. He got Frankie's car. He drove it to the gate and got out and went back into the shack. "Good! You're still here Orville. Did you start counting yet?" The guard nods yes. "Okay, start counting over." Leo punched the button that opens the gate, and then gets into Frank's car and goes to De LaParra's house.

He parked under a big tree to shade his car from the street lamp, then grabs the drugs and runs to the back yard and up the staircase. He knocks on the sliding glass door to the bedroom where all the lights are out, except for a couple of burning candles that Frankie kept on for the low light.

"It's about fucking time Leo? What happened?" says Frankie with worry. De LaParra was staring at Leo as he was about to answer his question.

"I had to plug the mother fucking guard!" Leo was trying to scare Randall into believing that he was a crazed killer.

"What the fuck did you do for man?! Jesus Christ Leo!"

"Ah Frankie, I had to do it. His name was Orville."

"Orville! What the fuck does that have to do with anything?!" shouts Frankie on this confused and abnormal night.

"Come on... Orville?" Randall De LaParra looks at Leo with fear. "Yeah know Randy, I'm not too thrilled about your name. So, what are we going to do Frankie? Kill his ass?!"

De LaParra, who is still hurting from the beating and looking like road kill, turns to Frankie.

"Santos! Listen... You keep the money and let me have the 'Snow' and it's over. Just go on and rebuild your sports bar. They'll kill me if I lose that powder!"

"You know what you cock sucker? I'm giving you the powder just like you gave Michele!"

"What are you talking about?" asked Randall while looking at Leo again with fear.

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“Leo, tear open a bag of that shit.”

“How much you want me to open up, Frankie?” asked Leo. Frankie was getting hot tempered again as he is thinking of Michele.

“All of it!” De LaParra looks up at Santos.

“What are you doing?!” yells Randall. Leo cuts open a bag of powder with a pocket knife and Frankie gets a hand full of the drug and throws it all over Randall. He grabs more from Leo and tosses it all over the bedroom.

“Stop it! Stop it Santos!!!” yells De LaParra as he starts to sob again. Leo grabs a handful and looks at it.

“Gee Frankie, I wonder if this stuff is really that good.” He holds his nose to it.

“Put that shit down you dummy!!!” Frankie knocks it out of Leo’s hands. “Fuck man... Give me that package and cut open the rest!”

“Don’t do it Santos! You’re burning lots of money!”

“How much? How much, damn it?” Frankie threatens to throw more out the sliding door.

“Five million dollars!”

“What?” Frankie says as his and Leo’s faces become a little stiff.

“Each package is worth ‘Five million dollars’... You’re holding \$25 million dollars worth of merchandise... I have to deliver it to the syndicate at the end of this week.”

Frankie paused for a moment.

“You killed Michele and you killed those young girls in the pool. Did you know they have families? Maybe that doesn’t mean anything to you! Leo... Dump that shit all over Randall’s palace. He won’t need it. I’ll take care of him.”

Leo cut open the rest of the packages and started to toss it around the bedroom. As he was heading out to the hall way and the rest of the rooms, he dropped a chunk of it on Randall’s face. Randall started gagging.

“Hurry Leo... Before somebody finds that guards body.” Leo went through the rest of the house as Frankie dealt with De LaParra.

“Now what are you going to do? You already got me killed, Santos!” Frankie reached for the pillow and wrapped it around his magnum .357 and pointed it at Randall. This was it.

“No Santos!!! No! You got the money!!!”

“Sorry you fuck head! You can’t buy me!!!” He points the gun six inches from his eye ball. De LaParra has been tortured to hell the last

hour. More beads of sweat and blood trail down from his forehead.

“Please Santos!!! I have more money!!! Take it all!!!” cries De LaParra. Frankie applies pressure to the trigger and De LaParra closes his eyes shut tight. As he tries to squeeze the trigger, it seems to be stuck and doesn’t fire. He looks at the pistol as if ... *‘What’s wrong?’*

De LaParra opens his eyes at half mast, and can’t believe he’s still alive. Santos looks at his gun carefully as he turns it over looking for the problem. Then he notices...smiles...and speaks softly...“Sorry, the trigger was on safety.” He points the gun back at Randall.

“No! Take the money! Take the money!” De LaParra cries in agony realizing that he is a beaten man.

Leo is standing at the door way and turns to Frankie with an uncertain look... “*Sorry, the trigger was on safety?*” He bursts out laughing. Frankie keeps his attention on Randall and thinks for a moment...

“Okay... What money, you fuck?” Frankie asked as he draws back his gun and toys with him. De LaParra opens his eyes again.

“I have a safe.”

“How much you got?” Frankie is now interested.

I have another \$200 thousand dollars. Take it! It’s all yours.”

“Where’s the safe?”

“It’s in my library... behind the large painting.”

“Get up and take us to the library. Keep the gun on him Leo. You pull a fast one and no questions asked... The bullet goes into your skull!!!”

De LaParra got onto his feet and limped down the stairs that leads to the living room and the library. It was still a low key light as they walk through the house.

“Where’s the fucking library, asshole?” Leo is losing his patience again and anxious to get to the money.

“Just through that door...” Randall led them into his library. He turned on the desk lamp to give a little light. He pointed to the large picture on the wall. It was a picture of a hologram of the planets.

“Wow... How did you come across that?” Frankie was impressed.

“Money Mr. Santos... When you have money, you seem to attract the right kind of people and remember... *‘Success breeds success’.*”

Leo was looking around the library. “Yeah..? Well if you’re so successful, how come I don’t see any pictures of ‘Dogs’ playing

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poker? De LaParra ignored him as did Frankie.

“Open the fuck’n safe Randall,” demands Frankie. Randall went to the wall and reached for something by the fire place.

“What the fuck you doing?!”

“It’s a button that lowers the picture frame. May I continue?” Randall requests.

“Go ahead... Slowly... Shoot if you have to Leo,” orders Frankie. De LaParra pushes the button. As the picture frame lowers, he sees the safe that’s built inside the wall.

“May I open it now, Santos?”

“You better not have a gun in there Randall. I’ll blow your fuck’n head off!”

“Okay Santos... I’ll be honest with you. I do have a gun in there and you can take it out.” Frank walks to Randall and pushes him to the side.

“I’m through fucking with you Randall! Where is it?!”

“It’s in the small holster attached to the side wall. You can get it if you want,” mutters De LaParra. Frankie goes for it and then stops...

“I’ll tell you what! It’s probably a fuck’n trap.” He stares at Randall for a moment. “You pull it out with your thumb and index finger, and pull it out slow! Leo, stick your pistol on his neck.”

“No problem Frankie... Pull it out slow you son of a bitch!” Randall De LaParra reached in and pulled out the gun by the barrel and held the butt towards Frankie. Leo grabbed it out of his hands.

“Now step back and get on your knees with your hands on your head.” De LaParra does exactly what Frankie Santos says.

“Watch him Leo.” Leo keeps the gun pointed at him while Frankie carefully pulls out the money.

“Fuck man, there’s a lot of money in here.”

“Just like I said, Santos... \$200 thousand dollars and it’s all yours.” De LaParra thinks he’s off the hook.

Frankie continues to pull the cash out and puts it on the lamp table.

“Leo, grab the plastic bag from the trash bucket by the desk.” He brings over the empty trash bag and starts to fill it up with the money. De LaParra just watches as Frankie and Leo look like little boys who just won the big prize at the penny arcade. Frankie just about had all the money out and he noticed some kind of certificates on a clip against the upper part of the safe.

“What’s this Randall? It looks like certificates.”

“Yes they are, Santos. Ten certificates from the bank of Scotland. They’re worth \$100 thousand dollars each.” Randall begins to lose his fear of death.

“You’re shit’n me!”

“No... Take that too and I’m practically wiped out.”

“Yeah... You don’t need it with all the drugs you weenies manufacture.”

De LaParra just watched as Santos was about to reach for the certificates. Frankie made sure all the money was out first and Leo had the plastic bag pretty full. He reached for the certificates and yanked them out from the clip... All of a sudden the house lights started flashing rapidly on and off. However, we didn’t hear any sirens or alarms. It was very quiet.

“What’s going on?!!!” Frankie yells as he sees De LaParra get up.

“It’s over Santos! It’s over you little piece of shit, Leo!” yells De LaParra. The lights were flashing and there are security bars coming down the window frames. Leo runs to the front door. Steel pipe-bars have come down at all doorways and windows.

“You fucker! I’ll kill you!!!” Frankie’s temper exploded. “How do we get out of here?” De LaParra just laughed and says...

“You don’t! The security is hired by this neighborhood and they’ll take it personal of what you have done to me. Imagine bringing your drugs into my house and killing those poor little girls you tried to pimp off to me.”

“Frankie, whatta we do?!!” Leo became upset. Frankie grabbed De LaParra and pointed the gun to his forehead.

“Go ahead Santos, kill me and they got you and your playmate. And you’ll be fucking each other in prison for the rest of your life!”

The phone started ringing. Frankie pulled out a Saturday night special pistol from his back pocket, and aimed the barrel at De LaParra’s shoulder. He fired a round into him. If he used the .357, it would’ve blown half his body off. The bullet went through his shoulder just missing his bone. De LaParra drops to the floor with screams that equate to wild boar being attacked by its prey. Frankie aimed at his other shoulder.

“You gonna get us out of here?!!!” Randall couldn’t say a word as the pain from the gunshot wound kept him screaming. Frankie was ready to

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pull the trigger again. Leo has been through a lot of gang violence in his life, but he saw something in Frankie that he has never seen before. Santos was in rage, and his violent act was worse than death.

“Fuck you Randy!!!” Frankie pulled the gun from De LaParra’s right shoulder blade and fired a bullet into his thigh. The scream and pain of De LaParra was more than most men could take. Frankie just figured that he was a cold blooded bastard that came from hell.

“This is it Randall! I might go to prison, but you are going to hell now!” Randall De LaParra screamed a loud cry.

“All right! All right god damn it... you win! Take me to my desk! I’ll hit the code and the bars will rise.” Frankie and Leo looked at each other.

“Hurry Frankie before the cops get here!” They dragged De LaParra to his desk and with his good hand so far, opened his desk drawer and pushed the code number on a radio wave calculator. The lights quit flashing and the bars started to rise from the windows and doors. The phone was still ringing. Frankie and Leo put their guns to his head and gave him the nod to answer it.

“Yes... ‘My dice are hot’... No... No. I don’t need you. I accidentally tripped the safe alarm. Please tell them not to come! Everything is okay. Please, it’s fine. Thank you. Thank you.”

“What about the dice?” Frankie asked in a threatening low tone. Randall responds with a mental and physically defeated posture.

“It’s my code. If the alarm goes off and someone picks up the phone, they must give the code or they continue to come.”

“Leo, see if anyone’s out there.” Leo runs to the window.

“It looks clear Frankie.”

“It’s a silent alarm for the safe. If you broke into the house, then the outside alarm would go off,” De LaParra continues to explain.

“Turn off all the lights Leo. Get the money and get into the car.”

“Okay, let’s go Frankie.”

“I have unfinished business with Mr. De LaParra.”

“Okay. Hurry Frankie...” Leo went by the door and looked again if anyone was out there.

“Get down on your back, Randall.”

“What?”

“Get on your fucking back!!! You’ll rest better!”

“What are you going to do now? I’m already bleeding to death!”

“Not good enough you fuck!” Frankie Santos had death written on his face. He grabbed a sofa pillow and put the .357 into it and aimed it at De LaParra’s forehead. Leo was watching from the doorway.

“This is for Michele... And coming into my life! Burn in fucking hell you piece of shit!” Frankie had the voice of Satan.

Randall De LaParra felt he was already in hell with his left shoulder practically blown off, and a bullet going through his thigh. He gave Santos that final look. Santos gave a stiff piercing eye stare. 15 seconds ticked by, and Leo wanted to see the end of De LaParra.

He started to pull the trigger. At the last split second, Frankie aimed it at De LaParra’s right knee cap and blasted it with two gun shots. Then he went to the other knee cap and shot two more rounds of the powerful steel bullets. Randall’s lower legs were nearly severed and Frankie just stared. Leo was stunned.

“Frankie... We gotta go now.” Frankie looked up and turned to Leo...

“I’m finished!” Leo looked at him and was seeing another person. De LaParra’s body was in shock as he laid there in a low whining tone with his eyes staring straight into limbo. The drugs he took earlier might have helped ease his agony of pain. They took one last look at him lying in his own pool of blood and then left. Leo grabbed Frank and rushed him into the Porsche and headed to the gate.

When they reached the exit side, Frankie stopped and watched if the cops were around. It was now 3:52 a.m. As they drove away, there was a neighbor standing in their front yard checking on a barking dog. She went back inside and calls security.

“Why did you kill that security guard, Leo?”

“Oh man, I didn’t kill anybody, but his name is Orville... Get outside the gate and park near those bushes. I’ll check on him.”

Frankie went through the exit gate. Leo got out of the car and looked around. The planned community of little palaces was a perfect situation. The next set of regular track homes was four blocks away down the hill. Leo rushed to the guard shack to see if Orville was okay. Leo found him lying on his side sleeping.

“Hey Orville... Orville! Wake up man...” Leo shakes his head and awakens him. His hands and feet are still taped up. Leo pulls off the tape from his mouth.

“Orville... You okay?” Orville gives the okay nod. “Good... Did you count to that number that I told you?” He nods the okay sign again.

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“Good... Now I want you to start all over. Okay? Go!” Leo ran back to Frankie’s car and they took off down the hill. They could see about a quarter of a mile from a top the hill and there were three cop cars with flashing red and blue lights coming their way.

“Frankie! What do we do?” Leo pulled out his gun again.

“Put that thing away!” I pulled over along the curbside with other parked cars in the neighborhood. “Get down Leo...”

We pulled the small handles next to the car seat and our back part of the seats went flat back. We lay there quietly as the cops passed us. Some of the neighbors were nosey and came out onto their lawns. We stayed there for a couple of more minutes. I peeked up to see if anyone was there. Can you believe these typical nosey asshole neighbors have to talk in the yard at four in the fucking morning? Finally it was clear and I started up the engine and left. I don’t think anyone suspected a strange car in the area since I was driving a Porsche. It fit right in with the neighborhood.

“Fuck, Leo... I need a beer.”

“A beer..? Fuck, let’s get a margarita in Acapulco.” We sped off to coast highway.

My life was changing and I had to make fast plans. I really didn’t know if Randall De LaParra was going to live or not. If he lives, he will see two Hells. He will live as a cripple, and that glorious day on how he dies.

Leo and I got back on coast highway and headed north toward Seal Beach. The sun was going to rise pretty soon, and I love to see the ocean early in the morning. Leo took a snooze as I just cruised along the coast. I had to think on what I was going to do. Do De LaParra’s wise guys know about me? Is he dead or alive? Do they know about the rest of my family? My Son..? Mother..? My sister and her family..? I felt like my head was going to explode. I can’t stick around Orange County as a lot of people know me as their bookie. I’m out of business now. The problem is that I don’t know the rest of the assholes in Randall De LaParra’s mob. They lost \$25 million in drugs thanks to me and I have their money. The \$425 thousand that’s in the bag and \$200 thousand from De LaParra. The fuckin’ mob will come after me for sure. They probably have connections inside the police department. Department of motor vehicles... Tracers... They could find out anything.

The sun is peeking on the horizon and I see the calm Pacific blue sea. Seagulls are flying in every direction and fishermen are on the beach surf fishing. It seems like another regular day. I got off Pacific Coast Highway and headed to the closest onramp to the 405 freeway and directly to East L.A. to take Leo home. There was a lot of morning traffic on the freeways. The normal everyday people were either going to work or probably taking their children to school. It seemed like the simple life. We arrived at Leo's apartment about 7:30 a.m.

"Hey, Leo... Wake up... We're here man." I gave him a couple of more shoves.

"What! What! What's going on? Who do we have to kill now?"

"Shut up man... Wake up from your dream. You're home now and we both need some rest."

"And you? Where you going now?"

"I'm not sure... I'm really not sure, Leo."

"Well then, come in and crash at my place. You need to rest man."

"I don't know Leo. I'm worried about what they know."

"Turn off the fucking motor and crash for a few hours and then we'll think this thing out."

"Okay... Grab the bags. I really am wiped out." We got in to Leo's apartment and he warmed up some leftovers in the microwave. We also just sat there staring at all the money.

"Leo I want you and Mondo to have De LaParra's money."

"Ah man, we can split it three ways." Leo says as he pops open a beer.

"No... If that really is De LaParra's, then he don't need it. I still have the mobs money and they'll be after that as well as killing me for the 'Angel Snow' we dumped. They don't know anything about you and Mondo. You take the \$200 grand and I'll keep this. Let's see how far I get with it."

"Okay man, but let's talk about it later." Leo went to his bedroom and got me a blanket. I was crashing on the sofa. It was hard for me to get to sleep. I kept having flashes of Michele getting shot in the back... Lying there on the sidewalk... Randall De LaParra's house and the young 16 year old girls are dead. His face staring at me when I was going to kill him and the last split second I shot off his legs. Man, that must've hurt... Fuck the bastard! He doesn't deserve to be in this world anyway. I gotta call my uncle for some help. I gotta call my son and mother. I gotta call.... 'Zzzzzz...' I fell asleep.

Chapter 12

The Meeting of the Minds

The Ritz hotel has a large meeting room on a cliff overlooking the Pacific Ocean in Dana Point, South Orange County, a very high priced area of large beautiful homes and fabulous restaurants. You can see miles and miles of deep Blue Ocean. The syndicate had an emergency meeting learning the fate of Randall De LaParra. Anthony Alejandro Martinez is the 'Godfather' of the syndicate. He is a 61 year old man, who immigrated to America with his parents from Rosarito Beach, Baja California, Mexico in the 1930's. He was raised in downtown Los Angeles, Ca. He is also the half brother of Randall De LaParra.

There are about a dozen members of the syndicate board discussing what took place at the De LaParra mansion a couple of nights ago. Rico and Charlie, Randall's body guards, were also on hand to describe to the members what they found when they arrived. The private security officers for the gated community always had strict orders to phone De LaParra's body guards before entering his property, if he didn't answer.

That's exactly what they did. Rico and Charlie were cleaners. It has two connotations; one who cleans up thoroughly and leaves no traces, especially after a hit, and the hit itself. They arrived at the property and went through the mansion. The community security was outside

waiting for instructions. Rico told them that everything was okay and thanked them for their services. Nothing else needed explanation. Security left the premises.

“Rico” Anthony Martinez speaks in a somber raspy voice. “Tell the board here what happened last night, and give the physical condition of my brother Randall.” Rico in a formal manner of speech began to tell the members of the syndicate what he discovered.

“Mr. Martinez, sir, and gentlemen... Charles and I arrived at Mr. De LaParra’s home approximately 4:55 a.m. The Laguna estates security services had orders not to step into the home of Mr. De LaParra. We dismissed them and began to investigate the situation.

Mr. De LaParra laid there in the library, soaking in blood as we were thinking that he was fatally wounded. He had a weak pulse. Charles and I saw that his lower parts of both legs were being held together by strands of tendons and pieces of muscle tissue due to gun shot wounds.” The members had shock on their faces. They were stunned and sickened what Rico was describing to them. “We applied a tourniquet to his thighs and slowed down the flow of blood from exiting. We called the members physician, Dr. Ruiz, and he in turn, notified his ambulance service, and all met at the premises. There were also two dead young girls by the pool.”

“How did they die?” asked a member.

“Sir, from an apparent overdose of a drug substance,” Rico reports.

“Charlie, tell the members about our platinum merchandise,” orders Anthony as he has already been informed.

“Yes sir. Gentlemen, unfortunately the packages that we were retrieving back from Mr. Daniel McCracken, fell into the hands of a Mr. Frank Santos, a small time bookmaker of the horse racing world. Mr. De LaParra found out and pursued Mr. Santos in the town of Seal Beach. A situation got out of control. I received a minor gunshot flesh wound. There were unfortunate circumstances with the demise of Ms. Michele St. James.”

“Charlie, get to the merchandise!”

“Yes sir, Mr. Martinez... I apologize. Mr. Santos took vengeance and went to Mr. De LaParra’s home with the merchandise and tossed it everywhere on the estate. He also threw and covered a great deal of it on Mr. De LaParra’s body. Mr. Santos shot Mr. De LaParra below

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the shoulder blade, and pumped four rounds of ammunition into his kneecaps.”

“God damn it Charlie! Tell the members of this family, the condition of my brother.”

“Yes sir. Mr. De LaParra is in intensive care at Newport Beach medical center. He will no longer have the lower part of his legs from the thighs. His shoulder blade will need bone restructure surgery. He will need some facial reconfiguration.”

Another member interrupted and asked, “How much of the merchandise is left?”

Rico steps forward and interjects... “Nothing sir... Santos’ accomplice, a male, was on video camera tossing it everywhere on the estate.”

“Is there a description of his friend?” asked Sal. Anthony keeps an eye on Salomon knowing that he was close to the Santos family.

“Not really sir, it was dark and he wore a netted watch cap just above the eyebrows. However, we are doing some checking on Mr. Santos’ sphere of acquaintances.” Anthony stands up and walks a few paces as he is in deep thought.

“Gentlemen... Mr. Frank Santos has stolen and destroyed, not only our most prized products worth \$25 million dollars, but he has an additional \$625 thousand dollars of ours. And, he has crippled my brother for the rest of his life!”

“What information do we have on this Santos person?” asked Sergio. Anthony looks over to Rico and Charlie. Rico speaks up...

“Sir, we only know that he had a small sports bar, the Seaside bar and grill, in the town of Seal Beach, which he also resides. Mr. Santos basically used it as a front to conduct his bookmaking business. He will not be returning to open his place of business as he knows we will be looking for him. We also found out where his residence is and searched that thoroughly, and there was nothing. We are assuming that he is carrying the money with him. He is divorced and his ex-wife has remarried and moved out of the state.”

“Does he have a brother?” Anthony asked with a threatening tone of voice.

“I’m not aware of one sir,” replied Rico. Anthony stands up at the head of the table and with a stern face and voice,

“Gentlemen... Members... Nobody, but nobody fucks with our

families. I want every source we have, to find out where this bastard Santos is! Find out who and where his family is. It's written in the bible... 'An eye for an eye'— and my fingers will rip his fucking eyeballs out of his fucking skull!!!"

There was a loud pop outside Leo's apartment. I jumped ten feet out of his sofa from a deep sleep. "What the ___!!! Leo, where are you?!" Leo came running out of his bedroom with a gun.

"What the fuck is going on man?" yells Leo as he is looking at all angles of the room.

I was at the window with my .357 magnum cocked. Leo joins me looking out into the street. There's a moment of silence.

"I thought I heard gunshots!" I was still trying to shake out of my sleep. Leo looks around and then goes out on the porch cautiously. He sees his next door neighbor and cousin, Roy Nunez. Roy is an auto mechanic who loves working on old cars, especially Fords and Chevys.

"Hey Roy, was somebody firing some shots out here?"

"No Leo... Sorry, I was trying to start my Ford and it backfired a few times."

Leo looked back at me and gave that look of 'chill out'.

"That's okay Roy. Maybe you can tune up my car this week."

"Sure Leo... Later man."

"Yeah, later..." Leo walked back into the apartment with me. "Man, you got to take it easy. You're starting to make me nervous. What the fuck time is it?"

I looked at my watch. "Damn, it's four in the afternoon. I can't believe I slept this long. I gotta get out of here."

"Whatta you going to do, man?" Leo grabs a couple of beers from the refrigerator.

"I don't know, Leo. But I know there's big trouble staring right at me. I can't go back to the sports bar and I can't go back to my apartment. I just have to think."

Leo was in thought. "Hey Frankie, do you think the cameras on De LaParra's house caught us on tape?" Frankie felt uneasy about it.

"I don't know Leo, but they already know who I am. But they don't know who you are."

"Oh man! Ah, fuck'um! I had fun last night." Leo laughs a little.

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“Fun..?! I thought that was a nightmare!” I’m not that violent by nature. But the experience has changed my life.

“Well, Frankie... Mondo and I have been through some shit here in the hood and learned many lessons. But watching you last night was ‘Graduation Day’ for me. We should’ve had you in the gang in the good old days.”

“No thanks. I gotta go see my Uncle Sonny. Maybe he can help me. Check on Mondo and you guys split up the money. You should be alright. I’ll let you know what I do.”

“Okay man. Be sure to call me later and tell me.” Leo and I finished the beers and went on to the porch. Another loud pop was heard. We hit the floor hard.

“Oh sorry you guys.” Roy yells up at us as he was still trying to get his car started.

“Fuck, Roy!” as Leo shouts. “Why don’t you take the day off and go to church man?”

We got up onto our feet. “Leo... I’m out of here. I’ll call you.”

“Frankie... I’m always here. You have been good to Mondo and me, man. We appreciate it,” says Leo as he gets sentimental. “By the way if you need me Monday, I’ll only be out for a couple of hours. I gotta go get my unemployment check.”

I gave a little chuckle... “Good Bye, Leo.”

As I was driving to the bar where my uncles hang out, I couldn’t help but to keep looking over my shoulder. It was the most uncomfortable feeling. It was 5:38 p.m. and I arrived at the Mambo Club. There was Uncle Sonny sitting at the bar with Uncle Amos, his brother. I approached them. “Uncles...” Amos looked over my way.

“Frankie! Hey Henry, get Frankie a beer. How about a shot of gold, nephew?”

Sonny was glad to see me. “Frankie, where the hell you been, man? I heard you had a small bar out in Seal Beach. And how are the ponies treating you?” Both he and Uncle Amos have been booking horses for years. A family matter.

“Yeah uncle, I’ll have a beer and a shot sounds good. Uh, can I talk to you guys...privately?”

“Sure Frankie. Let’s go to our usual booth.” Both Sonny and Amos walked me over to a corner booth. Amos was pretty concerned since

he hasn't seen me very much.

"What's wrong Frankie? Are you in some kind of trouble?" I was quiet at first.

"What is it Frankie?" Sonny was also sensing something was out of the ordinary.

"I have a very serious problem and I don't know what to do. In the past few nights my life has been out of control. I have a problem with the mob... A few people have died over drugs and money." Amos gave me a firm look.

"Are you on drugs, Frankie?"

"No! I don't do that shit."

"Of course not Frankie. I'm sorry I said that." Uncle Amos felt bad for thinking it.

"That's okay uncle. Let's face it, it's everywhere."

"Go on Frankie, tell us what happened. Wait! Henry. Another round of beers... Go ahead. Your Uncle Amos and I are listening."

I told my uncles the whole story about the shootings, the people killed, what happened at my bar in Seal Beach and my love, Michele. Then I mentioned what happened at De LaParra's mansion in Laguna Beach.

"And here I am uncles. I can't go back to my sports bar or apartment." Sonny and Amos looked at each other in deep thought. "So, what can I do?" I asked as I was ready to listen to any suggestion. Sonny spoke up.

"Frankie... We know who Randall De LaParra is. You pretty much got in trouble with the wrong people."

"Yeah, Frankie..." Amos gives the story. "De LaParra has an older brother, Anthony Martinez, who is the head of his syndicate. He started their little organization a lot of years ago. They were raised in the worst part of downtown L.A. Martinez began organizing their syndicate in the late 1940's and they expanded in the early '50's. I was intensely listening as Sonny continued the scenario. "His mother took in laundry to help pay the bills. Anthony was a teenager who thought his dad was a hero, so he would try the drugs himself. He was busted by the L.A. cops and his mom had to get him out of the city jail." Sonny continued the story as I can see that they sure knew a lot about this Anthony.

"Frankie... One night his dad over dosed on heroin and died. His

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mother went crazy for a while. She had trouble paying the rent, and in order to keep Anthony in school, she had two jobs. Taking in laundry and working at the Hanco garment factory. One night Anthony was out with more troubled pachucos, punks, hoods, and vatos. His mother came home one evening and got an eviction notice from the landlord, and she started crying.

There was a knocked on the door and it was the landlord; an old smelly cigar smoking fart. He demanded the rent money. She didn't have it. She pleaded with him to wait another week. He didn't have the patience, and didn't care to wait." Amos interjected the rest of the story...

"The landlord made an advance towards her for a sexual favor. She slapped him hard and then he slapped her and threw her down to the floor and began to rape her. As he was on top of her, Anthony walked in, and in a rage, got a baseball bat by the closet and whacked the landlord breaking his collar bone, and continued to break his back. The landlord cries were heard all over the building. The police and the ambulance came. The landlord almost died on his way to the hospital. Anthony was taken to jail because the cops also found marijuana in his pockets. He went to juvenile hall for 14 months. It was considered worse than the city jail. Teenagers watched too many gangster movies, and think they are just as tough. One night, Martinez was gang raped by a bunch of white tough guys and he was never the same man."

"How does Randall De LaParra fit into this?" Frankie was intensely listening as Sonny continued the scenario.

"Anthony's mother had a baby by her rapist, the landlord. Randall De LaParra was that baby." I seemed to get a little more confused as to who's who. Then I asked... "Was the landlord's name, De LaParra?"

"No, it was his mother's maiden name. Randall never knew or saw his biological father," says Sonny as he continues... "Anthony got out of juvenile hall and had resentment toward Randall for a long time. But before his mother died, she made Anthony promise to watch over him. Anthony was about 18 years older than Randall. Randall was about seven years old when his mother died. By that time Anthony was still involved in gang fights and extorting from the local merchants. He had a girlfriend who would watch over Randall because she wanted a baby from him, but he didn't want any children. Anthony got involved in selling drugs rather than taking it. On the other hand,

Randall loved drugs since he was ten years old, and Anthony lost control over him.

I had to ask... "How do you know so much about those people?" Amos was a little older than Sonny and could remember more of what took place in the old days.

"Frankie, some of your other uncles and our cousins also were involved in some gang fights. We were forced into it because we had to protect our families. We lived on 47th and Normandie Ave., in South Central L.A. At that time there were more Mexicans living in that part of town. Anthony was in a rival gang. We knew each other since kids. Every gang knew about the other gangs and their families. We were lucky enough to get out and start families of our own. It was tough to get a job without an education. We hated picking and then selling oranges on the corner streets to make a quarter. We had an older cousin that was into horse racing, and he taught us how to book bets. We worked for him for a very long time. He made all the money and paid us a salary with a little commission. Then we saw how the money came in, and with all the people we know, we built a clientele and here we are."

"Haven't you ever got busted for booking?" I asked as I was learning a lot about my heritage.

"Oh yeah, but we got out on bail and went right back to work. Once you start and get busted, no one will hire you for a decent job." Sonny interjects.

"Frankie, remember when I told you about investing in real estate? Now I am comfortable and real estate in California is great. I'm not rich, but I have nothing to worry about.

Amos continues as he develops a plan for his nephew... "Frankie, I'm going to make a couple of calls and see if I can find out anything on De LaParra. There are a lot of old timers still around East L.A., and I want you to stay at my place tonight." Amos lived in the Boyle heights section of Los Angeles, in a one bedroom apartment. He's never been married and he's quite happy living by himself.

"Okay Uncle Amos. I'll stay there for the night, but I gotta do something right away. There's a lot of news on TV about these killings in Orange County."

"You just stay there, Frankie. We'll find out what's going on," says Sonny as we all walked outside to my car.



Anthony and Randall with Mother

“Here’s the key Frankie. I’ll be home late tonight.”

Amos and Sonny went back into the bar and I drove up to Boyle Heights. I don’t think this is the type of neighborhood that a head of the syndicate would come back to. I parked my car under the carport of a four-plex apartment. I went to the upstairs unit where my uncle lived. It was on a hill and I could see a long distance from his window. I sat down on the chair and relaxed with a cold beer. I stared out the window at the L.A. city lights as well as the night-time interstate traffic. I was still exhausted, but this was relaxing. Nobody bothering me... I had no choice but to listen to the neighbor’s Spanish music on the radio. I can also smell the food they’re cooking. My eyes lids got heavier. I just closed them and listened to the passing cars on the busy intersection.

**I can’t open my eyes now as I can’t feel any movement. I don’t feel the rain or the breeze, but I can still hear the thunder. Nina...? She must be dead. I haven’t heard a word from her. I hear bottles of liquid dropping into a tin bowl. I smell strong incense. God, I’m shivering. It’s so damn cold... I... I...*

A hand gave me a gentle shove as I woke up and jumped out of my chair. It was uncle Amos. “Frankie? You okay?”

“Oh yeah Amos... I think I was having a little nightmare. What time is it?”

“It’s almost midnight. Frankie, we have to talk.”

There was a concerned look on his face that I didn’t like. “What is it, uncle?”

“You have to go away because Anthony Martinez is having everyone looking for you. I have an old friend that still works for him and De LaParra. I didn’t say that I had seen you, but he knows our families. De LaParra is in the hospital and it looks like he might live. The doctors had to cut off his legs completely. Man, you did a job on him.”

“Where should I go uncle? What should I do?” I was worried.

“Well, you got the mob’s money?” Amos asked with a concerned look.

“Yes... What if I got it back to them?” I was thinking this

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nightmare would end.

"It doesn't matter, Frankie. They're going to kill you, and if they find out about your son and ex-wife, they will kill them first and send a message to everyone." Amos continues to give the bad news. "You'll have to leave in the next hour or two when it'll be safer. I called a cousin in Las Vegas. Her name is Mary Torres. She has a bachelors unit over the top of her garage. You can stay there as long as you want. I think this part of California is gone for you as long as Martinez and De LaParra are alive."

"I have a lot of their money! Why don't I put a hit on them?" I was pissed and started raising my voice.

"Shut up Frankie! Are you like them?! Did your father and mother bring you up to be a killer like those assholes?!" Amos was upset, but right.

"I'm sorry uncle... I've been through hell the last few nights. I should have got into another line of business."

"I hate to say it Frankie. But I think it's in the family blood of this generation."

"Okay, I'll go. I always thought about living in Vegas." Frankie paces back and forth continuing to think... "How old is your cousin, Mary?"

"She's in her late 50's. She was a party animal in her hay day. She knows about the gangs of L.A. She dated a few."

"Damn... Is there anything else I don't know about anyone in the family? What about my mother?"

"Never mind, Frankie... Let's just say we had a big family of spread out cousins everywhere, and there was always a party going on. Mary and your mother use to go to the clubs in downtown L.A. when they were young. Mary moved to Vegas in the early 1950's. Her husband died a few years ago because he gambled and drank himself to death. She hoarded most of the money when he passed out next to his bottle of booze. Now she's living comfortable on the east side of town. Here's the address and her phone number. She's already expecting you. Your Uncle Sonny is making a few more contacts in Vegas to help you out."

"What about my mother and Linda's family? Do you think the mob knows about them?"

"They don't know about Linda, but they know about your mom."

They won't bother Maria out of respect for the old neighborhood families. But don't contact her for a while. I'll tell her what happened and that you moved."

"Thanks uncle... I guess this is what family is all about."

"One thing Frankie I'm going to stress to you! Don't spend the mob's money gambling or just spending it foolishly in any way. Anyone in Vegas that throws around money at the tables is a mark, and they will find out all about you. You'll be photographed from the ceiling cameras the moment you walk into the casino. There are undercover security officers all over. Once you sit at the bar, they'll watch you, especially if you're alone. They watch out if you're going to cheat or hustle the customers. They can tell if you are a tourist or a local. If you go to the same casino more than a week; they'll know who you are."

"Fuuuuccck, uncle. I'll be afraid to spend a dollar."

"Spend a dollar, but if you start to play the tables, just bet small and don't get drunk and make an ass of yourself, like most tourist do." Uncle Amos seems to have a lot of experience with the Vegas lifestyle.

"Get some rest Frankie. You should leave in a couple of hours... and by the way, you're taking my car and we're getting rid of yours."

"Why can't I take my car?"

"They've got your license plate number and they know your car." I wasn't thinking straight. What ever happened to the simple life? I guess not for me. Gee, I wonder what kind of a car I'll be driving.

"What kind of car do you have uncle?"

"I still have the Buick, hijo... It's going to be a classic someday." Amos was proud.

"Ah Buick?! What year?" Now I'm worried.

"1969," he says proudly. I shut my eyes tight as if I just bit a sour lemon. Then I wondered about my car.

"Okay uncle, but what about my Porsche?"

"Your Uncle Sonny and I will take care of it. Who's your insurance company?"

"What?" I was a little concern.

"Well, I need to know where to put the claim in for you." Amos seemed to know how the system with insurance companies worked.

"What claim?"

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“Frankie... We have to get rid of the car. I’m taking it to the hood and leave it there. Gang members will take care of it at the ‘chop shop’. That car is gone Frankie. You don’t get rid of it; they’ll hunt you down.” I guess my uncle was right. I suppose I had enough money to buy another cool ‘babe mobile’.

“And Frankie, when you get to Vegas, don’t even think of getting another babe mobile. You get a Honda or an Oldsmobile or something that’s not flashy. Frankie... You got into a mess with the wrong people. They’re bad news.” Amos was sincere on what he was saying.

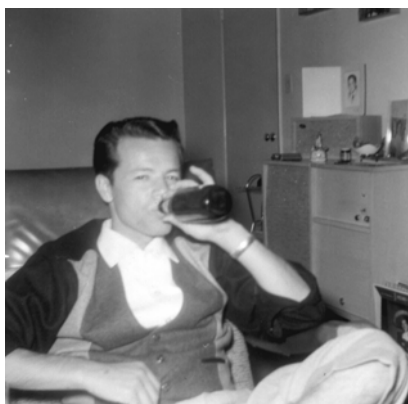
“I understand uncle... I understand. I need to get a couple of hours sleep.” I gave my Uncle Amos a hug and I laid down to rest. Life for me is really in the fast lane and that’s the path I chose.



Amos—WWII



Uncle Roy—WWII



Sonny –A Winning Day
WWII Veteran

Chapter 13

Hello Las Vegas...

Shall We Dance...?

It was 5:57 a.m. in the cold early morning, in the middle of the desert. I was on highway Interstate 15 northbound coming off the big hill and approaching the Nevada State Line. It still looks like a bare desert, except for the little bar that's been there for years. **Cactus Kate's** was a small casino that had about a dozen slot machines and a bar. That was the extent of the State Line Casino. I was about 45 minutes from the rock'n world of sin. Only two things can happen; Vegas is going to kick my butt or I was going to grab it by the balls, and squeeze the hell out of it.

The sun is starting to peek over the East Mountains. I was starting to get a little nervous, and at the same time excited. There's something about the desert air that makes you feel like you're back in time. I've come to Las Vegas many times, but never spent more than three days here. When I did, I had to recuperate for a couple of weeks from doing 24 hour marathons at the gaming tables. Now I'm basically on the run and hiding. However, I'm going to be around my element; 'Action'. What side of the table will I be on?

I still have the mobs money and I wouldn't doubt it if they had some connections in this state. Do I change my name? Do I stay

incognito and keep looking over my shoulder to see if I'm going to get whacked? Or do I build a new life for myself?

I passed the state line and gave Cactus Kate's casino a little wave. I had about another 30 miles to Las Vegas before I would actually see any sign of life, with the exception of **Pop's Oasis** bar and casino, of course. That was another little bar with one or two Blackjack tables and a few slot machines. It was about another 15 miles ahead. For people heading back from Vegas to California, it was also known as "The Last Chance Saloon."

I finally turned past the final bend of the Interstate 15 mountain curve. You can see some of the casino neon lights on the Strip that are lit in bright colors. I had that butterfly feeling in my gut. Looking at those casinos lit up, I feel like a kid going to Disneyland for the first time. I was thinking to myself—Someday I might operate or own a major casino on the Strip. I will be... **'King of the Desert'**.

I slowed down my speed from averaging 80 mph to 70. Most people still believe there is no speed limit from the state line to Vegas. That went out around early 1974 with the passing of the 'National Conservation Act'; conserving fuel. The president of the United States also got a law passed that **55 Miles Per Hour** was a national speed limit on every interstate highway in good old America. The price of gas shot up to around an average of 55 cents a gallon. According to our government, there was a shortage of gas in the United States. God Bless America. We adjusted our economy and weathered the crisis.

I exited Blue Diamond Rd. and it led me directly to Las Vegas Blvd. I was going straight up the strip. I felt I was in another world and I realized that I was going to be living here. As I got closer to Tropicana Ave., I finally came to the most popular marquis in America; **'WELCOME TO FABULOUS LAS VEGAS'**.

Here I am, entering the mouth of sin city in a 1969 Buick. I'm sure the chicks will be in line for a ride...ha! But still, I feel like I just came to a Mecca for the first time. It's a nice morning and I am starving. I cruised up Las Vegas Blvd. and still admired the structures of the casinos and hotels. I pulled into the Flamingo hotel to get breakfast. If Bugsy Seagle went to all the trouble of getting this place built, then getting his head blown off, I could at least have breakfast here. I had valet park my car. What damage could they do to my Buick?

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As I walked through the casino, I saw many beautiful women. What else is new? I went into the coffee shop for some steak and eggs. The waitress showed me to a booth and gave me a menu, and then poured me a cup of coffee.

“Good morning... We have specials on breakfast this morning for 99 cents.” The middle aged waitress was still giving that early morning smile.

“Uh, I’ll just have the steak, medium well and eggs over easy with wheat toast, thank you.”

I sat there drinking my coffee, trying to decide what my next move would be. I gotta call Mary Torres and get situated in the bachelor’s unit over her garage. As I sat there, I hear voices in the booth next to me getting louder. It was a man and woman having a little argument.

“You son of a bitch! We got here yesterday and you already lost the fucking money!!!” The woman was letting her husband have it. “Why in the hell did I come with you?! We’re suppose to be here a fuck’n week!” The lady was pissed at the ol’ man. The husband wasn’t giving up.

“Come on, honey... Please, just let me have another \$20 dollars,” he begs. “I can win.” The waitress arrived with my breakfast in the middle of my first Vegas show.

“Here’s your steak and eggs... and more coffee sir?” She was pleasant.

The irate wife continued... “Here damn it! Take the fucking twenty-bucks! I’m paying the bill we’re leaving this ‘hell-hole’ when you blow that!”

The husband had a smile on his face like he just got a reprieve from the warden. I finished my breakfast and walked around the casino. It was about 10:20 a.m. and people were still going strong on the gaming tables. There always seems to be blackjack tables busy with players as well as the craps games. I had an itch to play, but I decided to just walk along the tables. I stopped at the bar and had a beer. Yeah, it’s early in the morning, but this is Las Vegas. Time means nothing and you won’t find any clocks in the casino.

I always was a people watcher. I get a big kick out of watching them gamble. You’ve got the very serious gamblers and then you’ve got the loud mouths. They talk to the dice on the craps table. For a lot of people, every time they toss the dice, they look like their life is on the line. I guess this explains why my uncles Sonny and Amos became the bank. They taught it to me and I hope I don’t lose my common

sense in Las Vegas.

"Excuse me; have you got a light?" I turned around and yes, there was a nice beautiful chick staring at me with a cigarette hanging between her lips. Wow, even this early in the morning, Vegas is accommodating.

"Yes I do," I replied with a cool smile. Of course I didn't have a light... But every man will check his pockets to see if he has a book of matches, even if he doesn't smoke.

"Uh, I must be out... I'll get some. Hey bartender, can I get a book of matches?" The asshole bartender pulls out his lighter and lights the ciggy for her.

"Thanks anyway," she says with a smile and blows out her smoke at the same time.

"So, where you from?" I started to say Orange County, Ca, but hesitated.

"I'm from Arizona."

"Oh, I've been there a few times. Where about?" I'm sure she was being nice but asking too much about me for a casual conversation is something I wasn't ready for.

"Can I get you another cocktail?" I asked. She gave me the nod as she downed the last of her drink. "What'll you have?" I asked as I was trying to avoid her 'Where About' question.

"I'll have another bloody Mary, thank you." She was pretty relaxed. I waved to the bartender for a couple of more drinks as I turned the questioning around.

"Where are you from?"

"I'm from a small town in Ohio. I came out here a couple of years ago and got a job at the airlines as a ticket agent. The jobs okay, but not great excitement. I'm looking for something else. Maybe be one of those showgirls of magic or something...ha." She gave a little chuckle and it sounded like she was just bored with whatever she was doing. She was a nice looking girl about in her mid 20's with hazel eyes and nice long ash blond hair... and stacked! But I was ready to leave.

"Well listen, it was nice to meet you, but I have to go now."

"Where are you staying?" She continues the conversation.

"Actually, I just got into town and I'm looking for a place." I thought she was hot but I was trying to shy away from anymore questions. I had a long drive all night.

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“Oh, what’s your name?” The inquisitive chick asked in a friendly manner.

“Uh..., it’s Frank. What’s yours?”

“My name is Heather. Listen, when you settle in, if you would like to get together, here’s my number.” She gives me a generic business card with her name and number.

“Okay Heather.” I wasn’t sure if this was too fast or I’m just plain flattered. Maybe this was an indication of how things will be for me in Vegas.

“I don’t have a phone yet, but I will give you a call. What are your days off from work so I can call you?” I was sort of getting interested in her since she is my first Vegas connection.

“Oh you can call me anytime, Frank. That number is to my pager and that’s the best way to reach me. Then I can give you a call back and we’ll hook up.” As she gives a nice friendly smile, I extended my hand and shook hers and hey, that wasn’t bad. Frankie baby still has the magic.

“I’ll call you, Heather... and maybe you can show me the hot spots in town.”

“That would be so cool, Frankie. I’ll wait to hear from you.” She leaned over and gave me a small kiss on the cheek. What a friendly chick.

It was 11:47 a.m. and I thought I’d better get to my aunt’s house. Although she is really a second cousin from an older generation, it’s always been part of certain cultures to refer to them as aunts or uncles. I went to a phone booth and gave Mary a call. She’s probably someone I haven’t seen in a lot of years. But my uncles and mom are her cousins, and they all partied together as kids and teenagers.

“Hello, Mary? This is Frankie... Yeah, I’m alone... I just got into town and I’m trying to find your place... Yes, I’m on the strip now... at the Flamingo... Okay... So I go towards downtown and turn right on Bonanza Rd.... Turn right and go about 7 miles... towards the Temple on the hill... Yeah, I got the address... I can find it. I’ll be there in about 20 minutes... Okay, bye.”

I got back on Las Vegas blvd. and headed north to downtown where all the old clubs are. I still feel a little intimidated that I will be living here. It was like a pass to Fantasy Land. I noticed a lot of homeless

men and women lying under the highway overpass. It seems that some people just like to hang around on the sidewalks waiting for something to happen like money is going to fall on them.

I came to Bonanza Rd., turned and headed east towards Sunrise Mountain. That's one mountain I remember. Every time I did a gambling marathon here in Vegas, I came out of the casino looking at the sunrise behind the East Mountains. I drove about eight miles and started watching out for my aunt's street. It's right off Bonanza Rd. past Nellis Blvd. There it was... Mt. Hood Street. I turned onto the street and came into a cul de sac. There were a few homes built on acre lots. Everyone had their own taste, which was okay. No home looked alike. I pulled into my aunt's driveway and noticed the bachelor unit over the garage. Looks like my new home. Well, it had a private entrance which was good. My Aunt Mary came out to greet me. She used a walking cane to help her get around. She wasn't bad looking for her age. She has aged gracefully. I'm sure I'll find out how she got the limp. I can see how my uncles said that she was a party animal in the old days.

"Aunt Mary?"

"Well, Frankie... I haven't seen you since you were an altar boy."

"I sort of remember you Mary. I was pretty young, but I still have some memories of childhood days." We walked into the house and right away she says,

"You had a long drive, Frankie... How about a drink?" I really didn't have a chance to respond as she came out with a bottle of Bourbon and two shot glasses. I wasn't really ready for the shots yet, but I won't insult a woman who's been through a lot of adventures from L.A. to Las Vegas. I didn't know much about her, but I was about to learn.

"Frankie, your uncle Sonny and Amos tell me you got into trouble with the big boys." She lit up a cigarette and sounded like she had a lot of time to kill.

"Well, Mary... It's really a long story and I'm not sure it's what you want to hear."

"Frankie, do I look like I'm in a rush to get out of town? I live here alone and I don't have any dick heads running my life. What we talk about, is between you and me. You can stay here as long as you like,

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but you start bringing home any ladies, don't think of having them move in." Wow where did that come from? I just nodded my head with a smile. She continued to take another big puff of her cigarette, and as she exhales, she kept the conversation going. "Anyway, I know a lot about Anthony Martinez and Randall De LaParra. They're from the old tough neighborhood. De LaParra was the biggest problem. Now you're here and we're family son. We need to watch out for one another, Okay?"

"Yes, Mary... I do. But I'm not sure what I'm going to do next."

"How about telling me the story from the beginning..." She was sincerely interested.

I started the story right from the time I started gambling at the age of 10, to becoming a horse bookie, to being at the wrong place at the wrong time... and about Michele. I got into the situation with McCracken and the drugs, and money and the killings in Newport Beach. What I did to De LaParra as vengeance to Michele. About four and a half hours went by fast and Aunt Mary kept pouring the bottle of bourbon into the shot glasses with beer chasers. We both had a good buzz on...

"And here I am Aunt Mary. I don't like running from anything, but I got in over my head."

"Yeah, you did kid. The first thing is that we might have to change your name."

"Why?" I asked. I really didn't like the idea.

"Just about every syndicate has some kind of tie in, in Las Vegas. I haven't seen Anthony Martinez or Randall in about 30 years. But if what you're saying about the money and drugs they deal in, I wouldn't be surprise if they made trips out here." She was in deep thought especially after the whole story I just told. She continued...

"Do you still have the money you took from them?"

"Yeah, I do... Amos says not to spend it for a while."

"That's right, Frankie. Anytime you got money in this town and flash it around, you're a mark, and the money better be pure. Have you checked the money to see if it's marked? What about the serial numbers? Are they in sequence? Maybe they pulled a heist from a bank? Maybe it's counterfeit. It's easy to put a trace on it, especially if they're big bills."

This woman knows her shit. "I never thought of all that, Mary.

After I settle in, we'll take a look at the money. I need to get some rest. May I go to my room?"

"Sure sweetheart... Get your bags and I'll take you upstairs." We went up the outside staircase and walked into my new pad. It had everything. TV... Stereo... A telephone... Small refrigerator... A microwave... A kitchenette... and a view of downtown Vegas and the strip...

"This is perfect Aunt Mary. The view from the window is great." I gave her a hug and she gave me a key to the room as well as her house if I needed anything.

"You get some rest and we'll talk about a plan about your name and what you're going to do for a job here in Vegas." She left and I laid down in my bed and started thinking. What does she mean a job here in Vegas? And changing my name? Hell, I need some sleep. I closed my eyes and I was still uncomfortable thinking about the mob maybe surprising me and showing up at my door. All the booze was making me sleepy anyway and I need rest. Finally, I dozed... away.

**My eyes are still tightly shut as I am too weak to open them. I can feel heat from perhaps a flame. I still have a strong sense of smell. The incense is much stronger. I hear voices in a language which I cannot recognize. My thoughts are still of Nina... I fear that I will never see her again. There are beads of perspiration traveling down my face as my body temperature is rising. Oh god, please stop the pounding in my body. My stomach is burning.*

I suddenly burst out of my sleep in deep sweat wondering where I was at. I looked around and saw that I was in a strange place. I finally realized that I was in my new room at my aunt's place.

I was breathing rapidly as I was coming to a full awakening. I took some deep breaths and calmed down. I had the strangest dream as though I was dying. I got up and got a glass of cold water. As I was guzzling it down fast, there was a loud knock at the door. My glass dropped out of my hand into the sink and shattered.

"Frankie... Are you awake?" It was Aunt Mary. I gotta get over this nervousness.

"Uh, yes Aunt Mary. Come on in." I splashed a little water on my face as she walked in. I looked outside and it was dark.

"Frankie, from now on keep the door locked. This is not a well lit

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street and this is Las Vegas.” Mary seemed to be pretty cautious.

Do you know what time it is?”

“It’s going to be 7:45 p.m. and I made some dinner, so wash up and come down stairs and we’ll talk about a plan for you.” I felt I was being a little rushed. I just arrived in town. But she’s the boss.

“Okay Mary, I’ll be right down.” Although she was using a cane to help her walk up and down the stairs, she seemed to be getting around pretty good. Must be a tough lady. I sat at the dinner table. I offered to help her with anything, but she said she could handle it.

“What would you like to drink, Frankie?”

“Just a glass of wine...thanks.”

“I fixed some fish and vegetables, so I’ll pour you some white wine. Is that Okay?”

“Oh sure, that’s great. Are you sure I can’t help you with anything?”

“Well maybe you can bring over the platter of fish.” I got up and carried that and some sauce over to the table. And finally we sat to eat. I started to dig in and she started to say ‘Grace’. Oops... I put my fork down fast and closed my eyes.

“Amen... Frankie, help yourself to anything and everything,” she says with a big smile.

“Thanks Aunt Mary.” This was the first home cooking I had in a long time. As we’re eating, she started the conversation.

“Frankie, we have to make some plans here for your safety as well as the rest of your family back home. Anthony Martinez and Randall De LaParra are rough people and they only know one way to play. Now unless you are a killer and you want to try to kill them, then I say go for it... How do you feel about killing them?” she asked as though she had experience as a gun moll from the Bonnie & Clyde days. I thought for a moment....

“Well Aunt Mary, if I was a killer, and I’ve had a lot of good reasons the last few days, I would’ve killed De LaParra when I had the chance, especially after what he did to Michele. So, now I’m not sure. But if I am in a situation like that again, I would probably take extreme measures to protect and defend myself or a loved one.”

“Yes Frankie, I would too... But we have to change your name, even if it’s for a while until we know for sure that they lost track of you.”

I thought about it and said, “Okay... I’ll change my last name, but my mom named me after my grandfather. So I’m keeping Frank.”

“I understand...” Mary was thinking... “When were you born?”

“October 26th... Why?”

“You’re a Scorpio. It doesn’t sound ethnic and it could be any culture in most cases. Frank Scorpio... Yeah, it has a ring to it. What do you think?” I sat back and took in a deep thought of what the sign of Scorpio represents.

“Okay, I like it... Frank Scorpio... Well, it makes for conversation when I meet these Vegas chicks.”

“Right away Frankie, you haven’t been in this town 24 hours and you’re thinking of the Vegas chicks? They can be brutal, son. I know you have to get on with your life, but be careful.” At least Mary gives sound advice. We continued to eat and finish our dinner. I only had one more glass of wine. I was well fed and relaxed.

“Thanks for the great dinner Aunt Mary. I’m going to go out for a while to downtown and just walk around and get adjusted.”

“What about the money Frankie? Don’t be spending it until we know it’s clean.”

“No, no... I have plenty of my own money for a while. I just want to get out and think about what I’m going to be doing for my future here in Las Vegas. I’ll be okay. I’ve come to Vegas many times, so I know the main streets around here. I just want to think.”

“Sure Frankie. Just be careful... ‘Scorpio’,” she says with a smile. I smiled and chuckled. I helped her clean up the dirty plates and put away the dishes, pots and pans, and left the kitchen sparkling clean. It was going on 9:30 p.m. I gave her a kiss on the cheek good night and left. I went up to my little bachelors pad, showered and slicked up a little, ‘for just in case’... I took about \$500 dollars with no intent to spend it all. But in this town, I know you always have to have more than a buck in your pocket. There’s an old saying that my uncle Hank told me about Vegas. ‘A woman judges you by the size of your pocket in this town, not your dick’. My uncle also said. ‘This is Las Vegas. If your lover catches you on top of another woman totally naked, just tell her that you didn’t put it in yet... that it was on the side... and she’ll believe you.’ And one more important saying, ‘What happens in Vegas— Stays in Vegas.’ Well, my uncle has since passed away, but I’ll always remember the words of wisdom.

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It was 10:47 p.m. and the nightlife is just beginning to brew here in Las Vegas. I was going to leave my troubles behind me tonight. I've been through too much. I really loved Michele and she's gone. I have a lot of anger in me and I need to calm down. So I'll go downtown, casino hop, and have a few beers. It's a nice warm night and there are a lot of tourists in for the weekend. I parked off Fremont St. and Las Vegas Blvd. There seemed to be a lot of bums walking around with nowhere to go, and they also seemed to know one another. I didn't park in the best of areas, but I'm sure I'll learn where they are in time. I locked up my 'Buick' and continued to walk up Fremont St. It was a beautifully lit street and the bright neon lights from the casino marquees added to the illumination in the sky. I've been here many times and it amazes me how the rush flows in your veins when you see this.

My first stop was at the Four Queens casino. My dad and I used to come here before he passed away. I sat at the bar and ordered a beer. As I nursed it, I watched all the people in gaming action. There were many young hot babes with middle aged men. I suppose the younger guys were too occupied at the topless and bottomless dance bars. There was music entertainment in the lounge and everybody was having a good time.

"Excuse me; is someone sitting in this chair next to you?" I looked up and there's this young beautiful babe with the biggest smile staring right at me.

"Uh, no... You can have it." Wow, two times in the same day meeting a chick at the bar.

"Thanks," she says, and then waves across the room and this big ox of a guy comes over. "Hi honey. He says he's not using the seat. Go ahead and sit there while I play Blackjack," and she leaves.

"Gee, thanks guy. My name is Sid. What's yours?"

"Ehhh, Frank." Now the guy wants to be pals. "Listen, Sid. I was just leaving and your girlfriend can have my chair." I bottoms up my drink and said good night.

"Okay Frank", as he chuckles. "But she's not my girlfriend; she's my younger sister."

I looked at him and since I already made my move to exit, I thought I would just do it nice and easy.

"Well, so long Sid and good luck." I walked passed the gaming

tables and still refrained from getting involved in the action. I walked out of the Four Queens and went into the Golden Nugget casino. One of the great singers, Ray Charles, was performing on stage. I sat at the bar and ordered another beer with a tequila shooter as I watched Ray sing. I was relaxed and enjoying the atmosphere. People would be screaming from all sides of the casino when they hit for a few bucks. I guess that's what it's all about. Of course I'd hear the stick man at the Craps table occasionally yell, "Seven out... Line away and pay the Don't pass." You had cheers and jeers.

After a couple of more beers, I walked over to one of the oldest topless bars in Vegas; 'Glitter Gulch'. Why not...? I'm here alone and I'm not gambling. Might as well see some honey's dancing. Of course the place was crowded with guys and filled with smoke. I saw an empty chair next to a guy who was by himself.

"Do you mind if I sit here?" He nodded okay as he was giving all his attention to the girl dancing on stage with nothing but a G-string. As I sat down, he seemed so intense with the dancers that I knew he wasn't going to bug me with small talk. I ordered a beer and just watched the girls in action. There were a couple of real young beauties, and some oldies. Well, there's plenty for all ages in here.

After the girls finished their exotic dancing and stepped off the stage, they would mingle with the crowd of men trying to hustle another buck. As loud as the music was, the girls would whisper into the guy's ear for a moment and then the dudes would flip them a couple of more bucks. I guess it was my turn for a whisper.

"Hi honey, did you like my dancing?" What was I going to say? '*YOU SUCKED*'! "Oh yeah, it was great and you got nice breasts." Damn, I can't believe I said that. It just slipped out. She smiled and put her head of platinum blonde hair on mine and giggled a little...

"Aren't you a sweetie?" I thought I'd better give her a \$10 spot. She takes it with a quick smile and a wink.

"Well thank you sweetheart. Next time you're in here, I'll do a special dance just for you. Just make sure you asked for me... Candy." As she slowly walked away, she brushed her soft hands on my neck. I gotta say— she was a hottie in her early 20's.

I continued my tour of Fremont St. and stopped at Binion's horseshoe club. It still has the décor of the old Las Vegas, and it still had the \$10 million dollars in a one inch thick plastic display case of

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about a six foot replica horseshoe, and anyone could take a souvenir photo in front of it. That's exactly what I did. I figured some day all that would be mine; just daydreaming of course. I received my souvenir photo from the photographer and I shined in front of \$10 million bucks.

So what else can a guy do in Vegas if he's not gambling? Guess I'll get another beer. This is my first night in Vegas and I'm getting bored. Maybe I should get into a Blackjack game or Craps. Well I'm not drunk, but I have mellowed out. It's after 1:30 in the morning and decided I would just have one more beer for the road. I sat at the bar and continued to watch people talking and drinking. Most of the guys and ladies looked like they were alone. However, as usual, most of their significant others were at the tables, gambling their ass off. This is what it's all about.

An hour went by and I headed back to my car. Fremont St. quieted down a little. The crowd was winding down from all the action on the first night of the weekend. I walked off the main street and walked toward my car on 4th St. and Carson. I had one more block to go and saw the Buick at a distance. Glad it was still there, I guess.

As I passed a few bums lying on the sidewalk, I heard some loud talking or arguing. I looked to my left and saw two guys across the street arguing with a blonde chick. I just watched for a moment... It seemed to get more intense as one of the young males grabbed her arm and was squeezing it. She was hollering at the punk and scared at the same time. All of a sudden one of the guys slapped her in the face and shoved her into the other one. I looked around to see if anyone was going to help her. Although there were some people wandering around on the streets, they just ignored the situation. I see a lot of hookers minding their own business, and the johns and pimps don't care. If she was a hooker, her pimp wasn't around.

"Stop it!!! You piece of shit! My boyfriend 'ill kill you!" She was trying to fight them off.

"Com'on you little prick teaser... We forked out a lot of money for you tonight," says the asshole that was getting a little rougher with her.

"Fuck you, bastard! I don't owe you a thing! You got a show and that's all you're going to get!" The petite blonde had brass balls. I looked around and saw a small hand size rock with a jagged edge. I picked it up and walked over towards them.

“Hey!!!” I had that killer look on my face. “Let her go!” The little bastard turns to me with a bad ass look...

“Get the fuck outta here dude! This ain’t your business!” I looked at the girl in trouble... It was Candy, the dancer from the Glitter Gulch Topless club.

“I said, you little fucking punk, let her go or I’ll break your fucking face!!!” The two punks were a few years younger than me and I wasn’t sure if they had any weapons. But I was about to find out. I kept the rock in my hand with a tightly closed fist. The one guy lets go of her and tries to talk tough to me again.

“Hey man, this is our party and you ain’t invited!” He gives me that psycho look. I walked a little closer to the loud mouth as the other guy seemed to have more fear of what I was going to do. Candy just looked at me, but didn’t remember she had met me earlier.

“Step back Candy, while I spank the little loud mouth monkey.” She looked at me with sort of a dropped jaw and slight grin look, wondering who I was. I just concentrated on the tough guy, giving him a final stare. The other one quietly walked behind me. The taller guy in front came at me with a small three-inch pocket knife. As he lunged at me, I blocked his hand that held the mini-shank. I slammed the jagged stone from my hand onto his forehead with two quick blows. Then I turned to the other punk that was standing behind me. I raised my hand with the jagged rock in it, and he froze.

“No! Please... I don’t want any trouble,” he says with a tremble in his voice.

“Gee, what a sensible guy you are.” I think he peed in his pants. “Get your friend and get out of Vegas— now!”

“Sure... Sure. He picked up his buddy who was half conscience and took him away. I walked towards Candy with a smile.

“Are you okay, Candy?” She was quiet for a moment while staring at me.

“Get your friend and get out of VEGAS? Welcome to the ‘Wild Wild West,’” she says as she lets out a quick loud laugh. Candy had a sense of humor.

“Well, he won’t be bothering you anymore.”

“So, do I know you?” she asked with a puzzled look.

“I was at Glitter Gulch tonight and you whispered in my ear. I gave you a pretty good tip.”

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“Well that narrows it down to 500 studs.” She takes a closer look at my face and thinks. “Did you say I had nice breasts?”

“Sort of...”

“Yeah, I remember now. You tipped me ten-bucks because you got embarrassed. Well, here we are... this time I should be tipping you,” she says with a warm smile.

“That’s okay. You just seemed to be in trouble and I came to help you out. It’s dangerous around here, and why are you out here anyway?”

“Actually I live on the next block. I don’t have a driver’s license so I have to live near my job.” She was easy to talk to.

“What’s your name?” she asked with a grin.

“Frank.”

“Frank what?” I hesitated with a slight cough.

“Frank Scorpio.”

“Well Frank Scorpio, it’s almost 3 a.m., would like to get a cup of coffee?”

“Sure. Okay. Where do you want to go?” I figured I made a new friend.

“The best coffee is right this way.” She led me to the next block and we went toward the Orbit apartments.

“I don’t see a coffee shop.” I was wondering where she was taking me.

“The coffee maker is in my apartment. Now that you saved me from the ‘killers’, I should at least make you a fresh homemade cup of brew. Okay?”

“Okay” I said with a smile. We arrived at her apartment and as I walked in, I see that it was pretty plain. There were no pictures on the wall and the furniture looks like it came with the apartment. The green shag carpet seemed like it went through several past tenants.

“What do you think Frank Scorpio? I got this place furnished. Not bad for the price. I don’t have a car payment so I can afford this.”

“Yeah... it looks real nice.” What a dump I thought to myself. “So you live here alone?” I asked as I continued to check out the museum.

“Oh yeah... roommates can be nightmares. They’re always borrowing your clothes, your jewelry, and your boyfriends.” She likes to talk candid. She walked to the kitchen and started the pot of coffee. I sat at the kitchen table.

“So, have you got a boyfriend now?” I had to ask in case a surprise came walking in through the door.

“Nahhh... Once you give your body to them, they think they own you. So I do what I want, and I don’t want any man to tell me what to do.”

“Well, I hear what you’re saying Candy. How did you get involved with this...dancing business?” She stared out the window for a moment.

“I have a little boy to support. He’s with my brother and his wife. They want to adopt him. But I want him back.”

“So, get him back,” I said.

“I can’t right now. The court won’t let me have him.”

“Why not?” I was maybe getting too involved with this conversation. She handed me a cup of coffee as we continued to talk.

“Well Scorpio, I feel I can talk to you. You’re a good listener. When I was 15, I got into porn movies. It was going good for a few months until one of my brother’s friends saw me. Then hell broke loose with my family. I also got pregnant at the time and I didn’t know who the father was, and so my family disowned me. My brother did help me to take care of the baby, but now he wants to keep him.”

“How old are you now?” Maybe she was younger than she appears.

“I’m 19 years old and I have to survive somehow. Would you like a shot of whiskey? I’m having one.

“Sure.” I might as well listen. I might write a book some day. She poured me a couple of shots into my coffee and then went into her bedroom. She continued to talk as I sipped my drink.

“Anyway Frankie, may I call you Frankie? I have a cousin name Frankie.

“Yeah... Sure.” What the heck. I’m a Frankie.

“Well excuse me Frankie while I change, and help your self to more whiskey. I came to Vegas with a girlfriend, and we couldn’t get a job anywhere.” Candy continued to talk up a storm as I sat and wondered what kind of life she was living. And I was thinking, ‘what the hell am I still doing here?’ Candy comes out of her bedroom in tight cut off shorts and a tank top, and long brown hair. She kept talking without missing a beat.

“So my girlfriend and I were down to our last couple of bucks and

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we met some other girls who were dancers and yada, yada, yada... we ended up at Glitter Gulch." Candy lights up a joint...a doobie...pot...grass... Figured it out yet?

"Wanna hit Frankie? It's good stuff." I'm not into the drug thing, but grass, I'll do once in a while.

"Sure Candy. By the way, what happened to your platinum blonde hair?"

"Heck, all the girls wear something to perk up the guys. Are you disappointed?"

"No, no... I feel like I'm with a different person, but I'm not disappointed."

"Good. Come over and sit by me on the couch. I want to show you some party photos." She put on some music. I went and sat next to her and I think we were both pretty relaxed. She showed me some photos of the other girls that worked at Glitter Gulch. One of the girls had a going away party. Candy was really looking pretty good to me, and I think I've had enough pot. She took a few more hits.

"So Frankie, how long are you in town for?"

"Well, I just moved here and I'll be living here for awhile." Candy was getting friendly. She had fantastic legs and she looked like a young sweet girl with that long brown hair. She got up and went to get another shot of whiskey.

"Would you like one more Scorpio?" I paused for a moment and looked at my watch.

"Okay, one more." She filled two shot glasses and handed me one.

"To your good luck and fortune... Here, your new home in Las Vegas." We clicked our shots and down the hatch it went. She leaned over and gave me a passionate kiss. I wasn't sure how to respond since I just lost Michele. But I let her, because I felt like I really got to know her in a short amount of time. She told me a lot of personal stuff about her private life. I'm not sure why, but she had a lot of trust in me... or maybe she just needed someone to listen. And yeah, she really is good looking, but only 19 years old. We both got heavy into this and I started to return the passion.

She whispers to me in a low tone, "Frankie, I want you." She knew what she was doing and did it well. After all, she was a porn queen. It kind of turned me off, but thinking after hearing her story, who am I or anyone else to judge her? I pulled off her tight shorts and that's all she

had on. She threw off her tank top and helped herself to pulling off my shirt and unzipping my pants. She took me into her bedroom where there was a low gleaming red light bulb turned on. It was pretty sexy. I can't believe she still had a lava lamp. The music she had on was very soothing, and had erotic instrumental sounds.

As we made love, Michele's face kept flashing into my mind. Tonight I had beer, whiskey, and pot. My mind was floating. I continued to make fervent love with Candy as though I was with Michele. The only thing missing was the scent of Opium perfume that Michele wore. Candy was a passionate lover for her age, and all I could think of was Michele. It was hot and steamy and I threw on a sweat that wouldn't quit. I could hear Candy starting to cum as I was also about to. I closed my eyes tight. It got hotter and we we're going like rabbits from hell. Then— we both came at the same time. Our bodies just came to a standstill and dropped. We we're breathing heavy and totally exhausted. We laid there quietly with drips of water flowing off our bodies..... I whispered,

"I love you Michele."

Candy's eyes popped opened and softly threw me off her body. I realized what I had said. She got up slowly and went to the bathroom and closed the door. I was filled with guilt. I might do a lot of crazy things, but I am a compassionate man. I didn't know what to say. She was quiet in the bathroom. I just got up, put my clothes and shoes on, and went into the living room. I was just going to leave as she walked in.

"Who's Michele?" She asked me in a very low tone. I looked up at her and paused for a moment.

"Michele was a girl whom I was in love with... She died a short time ago." Candy sat next to me on the couch.

"I'm sorry... I'm sorry I put you in this position." She also seemed to be a sensitive person.

"I apologize Candy, for letting it go this far, but I really liked talking to you, and you got me at a vulnerable moment. It's really my fault... I better go."

Candy stared at the ceiling for a moment... "Frankie Scorpio. Tonight you were my hero. I opened up my personal life to you because I felt comfortable with you. When you walk out that door, I don't know if I'll ever see you again, but I want you to know, that you

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have a new friend in this town, if you want one.” I looked at her for a long 15 seconds.

“Thank you, Candy.”

“It’s Jen,” she says.

“What?” I looked at her with a big Huh.

“It’s Jenifer. Jeni—with an ‘i’. My family calls me Jen.”

“What’s with Candy?” I asked.

“I’m a porn girl and a dancer. What am I going to say my name is? Hi... I’m Jeni and I was born 50 years old?” I started laughing and she joined in. I see a friendship in the future. I got ready to leave and she walked me to the door.

“Well Scorpio, I had an interesting night. I hope we will run into each other again.”

I wasn’t sure if I should exchange phone numbers with her.

“Listen Candy... I don’t have a phone here in town yet because I just moved here, but I would like to get together with you for drinks or a dinner soon.” I wasn’t exactly sure what to say.

“Frankie, here’s my number and sure, we’ll get together. You know where I work. I’m the one with the platinum blonde hair and the nice breasts.” She smiled.

I laughed...“You’re a real peach Candy, Jenifer. Jen...” I smiled and gave her a tight hug. She opened the door and the sky was starting to get brighter. I took a last look at her, and left. I went home toward Sunrise Mountain. It was going on 5:45 a.m. I got home and went directly to my room. I sat on my bed for a moment wondering what happened through the night. Finally, I laid back and fell asleep.

Chapter 14

What is Family For?

There was a knock on my door and I really didn't feel like answering it.

"Frankie? Frankie? It's time to get up... Its past noon... Come on, it's me... Aunt Mary. I have some lunch made." I heard her but I was so tired, I ignored her. It got quiet. I think she went away. I just dug my head into the pillow and wanted to sleep longer. All of a sudden there was a loud scream...

"AHHHH!!! Help!!! Don't kill me De LaParra!" I jumped out of my bed and grabbed a kitchen knife since my .357 Magnum was in the trunk of my car. I yanked the front door open expecting to get a spray of bullets. There was my Aunt Mary staring me in the face and laughing.

"Oh, you are up," she continues to laugh her ass off.

"What the hell are you doing, Aunt Mary?!" I was pissed.

"Frankie, you're not on vacation. We're here to get your life back on track and keep the bad boys from getting to you. You get careless and you'll get busted." I calmed down... and yes, maybe I thought I was on a mini vacation.

"Sorry Mary. I was out late last night."

"You mean, you were out until early this morning", she says seemingly pissed off.

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“Did you wait up for me?” I felt like I lost my privacy for a moment.

“No. I always get up early in the morning. Up by 6 a.m. Now come on. I have lunch ready for us and we need to talk about the money you took from the tough guys. See you in ten minutes.”

I went back inside the room and took a quick shower. I was tired, but managed to get dressed and went down stairs to eat. I walked in my aunt’s kitchen and there was a good size sandwich on a plate and a glass of milk. She really is taking care of me.

“This looks great Mary.” As I began to dig in, I thought I’d better say something about last night. “I’m sorry for staying out late... I drank a few too many beers and made a new friend and had coffee.” I figured she didn’t need any details.

“So you made a friend and had coffee... Let’s have the details.” She got nosy.

I almost choked on my sandwich, and quickly drank my milk. “Details? I met a girl at the casino bar and we talked, and talked. Then we had coffee and talked some more.” I made it quick and short.

“You’re picking up strangers? Do you trust strangers now?” She seemed a little more pissed off.

“Are you upset, Aunt Mary?”

“I’m not upset, but your life is in danger, and we are trying to help you.” Mary seemed to be more worried about me than I was.

“It was just my first night here in Vegas and I don’t know anyone but you. She was just a young girl who was nice to talk to.”

“I don’t mean to sound perturbed with you, Frankie, but I’m worried that Martinez and De LaParra might have connections out here. I don’t think they know anything about you being here, but you still have to be careful son.” She means well.

“Sorry Mary. I will be careful about the people I meet out here. I just gotta get things going for me again.”

“Frankie, you have to lay low for a while until your uncles’ find out more about what’s going on with the syndicate. Like I said, you need to get a job so it looks like you’re at least trying to make a living. If you hang around the casino all day...everyday, they will get curious and want to know who you are. They might think you’re a hustler.”

“What about all that money that I took from the mob?” I gave the impression I really didn’t want a job.

“That’s another thing... Get the money. We need to see if it’s

dirty.” I went to upstairs to my room and got the bag of cash.

“Here it is Aunt Mary.” I dumped the cash onto the living room table. “There’s about \$425 thousand dollars.” She looked at it for a moment.

“Start checking for any unusual marks on the bills. The \$100 bills, \$50’s and whatever else you find.”

We started thumbing through the bills that were wrapped in money bands. I never had so much money in my hands to count and see if it was dirty. After an hour and a half, we really didn’t find anything out of the ordinary.

“I haven’t found a thing, Mary.”

“I really haven’t either, but I don’t trust anything about this cash. We need to hide it for a while and wait to see if the syndicate is on to you. Maybe your uncle’s friend is going to be a good informant. That way we’ll know about Anthony Martinez’s every move.”

“Where do you suggest we hide the money?” This is really going to be a hassle.

Aunt Mary was pacing around thinking. “You know Frankie; I have a safety deposit box at my bank. It’s only a few dollars a month. We need to get you one to put the money or anything else into it. The bank has been there for years and will be there a long time.”

“Okay Mary. What do I have to do?” I was putting my trust into her.

“Leave it to me Frankie. I’ll take care of it. Right now, just put the money into my safe in the basement. Come on, I’ll show it to you.”

We headed downstairs to the basement. I was thinking— can I really trust my aunt whom I haven’t seen in around 20 years? I trust my uncles, Sonny and Amos with my life, and they trust Mary. I guess I don’t have a choice. Maybe I should be ashamed for even thinking of a doubt in trust.

She pulled back a large piece of old carpet on the corner of the floor. There was the combination safe. Mary got down on her knees and looked closely at the numbers on the combination lock. As she turned the combination dial on the safe, she said the code numbers out loud so that I could hear them. I guess she really does trust me. When she opened the safe, all I saw was a bunch of legal size papers. I think all her money was in the safety deposit box at the bank.

“Okay Frankie... Let’s put the money in here for now, and we’ll

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go to the bank on Monday and get you a deposit box. We'll take a little at a time so no one sees us carrying in a large bag. The Banker will open the safety deposit box for you and then he will give you privacy."

"That sounds good, Mary." We finished putting in all the money, and that was the end of it. I had enough of my own money to hold me over for about three months. But once we know about the mob's money for sure, then I'll have plenty. We locked up the safe and pulled the carpet over it. There was a lot of junk in here, including the dust. It's like nobody ever comes in here. We went back up stairs to the kitchen and sat down. Mary pulls out the bourbon and pours us a shot. It was the afternoon, and we are in Vegas. I gotta make some adjustments or I'm going to run my body down soon. But, we toasted and Mary again began to think...

"Frankie, I talked to your uncle Amos last night and he's getting more information on Martinez and De LaParra. We want you to begin building a new life here. You have smarts for working in the gaming business. I have an interest in a small club. I'm going to ask my partners if you can start working there. Can you bar tend?"

"Yeah, but I'm not sure about the exotic drinks."

"That's okay. You can tend the bar a little and learn the table games. It's a small club on the east side about 15 miles off the strip. We cater to the locals. We have five Blackjack tables, two Craps tables, and one Roulette table. It's just a little casino with small betting limits. There are also about 100 slot machines. Once in a while we get entertainment by a trio band, and there is a dance floor. The casino is a small gold mine with a lot of friendly locals."

I was getting as excited to what she was telling me. Mary gave me the impression that she is a woman of many ventures. I became more curious... "Aunt Mary, how did you get involved in this?"

"It's a long story Frankie. Another time we'll talk about it."

"What's the name of the club, Mary?"

"The Nugget Junction Casino," she replied. "We'll go late tonight and I'll introduce you to my two partners. I told them about you, but not about the problem you have with the mob. You learn fast and you know numbers. It might take some time for them to know you, but once you're accepted, you're in."

"I won't let you down auntie. I can make a go of it."

“Thank you, Frankie. It’s a nice Saturday afternoon, but I’m going to take a power nap. We’ll head out to the club tonight. Do you have plans today?”

“I’m going to watch some ball games at the sports book somewhere on the Vegas strip.” I gave her a kiss on the cheek and left to my room. I laid on my bed for a moment and thought about the club my aunt was going to take me to. I was getting kind of excited. Wow, working in a casino and learning the business. I got up and went to the strip. I finally found a good sports book to watch ball games.

I went to my old hang out where my dad first brought me for my 19th birthday. Sure you had to be 21, but the casinos were a lot looser in those days, and I always passed for over the age of 21. I got to the ‘Majestic Palace Casino’ and walked around for a while. It was a busy Saturday and I headed for the sports book to play a few horse races on closed circuit TV, also I bet some ball games. I saw an empty seat and made myself at home. The cocktail waitress came and I ordered a beer. I first played a horse race from Santa Anita race track in California. As I sat there, I noticed a lot of people really getting into the excitement of betting the horses. My race was about to start.

There was an older man sitting two seats away from me, about in his early 60’s, puffing a lot on a big cigar. He was also talking a lot into the air and to anyone else who would listen. People would look over to see who he’s talking to, and then just ignored him. Horse handicappers will try to justify why a horse should win, or has no chance of ever winning.

The race that I bet on was off and running. The cigar puffing handicapper was also involved in the race. I’m not the type who will express emotions in a horse race like a lot of people do. They will yell their heads off at the horses coming down the stretch. Problem is that the horses, or the jockeys, can’t hear anyone screaming from a closed circuit TV. Most of the horse bettors don’t even know or remember the horses name... ‘COME ON # 6... COME ON #8... USE THE WHIP!!! USE THE WHIP YOU SON OF A BITCH!!!’ All of a sudden everyone’s a jockey’s trainer.

And when the horse loses, they want to get a ‘hit squad’ out before the next race and shoot the jockey. They forget it was the horse that was running. The old guy next to me threw his racing form down and shook his head. He turns to me and says...

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“Man, if that wasn’t a fixed race, I’m the Pope! That Stevens is a bum.” I looked at him since I know a lot about jockeys and replied...

“What do you mean fixed race...? That jockey is one of the best jockeys in the country.”

“Ahh, B. S. My Aunt Matilda is one of the best jockeys in the country, but I don’t trust her either. These jockeys outta get their ‘Screen Actors card’. What a bunch of phonies!” He shouts as he takes another puff of the smelly cigar.

Now here was a bitter man who’s been a race horse gambler since he entered life. He has obviously lost his ass here and there. My dad and uncles taught me well about horseracing when I was younger. That’s why I began to beat the game. I was the bank. However even a small bank, like me, can have a bad run. Race tracks and casinos never seem to run out of money. Perhaps this is why I’m in a mess right now. I had to ask the old guy...

“So, where is your Aunt Matilda riding race horses at?” He just looked at me and went back to his racing form. He looked over to me again while puffing on his cigar and asked,

“Where you from?”

“California,” I said with a slight grunt. He seemed harmless.

“I’m from California. What part?” I believe he just wanted someone to talk to.

“North,” I said.

“Oh, I’m from Southern California; The San Fernando Valley. I was a security guard at Paramount movie studios for a few years. But I retired and here I am.” This guy really did need someone to talk to. His attitude about losing seemed to settle down. Now it was a normal conversation.

“What’s your name?” he asks.

“Frank Scorpio.” For the short time I’ve been in town, I sure am meeting a lot of people. This guy lives here and although he barks a lot, he seems content being here.

“What’s yours?” I asked.

“Jimmy... Jimmy Mills.” He leans over to shake my hand. Maybe he really isn’t a bad guy. One thing a horse better likes to talk about is ‘Horses’. What else do you have in common on your first introduction to one another? I told him I’ve been to Santa Anita race track a few times in my life. And he tells me about all the southern horse tracks

he's been to. Well, of course I've been to all of them. That's where I'm from.

Jimmy sounds like he was happy to make a new friend. And that's okay for me, because I don't mind meeting down to earth people. We all have our hobbies, whether they are vices or not. We continued to talk horse talk. We ordered a couple of more rounds of drinks.

"So, are you going back to California?" asked Jimmy with a better tone of voice.

"No, I just moved into town and I'm living with my aunt for a while."

"Oh that's good. Are you a gambler?"

"Well, I gamble a little. I like playing Blackjack most of the time."

"That's a tough game. They'll get you if you play too long." He's giving good advice, so he can't be too bad of a guy. He doesn't know my background, so most of the gambling talk we do is already something I know about.

"I know Jimmy. The horses are actually tougher to beat. But I'm sure you know that." Now as young as I am, I'm giving advice. Jimmy and I had a good rapport with one another and we kept playing the ponies throughout the afternoon. Jimmy liked to drink Bourbon and water, but he nursed it. He never got drunk. He always had a bottle of water to drink in between the Bourbon drinks. I, on the other hand, didn't want to give a bad impression on the first day of a new friendship, so I just had light beers and bet a few horse races.

As we were half way through the races, another man comes up to Jimmy and greets him. "How are you doing Jimmy?"

"Hey John, how ya doing? The races are about over. Where you been?"

"Jimmy, you know I don't play the horses." John was about the same age as Jimmy and they seem to have known each other for a long time. John has an accent which sounded it could be from Great Britain.

"John, I want you to meet Frank Scorpio. Frank, this is John. John this is Frank." We shook hands and he seemed to be a pleasant guy.

"John McTarbet," he introduces himself with a smile. "Nice to meet you, Fred."

"It's Frank." I said thinking he might be hard of hearing.

"Oh, sorry. There's a lot of noise in here with everybody trying to look for a winner."

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“You don’t play the horses, John?” I asked out of curiosity.

“No Frank. Too hard to beat and the race is over in a minute and a half. I bet the sports. They play for about three hours and I’ll only spend \$10 – \$20 dollars.” John gave me the impression he was just happy to be here.

“John, can I get you a drink?” I was making another friend.

“Thanks Frank, but the drinks are complimentary here as long as you’re betting. Where is the cocktail waitress?”

John was right at home. For him, it was like going to the local pub after a hard day at the office. Jimmy continued to read the racing form trying to handicap the next race. I turned my conversation toward John.

“So John, what do you do for a living?” I asked. Maybe now I’m getting nosy. He kind of chuckles.

“I’m sort of retired Frank. I was an engineer and right now there are not any openings for men my age. Believe it or not Frank, there is age discrimination in this town. But my kids are grown and my wife is a nurse, so everything is okay. I’m not a big gambler, so I can’t lose much.”

“That’s good John. Are you from England?”

“No Frank. My wife and I are from Scotland. That’s why you might hear some people call me Scottish John, and you know there’s a lot of ‘Johns’ in Las Vegas— Ha.” John had a hearty laugh which tells me he has a sense of humor. I’m guessing he’s in his late fifties. He’s a slim man with dark reddish brown hair.

“Well, I’ll just call you John, okay?”

“That’s okay with me Frank,” he says with a friendly smile. “Hey Jimmy? What waitress is on duty today?” Just at that moment a waitress walks up with John’s drinks.

“Hi John. Here you go. I saw you walk in and got your usual ‘Double VO and Seven and a tall beer’.” John was impressed and felt like he was part of the family at Majestic Palace.

“Tamika... You’re always taking care of me.” He gave her a couple of bucks tip.

Tamika was a tall black woman in her mid 30’s. She had that jet black hair past her shoulder. She seemed to know how to treat the customers with respect. She knew the regular players drink and she was sociable.

“Can I bring you anything, Jimmy?”

“Yeah Tamika, would you bring me a cup of coffee? I’m going in a bit.”

“Sure Jimmy. How about you?” Tamika was looking right at me.

“Tamika. Have you met Frank?” asked Jimmy.

“No I haven’t. Just saw him here today. Nice to meet you Frank.” I stood up and shook her hand. “Nice to meet you too, Tamika.”

Tamika Jordan has been at the Majestic Palace a long time. She knows her customers and they seem to know her well. She is friendly and that’s what keeps the customers coming back. I ordered another beer from Tamika, and all of a sudden, I have three more friends.

Jimmy was concentrating on the horses and Scottish John was looking at the lineup and odds for the baseball games. I didn’t play anymore races, and I never really bet on sports, Vegas style. John seemed to know all about sports and how to bet the Vegas odds. I watched him for a while. Although I was always interested in sports, I never really became a fanatic. The funny thing about betting on sports and watching the game is that you really get to know the ball players. Either you’re cheering them, or cussing at them. They can become our heroes or our enemies.

As John and I carried on a pretty good conversation, I made a bet on a baseball game. Of course I bet the California Angels. Anaheim stadium is where I went most of the time to watch a ball game. Jimmy was finished with playing the horses, and he’s not into sports.

“Well, that’s it. I put my last \$20 on the favorite, and the jockey jumps off the horse in the middle of the track!” blurts Jimmy. I looked at him with a ‘what look’.

“Jumped off? The jockey fell off,” I said.

“Ahh, he jumped off. Remember, they’re good actors. I’ll see you guys later.”

John started laughing. “Ignore him Frank. I’ve known Jimmy for years. He was complaining then, and he’ll be back again tomorrow.

“I understand John.” Scottish John and I watched the baseball game for the next couple of hours, and had casual talks. We also have a good rapport. I see this friendship as someone to watch sports, and also enjoy a few drinks with, here at the sports book. The game was over and of course I lost. There’s my introduction to betting sports. But I did get a better run for my money than watching a horse race get

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over in a minute plus.

“John. It’s getting late and I have to run. It was great to meet you.”

“Sure Frank. Will you be coming in again?” John asked with a slight buzzed smile.

“Yes I will, John. I’d like you to show me the best way to bet the parlays. I haven’t got that down yet.”

“When you come in, Frank, I’ll show you whatever you want to know. Buy the way I hope to finish my book soon, and you can read it.” Wow, I’ve met a writer.

“What’s the name of your book, John?”

“Sports Betting on the Edge,” he says with a sense of pride.

“A book on gambling?” I asked.

“When I finish in the next couple of months, you can read it and know all the odds about sports betting, Frank.” Man, this has to be written in the stars or just a pattern in my life. I run into a new friend my second day in Vegas, and he’s writing a book on sport’s betting.

“I can’t wait to read it, John. But I gotta go now and I will see you here again. Good night, and again, it was good to meet you.” I shook his hand one more time.

“Okay Frank. See you soon.” I left and walked through the casino to get to the parking lot. I saw Tamika, the cocktail waitress, and gave her a wave good bye. She returned the hand wave as another waitress was talking to her, and the other waitress gave me that curious look. I felt pretty good about meeting some locals. It took my mind off all the things that happened the past week. I had to rush home and get ready to go with Aunt Mary to her casino, ‘The Nugget Junction’.

It was almost 9 p.m. I showered, shaved, and sprinkled some expensive cologne on the important parts of my body. Then I put on my black slacks and a swanky nightclub shirt. I went down stairs to get my aunt.

“Hi Aunt Mary, are you ready to go?”

“Yes I am Frankie.” I looked at her. She was dressed in Levis, a cowboy shirt, and cowboy boots.

“Mary, is that how they dress at the casino?”

“Let’s go or we’ll be late.” She was perky for a lady in her late 50’s. “Let’s take my car,” she says.

“What? You don’t want to ride in a Buick?” I said with a grin.

She chuckled.

"I rather drive in a 1957 black Thunder Bird." Oh wow, one of my dream classic cars. I didn't even know she had one.

"I didn't see the car Mary. Where is it?" I was anxious to check it out.

"I keep it locked in the garage. I don't go out a lot. My dad bought it back in '57 and I still have it. It's got low mileage for an old car." We went to the garage. As the electric door rose, I saw the T-bird sitting there looking like it was on display in a show room.

"Aunt Mary... She's beautiful." I became mesmerized.

"Well Frankie, let's go... And, here are the keys." She flipped me the keys, and we got into the car. I started it up and it purred like a kitten.

"The car sounds great and it's beautiful Mary."

"Sorry Frankie. Don't get any ideas about driving it around town. Remember what your uncle told you... 'No flashy cars.' If you don't want to drive the Buick around, then find a low key looking car."

I listened. This is what life has put on my plate. We headed to the Nugget Junction casino on the east side. It was about 10:15 p.m. when we arrived. It was sort of a lonely casino in the desert with a RV park near by. It was built on a small hill that over looked the city of Las Vegas lights. We were about 14-15 miles from the strip. It had all the incoming traffic coming from Laughlin, NV, and Arizona. So for the size of the casino, it wasn't bad.

"Well Frankie, what do you think?" Mary asked with pride.

"I think it looks fantastic from the outside. Lots of parking, and I see large parking spots for the truckers." I was sort of in admiration of her.

"Yeah, we get a lot of them stopping by after that long haul on the highway coming in from Arizona. Come on and I'll introduce you to my partners."

We walked in and I was impressed for the casino being so small. I felt out of place because I was slicked up and everyone else was dressed very casual. Oh well, I looked rich and maybe I'll catch a chick's attention. Mary gave me a quick tour of the Nugget casino. Like she said... there are five Blackjack tables, two Craps tables, and one Roulette table. Oh yes, about 100 slot machines. There was a nice long bar that had large windows behind the bartenders. It was a nice

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view seeing the Las Vegas Strip lights that far away. "Come on Frankie. I'll take you to the boss man," says Mary. We walked up the stairs to the business offices. Mary knocked on the President's door. A man in a cowboy shirt opened the door. He had a bushy mustache.

"Hi Mary... Come on in."

"Hi Bobby." Mary gave him a little hug and a kiss on the cheek. Bobby was probably in his late 60's, and you can tell he's a 'Vegas good ol' boy'.

"Bobby, this is my nephew, Frankie Scorpio. Frankie, this is Bobby Fager... and the old man in the big chair is his big brother, Ted." I shook hands with Bobby and walked over to Ted, also in his 60's, and extended my hand to him.

"I might be old, but I don't miss much," Ted says as he walks over and shakes my hand. "Your aunt doesn't miss much either. Welcome to our part of the desert Frankie. I heard some good things about you from Mary. I understand you want to learn the casino business."

"Yes sir. I was practically raised in the atmosphere with my relatives in California. I'm fascinated with the gaming business and I like working with people. I believe the key is to make them feel like part of your family, and they will be loyal customers." I hope I didn't lay that on too thick.

"Well Mary, I see where he gets his wit from," as he chuckles with Bobby.

"Of course Ted. I know he'll learn from the best, you ol' dog." She went up to him and gave him a kiss on the cheek. Ted was the president of the casino and Bobby was vice-president. Ted thought for a moment about what he could offer Frankie.

"Frankie... Your Aunt Mary has told me a lot about you. You booked horses in California for a while, and now you're here in Vegas. I gotta tell you... There's no room for a side business around here. We don't break the gaming laws here. I'm willing to show you how the gaming world works. You stay straight with Bobby and me, and you'll excel in this business. Now, I don't have anything right now except a part time bartender's job. Would you like to take that for a while?" I looked over at my aunt first.

"Sure Ted. I have experience doing that."

"Good... And maybe you'll get used to the atmosphere and see if it's really what you want. As time goes on, if you're still interested in

the business, we'll train you to be a card dealer and a pit man."

"Thank you, sir." I got pretty excited. Bobby was head of the beverage and food management, and told me of what they expected of me.

"Frankie... You'll start out part time, and you'll learn on how to order liquor as needed. I want you to watch out for everything that happens in the casino. You'll see things go on with people. There are cheats out there, and there have been cheaters who are on the payroll. There's bums that'll hustle a buck from a customer. They'll put a nickel in the slot machine and order a couple of drinks and stiff the cocktail waitress."

Man, what did I get myself into? "What do you mean, 'cheaters on the payroll', Bobby?"

"What I'm saying Frankie, is that we have caught our own employees cheating on the tables, or bartenders taking a few extra dollars from the till. They'll ring up the cash register as a complimentary drink while actually charging the customer for a drink."

"Why would they jeopardize their job?" I was curious about all this. Ted interjected into the conversation.

"Frankie... Some of the casino employees get caught up in gambling and lose their paycheck almost every week. That's one of our policies and rule; No employee can gamble here in our casino. They can have a drink off duty, but that's all. We try to treat our employee's like family. But once they fuck us... Well, lets just say, they're through in the gaming world. Las Vegas is still a small town where most casino owners have known one another for a very long time."

"Okay Bobby... Ted... There sure is a lot to learn, but my aunt says I'll be learning from the best."

"Oh stop Frankie. They already know that," says Aunt Mary. Everyone laughed.

"Can you start Wednesday Frankie?" Ted asked. "It won't be too busy. We have to get you a Sheriff's working card. The bartender on duty is Paul Leone. He's been here a few years and he'll show you how we run the program. But I want you to keep it quiet about us training you for a gaming position. Okay?"

"No problem Mr. Fager." I started thinking... 'What's with this

Sheriff's card? I don't like that.'

"Please, just keep calling me Ted and my brother, Bobby."

"Yes sir. And Wednesday would be great." My Aunt Mary gave them a hug and we left to go back down to the casino bar. There was a trio playing some country music mixed a little with rock and roll. Mary and I ordered drinks.

"Hi Mary... How are you tonight?" asked the sexy bartender who was pretty friendly and seemed to know Mary well.

Dee, I want you to meet my nephew Frankie Scorpio. He's going to take the part time bartender's job, as well as fill in when ever needed."

"Nice to meet you, Frankie. You got a crazy aunt here."

"So I'm learning more about her everyday. It's nice to meet you, Dee. Mary jumped right in..." Frankie, we call her Big Dee because she likes to ride big horses.

"You got that right Mary" replied Dee. "But when I'm off the saddle, you can just call me Dee, Frankie."

"Okay Dee. How long you've been working here?"

"Oh, about four years. Have you lived out here long?" she asked?

"Actually I just moved out here, and looking to be here for a while."

"Hey Dee, how about a beer and a shot of bourbon for Frankie and me?" Mary seems right at home here. After all, she does own a small piece of this place.

"Coming right up Mary." Dee went to get the drinks.

"Well Frankie, what do you think so far?" Mary asked. I looked around the casino and smiled.

"Louie... I think this is going to be the beginning of a beautiful friendship." A classic line from the movie 'Casa Blanca'. Dee brought the drinks for Mary and me. We each held our shot of bourbon and clicked the shot glasses. Mary toasted...

"To a prosperous new career in the gaming business." I agreed to that. As long as I have all the mess with the mob taken care of, things will be alright. I chased the bourbon with a beer and thought for a moment... I turned to Mary, "What is this Sheriff's card I gotta get? What's it for?"

"They do a background check for criminal records when you get a job in a casino. You don't have one, do you?" Mary had that look of

‘hope not’ on her.

“No... No I don’t Aunt Mary. I’ve been pretty lucky for the horse business I was into. But now we’ve changed my last name to Scorpio. What do I do about that?”

“I’ll take care of that Frankie. I’ll get you a new I.D card.” Mary seemed to know the way the game was played. I wasn’t going to ask her how... Yet!

We ordered another round of drinks and the casino, as well as the bar, was getting a lot more customers as the night moved on. The music was good and people were dancing and having a good time. For a casino of this size, it was doing real well. All five Blackjack tables were busy along with the crap tables. I could see the locals were feeling at home and the management of Ted and Bobby Fager knew how to treat them.

Mary grabbed me and we went onto the dance floor and did a little country two-step. Although she needed a walking cane to help her get around, and was dancing with a small limp, she was having a good time. What a change of pace from last week as far as my life is concerned. I’m meeting new friends and going to work in a casino... And they’re going to teach me the gaming business. This is great! I think there’s going to be a nice future here. Thank god for family. Mary continued to introduce me to her friends. I was trying to get to know who my Aunt Mary really is.

It was a clear blue sky on a Sunday morning in Newport Beach, California. Anthony Martinez, the head of his syndicate, went to the hospital to see his brother Randall De LaParra. Martinez arrives in front of the Medical Center. He steps out of his limousine assisted by his bodyguards.

“You boys park the car and stay with it. I’ll call you on the mobile phone when I’m ready to come down.” Anthony looks over the medical center grounds. The two well-dressed bodyguards in dark pin-stripe suits received their orders and left. Martinez went into the hospital lobby and approached the information desk.

“I’m here to see my brother, Randall De LaParra. What room is he in?” The candy striper volunteer looked into the computer.

“He’s in room 335, sir. Just go down the hall and take the elevators.”

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Martinez went up to the 3rd floor in the elevator. He walked into room 335 and saw Randall lying on the bed with I.V. tubes all over him. The blanket covered him up to his chest, but it laid flat from the thighs down. It finally hit him that De LaParra's legs were really gone. Anthony walked over to his side and touched him on the shoulder and whispers...

"Randall... Randall... It's your big brother, Tony." Randall opens his eyes slowly and gives Anthony a weak smile.

"I'm here for you, Randall. The doctors are the best and they're going to help you heal." Knowing Anthony is at his bedside; Randall continues staring at the wall ahead of him and speaks in a somber voice.

"I don't have my legs anymore... I don't have my legs anymore, Tony." Randall starts to let a couple of tears flow off the sides of his cheeks.

"I know Randall. We're going to fix you up and then we'll take care of the bastard who did this to you! We know its Frank Santos. We just don't know where he is right now. But I know who his family is. They're from the old neighborhood." Anthony gave a vengeance look with his eyes.

"Do I know who his family is Tony, because I don't remember them?" De LaParra struggles to speak.

"I don't think so, Randall. You were pretty young, and we left the old neighborhood a long time ago... a very long time ago." Martinez continued to pat his fingers on Randall's forehead.

"Tony... I'm pretty tired and I need to sleep." De LaParra was under sedation.

"Okay, Randall. I have to go anyway. I will take care of things, and you get well." Martinez pats him on the hand and leaves. He went to the nurse's station and asked for Randall's doctor. The nurse paged him and the doctor arrived right away.

"Doctor this is Mr. Martinez. He is Mr. De LaParra's brother." The doctor shakes Anthony's hand.

"Is my brother going to be all right, doctor?"

"Yes he is... but he's lost a lot of blood. We had no choice but to amputate his legs," the doctor explains. "Currently, he is under heavy sedation."

"Yes doctor, I understand. What can I do?"

"After some rehabilitation, there is a possibility of having prosthetic surgery in the future. It will depend on the damage to his

muscles and tendons. There were a lot of ligaments severed. But there is a good chance he will be able to have artificial legs and walk again.” Anthony Martinez realized there was hope that Randall will recover.

“Thank you doctor, that’s really good news. And doctor, money is no object. We’ll get him whatever he needs.”

“I understand Mr. Martinez. We will do our best. Just be patient and I’m sure Mr. De LaParra will be just fine.” The doctor gives his optimistic analysis.

“Thank you doctor, and now I must go.” Anthony shakes his hand and leaves.

Anthony steps out of the medical building and into the limo. They travel up coast highway as Martinez continues to think... He gets on the mobile phone and makes a call...

“Hello, Sal? This is Anthony. Do you remember, in the old neighborhood in East L.A., a Maria Nunez? Yeah, she married a Freddie Santos and they have a son, Frank. Yeah... you knew her brothers; small time bookies in the East L.A. area. A Sonny and Amos Nunez... Tell me Sal, do you know where Maria lives? When’s the last time you saw her? Ah huh... When did her cousin die? Yeah, I remember her. That’s too bad. Well give me Maria’s address, and if you know Sonny’s and his brother’s, I want it. Okay, then just give me Maria’s... Ah huh... Thanks Sal... Have you got any information about Frank Santos? Keep on it and I want results soon from you or the boys... Good day.”

Martinez looks at the address he wrote down of Maria’s apartment. “Rico, drive to City of Commerce... We’re paying a visit to an old friend.”

“Yes sir, Mr. Martinez.”

Anthony arrived in the City of Commerce around noon and parked in front of the building. “You fellas wait here”. It was a senior citizens apartment complex on Eastern Ave. Martinez walked up the sidewalk to the directory board. There was Maria’s name. He went to the apartment and knocked on the door. The door opened slowly. The lady was in her late 50’s and seemed in good health.

“Yes, can I help you?”

“Hello Maria... It’s been almost 30 years.”

Maria looked for a moment. “Do I know you?”

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"I'm from the old neighborhood. It's me... Anthony Martinez."

She stared again and finally remembered... "Anthony Martinez... I thought you were dead." She says with a wish.

"No Maria... May I come in?"

"Why?" she asked.

"I was wondering if I could speak to you about some old friends." He was polite enough to talk his way into her apartment.

"Okay Tony," she mutters as she lets him in. They sit. "So what is it Tony? I understand you're still in the rackets. Once a gangster... always a gangster."

"Maria, I'm not in the rackets. We we're kids when we all ran around in gangs. I run a business now. It's a mortgage company. It's legit." Anthony talks gently.

"I don't need a loan, Tony. I rent. So why are you here?" Maria is being blunt and cautious.

"Maria, I hear that your son Frank is in business for himself, and I'm wondering if he would like to invest in our company."

"If your company is so great, why do you need his money?" Maria says with sarcasm.

"We make our money by people investing into our mortgage company. We make loans on many large properties. I thought since your husband passed away, that this would be an opportunity for you or your son Frank to get in. I try to help all my old friends." Tony says with a gentle voice as if he was just ordained a priest.

"Well, Tony... I don't have any money, and I don't know too much about Frankie's business. I know he had a small restaurant at the beach. I haven't been there, since I don't get around much with my arthritis."

"Maria, I've been to his place at the beach, and it's closed down." Maria looked surprised as she took a couple of steps, turning her back to Anthony.

"When? I haven't seen him in maybe two or three months. I know he lives out there, somewhere."

Anthony is thinking to himself that Maria may not really know where Frank Santos is.

"So you don't know where he is, Maria?"

"No Tony. He just hasn't had time to visit his mother too much this year. Since his father passed away, he just seems to be on the go

all the time.”

“Okay Maria. How about your brothers, Sonny and Amos. Do you know where I might reach them?” Martinez still probes.

“You would be wasting your time with them. They won’t invest with you. Besides you guys were in different gangs back in the old days. I don’t think they like you. Especially what you did to our cousin, Mary.”

“Mary..? I didn’t do anything to her. We dated for a while. I’m sorry to say it didn’t work out and we moved on,” says Anthony as he starts to think back when.

“You dated for a short while, but you two were always getting high together on stupid drugs. She never had drugs until you got her involved with it! And I know you got her pregnant! And we all know you took her to some illegitimate ‘Quack’ to get an abortion!” Maria was letting out her inhibited anger. “After that, you just deserted her. She was in love with you. Her father disowned her and she decided to leave town. Her mother had a heart attack soon after that and we couldn’t find Mary.” Anthony was just staring outside through the window letting Maria air out her feelings...

“I had no idea Mary left town and that her mother died.”

“Of course you didn’t, Tony... You were into drug dealing and living a big shot. But your big mistake was getting your little brother into drugs. And I’m sure he paid a price for that!” Maria was still upset, but got some things off her mind. “I think you should go now. I don’t know where Frankie’s at and I don’t know where my brothers are. I can’t drive and I have no car. I’m stuck here.”

“Is Frankie the only son you had Maria?”

“Tony! Yes! Frankie is my only son! Now I have to go.”

“Maria, sorry, just one more question. Have you seen Mary? I was just wondering about her.” Maria thought for a minute...

“I haven’t seen Mary for about 30 years. She doesn’t keep in touch with anyone back here. At least she hasn’t with me.”

“Thank you Maria. And I’m sorry about Mary. If you ever hear from her, tell her I was asking for her and I hope she is fine.” Anthony was getting sentimental.

“Sure Tony... Good bye.” Maria showed him to the door and Martinez left. Maria still had anger on what he did to Mary through high school. The one thing she didn’t tell Tony was that the abortion never

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took place. Mary had the baby. Maria phoned her brother, Sonny.

"Hello Sonny... He was here... I told him nothing... He believed me... He knew I was still upset about Mary and him... Tell Salomon thanks for the call... Tell him to be careful... If you talk to Frankie, tell him to be careful and the family will watch over him... Especially Mary... She's his godmother... He just doesn't remember... Okay I will... Bye."

Anthony Martinez was going back home to Orange County. As he sat in the back seat of his limo, he was thinking of his conversation with Maria...

'It's been a lot of years since they were kids. But Frank Santos destroyed \$25 million dollars worth of 'Angel Snow', the hottest and most exclusive drug on the market. He shot the legs off my brother. I don't know the little bastard, but you don't fuck with the family'.

"Rico... Charlie. I want you to check all our sources including the department of motor vehicles, on Frank Santos. He just can't disappear without somebody knowing where he is. See if he has any close friends in Seal Beach. What about those punks he had working for him. Didn't they shoot our people; Shelton, Bart and Smitty?"

"Yes sir," Rico says. "We're not sure who the two men are, but we know they are from East Los Angeles."

"I want the word out on the streets about who Frank Santos hired to collect for him. I understand he had a large clientele for his horse bookie business. Find out who they are, and they should tell you who Santos' punks are."

"Yes sir, Mr. Martinez," says Charlie. "I believe that most of his clients will be looking for him. I'm sure they are owed money from Santos. We'll get on it right away, sir."

"Thanks boys..." Anthony continued to stare out the car window. He was thinking of his romance with Mary Torres. They were young teenagers when they met. He was a few years older than her. They became lovers while she was in high school and he had been a drop out. In her senior year, a few months before graduation, Mary became pregnant. Anthony was not going to take the responsibility of fatherhood. He hated his father for the things he did. At one time, his father was his hero to him when he was a young boy. Mary didn't graduate from high school and her family disowned her. Anthony never saw her again.



Aunt Mary – Homecoming Queen



Aunt Mary now Living in Las Vegas

Chapter 15

What's The Big Secret?

It was about 1 a.m. and Mary and I were still at the Nugget Junction casino having a good time. We pounded down a couple of more shots. Dee, the bartender, and I were getting pretty friendly. She was about in her mid 20's and we had good rapport. I started to give her more attention as I sat there with my aunt. I turned to Mary and we had another shot of bourbon. She smiled back and glared towards the dance floor and seemed to be in deep thought...

***Mary was a teenager when she became pregnant.* She moved in with her cousin Maria and Aunt Lupe. After the baby was born, the doctors discovered the baby had a birth defect. Because of the drugs Mary took with Anthony Martinez, the baby was born mentally unbalanced. Mary wanted to leave the city. She moved to Las Vegas in the early 1950's when Vegas was just barely on the map. She had borrowed money from Maria and her Aunt Lupe to get a fresh start in Vegas. She couldn't find a job for weeks and she needed money to take care of her retarded baby, little Alex.

She lived in a boarding house owned by an elderly Hispanic lady in North Las Vegas. Mary asked the landlady, Margaret, if she would watch her baby while she looked for a job. At first Margaret hesitated because of the responsibility.

"I will help you Mary... But you must find a decent job that pays enough for a younger baby sitter because I have a heart problem," Margaret says with a gentle smile as she holds the baby.

"I will Margaret... I should find something in a couple of days." Mary went out everyday for the next four days. She finally got a job as a waitress at a local coffee shop by the casinos on Fremont Street, downtown. The regular customers that came in after the midnight shift were usually casino employees. She met a Blackjack dealer name Brian Simpson. He was a clean cut man about 30 years old. He would always make it a point to come in and order the same breakfast of steak and eggs. Basically, it was just an excuse to see Mary. The more he came in, the more they got to know each other.

Mary never mentioned anything to him about her baby. Finally he asked her out for a date and she accepted. It started out with the movies and burger stands. They became lovers. After a few weeks of dating and doing the same things, Brian got a little bored and wanted to go partying at night clubs and bars. Mary wasn't a drinker, but he is the only man who has given her a lot of attention. She joined him on the bar atmosphere. Although she wasn't 21 years of age yet, Vegas was pretty loose about under age girls getting into bars. During all the night clubbing, Mary's landlady, Margaret was still taking care of the baby, little Alex.

Brian was making decent money with all the tips he was getting from the gamblers. He liked to spend it as fast as it came in. Six months past by and Mary was still a waitress at the Aztec coffee shop. Although management felt she was a hard worker, there was no room for advancement. She never made enough money to hire a younger baby sitter.

It was 2 a.m. in the early morning, and Mary finished another hard day at work. She arrived home and found Margaret on the rocking chair with little Alex sleeping on her chest. Mary tried to awaken her, but she just lay there quietly. Margaret was in her mid 70's and suffered a heart attack. Mary was in shock. She took little Alex in her arms and started crying.

Margaret's only son came in from Arizona, and took care of the funeral arrangements. The funeral was a couple of days later. She was buried at Paradise Valley cemetery. Right away, he decided to sell his

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mom's house. Mary had to look for somewhere else to live. Margaret's son gave her till the end of the month to move.

Mary's boyfriend, Brian, wanted her to move in with him. That wasn't her style and she refused. He was in love with her, because she was probably the most beautiful girl he's ever had. Brian finally proposed marriage to Mary and after two weeks, she felt that she was at her final destination, she accepted. The only secret in her life was not telling Brian about little Alex being retarded. If Brian found out in the future, she would hope that he would love both of them enough not to reject little Alex's handicap. Mary always wanted to be married in a church. But Brian wasn't religious at all, he just wanted to go to city hall and get it over with. Mary went along with what he wanted. She needed security for her, and her two year old baby.

As the months rolled by, Brian was doing great as a blackjack dealer. Mary and Brian bought a house on the east side near Sunrise Mountain. It was a large four bedroom house with a family room and fireplace. Mary was finally going to have a stable and comfortable life. By the following year, Brian was working more hours and not coming home until four or five in the morning. Mary wasn't sure if he was working overtime. She finally had to ask why.

"I don't understand Brian... Why are you coming home so late?"

"I'm trying to get a promotion Mary, and I have to put in a lot of overtime. I want to become a pit boss." Brian was getting a little pissed off for the questions. Mary had something on her mind.

"I'm sorry, Brian. I just wanted to tell you... that I'm pregnant." Brian looked at her for a moment with a straight face. Mary was worried that he wouldn't like the idea.

"Wow... I think that's great!" he says with a smile. "When's the baby due?"

Mary also let out a smile... "In about five months. Are you happy?"

"I'm very happy, Mary... Let's celebrate with champagne" There was a spark in Brian that Mary hasn't seen for awhile.

"No Brian. I can't drink alcohol. It would hurt the baby," she says in a low tone.

"Oh..., okay sweetheart... Mother knows best... But dad will have some." Brian had champagne in the refrigerator. Mary was thinking about the drugs she took during her last pregnancy which hurt the

baby. She still has never forgiven herself.

Four months later it was little Alex's 4th birthday and Mary invited some of the neighborhood children to celebrate his birthday. There were some young mothers in the neighborhood, and there's nothing like a Saturday afternoon birthday party for children. This was Alex's first real party. This time he was spending it with children from his neighborhood. There was cake and ice cream, and Mary hired a birthday clown for the kids. Every child was having fun except little Alex. He wasn't responding with laughter or happy emotions. A couple of the mothers noticed Alex's reflexes also, while others just stayed tuned into their own children.

It was Brian's day off from the casino and he was helping with the barbeque. He also started noticing Alex's emotions and peculiar expressions. He questioned Mary about his behavior. She was elusive in answering his question hoping that he would overlook it.

"He's probably just exhausted, Brian... He's never been around this many children before. It's nothing... Now go finish the barbeque and I'll entertain the company." Mary was starting to get worried. All of a sudden little Alex started having a seizure. He fell to the ground, and his body started trembling and shaking. Mary grabbed him and tried to hold him tight and calm him down. Little Alex was turning blue and then passed out. One of the mothers at the party started CPR on little Alex. Brian called an ambulance.

Three hours later in the emergency room at UMC hospital, the doctor managed to save little Alex. The doctors that examined the baby, determined that little Alex had damage to the brain. This already existed which probably caused the seizure. The attending doctor went to talk to Mary and Brian. He explained the problem that little Alex had already suffered damage to the brain at birth.

"Mr. and Mrs. Simpson... Your son is doing fine, but we discovered a problem..." the doctor added.

"What is it, doctor?" Mary was scared of his prognosis.

"When you gave birth to your baby, did the doctors find a problem with him?"

Mary just stood quiet for a moment... She looked at Brian first, and then turned to the doctor. "Yes doctor... He was born with a birth defect to the brain and became mentally unbalanced."

Brian stared at Mary with a face that looked stone cold. The doctor

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continued to give Mary the rest of his diagnosis. Little Alex would be getting worse. He had degenerative brain damage. Mary and Brian would have to give constant care 24 hours.

In the next few months, the stress of all of this had taken a toll on the marriage. Brian never forgave Mary for not telling him about little Alex's mental condition. She stayed home a lot taking care of her child and Brian continued to work a lot of overtime and stayed out late. Mary started becoming suspicious of Brian having an affair. She was irritable and becoming withdrawn. When she heard a car in the neighborhood, she would run to the window to see if it was Brian. All of a sudden Mary started hemorrhaging. She became hysterical and paranoid. She fell to the floor and cried very loud.

Her neighbor, Dora Gonzalez, heard the scream and entered through the patio door. She called the paramedics. Mary had a miscarriage and lost her baby. She would never be able to have children again. For weeks Brian suspected her of taking drugs and occasionally asks Mary if she had been taking any. Mary has not been into drugs since leaving Los Angeles. She was extremely upset and hurt.

They were becoming distant as man and wife. She suspected that he was straying away with other women. The following year, Brian finally made floor supervisor at the gaming tables and went onto becoming a pit boss at the casino. Unfortunately, as the good years of Vegas were becoming profitable for all employees, her husband became an alcoholic and a chronic gambler. He played around with the ladies, and got involved with cocaine. He started skimming money and casino chips from inside the cashier's cage with a partner employee. Five months later, Brian was finally busted by the casino managers, which were controlled by the Chicago mob. In the casino business, everyone is being watched by someone. Even a man, who may look like a typical tourist or bum, could be a spy for the casino owners. Brian and his friend were taken for a ride to the desert towards Indian Springs, and never returned.

A couple of days went by and Brian never came home. Mary knew something terrible was wrong. She also knew that her husband had a safety deposit box at their bank. He had hid the bank papers from Mary, but she was clever enough to find them and keep the secret to

herself. She went to the bank to see what she could find. There was more money in the safety deposit box than Mary had ever seen. It was too much for her to count in a short time. She knew Brian did something very wrong. She took \$50,000 dollars from the pile and put it in her large bag purse, and went home. She was nervous and thought for a moment...‘Where’s Brian and is he coming back..?’ She went down to the basement and put it in the small metal safe under a loose piece of carpet.

In the next three days, the casino boss had his men pay a visit to Mary’s house and asked her for the money that Brian stole. She told them that she didn’t know anything about it. They didn’t know whether to believe her or not. They pushed her down to the floor and threatened to shoot her. Again she told them she didn’t know anything about any money. The two henchmen started tearing up the place throwing furniture all around. One of the thugs went up stairs to look for the money. Mary started crying and yelled at them that she had a son upstairs.

“Why are you doing this? I told you I don’t know anything about any money!!!” Mary screams at the rough burley hood as he continues to look for the money. The other thug comes down stairs with Mary’s retarded son. She ran and grabbed Alex away from him.

“I’ll give you one more chance to tell me where the money is!” yelled the hood. The other thug put the gun to the kid’s head, and threatened to shoot him.

“No!!! No!!! I’ll give you what I have... I don’t know how much he took. He never told me what he was doing... I have some money down in the basement where my safe is.” Mary had put \$50,000 dollars in the safe and kept it for emergency money. A lot of the money Brian took was still in the safety deposit box at the bank. The thug followed Mary down to the basement and she led him to the small safe she had. She pulled out the \$50,000 dollars and gave it to him.

“Where’s the rest of it?” yells the rugged face man.

“There isn’t any more!” she screamed. “I don’t know what he took! This is all I found! What did you do with him?!”

“Never mind... Get up stairs!” He shoved Mary as she went up the steps and into the living room. “This is all she had in the safe, Lefty...” Lefty looked at her and Alex. Alex runs to Mary as she enters the

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living room. He didn't understand why his mother was crying. "Why you crying, mommy?" Alex asks as he puts his arms around her. She just holds him tight.

"I'll ask you for the last time... Where's the rest of the money?!" Lefty was holding a steel baton he pulled from his back pocket.

"I don't know if he had anymore... That's all I know about!!!" says Mary as she is still whimpering holding Alex.

"Dizzy, take the kid into the kitchen for a minute..." Lefty was up to something.

Mary screamed at the thugs to leave Alex alone. Dizzy took the kid into the kitchen and closed the door.

"Okay sweetheart... How much of our money did you spend?" Lefty was slapping the steel baton against his right hand. Mary had a frozen scared look on her face.

"I didn't spend anything. When my husband didn't come home for a couple of days, I knew something was wrong. I found the combination to the safe and opened it. There was the money. That's all!" Lefty stared at her for a moment...

"Okay Mary... I believe you... I'll bring out your kid in a minute... Just sit on the chair for a minute and look at the fireplace." Mary sat gently on her chair and stared at the firewood burning in the hearth not knowing what was going to happen.

"Just keep staring at it Mary... I'm deciding what to tell my boss." A long 15 seconds go by and Lefty walks up behind her. Mary's eyes are large and round looking at the fireplace. All of a sudden Lefty winds up and slams the steel baton on Mary's thigh twice... She goes into pain and shock with a loud and then low crying scream. The pain was so bad that she was ready to pass out. She fell to the floor and whining like a cat that was just hit by a car. Dizzy brought Alex back into the living room and sat him on the couch. He looked at his mother on the floor. Mary's crying sound was fading. The two thugs left. Alex got off the couch and knelt next to her. He just stared for a moment.

"Mum... Mum..." Alex got up and opened the front door and went outside and started playing with the water hose. Mary's next door neighbor, Dora Gonzalez, just drove up her driveway and saw Alex playing outside in muddy water by himself. She got out of the car and grabbed Alex by the hand, then took him back inside the house.

"Hello... Mary? Hello... Mary, where are you?" Dora walked

around very slowly and felt something was wrong. She saw Mary on the floor by the fire place and rushed to her... “Mary!!! Mary!!!” Dora hurried to the phone and called 911.

Mary was taken to Sunrise hospital. She was there for the next month. Her thigh bone was shattered. It was a major operation and Mary survived. But she wasn’t going to walk normal anymore. She would go through rehabilitation for the next six months. She would also go through mental therapy. Alex stayed at Dora’s home for the next few weeks. It was rough on her family, especially her husband. They couldn’t deal with Alex’s handicap. A social worker was called by Mary’s therapist. She was forced to put Alex in a special Clark County protection service home for retarded children. He would have to be there until she was able to walk again... and be able to take care of him. Although Alex was in better hands, Mary went into a deep depression.

A few months went by and Mary was in better health, physically as well as mentally. She had to use crutches for a few weeks, and then she was able to use a cane. Alex was still at the county child service center and Mary would visit him as much as she could with her handicapped leg making life rougher for her. She realized the program was doing Alex real good and she thought for a moment that he might be better off there permanently. She had to think of that decision thoroughly. What was she going to do with the money in the safety deposit box? There was nearly \$1 million dollars that Brian had stolen. He and his partner took cash and chips a little at a time. The casino boss wasn’t able to notice over a six month period, or so he thought. Mary risked her life as well as her son’s, just to keep the stolen money from the casino. It almost cost her losing her leg. What was Mary thinking? Was it worth the money? She wasn’t a gambler. She was conservative with her finances and always wanted to invest into something big.

In the next couple of years, Mary was meeting more people and making new friends. She was having a drink with some of her girlfriends at the cocktail lounge of the Landmark casino when a distinguished silver haired man, noticed her and sent a cocktail waitress over to her table with a round of drinks. Mary was flattered and called him over to join them. Ted Fager was a casino pit boss at

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the Sands Hotel. It was quick chemistry between them. They started dating and developed a unique friendship. A few weeks later, Ted confessed that he was married. He was not going to leave his wife. She had suffered a stroke four years ago and was paralyzed on the left side of her body and up to her face. Although Mary was upset, she continued to see Ted. She saw that he was a compassionate man. She also realized there was no future, and the romantic adventure changed into a warm friendship. They respected each other as friends. Mary was not going to let an affair bring her down again. Mary and Ted remained friends throughout the years.

In the late 1950's, Ted and his brother Bobby worked for the Sands casino on the strip as pit managers. They came into a lot of money by participating in a backroom poker game. The stakes were high. The players were other casino executives and well as a couple of popular celebrities that were appearing that week in the showroom. Instead of gambling it all back, they decided to invest in the dream they always had. They bought a little casino just outside of town.

About five years later, they were in jeopardy of losing it because the property they owned was far away from main downtown, and they were not getting enough customers for business. The Nugget Junction Casino was a small bar with 10 slot machines. Ted and Bob had seen the future of the lonely highway; heavy traffic with truck drivers and tourist coming in from Arizona as well as other nearby states... And they had to pass by the casino to go back home. It also leads to the Dam. The government had plans to build a wider road to and from Hoover Dam. It was a slow start for city and federal officials to get all the plans approved. This hurt the business for the Fager brothers. They had put everything they had into their casino. They were smart enough not to take a chance and try to gamble for the money. They have seen many losers dream of the big payoff. That's why Vegas casinos were growing. Ted and Bobby were thinking of taking in silent partners.

Mary had a lot of the money her husband stole from the casino before he got whacked in the desert. She started wising up and started learning all about the profits of casinos. That's the business she wanted to learn and invest in. She had to do something for income because the money she had in the safety deposit box in the bank was just sitting there. If she put it in the bank savings account, she was afraid that the casino bosses would find out about the money. There

always seemed to be a connection between the casino bosses and bank executives. Don't trust any of them.

One evening Ted and Mary met for dinner just as friends usually do. In the conversation, Ted let Mary know about the situation with his casino and maybe going into foreclosure or bankruptcy. He just lost his wife and things were changing quickly in his life. Ted never knew that she had access to a lot of money. She listened to his problem and then made a suggestion.

"Ted... I have a proposition for you and Bobby. I have some money my mother left me when she passed away... I've been waiting a long time to invest into something like this. I want to invest into a casino..." Mary laid her cards on the table as if she was a businesswoman for many years.

"Mary... It's a big risk as you can see the problem Bobby and I are having. It would be too much for you and besides, Bobby and I only want silent partners. They could only buy a percentage of our property." Mary thought for a moment...

"Ted... I want to do this. You are a good friend and I trust you. We have known each other for a long time now, and I want to do this." After thinking a long moment...

"Mary... I will talk to Bobby. I would love to have you as an investor in our casino," says Ted with a rejuvenated look.

"By the way Ted, there is also just one important condition... I want you to teach me how to run a casino. I will be a silent partner, but I need to know how the business works... Is it a deal?" she says with a flirtatious smile. He smiled... The deal was consummated with a long hug.

In the next few weeks, Mary was feeling like a winner in a lottery. She finally got little Alex back to live with her at home. Little Alex wasn't so little anymore. At the age of 17, the five-foot ten-inch young man had the mental capacity of a five year old. Mary was over protective and was never going to let him go into the real world.

One Sunday morning when Mary was asleep, Alex was trying to smoke a cigarette. He threw the lit match onto the couch and it caught fire. Alex was in a panic state and went into another seizure attack screaming, yelling and crying. Mary woke up and smelled the smoke and heard Alex. She rushed into the living room filled with black

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smoke, grabbed Alex and ran outside. A neighbor saw the fire and smoke coming out of the house windows. He grabbed his fire extinguisher from his home and ran into the inferno and tried to put out the fire. The couch was burned to ashes and the fire was starting to spread from the lamp and coffee table to the corner of the living room. The neighbor put out some of the flames as the fire trucks and police arrived.

In a matter of minutes, the fire was under control and eventually the flames were extinguished. The paramedics also arrived and attended Mary and Alex. His vitals were checked and he was okay. The police talked to Mary about how the fire was started. She explained that she fell asleep smoking. It might have been a mistake on her part because the police were contemplating on issuing a citation for child endangerment. They saw that Alex was mentally retarded and notified the county child services. Mary took Alex to the guest bedroom above the garage.

The firefighters took care of airing the damaged rooms filled with damp furniture and smoke. They were to spend the night there and Mary saw that Alex didn't realize what he had done. She is considering putting him in a sanitarium for the mentally disabled. She laid there staring out the window with a distant view of the Las Vegas strip. *Finally, she closed her eyes and went to sleep.*



Mary's family who did not desert her. Aunt Lupe, Cousin Maria, and Grandparents

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“Oh good... Paul Leone has been around for years... Well, maybe I’ll see you in the late afternoon when I come in” says Dee as she gives the little girl flirts to Scorpio.

“I will see you then.” Frankie finishes his last beer and Mary sips up the coffee.

“Bye Mary...” as Dee gives her a hug and whispers something into her ear.

“Bye honey...” Mary gives a big grin as she puts on her western jacket. Frankie and she leave the casino.

It was a nice night filled with stars in the sky. I had a good lift in my life. Mary was already my best friend as well as my aunt. I have a lot to learn about the casino game. What are my plans..? I want to run the biggest casino in Las Vegas. As we headed back towards home, you can see the city lights as well as the beautiful array of the strip casino neon lights. It was exciting. What was I doing just booking horses the last few years..? I’m about to play in the big leagues.

Back at the Ritz Hotel in Dana Point, South Orange County, California, syndicate boss Anthony Martinez, calls a meeting of the board. He is not going to forget Frank Santos.

“Well gentlemen... I asked you to come here today because we have a shipment coming in from Peru. We are buying it at a decent wholesale price, and I would like your approval if you think we can get rid of the merchandise quickly in each of your districts. The merchandise is top quality like the one that Frank Santos destroyed. Not only does he owe us \$25 million plus dollars, but he will pay for the fracas he has caused to our family.” Martinez sends one of his men to go get Rico and Charlie in the hallway. Rico comes in and stands at attention with Charlie in front of the board. Anthony turns to Rico... “Rico, is there a report on Frank Santos that we can share with the committee?”

“Sir... We have not been able to find anything or anyone on his whereabouts. We do have our people going throughout East L.A. asking if he’s been seen. He has a lot of family living there, but we aren’t able to get any information. We know he has two uncles that are regulars at the Mambo Club. We have planted a member inside the bar as a regular patron. He is watching the Nunez brothers. They are small time horse bookies. They have the same routine almost everyday.

There hasn't been any contact with Frank Santos." Rico sounded like he was finished with his report.

"Is that all, Rico?" Martinez says in a low rugged voice.

"Yes sir... That is all we have at the moment," he replies with a fearful voice. Martinez was getting more distressed over the report.

"God damn it Rico!!! Why can't you find a little shit like Santos? A lot of people know him and he probably owes them money. Haven't you found any of his clients?"

"No sir... Santos had a code system for them. Only he knows. If he owes anyone money, they would have gone to his bar in Seal Beach. That has been shut down completely. We had it staked out the last couple of days. No one has showed up. We questioned some of the town's people and no one has heard from him... I am sorry sir." Rico hoped that Martinez would calm down. A member of the board spoke...

"Rico, have you or Charlie thought about Santos going to a friend or relatives place in another state, to hide out?" Rico thought for a moment...

"No sir. We know he has family in Mexico and perhaps in Arizona. We will try to find out."

"Please do, Rico and Charlie... If you can't find out that information, perhaps we better employ someone who can," Martinez says with a threatening tone. "Now, I must go see my brother tomorrow and tell him that we are still looking for Frank Santos. Good day Rico... Charlie." They exit quickly.

"Now gentlemen..." as Anthony smiles at the dozen members ... "Are we going to have any problems delivering our merchandise to your districts for a quick sale?"

Chapter 16

Show Me How It's Done

It was a warm spring day and I was about to start my first day as a bartender at the Nugget Junction Casino. Right now I'm still driving a Buick, but that's going to change real soon. I arrived at the casino and went directly to the bar. There was only one bartender there so I figured it was Paul Leone.

"Hi, are you Paul?"

"Yes I am. You're Frank Scorpio?" he asked as he gives me the once over.

"Yes, nice to meet you. I guess I'll be working with you." We shook hands.

"First we need to get you the Nugget bar shirt. Then I'll show you the system we have around here." Paul introduced me to the cocktail waitress for the day shift. Her name is Sue Ann. She's about 22 and a busty little thing. She had long ash blonde hair and great legs.

"Sue Ann, this is Frank Scorpio. He's going to be our part time bartender." Sue Ann gave a nice smile as she extended her hand toward mine. As I shook it, I looked into her deep blue eyes. This is a hottie— a babe.

"It's nice to meet you Sue Ann." As usual I looked for a wedding band on her finger.

"Hey, it's nice to meet you Frank. If you need anything, let me

know. Excuse me, but I gotta go take some drink orders. Be right back.” Sue Ann walks away with a nice sway. Paul and I went into the back room and there was a shirt hanging on the rack with my name on it. It was a good fit and all of a sudden, I’ve gone country. I was shown where all the stock of liquor was kept and learned the well brands. It wasn’t real busy and it gave me time to study the gaming tables. I watched people as they played and I watched how smooth the dealers were. The card and crap dealers seem to do it in their sleep. We had a couple of beginners, but this is the way most of them start.

Bobby Fager came in and greeted me. I gave him the thumbs up on the friendliness of the employees so far. He asked me to go for a walk with him. He was giving me a mini tour of the casino. He was pointing out to me the dealers as well as the regular day players. He goes on to tell me about the day players getting a little extra special treatment.

“They are the bread and butter of the business, Frankie. Always take care of them, and this will be their home, away from home. A gambler always wants respect from a casino and you’ll have a great percentage of loyalty from them. A gambler likes to brag to his friends on how the casino gives him special treatment. However the player pays dearly for it and the casino has steady income.” Bobby continues the tour... “I want you to start just observing the operation, Frankie. The quicker you learn, the quicker you can deal and become a floor manager,” says Bobby.

“I will Bobby. I’ll stay after I’m off my shift and just watch. I really like the atmosphere and I thank you and Ted for helping me.”

“Your aunt Mary has been good to us, Frankie, and we try to make people feel like family here. They’re a little rougher on the strip.” Bobby talks to the point.

“What do you mean rougher, Bobby?”

“In most casinos, it’s strictly business. They really don’t have much personal interest in their employees. Not all are that way, but the new corporate structure can be brutal. You can have a job working in any position in a casino for 20 years, and all of a sudden you’re out. However, there are employees that deserve to be fired. Some of them steal, drink or deal drugs on the job. That’s what you’ll be looking for on the ‘Q. T’. We have to know if anyone is doing drugs or stealing on the job.” Bobby is adamant on this subject.

“So you want me be a snitch?” I figured I wasn’t into that. He gave

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me that look.

“Frank... This is Las Vegas. There are drugs everywhere. If our dealers, bartenders, and cocktail waitress are on drugs, the only alternative to afford their habits is to steal. And that would be from us because of easy access to money.”

“I understand Bobby. It just wasn’t my style to be a spy.” I said.

“I’m going to tell you something Frank. If you want to learn this business, you have to protect it. If you see cheating from anyone, treat it as though their stealing directly from your pocket. Have no mercy! Here at the Nugget Junction, we are a lot easier to get a long with. If you end up on the Vegas strip, watch your back as well as who pretends to be your good friend. They’ll chew you up for lunch, and spit you out into the gutter.”

Bobby was giving me a verbal warning for my future in the gaming world of Las Vegas. It was kind of scary. What was I getting into? Bobby meant well by giving me all the negative info. But it was for my benefit and achievement in the management level. I thanked him and I went back to the bar to help Paul.

“What was that all about, Frank?” Paul wondered why Bobby took me for the tour.

“Oh, he just gave me the welcome wagon and wanted me to know the regular players... and just get a feel for the place.”

I don’t know Paul well enough to give too much info. I wondered if he had anything to hide. Right away I’m starting to get suspicious of everyone. I don’t know if I’ll like this. I would always be wondering if you can trust or not trust anyone. Like I said earlier... I want to run the largest casino in Las Vegas and this is the best start. Owners, who were bred here and went through the ranks, are showing me the way. I guess this is a blessing. I was willing to learn everything at any cost. I’m sure Randall De Laparra’s mob isn’t onto me, or my whereabouts. By the time I learn all this, the mob will forget about me...

I finally served my first drink to a customer at the bar. I am now officially a member of the Nugget Junction Casino bartenders club. Besides, Sue Ann and I will be working the day shift together. God bless this world.

While ordering drinks from me, Sue Ann starts a casual conversation. “Hey Frank, where are you from?” Here we go again. Everybody wants to know where everybody came from.

“Uh, I’m from California, Sue Ann... And you?”

“I’m from Southern California. A town called Norwalk. It’s just outside Los Angeles, near Disneyland” she says while chewing gum. I thought that’s too close to home for me since I went to school there, and since Seal Beach is only 15 minutes from Norwalk. I better cut this topic of the talk.

“Hey Sue Anne, how long you been here?” I asked quickly.

“Oh, about two years. I just came out here because I heard the money was good in cocktails. I couldn’t get a job on the strip because I didn’t have enough experience. I met Paul at a bar, and he recommended me to Bobby. So here I am, and I love it.”

“Have you got a boyfriend?” I had to ask.

“Hell no! I just got rid of one and he won’t leave me alone. Just because you sleep with them, these cowboys think they own you!” I finished her order of drinks and she swiftly went to serve her customers.

A few hours passed by, and I was getting the hang of this. I really did like the atmosphere and the customers were pretty friendly. I took a break and decided to go see Ted in his office. I knocked on his door and he yelled out to come in.

“Hi Frank. Come on in and have a seat. How’s the casino world treating you the first day?” At least he was in a good mood.

“I’m having a good time, Ted. Paul has been showing me the ropes and I met Sue Ann. She’s real nice.”

“I’ll say she’s nice... Reeaaal nice. Ha! Now you be careful with the ladies. You’re a handsome devil and there are a lot of gold diggers in this town,” says Ted as he gives me the fatherly advice.

“Well, thanks for the warning, Ted. By the way Bobby gave me a tour and an earful about the business.”

“I know he did and he really knows his stuff... He better! I taught him everything I know! Ha!”

“Ted, I just wanted to let you know that I am really excited about this place and all that I’m going to learn from the both of you.” I hoped that I didn’t lay it on too thick.

“We’re glad to hear that Frankie. Your aunt Mary means a lot to us and she’s vouching for you... And that’s good enough for Bobby and me. Now if you need anything, make sure you let us know.” Ted was a trooper.

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“I want to excel fast Ted. I’m staying after my shift and just watch how the other floor managers act and treat their customers.”

“Frankie... Just don’t let anyone know that we are preparing you for management. I trust you. What you are going to learn is exactly what happens on the strip. Always be observant and trust your instincts,” says Ted with firmness in his voice.

I thanked Ted and went back out to the casino. It was time for a shift change and Paul and Sue Ann were being relieved of duty. Dee took over for Paul. A waitress I haven’t met yet took over for Sue Ann. My shift was over so I sat at the bar and just started observing the activity in the casino. Dee greeted me and served me a beer.

“So, how was your first day, Frankie?” Dee asks with a warm tone in her voice.

“Fantastic, Dee... I sure learned a lot about a casino bar. Paul showed me about comping customers’ drinks, and especially how to treat the regulars.

“What about Sue Ann? How did you like her?”

“Oh... Sue Ann? I didn’t get to talk to her too much. She was pretty busy...” Like I was going to tell her anything about another hot babe. As Dee was pouring drinks by the well, she continued the conversation.

“So how come you’re still here Frankie?” Pretty inquisitive for a bartender just coming onto her shift.

“I just wanted to see how the evening shift was on a weekday. And, I can get to know more about my fellow employees.” Of course I said it with a little flirt. Dee smiled and went to wait on more customers at the bar. I stayed around the casino about three more hours, and then I was getting tired. Dee and I had small talks about nothing really. I was watching the dealers most of the night. Right away I’m getting suspicious of some of them. I’m beginning to see what Bobby and Ted were talking about. Maybe I do have the mind to be a casino boss. Who do you trust?

A few months have passed and it was now the middle of August; a hot summer night. I feel right at home. I learned a lot about beverage control and I thought it was time for me to start dealing cards. Ted and Bobby have been giving me training tips. The only reason they have the time for me is because of the size of the Nugget Junction Casino.

Ted has another private office upstairs which he allows me to use. It has a two-way mirror overlooking the gaming tables. This is where I've been spending most of my time.

Bobby also gave me a few pages on how cheating on the gaming tables is done. Some customers have a way of doctoring the cards and dice. The unscrupulous dealer is also known as the 'Mechanic'. He can deal you or himself a Blackjack anytime he wants. In some cases, the casino boss orders the dealer to do it as a one time shot for very, very big bet.

This is one of the most informative subject matter that I have ever read on cheating in gambling. If these are the activities that exist, then there will always be someone trying to beat the casino... whether he's the player or an employee. I am going to love the challenge of running a casino. I practiced dealing Blackjack almost day and night when I wasn't tending the bar. I learned the way that Crap dealers cheat by tossing a bigger value of chips to a partner in a fast pace table.

It was time for me to head home so I stopped by the bar to have a beer. Dee was on duty and believe it or not, we have been only friends. She's is really a good looker. Although I liked Sue Ann and wanted to get her in the sack, she was a little too daffy for me. Dee was more matured and had a great body, but I'm trying not to get involved with anyone I work with. I would be a minority on that subject in this town. I got involved with Michele back at the Seaside sports bar, and here I am.

I went home and chatted with my Aunt Mary. She's been real good to me and I have her full support. I haven't talked to anyone in my immediate family since I came to Vegas. Mary and my uncles thought the phones could be tapped to my mom's place or perhaps some type of bug might have been placed in her apartment. Aunt Mary has talked to uncle Amos and Sonny. They would only call from a public phone booth. They told my mom that I was okay, and my mom kept in touch with my sister, Linda. She took care of all the paper work for the Seaside sports bar in Seal Beach. Linda was also suspicious of strangers and felt people were watching her. No one ever approached her. She closed it down, and that was all to it. The landlord didn't give her any trouble.

"I talked to your uncles today Frankie," says Mary. "So far Anthony Martinez and Randall De LaParra haven't found out any

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information about you. Sonny and Amos keep in touch with a friend from inside the organization.”

“He must be a good friend, Aunt Mary,” I said as I was thinking why.

“He is Frankie. As kids, most of us were close friends or relatives from the old neighborhood on 47th. Most of us always kept in touch.” Mary was going back into time.

I was thinking for a moment and then asked her...

“If he works for Martinez and De LaParra, how do you know we can trust him?” I was again feeling to not trust anyone.

“You can trust him, Frankie. He’s your Godfather,” she says while pouring herself a cup of coffee.

“My Godfather! What do you mean?” More surprises in my life.

“He baptized you at Saint Cecilia’s church when you were a baby.” Here I am learning something new about my life.

“How come no one has ever told me who he was?” I asked like I just came from another world.

“His name is Sal Valencia. He was the best man at your parents wedding, and a few weeks after you were born, they asked him to baptize you.”

“Why didn’t I ever get to know him? I remember some things when I was about four or five years old, but it’s not that clear.” I seem to have a mystery over me.

Sal Valencia started booking horses in his teens. He worked, just as your uncles did, at the Mambo Club. A couple of years later, he got in over his head taking on big bets from the wrong people. Well he knew he had to get the money to pay off the big boys or they were going to kill him. Sal knew Anthony Martinez when they were in separate gangs back in the old days. Sal went to borrow money from Anthony to pay them off. They charged him heavy interest. Sal got so far behind that it was impossible to pay it all back. Martinez made him an offer he shouldn’t refuse; to work for him and peddle his dope to the Mexicans in East Los Angeles. Sal hated it but his family was in danger. Everybody knew everybody’s families. Since that time, Sal has been part of the Martinez and De LaParra syndicate. Once you’re in... You’ve reached the end of your line. It’s a matter of survival.”

Mary continued telling me some wild history about my heritage. I had to ask, now that the subject was open... “Who’s my godmother?

She looked at me with a gentle smile...

"I am," she says with a warm smile. Wow... What's next? I was stunned for a moment.

"Why didn't you tell me before, and why don't I remember?"

"You were just a baby and I was already living in Las Vegas. There are reasons I left Los Angeles. Your mom called me about the baptism and I made a special trip for the ceremony. How do you feel about it?" she asked in a mild manner. I just got up and gave her a hug for a minute.

"If you ever want to tell me anything, or just talk, I will always be here Aunt Mary... or do I call you Godmother?" She just gave a little laugh. I told her, "You have treated me like a king since I've been here. I am getting a dream come true by having a job in the casino. You, Ted and Bob are giving me a gift." I was getting sentimental. Mary was also getting a little emotional.

"Hey Frankie, how about a nightcap? I got some great 1800 Cuervo Gold." She went and got a couple of shot glasses. She poured the gold. "Here's to my godchild and the family back home." I also had to make a toast...

"To my cool Godmother and our future— Thanks to the family for helping and protecting me, because that's why God brought us together. And I swear on my father's grave...that I will always protect you and the family."

"Well said, Frankie. Now you're on your way to a new journey. Make it a good one."

"I will Mary... Uh, we will," I said. "Good night."

A few weeks later I talked to Ted and Bobby. I told them I was ready to make a move and try my hand at dealing. I came in a little early to work so I could show them. They took me into the next room where there was a Blackjack table and a Craps table. Ted and Bobby sat on the player's side. Ted sat at first base which is seat one, and Bobby sat at third base, which is seat five. We used the fake chips and a six deck shoe box. I dealt the cards face down to them, and we are on our way.

I was a little nervous at first, but I was dealing the cards the right way... and Ted and Bobby seemed real pleased. After the first round of dealing from the shoe... I, the dealer, was ahead of the game. I reshuffled and we went another round. I got very relaxed. All of a

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sudden, Ted got four Blackjacks in a row. Bobby had two out of four Blackjacks. I stopped for a moment. How lucky are these guys. Ted kept letting his winnings ride. The chips had no value here, but it could be a fortune in the main pit.

“Wow... You guys are lucky. You would make a killing at the tables down stairs. Ready to go again?” My luck as a dealer was about to start. I dealt another hand. This time they both got Blackjack again.

“Man, you guys should be playing in another casino for real money. You could rake in a fortune.” I was stunned. Bobby looked at me.

“Frankie... We cheated.”

“What?” My face stiffened

“While you were busy wondering if you were dealing the cards right, you took your eyes off of us and we switched cards on the table,” Ted says with a grin.

“What are you talking about? You’re right in front of me. I didn’t see you move a muscle.”

“Ted and I had both our hands on the table and looking at our cards using both hands. We used our own cards with the same backing coming from our sleeves, or in the lining of our sports jacket.” Bobby and Ted showed me how they did it. I was embarrassed and looking like a little school kid who broke the teacher’s ruler.

“I’m sorry, guys... I can’t believe this.” I kind of hung my head with a little shame.

“Don’t worry Frankie. There are a lot of ways that it could be done. You’re always going to have a challenger. That’s why we have cameras in the ceiling. We hire professional and convicted cheaters to spy on our clientele. Even on our own dealers,” adds Bobby.

“I don’t know what to say.” I felt stupid.

“There’s nothing to say, Frankie. Just watch more closely at the players on the tables. Keep working at it. You’re not learning just to deal, but you’re learning to be a pit boss. He has to hear and see everything. If one of his dealers blinks, he has to notice it. If they need to sneeze and use a tissue, they have to back away from the table with letting you know what they are about to do,” explains Ted. I just shook my head and thought for a moment. I’m in shock. These guys are sharks.

“I gotta tell you guys; this is an experience and lesson I will never

forget.” Ted and Bobby had a good laugh.

“Frankie... You are going to be all right. A lot of our dealers have been dealing for years. They just don’t want the pressure of the casinos on the strip. They’re relaxed here and we only had a problem with a couple of them in the past few of years.” Ted was talking like a dad to me. “Now go on back to the bar and help Paul. It won’t be long now,” says Bobby.

“Thank you Mr. and Mr. Fager. You are my mentors.” I laughed lightly, as they also did. I went down stairs to go back to work behind the bar. Paul always had his regulars come in and chat with him. He knew how to treat his customers. Then there’s Sue Ann... She was perky and had the older guys smiling every time she handed them a drink.

“Hey Frankie... You been here for a few months and we never see you go out socially with any of us,” says Sue Ann.

“I go out to dances and stuff, Sue Ann. I just don’t know too many people that like to do the things I like.”

“Do you drink and dance?” asked Sue Ann with a flirtatious wink.

“Of course, I said.

“Then we do the things you like. Ha...” She yells to Paul, “Hey Paul. Why don’t we take Frankie to the ‘Buckaroo Club’ tonight? They got a great band. It’s not too far up Boulder Highway, and they always have specials on the beers. Okay, Frankie?” I thought this sounded like it would be a lot of fun. I said to her...

“Okay, Sue Ann... I’m ready.”

Sue Ann was high spirited and that’s the way the guys liked it. She also invited a couple of work friends that I barely knew. Yolanda and Becky were two Mexican chicks that worked in slots. They’re about in their mid 20’s and looking hot. I find out later in the night that they’re sisters.

It was about 10 p.m. and we had the next day off of work, so we were going to party all night. We met at the Buckaroo Club and for a Wednesday night, it was jumping. After all, this is Las Vegas. We bought drinks and the party was underway.

The band played a lot of variety. Country rock to plain ol’ rock and roll, and there was a little bit for everybody. Luckily I loved to dance and I knew how to do the two-step. So naturally I was a hit with the chicks. Right away Paul was hitting on the babes; and there were

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plenty. Half the cowboys in the place zoomed in on Sue Ann. I danced with Becky and Yolanda at first to warm up the dance shoes. A couple of hours went by and we we're all having a good time.

Sue Ann was a dancing machine. She would make a fabulous dancer at the gentlemen's club. Finally, we all needed a break and met at one of the stand up tables.

"Hey you guys... Is everybody having a good time?" hollers Sue Ann as she was getting a good buzz from the shots of liquor.

All at once we gave a loud "Yaaa—Hooo." We ordered more Tequila shooters. We clicked our glasses and down the hatch they went. Becky pounded it down with a chaser of another shot. This girl was out to party. Yolanda on the other hand was sipping her shot. Are they really sisters? Anyway we we're having a fun time.

"Come on Frankie," Sue Ann yells out loud. "We're going to cut a rug— Yahoo!" She grabbed my hand and we did a swing dance to the rock and roll music. This was great. Finally, Paul and Becky were out on the dance floor. Yolanda was still sipping her shot of Tequila... And the band played on.

It was nearly 2 a.m. and the party was still going strong. We were at our table having another drink while laughing and telling jokes. Just then this husky looking cowboy and his friend come up to the table and approaches Sue Ann.

"Hey Sue Ann..." She looked at him and rolled her eyes. The rest of us just got a little quieter. "How come you haven't returned my calls?"

"Look Rex, I told you it was over!" Sue Ann acted like she didn't want him around. Rex was about in his mid-thirties, six feet tall, and weighed about 250 pounds with a beer-belly gut hanging over his belt. I couldn't believe Sue Ann had anything to do with this ape.

"Sue Ann, can we go outside and talk?" He became a little demanding.

"No, I told you. We had a few laughs and that's it! Now go home to your wife and kids," she says as he grabs her arm. "What are you doing? Let me go!"

Rex was putting a damper on our party. Paul was sort of minding his own business. I had to step in. I can't stand for a Bozo like cowboy Rex to manhandle a girl, especially when the asshole is married already, and the girl is a friend of mine.

“Hey Rex... Why don’t you take your hands off my girlfriend?” Everybody looked at me. I gave them a wink, except for Rex and his boyfriend.

“Who’s the dick head, Sue Ann?” Rex says, like he’s the toughest guy from ‘World Wrestling’ on TV.

“None of your business, Rex. Why don’t you just leave? We’re having a private party and you’re not invited!”

“Fuck you, you little whore!” Rex was ready to fight anyone. My face turned red and hot. Sue Ann shouted back at him...

“Get the hell out of here, you smelly fucker!” Sue Ann had a lot of fire in her. Rex gave her a shove and Sue Ann fell backwards onto the floor. The people around us sort of scattered. I was pissed and Paul was still drinking his beer not caring to get involved. I went around the table and gave Rex a shove into another table.

Another big ox with a big silver belt buckle that was with Rex, came over and picked me up and threw me across the table. I noticed the band kept playing and got louder. I think I was in trouble. Paul continued to drink his beer. Becky threw her shot glass at the big guy who threw me. Yolanda left for the car. A couple of other horse trainers got into the action. Chairs were flying. I was pissed at Rex, and took him on. It was tough to give a good shot to his belly because it was so big. But I gave him a good shot to the chin as Sue Ann jumped on his back. He threw her down again. We continued to battle. The bouncers jumped in, but didn’t have any control. Everything was moving so fast, you didn’t know who was fighting who.

Rex pulled out a knife from his boot and waved it towards me. I tried to look for something, but couldn’t really take my eyes off of him. He walked slowly at me and I wasn’t sure what I was going to do. Just then he was whacked with a beer bottle on his head... It was Paul. He waited for the right moment. In just a few minutes, about six to eight police cars arrived, and there were going to be plenty of arrests. The crowd panicked and ran in every direction. The cops were grabbing mainly the guys and a few fighting chicks. I wasn’t going to get busted. I’m supposed to lay low. A cop grabbed me by my shirt while he was using his baton on another dude. I swung my arm and pushed him away. The one guy he was using the baton on came around and belted the cop causing him to split his lip. Good for him! On the other side of the dance floor, there were two gunshots.

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Everybody ran out of the building and cars were speeding away in every direction. I didn't see Sue Ann, Paul, Becky or Yolanda. It was everyone for themselves.

I ran to my Buick, but there was a cop car behind it. I didn't know which way to go. At a split second, out of nowhere, a chopper motorcycle with a person wearing a helmet and smoked glass face guard, and a long blonde ponytail, skidded up to me...

"Get on!" she yells as she was revving up the engine.

"What?!" Things were moving too fast in the parking lot.

"Shut up and get on!!! Here come the cops!!!" This was a woman who was in control. I jumped on the back of her double seat and she peeled out on a wheelie. I closed my eyes and hoped we didn't crash. She headed south on Boulder Highway. We had to be doing about 80 mph. If she went any faster, the cops would be sure to notice us and we would get busted.

I'm staring at the back of her head with all this long hair coming out the bottom of her helmet. The chopper's motor was loud and I just hung on for dear life. There were more cops heading north on Boulder with their lights flashing and sirens on. I knew where they were going. This chick continued up Boulder Highway which is a gateway to Boulder Dam, Laughlin, and Arizona. We got into a quiet part of the city. I've never been here before. She acted like she knew where she was going. I kept quiet. I finally saw a sign... 'Welcome to Boulder City.' We stopped at a bar, which she seemed to know pretty well. I noticed there weren't any casinos around. She parked the chopper and she finally took off her helmet. I looked at her. She was a beautiful honey, but I didn't know who she was.

"Are you okay, Frank?" she asked as I followed her into a small bar.

"Do I know you?" I asked as she just kept walking to a small table in the corner as I followed. She yells to the bartender...

"Hey Poncho... How about a couple of Heinekens?"

"Coming right up, honey," says the bartender like he's an old friend. We sat down and I kept trying to remember if I met her.

"Okay... How do you know me?" I asked.

"Do you forget the girls you had drinks with?"

"Not really. Where did we have a drink?" This is a girl I should remember.

“Have you been to the Flamingo casino?” she asked as she lit up a cigarette.

I thought for a minute... “At the bar,” I said. “Heather?”

“Yup... I gave you a phone number, but I never heard from you,” she says with a smile as she goes ahead and pounds down a beer.

“Uh, yes... I remember. I’m really sorry Heather, but that was my first day in Vegas and I had to find a place to live. I just lost track of time... So how did you recognize me or see me or _____”

“I saw you in the Buckaroo with your friends. I also saw you with the cowboy who was breaking up your party.”

“Well I can’t believe you remembered me. I’m flattered... And you probably saved my life.” I ordered another round of beers.

Heather and I talked until the sun rose over the East Mountains. I thought about taking her over to my place, but then again, I don’t know her. Maybe she’ll invite me over to her place and I can make some wild passionate love with her.

“Well, I better take you back to your car, Frank.”

“Oh yeah... I’m pretty tired and I have to go to work tomorrow.” I said that real smooth.

“Where do you work?” Heather seemed interested in me.

“I work at the Nugget Junction Casino. I’m a bartender there.”

“Oh, I’ve been there several times before. I just haven’t been there recently. Do you mind if I come in and visit you?”

“Sure... Come in the afternoon. I usually work until 6 p.m. Then I’ll have a drink to wind down.” She was looking a lot better since the first time I saw her. We left the bar and got back on her chopper. “Why do you have a motorcycle, Heather?”

“My dad was into bike racing when I was a little girl. He always gave me a ride on it and I felt like I was flying freely in the air. It was a high for me, so I learned how to build an engine. I go dirt biking a lot in the hills... Ready?” She cranked up her engine as I jumped onto the back seat. We peeled out and headed back up Boulder Highway. It was a bright sunny warm morning. She was right. I felt free as a bird on her chopper flying up the highway. We got to the Buckaroo parking lot and all was quiet. My car was still in one piece.

“Where’s your car?” she asked. I didn’t know what else to do because that car wasn’t me.

“It’s right there in the second stall.” She pulls up to it and stops to

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let me off.

“Is that a Buick?” she says as she has a surprise look on her face.

“Ah..., Yeah... It’s my aunts. I borrowed hers since my Porsche broke down.” Instead of saying good bye, Heather asks another question...

“So when you getting you’re Porsche back?” Holy crap! Think of something...

“Uh, actually it needs a new engine. I’m getting a new car soon.”

“What kind?” Is there no end to this line of questioning?

“Oh, I don’t know... I’m just looking and uh, I really have to go Heather. Gosh, it was great to see you again.”

“Do you want to call me so we can get together sometime, Frank? By the way, what’s your last name?”

“Scorpio... And yes, let me have your number and I promise to call... and you know where I work.” After I got her number and walked away, I yelled back to her...

“Where do you work?” She revved up her chopper and put it in first gear. As she started to drive away, I asked again... “Where do you work?” She yelled back...

“I work in Sales. See you later.” Off she went— Sales...hmm, must be cosmetics.

Chapter 17

Spread Your Wings Young Man

It was a warm Saturday morning and I wanted to see some major league baseball games at the sports book. I went to the Majestic Palace Casino on the strip. There was Scottish John McTarbet, watching the ball games and drinking his usual drink; Double VO seven and a beer.

“Hi John...” I shook his hand.

“Oh, hi Fred. How are you doing and I see you’re still in Las Vegas.”

“It’s Frank, John... My name is Frank.”

“Sorry Frank.” John was a little embarrassed.

“That’s okay John. I came to bet on a couple of games today. Are the Angels playing?”

“They’ll start in about another hour, Frank... How about a drink?” John asked as he flags down the cocktail waitress.

“Sure, I’m ready.” Tamika, the cocktail waitress, is still working in the sports book.

“Hi John,” greets Tamika.

“You remember Frank, Tamika?”

“Sure do... Hi ya Frank. What can I get you?”

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“Tamika, let me have an Amaretto on the rocks and a beer.” I was feeling vibrant and it was a great day.

There was Jimmy Mills still playing the horses and puffing on a big cigar. His only attention span was on Santa Anita race track. Scottish John and I did a lot of talking. That’s one thing John loved to do. He could talk about any subject on current or past events of the world. He was a small time bettor, retired and loves what he’s doing. His wife still works as a nurse at a local hospital.

I looked around the casino and sort of daydreamed about running a place like this. It was really a palace the way it was designed. It was a grand sports book with extra large TV screens. I noticed John was relaxed and that was a good sight. He felt like he was home. I liked that feeling. Tamika brought our drinks and I tipped her. I see the waitress’ get stiffed a lot around here. They have to walk a long ways to the service bar from the sports book. I see them carry about 20 to 30 drinks on their tray. So the players will get about \$20 bucks worth of drinks, and maybe tip a dollar. This is a service oriented town, and I was learning all about the casino business. The table dealers and cocktail waitresses work for almost minimum wage, and rely on tips. Some hot looking waitress could get a very large tip that would make up a week’s wage. I know a lot of them like to go after work and play the slots or video poker. I now know what Ted Fager was talking about not letting his employees gamble in his casino. I’m getting to know more about this town’s bad habits.

John has been living here for nearly 20 years. He used to be a card counter at Blackjack. The casinos can and usually will ban you from their casino for card counting. It’s not illegal, but it’s their policy because it diminishes the house odds. John was on the quiet side and not greedy at all. He made a few bucks. He tells me there have been times that he has taken a dump on the tables, and it’s very hard to recover. He finished his book, ‘Sports Betting on the Edge’, and the next time I come in, he was going to give me a copy.

“John, you still need to show me the best way to bet a parlay.”

“First of all Frank, if you want to come out ahead in this game, stay away from the parlays. The casino loves parlay players,” exclaims John with wisdom.

“I thought you could make more money on a small bet with the odds, John?”

“You can Frank. You will win once in a while. But if you’re really good at picking teams, there will always be one team that will kill your parlay. If you know your teams, bet them straight up. You’ll come out ahead. Frank..? Read the book.” Then John chuckles a little and has his drink. I decided to take a walk around the large casino.

“John, I want to see what this place has to offer the tourist. It sure has grown since the last time I was here.”

“Okay, Frank. I’ll be here when you get back.”

I walked all over the casino and saw a lot of beautiful cocktail waitresses. They showed a lot of leg along with the cleavage of busty women, and that’s what I love. The Majestic Palace had a theme of the Roman Empire. As I passed a waitress, I always made sure I gave her a smile.

I hung around the Olympic bar watching all the employees in action. Frankly I was also watching all the friendly girls sitting here at the bar. You can tell they weren’t tourist. However, I was still daydreaming about me running a place like this. I was watching the dealers at the main pit. They weren’t as friendly to the customers as the Nugget Junction Casino was. It seems a bit more formal in playing cards, roulette or craps here. It was real formal in Baccarat. Maybe this is where the card sharks like to come, and the Majestic Palace is always suspicious of everyone.

I watched the floor managers and their demeanor. If they saw a player with a lot of chips, they get the extra attention and service. The drinks come quicker. If you had a good winning streak, they would spend some time talking to you while you were playing. If you still kept winning, they would change the dealer or call in a shield to sit at the table with you and throw the cards off. They would do anything to get your attention away from how you were winning. Of course you always had the big shot players, with all the cash, being the loudest at the tables. They liked to flirt with the cocktail waitress and once in a while, cop a feel.

As long as they were tipping well, with some girls, you could feel all day long. I did see a high roller, who was feeling no pain thanks to the booze, whisper to the pit boss. This obese gambler had about \$50 thousand dollars in front of him. I could tell by the color of the chips. I don’t know what he was whispering about, but I saw the pit boss go to the phone. I didn’t think of it too much anymore.

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About 45 minutes later, I saw the same cocktail waitress that had been serving him all day, come out in a nice evening black strapless gown, with a large V shape cut in the front part of the dress. I'm not sure if she was wearing a push up bra. It didn't matter... she was spectacular. Her long strawberry blonde hair brought out the gold tan on her body. She stood by his side with the biggest smile. He then cashed out his chips and left with her. What was I seeing here? I was just beginning to learn the game of Vegas in dealing with the clientele, or as the high rollers are called— Whales. I feel like I've been sheltered all my life. Here I was thinking I was in the big leagues when I was booking horses. Compared to this, I was a pup.

I went back to the sports and race book to say my good byes to Scottish John and Jimmy Mills. John was still sitting enjoying the ball games.

"John, I have to go now." I leaned over to give him a quick hand shake.

"Okay Frank. I will bring in a copy of my book for you to read. I think you will learn all there is to know on the odds." John seemed proud of what he accomplished. Jimmy was still sitting there handicapping the horses and puffing on the cigar.

"Tell Jimmy I said good bye for me, John."

The next day I went into the Nugget Casino about an hour early before my shift started. After walking through and really taking a good look at the Majestic Palace Casino, I saw a lot of how the pit managers worked. Especially after what Ted and Bobby told me about the cheats and sharks, I wanted to let them know how motivated I was. I knocked on Ted's office door.

"Come on in," says Ted. "Hi Frankie... What can I do for you?"

"Ted, I am really anxious to learn this business and you and Bobby have really showed me some stuff. When can I start dealing cards and craps?" Ted showed a little smile...

"So you think your ready, Frankie?"

"I can only get better and faster on the tables, Ted. How about me working in the middle of the night on a weekday when it's not too busy?" I was being pretty persuasive. Ted got up from his chair and walked over to the two way mirror and looked out into the casino's main pit. He was quiet for a moment.

“Okay Frankie... I want you to come up here before and after work and practice on the card table in our private room. You deal Blackjack with the cards faced up to the imaginary players, and do not look at your hole card. Leave it face down until it’s your turn to draw. You play the players hand the way it should be played and then you draw. Put different amounts of chips in front of the players so you can get used to collecting or paying off the right amounts. Bobby and I will come in periodically and check on you. Then we’ll see if you’re ready in the next couple of weeks.”

“Thanks Ted... I won’t let you down and I’ll work hard. Well, I better go to my shift now. Thanks again Ted.” I was breathing fresh air.

I went down stairs and got ready for my bartending job. I saw Sue Ann and Paul, and thank god they are still alive.

“Hey Frankie... Mr. Hero and bar room brawler. You made it and you didn’t get busted,” Sue Ann blurts out with energy.

“Glad to see that you and Paul are here and well. Whatever happened to Becky and Yolanda?”

“They’re fine. Yolanda had a hangover, although I don’t know how. They’ll be in soon.” Sue Ann continues to give an order of drinks to Paul.

“Hey, Paul... Thanks for saving my butt with cracking that beer bottle on that ass holes head.”

“That’s okay, Frankie... I had a blast that night” says Paul with a smile.

“Has that dude bothered Sue Ann since that night?” I asked.

“I think he tried to call her, but she wasn’t answering the phone.” I was glad that everyone was okay and we had our usual day at work. I was still watching the gaming tables and how the dealers and floor managers were working. I was picking up the little things they do over and over to protect the game from cheats. It was about time for my shift to end, and so far it’s been a routine day. I said my hellos to Becky and Yolanda. Becky was fired up to go back to the Buckaroo. I told her that we might try another place considering we may not be welcomed.

Dee came in to relieve Paul from his shift. I was going upstairs to practice on the Blackjack table. I think Dee was getting a little suspicious of why I was always staying after work.

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“Hi Dee... How was your weekend?” I said as Paul was counting out his change to close his bank.

“Oh, it was the usual Frankie. A little boring,” she whimpers. “But I hear you and the gang got together the other night at the Buckaroo Club and almost ended up on TV news,” she says as she giggles.

“Yeah... Sue Ann got a little too popular with the cowboys” I snickered.

“So, I hear you’re a big dancer, Frankie”

“That’s why they call me— *Mr. Disco Dynamite*. Maybe you and I should put on our dancing shoes some night.” I said that with a mild flirt.

Dee laughed and went to work behind the bar. Paul went home and Sue Ann was going to work a little longer because her break girl was running late. I went upstairs and went into the private card room. I got out the cards and shuffled till I could do it with my eyes shut. As I was shuffling the cards over and over, again I continued to imagine running a large casino. Getting the tourist into the casino on promos... High rollers... Celebrities... The public will fill the casino just for that reason. Have three or more pools in the back yard. One would be for adults only which means the women are free to go topless.

I started to deal the cards to my imaginary players. Even playing alone, these cards are running crazy. One of the main reasons the dealer wins is because he doesn’t have to make a decision on whether to hit a card or not. The cards tell him what to do. The players have a choice whether to stand or hit. And most of them don’t know what to do, so the real players get fucked. It’s a percentage game and a real player knows what it is. Not only am I practicing dealing the cards up here in the room, but I watch the players at the tables in the casino through the two way mirror. I see a lot of losers and very few winners.

Three hours have gone by and I was finished practicing. I went back down stairs and sat at the bar. Dee came over to me...

“What are you still doing here, Frankie?” she says with pleasantness.

“I was just watching some games in the sports book.” That excuse worked out since we have a very small one man sports betting area. There were about six TV’s so it was quaint.

“You want a beer?”

“Sure. It’s still warm outside and I could use a cold one.” I was

winding down for the evening. I was sitting on the side of the long wooden bar, and watched Dee as she was serving the customers. She was wearing tight Levis shorts with her western shirt. She was looking hot. But I didn't know too much about her personal social life, and I didn't want to pry. I saw Sue Ann, the cocktail waitress still working. "Sue Ann, why are you still here?" I asked casually.

"Amy called and couldn't get her car started, so I told her I would work half her shift. She'll be in though." I continued to watch the tables. It's like an addiction now. I'm always watching everybody. It was almost 9 p.m. and Amy finally showed up to relieve Sue Ann.

"Bye Dee, Frankie. Amy's here and I am on my way out." Sue Ann was in a perky mood. She's got a lot of energy. I was just about finished with my beer, and I was ready to leave.

"Dee, I am heading home... Yeah know, Dee, I just wanted to tell you, I think you got some great legs." I gave her a smile, and a friendly flirt. She looked at me...

"When are you going to wear some shorts so I could check your legs out?" She chuckles a little with another wink.

"Gotta go... See you tomorrow," I said in a way to ignore the question. I downed my last ounce of beer, and walked outside to the casino parking lot.

I saw a couple of people arguing between the cars. I figured it was a spat between couples losing all their money. The shouts got louder and I walked over to see if it was getting out of control. It was Sue Ann arguing with her asshole ex-boyfriend, Rex. I rushed to help her.

"Hey!" I shouted... "Are we going to go through this bullshit again?" He wasn't letting go of her arm, and I wasn't in the mood to go anymore rounds with him. "Let go of her!"

I could tell Rex had been drinking because he was rocking back and forth a little.

"Let me go, Rex!" Sue Ann shouted. "I don't want anything to do with you!!!"

"You heard her, Rex. Go home and don't come back here anymore!" I was getting pissed. I grabbed Sue Ann and tried to pull her away from him, and then he gave us both a shove onto the car next to us. Sue Ann snapped back and started hitting Rex with her hands. Rex reared back and belted her across the face with his fist. Sue Ann bounced off the parked car and dropped to the ground. I couldn't

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believe it. I shouted at Rex...

"You son of a bitch!!!" I started to go after him. He pulled out a Saturday night .38 special from his pocket, and aimed it at me. I froze for a second... He just stared at me. I saw a look in his eyes... He pulled the trigger... A loud pop with a small blaze came out of the barrel..... I went down.

Sue Ann rushed at my side screaming and crying... Rex peeled out of the parking lot in his pick up truck. I just stared into the sky and saw all the stars glitter with a glow... I couldn't say a word. Sue Ann was leaning over me as her blouse was absorbing my blood. A lot of the patrons rushed outside to see what was happening as well as the two security guards we had. My eyelids were getting heavy and slowly closing. Was I going to die?

** There's some kind of incense that has a stronger aroma. I can feel the heat of fire burning near my body. There's movement of people around me— and the sound of hoof beats... of horses. I must try to open my eyes. It was like trying to lift a ton of weight. I see a beam of light flickering through my eye lids. What has happened to me? I can't open them much more. Funny thing... My eyes are now closed, and yet, I can see the stars shimmering and gliding through space. I can see the image of an Angel floating in the heavens of the Galaxy. 'What a beautiful smile'... Total darkness has set.*

I hear a loud siren, and the left side of my body is burning. I opened my eyes, and I see the paramedics sticking a bunch of needles in me.

"Frankie... Frankie." I looked in the direction that the voice was coming from. It was Dee. I just looked at her for a moment... Then I shut my eyes again.

The ambulance arrived at Sunrise emergency hospital. I was taken directly into the operating room. The doctors and nurses kept trying to talk to me in a loud tone.

"Mr. Scorpio... Mr. Scorpio... Frank Scorpio... Do you know where you're at?" I could hear them, but I was too weak to answer them. Then all I heard was tin bowls and the clanging of medical instruments. An oxygen mask was tightened around my face.

I remember seeing the fire coming out of a pistol... Oh crap!!! I'm shot! The nurse injected me with a needle and I was starting to get

dizzy and floating on air... I... I... went to pitch black.

“Mr. Scorpio... Frank Scorpio.” I opened my eyes about half mast. I saw this blonde nurse in her mid 40’s trying to wake me up. I answered her.

“Yes... Yes... What happened?” I asked with a groggy voice.

“You had an operation and you’re going to be alright,” she says with a smile. I just stared at the ceiling. Then I heard a familiar voice...

“Frankie... Frankie, sweetheart... It’s your Aunt Mary. Smile if you can hear me.”

I forced a smile and had the facial look of someone whose chest is being stepped on.

Then I heard another familiar voice...

“Hey Frankie... I hadn’t had a ride like that in an ambulance ever.” It was Dee Hutton. She was trying to put a little cheer in the atmosphere. I looked her way with the movement of my eyes only. I couldn’t believe she was here. Then I remembered... She was in the ambulance with me. Aunt Mary continued to talk in a low tone.

“Frankie... Everything is going to be okay. I called your uncle Amos and Sonny. They’re not going to tell your mother yet. Besides you’re going to make it.” I gave her a weak smile and then I looked at Dee. I rolled my eyes and fell into a deep sleep.

Chapter 18

Heal Thyself Say'th The Big Guy

It was the next day when I woke up, and different nurses were watching over me periodically. It seemed like I had several nurses coming in all the time and doing something to me. I was still on the I. V. bottle and my bandages were being changed every few hours by different nurses. I finally recognized one of the nurses. She was the blonde that I woke up too after my operation. I gave a little smile since I felt I already knew her. I still spoke slowly... “Hi.” She had a big smile and replied...

“Hi yourself... How are you feeling, Frank?”

“I’m ready to go jogging, nurse,” I said with a half ass smile, and she smiled right back. Then I said “Thank you.”

“For what?” she asks as she was changing the I.V. bottle as well as the needle in my arm.

“Just for watching over me, nurse.”

“Well, I am the nurse, and they pay me a thousand dollars a day to watch over you.”

“What? Where do I sign up as a male nurse?” I struggled to say. She just laughed as she opened the curtains to the window and lets the sun shine in.

“There you go, Mr. Scorpio. It’s a bright warm day out there.”

“Just call me Frankie... Most nurses do.” Here I am, practically on

my death bed, and I'm flirting with an older nurse. She chuckled again and took my temperature.

"Well, you still have a little fever, but that'll go away real soon." Then she gave me a pill with a glass of water through a straw. "The doctor will come in a little later and tell you exactly what happened, and what you have to do for rehabilitation. But you'll be fine in no time."

Just then Dee walked in with some flowers. "Hi cowboy," she greets. "Well, you ready to go galloping with this filly?" I gave her a big smile...

"Don't make me laugh, Dee. Thanks for coming and for being with me in the ambulance."

"That's okay, Frankie. Sue Ann will be here in the late afternoon. She's still shook up from that night. The cops are looking for Rex. Sue Ann told them everything about him. He won't get far."

"Good. Why do you girls always pick assholes as boyfriends?"

"What are you talking about? Oh, yeah... I divorced one... ha! Some of us Vegas girls fantasize too much about the gold in Las Vegas; The bastards that have a lot of money. What the hell, we live and learn... sometimes."

Dee stayed for about an hour and we got to know each other a little better. She was not only a good looking girl on the outside, but a real genuine person on the inside. I looked at her in a different way. But I don't think I could feel about anyone as I did Michele. The nurse came in and gave me another shot of medicine in the ass. Dee had to go home and get ready for her shift at the Nugget Junction casino. I was tired and I think the shot the nurse gave me was a pain killer, because I was feeling no pain... I dozed off.

I woke up around 7:45 p.m. and Aunt Mary was sitting on the chair next to my bed. I was still a little weak and groggy from the medicine.

"Hi Mary... Nice to see another pretty face." I just smiled at her.

"Are you feeling better, Frankie?" You've been sleeping since I got here at 5:30 this evening. Sue Ann was here for about an hour and a half. I just told her to go home and maybe come back tomorrow."

"Thanks Aunt Mary. Is she okay?"

"Yeah... She's a tough girl. She feel's so guilty about what happened."

"Tell her everything is okay and I would come to her rescue

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anytime. But next time she has to pick a nicer guy.” I just gave a weak chuckle.

“Ted and Bobby will call you in a few days. They’re really sorry and hope you hurry and get back.”

“Aunt Mary... I need to hurry and get out of here. I want to get back to work.”

“You have to heal first, Frankie. I’ll talk to Ted and Bobby to see what we can do while you’re in rehab. Just don’t rush yourself. We still have to make sure Anthony Martinez doesn’t know where you’re at.”

Just then the blonde nurse walked in and checked the vitals on me. “Hi nurse... This is my Aunt Mary. I’m sorry I don’t know your name,” I said.

“Nancy.” She says. “Yes, I saw her here after the operation. Nice to see you again, Mary.”

I was trying to look at Nancy’s name badge. “What’s your last name, Nancy?”

“McTarbet. It’s an old Scottish clan name,” she says with a smile.

I thought for a minute... “Do you know John McTarbet?”

“Well, I have a husband name John.”

“Does he like to go to Majestic Palace?” I asked with subtle curiosity.

“Oh yes... He’s been going there for years.”

“Wow... What a small world. I met John a couple of times at the casino and he told me about a book he wrote; ‘Sports betting on the Edge’. He was going to give me a copy.”

“I remember now. He said he met you, and you guys watch sports together.” All of a sudden she seemed to know me as a friend. “I’ll tell John you’re here.”

“That would be nice.” It’s like Scottish John and I became old friends. Nancy left and Mary was about to leave because visiting hours were over.

“Mary... I want to hurry and get out of here. Was there anything on the news about the shooting?”

“Yes Frankie, there was. But all they said is that it was an employee that worked at the Nugget Casino. They haven’t got your name yet. But it should stay local. A TV news reporter, Ben Correa, has been calling the casino and trying to find out about the employee

who got shot. They took video footage of the casino and Sue Ann that night, but that's all they have. I think you should not see anyone, Frankie."

Mary was concerned like me about the publicity. There seems to be a killing everyday in Vegas. There's a lot of domestic violence in this town. My situation is just another story, except the police are still looking for Rex. As long as he's on the run, the news story is still open.

I had a Detective Selenak come by to question me about the shooting. He didn't learn anything any different from me. Sue Ann told him everything she knew. Mary was at my side the whole time the cop asked questions. Every time he asked me a question, he would look over at Mary. I'm not sure why. He finally left. Mary stayed a few minutes longer. After she left, once again a different nurse comes and gives me another pain pill.

A week went by and I had a few phone calls from the gang at the Nugget. Becky and Yolanda called. Becky wanted to know when we we're going to go out partying again. I told her in a day or two just to add humor. Yolanda was more of the emotional one. Every time, she said something to me, she would start crying. I told her I was just fine and we'll do some Tequila shooters again. But in her case it's a Tequila shooter. Dee came to visit me a couple of times in the day before she had to go to work. She's been pretty attentive and just plain nice. I don't like the idea of starting another relationship. Maybe Dee was. She must not be seeing anyone since she spends a lot time visiting me. I can't believe she's running around single.

About a week later, Sue Ann came in to visit me. I was glad to see her. "Hi Frankie..." Sue Ann was looking hot as usual in her tank top and shorts.

"Sue Ann. How are you, and are you okay?"

"I'm fine but I want to know that you're okay," she says in a somber tone.

"Sue Ann, I am going to be good as new. The bullet went straight through just under the shoulder blade. I was lucky." Right away she broke down into shedding a few tears and put her head on my chest.

"I'm sorry... I'm sorry." She says. "It should have been me that Rex shot. I'll tell you what. When I see him, I'll shoot his ass this time."

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“Sue Ann,” as I chuckled a little. “Don’t make me laugh. I still hurt.” She was still giving me a nice hug and that perfume wasn’t bad. To me Sue Ann was still a little daffy for her age, but I liked her as a good friend.

“Hey Sue Ann,” I said. “They’re going to get that bastard and if they don’t, we will... Okay?”

“You’re fucking right, Frankie!” She says with a girlish vengeance tone. “And after we shoot him with a shot gun about a dozen times, I would cut off his balls, but I’m sure he doesn’t have any!” Sue Ann is funny, but I’m pissed, and Rex and I aren’t through. Sue Ann had to leave and she gave me a kiss on the lips. I’m happy to say that I have not lost my virility. That brought a smile to my face.

John Mc Tarbet gave me a call on the phone and said that Jimmy Mills and Tamika Jordan, the cocktail waitress, send their best. I told him I would be by to see them soon. I was feeling better and ready to get out of this hospital. I’ve been here two weeks already and the doctors say I can go home in a couple of days. I was walking around the hospital corridor a little for the rehab exercise and had nurses giving me a message on the injured shoulder. That was the best part of therapy.

Finally the day came to check out of the hospital. My aunt Mary came to pick me up. I had to be wheeled out in a wheel chair according to hospital rules. I felt great and I was ready to take on the world again. I was given all my prescriptions, and especially the pain pills. Mary parked in front of the hospital in the patient loading zone. I saw the Thunderbird. This is great. It was a beautiful day and I feel like a new man. All of a sudden, I see a TV news truck and a reporter coming my way.

“Sir... Mr. Scorpio... Can I ask you a few questions?” says the tenacious reporter. I gave him a quick look and turned towards the car. “Mr. Scorpio... How are you feeling? Was there extensive damage from your gun shot wound?” I just kept my eyes towards the car as Mary pushed me in the wheel chair. I finally acknowledged him...

“I’m fine, thank you...and my shoulder is fine.” Ben Correa continued to try getting a statement from me.

“Mr. Scorpio, have you had anymore threats?”

“No... Sorry, I have to go now.” The news camera was aimed right

at me and I turned away from it as much as I could. I finally got into the car and rolled the window up. The interview was over.

I saw Correa tell the photographer to turn off the camera. He walked up to me in the car as Mary was getting in. He taps on my window and I gave him the 'No' sign by shaking his head slowly. He continued to talk to me through my car window.

"Mr. Scorpio... Can I talk to you off the record?" I hesitated and then rolled down the window.

"Yes." I softened up.

"I just want to know if you are okay and to let you know the cops still haven't caught Rex Huckster. Are you still in danger?"

"No Mr. Correa. It started as a bar room brawl before the shooting and Huckster got out of line with a friend of mine he used to date. So now that the cops are after him and I'm pretty sure this whole thing is over." Ben paused for a moment...

"Okay, Mr. Scorpio... I hope everything turns out for you and take care of that shoulder." His tone changed. For a news reporter, he's starting to sound human.

"Thanks, Mr. Correa." I said with a warm smile.

"Call me Ben."

"Okay Ben." Maybe he really is a compassionate reporter. Aunt Mary pulled out of the hospital parking lot and I wondered if this was going to be the end of it.

We got home and I stayed in one of the bedrooms in Mary's house. We had a talk and I wanted to move things a little quicker. Three weeks went by and I was getting around pretty good. But I was jaded and just plain bored. I couldn't go back to work yet because I needed a little more time for my shoulder to heal and not re-injure my wound. Mary went to Ted and Bobby and asked for a suggestion to help me. They suggested for her to go to a gaming store and purchased a Blackjack table for home games. Now I could practice at my pace and Mary would be the player for all hands I dealt.

As another month rolled by, I hadn't been seeing any visitors. Dee called a few times, but I told her that I wasn't ready to see anyone yet. I thanked her for the thought and asked her to let Paul and the others know that I would be in soon.

I continued my exercises, and my shoulder was back to near

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normal. One day I went to the library and got a few books on gambling. I was interested in how to cheat. There aren't too many secrets on cheating. Usually the books are written by the cheaters that got caught and banned from the casinos. The biggest challenge of cheaters came from a very upscale college in the east part of the United States that specialized in math. These future scientists and calculus geniuses were young people that learned how to beat the odds on a gaming table. They discovered the art of card counting in Blackjack. They also discovered ways from a computer to break down the odds and probabilities on each table game. However, greed had the upper hand with youth. The problem was that they weren't knowledgeable enough to know that if you are on a winning streak, the casino automatically has suspicions of you cheating.

The boys upstairs with the ceiling cameras will zero in on you. They were eventually busted and banned from all casinos. The casino executives gained more knowledge on how thieves and cheaters can beat the house. There are a lot of smart people in the world, but the majority of them really don't have a good criminal mind.

I picked up a lot of information at the library by reading different books. Cheating becomes very high tech. The casino practically welcomes cheaters, because they discover more ways that the house can be beat. They might lose a few bucks before they bust a cheater, but in the long run, they'll save millions. I checked out more books from the library and studied at home. I'm starting to feel like I already own my personal casino. Mary worked with me at home on the Blackjack table and surprised me with a roulette felt cloth and wheel for home games. I had to learn my odds because I wanted to be a know it all.

It was time for me to go back to work, but I didn't want to be a bartender anymore. I talked to Ted and Bobby and they saw my desire and goal to be a casino supervisor. They made the decision to put me on the Blackjack table, and I was excited. It was the after midnight shift and it wasn't too busy for a small locals casino. After a couple of months, I was put on the craps table and eventually on the roulette wheel of fortune.

The bartenders, Paul, Dee, and Sue Ann didn't get to see me much as I was working a bad shift. In the very early morning about 3 a.m. to about 7 a.m., there was hardly anyone in the casino. I was bored, but I

felt I wasn't learning all the techniques of the business. It was just a little too slow for me. But I had to also learn to be patient.

Two months later, Ted gave me the opportunity to work the morning shift which began at 10 a.m. until late afternoon. There was way more action on this shift. I was getting the experience I needed. I got real good and so far I haven't come across any problems with any players except the drunken ones who had a habit of spilling their drinks on the game table. The pit boss got on my case occasionally because I screwed up on a payoff or miscounted the player's cards. Some players would actually break 21 on a hit, and instead of throwing their cards over on a bust, they would slide them under their chips, as if they made their hand. I was so proud of dealing so fast that when I busted, I started paying the players automatically. I got caught by the pit boss again, who is supposed to see behind his head.

It took three more months but I was finally going to the night shift which was prime time. You had the weekend crowd for a long night, and they liked to drink up a storm. We had entertainment which kept a lot of the customers around and partying all night long. I saw more of Dee because now we have the same shift. So on my breaks, I would stop by to say hello.

"Well stranger," she says with a grin. "How are the gamblers treating you?"

"I love this business, Dee. The tips are pretty good, and I meet a lot of interesting people." I thought for a moment, "By the way, I want to thank you for the time you came to see me in the hospital, and I apologize to you for not letting you see me at home while I was recuperating. I was just a little depressed and I would have been bad company. Please forgive me?" I said with a big smile.

"Okay. I'll forgive you under one condition..."

"Uh ohhh. What?"

"You let me cook you a welcome back dinner. After all you protected one of us in our hour of danger." Dee was the sweetest girl.

"It's a deal," I said. "But I'll bring the wine."

"That sounds real nice, Frankie. How about Wednesday? You and I have off Wednesday and Thursday." She was real perky for the occasion.

"That would be perfect. Thanks Dee." I was attracted to Dee in a way I wasn't sure of. Sue Ann and I could have a roll in the hay and

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that would be the end of it. But Dee was more matured and down to earth. I really didn't want to get involved with anyone, but Dee is hard to say no to. Those great legs really turn me on.

I went back to the Blackjack table and finished with another good night. I made a lot of tip money, but it really didn't matter to me. I had nearly a half million dollars in a safety deposit box. So far, I have listened to my uncles and aunt... 'Don't be pissing the money around, because then you are a mark.' It's great to have family that's been around the block.

I got off my shift and Bobby wanted to see me up in his office. I hope nothing was wrong.

"Hi Frankie... How are things working out for you at the tables?"

"Fantastic Bobby... I can't believe the things that I have learned from everyone here. The other dealers share their experience with me and the pit manager is pretty sharp. I guess the rumors are true that they can see behind their head." Bobby laughed along with me.

"Have they caught the bastard that shot you?"

"No sir. Not yet. But they'll find him," I said.

"Frankie, Ted and I are happy with you and we appreciate your enthusiasm for the business." Uh ohhh... Here it comes, I thought. "We want you to start floor supervising on the mid morning shift and see how you handle yourself. The pit manager and others will be watching you and it's a very important position. You will be responsible for the dealers at your assigned tables. You will learn how to handle customers that need to take money directly out of their bank accounts. You need to know when to cut someone off if they had too much to drink. If you have a high roller at your table, you need to know how to treat him and make sure he loses the money honestly—on both ends. Remember, they are out to beat the hell out of you. They will do everything they can to beat a buck from the casino. Are you prepared to handle this emotionally and maturely?"

Is this the big talk by the Commander before we go to battle? "Yes sir... It's what I want and I do have some experience dealing with gamblers back home." I was excited.

Bobby laughed a little again.

"Okay, we'll start you in a couple of weeks. We have a supervisor leaving and you'll be taking his place. Good luck my friend and holler if you need help." Bobby and Ted are two of the nicest casino owners.

Aunt Mary was right about them. I wonder if Ted still wants her. I should get them together. Now I'm starting to act like a pimp.

Not only am I on a high in life, but my shoulder is healing a lot quicker than I thought it would. I felt like a new man and I was going to reach my goal. Everything I've learned from the streets in L.A. and the education from my family about handling life, to confrontations with the mob. It's time to graduate. I thanked Bobby and we shook hands and I went home.

Aunt Mary was cooking dinner when I got home. I told her about my promotion and she already knew it was going to happen. After all, she still owns a percentage of the Nugget Junction Casino.

"Well, Frankie... You're on your way. I want you to be careful in every way. You are still incognito and you have to live that way for a while. I'm still going to be in touch with your uncles, and we'll keep an eye on every move that Anthony Martinez and Randall De LaParra make. Remember, they have a syndicate and it's related to drugs and gambling." Mary was always pretty cautious.

"I understand." I thought perhaps they'll forget about me in time. But if they hurt anyone in the family, I will risk everything to put them in permanent hell!!! Just talking about them, gets me extremely angry. "I'm still livid over Michele, Aunt Mary."

"I know you are, dear. I know you are. But now you have a new road to your dream. I think you will succeed in your journey." Mary was encouraging. We ate dinner and I was feeling pretty good.

"I don't have to go into work tomorrow, Mary. So I'm going to a new club at the 'Gold Rock' by the strip. I just feel like going out by myself. Uh, do you mind if I borrow your Thunderbird?" She stared at me for a second.

"Okay, but remember, you're still on medication, so you better not drink."

"I won't, I won't." I said convincingly as I got up and gave her a big hug. I was riding high.

"By the way," she says. "When are you getting a new car? Nothing flashy, you know."

"I will this week. The Buick is getting to be an eye sore for my new position at the casino. Well Mary, I gotta go now." I rushed off to my room, cleaned up and headed for the strip.

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It was nearly the end of summer, and it was still very hot. There were still a lot of tourists around, even for the weekday. It was about 9:40 p.m. and the clubs on the Strip were about to start jumping. I still had to be careful because I didn't want to hurt my shoulder, and I hoped that there wouldn't be any boxing matches for me tonight.

I arrived at the Gold Rock club and there was a good crowd dancing. There were about five different dance floors in the club. That drew a lot of people. I was going to have a good time without getting drunk. I ordered a cola to get me some quick caffeine. There were many hot babes in mini-skirts. Some chicks wore extra tight jeans with those tank tops that exposed their stomachs, let alone their belly buttons. The music was good and I just enjoyed watching the people. I danced a couple of times with some outrageous girls, but I wasn't sure if they knew what planet they were on. I had been there a couple of hours already and I thought about going to another club. I was standing at the bar and all of a sudden... a girl's hands were across my eyes.

"Well... Can you guess who this is?" Whoever it was had a familiar scent of perfume. I started to ask questions. "Are you over three feet tall?"

She laughed and said, "No." Good, I thought. She was humorous.

"Are you a nun?" I asked.

"Yes I am. Turn around you handsome priest." As I turned around, I stared for a moment and I wasn't sure who she was.

"Ah, it's me... Jenifer."

"Jenifer?" She did look a little familiar.

"Busty Candy... Glitter Gulch... The blonde... We smoked pot..." She was wondering if I ever remembered.

"Oh yeah... Oh my god. How could I forget you? What's it been? A year...?"

"I can't remember, but you never called. Was I a bad lay?" I looked around if anyone was watching or listening...

"No... I think... Ha!" I gave her a hug and a quick kiss. "What are you doing here? Have you been here long?" She looked like she had a pretty good buzz going.

"I'm here with a couple of my friends and out just having a good time." She likes the rhythm of the music according to her body moves. I guess she's used to that since its part of her job being a topless dancer. "Come on, let's dance," she blurts out. We jumped out onto

the dance floor, and I actually started having a good time. She was a doll whether she was a blonde or brunette.

“Hey...” I said. “How did you get in here? You’re only 19.”

“No I’m not... and hush... I had a birthday.”

“So, now you’re 20?”

“Yeah... Where’s my wet birthday kiss?” Jenifer asks as she’s just dancing like a free spirit and getting noticed by a dozen guys at the bar that are natural horn dogs.

The dance ended and one of her girlfriends came up to her and said they were going to the club across the street, and invited her to come along. She said she was going to stay a little longer. Her friends then said they would be back to get her later. They left. They were also foxes that were looking for action.

“Come on Frankie. Let’s get some fresh air.” She grabs my hand and drags me out to the parking lot. “Have you got a match?” she says.

“Yeah, I just grabbed a souvenir book of matches from the Gold Rock.” I gave them to her. She pulls out a joint and lights up. I looked around and it was pretty quiet. She takes a few hits and automatically hands it to me. I looked around again and what the hell... I took a hit. I can’t drink, so why not. She took a couple of more hits and gave it back to me.

“Okay, one more.” I said as she puts it on a roach clip. We blew it out and just began some chit chat.

“How’s Vegas treating you Frankie?” Jenifer was feeling no pain.

“Well, Candy... I mean Jeni. Uhh, Jen...” We both start cracking up so she must have had the good stuff. “What was I saying? Oh yeah... In the short time I’ve been out here, I’ve sort of been in the fast lane. I’ve been a bartender, a card dealer, and now I want to take over a casino.” She lets out a big laugh, and put her head on my shoulder.

“Can I be your mistress?” I wasn’t sure how to take that laugh. I think she had one too many hits of the doobie.

“Sure you can Jeni... I mean Jen.” We both laugh again.

“Frankie... Let’s go to my place. I don’t have to work tonight.” She got pretty affectionate with me. We kissed and she slowly put her hand into my pants. What a turn on from a girl that just turned 20 years old. Who’s got time to go back to her place? I thought for a moment and looked around the under lit parking lot. There were plenty of cars around and we were in the far corner. Her tongue was so hot and

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steamy in my mouth that she was in control of my mind. I kissed her hard on the mouth as well as all over her face. I noticed she had a Japanese tattoo on the back of her neck that was similar to my last love, Michele. I got a good buzz on from the pot and I licked the tattoo on her neck. Now, who was I making love with in my mind?

Jen was panting as I raised the back end of her mini skirt. I grabbed her sweet ass cheeks, and put the squeeze to both of them. She raised the half top blouse that was practically a see through, and of course, no bra. There were those beautiful bodacious tits with cherry nipples on flames. Well, maybe in my little creative mind... God, this girl is a major turn on. I would've ripped off her G-string, but she wasn't wearing anything. She unzipped my pants and grabbed me. I opened my eyes still looking if anyone was around.

We finally went for it. She wrapped her legs around me and my shoulder was not a factor at this point. She was making those noises that girls do that are about to cum. I had two things that occupied my mind; Jen and the security guards. I think we were both starting to reach our moment of ecstasy. All of a sudden I heard the security guard walking through the parking lot. Jen didn't care. She continued to pant heavy. I put my mouth on hers to quiet her. The security guard was about 15 yards away from us and I whispered to Jen to be quiet. Her eyes were shut tight, and I went into a crouch. This was not fun and Jen wasn't the lightest person on earth.

The security guard looked over as if he heard something. I was still in Jen in a crouched position. Just then, two guys started arguing in the parking lot about 50-60 yards away. The security guard ran over to stop the confrontation. At that moment, Jen let out a big sigh as she reached her climax. Then I whispered in her ear... "Hey, what about me?" She opened her eyes and looked deep into mine. Then whispered something in my ear and passionately kissed me. That was it. I did my thing.

We slowly got up and regrouped. Man, she had a beautiful tanned body with no tan lines. We walked back into the club and there were her girl friends looking for her. I needed to go home.

"I gotta go Jen." I said that like I just had the biggest work out of my life.

"Okay Frankie. Are you going to call me this time?" She says in a seductive voice.

“Oh Yeah...” She gave me her number one more time. I gave her a kiss and a hug. I went home and crashed into my bed. What a night. Apparently, my wounded shoulder was healed. Somebody’s watching over me. If this is any indication of my future in Las Vegas, I’m in for a roller coaster ride.

Chapter 19

Suspicious and Lollipops

“How are you doing Randall?” Anthony sits on the chair next to his bed.

“I’m a fucking mess, Tony! The mother fuckers out there will start calling me Al Capone with these fucking scars on my face!” He throws a drinking glass across the room. Anthony just stares knowing that he can’t do anything to help his brother who lost his legs, and has permanent scars on the right side of his face and forehead.

“I’ll get the nurse to get you another glass of juice or whatever you want.” Randall shouts into the air.

“I don’t want a fucking glass of anything! I’ve been in this bed forever. I can’t go anywhere looking like this! Why can’t you find that fucking Santos?!!! He didn’t disappear off the face of the earth!” Randall was losing his mind and patience.

Anthony walked over to the window and looked out towards the ocean... “I have everyone looking for Frank Santos. We’ve infiltrated our men into the places where his family socializes such as local bars, and the old neighborhoods. We tapped into the phone line of his mother’s apartment. She doesn’t know where he’s at. He could be dead for all we know.”

“Oh bull shit!!!!” We would’ve heard about the funeral, unless he was killed at sea!” De LaParra screams. Anthony lost his temper and

screams back at Randall...

"God damn it, Randall!!! Why did you have to kill his girlfriend?!!! This would've never happened! Sometimes I wonder if the drugs you've taken have fried your fucking mind!" Randall just laid back deep into his pillow.

"She was my bitch! He got in the way and he not only stole my fucking money, he stole our fucking drugs! \$25 million fuck'n bucks! We should just kill his fucking family! His mother... cousins... uncles... aunts... and whoever else he's related too!" Anthony gave him a long stare.

"You know Randy... Sometimes, even you scare me. There's a code or understanding, if you will... Our generation is from the old neighborhood where we had to be in gangs if you wanted to survive. The only time we merged together is when the fucking L.A. cops beat the hell out of us for just being Mexicans, Cubans, South Americans, or from any other Hispanic country! We did what we could to survive. This is a different generation we're up against, and Santos falls into that category. Even though his family is from East L.A., he fucked with us! Not his mother, cousins, uncles, or aunts! Now take a fucking tranquilizer and shut the fuck up!" Anthony gets his coat and starts to leave.

"Now where you going?" shouts Randall in more of a controlled tone.

"I'm going to the members meeting, and then I have to go see a doctor."

"What's wrong with you?"

"Nothing... I gotta get you a pair of legs so I can get you the hell out of my house!"

Anthony left in anger. Randall became more frustrated and started banging on the bed with both fist and screaming at the top of his lungs.

Anthony Martinez held a meeting at his usual place at the Ritz hotel on the beach. The members were frustrated that business has slowed down. Martinez felt something was wrong in the atmosphere of his syndicate's meeting.

"Okay, gentlemen... Let's hear it. I sense ill feelings amongst you." Martinez stands at the head of the boardroom table. After a moment of silence from everyone, Anthony sat down and talked more gently to them. "Okay, let's try it again... What's wrong?" Sal

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Valencia spoke up for the members.

“Anthony... We have a problem. We feel that you have put too much time into finding Frank Santos. We are falling behind on getting the merchandise and distributing it. We need just about every man you have put on this personal vendetta of Randall. Forgive us, but we all want to get vengeance on anyone who hurts our family. But since we lost the Angel Snow... worth millions, we have to move on and recoup our losses.”

Martinez stood quiet for a while as he looked at all members in the eyes. “Sal... You’re from East Los Angeles. Aren’t you related to the Santos family?” Sal was taken back for a moment.

“Anthony... You know I was part of his uncle’s gang nearly 40 years ago. I don’t even know this kid, Frank Santos. I became part of your organization back then, and I’m still here.”

“Yes you are, Sal... Yes you are.” Anthony paused for a few seconds. “Do all of you feel the same?” The members reluctantly nodded their heads.

“Okay gentlemen... You are absolutely right. I let my personal feelings interrupt the progress of our business. I apologize to all the members.” Everyone was relieved to hear Anthony say exactly what they wanted to hear. Martinez conducted the rest of the meeting, and they concentrated on their drug and mortgage business. The meeting was over in about two hours, and everyone started to go their way. Anthony asked Sal Valencia to wait back.

“Sal, can you sit with me for a minute?” Sal was a little concerned about the conversation he was about to have.

“Sure Tony... What can I do for you?”

“Have you kept in touch with any of the old gang? You were pretty tight with Maria Santos and her brothers.”

“Oh yeah, Tony, but that was years ago. I’ve been too busy with our family here, and I have a different life now. It’s been years.” Sal was getting a little more nervous.

Anthony continues... “So you haven’t seen anyone who associates with Frank Santos?”

“Jesus Christ, Tony... I joined the organization over twenty-five years ago. Look at me... I’m still here. I’ve made my home in San Juan Capistrano Beach. East L.A. is in another world as far as I’m concerned. What’s on your mind, Tony?” Anthony paused again for a

moment like he was in a trance. Then snapped out of it...

"Oh, nothing Sal... I was just trying to figure out how Santos disappeared off the face of the earth and we haven't heard anything about him... and it's been a long time. So I figure he's still alive. Maria and her family were always tight. Hey Sal, weren't you dating Maria's sister, Mercy? She was one of Mary Torres' cousins."

"Come on Tony... That was centuries ago."

"Say, you don't know where Mary disappeared to?" Martinez was getting too inquisitive.

"I heard after her father disowned her for getting pregnant, that she left the state, and I haven't heard a thing about her. Come on Tony, I got an old lady of my own. We're in a new decade." Sal tries ending the conversation.

"Well Salomon, I guess I was just thinking the family never changes their way of life.

"Yeah Tony, but they're all getting old." Sal chuckles a little... "Hey look at us Tony... I don't think we can run the track that fast anymore...Ha! Remember we kicked that gang's ass from the Gardens in East L.A. way back before the Watts riot? Man, wasn't that the good old days?" Sal let's out a little laugh again. Anthony has a stiff grin on his face... then breaks out into laughter himself.

"That's right Salomon. We kicked their asses almost back to San Salvador via Puerto Rico...Ha!" Martinez thinks for a moment... "Sal, let's get together next weekend and have a nice dinner. We'll dine at a fancy restaurant in San Juan and drink ourselves silly."

"Sure Tony, anytime. Even at our age, we can leave the ol' ladies at home and rent some young honeys... eh? Ha!

"Good night Sal and give my best to Luz." Anthony walks Sal to the conference door and gives him a hug. He takes another deep look at Sal as he leaves. Anthony goes to the phone and makes a call.

The next day, I was sleeping late since I didn't have to go to work. I woke up a couple of times, and looked at the clock. Then I turned back over and went to sleep again. About 1:15 in the afternoon, the phone rang. I answered in a voice that was half asleep. "Hello..."

"Hello, Frankie? This is Dee... Are you awake?"

"Oh, hi Dee... Yeah, I was up earlier and I am just taking another snooze. What's up?"

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"I was just confirming of our dinner date tonight. I was going to make you dinner here at my place. Are we still on?" Dee was in a spunky mood. I had to think for a minute...

"Dinner... Oh yeah..."

"Did you forget, Frankie?" Her voice started taking a turn for suspicion.

"No, No... I'm sorry. I'm just a little groggy. I took a sleeping pill last night. Yeah, I'm ready for that dinner." I think I pulled that one off. Her voice turned back to a perky mood.

"Great! Is seven o'clock good for you, Frankie?"

"Oh, sure... That's perfect. I'll see you tonight. Bye." Man, what a hangover I've got. I better sleep the rest of the day since I gotta go out again. And that's exactly what I did... My day is shot. This town is already wearing me down.

I arrived at Dee's house at 7:09 p.m. They always like to keep us waiting, so I thought I would do it. I rang the door bell.

"Hi Frankie... Come on in." Dee gave me a hug and I handed her the six pack of Guinness Beer. She gave me that quick surprise look.

"Oh... Thanks Frankie. This should go good with the steaks," Dee says in a skeptical tone. I had to take a double look... Was there something I missed in that sentence? She showed me the way to her den with a nice fireplace burning. The music was on and I popped open a Guinness.

"Are you having one, Dee?"

"Thanks for the offer, Frankie. But I started drinking chardonnay a bit earlier, and I better stick with it," she casually says as she takes another sip of wine. "So tell me... How is your shoulder? Has it healed?"

"Well, it's still a little sore, but I'm exercising everyday." I don't know why I said that. We continued to talk about nothing. She would occasionally check on the steaks and kept bringing on the beers for me. She was drinking the wine at a good pace. She wanted to know more about me.

"Frankie... What is it you want from being a Blackjack dealer?" I thought it was time I was a little honest with her. It wouldn't hurt for her to know my goals.

"Well Dee... I want to learn everything about running a casino.

I've sort of been training on my own, with the help of Bobby and Ted. They're always willing to answer any questions that I have."

"Yes... Ted and Bobby are great guys. I've known them both for a lot of years."

"How did you come to have known them so long?" I was curious.

"They're friends of my mother," explains Dee while still sipping the wine.

"Really... How does your mom know them? Did she work there?" She chuckles a little.

"No... She works at a TV news station here in town. She used to be a field reporter running around town gathering the news. But she's been at news 7 for so long that she became an anchor on the evening news. She's been there for almost 20 years."

"Wow, a news anchor. I've never really met a news anchor before. It sounds like an adventurous career." Finally we're talking about something that's of interest. Dee was happy to know that I found the news business interesting.

"Perhaps sometime I could take you to the station and show you around. Would you like that, Frankie?"

"Sure I would. I'll try to catch your mom on the evening news when I get a chance. What's her name?"

"Raylene Hutton." I really didn't know who she was since I haven't watched the news lately. The timer went off in the kitchen. "Dinner's ready Frankie... Hope you're hungry." What guy my age isn't hungry after a few beers? We went into the dining room which was a very romantic setting. The candles... the soft music and... well, you know the rest.

She came out with these great looking steaks, which were char broiled. She had the salad, some vegetables, and of course, another round of Guinness.

"Is everything okay, Frank?" she asked in a soft voice. Am I being seduced here? After last night, a man's gotta know his limitation.

"Everything is perfect, Dee... I can't believe you're not married. You know how to place a table setting."

"Thank you Frankie. I was married once, but he got involved with a showgirl and that was that!" Dee seemed like the break up didn't faze her at all. "Actually, I just lied to you," as she continued.

"What..? What do you mean, you lied?"

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"My husband ran off with a show boy. It was years ago. I thought his favorite place to gamble was at the 'Silver Slipper' casino on the strip. My mistake! He was going to the show, 'Boylesque'... a review show of gay men. The bastard was bi-sexual!" She drinks a little more wine. It's amazing how alcohol can make you talk a lot.

"You married a gay guy?" Actually I have gay friends, so it didn't bother me. But to be married to one had to be shocking when she found out. "How did you find out?"

"He came home and told me. Oh, I went crazy for a while, but I survived it."

I had to ask... "Whatever happened to him after he left you?"

"They moved to Paris because that's where his boyfriend is from. I don't want to talk about him anymore. It was long ago." Dee poured herself another glass of wine. She hardly touched her dinner. I was sort of starting to get a little buzz from the beer, but she was passing me up. Dee is a good looking girl with great legs, but for whatever reason, I don't feel that wild sexual passion about her. I better get another beer.

"Come on Frankie... Let's go back to the den and relaxed by the fireplace. Did you like your dinner?" She says with a little touch of slur.

"It was great sweetheart." I thought for a moment as she was sitting close to me. "Dee... What do you do for entertainment and excitement?"

"I've been to a million places living in this town with my mother. It gets kind of boring doing the same old nightclub routine. My mother likes to think she's still thirty years old. She loves to go to media parties and then comes home very late at night... if she comes home at all. She just doesn't quit. And she knows so many celebrities and casino people, that I don't know how she has the strength to work."

"You mean she goes to a lot of parties with casino executives and stars?" I got interested right away. Dee got up to fix herself another glass of wine. I was a little full from the dinner we just had.

"My mother is a big on socializing with the upper class of people. She got where she's at by knowing the right people. Oh, my mother is a good journalist, but you still have to have help in this town, and she knew how to do it."

"What about you? What do you want? You've met a lot of

powerful people in this town. Why are you a bartender?" I was really curious about why Dee didn't seem to care. Now she was getting pretty high from all the wine.

"Because it's what I want, Frankie... I am real happy at the Nugget and I've made a lot of real friends, not like my mom has though... She knows a lot of phonies that'll stick the big one right in your back! Hey, you want to meet my mom? I think she would like you" Dee says with wide open eyes.

"I would love to meet your mom." I was thinking that this could be a big step for me. "When could I meet her?"

"You will... You will. I'll call her tomorrow." Dee started snuggling up to me, and as tired as I was, I responded.

Then she got up and dimmed the lights. She came back and sat real close to me. She was wearing this nice sheik dress with a slit on the side. The way she was sitting with her legs crossed, she exposed one of the most perfect thighs that I haven't seen in a long time. Oh what the hell... Why not...? We started kissing passionately and I went right to the breast. She started making that heavy breathing noise, and then she started to unzip my pants and was going right to the main event. Like any other logical male in this situation, I let her do what she wanted with me. She started fondling me and slowly put her head between my legs. I was in for another ride. All of a sudden she stopped. She stared at me for a moment... She was still a little buzzed from the wine, but I just sat back and closed my eyes. Then she started crying a little and I didn't know what to say. All of a sudden she popped her head up and ran to the bathroom. She was barfing her head off for the next ten minutes.

Well, I had a nice dinner and conversation anyway. I knocked on the bathroom door to see if she was okay.

"Dee... Dee? Are you all right?" It was quiet for a moment, and then I opened the door. She was laying her head on the porcelain toilet with her dinner all over it. I turned on the shower and put her under it. I think she was starting to sober up. She started yelling a little bit as I had the cold water running on her.

"What are you doing?!!! What's going on?!!! Turn it off!" Dee shouted as she was coming around. After about a minute, I got a towel and put it around her. We walked into her bedroom.

"Dee, are you feeling better?" I sat her on the bed and got a couple

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of more towels. I had my arm around her and she was sobering up fast.

"I'm sorry," she says. "I feel like shit!"

"Well then, you look like you feel... ha." I was trying to put some humor into this.

"Thanks, Frankie. I'm still not feeling so good." She hung her head down.

"Listen... I want you to go to bed and rest all day tomorrow. I'm going to do the same." I gave her a hug and 'the kiss' was definitely out. I laid her down on top of the bed. "I'm going now, and I want you to take off your wet clothes and get into bed. I'll call you tomorrow to see how you're doing, okay?"

"Okay... I'm sorry." She just keeps apologizing for what we all have been through. I went home, and again, this Vegas life is wearing me down, but I love the excitement.

It was about 2:15 in the afternoon the next day and I was still in bed. Thank god I had the day off. The phone rings... "Hello..."

This is Dee. I want to apologize for last night. I usually don't get like that." There she goes again...apologizing.

"Dee, it's okay. Nothing's wrong. We've all been there. Are you feeling okay?"

"Oh sure... I threw up again after you left and I got it all out of my system. Listen Frankie, I talked to my mother today and she's doing a newscast tonight. Would you like to come and see it?" I really liked this idea...

"Sure I would, Dee. What time?" I perked up.

"Well, she has the 6 p.m. news to do... Do you want to get there about 5 or 5:15?"

"That sounds perfect! I'll come over about 4 o'clock so we aren't in a rush." I was excited. I was always interested in the news business. I just never pursued it after the Navy, since I was the ship journalist. Dee was sounding a lot better.

"I'll see you then, Frankie."

I got up and showered, and I was starving. Later I went down stairs to see my Aunt Mary. As usual, she always had something on the stove cooking.

"Hi Mary... How's your day?"

"How's *your* day? She seemed more interested in my night with Dee.

"We had a nice dinner. And today she invited me to meet her mom at the news station."

"So you're meeting the mother already, huh?" asked Mary as she was fixing me a plate of chorizo and eggs...a favorite Mexican dish.

"Don't get any ideas Aunt Mary. I was a journalist in the Navy, and I was always interested in broadcast news. It just didn't work out for me."

"Well, be careful of her mother, Raylene. She's a player with other players."

"You seem to know her, Mary. Do you like her or not?"

"Well, I'm not a personal friend of hers, but I have met her at a few parties. That's how I met her daughter Dee. Then she came to the Nugget to work for us. Dee was uncomfortable in the high society lifestyle that her mom lives in. They're pretty much two different people." Mary's been in Vegas a long time and she sure knows a lot of people's personalities. I continued to scarf up my late lunch.

"Well, I'll tell you Mary... I just would like to see a live newscast and meet people... That's all."

"Like I said, be careful with all this socializing you're doing, because you aren't out of the woods yet with the mob in California." I paused for a moment...

"Yeah, I know. I'll be careful. You know how motivated I am to learn the gaming business. I just want to meet influential people."

"Frankie, Ted and Bobby have been in this business practically all their lives. Someday they will have to retire and sell the casino, or continue to own it and have someone they trust to run it." Was Mary giving me a hint about something?

"I understand what you're saying. Wow... I've never thought about it that way. Not to change the subject, but I need a new car. Uh, what do you think I should get?" I was hoping that she would say an Excalibur or Ferrari, or something like it.

"You know what your uncles said; nothing flashy or expensive." Mary is usually level headed.

"Then what..?" I asked.

"We'll go to the dealerships on Sahara Ave. later this week and see what we can do. You haven't taken any of that mob money out of the safety deposit box, have you?" Mary got a little nervous.

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“No. We have enough money in the basement safe.” Mary was showing a little relief. “Mary, do you not trust me?”

“Yes dear, I trust you, but I also worry, because I’ve dealt with people like Martinez and De LaParra before, and they are nobody to screw around with. Sorry...”

“That’s okay, Mary. I thank you for watching out for me.” I got up and gave her a kiss on the cheek, and then put my plate in the sink.

“I gotta go, auntie. I have to pick up Dee at four o’clock. We’re going to the TV News station. Uh, I was just wondering if I could use the T-bird?” God, I asked her like I was going to get my tooth pulled. She looked at me for a moment...always torturing me with a long questionable look.

“Okay,” she says. “Are you going to go out later?”

“No... Maybe get a bite to eat, but that’s all. We’re just going to sit in on the 6 p.m. newscast, that’s it.”

“All right, Frankie... I’m sorry if I’m protective of that car, but I’ve kept it in mint condition and this is a bad town to drive in. For some reason, everyone seems to leave the casino mad...or stinking drunk.”

“I understand, Mary. Thank you for trusting me.” My aunt is so cool.

I arrived at Dee’s house, and as I came up her driveway, she stood and waited for me on the porch. She was looking pretty good considering what she went through last night.

“Well Dee, you look pretty nice. The hangover all gone?” I grinned a bit. She gave me a peck on the lips and smiled a little.

“I am so sorry, Frankie.”

“Ah, don’t even think about it. Are you ready to go?” I said in a cheery tone.

“Yes, but I just want to warn you about my mother. She will be a little cautious about you at first because I’m still the protected baby. Just go with the flow and don’t let her hit on you.”

“What?” I couldn’t believe she said that. I felt that her mother may be way older than me.

“Not to worry Dee. Frankie baby is in control.” We laughed and got into the car and went to News 7 TV station. I was pretty excited.

Chapter 20

Whatso're We Perpetrate... We are Steered by fate

We arrived at the TV station on time and we entered the main office. The receptionist recognized Dee right away. “Hi, Dee... Your mother is expecting you. I’ll ring for her.”

As we waited for a minute, I was noticing the photos of all the news people on the wall. There were young and older reporters, but they all looked good. I also saw Ben Correa’s picture. I guess he’s for real. I see a lady through the glass doors coming up the hallway. If that’s Dee’s mom, I can see what she’s talking about. Her mom does look youthful...and hot.

“Hi honey.” She steps towards Dee and gives her a hug.

“Mom, this is Frank Scorpio. He works with me at the Nugget. Frankie, this is my mom, Raylene Hutton.” She gave me a pleasurable look as if Dee did real well in hooking up with me. “Nice to meet you, Frank.”

“Nice to meet you, Mrs. Hutton.” I extended my hand towards her.

“That’s Mz.” She shook my hand and held it in a different way than I’ve shaken older women’s hands before. Maybe it was just my imagination. “Please Frank...or is it Frankie?”

“Whatever you like”, I said. She definitely had sex appeal.

“Okay... I’ll call you Frankie and you call me Raylene. Is that a deal?”

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"It's a deal Raylene." I like her already.

"Honey, I'm going on the air in about 45 minutes and I have to go over my scripts. Now Frankie, Dee practically grew up around here, so I'll let her show you around and then she'll take you into the studio and I want you both to get comfortable and enjoy the news." The lady has class.

"Thank you Raylene, and break a leg...or something like that." I felt a little stupid saying that.

"I'm afraid I did that many years ago, Frankie." She smiled and went back into the news room.

"Frankie, were you flirting with my mother?" Dee asked.

"What?" I got defensive right away. "What are you talking about? She's a lot older!" But in my mind..., Yeah, I'd do her.

"Well don't get mad, I was just kidding," says Dee with a grin.

"I'm not mad." Then I gave a little chuckle. "So, are we ready for the big tour?"

We went into the large TV station and there were a lot of staff people running around getting ready for the news. Dee knew quite a few people and I had a chance to meet some of the field reporters. Then we went into the control room where the director prepares and directs the news cast. There must have been about eight people in there, each having a particular job to do. There's no way I could handle the technical directors job. There must have been a thousand buttons he had to push. I saw a department what they call 'Master Control'. This is where the engineers control whatever goes out onto the airwaves. It was too high tech for me with all the satellite monitors getting feeds from almost anywhere in the nation. The audio room looked just as confusing with all the buttons on the audio board. Next, Dee took me into the editing room where the news video clips are prepared for broadcasting. That was something.

"How do you like it so far, Frankie?" Dee liked being the host of this little tour.

"I think it's a real kick, Dee. I've always had an interest in this business. I should have come to Vegas years ago."

"It's almost time to go into the studio. We have just a few more minutes, so I'll show you the TV cameras we use." I was really having a good time here at the station. Dee continued to give me the grand tour and introduced me to the camera operators. The news anchors

entered the studio as it was just about time to go on the air.

“Hi Frankie, are you enjoying the special tour with Dee?” asks Raylene as she sits on the anchors chair.

“I am having a wonderful time Raylene, and Dee is a gracious host.”

“Come here. I want you to meet my co-anchor, Mitch Stockwell... Mitch, this is Dee’s friend, Frank Scorpio.”

“Nice to meet you Frank... Hope you like the show.” Mitch shakes my hand and I go back to my seat with Dee— and a little boy’s smile on my face.

The clock struck 6 p.m. and the television news broadcast was on the air... Raylene was very professional and had control of the newscast. I was impressed. I see that there is a high rate of crime in Clark County. There was a lot of news about politicians and nightclub owners. People are missing. But yet... Las Vegas is still a big world tourist attraction. It was an hour show and it was real interesting on how the newscast went as prepared. I was watching Raylene in action. She was very impressive... and somehow became more attractive to me.

After the show was over, Raylene came up to Dee and me, and invited us to have dinner with her. She was on a lunch break until 10 p.m. Dee and I accepted her invitation. She drove us over in her Lexus to the ‘Bootlegger’ restaurant on the strip. There was a touch of the old Vegas style restaurant and cocktail lounge. The carpet was rustic red and the wallpaper was also velvet red with real oak wood trim. You could feel the ambience of the good ol’ days in the low key lit room. As we were escorted to our table, Raylene seemed to know many of the employees. I find out that she comes here a lot for dinner.

“So Frankie, have you been here before?” Raylene asks as she waves to the cocktail waitress.

“No, this is my first time, and it’s impressive.”

I panned my sights across the whole room. “It has a nice style... like it’s the place to be all the time and meet with your friends,” I said in a sentimental way. We sat ourselves in the velvet cushioned booth. Dee finally jumped into the conversation.

“My mom’s been coming here for years. This is where the old gang, so to speak, like to meet and talk about anything and everyone... ha.”

“That’s right dear. Most of the restaurants they build today are a bunch of fast in and out chains. There’s only one Bootlegger

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restaurant, and it's been here for nearly 30 years.

Sometimes we have great entertainers come in from the rat pack days and perform with the pianist. Some of them performed with Sinatra and Martin. Sonny King still comes in occasionally. Sammy Davis Jr. was a big fan of this place and used to come in and party with the crowd." Raylene continues to think of the good times here... "Louis Prima and Alan King always came in after their show on the strip. I'll never forget the time that Elvis and his band, the Jordanaires, came in late after a show at the International Hotel. He loved to sing and gave a performance with a couple of songs at 3:30 in the morning. There were so many performers. I'll never forget Toti Fields and Sophie Tucker. It was like a family of talented people. Yes... I really miss those good times."

I listened to Raylene as she was reminiscing from a great era. I wasn't there, but I have heard all about it from my parents and other relatives. "Do any of the Vegas performers ever come here anymore?" I asked.

"Oh, yes. Usually on weekends we'll have a few... Phyllis McGuire loved the piano man we had. She would do a beautiful solo as he played 'Sincerely'.

As I listened to Raylene talk, I only wished that I had been old enough to enjoy those days. "So Dee... Did you come here a lot?" I had to ask her since she was being quiet most of the time.

"I did when I turned 21 because my parents spent a lot of time here. But not as much because my crowd is a little younger, and I'm in a different world when it comes to music. I really don't know the older entertainers like mom does." Raylene jumps right in...

"Careful dear, you're going to slip and give away my age." Now I jumped right in...

"As far as age is concerned, Raylene, it's a state of mind and I admire all the people that love to live." I think I got her attention.

"Well, you said that profoundly, Frank. Dee always had good taste in men...as long as they liked girls." My eyes widened as I thought... "That was a shot".

"Mom... Stop. I told Frankie about my ex." At that moment the waitress brought our drinks, and we went ahead and ordered our dinner. Dee didn't like to talk too much in front of her mother. I wondered if there was a conflict between them. They seem to get along. Raylene

suddenly had a quick thought.

“Dee... Remember I told you about Carissa having a get together for her birthday this weekend?”

“Yes mother, you wanted me to come, but I still don’t know if I can.” Dee sounded like she really didn’t want to go.

“Well honey, I want you to go because there will be a lot of important people there for the governor’s campaign, as well as it is her birthday.”

“I’m not sure, mom. A bunch of politicians really bugs me.”

“You’re also invited Frank. Are you into politics?” Raylene sounded like she wanted me to say yes.

“Yes, I am... But I really don’t know the politicians in this town or state.” Actually I can’t stand politics. Ever since the John F. Kennedy assassination, my dad stopped voting as well as a lot of the post war Veterans and baby boomers. I remember the assassination like it was yesterday. I was only a kid... Raylene continued to persuade Dee.

“Dee, I want you to bring Frank to meet Carissa and the Mayor, and also the Lieutenant Governor.”

“You mean all those people will be there?” I asked.

“Yes, and you have to meet my friend Carissa. She’s married to a man who owns 12 casinos throughout the world.” Raylene was giving me some fabulous information. Dee wasn’t too enthused.

“Do you want to go Frankie? It’s this Saturday, and you’re supposed to work.” She looked at me like she hated the idea. Guess what I said?

“Well Dee, I would like to meet the Mayor and Lieutenant Governor...and your mom’s friend, Carissa sounds like a nice person. Sure, I think I could get that night off...” It took Dee a long two seconds to say something.

“Okay mom, Frankie and I will be there.”

“Fantastic... It’s this Saturday night, and be there about seven. It’s going to be crowded. Dee, be sure to wear that red chiffon cocktail dress I bought for you,” requests Raylene as she finished her drink. “And Frankie... Do you have a tuxedo?”

“Mother!” blurts Dee as she steps into my would-be normal rescue. “He doesn’t have to wear a tux.” Then I jumped in so cool...

“Oh that’s okay, Dee. I do happen to have one. I think next Saturday night will be a great night. Okay Dee?”

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“Okay Frankie. If you really want to go?” says Dee as she pushes out her words. Inside my mind, I was shouting across the universe. I was going to meet this Carissa broad, whose husband owns 12 casinos around the World??? There were the sounds of trumpets in the air.

We finished dinner and went back to the TV station since Raylene had to do the late news. Dee and I went back to her place. It really didn’t sound like she wanted to go to the campaign and birthday party. I thought I should say something.

“Is something wrong, Dee? It sounds like you really didn’t want to go to this event.”

“Oh, it’s okay... It’s just that I’ve been to these things before and it really is boring to me. My mother loves it because she meets politicians and she’s into that.”

“What about this... Carissa? Who is she? And who is her husband that owns 12 casinos?” I hoped that Dee was going to tell me everything.

“Carissa and her husband are a weird couple.”

“What do you mean... weird?” I asked as though I might seem to get a little nosy.

“When I was younger, in my teens, her husband use to give me a lot of attention, and I don’t think Carissa liked it. She never was really nice to me. She wasn’t hostile towards me, she just wasn’t nice.”

I thought Dee might be hiding something. “Are you going to have a problem being there?” I asked.

“No... I’m older now and I hardly ever see any of them. Her husband is always gone to one of his other casinos, so she’s home a lot by herself. But as for the rumors...”

“What rumors?”

“Well, she’s been seen with other guys in nightclubs. My mom always goes out with her... and they always meet younger guys.”

“Well, is your mom single or does she have a boyfriend?” Now I’m feeling like I’m really getting the poop scoop.

“She’s single, but I think she’s seeing some guy casually.” Dee was starting to withdraw from giving too much information.

“Anyway Dee, I think it will be fun just looking at all the rich people and maybe meeting the Mayor and others...” I just let the conversation end.

“Yeah Frankie... We should have a lot of fun with the old fuddy

duddies there.” I took Dee home and gave her a big kiss goodnight, and I think she felt better about going to the party. Man, I hope she doesn’t think like we’re a couple now... I hate that! Well next Saturday, I’m going to meet a lot of big shots. The new Frankie baby is on an escalator.

The next morning I told my Aunt Mary about Dee’s mother, and that I was invited to the big political campaign and birthday party.

“Frankie... Dee’s a real nice girl and she’s been surrounded by wolves all her life. Her mom was always into the Vegas scene, and she got to where she wanted at the news station. She makes great money and she’s doing the station owner.”

“What? How do you know that, Mary?”

“Dee told me and she’s embarrassed because he’s married. But Raylene doesn’t care. She has her freedom and can bang one of the richest guys in the valley whenever.”

“Aunt Mary... I can’t believe you talk like that.” Mary sure knows how to call a spade a spade in this town.

“Just be careful how you treat Dee at the party. She’s a nice girl and those people are a bunch of phonies.” Mary was pretty clear on how they were.

Ted let me have Saturday off since they had other part time dealers on the extra board. I really didn’t have a tux, so I went to the fashion center mall and rented one. It was sharp. Not your typical black, but a silver jacket with the black pants, and the now custom tux shirt and bow tie. Since I hadn’t bought myself a car yet, good ol’ Aunt Mary loaned me her 1957 black shiny Thunderbird car...again. I have to admit, the way I was dressed and driving a classic car...look out Las Vegas, ‘There’s a Santos, aka Scorpio, in town to take over.’

I arrived at Dee’s house and knocked on her door. She opened it, and there she stood... This dress had ‘Let’s have sex now’ written all over her.

“Wow... You look beautiful, Dee.” I almost got speechless. She was wearing a pleated red chiffon cocktail dress. The top part of her dress was showing a lot of cleavage and the bottom part of her dress only went down to her thighs. She wore high heel low cut boots where the laces went up to meet her just below her kneecap. Her hair was

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loose curls that went just below her shoulders.

“Would you like a glass of wine before we go, Frankie? Or do you want a Guinness?” Dee said with a soft voice and a little sarcasm.

“You know what, sweetheart? I’ll have a glass of wine with you on this special night. It’ll be my first formal affair in Vegas.”

“Well, we’ll make this special. What kind of wine would you like?” Heck, I really don’t know my wines. I had to think for a moment... “Frankie?” She says as she waits for the tall order.

“Oh... Uhh,” I could only think of my car... “Dee, I’ll have a Thunderbird.” She gave me one of those looks like it was a foreign drink.

“How about a Chardonnay?” she blurts out.

“That sounds even better!” Wow... She does have foreign wine. We sat in the den and just relaxed a bit. Man, she was looking hot. Why haven’t I noticed her like this before? She starts the conversation...

“Frankie... I’m glad my mom did invite us. I really haven’t been to an event like this the last few years.”

“I’m happy that you both invited me, Dee. I like meeting people.”

“Well, if you get bored, just let me know and we’ll leave. My mom’s friends can get a little snooty at times.”

“Oh, I can adjust.” I drank my wine in a quick manner. “Are you ready to go?” I was anxious to see the big wheels of Las Vegas. We finished our wine and she gave me a kiss and yes, it was nice. As we left for the casino, it just occurred to me that Dee never told me what hotel it was. “Dee... With all this talk about the shindig, you never told me which casino we were going to. All you said was that it was on the strip.”

“I’m sorry, Frankie. It’s called the Majestic Palace.” I had that surprise look on my face...

“The Majestic Palace..?”

“Yes. That’s one of the casino hotels that Carissa and her husband own. Is there a problem?”

“No, No... It’s just a coincidence that I went there a few weeks ago and watched some ball games in the sports book. I met two older guys that were regulars there and we became friends. It’s a nice casino.” Deep down inside of me, this was a dream. It’s a beautiful casino, and I was going to meet the owners.

We arrived at the Majestic Palace valet parking. I slipped the valet

driver a \$10 spot and told him not to park it next to any other car. I didn't want any dings on it. I hoped that was enough of a tip. If it isn't, I'll blow his legs off if there's a finger print on the car. Now I'm starting to feel like a gangster. It must be the atmosphere.

As we entered the casino, it was a busy night and the lounge was filled with loud music. There were a lot of well dressed women that were by themselves just sitting at the bar like they were waiting for someone.

"Hey Dee, let's get a drink before we go up to the party." I was escalating in the casino atmosphere.

"That would be nice. Do you want another Chardonnay, Frank?"

"Sure..." We sat there for a moment while we waited for the cocktail waitress. "This is really a nice place, Dee. What's the name of Carissa's husband that owns this palace?"

"His name is Mark Kingman. He's British. He was born with a silver spoon...big money family background." The cocktail waitress finally came to our table.

"I'm sorry to keep you waiting sir, but we are busier than usual tonight. There's a big convention in town, and they love to party." I took a look at this young waitress, and she looked like an angel that was just released from heaven. I was staring for a moment. She had this long ash brown hair that stood out like a shimmering star against the pure white color of her Roman cocktail uniform.

"Frankie... Frankie." I snapped out of my trance.

"Oh, I'm sorry... What?" Dee gave me a concerned look.

"What are you staring at?"

"Oh...I...Uh, was just thinking of maybe having another drink besides wine." I looked back to the waitress. "Can I have a Blue Sapphire and tonic, please?" Whew... I got out of that one.

Dee was sort of back to acting normal. "I'll have a Chardonnay this time, Frankie."

"Okay waitress... I'm sorry, what is your name?" I had to ask.

"Nina," she says with the soft angel voice. I almost went into another trance.

"Okay Nina... She'll have the Chardonnay, and I'll pay cash."

"Thank you, sir." She walked away, and I thank the lord for having Vegas in this world.

Dee and I had small chats about the atmosphere of Vegas as we

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listened to the trio playing the music on stage. I casually looked over to the service bar and caught quick glances of Nina. I wasn't sure how old she was, but she had to be early twenties. She started back to our table with the drinks. I quickly turned towards the band.

"Here you are sir... Blue Sapphire and tonic, and a Chardonnay." She handed me the bill and I gave her a \$5 dollar tip.

"Thank you sir... and I'll be over there if you need anything else." She swayed away.

I turned to Dee. "You know, I feel old when someone calls me sir. I'm only 30 years old." Dee laughs a little.

"Well, she's a young girl and probably someone dressed up real swanky like you, seems older to her."

"Yeah, I guess..." We listened to a little more music and finished our drinks. As we left the cocktail lounge, I took one last peek at Nina. She really didn't know I was alive.

Dee and I went directly to the elevators, and there was an escort security that assisted the invited guests to the penthouse.

"Wow... Our private escort, Dee." The security in a suit heard us, but kept that straight face. I guess all the politicians and guest had to be guarded. Who could blame them?

We reached the top of the floor, and when the doors opened, we walked into this large atrium foyer. There were lots of tropical plants, flowers and artificial trees. It almost looked like a rain tree forest. This was the entrance to Carissa Kingman's home. There was music with five musicians and a large portable wooden dance floor. Dee was looking for her mother, Raylene. I on the other hand saw the cocktail waitress carrying a tray of appetizers. She came up to us and held the tray of finger food. I took it of course, and Dee didn't want anything. She was still looking for her mom. I have to admit, there were a lot of people here all slicked up.

"Hey, you two..." It was Raylene who found us. "You finally made it." She gave her daughter Dee a hug and a kiss on the cheek, and then the same with me. Then she saw the lip stick print that she planted on me, and smiled as she rubbed it off with her hand...

"Sorry Frankie. We can't start you off at a party like this." She had a seductive chuckle and Dee was paying attention to it.

"Come on honey, I want to introduce Frankie to Carissa." Raylene grabbed Dee's hand and put her arm around my arm, and then led us to

the hostess of the ball. Raylene gave a little shout towards a woman, which I assumed was Carissa since they were about the same age, and she acted like she did own the place... "Carissa... Carissa." Raylene caught her attention, and Carissa waved her hand for us to come over by the bar.

As we were walking towards her, I was looking at this attractive older hot woman, who seems to have the world by the brass balls. You could see that she was filled with poise and confidence as she was talking to several dignified well dressed people that were giving her all the attention in the world.

"Excuse me everyone, I see an old friend that I must talk too." Carissa walked a few steps towards us as we reached her, and she gave Dee a big hug, but no kiss on the cheek. I always notice the little things.

"Hello Carissa." Dee was cordial, but seemed to be aloof.

"Dee, I'm so glad you came, and I heard about your friend," she says as she is talking to Dee, but looking at me. "Hi, I'm Carissa Kingman." She extended her hand to me and I gently shook it. I was trying to keep it classy.

"It's nice to meet you, Mrs. Kingman." I could read something looking into her eyes.

"This is the gentlemen I told you about that Dee brought by the news station," says Raylene as she orders drinks from the bartender. "Frank, what are you and Dee having?" Dee speaks up before me.

"Frankie's have a Blue Sapphire and tonic and I'm having a Chardonnay."

"How long have you been here in town, Frank?" Carissa is being a nice host and giving me the welcome wagon approach.

"About a year and it looks like I'm here to stay," I said.

"You're going to love it here if you like the night life." She continued to be friendly and a gracious host. "Dee, why don't you show Frank around and introduce him to some our friends that you know. I need to talk to your mother for a bit. And Dee, there's plenty of food and drinks." Carissa and Raylene walked away as Dee and I took a stroll on the large veranda that overlooked the strip. It was a warm beautiful night, and the strip was bumper to bumper with cars.

"What do you think so far, Frankie?" Dee wanted my opinion right away.

"I think it's beautiful up here, and I kind of like being around the

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big shots. Where's Carissa's husband, Mark Kingman?" Just as I asked Dee, an older gentleman, maybe in his mid-seventies, walks up and joins us. He's very distinguished looking.

"Hello Dee." He gives her a kiss on the cheek.

"Hello Mark. I want you to meet Frank Scorpio... Frank, this is Mark Kingman."

Wow... So this is like what one of the richest guys in the world looks like. He does have a British accent. "It's a pleasure to meet you, sir." I shook hands with the top brass of the gaming world.

"The pleasure is all mine, Mr. Scorpio," he replies in that elegant British manner.

"Please sir, call me Frank."

"And you may call me... Mr. Kingman." I was too mesmerized to pay attention to what he said.

"Mark, stop that." Dee says to him like there is no formality between them. He chuckles a little.

"Just kidding, Frank. Please call me Mark. Everyone seems to think I'm a tyrant. I believe they want to kiss my ass just because I have a few casinos." He grins as he overlooks the party of the elite.

"Oh, don't worry Mr. Kingman... I mean Mark. I won't be kissing your ass_. Oh, I'm sorry! I didn't mean that." What was I thinking? He continues to grin.

"Well, I must go and play host to the Mayor and Lt. Governor. This is election year." I extended my hand to shake his again.

"It was a pleasure to meet you sir." We shook hands again and he gave Dee another kiss on the cheek, but this one was a little different...and left.

"He's not a bad guy, Dee. He's seems to be humorous and friendly."

"Yeah, well... Let's go walk around." Dee has a peculiar attitude with the atmosphere around here. I like it here and I feel more matured. I saw Carissa and Raylene from a distance and they were just having a blast. I do see them talking to a lot of younger guys. The older men seem to have a struggle getting their attention. The band was playing up tempo music, and I think the crowd was really loosening up. A few couples started to dance and gradually more joined in. I was standing there with Dee as though she was waiting for me to ask her out to the dance floor. Just then, this guy who is built

like a running back for a pro football team walks up.

"Hello Dee." Dee already knew this guy.

"Hello Troy. How are you?" Big Troy leans over to give her a kiss on the cheek. This is the kissiest place in the world. "Troy, this is Frank Scorpio. Frank this is Troy Buchanan." As he shakes my hand, I'm thinking that I either know or have met this guy.

"Nice to meet you, Troy... Have we met?"

"I don't think so, Frank." Dee spoke up casually breaking my thoughts.

"Troy used to play football for the Los Angeles Dons." I had that surprised look again and finally remembered...

"Oh yeah, Troy Buchanan... You were quarterback for the Dons, and you broke your leg as you were being sacked by Big Daddy Lipscomb of the Colts." Troy gave a little sarcastic grin...

"Yep... and that ended my career." He didn't say that with a smile either.

"Oh man... I remember now. I saw that play. You faded back and were ready to throw the pass, and somebody missed a block... this mountain of a man tackled you to the dirt in an awkward way where the bone was sticking out of your leg and ____"

"Frankie!!!" Dee jumped right in... "I'm going to be sick!"

"Uh, sorry Dee. Sorry Troy." I felt like a little boy again.

"That's all right, Frank. I've been put back together again and I'm good as new, but I can't ever return to playing football."

"I'm sorry again, Troy. What business are you in now?" I had to change the conversation of the crushed tibia.

"Right now Frank, we're starting a franchise arena football league here in Las Vegas. I'm going to be co-owner and coach."

"That's great, Troy. I'm glad to hear that and ____" He turns his attention to Dee. He had that look in his eye as he asked her...

"How about a dance, Dee?"

"Sure Troy. Do you mind Frank?"

"Oh I'm sorry. Are you two together?" Troy asked like a gentleman.

"Oh, we came together, but please, dance your *legs* off," I said. Dee looked at me with her eyes popped open.

"What?" She says with a stiff lip. I thought for a split second...

"Oh, I'm sorry Troy. I didn't mean that!"

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“That’s okay, Frank.” The good sport chuckled a little and took Dee out onto the dance floor. I felt like an idiot.

I stood by the bar and ordered another drink. Good thing I had a few of the appetizers to coat my stomach. I was watching Dee dance with Troy as well as watching more people getting onto the dance floor. I even saw Raylene rocking out with a Joe Stud looking guy. I was enjoying the music as I took a glance around the large penthouse suite. I saw Mark Kingman enjoying himself as he’s surrounded by women of all ages. Wow... That would be a nice situation that I would love to be in. I wonder if Carissa Kingman is keeping an eye on him.

“Hi Frank.” I got a gentle tap on my shoulder as I was starting to daydream. It was Carissa with a drink in one hand, and me on the other. “Come on and let’s show them how it’s done.”

Without giving me a chance to say anything, she took me out to the floor and started the old disco dance steps with an up tempo Latin beat. Good thing I knew how to dance. We were dancing up a storm in the middle of the floor. We became the center of attention and Carissa was the belle of the ball. The music ended and we gave one another that little embrace after a couple has a good connection on the dance floor.

“You dance real smooth, Frank,” Carissa comments as the next song was a slow one. It was a hit from the Bee Gees, ‘How deep is your love’, and this band seemed to know the sound tracks from the movie, ‘Saturday Night Fever’.

“You rock, Carissa,” I said with a slight flirtatious grin. That added a big sensuous smile to her face. I looked at her, and as I glanced away, I noticed Dee was watching us as she wasn’t giving much attention to Troy. I got a little nervous and tried to concentrate on the dance. Man, Carissa’s perfume was putting me on cloud nine. The music ended, and I ended the dance as I always do; a subtle ending dance dip and holding her with her head about five inches from the floor. At that moment, everyone started clapping and whistling...except for Dee...and Troy.

“Thank you Frank,” says Carissa... “You’re a regular John Travolta.”

“I don’t think Johnny had a chance against these shoes on the floor,” I said in sort of an egotistical way. Carissa laughed and paid me another compliment.

“You can dance with me anytime, Frank.” There was that look the

older rich gals give younger guys. At the end of that note, Dee and Troy walked up. "Hello Dee. You have yourself a real sharp dancer." Carissa commented to her.

"Yeah, so I noticed. I'll have to dance with him sometime." Uh ohhh... The music started another slow dance. It got a little tense and I thought I better say something...

"How about this song, Dee? It happens to be one of my favorites." I really didn't know what the name of the song was, but I knew I had to do something fast.

"Come on Troy," says Carissa as she pulls him to the dance floor. Dee and I were dancing quietly at first. Which one of us was going to say anything to break the ice?

"Well, you *are* a dancer, just like I heard from the guys at the Nugget," she says with a calm voice.

"Yeah well, Disco's Salsa dances have been hot, and I really love to dance. I learned a lot of dance steps because if you didn't dance, you were just going to drink a lot and be ignored by the girls that liked to dance." I thought I explained that very logically to her.

"And I guess you were never ignored?" She says with a touch of sarcasm.

"Right... I mean... I just danced a lot... Didn't you?"

"Yeah, I liked to dance, but I really wasn't a big dancer. I also liked country music."

I guess this is her way of letting me know that she is more into country style.

"Hey, I can do a little two step when it's time. Why don't we go to the Buckaroo?" Then I thought for a split second... "Wait a minute. Let's try another country rock bar next week." I almost forgot that they might remember me there from the last riot.

"Okay Frankie, that's a date. We'll go on our day off during the week." Dee was in a better mood and starting talking normal again. I saw Troy Buchanan, the football star checking us out occasionally. Should I ask?

"So, what's with you and Troy, Dee? He seems to be interested in you."

"We used to date a couple of years ago," she says very calmly as she catches me off guard.

"You used to date Troy Buchanan?"

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“Yeah... It wasn’t a big deal. My mother interviewed him at the news station one time and I happened to be there, and he asked me out.”

“Your mother let you go out with him?” I don’t know why I was surprised. We’re still dancing to slow music as the conversation continues.

“Sure she did, and we went out for a few months.”

“A few months? Did you like him a lot?” I think I might have sounded jealous.

“I didn’t like him as much as he liked me. He always had girls around him and I thought that he was too much into that scene. So, I broke it off, and he was always on the road anyway,” she says like the subject was on another planet.

I noticed Troy boy started talking to another hot babe. I guess he got the hint that Dee wasn’t interested in him. I continued to dance and noticed that Mark Kingman was looking at us.

“Why does Kingman keep looking our way?” I asked with suspicion. Dee didn’t pay much attention to what I was saying about him.

“Oh, ignore him. He plays that father figure with me and wants to be my protector. He’s known me too long.”

The song ended and Raylene came up to us to see how we were doing. “Are you having a good time, Frankie? You really can dance up a storm. When’s my turn to test the Disco Salsa?” Dee spoke up before I could say anything...

“Mom, we’re getting ready to go now.”

“Oh, do you have to go now?” Raylene asked. “Mark wants to talk to you for a minute Dee.”

“What does he want?” Dee wasn’t that anxious to talk to him.

“I don’t know. I think its business. Go talk to him. I’m going to take Frankie to meet the Mayor and the Lt. Governor. Would you like that Frank?” Raylene can be very controlling and persuasive. “Go Dee... He’s waiting.”

At that point, neither Dee nor I was in control of what we wanted to do. However, I would get a kick out of meeting the big politicians of Vegas. Although I spent most of my life in California, I have never met the Mayor of Los Angeles or the Lt. Governor of the state. The only politician I’ve ever met before was the Mayor of Norwalk... and I only saw him riding in a car that was in the Norwalk Christmas parade. Raylene made way to the large cocktail bar as the Mayor was

talking to the present Lt. Governor.

“Hi Lindsey, I want you to meet a friend of mine. This is Frank Scorpio. Frank this is a good friend of mine, Mayor Lindsey Cantwell.”

“Nice to meet you Mr. Scorpio,” as she shakes my hand, she turns to Raylene...

“You got yourself a handsome man here, Raylene.”

“Uh, Mr. Scorpio is actually my daughter’s date tonight, Lindsey.” Raylene says with a big grin.

“Oh, excuse me... I’m sorry Mr. Scorpio.”

“Please call me Frank, Mayor Cantwell.”

“No need to be formal around here Frank, please call me Lindsey. Republican or Democrat..?” I looked at her sort of stunned.

“What?”

“I’m sorry; I caught you off guard, Frank.” She and Raylene as well as the Lt. Governor, who is standing quietly about three feet away, laughed a little.

“I was just asking if you were a Republican or a Democrat.” I had to think fast since I didn’t give a crap about politics...

“Well, I’ll tell you Mayor... uh I’m sorry, Lindsey.” All had another chuckle again. “I don’t make it a habit of discussing religion or politics around a happy environment. If I did that and everyone knew how I voted, then the other party will know how I’m voting, and they won’t talk to me anymore.” I was trying to make light of the question. The small group that was listening to me was quiet for a very long 10 seconds... I started to get a little hot under the tux. “I’m joking!” Then I start laughing out loud and they joined in.

“It’s an old joke that my father use to tell at parties,” I said as a few beads of perspiration started to accumulate on my forehead. The Mayor continued to chuckle.

“What party was your father?” She asked. I stopped for a split second and looked at her...

“Just kidding,” she says as she and Raylene start to laugh again. “Frank, I apologize. This is a very dear friend of mine. May I introduce to you the Lt. Governor, and our next Governor of the state of Nevada; Mrs. Lorraine Madison.”

“I’m honored to meet you Lt. Governor.” I extended my hand once again. “Frank Scorpio.” The Lt. Governor shakes my hand with a hard

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firm grip for a woman.

“Yes Frank, I was listening... Republican or Democrat..?” She shoots a quick question at me. I looked at her and was caught off guard again. They all started laughing. This was the most humorist political party I’ve ever run across. We continued our small chit chat as I noticed Dee was talking to Mark Kingman alone by the veranda.

“I really don’t want to work here, Mark. I’m happy where I’m at and I don’t have any pressure on me,” says Dee. Mark continued to persuade Dee to work at his casino as a food and beverage manager, and then to the top level of department head.

“But Dee, you’re a bright girl with a future. I want you to think about it. I’m looking for someone to eventually control the department here at the Palace.”

“You already have Shannon controlling your beverage department.” Dee was looking for any excuse to not work under Kingman.

“Shannon is on her way out, dear. She keeps fucking up the stock orders as well as other things.” Mark sounded like he was ready to replace her. Dee looked him right in the eye...

“Look Mark... I know you’ve been fucking her in the back office, and I think a few other people know it. If you want to get rid of her, I suggest you transfer her to one of your other casinos, and far away from here, and your wife, Carissa.” Mark took a quick look around to see if anyone was listening... He was getting a little annoyed with Dee.

“Okay Dee. I just wanted to help you with your career, and have you make very good money so you can have everything you want. I’m sorry for bringing it up,” he says in a caring way.

“Thanks for the offer, Mark. But you know why I won’t work here.” Mark had a bothered look on his face as if he regretted something.

“But Dee... I’ve known you since you were a very young girl.”

“Yes Mark... *A very young girl*,” replies Dee with resentment in her tone.

Mark stares at her for moment... “Okay dear... I just wanted to help you. If you want or need anything, just let me know.”

“I won’t need anything... *Uncle Mark!*” Across the room, Carissa had been watching her husband and Dee having a conversation alone. She was suspicious of them. But she has always been suspicious or

jealous of Mark's lifestyle. Dee walks away and joins Frank who is talking to her mother, Raylene.

"Hi Dee," I said with a cheery tone since she didn't look too cheerful herself.

"Can we go Frankie? I still have to work tomorrow and it's getting late." Raylene looks over Mark Kingman's way at the bar, and then at Dee...

"Everything okay, honey?"

"Oh sure mom... Mark was just asking if I was interested in a management position here at the Palace, and I said I was happy where I was at." I almost had a cow. Dee was just offered a job to work here? My god...

"You said, *'you are happy where you are at'*? Are we talking about the bartender's job at the Nugget, Dee?" The question just shot out of my mouth. She's turning down my dream of getting into a place like this.

"Yes Frankie. I'm just not interested. Can we go now?"

"Sure... uh, it was nice seeing you again, Raylene." Raylene gives me a hug, and then Dee. Just at that moment, Carissa walks up to us.

"Where's everybody going? The party is still going strong." You can tell that Carissa has a slight buzz from drinking, and still has a hard grip on her champagne glass.

"Dee and Frankie have to go, Carissa. They have to work tomorrow," says Raylene as she watches Carissa look at Scorpio a certain way.

"That's a shame, Frank. I'm glad you were able to come tonight, and especially thank you for the wonderful dance. I haven't danced like that since... well since Raylene and I used to party at 'Dirty Sally's' night club ages ago." Carissa leans over to Raylene,

"Remember one of the best days of our years, Ray?"

"Well Carissa, they have to be going now." Raylene cuts her story off.

"I want to thank you for having me here at this beautiful party Carissa, and I want to wish you a real happy birthday." I extended my hand to shake hers, and as she grabbed it, she pulled me over for a quick kiss on the lips. My face turned red. I didn't want to see the look on Dee's face, so I just went on like it was kissing an aunt... an old aunt. Dee and I said our good byes and we headed to the penthouse elevator. As we got out of the elevator and walked towards the Emperors lounge where we had a drink before the party, I saw the

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cocktail waitress, Nina, still working.

“Say Dee, I really like that band’s music. It’s only almost midnight and I could use a drink to wind down. Do you mind?” That should sound innocent enough.

“Okay Frankie. But just one drink, because I’m getting exhausted.” We walked over and got a table in Nina’s section. I was also getting tired, but this sure gave me a boost. It was still a good crowd and the cocktail girls were real busy. We just listened to the music as we waited for Nina. I looked over at Dee...

“Are you okay, Dee?”

“I’m fine.” She finally gave a smile. “It’s just been a long night for me, and it’s pretty much the same old people at Carissa’s Parties.”

“I just want to thank you and your mom for inviting me. I really had a good time.” I said that with a very big smile.

“I’m sure they all liked you, Frankie. You were the smoothest dancer there,” she says in a subtle way thinking about it. I started thinking... Was that a sarcastic crack?

“Thank you Dee. But remember, you and I are going dancing next week... if you still want to that is.”

“Yes I do, Frankie.” An angel’s voice came out of nowhere.

“Hello... What would you like to drink?” Thank god, it was Nina.

“Hi again,” I said with a big smile. She gave me that, ‘Who are you’ look. I felt kind of stupid and Dee looked at me like I was a little boy. Then all of a sudden...

“Oh hi— the Blue Sapphire and tonic and Chardonnay couple... How are you? Would you like the same?” Nina remembered. Whew...

“Thank you, yes we would.” I looked at Dee and she had that look on her face...

“What?” I asked...

“Nothing...” She just smiled and shook her head. All men know about that ‘Nothing’ remark. We continued to listen to the music. I glanced over to the bar just to see the action of the barflies. It was kind of comical watching the chicks just sitting there waiting for a guy to talk to them. They seemed real friendly. Of course all the guys like to play the rich guy. I’ll be damned if I fork out any cash to these broads for a piece of their pie. A loud laugh caught my attention further up the bar. There was this beautiful blonde girl laughing it up with a couple of guys. I thought I knew her because of her body movements.

It's usually everyone's signature. I stared at her way for a moment to see if I recognized her.

"A Blue Sapphire and tonic and a Chardonnay for the lady..." Nina timed that perfectly.

"Thank you Nina. You have good music here as well as service." Hope I didn't lay it on too thick. I gave her a \$10 tip.

"Thank you, sir. Enjoy..." Then she just walked out of my life into the sunset.

"Frankie... Frankie." Dee gives me a small tap on my arm.

"Oh... What?"

"That was a pretty generous tip for two drinks." Dee's a bartender, and she's saying it was too generous?

"Well, I'm in a good mood, and there's great music and the drink is good. Besides, I have good company." I raised my glass and we tapped our drinks. "Cheers."

I looked back at the bar to see if I knew the blonde that was laughing so loud. That figures. She was gone. The band played another long song.

"Are you ready to go, Frank? I'm pretty tired."

"Sure Dee... Let's go." I thought Dee was more of a night owl since she works the swing shift at the Nugget Junction Casino. That's what most casino employees do in Vegas after work.

We went home and it was a quick good night kiss.

"Thanks Dee. I had a great night."

"Thank you Frankie for coming. I'm glad you had a good time."

"Hey, it was a blast meeting all the politicians. Can you imagine those people are running this state?" I remarked sarcastically. We gave each other another goodnight kiss and I went home. What a night... I went right to bed. I laid there awake for a minute thinking about the night, and meeting Nina...the angel of cocktail waitresses. Carissa was a sexy lady although she was in her 40's, or probably pushing 50. Hard to tell nowadays. Raylene was a good flirt... What about all those politicians? And Mark Kingman? Well, I'm not sure about him, but in a way, he's my idol. I want to own or run major casinos just like him. There's something going on and I don't remember seeing him and Carissa together at any time... Screw it! I need sleep...zzzz

Chapter 21

The Devil's Boots Don't Creak

The next day I got up feeling like a million bucks. I got my foot in the door thanks to Dee. It was around noon and I went down stairs to eat. Mary was watching her 'novellas' on TV; another word for Spanish soap operas.

"Hi Aunt Mary... I had a nice time last night, and thank you again for loaning me your T-bird."

"Did you meet all the big shots?" She asked as she got up to fix me something to eat.

"I met a lot of people. The Mayor and the Lt. Governor... And of course, Mark Kingman."

"What did you think of him and Carissa?"

"Carissa is a beautiful woman who feels like she's still in her twenties... which is great. But there's something strange about Carissa and her husband. I don't know what it is, but I felt there was a strain between them."

"Did anyone tell you that Mark Kingman married a showgirl from the Dunes Casino?"

"No. Was that another wife he had?"

"It was Carissa. She was one of the most popular showgirls in town. She was also a singer as well as a dancer."

"No wonder we danced so well together," I said. Mary just

finished fixing my sandwich, and sat next to me at the table.

“So, Carissa got you out on the dance floor... Ha! That must’ve been a sight for Mark and Dee to see.”

“Why do you say that, Mary?”

“Mark is a pretty jealous old man, even though he has a reputation for spending time with younger women,” she says as she seems to be going back into time. I thought for a moment as I was downing my turkey sandwich.

“He certainly wasn’t paying much attention to Carissa at the party. He was giving more time to Dee. He was offering her a big job at the Majestic Palace, and she turned it down,” I said still in a surprised pissed off way... “I was curious, Mary. Dee says, when she was younger, Kingman liked to play the father figure with her. I keep wondering if Raylene and Dee are hiding a secret from the rest of the world.”

Mary changed the subject right away... “Tomorrow we’re going to find you a car and we’re going to put it in my name. The DMV asks too many questions of people’s personal life, and then before you know it, you get on the jurors list. Do you still have your California driver’s license current?”

“Yes. It won’t expire for about another two years.”

“Just try to not get stopped by the cops in this town, because if they know you live here, there’s a fine for not registering for a Nevada driver’s license. I think Anthony Martinez has friends working in the California DMV, and he can’t find you as long as you still have the old address on there.”

“I’m getting sick of Martinez and De LaParra looking for me as though I was a fugitive from the law. They’re the criminals! De LaParra kills my girlfriend and the cops can’t figure it out!” I went off on the wrong person. I just lost control of my emotions for a minute. Aunt Mary was trying to be rational.

“They’re professionals, Frankie. It’s a way of life for them. They started their organization years ago. Let’s just keep doing what we’re doing and you learn the gaming business. In time, everything will settle down and you can move on with your goals.”

“You’re right Aunt Mary... I’m sorry. Thanks for being patient with me.” I went back upstairs and took it easy for the rest of the day since I had a couple of rough nights on the town. I had to go into work

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tonight and I feel so motivated after the meeting the big brass of the Majestic Palace. Dee was also going to work and I hoped that she was in better spirits.

I arrived at the Nugget Junction Casino to start my shift at 5 p.m. Sunday wasn't as busy as Friday and Saturday nights. Only three of the five Blackjack tables we have, were open for business. I noticed that security was hanging around the tables more often than usual. Like Ted and Bobby Fager said..., 'Watch everyone and everything'.

My break was about to come up and the pit manager, Vanessa Myles, came up behind me as I was shuffling the cards, and asked me if I could skip my break for a while longer. I gave her the okay nod. I don't know why, but something wasn't normal. I just kept dealing and kept another eye on anything that was out of the ordinary. The table on my right only had one player left while my table had three players. Vanessa went up to the table on my left where Jason Adams, a dealer about 32 years old was dealing Blackjack, and was told to close down the game. Vanessa told the only player at that table that we were going to fill up the other tables and if he wouldn't mind moving. The player was obliging and moved over.

As the security guard put the glass cover over the house chip tray and locked up, Jason was escorted by Bobby Fager along with two other security guards, to the upstairs business office. Then one more security guard came and took the money drop box from under the Blackjack table. That's where the table dealers drop the player's paper money in exchange for player's chips. He also followed them upstairs. I continued to deal to the players as I watched them leave. It didn't look good.

Jason Adams was escorted to a private room upstairs. Bobby and the two security guards stood there for a moment quietly in the low lit room. Two men in plain clothes walked in and the other two uniformed security guards left. Bobby sits at the far end of the rectangle table and stares for a very long moment at Jason...

"How long have you been stealing from us, Jason?" Jason didn't know what to say at first, but he knew he was busted. He thought for a moment...

"Not long, sir." He replies with a little tremble in his voice as he doesn't know what to expect. Bobby slams his fist on the table and

then yells...

"How long?!!! And who is working with you?!" Jason hung his head as beads of sweat rolled down his forehead...

"I can't..."

"You can't what?!" Bobby continues to yell.

"I can't tell you. My family will be in danger." Jason starts to show a tear from his watering eyes.

"Okay Jason... We treated you like family here. But when you fuck over the family, you have nothing! You have nothing! I'm giving you one more chance to talk. Who's in this with you? We're going to find out either way. Is it one of the security guards? Somebody in the soft count cage? Tell me god damn it!!!"

Jason just wept. Bobby looked up to the two plain clothes men standing in the dark. He gave them a nod. One of the men in the shadow put a handkerchief over Jason's nose and mouth. It had chloroform on it, and he passed out.

"You boys know what to do. Take him out towards Blue Diamond and have another talk with him. If he doesn't talk, let nature take its course." Bobby Fager was a true casino boss from the old days.

About an hour later, Vanessa told me to go and take my lunch with an extra half hour. I went up to the dealers lounge and just relaxed and watched TV. I was still curious on what happened. Just then Bobby walked in.

"Hi Bobby," I said a little nervously. I didn't want to say anything if it wasn't my business.

"Frank, can you come into my office for a moment?" Damn. Was I in trouble or what?

"Sure Bobby." I got up and followed him to his office. It was quiet and my heart was beating at a high rate like I did something very bad. I entered his office after him. "Is something wrong, Bobby?" As Bobby sat in his executive chair, he started to shuffle some paper work.

"Sit down, Frank." I don't know why, but I was about to piss in my pants.

"Yes, Bobby."

"We just had a situation down stairs. Jason Adams was stealing from us." I just kept staring at Bobby thinking that he might think I was stealing too.

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"I'm sorry to hear that, Bobby." I didn't want to ask any questions.

"The casinos have a mathematical calculation on how much of a percentage we should average per hour. For some reason, Adams tray hasn't matched the money box from his shift. It's been short the last couple of months. We don't see him palming any chips or passing extra chips over to a player..." Bobby paused for a moment, thinking as he gets up from his desk and walks over to the two way mirror overlooking the casino. "We also believe he has a partner working with him. At the moment, Jason is not talking, but he will. This has been going on a while, and we know it's another employee here. We have a feeling who it might be, but we're not sure." Bobby continued to analyze the situation. I hope he doesn't think it's me. This Vegas gaming business is starting to show it's reality among employer and employee relationships. It's funny how guilty you can feel, and still be clean and honest in this environment. I'm in a world of 'No Trust'.

"How can I help you, Bobby?" I asked with a little stiffness in my throat.

"So you want to run a casino, huh?" he asked as he sits back in his leather chair.

I just gave a little nod to him.

"Yes I do, Bobby. I like the casino action, and ever since you and Ted told me to always keep my eyes open, I've been trying to do that."

"Well this is a good situation for you, Frankie. Sometimes, the crook is within arms length of you. Jason Adams was just that... And you didn't see anything out of the ordinary, did you?" I paused for a moment...

"No sir." I felt stupid.

"We trust you Frankie, and we love your aunt Mary. This is why we want you to learn the business. It's hard to trust anyone. And when Ted and I decide to retire, we need to know people we can trust who can take over. Or should we just sell the Nugget..." I really don't know what Bobby is trying to tell me.

"You can trust me Bobby. You and Ted have been straight with me and I will never forget it. What can I do to help you?" Bobby thought for a moment...

"Our security is suspicious of a few people that work for us. Just keep your eyes open and tell us if you see anything that doesn't seem right. Just let us know." Bobby was very concerned and hurt in a way.

"I will Bobby." I feel like I let somebody down, because the thief was standing next to me all the time. But how was Jason doing it? Bobby continued...

"I want to show you a video tape, Frankie." He took me over to the TV set and played the tape. "I want you to look real close at Adams exchanging the players money for chips." I looked real close... I didn't see anything unusual.

"I'm sorry Bobby. I don't see anything wrong."

"Look again, Frankie. Watch his hand as he puts the player's cash into the drop box through the money slit on top of the table. Do you see how he pushes it down with the plastic plunger?" Now I'm really getting bugged.

"I don't see anything, Bobby." I'm freak'n out.

"Okay, Frankie. Look... Every time Jason Adams pushes the money down into the drop box, he has a hesitation, and gives a little shove *sideways*... Now watch again." Bobby played the tape a couple of times over.

"Yes I do, Bobby. But what does that mean?" Am I really that naïve about something so simple? Bobby points to the box under the table.

"That box, Frankie, has a hidden compartment about a half inch wide. Every time Adams decides it's the right moment, especially when it's real busy on the tables, he'll make sure nobody's watching and he'll tilt the plunger his way and the money goes into the little compartment." Bobby now gently explains. I stood back and was in shock... stunned... practically traumatized!

"Wow, Bobby. I can't get over it. I feel like a new babe in the world. Then how does he get the money if the security picks up the drop box and delivers it to the cage?"

"That's just it, Frankie. We're not sure if it's another security guard or someone in the cage. We'll find out soon enough. You can go back to work now, and I want you to be aware out there."

"I will Bobby. I will." I left back to the tables a different person. I took a glance at Dee behind the bar as she was serving the customers. I don't think I even trust her. What am I thinking? Now I'm really going off the deep end. So this is Las Vegas?

I finished my shift early and I stopped by the bar to have a beer...and maybe a shot of hard liquor.

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“How was your night Frankie?” says Dee as she pours me a beer.

“It’s been a long night, Dee. And could you add a shot of Christian Brothers?” Dee began to probe a little.

“We saw security walk Jason upstairs? I think everybody’s heard all kinds of wild stories by now.” Dee paused, “Man, once you screw up like that, you might as well leave the state after you get out of prison... or apply for a taxi job,” says Dee in a humorous way, yet feeling sympathetic for Jason Adams. I just laughed, but Dee was right. I don’t think you’ll be able to work anywhere in town. But a ride to the desert with two guys in suits..? Nahhhh... I better go to another topic.

“I had a nice time last night, Dee. I just want to thank you again for taking me to the party.”

“I’m glad you had a good time, Frankie. The crowd seemed to really like your dancing... especially with Carissa as a partner.” Dee says grimly.

“Oh Dee... She was just an old gal sticking with her youth, and she’s having a good time. Her husband doesn’t seem to like being around her much.” I noticed Dee just kind of ignored the subject.

“I gotta go wait on a customer, Frankie.”

“I have to go myself Dee. Thanks for the beer.” I left for home. As I was driving, I was thinking about Jason Adams stealing the money from the casino. I had no idea about that kind of scam going on. There must be a lot of ways you can cheat a casino that I can’t even begin to think of. I needed to apply myself to learn more about casino cheats and hustlers.

A few days later, it was my regular day off from work, and I went to the Fashion Mall on the strip. I decided I needed to get some cologne and maybe a few swanky shirts. After all, I am starting to meet the right people. I went through the busy shopping center looking for an upscale classy mod clothing store. I found the ‘Chic Fashion’s for the Man’ store. It almost looks like the future in clothes. I looked around and found a jacket made of shark skin and a silky black shirt. I went into the change room to see how the jacket fit. The mirror was too small and so I went back into the main part of the store where I found a full length mirror. I was admiring the jacket when I heard someone trying to get my attention.

"It looks very stylish... It's you." A soft voice from behind me utters. I thought it was the sales girl coming to my assistance. As I turned, I was stunned to see it was Carissa Kingman. My eyes were wide open.

"Carissa," I said with that surprised look on my face.

"So you remember your dance partner, huh Frank?" she says with a real big smile. Carissa was still looking pretty good, even without her expensive fashionable formal outfit that she had for the party last week.

"What a surprise," I said with a little shyness. "Do you shop here at a man's store?" I guess I was being a little silly.

"No, but I do shop here in the mall, and I saw you through the window, and thought I would say hello," Carissa says tactfully.

"Well, I'm flattered. So, do you like it?" I said as I modeled it in front of her.

"As I said earlier, it's you," she says with that flirtatious smile.

"That's good enough for me. I'll take it!" Now I got one of the richest women in Las Vegas picking my suits out. I wasn't sure what to say now since I'm finished buying the jacket and shirts. I felt I was getting a little hot under the collar.

"Frank..." Thank god she said something. "If you aren't in a hurry, why don't we have lunch at the 'Crystal Spoon'?" Holy crap, I don't think I have enough money to take this gal to an expensive lunch!

"My treat." She just said the magic words.

"I would love to have lunch with you, Carissa. But I should be taking you to lunch for giving me such a good time at your party." I hope I didn't push it too much, and that she still would insist on buying lunch.

"Okay, Mr. Scorpio. I accept." Oh crap!!! I just smiled and...

"Buy the way, Carissa. Where is the 'Crystal Spoon'?"

"It's a real nice place here in the Fashion mall. We can walk there."

"Okay. I'll just pay for these clothes and we're on our way." I went back into the dressing room like I was going to get something else. But I had to count my money to make sure I had plenty for the lunch, and I know she likes to drink. Oh crap! I need an ATM machine. I paid for my clothes and we were off to lunch.

Carissa and I had small talk as we walked through the mall. I

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couldn't believe I was walking with a big shot casino owner. We reached our destination for lunch; The 'Crystal Spoon' restaurant. They actually had a maître d' escorting people to the tables. There was a line to get into this place, and it was only for lunch. A lot of business people are here and must be having liquid lunch which includes Martinis.

"The line looks kind of long, Carissa." I was hoping I could get out of this. She grabbed my arm and escorted me to the podium where the maître d' has been taking reservations.

"Hello Marcel," she says like they're old friends.

"Oh, hello my dear old friend Carissa. You look beautiful as usual." The maître d' was all smiles.

"Thank you, Marcel. It's a beautiful day. How about a table for two?"

"Right this way, Mrs. Kingman. Your table is always ready." He escorted us to her usual table. We sat down...

"Thank you, Marcel. Please say hello to your family for me."

"Thank you, Carissa," gently says Marcel with that extra smile.

"By the way Marcel, this is a dear friend of mine. Mr. Frank Scorpio... Frank, this is Mr. Marcel Le Vant. His family owns this place."

I stood up to shake his hand, and as he extends his hand to me, "Nice to meet you Mr. Scorpio... and please stay seated. I will send over the cocktail waitress to take your order Carissa."

Holy crap! I knew we were going to hit the booze! Carissa took the wine list from the middle of the table. So I did the same and opened it. I'll be a mother____... Are they nuts asking these prices for wine?

"So, Carissa... Do you have any preference or suggestions?" I'm stepping into a pile here as I'm breaking out into little sweats in my shorts as the waitress walks up to our table.

"Hello Mrs. Kingman. How are you today?"

"Hello Charlene. I'm fine thank you. I would like you to meet a friend of mine, Frank Scorpio. Frank, this is Charlene. She's is the best waitress here. Charlene shakes my hand.

"Nice to meet you Mr. Scorpio... Mrs. Kingman has always been our favorite customer, and we welcome you also to our home. Well, Mrs. Kingman, have you decided what I could bring you?"

"Yes, Charlene. Do you like wine, Frank?"

“Sure... Get whatever you like. I’m easy.” She gives me that smile. What did I just say? Carissa orders without really looking over the wine list.

“Charlene, please bring us a bottle of Chateau Lafitè... and we’ll take a few minutes before we order our food.”

I took a peek at the price from the wine list... \$185 dollars?! My heart started beating fast. I can’t afford this. I was looking for an excuse to run out and look for a bank machine. I needed to pull out more cash. Carissa continued the conversation.

“So tell me Frank, where is it you work?”

“I’m a dealer at the Nugget Junction Casino, and I’m training to be floor manager and eventually become director of operations.” Was I laying it on too thick?

“Oh, a director of operations... That’s a big responsibility. Who’s training you?”

“The Fager brothers,” I said very casually since she probably didn’t know them.

“Ted and Bobby Fager?” she asked as she took a sip of her water with a lemon.

“Yes, you know them?” I asked as I took a sip of my water with lemon.

“Very well... They were raised in this town and did real good in management on the strip. You’re learning from one of the best.” Carissa was complimenting them with grade ‘A’ marks. “And are you going to take over the operations of their casino in the future?”

“I hope so. I really have that dream of having my own casino some day.”

“Really..? That’s a pretty big dream. It takes a lot of money and investors to believe in you,” she remarks as she marvels my ambition.

“I know Carissa. I hope that day will come. Ted and Bobby have been good to me and I will work with them as long as possible.”

“Good Frank. I admire the loyalty in a person.” She seemed impressed. The waitress, Charlene, brought the bottle of wine and poured a small amount in the glass for Carissa to taste. She did the connoisseur thing as she took a couple of small swallows.

“Very good, Charlene... Please pour Mr. Scorpio a glass.” I drank the wine about half way and...

“That’s good, Carissa,” I said as I loosened up a little. She gently

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put her glass down.

“Not to change the subject, Frank, but are you and Dee in uh..., relationship?” That was subtle I thought.

“We’ve been out a couple of times, but it’s nothing serious. Why?”

“I was just wondering because I saw Troy Buchanan dancing with her at the party, and I wasn’t sure if that was over.”

“Dee told me it was over a long ago. It didn’t bother me much.”

“Well Dee’s mom, Raylene, likes you and that’s rare for her to like anyone that likes her daughter,” she says as I saw that her wine glass was empty. I poured her a little more.

“I always said I was a good guy, Carissa.” I just gave a little laugh to liven up the conversation. She gave a small chuckle herself. Charlene came to take our lunch order and I thought, ‘what the hell.’ Just order whatever and deal with it later.

Carissa ordered the Caesars chef salad and I ordered the fish of the day. We ate and I did enjoy her company. She was pleasant and flirtatious. So I thought it was time I asked the questions.

“So Carissa, tell me about your husband, Mark.” I might have hit a sour note.

“My husband does a lot of traveling to his other casinos. Maybe that’s why we get a long so well.” She gives a grin.

“Are you running the Majestic Palace when he’s not here in town?”

“I run the Palace even if he is here in town. It was my gift he gave me after we both realized that he was spending too much time at his favorite casino in the Grand Cayman Islands.”

“That should be like a paradise having a casino in the tropics.” I sounded like I was ready to go to Disneyland. She lights up one of those Virginia Slim cigarettes.

“I go there occasionally, but I love the lifestyle here in Vegas. Mark has seven other casinos, and I don’t know why he wanted so many. Probably greed... But that’s Mark. He wants it all.” She talked like she regretted his voracity. Carissa poured herself another glass of wine as she was thinking of something...

“Frank, how would you like to see how things run from behind the scenes at the Majestic Palace?” I about choke on my glass of wine...

“What are you saying, Carissa?”

“Well, I like your ambition and I know Ted and Bobby Fager. I

also know that Raylene Hutton thinks a lot of you. She certainly approves of you seeing her daughter. So, how would you like to see how security works, and the type of people we hire to catch cheaters?" I was in total shock. My mind went north to oblivion land. I had to ask...

"Carissa... If you're trying to torture me by kidding with me, you're very cruel." She laughed.

"No, I'm not kidding Frank. I've known you for such a short while and I feel I can trust you." She took another puff of her cigarette as she went into a deep thought...

"Can I trust you Frank?"

"Carissa... First, yes you can. Second, pinch me; I think I'm dreaming."

"Well, maybe I'll pinch you later." She let's out another little laugh. I had to think about that one for a moment. Hell, this is fantastic!

"When can we do this, Carissa?" I asked like a puppy that was about to get a milk bone. She looked at me and took another puff of her cigarette.

"I'm through shopping for the day. Do you want to go after we finish here?"

"Carrisa, I don't know what to say." I poured her another glass of wine as well as myself. I held my glass up and she followed. We clicked our wine glasses together and in unison, said... "Cheers."

We finished our lunch and we both had a fairly good buzz from the expensive wine. It looked like she could out drink me, so I thought that I would slow down.

"Frank, I have to do a couple of things, and then I want you to meet me at the Emperor's lounge. Give my card to the bartender and tell him that you're my guest. Just order anything you want to drink and I'll meet you there." It looked like Carissa was more excited about this than I was. I was dancing on air.

"I'll be there." I just thought about the check for lunch... Oh crap!!! Just then Charlene the waitress came up to our table.

"Will there be anything else, Mrs. Kingman? Anything for Mr. Scorpio?" I just shook my head and said no.

"No thank you, Charlene. The lunch was fabulous and the wine was excellent. Mr. Scorpio and I have an appointment, so we're off."

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“Thank you for coming, Mrs. Kingman, and it was nice to meet you Mr. Scorpio.”

“Nice to meet you, Charlene... And the service is first class, thank you again.”

Carissa downed her glass of wine... “Ready to go Frank?”

“Uh, why don’t you go ahead Carissa, and I’ll take care of the bill for the lunch?” She chuckled a little and said...

“It’s already taken care of Frank. It’s automatically billed to the Majestic Palace account. I told you it was on me.” God Bless America! Is this a woman given birth by the right hand of God?

“Uh, thank you Carissa. I could’ve taken care of it.” How humble did I look?

“I know you could have, Frank, but I invited you and it was my treat.” This lady is nothing but class ‘A’ in my book.

We left and I walked her to the valet parking. I waited with her until her car was brought by the parking attendant. We had small talk, and we were both feeling pretty good. All of a sudden, here comes her car. You can just tell, ‘it’s her’. It was a beautiful, sort of a silver frost light blue color. But the real eye catcher is that it was a Lamborghini sports car. I saw this car in a magazine for over \$200 thousand dollars. Well, I acted real cool while I was staring at it. Carissa had a smile on her face and turned to me...

“It’s a Lamborghini Frank. Do you like it? I just got it a week ago.” As I continued to stare at it, what else could I say?

“Yeah Carissa... It looks really sharp.” Is that all I had to say? “I mean... You’re able to handle this machine?” I guess I thought I was another Mario Andretti.

“Frank, my grandfather manufactured exotic cars for years. So I know a little about them.”

“It’s beautiful, Carissa. And you have good taste.” The valet opened the door for her as she tipped him.

“I’ll see you at the Emperor’s lounge Frank.” She gives that little wave as she puts on her custom sun glasses. I waved to her as she drove away. If being a casino owner provides this perk, I want a piece of it. It was like my uncle Amos and Sonny told me...

“You have to be the bank if you want to survive this game.” Carissa is living proof, although her husband had a lot to do with it. I went to my uncle’s old Buick in the self-parking lot. I drove discreetly

into the Majestic Palace parking lot, and went into the casino.

I strolled through the main pit and on to the Emperors lounge, and waited for Carissa. It was late afternoon and there was a pianist playing some blues music. I gave the bartender Carissa's business card and ordered a beer. He didn't hesitate about it and served me fast. I sat by the piano and listened to the good music. A half hour passed by, and I was real curious what Carissa was going to show me. Just then___

"Hello sir. Would you like another beer?" I looked up to the waitress and just stared for a lifetime second... It was Nina; the cocktail waitress I met last week whom I thought had the look of an Angel.

"Yes, I would please." She really caught me off guard. Nina smiled and went to get my order. Man, what luck is this? She came back with my beer and I lit up with a big smile. I wanted to say something to start a small conversation, but I didn't know what to say.

"Here's your beer sir and it's taken care of. Enjoy..." She starts to walk away.

"Wait!" I had to think fast. Oh yeah... "Let me give you something here." I pulled out a couple of dollars and gave her a tip.

"Thank you, sir." She threw on that beautiful smile, and then..."Excuse me, sir... Have we met?"

"Uh, yes... I believe we met last week. I was here for a gathering for a bunch of politicians' party." I'm thinking—Play it cool... play it cool.

"Oh, I remember. You had a girl with you and you ordered Blue Sapphire and tonic," Nina says like the professional waitress that she is.

"Wow... I'm impressed you remembered?" Thank you god...Thank you god!

"Well, I've been serving cocktails awhile, and that's how we remember people instead of their names." She talks with that sweet soft voice. "No gin and tonic today?"

"Not today," I said with a slight regret.

"So where's your girlfriend?" she asked.

"Oh..." as I gave a very small chuckle... "She's not my girlfriend. She's just a friend who invited me to the party because her mother knows the owners." I gave that little nervous laugh again and hoped to turn her thoughts just to me.

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“Well, if you need anything else, please let me know, sir.”

“Frank... Please just call me Frank.” I said with almost a stutter.

“Okay. Nice to meet you Frank... I’m Nina.” I guess she forgot that we exchanged names last week. Hell, why would she remember? She walked away back to the bar, and I watched her sway that ass with rhythm.

“How’s the view?” A voice from behind me came out of nowhere, again. It was Carissa— “You made it safely.” I tried to throw her off the attention I was giving Nina.

“Is Nina taking care of you, okay?” Carissa says with a wicked smile.

“Oh, yeah... She’s a nice friendly person. And thanks for the comp drinks.”

“Are you ready for the grand tour, Frank?”

“Yes I am, Carissa. I feel like it’s my first time at Disneyland.”

“Well then, you’ll like this ride. Let’s go.”

As she took me to the elevator, I was thinking why was she being so nice to me? She’s a lot of years older than me, but age is a state of mind. I should talk. We arrived at the security offices, and she got me a casino badge to wear as I took the tour. We went into the room where the security cameras are linked to almost every inch of the casino hotel. The room was filled with video recorders and men in plain clothes that would be watching the small televisions zooming in on everyone, including the employees of the Majestic Palace casino.

“What do you think so far, Frank?” Carissa asked as I was just panning the room with my eyes.

“I think this is fantastic, Carissa. I’ve been in the one at the Nugget, but this is enormous.”

“Come on, Frank. There’s more.” Carissa continued to take me on the tour of the glamorous casino. We went out to the pool area where there are four pools and three Jacuzzi Spas. It was an ambiance of the Roman Empire with cocktail girls dressed in white and gold lace trim bras, and bikini bottoms. There was also a small sarong around their waste.

“The girls look very classy in their cocktail pool uniforms, Carissa. It really gives that feel of the biblical era,” I said to her as she grabbed my arm in an escort fashion.

“Yes it does, Frank. I also have one of those pool outfits I wear at my penthouse roof pool... Just to keep up with the atmosphere, you know.”

I was picturing her with it on. For an old broad, she does have a sexy body. I think the position she has as owner of this casino, gives her that extra beauty and charisma that us guys fantasize about. There are certainly women who are attracted to a man once they find out he's got tons of money. No one's going to find out about the money I have in a safety deposit box at my bank. That's all I need is for a woman to spin my head, and I start blowing the cash on her. I don't have to worry about Carissa taking me for my money...ha! She knows what a dealer makes in a small casino.

“How do you like it so far, Frank?”

“Are you kidding? I'm really happy for you, Carissa. You have it all and you seem happy,” I said it to her with sincerity.

“Frank... Just remember that money always doesn't bring you happiness. It makes you a lot of friends though.” She laughs a little. “But Raylene is probably the best friend I have.” Oh man, Raylene... That's all I need now is for Carissa to tell Raylene about this day and then she tells Dee. I better be real cool about this. I can sense that something was going to be out of control, and all hell will break loose.

“Have you seen Raylene lately?” I asked her as casual as I could.

“Raylene is out of town for a couple of days. She's says she has to do some special report on rare birds. That's her code over the phone for going away with her lover, the news station owner. Raylene's got a lot of energy, Ha!” She has a continuous small chuckle as she escorts me back inside to the hotel.

“Have I taken up too much of your time, Frank? I catch you shopping and steal you away for lunch, and then take you all over the casino and hotel... I'm sorry.”

“Not at all, Carissa. This is one of the most exciting times in my life. I have a goal and some day I want something like this.” I was being honest of what I was saying. Carissa looked at me for a silent moment...

“I believe you, Frank. You seem to have the drive and determination. That's very good.” I was hearing her say that with sincerity. “Now, let me show you what the penthouse looks like. If that doesn't give you more motivation, nothing will.”

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We walked to the elevators and went up to the penthouse where she was living while staying on the strip. It was the same place she had celebrated her political and birthday party a week ago. This time, the beautiful suite looked a lot bigger because there were no people. There was a large extended living room area where it led to the pool outside. The whole decor was looking extremely beautiful as she walked me through the luxurious penthouse. There were paintings on the wall that must have cost a fortune.

“Frank, why don’t you go out through the sliding door and sit by the pool? It’s a pretty warm evening and I’ll get us a drink.” I did exactly that, and as I stepped out into the patio, I could see for miles and miles around the city of Las Vegas. We were nearly fifty floors above the Las Vegas Strip. I looked down to see the traffic and pedestrians move about. Then I continued to pan my view of her exotic property. There were cactus plants and artificial trees that added to the backyard scenery of this penthouse. It was a great sight. The pool was built with marble looking large rocks with water falls. There was a volcano shaped rock mountain spa about six to eight feet above the pool. It also overlooked the city lights.

“Here we go Frank.” She handed me a glass of wine and we sat on the pool furniture. This was the life.

“You have a beautiful place, Carissa. I’m happy for you.”

“Thank you, Frank. But why are you happy for me? You hardly know me.”

“You hardly know me, Carissa. You’ve been treating me like a V.I.P. How come..?” Now I’ve reversed the role. She looked at me for a moment.

“I don’t know why, Frank. But you have a special quality about yourself. I’m not sure what it is, but it’s there. Raylene took a liking to you and I trust her judgment. After all you took her daughter out and she trusts her daughter.” I was flattered by this stylish older woman who seemed to have it together.

“Dee and I work together and we’re good friends. I really don’t have time to be in a relationship. I’m studying everyday how to run the operations of a casino. So far today, you have given me the best education on the strip.”

“You flatter me, Frank. Ted and Bobby are probably your best mentors.” I looked around and enjoyed the view of the city. All I could

think of to say was how relaxing this was.

“Thanks for inviting me, Carissa. I’ve really had a beautiful time.”

“You sound like your ready to leave, Frank.”

“I’m sorry Carissa, but I feel like I’m maybe taking up all your time.” I was trying to be nice and not ruin my welcome mat with her.

“Don’t be silly Frank. This is my ‘no work’ day. If I had to work everyday at running this place, I would go nuts. That’s why I have a casino manager. He better run it like it’s his or he’s out on his ass!” Wow... I’m seeing the hard business side of Carissa, as she lights up another cigarette.

“I’ll tell you what Frank. I really don’t have a lot of friends that I could trust. I’ve known Raylene for a very long time, and she has been a best friend and I trust her with my life. Just remember this... Once you have money, you can’t trust anyone. Do they like you or your money, thinking they’ll get a piece of it? Remember that! It’s your first lesson in learning the casino business!” Carissa says that with firmness in her voice.

She started to get a little edgy. I don’t know if it was the booze speaking or she’s having a rough time being in the limelight as a female casino boss.

“Are you okay, Carissa? She took another puff of her cigarette and blew.

“Yes Frank. I’m sorry. It’s just that once you seem to have it all, it becomes hard to trust anyone. Then your employees steal from you.” I was thinking of what she was saying.

“Carissa... Are you having problems with employees?”

“Frank, you have to be aware and cautious of everyone! People in this town like to gamble, and when they lose their ass, they think they can get it back by stealing from the casino.” There was a lot of sense to what she was saying. Jason Adams, the Blackjack dealer from the Nugget where I work, did just that.

“I understand what you’re saying, Carissa. I really do.”

“Hey Frank... I’m in for the evening. Would you like to go for a swim or a Jacuzzi? She asked while she looked me straight in the eyes.

“Uh, I didn’t bring my swimming trunks.” She took another puff of her cigarette and smiled—

We’ve been in the Jacuzzi for about 10 minutes with our glass of wine. She did give me a pair of her husband’s new swimming trunks.

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Mark Kingman was never around and he had about a dozen new pair put away in the closet. Carissa, on the other hand, had the perfect body for the bright colored string bikini she put on. It sure set out the glow of her golden tan she had. All of a sudden, there was lightning in the sky.

“Is it going to rain?” I got a little concerned.

“It’s just a passing cloud, Frank. We get this all the time. It’s just so warm that ‘Mother Nature’ gets pissed off sometimes and throws electricity around, and it clashes in the sky... Are you scared?” she asked with a slight grin.

“No. I just thought that there was going to be a sudden storm.” I looked around up into the sky actually thinking I was going to be hit with an electrical force, because we we’re about 50 stories high.

“I’m fucking with you, Frank. Just relax and enjoy.” Carissa takes another sip of her wine and tilts her head back on the edge of the Jacuzzi. The air bubbles from the jets really made my body relax, especially with the soft music playing throughout the penthouse backyard. When you close your eyes and tilt your head back, it almost feels like your floating in the sky. I was so tranquil with the warm night breeze blowing on my face—

**Why am I not feeling any pain? I saw the flash of gunfire coming from all directions. As I turn to my left, I can see Nina smiling at me as if there were never any fear of the desert storm. Incense... Why is there always an aroma of incense? I sense movement all around me, but I can’t feel anything or move my body. I’m floating in air. The feeling of elation... Nina, you keep looking at me, but you won’t say anything? I... I...*

“Frankie... Frankiel!” Carissa was giving me a shove to see if I was still alive from the heat of the Jacuzzi.

“Yeah, Carissa... Oh, I’m sorry. This is so relaxing that my mind just drifted away.

“Are you sure you’re okay, Frank?” Carissa put her hand on my shoulder. “Frank, do you mind if I ask you something that might seem personal?”

I thought for a moment, what could be so personal? “Sure, Carissa... What?”

"I noticed the scar under your shoulder. Did something happen to you recently? It looks kind of fresh." I looked at her and she seemed concerned.

"I was shot, Carissa. The bullet went straight threw missing the bone. So everything is okay." She wasn't sure what to say at first.

"I'm sorry... What happened?"

"The usual... Girl has man problem... Other dumb man comes to rescue... Man has gun... Other man gets in way of bullet... and bleeds." I said that plain and simple. She just stared at me for a moment.

"So you came to rescue a 'damsel in distress'... And you turned into the victim," she says as she leans back and looks at me.

"Yeah... Good ol' Frankie Scorpio always gets into trouble when it comes to women...Ha!" I started talking pretty freely to a woman I really didn't know that well.

Carissa just looked at me and stared as if to see right through me. Then she leaned over and gently kissed me on the lips. I just sat there in the steamy water and didn't move. She backed off and looked at me again. I really started to get turned on. She put her hand under my chin as I looked at her. She kissed me again... That's it!!! I grabbed her and kissed her hard as my tongue went all over her steamy dripping face and neck onto her shoulders. She really knew how to work her tongue on me. I pulled off her bra and pressed my body against her. Oh my god, I can't believe I'm with an older woman... An older rich woman... An older very rich woman... That owns a casino.

She grabbed my ass and squeezed it like it was the last ass on earth. She finally ripped off my swim trunks, or should I say, her husbands... and I thought I should go with the program. We continued to hang on to each other as if we were held by crazy glue. We were both completely naked; and we are still embraced and kissing passionately.

I always learned to keep one eye opened as a look out in case someone was going to intrude like the ex, or the present husband, or boyfriend, or hell, a girlfriend for that matter, who was about to walk in. We got out of the Jacuzzi as we were still embracing one another, and flopped onto the double lounge chair...To hell with me thinking that older women are too old! This is great, and for some reason, she knows what to do at the right moment when we are in a certain position. She was wearing me down, and I'm the young stud. We

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came together...and man... This was heaven.

I've been with Jen, Dee, and almost Heather. They are all beautiful, but this was the 'art of making love'. We just laid there for a few minutes. She got up and gave me a kiss and then went to put on her pool bath robe. Of course she had to light up another cigarette. Isn't that what all women do? At least that's the way it was in my all time favorite movie; 'The Graduate' with Ann Bancroft and Dustin Hoffman. Hey, I wonder if Carissa has a daughter...

"Are you having a good time, Frankie?" She whispers softly to me as she sat next to my naked body, and gave me a small kiss on the lips.

"I'm having a beautiful time, Carissa." I had to wonder, why is she with me? I'm not rich— Cute... but not rich. Maybe I'm starting to think too much into this.

"Well Frank... I don't want to seem rude, but I have to turn in early, because I have a meeting in the morning with the department heads."

"Oh, I understand Carissa. I have to go anyway." I got up and dressed. She walked me to the door. I wasn't sure if I should kiss her good night or shake hands... What am I thinking? I feel like a little boy on his first date to the sock hop. "I really had a great day, Carissa. I just went to the mall to buy a few things, and I feel like I was on a getaway vacation to another world... Thank you."

"You're welcome, Frank. And if you don't mind, we don't need to let anyone know about this little get together. Okay?" she says with a very soft voice.

"No... This was a perfect day and it's nobody's business but ours, Carissa." I sensed that she liked what I said. After all, she is a married woman. What am I saying? She's a married woman to a casino boss who is very rich! She gave me a soft kiss goodnight.

"Goodnight, Frankie..." I smiled with a thought in my head— '*Goodnight, Mrs. Robinson*'...

"Good night, Carissa." I felt like I was involved in some kind of puppy love. How dumb is that?

I went downstairs to the casino lounge. After all that has happened today, I had this feeling to just take a small glance at the cocktail waitress, Nina. I looked around the lounge by the small band that was entertaining. I couldn't see her anywhere. I called it a night and went home.

Chapter 22

Beam Me Up Scotty... I'm Glowing

I got up early the next morning, and thank god, I had the day off from work. I went down stairs to see Aunt Mary, and of course get some breakfast.

“Good morning Aunt Mary,” I said in a cheery tone.

“And where were you all day, Frankie? I thought we were going to look for a car for you,” she says with a suspicious concern in her voice.

“Oh, I went shopping for some clothes and just lost track of time. I’m sorry. I watched some games at the sports book.” Now I’m lying to her. This could give me an anxiety attack. I spent an evening with a married woman and now I’m lying to my family.

“Dee called a few times yesterday. I told her that you went out shopping for clothes, and maybe looking to buy a car.” Mary continues to probe with a suspicious tone. I had to think fast ...

“Why don’t we go after breakfast to the auto plaza, and you can help me pick out my car?” I said with a perky smile. She gave me that look of ‘what are you up to?’ then...

“Okay... We’ll go and find you a car.” I turned all smiles, but I wasn’t sure what kind of a car she had in mind.

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“But we’re going to put the car in my name, Frankie. This way you won’t have to register it with Nevada State in your name.”

“Okay Mary.” I started thinking of the mess I was in with the mob. It’s sort of bitter sweet. The situation got me here in Vegas. I’ve met important people in the gaming world. And I’ve met some of the most beautiful chicks around. I didn’t have this much action back home with women. Yes, I do miss Michele.

We finished our breakfast and then went to the Auto Plaza. I wasn’t sure what model I was going to get. I know what I wanted, but according my uncles and Aunt Mary, I had to drive something mellow so as not to draw attention. But I had to have something to impress girls as well as myself. We continued to look around.

“Have you seen anything that you might like, Frankie?”

“Yeah, but you won’t let me have a new Porsche, Ferrari, or the convertible 560 SL Mercedes.” I was getting worn out. Mary continued to walk around with me into different car lots at the Plaza. After a couple of dragging hours, I saw this nice Corvette.

“Look Mary... That’s a nice looking silver convertible Corvette, and it’s not that fancy like a Pantera or other exotic cars,” I said with a soft mellow tone. She looked at it and went into deep thought...

“It looks expensive.”

“It is a little expensive, but that’s because of the engine. It’s fast and powerful.”

“So you need a fast car?” She asked like a conservative parent.

“Yeah... What if the mob catches up with me and all I’m driving is a Ford Escort?” I was trying to be a little humorous, but I just got the eye from her.

“Go ahead and give it a test run,” she says as her eye brows are raised. That put a smile on my face as the car salesman walked up to us. I took it out for a spin and this car had rocket power. It was a stick shift and I love that kind of power. I decided that this is the right car for me. The asking price is \$37 thousand dollars. We made an offer, and it took about an hour to come to an agreement.

Aunt Mary wrote the dealer a check for the full amount. I had to reimburse her with the money I had put away in the safety deposit box at our bank. Now I’m dipping into the mobs money for luxury items. What’s done is done... It’s mine now. We walked out of the sales office and there was my Corvette in the front. It had just been washed.

It was a beautiful silver color. Just the color I always loved.

“Uh, here’s the key to my Buick, Aunt Mary. Uncle Amos would probably want it back now. You can drive it home, and I will drive my new baby home, in awhile.”

“You better come home tonight, Frankie. I know how you young guys like to drive the new car forever and show it off,” she says with a slight grin on her face.

“I’m just going to take it for a small test ride, Mary... I’ll be careful and I’ll be home early,” I said excitedly as I stared at my new toy.

“Okay. I’ll have dinner for you, when you get home.” She left in the Buick, and I went to fill the Vette up with premium gas. So now I’m driving down Las Vegas Blvd. like I was the King of the Desert. I had the top down and I felt free as a bird. Yup, I see a few chicks turn their heads this way. What I’d really like to do is call Carissa and take her for a spin.

I went to the Majestic Palace and decided to go park valet. I thought I’d better tip the attendant before he parked my car. I prayed that he didn’t park it too close to another car. I would have to kill him if my beautiful Vette ended up with a ding on it.

“Here’s a little something for you pal. I hope you find a spot where some asshole can’t put a ding on my car.” I said it in the friendliest way.

“I will sir. Don’t worry at all. And thank you very much.” The valet boy seemed to appreciate the beauty of my new Vette. I don’t know why, but I was still worried. Maybe I should’ve thrown Carissa Kingman’s name in the sentence.

I walk into the main casino and picked up the house phone. I asked the hotel operator to connect me to Carissa’s office. I waited for almost a minute.

“I’m sorry; Mrs. Kingman is in a meeting right now.”

“Would you leave her a message that Frank Scorpio is in the lounge, and that I would like to see her?”

“Yes sir, I’ll tell her,” says the operator.

“Thank you.” I hung up the phone and decided to have a drink in the lounge. I actually was hoping to see Nina, my number one cocktail waitress. I’m starting to feel I’m obsessed with her. I sat at my usual table where I first met her. Another cocktail waitress came up to me and asked

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what I would have for a drink. I didn't want to make it too obvious on asking for Nina, so I just ordered my Blue Sapphire and tonic drink. I sat there getting a little bored. An hour went by and I hadn't heard from Carissa, nor have I seen Nina. I went to the casino house phone again, and asked the operator to ring Carissa in her office or penthouse. I waited another minute before the operator got back to me.

"I'm sorry sir, but Mrs. Kingman is still in a meeting."

"Please leave her a note that Frank Scorpio is in the lounge... Thank you." Maybe I just caught her at a bad time. She did have the day off yesterday and I took up most of it. I just went back to finish my drink and I was going to be on my way home. There was a young girl performer playing here in the lounge in the late afternoon. Not too many people are in here, but she kept on singing. I heard a couple of songs and decided to drink up and leave. I got up and reached into my pocket to get a couple of bucks to leave the waitress. As I dropped it onto the table, all of a sudden I hear...

"Are you ready for another Sapphire and tonic?" I looked over to the waitress to say I was leaving, and I'm looking right at Nina's eyes.

"Uh, yes... I would." She had that great smile.

"It looks like you're leaving," she says with those angel eyes starring at me. Come on god; give me my next sentence...

"Uh, no... I was just going to the restroom, and I was going to order another one. So you're just in time, Nina."

"So you remember my name," she says with a wink.

"Well, of course. I always remember the good cocktail waitresses that remember my drink." How was that for flattery? That smile was still controlling me. "By the way, just in case you wanted to know, my name is Frank Scorpio, and uh, if you don't mind, what's your last name, Nina?"

"No, I don't mind. My full name is Nina Celeste Vargas. Celeste was my mother's name. Are you a local, Mr. Frank Scorpio?"

"Please Nina, we're old friends now... Call me Frank—and yes, I am a local now. I just moved here last year." I hope she doesn't start asking me too many questions.

"Where are you from?" She asked with a lot of politeness I thought. The words instantly came out of my mouth...

"Southern California." Oh crap! I let that slip out. She continued on...

“What part?” The good news is that she’s asking. The bad news is I gotta lie to her.

“Outside San Diego. Uh, I’ll be right back. I have to go to the restroom.” Great excuse! It works all the time.

“I’ll bring your drink, Frank.” I wondered if that was a flirt. I went and did what a man has to do who’s been sweating over a beautiful honey... really take a piss and wash up!

I got back to my table, and there was my drink. Nina got busy all of a sudden. The female singer was still going strong, and a few more people gathered at the bar as we got into the late afternoon. I watched Nina at work and she handled her customers very well. I started looking around. Where in the hell is that Carissa? Well maybe she just got too busy. I was kind of glad she didn’t show up. It gave me more of a chance to talk to Nina. The problem is that she was getting too busy. I wanted to ask for her number. What if I get shot down? I’m usually not worried about that, but with her, I don’t think I could handle the rejection. She came up to me again...

“Would you like another one, Frank?” I was going to say yes, and then I thought... ‘What if she thinks I’m an alcoholic?’ I am getting a little high, but not drunk.

“You know, Nina Celeste Vargas... I have to go on a business meeting, so I better say no.” Now that had to be impressive.

“Okay Frank Scorpio. It was nice to meet you, and I guess I’ll see you around again.”

“Oh yes. I usually come to the sports book and watch the games.” She had to ask?

“Are you a gambler?” I had to say...

“Oh, I bet real small on the ball games. You know the suckers play the gaming tables and the slot machines.” How was that?

“That’s why we have the big casinos,” she says. She seemed like she wasn’t into gambling. As far as I’m concerned, that’s one less headache I have to worry about!

“Well, good night Nina. I feel like we’re real old friends now.” She chuckles a little...

“Good night, Frankie. I hope to see you again.” I walked away like I just won the lottery. What progress! Now we know each others name. This is great!

I went to the casino house phone to see if Carissa was in. I got the

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same results, except this time the hotel operator says that she left the hotel. I thought for a moment... Oh well, what the hell... I just left the casino and headed straight for the valet to get my power mobile. I wanted to drive it more. I was on a high. I got a new Vette and I broke the ice with Nina.

The valet brought my car to me and I made a nonchalant move around the car just to see if there were any dings on it. I didn't want to insult the valet kid, especially if he remembers me the next time I come back. I drove out onto the strip and headed south on Vegas blvd. I got to highway 160 and went west towards Pahrump. The road is practically a straightaway, and I wanted to put the pedal to the metal. I was far enough into the Blue Diamond highway to put it to the test. I looked around and the road was clear for miles ahead of me. I came to a complete stop. I revved up the engine a few times. All of a sudden, I just floored the pedal. This baby took off like a bat out of hell... The top to my Vette was down and the strong wind was blowing through my hair. I had a big smile on my face. I felt like I was in euphoria. My speedometer was screaming 140 miles per hour, and the bright sunray was shining through the cool breeze. I wanted to close my eyes and feel the freedom of a bird flying in the heavens.

** I can feel hot liquid running through my veins. It's the strangest...good feeling. I can feel the ecstasy of my body rising off the ground. As my head drifts from one side to the other, it brings a relaxation to my mind. The aroma of incense lets you breathe the freedom of your spirit. The colors of the prism that radiate through the sun... This is where life begins... Things are going to be okay Nina. We are going to wake up from this bad dream very soon.*

Chapter 23

Don't Squeeze the Dice Too Tight

It was one of those real hot days in the middle of summer. Anthony Martinez arrived in Las Vegas for a business meeting. There was a limousine waiting for him at McCarran Airport terminal. He was dressed in his usual manner of a very expensive suit, and he carried himself like the rest of the world should know who he is. His car pulled up to the front of the Majestic Palace Hotel and Casino. The valet opened his door and out stepped a business man in 109 degree weather. There was luggage and the head bellman did recognize who he was, and rushed to his assistance.

“Good afternoon, Mr. Martinez. I hope your flight was pleasant.”

“It was fine, thank you. I need to let Carissa Kingman know that I’m here.” Anthony was in a good mood as he tipped the bellman very well.

“Thank you sir and I’ve already notified the front desk that you have arrived and your penthouse suite is ready.” The bellman picked up his luggage and led Anthony Martinez to his room. The room was a \$3,000 a day suite. Of course Martinez didn’t have to pay a dime. After all he and Carissa Kingman were old friends and business partners.

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He entered the suite designed with marble floors and looked around as if he was giving final approval. He poured himself a drink from the bar, and walked out into the penthouse patio that was almost 50 flights up over looking the city of Las Vegas. He enjoyed the view for a few minutes and walked around his private Jacuzzi and small pool. There was a ring from the phone. Martinez answers after he downs his drink...

"Hello... Thank you... Yes, I will be there in her office within the hour. Good bye."

Martinez thinks for a moment, and then makes a call. "Hello... How are you Randall? I'm here in Las Vegas. As soon as we finish the transaction, I'll be on my way back home... I know... Yes Randall... Just relax and I'll take care of this... No, we haven't found out anything yet... I have to go into a meeting now... Good bye." Anthony poured himself another drink and sat down outside in the patio lounge chair. He was just viewing the Las Vegas strip as he started going into deep thought...

'I don't want you to have this baby, Mary! We can't deal with having a child at our age!'

'But I want this child and it's ours Tony. I have already disgraced myself with my family for just seeing you. My father hates you and the members of your gang.'

'Your father thinks he's a law abiding saint that picked oranges for a living, and the best he could do is get your family a shack in the barrio!'

'And you! What did your father do? He cheated on your mother and was a drug addict. He died on heroin! And then look what happened?! She gets raped by the landlord of her apartment and she becomes pregnant!' Anthony slaps her face with force and Mary falls to the ground.

'Mary! Are you okay?' Mary recovers with tears in her eyes. 'Look Mary... I'm sorry... I cannot handle having a child! Yes! My mother was raped and the son of a bitch got her pregnant with Randall. But I had to help take care of him! And I can't do that anymore! My mother and I cannot handle him! For a young child, he has a mean streak! I don't have time to play a father or big brother. You will have the abortion!'

'No!!! I will not!' Mary starts to weep frantically.

The door bell rings to the penthouse which interrupts his thoughts. Anthony snaps out of his trance. He answers the door.

“Well I decided to join you in your suite, Tony.” Carissa carries in a special bottle of Louis the XIV Brandy. Anthony gives Carissa a hug and a gentle kiss on the cheek.

“Carissa... You know how to charm a man.”

“Nothing but the best Tony.” Carissa sets one of the most expensive brandy’s in the world on the bar nook and gets a couple of shot glasses from the cupboard. “If you ordered this drink from the casino bar, it would cost you about \$175 dollars a shot. Today it’s free.” She pours the brandy into the shot glasses and they toast. As they click glasses, Anthony looks into Carissa’s eyes...

“Carissa, you are the sunshine in my eyes.”

“Tony— always mixing business with pleasure.” She smiles while they down the shots.

“I haven’t considered this moment to be a business meeting, Carissa. After all, I just got into Vegas.” Anthony says with a flirtatious smile.

“Well Tony, it’s always nice to have you here, and of course it’s always great to hear how our business is doing. How is the business back in Southern California?”

Martinez walked over to the bar and poured him and Carissa another King Louis XIV Brandy.

“Business is fantastic! A few of the corporations are hurting financially because of the weak economy. And that’s great for us. We don’t give a damn about their credit. We just put a mortgage on their commercial properties. If they go into foreclosure, we take back the property. It’s as simple as that.” Carissa thinks for a moment...

“What about the primary business? I understand you haven’t fully recovered from the loss of \$25 million dollars last year that your brother Randall fucked up!”

“We are recovering from that loss. I contacted my source in Peru on what happened, and they’re going to work with me. However, I have about three months to complete our contract.”

“Or what?” asked Carissa as she has one more shot of brandy.

“Mr. Escobedo is not going to take this lightly. He built a powerful ingredient that was added to our merchandise. I contracted... That is... We contracted with him to buy a certain quota, monthly. We are short,

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but he likes our past history of business.” Anthony knows that Carissa has an edge in the power of the syndicate. She has been the main artery for the financial investments.

“Why haven’t we made up for the loss in the past year?” asked Carissa.

“I’ve been trying to take care of Randall. He needs an operation that will give him a new pair of prosthesis legs. I’ve been trying to take care of his territory on the sales.”

“I don’t give a fuck about his limbs, Tony. I want the financial results! I’m sick of my husband and his ‘Kingdom of Casinos’. This place was going to hell before I took it over. I got into this with you because you said you would guarantee over 60% on my investment. It’s going too slow!” Carissa was turning more into a business bitch as Anthony was trying desperately to explain the delay of the investment.

“Look! Don’t get pissed off at me, Carissa! I’m running my ass off back in California trying to make a fortune! Make all of us a fortune. You want everything to run in a perfect manner?! It doesn’t work that way! Now I need you and you need me!”

Carissa looked at Anthony right in the eye and grinned... “I don’t need you, Tony.”

Carissa casually pours the King Louis brandy into both their shot glasses again. “But this is an exciting adventure for me. When it comes to money, I do not fuck around and get into personal problems like your brother, Randall. Hurry up and get him his new pair of legs and get him back to work!” Carissa says very firmly with a subtle threat in her voice. Anthony takes a deep breath for a moment...

“Okay Carissa. I almost have enough money for the operation. Which leads me to the next question?” Carissa looks at Anthony with a little suspicion...

“What?” Anthony first gives her a kiss on the cheek with a mild flirt.

“I need five-million dollars for the next transaction.” Carissa puts her shot glass down and lights up a cigarette.

“What for..?”

“Gabriel Escobedo, from Peru, has offered me a deal if I could move his merchandise real fast. He will cut the cost and give me an extra month to get rid of it.”

“How do you plan to get rid of it so fast if things are going too

slow with Randall out?"

"Leave that up to me." Anthony seemed to be finished with business.

Carissa thought for a second... "When will I see a return?" Anthony gently grabs the back of her hair...

"I'll show you a return right now." He kisses her passionately on the lips. She gives him a wicked stare for a moment, then, she returns the same. They have had a lover's toy relationship for the last few years. Carissa leads him into the small swimming pool with both of them fully clothed. Carissa always seems to wear sheer clothing which will expose erotic parts of her body. She never really liked to wear any undergarments. They slowly remove one another's soaked apparel. As Carissa is extremely affectionate with Anthony, she opens her eyes towards Sunrise Mountain, and gives the most devious look as though she had an alternative plan. Anthony also had the same look on his face, but had no control over her beauty.

Chapter 24

Caution...Merging A New Life

I arrived at the Nugget Junction Casino about noon. Ted and Bobby Fager wanted to see me. Why do you always feel like you're in trouble when an authority figure wants to see you? I straightened my shirt and I don't know why we always brush back our hair. I knocked on the door.

"Come in."

"Hi Ted... Bobby. You wanted to see me?"

"Yes Frankie. Please sit down." I sat in the chair next to Bobby who was sitting in front of Ted's desk.

"Frankie. Bobby and I feel it's the right time for you to advance with our business. You have shown a lot of energy and enthusiasm. Everybody here seems to like you, and you have a drive for this business that Bobby and I had when we started many years ago." Ted pulled some papers from his desk as Bobby continued the conversation.

"That's right, Frankie." Bobby interjects his views. "We watch everyone that works for us, and we see that you have been working hard to learn the business. Your Aunt Mary really believes in you and you don't have a discipline problem at all. You have respect for the older generation that has been where you are heading towards. There is always something we all can learn in running a business in Vegas.

There is a lot of new technology coming into the casinos. We need you to learn as much as you can. We want to grow and expand.” Bobby was saying everything I wanted to hear.

Ted sat with his hands relaxed on the papers. “Bobby and I want you to become a floor manager and get familiar with the money system here. How to calculate the income from a player at a gaming table they play for a certain amount of time, etc. Is this something you want to take on? It’s a tremendous responsibility.” I looked at both Ted and Bobby with a glare look.

“Gentlemen... This is a great opportunity that you are offering me. I want to make the best of it. I have been extremely fortunate to have had the proper guidance under your wings. I won’t let you down, and I will continue to learn and progress with your company.”

“You flatter us Frank. We are getting on with the years, and someday Ted and I will want to retire. We had a beautiful and adventurous life. We hope to leave a little something to all our loyal employees here at the Nugget. We are doing something the strip will never offer. We want to present long time employees with a share of the business. Basically it’s a ‘Profit Sharing plan’, and you will be part of that program, Frankie.” I was in such a daze for a moment that I almost forgot where I was at. I was looking too far ahead into my future. I finally snapped out of it.

“I’m flabbergasted. I’m...speechless. What do you want me to do next?” Here I am sounding like a little kid again. Bobby chuckled a little.

“Frankie, we would like you to go pick out a few nice suits at the Fashion Mall. We’ll take care of the bill. We want you to represent us in style as you over see the gaming tables. You will treat our customers as if the casino is their home, away from home. However, you will have to handle those who may get out of line. That will be the real test on handling people. We know you can do it.”

“Thanks Bobby. I won’t let you down. When can I start?” I asked that question with lots of energy. Ted got up with Bobby to shake my hand.

“You are starting in the next few days,” says Ted. “Now go get fixed up in some nice duds, and keep doing your homework studying the business. We’re going to put you in the pit your first week with Vanessa. She’s been with us about five years and she’s excellent.” I

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shook Ted's and Bobby's hand again with excitement.

"Thank you again. I don't know what to say except... I am ready!"

I left their office and went downstairs into the casino. I felt like telling the world. I saw Paul the bartender and gave him a wave of the hand. I wasn't sure if my co-workers would be comfortable of me going up the ranks so quickly. Maybe it was just in my head. I saw Sue Ann waiting on customers. I wanted to tell her. Maybe I should just wait until there's an official announcement by the casino.

I rushed home right away to tell Aunt Mary of the news. She wasn't home. I saw a note on the kitchen table. She always seems to be gone at the same time on this particular day. Maybe she's got a lover... Damn, at her age? I poured myself a drink and turned on some music. I was getting ancy and I had to be sharing this news with someone. I called Dee.

"Hi Dee... What are ya doing? I got some good news and I want to take you out for a drink... What? What time do you have to go into work? We still have time... You gotta do what..? Oh man... Well then, I can't tell you... Nope! Nope! Yeah, it's very good news... Okay, I'll tell you tomorrow. Okay... Bye."

I hung up and felt real alone. I really don't give a damn about being by myself, but I wanted to share my news with someone. I looked at my phone list. I have never really called Heather before to get together. I called her and got a voice mail. I left a message. Man, it seems like no one is ever around when the big stuff happens to you. I decided to just have a glass of wine and call it a night. I'll get plenty of rest and go buy those new suits tomorrow. I finished the glass of wine and started to go to my room. Just then the phone rings...

"Hello... Hi Heather... Thanks for getting back to me... What's all the noise in the background? It sounds like a lot of slot machines... I hope I didn't interrupt you... I was wondering if you wanted to get together for a couple of drinks this evening... Oh, you're busy right now? Okay... Maybe some other time... No, I'm not doing anything at ten o'clock... Sure... Do you want me to pick you up? Okay then. Where do you want me to meet you? Okay... At 10 p.m. sharp... Bye."

I hung up the phone and thought for a second. I wondered if I was busting up her party. I drove to the bar where she wanted to meet me. It was called 'The Peppermill'. It's located on the strip, and it seems to have a touch of class. As I walked into the lounge, I see a lot of

couples dressed nice. There's no entertainment, but good background music. I thought I might have been a little too early. Heather wasn't here yet. I sat at the bar.

"Can I help you, sir? This bartender was about in his late 50's, and you can tell he's been around for some time.

"Yes... I'll have a Blue Sapphire and tonic with a squeeze." I continued to look around since I've never been here before. The seating arrangement seems to be ideal for couples. That's a good thing. Who wants to be at a table sharing your conversation with other people? There was a nice fire pit in the circle of a small ring pool of water. There were a lot of artificial plants as well... very romantic. I took another look at my watch and it was 10:23 p.m. The one thing I hate is tardiness. That turns me off big time. I finished my drink and I was going to get the hell out of here.

"Hi." I turned around and Heather was standing there looking pretty hot.

"Hi. How are you?" I said with a big smile on my face.

"Great. I hope I wasn't too late?" She sits next to me at the bar and takes off her leather jacket.

"Oh, no... I didn't even notice the time. I was watching a late ball game on TV." I feel like I just weakened.

"Why don't we order a couple of drinks, and go to one of those lounge seats by the fire place?" Heather suggests with a beautiful smile.

"Sounds nice." I was trying to get the attention of the bartender. I was also intrigued by the way Heather handles herself with class. The bartender had the drinks in seconds, and I didn't hear myself or Heather order.

"Here you go," says the bartender.

"Thanks Gino," replies Heather. The bartender not only knew what she likes to drink, but he seems to know her on a personal level. "Come on Frank... Let's get that seat before someone else does."

We got to the lounge seat and the water fireplace burned the fake logs in the romantic setting. There was low key lighting with candles also burning. We got comfortable. Took a sip of our drinks and a conversation was about to begin.

"So, how did Gino know what drink to make you?" I had to ask of course.

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"Gino is one of my favorite bartenders and a good guy to talk to as you sit at the bar," Heather says as she lights up a cigarette. Of course I didn't have any matches to light it for her.

"So I guess you're a regular here?" I said in a very casual way.

"I've been here a few times with some friends for happy hour. When they see you here a couple of times and know you're not a tourist, they like to get to know you and make you a regular customer. That's how they build a business." Heather is a very confident person who seems to know her way around for a young girl. There's something about her personality that's attractive also. I decided to toast a drink.

"Here's to our real first planned get together to have a drink." I held up my glass and she did the same. We clicked them for good luck and drank. "Heather, I was wondering about your custom motorcycle."

"What about it?" She asks as she flips her long hair to the other side of her face.

"Do you always travel on it? Don't you have a car?"

"I love my chopper. I was raised on a chopper. And I do have a car, but I hardly drive it. I get bored real easy. So, what made you call me out of the blue?" I hoped that I wasn't starting to bore her.

"I just wanted to celebrate my new position at the casino as floor manager with the first friend I met here in Vegas."

"Well, congratulations. But why did you call me?" Heather likes to get right to the point.

"I've always been meaning to call you, but I've had to put in a lot of hours at the Nugget Casino and train to be an operations manager."

"You want to run a casino? Heather says with a grin.

"Not only do I want to run one... I want to own one." I thought that sounded impressive.

"Well... That's impressive Frank. Are you going to need a personal assistant? Heather gives one of those seductive smiles. I shied away from it and smiled.

"I just might Heather. Now, what is it you do? Something about sales..?" She takes another sip of her drink and waves to the cocktail waitress for another round of drinks.

"Yes, Frank. I sell expensive lingerie to high price customers. It's the real silk. We go to convention parties or anywhere my company owner tells us to go, and the commission is very good."

"So if I need some lingerie for whatever reason, I should give you

a call?"

Heather gives a little chuckle... "Sure Frank. Do you have someone in mind?" The only one I couldn't help thinking of was Nina.

"No, not right now, but when the time comes, you'll be the one I will call. And I suppose as a salesperson, I will see it on a model before I purchase it?"

"Of course you will, Frank. I will personally model it for you." There goes that tingling in my body. Heather has already got me sold without the merchandise.

We continued a lot of small talk and another round of drinks. Heather is a beautiful looking girl, and a charmer. It's almost like she's one of the guys with her love for the chopper motorcycle. She has that touch of class. I know I'm being a dog when it comes to women, but I can't help it. I have romantic feelings for Nina, but I have a strong sexual attraction for Heather. I've had a few drinks and what the hell... I'll ask her if she wants to spend time together tonight.

"Well, Frank. I thought it was nice for you to call me for getting together for some drinks, but I have to go to work now."

"Now? You have to go to work, now?" I felt like I was just kicked in the shin.

"I usually work at night. My customers have their business parties at night and that's when I do the best sales. I'm sorry. Did you want to do something else tonight?"

"Uh... Oh I just thought we could go and uh..., well I caught you at the last minute and I'm glad you were able to be here for a couple of hours." I wasn't sure what to say. I'm not too fast with words.

"Was there something else you had in mind, Frank? Because we could get together another time," she asked with a nice tone in her voice.

"Heather... I'm just being silly. I know you have to work and we can get together some other time and go clubbing or something."

"I would like that, Frank. I'll look forward to it." I walked Heather to her chopper and we made small talk about nothing. Then she turned to me before she put on her helmet.

"I had a good time Frank. Let's get together soon."

"I'd like that Heather, and I still owe you my life for saving me from the cops at the Buckaroo Club a few months ago." Heather laughs lightly.

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“I just happened to be there, and when hell broke loose, I saw you and remembered you from the bar at the Flamingo. It was a natural instinct. Here we are.”

“Yes... Here we are.” Heather gave me a small kiss on the lips and smiled. It was a different feeling with her. Not a romantic one, but a closeness of a female friend. But I’d still like to do her! “Bye Heather... I’ll call you soon.” She got on her bike and took off like a pro. I decided to go home and rest. This Vegas life style is going to make me age fast.

Indian Springs is about 40 miles north of Las Vegas. Mary’s son, Alex, had been residing in the sanitarium there for about the last 15 years. She would visit him as much as she could. He is nearing the age of thirty, but still has the capacity of an eight year old. She has kept a regular schedule on her visitation with him. Alex always knew the time his mother would be there to see him. Mary was never happy about the way the facilities looked. It had the atmosphere of a prison in some ways. But she felt that the hospital was taking care of him in a more proper way than she could. When she became partially crippled from a whack on the leg by the casino wise guys, there was no way she could watch out after him. She watched the clock as she waited for the male nurse to bring Alex to the visiting room.

“Hi mommy, did you bring me a new baseball today?” Alex comes up gently to her and gives her a hug. She starts to shed a tear or two and gives him back a hard squeeze.

“Yes dear... Here you go. Now don’t throw it in the room. We’ll go outside to the yard and toss it around there,” Mary says with a little tremble in her voice.

“Okay mommy. Let’s go.” Alex grabs Mary’s hand and leads her out to the hospital back yard where other visitors are with a family member or friend.

The baseball was made of soft rubber about 10 inches in circumference. Alex, who always had a love for baseball, still feels he will become a professional baseball major league pitcher, like his hero Nolan Ryan.

“Com’on mommy, catch my fast ball.” Alex was having the time of his life playing catch with his mother. He was told by some other younger fellow patients, that they play catch with their dads. But he would think for a moment and come back with... ‘I bet your mommy

can't catch or throw a ball!' Alex seemed to be bragging with confidence. The young patients would just look down or snicker, and walk away.

It was time for lunch. Mary and Alex had something to eat and just spent time with small talk. About three hours went by and... "I have to go now Alex. It's getting late."

"Don't go mommy. Let's play some more catch. I promise not to throw too hard."

"I can't Alex. I have to go because you have to take your medicine and rest."

Just then the male nurse walks up to them as its time for visiting hours to end. Mary looks up to him and continues. "Is Tiko taking care of you, Alex?"

"Oh yes mommy. Sometimes he plays catch with me," Alex says of his friend.

Mary looks at Tiko.

"Thank you Tiko. That is really nice of you. Alex never knew his father." Tiko is about 30 years old and has been working with children and adults who are mentally challenged for the last four years. He and Alex have become friends.

"I know Mrs. Torres. Alex is a good man. Even at his mental capacity, he has respect for people. Once in a while he'll get out of hand, but we will be there 24 hours." Tiko was gentle in what he was saying to Mary.

"Thank you again, Tiko. Thank you." Mary gave Alex a long hug.

"Someday I'm going to bring you home Alex...someday soon."

"Okay mommy. But I have to go and watch TV now." Alex was going through his usual motions whenever Mary was leaving.

"Okay sweetheart." Mary gave him another kiss and a hug. Alex responded the same.

"Bye mommy— gotta go." Alex ran through the hall and into his recreation room. Mary was saddened and upset about how life had turned out for Alex. She will never forget about the drugs she took while having sex with her boyfriend in high school. As she walks out of the hospital she stares into the air.

'Come on Mary... It's not going to hurt you. Look, I'm taking it. It

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gives you a real nice feeling, honey. You'll see when we are together tonight, and we lie next to each other and make real love. You still love me, right?'

'Yes, I still love you Tony... But I don't know what these pills are.'

'It's okay. Trust me honey... Always trust me...'



Aunt Mary's visit with family In Los Angeles

Chapter 25

It's Post Time

It was a beautiful Thursday morning... and today is very special for me. I'm going to be training as a floor manager for the Nugget Junction Casino. I showered, shaved, and put on the best looking suit. I went down stairs to show off my duds and of course have Aunt Mary's special breakfast burritos, chorizo and eggs.

"Well, look who's the handsomest floor manager at the Nugget Junction?" says Mary with a big smile.

"Thanks Mary. I feel so good and I owe this all to you."

"Thank you Frankie, but you really wanted it, and you went after it. Tenacity is a virtue you possess. It comes from your family background," Mary says as she makes me another plate.

"It's what I really want to do. It sure beats booking bets on horses back home."

"Just be careful Frankie. Don't get caught up in the business. You treat the business with respect, and it will do the same for you," she says with confidence and experience.

"There's a good future at the Nugget. Just give it time to grow. Vegas will start to boom in the next few years and grow rapidly in population."

"How do you know Mary? We are out in the sticks, and all we got is a few tables and slot machines." I sounded a little pessimistic.

“Frankie... Have you noticed the stores that are going up little by little? The big store chains hire professional land developers to analyze areas for future population growth. Then they buy the land real cheap and start building.

Wow... She makes a lot of sense.

“Aunt Mary, you are very observant.” I thought for a moment and asked... “Do Ted and Bobby realize that?”

“Sure they do. That’s why they invested in the Nugget years ago. And that’s why I invested with them.”

Mary went on to talk a little more about the future of Las Vegas. I’m still the new kid in town. But I am sure learning a lot. “I gotta go and get to the Nugget, Mary. This was a nice breakfast. Are you going to come down to the casino later?”

“I’m not sure yet. I don’t want to make you nervous on your first day. You’re going to have plenty of attention from Dee, Paul, and the others.”

“Oh, Aunt Mary... Please come over and we’ll have a nice dinner. I’m buying,” I said in a sweet tone. She smiled and gave me the ‘*maybe*’ look. I was feeling like a new man. I finished my breakfast and I gave her a kiss on the cheek. I was off to my new job....in a Corvette!

I drove up to the parking lot and saw a parking spot with my name on a sign. This was exciting. I stepped out of my car... put on my suit jacket... checked the zipper on my pants... locked the car doors... and away I go. I walked into the casino and it was business as usual. It was a very light crowd for this time of day. I was glad because there were a lot of things I needed to learn.

“Hi ya Frankie,” Paul blurts out from behind the bar. “Congratulations on the upswing.”

“Thanks Paul,” I said as I was passing the bar. I leaned over to Paul and said in a low tone. “We’ll celebrate this weekend and pound down a few!” Paul laughed and gave me the ol’ high five...

“Right on, man. I think Sue Ann wants to congratulate you. I think she’s out near the pit.”

“Okay man. We’ll talk later.” I walked toward the stairway that leads to the business offices, and out pops Sue Ann coming down the steps.

Congratulations, and I know you’ll do great.” Sue Ann gives me a

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kiss on the cheek and a nice hug.

“Sue Ann, I told Paul we’ll get together this weekend and have a little celebration. Are you in?”

“Hell yes. I know Becky’s in. I think Yolanda’s in love. Let me know when, Frankie. Gotta go.” Sue Ann was always in the fast lane. I went up stairs to Ted’s office and knocked on the door.

“Come in... Oh, hi Frank. Are you ready this morning to take on a new endeavor?”

“Yes I am, Ted.”

“Good... Good. Vanessa will be here in a few minutes and she will be your mentor for the next few weeks. She’s a good woman Frankie, and she’ll show you the ropes. And if there’s anything you need or have a problem with, please come to me or Bobby. We want you to succeed in this, Frankie.”

“Thanks Ted. I’m really happy to have this position and I won’t let you down.” There’s a knock on the door and Ted yelled out for the person to come in. It was Vanessa the pit boss.

“Come in Vanessa... You’re already acquainted with Frank Scorpio.” Ted gives a quick intro.

“Yes I am, and welcome Frank. I hear you’re a fast learner and you’ve been doing a lot of homework,” Vanessa says with a nice business smile. I’ve known Vanessa for a while as I’ve worked on her shift a few times.

“Thank you Vanessa— and I hear you are the best to learn from.” How’s that for a kiss up? Vanessa smiles with authority floating in the air.

“I think Ted and Bobby have been exaggerating a little, but I appreciate it Frank.”

“Then take Frank and get him started... and good luck to both of you,” Ted says.

“Come on Frank. It’s already getting late in the day. We got a lot to do.” Vanessa was very business and I guess that’s a good thing. She was a very attractive woman in her mid-forties and has a great body for her age. I can’t compare her to Carissa though...as far as looks go. Or was I attracted to Carissa’s status? Damn, it’s tough being around these classy dames.

Vanessa took me to a couple of small offices that had computers. She explained to me about how they could find out about a person that

wanted a line of credit, or simply write a check.

“We can find out a rating from his bank and grant him a line of credit, Frank. We’re a small casino, but it’s the wave of the future and some of the casinos on the strip already have superior computers compared to ours.” Vanessa has a lot of knowledge about the future of the casino business.

“So you’re telling me that we will be able to have instant information on a player?” I felt like I was getting into the guts of the business. It seems the future of computers is revealing that there won’t be any secrets about anyone who wants credit with a casino.

“That’s right, Frank. As we grow, there will be more people who will want credit and we will be able to withdraw the funds directly from their bank.”

I thought that was amazing. A player wants more money and soon there will no more checks to write to a casino. The money is withdrawn right away. This is going to be fantastic for the business. More income generated for the casino. I find this business already more fascinating. Vanessa finally took me out to the pit. I felt right at home behind the gaming tables. It was still a little slow, but I was getting the feel. I had learned the chip count in the tray in front of the dealer. You always had to keep track of the money that was coming in and going out. I couldn’t screw up. Although I’m close to the Fager brothers, I knew I was still being watched by someone. Everyone is watched by someone.

The day was going by quickly as I was enjoying the atmosphere. There were more people coming into the casino in the late afternoon. I kept my arms folded most of the time because that’s what I saw most of the pit bosses do whenever I played cards. The Blackjack dealer always had to yell out lightly to the floor supervisor when they exchanged chips for money from a player at the table. I had to acknowledge every call. On the strip, the only time a floor manager would greet a player is if the player pulled out a \$1000 dollars. Here I greeted everyone because I felt it was good public relations, and every player in the casino should feel like this is his or her recreation center. About 65% of these players are locals and the rest are travelers from Arizona and neighboring states. This area is growing and as the population explodes, so will we.

My shift was over at 7 p.m. and I went upstairs to clock out.

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Bobby Fager was just going into his office and invited me in.

“How was your first day in the pit, Frankie?”

“It was a very informative day, Bobby. I’m looking forward to tomorrow.”

“And how was it working with Vanessa?” he asked as he puffs on his cigar.

“Real good and she really knows the operation. What are her plans for the future? Is she staying here or heading for the strip?” I was getting inquisitive.

“Well Frankie... No one is ever sure what their plans are for the future in the gaming world. But Vanessa was raised by a family of gaming dealers and casino managers. Both her parents have passed away and she has a couple of sisters. But we hope to have her here a long time. And we hope to have you here a long time. We may expand to the west side in about another year or so. There’s an area about 10 – 15 miles in the Northwest and we’re thinking of building a small place there. I hear that area is the wave of the future?” Bobby says as he stares at the county map on his wall.

“I feel there is a future for major growth Bobby, and I will be there with you.”

“Thank you Frankie. Ted and I would like that.”

“Well, my shift is over, Bobby. I’m heading home and I have a lot of homework to do. I’m going over my notes tonight that Vanessa gave me. I’ll see you tomorrow.” I shook his hand.

I got home about 7:45 p.m. Mary was sitting on her rocking chair staring at the fireplace. She seemed a little pre-occupied with something.

“Are you okay, Mary?”

“I’m fine, dear.” She looks my way and forces a little smile...

“How was your first day as the new *Pit Boss*?”

“It was the most fantastic feeling!” I sat down beside her near her by the fireplace and it was very relaxing. “Can I get you a glass of wine Mary? I feel like having one.”

“Thank you Frankie. There’s Merlot in the cupboard. The doctor said it’s good for the heart.”

“Are you having heart problems, Mary?” I was very concerned.

“No dear... I’m fine. I’m just at an age that you start thinking of

taking care of yourself a little better.”

“You are right, auntie... and I have a plan. I’m going to excel fast in the business. With the money I make and the money we have in our bank deposit box, soon we will buy a real big house... maybe even two houses. You’ll probably throw loud parties, so I’ll live in the other one.” I was attempting to make her laugh. Finally— she started laughing out loud and her smiles were genuine.

“Ya know what Frankie? That’s a great idea. That damn mob back in L.A. should all be dead soon. They’re all getting too old...Ha!” Mary’s wine must be getting to her real quick. She really has loosened up.

“One more glass Aunt Mary before I go to bed?” I offered.

“Let’s make a toast Frankie. Let’s toast to our future. Everything is going to be fine! You know why? Because we’re family.” We clicked our glasses... sipped our wine... and we sat quietly watching the fire logs burn. We had things to think about.

A month went by and all I was concerned about was to do my job, and do it well. There was too much distraction in my life with women. I had my little boy crush on Carissa, and I did try to call her a few of times, but I never got through. She hasn’t returned any of my calls. As for Nina, I thought about her a lot, but I had to focus on my position here at the Nugget Junction Casino. I loved this job and I have learned a lot. I’ve been watching for card cheats and also watching the dealers. I felt a little guilty at times because they were personal friends. But this is Vegas and money makes people do crazy things, especially when they piss it away on gambling, themselves. I had a lunch break and I went up to the employees lounge. Dee was there having her lunch as well.

“Is this seat taken?” I said to her. She looked around the break room and there wasn’t another soul around.

“Uh, I believe the seat has your name on it...stranger.” Dee throws in a mild sarcasm.

I just kind of grinned and sat next to her.

“Stranger..? I’ve had to work six days a week this month, and I haven’t had much time to myself,” I said looking for a little compassion.

“I’m sorry Frankie. I was just being childish. You and I have almost the same hours, but you are putting in more time... Forgive me?”

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"There's nothing to forgive, Dee. I have just been too busy and I'm really tired when I get off the clock." Dee continued eating her lunch as I got something from the wheel of death...meaning the vending machine.

"By the way Frankie, have you heard anything about Jason Adams, the dealer who was caught cheating?"

"No... Why?" I was thinking that it was something no one likes to talk about.

"There's been a guy I haven't seen before, having a few drinks at the bar asking about him. I just tell him I haven't seen Jason in a few of months and he doesn't work here anymore." That was probably the best answer Dee could have given.

"Did this guy give you a name, Dee?"

"No... But I can't believe how much he looked like Jason. I would say he is a few years older, though." Dee went on as I was thinking about him. I was concerned about this man asking questions about Adams.

"How often do you see him, Dee?"

"He comes in occasionally, maybe three or four times in the past couple of weeks. He just sits there, watches people and drinks his beer. Do you think he's up to something?" I thought for a moment...

"Nah... He's probably a local who knew Jason. Don't worry about it." I ate my sandwich and rushed off.

"Where are you going so quickly, Frank?" Dee asked as I drank down my cola.

"I gotta go Dee and do some paper work that I have to get right away. Let's get together soon for dinner or something... Okay?"

"Sure Frankie. Good luck with your paper work." Dee felt the lunch break went by too fast since she hasn't talked to me much the last couple of weeks.

I rushed to the personnel office. I had a pass key that opened up most offices that were okay to enter. I went to the filing cabinet of past employees. I looked up Jason Adams' personal file. He does have a brother named Chris Adams from Laughlin. It didn't say much about him except to be notified in case of an emergency. There was a phone number. I called it and the phone was disconnected. There wasn't much else to see. Both parents deceased. I put the file back and just let it go at that. I went back to my pit to finish my shift. Everybody has

pretty much forgotten about Adams. In this business, people are very mobile. They get caught up in the action and forget the real world. After I got off work, I was heading out the door as Bobby stopped me.

“Oh Frank...”

“Hi Bobby, how are you?”

“Good Frankie. Good. I just wanted to know if you were free for dinner tomorrow.”

“Sure Bobby. Is everything okay?” Like I said before... When the brass wants to talk to you, you always feel guilty about something.

“Everything is fine Frankie. Ted and I want to talk to you about a piece of land we’re thinking of buying for the future. It’s in the Northwest side of town. If the deal goes through, we’re going to build on it next year. We’ll talk more about it at dinner tomorrow.”

“It sounds promising Bobby, but I have the shift tomorrow.”

“It’s taken care of Frankie. We talked to Vanessa and she has Kevin Barker covering you.”

“Sure Bobby... Where do you want me to meet you?”

“Meet us here at the Nugget at 6 p.m. The three of us will ride together in Ted’s car. We’re going to the ‘Bootlegger Restaurant’ on Las Vegas Blvd. Have you been there?” Bobby asked. I thought for a split second.

“Uh, yes I have Bobby. It’s a real nice place, and the food is fabulous.”

“It’s an icon on the Strip, Frankie. Then Ted and I will see you here about 6 tomorrow night.” Bobby left in a cheerful spirit as he walked away. This could be something real good for reaching my goals. I think they are going to want me to eventually run the new casino. I got a big lift from that conversation. I went home and worked on more papers that I needed to catch up on. I finally felt like I’m accomplishing something in my life.

As I sat by the fireplace having a drink, I was just reminiscing about things in my life... Randall De LaParra killing Michele... All the drugs I destroyed and the money I took from the mob... It’s hard to live a double life. They say all things, good or bad, happen for a reason... Here I am... I often think about my son... What is he doing? I’m afraid to try to contact him and my ex-wife. I can feel the mob watching them. Maybe not... It’s just a feeling. I looked up at the antique clock, and it was 1:37 a.m. and I was tired. I turned in.

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Friday turned out to be another gorgeous day, and I was looking forward to meeting with Ted and Bobby this evening. I was also excited about the property they have in mind. It's almost like starting a new world on the other side of town. I arrived at the Nugget Junction Casino at 5:43 p.m. I was a little early, but my pet peeve is... People that are late! I don't have much patience for that and I try to keep to that rule myself. I went to the bar to see Dee. I wasn't going to drink since I had a special meeting with the brass.

"Hi Dee... How's your evening so far?"

"It's a little slow, but it's pay day for a lot of people, and I'm sure they're cashing their paychecks and getting ready to party," says Dee with a smile. "Oh by the way, that guy that comes in and asked about Jason Adams..?"

"Yeah..?" I was sort of getting a little suspicious. Dee continues the small talk.

"Well he came in again, about an hour ago, but he didn't stop by for a drink. He just casually walked by the Blackjack tables and slot machines like he was looking for someone."

"Did he find anyone or have anyone else with him?" I felt something was not right.

"No, he just kept to himself. He looked like he hadn't much sleep. He was unshaven, and he just looked like... I don't know how to describe it. Anyway, you want something to drink?" Dee seemed like she got bored with the subject.

"Yeah, bring me a cola please." I looked around to see if the guy was wondering around. We don't have a large casino so it's pretty hard to miss anyone.

"Hi Frankie... Are you ready to go?" Bobby comes up to me dressed in a nice pin stripe suit. I on the other hand wore a sharp charcoal suit, but I added suspenders to my décor.

"Nice suit Frankie. I love those suspenders. It gives you an appearance of power. The power of a business man," he says while chuckling and shaking my hand. That was real nice coming from a tycoon like Bobby.

"Thanks Bobby. That's a real compliment. Where's Ted?"

"He'll be down in a minute. Are you having anything to drink right now?"

"Just a cola. It's pretty warm outside." Wow, that was close. I hope

he doesn't think I would drink before a big meeting.

"Well I'm a little thirsty myself. Oh, Dee..." Bobby sets his business folder on the bar and waves to her as she just finished serving a customer.

"Hi Bobby, what can I get you?" asked Dee with a sweet smile.

"Let me have a shot of Crown Royal with a water back." He caught me off guard with that order. I guess at his age and the experience he's had in his life in Vegas, he can do pretty much what he wants, and does it with class. Ted just arrived...

"Are you handsome gentlemen ready?" asked Ted with a great big smile.

"We are Teddy," replies Bobby who just downed the shot of liquor. I finished my cola and we said our good byes to Dee.

"Now you hold onto the Fort, Dee. Remember, don't take any wooden nickels," says Ted with a chuckle. "By the way, how's your mother, Raylene?"

"She's fine Ted— Still doing the evening news and partying like a 20 year old."

Ted and Bobby give a mild laugh to go along with a smile.

"We remember Raylene from the good ole days on the Strip. She hung around with that showgirl...uh, Carissa. Yeah... Carissa married our old friend, Mark Kingman. What a mistake that was. Anyway Dee... Give your mom our best." Ted gave her a tip as he always does to his service employees as did Bobby.

"I sure will... and thank you Ted and Bobby. Have a nice time and keep an eye on Mr. Scorpio. He's looking a little too sharp."

We went outside to the parking section for the employees. It was pretty casual here and we were too small to have valet parking. Ted had a nice Mercedes Benz with trimmed chromed siding. His license was personalized with 'SILVER TED'.

"Damn... I left my folder on the bar," says Bobby. He had the plans from the land and the blue prints of the casino they wanted to build. "I'll be right back boys." Ted and Bobby weren't that young where they could just dash away.

"I'll get it Bobby. You guys go ahead. I'll be out before you reach the car." I figured I'd better get the folder since I wanted to hurry and get to the business dinner meeting tonight. It was just a little sarcastic remark to myself. I was just anxious and excited to hear the plans they

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have for me.

“Hey Dee... Bobby left his folder on the counter. Have you seen it?”

“Yes, it’s right here. Some business guys you are. Good luck!” Dee gave me one of those smiles. I dashed off with sort of a slow jog to where Ted’s car was parked.

“That Frankie... He’s a little hustler, eh Ted? I think we’re making a good move with him,” says Bobby as he waves to Frank. Ted gives a gentle smile as he opens the car doors.

“Yes, he is Bobby. His Aunt Mary has been a blessing to us when she invested her money into our casino, so we wouldn’t go bankrupt... Remember that?” Ted looks over towards Frankie as he and Bobby get into the car.

You’re getting slow, Frankie” yells Ted continuing to show a warm friendly smile. I picked up my jogging speed and of course... I dropped the papers from the manila folder.

“I’m coming guys.” I picked up the folder as Ted started the car. There was a tremendous flash followed by a loud explosion. The force of the explosion blew pieces of debris in every direction as I fell to the ground. I looked up and Ted and Bobby Fager were instantly killed from the ball of fire of their car... I got up and ran towards the flaming Mercedes. The bodies of Ted and Bobby Fager were almost incinerated. I broke down into a silent cry as the people ran outside from the casino.

“Frankie!!! Frankie!!!” Dee grabbed me and was screaming hysterically. I held onto her very tight with what little strength I had left. The shock and emotion of this weakened me. Dee and I just watched the flames as there was nothing anyone could do. With the illumination from the flames, you could almost feel the spirits of Ted and Bobby, ascend to the heavens.

The fire department, police, ambulances, and the television news camera crews and reporters arrived very quickly. The fire to the Mercedes was put out immediately. The paramedics came to my aid. I had a few cuts from the flying debris, but I was physically okay. I told them to attend to the other injured victims. The police tried their best to control the crowd as they began investigating and asking for witnesses. I didn’t want to talk to them now. I wanted to rush off and get inside the casino. The couple that was hurt from the debris was

being interviewed. With all the commotion, the police didn't know about me, or see me yet.

The reporter from one of the television news stations, Ben Correa, was the same journalist who was on the scene when I was shot... ironically, the same location. He was also at the hospital trying to get an interview when I was being discharged. He must be wondering who I am. He glanced over to me and then they went live on the air.

'Good evening. I'm Ben Correa where an explosion just took place killing the owners of the Nugget Junction Casino, Theodore and Robert Fager. According to witnesses, Ted and Bobby, whom their friends have called them since childhood days, were on their way to a business meeting. We can only speculate that a business deal went wrong, and someone or an organization retaliated. The Fager brothers bought this little hideaway casino about seven years ago. They were one of the most respected casino managers on the Las Vegas Strip back in the mid 1950's and 1960's and are also...'

I heard what Ben was saying on the air. I was a little pissed off because Ted and Bobby didn't have problems with anyone that I could think of except... maybe— Correa started to bring his microphone and photographer my way. I covered my face and rushed towards the casino with Dee at my side.

"Sir... Mr. Scorpio... Can I ask you a few questions?" Ben Correa was rushing towards me as I quickly went into the casino. He turned around back to the camera since he was live on the air, and continued his reporting.

Vanessa was inside the casino attending to the employees. She also had to guard the money and casino chips. She locked down all the money trays and closed the pits. She took command in closing the casino even though she was upset and emotional over this tragedy.

"Frankie... I was told it was Ted and Bobby," says Vanessa as tears are rolling down her cheeks.

"Yes Vanessa. Please do what you can. I have to go upstairs. The reporters are hounding me, and I don't want to talk to the cops!" Dee and I went up to Ted's office. She continued to cry and I just held her in comfort. I was still in shock and stunned. What do I do? Oh my God! I have to tell Mary. I have to get home and tell her before she sees the news.

"Dee! I have to go and see my aunt. This is going to destroy her!"

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“I’ll go with you,” she shouts as she continues to cry.

“No... I have to do this alone. You have to stay here and help Vanessa watch the place. We have to keep the doors closed for awhile until my aunt decides what to do.

“Is there anything else I can do?” Dee asked as she’s trying to compose herself. I thought for a moment...

“Dee... Do we have access to the hidden video cameras in the casino?”

“I don’t know. Vanessa might know about it.”

“Tell her I need to get a hold of the video tapes. It’s really important! I have to go see my aunt now. Tell Vanessa to call me. I need to talk to her. Okay Dee?” The phone on Ted’s desk rang. It was an in house line.

“Hello... Yes Vanessa... I don’t want to talk to them... Tell them I left... Okay, but stall them for a couple of minutes. I gotta get out of here!” I hung up the phone and had to think fast.

“Dee, the detectives want to talk to me. Vanessa’s stalling them. I’m going down the private elevator, but I can’t get to my car.”

“Here are my keys, Frankie. Go!” Dee gave me another tight hug and I returned it. I left and went down the elevator that leads to the north end of the building. I got into Dee’s car and slowly drove away. I looked back through my rear view mirror. It was a mess— and I lost my mentors and, good friends.

Chapter 26

If You Take Away My Friend I will Taste Your Soul

As I was driving home, all I could think of... is what's next? Will the Nugget Junction Casino close down forever? What and how do I tell Aunt Mary about how Ted and Bobby were killed? I arrived home and sat in the car for a moment. Finally, I went inside the house. I saw Aunt Mary sitting facing the fireplace. She was rocking back and forth slowly in her favorite rocking chair with a glass of wine in her hand. I talked as gently as I could.

"Aunt Mary... Aunt Mary." She continued to be silent as she stared at the fire burning logs in the hearth. "Aunt Mary, are you okay?" She paused for a moment to give me an answer.

"I lost both of my closest friends, Frankie... But I thank god he spared your life." Mary was talking with deep sadness in her voice. I walked up beside her and put my arm around her.

"I'm sorry." I just held her for a minute as she was stone faced, still looking at the fire. I let go of her and went to pour myself a glass of wine, and then I sat across from her as I also started to stare into the fireplace. I wasn't sure what to say next as we were both in a state of shock.

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“Frankie... Do you know what happened or who would do this?” I paused for a moment.

“I’m not sure Mary, but I’m going to find out. Vanessa closed the casino down and the police are investigating. They’re going to want to talk to me. I don’t know what to do.” Mary talked very softly as she was still staring at the fireplace.

“Frankie... After the funeral, we’re going to find out who did this!” she says with determination.

“Yes Mary.” It was quiet for the next 30 seconds. “Mary... What’s going to happen to the casino? Did Ted and Bobby have any family?”

“Yes they did. But we have to talk about that later. I still have part ownership in the Nugget, and I’ll have to wait and talk to their attorney to see what was in Ted and Bobby’s will. Whatever happens, Frankie, we are going to continue to make the

Nugget grow, because that was Ted and Bobby’s dream.” I was hearing Mary talk calm with a lot of anger and bitterness in her voice. She was hurting very badly inside.

“How did you find out about the car bombing, Mary?”

“I was watching television and there was breaking news. Your friend, Raylene Hutton, was anchoring. Then I saw the reporter, Ben Correa on the scene with his photographer showing Ted’s burning car.” Mary was still talking in a low tone.

“I’m sorry Aunt Mary.” We continued to sit there watching the fireplace in deep thought, as we hear every crackle of burning wood. We both didn’t feel like talking anymore, and it was a long ending night. I think we were not going to get any sleep.

The next day, early in the morning, the Metro Police detectives were knocking on our door. Mary and I were in the living room wondering what’s next. I answered the door.

“Can I help you?”

“Are you Frank Scorpio?” One of the detectives asked with a stern face while the other was glancing around the inside.

“Yes I am.”

“And is this where a Mary Torres lives?” continued the detective. I looked at the both of them. One of the detectives looked familiar.

“May I see more credentials other than your badges?” The detectives did show their picture I.D. belonging to Las Vegas

Metropolitan police department.

"My name is Det. Selenak, and this is Det. Hurtado. We're with Metro homicide. May we come in?"

"Yes, of course." I led them to the living room where Mary was in her chair by the fireplace. "This is my aunt, Mary Torres... Aunt Mary, this is Det. Selenak and Det. Hurtado of Metro homicide." Mary got up to greet them.

"Please sit down, detectives." Mary recognizes one of them. "So, we meet again, Det. Selenak. May I get you gentlemen a beverage?" Det. Selenak was the spokesperson of the two. "No thank you Mrs. Torres. Yes, we meet again. You have a good memory, Mrs. Torres." Mary corrected him right away...

"That's Ms. Torres Det. Selenak." I took a double look at the detective. He was the investigating officer, when I was shot by Rex Huckster.

"Sorry... Ms. Torres. We're investigating the explosion that occurred last night in front of the Nugget Junction Casino. Theodore and Robert Fager were killed in their automobile. Our crime scene investigators found a wiring device near the vehicle that is used for designated relay switches in the implosion of buildings. We have record that you are part owner of that casino Ms. Torres. Is that correct?"

"Yes sir. That is correct." Mary answers again in a mellow tone of voice.

"I'm sorry I have to ask you these questions Ms. Torres, but where were you approximately 6 o'clock last night?" I jumped right in with a pissed off attitude...

"What are you implying detective?"

"I'm not implying anything Mr. Scorpio. We're investigating a homicide," replies Det. Selenak. Mary cuts right in...

"I was right here detective; all day and all night."

"Was anyone with you?" asked Det. Hurtado who was more the quiet type of the two.

"Excuse me detectives! You're implying my aunt had something to do with that explosion! I was also supposed to be in that car!" I was losing my composure. The detectives look at one another...

"Why weren't you in the car, Mr. Scorpio?" My temper was flaring up as I stared at the detective who was asking stupid questions

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like we had an involvement.

“We were on our way to a business dinner when Bobby Fager left his folder with his business notes in it on the counter at the bar! You might ask Dee Hutton, the bartender. She handed it to me!”

“Well, do you or your aunt have any enemies that would try to harm any of you or the Fager brothers?” asked Det. Selenak. I walked towards the fireplace and I thought for a moment... It had to be the stranger that Dee Hutton keeps noticing around the casino. But she doesn’t know who he is.

“No detective. I don’t know who would’ve gone this far with a grudge.” Det. Hurtado looks over to Mary...

“And you, Ms. Torres. Do you have any idea who would want the Fager brothers dead?” Mary looked him right in the eye as if she was going to throw a dagger at him...

“No Mr. Hurtado! I don’t know anyone that would want to hurt them! And I think this conversation is over! Anymore talking will be with my attorney present! Frankie... Show the gentlemen to the door.” Mary was extremely upset.

The detectives got up from their seats and weren’t sure what to say next... “I’m sorry for disturbing you Ms. Torres, but we have to conduct the investigation and find out what really happened and why,” says Det. Selenak. Mary very calmly responded.

“If you don’t find the murder, or murderers, I will! The detectives looked at each other again. Det. Hurtado takes another firm look at Mary.

“You will call us if you have any suspicions or any information that will help us, won’t you Ms. Torres? Mr. Scorpio?” I spoke up on this one...

“Yes. My aunt or I will call you if we find out anything that will get the killers! By the way Det. Selenak, have you caught Rex Huckster—the guy who shot me?”

“I’m sorry Mr. Scorpio; I thought the department notified you... He was killed on the highway, heading to Laughlin. He had been drinking and ran into a semi-truck.” I just nodded my head in acknowledgement.

“Good.” That was my demeanor. If you try to take my life, go and die. Do I sound bitter? Just a trait of a Scorpio... The detectives left without anymore questions. I closed the door and went to Mary...

"I'm sorry Aunt Mary, but I think we are in for a wild ride. We both may be on the suspicion list since they think we might have something to gain by killing Ted and Bobby." Mary was staring at the fireplace again. I've never seen her angry like this.

"If those cock sucking detectives want to think we would have something to do with this, those bastards are going to have a long wasted life trying to prove it!!!" Mary slammed her cane onto the sofa three hard swings.

"Aunt Mary! Stop!" I grabbed her and held her tight as I felt she was loosing her mind... "Everything is going to be all right," I said softly as I could. "It's going to be all right..." She just wept in my arms as I tried to rub her temples and soothe her emotions.

"We need to find out who did it Frankie... We need to find out who did it."

The funeral ceremony was held three days later. Mary knew the only sister that Ted and Bobby had... Patti Lou Fager. Mary contacted her and arranged transportation for Patti to come to Las Vegas. But Mary, with Patti's written consent, would make all the arrangements for the funeral. Patti was living in a trailer park in Arizona, off Parker Dam. She hadn't seen her brothers in years. Patti was a compulsive gambler starting in high school. She had gone through four marriages, and all were destroyed from gambling and drugs. She was a thin girl who always had the attention of cowboys. She got into drugs with her last boyfriend, Riley Joe, who was addicted to cocaine for a lot of years.

Unfortunately when Riley Joe and Patti Lou tried to sell some fake drugs to a couple of high school kids to make some quick money, the drug deal went wrong. The high school kids took it out on her two children. She had a son that was eight and a daughter that was two years old. The gang stabbed and killed the children in retaliation. The high school punks were eventually caught. Patti and Riley Joe, were also sent to prison for the involvement of the sale of drugs and child endangerment. Patti spent five years in a Nevada prison while Riley Joe spent 15 years at High Desert Prison for his past history with crime. Ted and Bobby spent a lot of their money hiring the best lawyers for Patti. She had mental problems after the death of her children. She would never leave her trailer home as guilt condemned her to isolation.

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There must have been about five hundred people at the funeral. There was standing room only in the chapel with many people standing outside the chapel doors covering the courtyard. Ted and Bobby Fager grew up on the east side of Las Vegas since the depression days of America. Many mourners were paying their respects to old friends. I think Mary was taking it the hardest. She and Ted were lovers at one time. But neither could commit in a relationship. They remained as long time loving friends. Patti Lou was sitting with Mary in the chapel, and didn't show much emotion. You could see that she was somewhat withdrawn from reality.

The reverend gave the final blessing, and the mourners and friends were welcome to pass by the urns that have the ashes of Theodore and Robert Fager on the white and gold cloth covered table. A portrait of each of them was on display. The people in the front pews filed and walked in procession as they passed the urns. Mary, Patti, Dee, Sue Ann, Paul, Vanessa, myself as well as other employees from the Nugget Junction Casino, continued to sit as we watched the people pay their last respects. Mary was still stone faced. I wasn't sure what she was thinking but I was pretty upset myself. There were many casino owners and big shots from the Vegas strip that attended the services. All of a sudden, I saw Carissa Kingman walk pass the urns. I was looking at her as she turned the corner.

She took a glance my way and nodded. I didn't move my head, but I gave an eye blink that acknowledged her. Dee simultaneously looked at me as Carissa continued to walk out the side door. It was almost an hour before the final visitors paid their respects. Then Mary and I, as well as the rest of the employees and friends, had a final procession to the resting ground for the Fager brothers.

The priest conducted the final words, and that only took about 15 minutes. Patti Lou stayed at Aunt Mary's side throughout the ceremony. She was still somewhat withdrawn, but she understood what was going on. The priest blessed the ten acre desert grounds, and distributed the ashes from the urns as there was a light breeze blowing in the air where the Nugget Junction Casino was built. You could almost hear music from the wind.

The crowd gave Mary and Patti their final condolences as they left the sandy acreage of the Nugget Casino. Mary remained seated in her chair as did Patti Lou. Dee and the rest of the employees of the casino

sort of wandered around hoping to hear a word of what was going to happen to their jobs.

“Frankie... What should I tell them? Vanessa doesn’t even know what to say or do,” asked Dee with skepticism in her voice.

“Tell them we are going to remain open, and not to worry. Their jobs are secure. We just have to talk to the attorney and make sure that everything is legally okay to reopen. I will talk to you later Dee.” I hoped that I eased her mind, and since Mary is part owner, we have to go through the gaming commission for approval of the ownership change. Patti Lou Fager is the legal heir of the Fager share of ownership. Everyone was finally gone... I remained with Aunt Mary at the ceremony sight.

“Have the limousine driver put Patti in the car, Frankie,” says Mary with a somber tone. “Then I want to talk to you.”

“Sure Aunt Mary.” I waved to the driver to escort Patti back to the limo. “Patti, the driver is going to take you to the car and Mary and I will be there in a couple of minutes.”

“Okay, but please hurry... I don’t like being here.” Patti Lou always seemed to have a frightened tone in her voice. I went back to Mary, and as I arrived next to her, she stood up and stared at the ground where the ashes were distributed around the casino.

“Patti is going to sign the majority of the ownership to me Frankie. We are going to take care of her, and provide anything and everything that she may need. The papers will be signed at the attorney’s office tomorrow. Catherine Hollinger has been the Fager’s attorney for the last five years. They trust her, and so do I.

After the interim approval of the gaming commission, everyone will be able to go back to work in two weeks.” I just listened to her as she talked with a continuous glare towards the mountain range.

“Yes, Aunt Mary. Just let me know whatever you want, and I’ll get it done.”

Mary continued in deep thought...

“I want to find out who did this, Frankie. I want you to do whatever it takes to find this person...or persons! We are going to continue to make the Nugget Casino grow and build another casino in the Northwest.”

“I will help you all I can, Mary,” I said with a little vengeance in my voice.

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“You are going to run the casino now, Frankie. Vanessa will be second in operations. I trust you and I have faith in you to make sure of the success of the Nugget. But I want the fucking heads of the bastards who killed Ted and Bobby!!!”

I don't think I've ever seen this side of Mary before. She has the degree of anger as I had after Randall De LaParra killed Michele... “Yes Mary. We should go now. It's been a long day.” I said it as gently as I could. We left the back lot of the Nugget Casino where the ashes were spread, and went home.

Aunt Mary made a pot of coffee for Patti and I. Mary also put a shot of brandy in her coffee. She looked over to me and I gave her the nod to pour a shot in my coffee. As she finished pouring my shot, she was about to put the cap back on the bottle...

“I'll have one too, Mary,” says Patti Lou with a straight face. Mary and I looked at one another for a moment, and then Mary poured a shot into her coffee. Patti took a sip and seemed to enjoy the brandy as well.

“Thank you, Mary... Mary?”

“Yes Patti.”

“Where's your baby?” Patti asked nonchalantly. I was about to take another sip from my cup when I began to choke on the coffee which was already going down my throat.

“What do you mean— *where's your baby?*” asked Mary who looked like she was hit by lightning. “I don't have a baby, Patti.” Patti continues the peculiar conversation...

“Didn't I baby sit him a long time ago?” she says with a straight face while staring. Mary took another sip of her coffee, except it was more than a sip.

“I'm sorry Patti, but I think you might have me mixed up with someone else.” Patti looked straight ahead out the kitchen window for a few seconds...

“What about the fire?” I just looked at her with my mouth popped opened again.

“What fire?” I asked. Then I looked at Mary... “What fire, Aunt Mary?”

“I think it's just her imagination, Frankie. You can see my house is still standing. Patti, I think it's time for you to take your medicine and

lay down for a while. You need to get some rest. We have to go to the attorney's office tomorrow and sign some papers. Say bye to Frankie." Mary was anxious to get Patti to her room.

"Bye Frankie." Patti gave me a gentle kiss on the cheek. As Mary escorted her to the guest room, Patti tells her... "Say good night to little Alex for me, Mary." I looked at her again nearly spitting out my coffee back into the cup. Man, is Patti really sick? I hope she was still taking her pills. I poured myself some more coffee, and a double shot of brandy.

The next morning Mary took Patti Lou to the see the casino attorney, Catherine Hollinger, Esq. I just sat at home thinking who had reason to kill Ted and Bobby. I haven't heard of any conflict between them and anyone else. I remembered the Blackjack dealer, Jason Adams, was caught stealing from the casino. I never found out what actually happened to him. I didn't want to ask. I wondered if the stranger that Dee was suspicious of, could have something to do with this. I was sort of into a trance when the phone rang.

"Hello... Yeah, this is Frank... What a surprise, Carissa... Thanks for the personal condolence, but things will get back to normal by the end of the week... My aunt isn't in right now... She's at the attorneys... What..? You want to see me this evening? Carissa... I'm a little confused. You haven't returned any of my calls this past month. Is there a problem? Just too much business to take care of, huh... I don't know... I have to find out who killed the Fager brothers. Metro's detective's is a comedy act! Sure... Okay... It's been a while since I've seen you anyway. Sure... Seven this evening will be fine... Where? Yes, I know where the Bootlegger Restaurant is... See you at seven."

After I hung up the phone, I was wondering why Carissa called me. She's been dodging me for a while... or was it my imagination? Anyway, I had to get back to thinking about the wandering stranger in the casino. I was going to go back to the Nugget and look for the security video tapes. However, the cops put a pad lock on all the entrance doors. They also blocked off the whole casino with that yellow tape that reads—**'Police activity... No trespassing.'** Well, I thought I might have a long night meeting with Carissa, so I took a nap. I was anxious for Aunt Mary to get back and tell me what her attorney said.

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I had a power nap and took a shower to get ready to meet Carissa. I went down stairs to see Mary. She was just making a fresh pot of coffee.

"Hi Mary... How did the meeting go at the attorney's office?"

"It went just fine Frankie. Patti was agreeable with everything and I have the power of attorney on her behalf. I hold the majority ownership of the Nugget Casino and with the gaming commission's approval; we'll be open for business at the end of the week."

"That's great news, Mary... I'm ready." I said with much enthusiasm.

"I really do need you now, Frankie. I'm just too old to handle it all that by myself."

Mary is talking very casual as she fixes us both a cup of coffee. I thought I'd better ask.

"How do you feel about Vanessa Myles?" Mary sat back and thought...

"I've known Vanessa a very short time. She has never done anything out of line and Ted trusted her. She was raised from a gaming family. Has she been a good mentor to you?"

"Yes she has. I could probably learn a lot more from her as we move forward."

"Then I will re-structure the administrative chain before we open. Soon, we will be on our way and back in business." Mary was handling this like a pro.

"I'm going out for a while Mary. I'll help you out with anything you need tomorrow." She gave me that look again...

"Will you been coming home tonight dear?"

"Of course... I'm just going to meet a few friends on the strip. Is Patti still here?"

"Yes. She took some medication and she's already asleep in the guest room."

"Then I'll see you tomorrow, Mary." I gave her a kiss on the cheek and left.

While I was driving, I felt kind of guilty about what I was doing tonight. I didn't want to tell Mary that I was going to meet Carissa. She might not like the idea. I don't think she really trusts her. If Mary found out what I've done with Carissa, I might be thrown out of Vegas.

I've arrived at the Bootlegger Restaurant right at 7 p.m. sharp. I walked into the lobby and looked around the area for Carissa. I didn't see her. I figured women for some reason are always late, or want to make the grand entrance. I went to the bar and ordered a drink.

"Can I help you?" says the middle aged bartender.

"Uh, yes... First, have you seen Carissa Kingman?"

"Who's asking?" Right away there's a protective bartender. He must get tipped real well.

"I'm supposed to meet her here for dinner. So I assume she hasn't shown up here yet." I really can't stand a wise ass bartender who thinks he's always got an 'Ace' up his sleeve when he knows the big shots.

"No, she hasn't been here yet. Can I get you something?" He still has that look like I'm bugging him. I was going to order a mix drink, but I'm not sure I trust him to fix it right.

"I'll have a bottle of Heineken." I felt it was safer if I got beer straight from the bottle. Good start coming in here and running into an asshole. I listened to the music combo and the restaurant was packing a good crowd. This was pretty relaxing compared to the rock night clubs. There was an older crowd here, but there were sure a lot of attractive women.

"Is there room for one more, handsome?" I looked over my shoulder and there stood Carissa in a red flaming dress.

"I believe this velvet chair is for you, hot stuff." I was in the flirting mood, and she was hot! She sat next to me and called for the bartender.

"Hey Frenchy. How about a brandy and... I'll have a beer just like my friend here." Carissa was like one of the guys in a pool room. Maybe she really is cool about having fun without signs of acting so rich.

"Have you been waiting long, Frankie?"

"Nah... I just got here and just in time for some good music." I didn't want her to think I rushed over here as fast as I could just to meet her. She probably thought the same thing. Guess we gotta play that fucking game! The bartender brought her drink. I thought I'd play it like a big shot and tipped him a five-dollar bill. He looks at it... then pushes it back to me.

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"It's already taken care of buddy," he mutters. The old bartender must know something I don't, but I could figure it out.

"I guess my money isn't any good around here, Carissa."

"Frankie. We give them business all the time. We send our high rollers over here for a comp dinner. They won't charge me or my guest a dime. Is that okay with you?" Carissa looked at me with those seductive eyes.

"It's fine with me Carissa. What the hell, this is Las Vegas. We just transfer money back and forth. It never leaves town." I just laughed and she agreed. We clicked our glasses for good luck. Then it got into a heavy conversation.

"Frankie... I'm sorry about Ted and Bobby with the accident."

"It wasn't an accident, Carissa. Somebody murdered them!"

"Oh... I'm sorry Frankie. Do you have any idea who did it?" Carissa seemed concerned.

"I actually do have an idea, but I got to do some investigating of my own."

"What about Metro Police?" she says like it's the right thing to let them handle it.

"I don't believe Metro can solve this one, Carissa. There's no evidence of anything left from the explosion." She continued to probe...

"Well Frankie, you said you might have an idea. Why don't you tell Metro about it?"

"I don't know Carissa. There's something fishy about all this. But I'll find out." I was sort of getting pissed about the conversation and thought it was time to change the subject.

"Listen Frank; let's stroll over to the corner booth and talk. I'm not too hungry yet... Are you?"

"No, not really... Let's go," I said. I wasn't that hungry anyway. I'd rather pound down a few beers. "Are you comfortable now, Carissa?"

"Yes, this is much better Frank. I really wanted to talk to you about business anyway."

"Business? What kind of business?" I was sort of surprised. She didn't know that much about me or my background to start talking business.

"I'm looking for a young operations trainee."

“What? I don’t understand,” I said.

“I have plans to expand my business and I’m looking for a young operations trainee for the Palace. The last time we talked, you had such a passion to run a casino. Isn’t that what the Fager brothers were teaching you?” I looked at her mesmerized. “Are you interested, Frank?” Carissa calmly offered me something that I couldn’t believe.

“Carissa, are you offering me a position with your casino?” I think I was getting a little mentally intoxicated as I was talking.

“Sure Frank. Now that the Nugget Junction Casino is closed down, this could be an opportunity for you.” I wasn’t sure what Carissa had in mind... And what does she mean closed down.

“Carissa, the Nugget is only closed for about a couple of weeks. Then it’s going to reopen.” She inhales her cigarette deeply... She then exhales high into the air simultaneously as she waves to the waitress to bring us another round.

“Frank... What do you mean a couple of weeks? I thought the casino was going to probate. I figured the casino and land might be sold at auction.” Carissa was real concerned.

“I’m sorry Carissa, but I don’t know where you got your information. My aunt now owns it. She wants me to help her run the casino.”

“I’m sorry, Frank... Did you say she owns it? How is that?” Carissa’s inquisition was starting to cause me concern, but I was cool and calm.”

“She bought into the partnership about five years ago for a percentage, and now she owns it.” Carissa didn’t look too pleased about it. She sort of went into a deep thought.

“Well Frank... I would still love to have you work for us, and the salary is pretty hard to refuse,” she says with another puff of her cigarette and a sip of her drink. I thought for a minute... How much could this salary be as a trainee? I wasn’t going to accept it for Mary’s sake, but I was extremely curious about how much she was willing to pay.

“Well Carissa... If I did accept your offer, what is the salary?” I stared her right in the eye.

“Frank... Tell me that you would seriously consider it, and I’ll give you a quote.” Carissa likes to play hardball in negotiating. I had to think for a moment... There’s no way I could leave Aunt Mary.

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“Okay Carissa... I would seriously consider it, if it was worth my while leaving the Nugget. What are you offering?”

“I will offer you the first year as a trainee, \$60 thousand dollars, and if this works out, I’ll give you a three year contract at \$150 thousand a year with an override of the profits per year. You’ll have your own business suite on the top floor. You’ll oversee the gaming operations. How’s that for starters?” She was making an offer I can’t refuse. I took another swig of my beer. I rubbed my eyes and then took a deep breath.

“I don’t have that much experience, Carissa. Why are you offering me this?” I suspiciously asked. Carissa looked straight ahead...

“I want to get away from my husband and build my own empire. He has his and I want mine. Ted and Bobby had the Nugget Junction, and I’ve always had my eye on it. I hoped someday to purchase it, if it ever went up for sale. Someday your aunt may want to retire, and if she will sell it to me, I will make sure she will live very comfortable, forever.” I stared into the air for a moment, and then took a sip of my beer.

“She won’t sell, Carissa. She loves that place and besides, she feels obligated to finish the project that the Fager brothers started.” I gave her the straight facts. Aunt Mary won’t give it up. I kept thinking about the lucrative offer she presented to me. I feel like I was getting sick because I knew I was going to turn it down.

“I’m sorry Carissa, but I can’t give you an answer tonight. My Aunt wants me to run the Nugget, and I should talk to her about it. You have offered me an opportunity that is extremely hard to reject. I will considerate it real hard.” She looked at me... nodded her head in agreement. Then she finished her drink and put out her cigarette.

“Okay, Frank... I respect your feelings and loyalty. Your aunt’s lucky to have you. Listen, I’m not really hungry. Why don’t we go back to the Palace and enjoy some wine overlooking the city lights?” Now what does she have in mind? Wine and the city lights..? She is hot looking tonight. That older age crap doesn’t bother me. Older women in this town have that attractiveness that I can’t explain. They really know how to glow.

“Okay Carissa... It’s a nice warm night.” I said that with confidence as I figured I was going to bang the hell out her tonight!

We left the Bootlegger Restaurant and as usual, the bill was taken

care of. Having the **‘Juice’** in Vegas is fabulous! The term **‘Juice’**, in this town, is when you have some status or you happen to be a high stakes roller. You can pretty much have anything you want. Just don’t lose the status or all your big cash... and hope you don’t run out of credit. If you do, you’ll find out how much **‘Juice’** you have. You’re pretty much forgotten... unless the casino is holding your marker. We had separate cars and I followed her over to her casino, the Majestic Palace. It was a busy night for the casino and that was impressive. I think Carissa knew what she was doing by bringing me here. She was going to meet me in the Emperor’s lounge after she had the valet take care of her car. I always have this feeling that Nina is going to be working when I come by, or was it just plain wishful thinking. That is one girl I can’t stop thinking of in a serious way. So I continued to look around as I sat at my usual table, and Nina’s usual section.

“A penny for your thoughts...” Carissa had her hand on my shoulder.

“Oh... Hi Carissa. I was listening to the singer. He does a lot of the great oldies.” I felt like I wanted to get out of there fast in case that Nina was in. I didn’t want her to see me with Carissa. “Are you ready to go?” I hurriedly said to her.

“Yes, but did you want to listen to more songs?” she asked while panning the lounge.

“Nah... That’s okay. I’m anxious to view the city lights with a nice glass of wine.” How’s that for getting the hell out of here? She did look like she was looking for someone. I have my suspicions.

We went up to Carissa’s penthouse suite. I just couldn’t get over how beautiful it was. I was fantasizing of how it would be if I had something like this. As Carissa went and changed into something more comfortable, I poured myself some wine. Carissa was in the bedroom with the door left open so she could still talk to me.

“Are you finding everything okay, Frank?”

“Yes I am. I’ll pour you a glass of wine. Chardonnay or Merlot..?”

“Let me have a Merlot, sweetheart.” She was still changing her clothes. I decided to stroll around the living room. I noticed her picture frames on the wall with a lot of political people. I didn’t know who they were, but they had flags on stands in the photos. What else could it be?

Carissa finally came out in her usual sheer evening lounge attire.

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I'm beginning to know her routine. She sure can make you horny. After all, she was a show girl before marrying Mark Kingman.

"Where's my glass sweetie?" says Carissa as she seems so relaxed.

"Right here, sweetie." I said with a little grin.

"Let's go out onto the veranda and sit by the pool." She grabs my hand gently. I think I remember this situation before. We ended up in the Jacuzzi and I had a fantasy fulfilled with her. This time I played it cool, sat back and just stared at the city lights from atop of the Palace. I also remember her not getting back to me on all the messages I left her after our first time together. Perhaps she is a game player. Maybe the job offer she made me was bogus. I'm a little confused right now on why she invited me to see her tonight. Especially the day after the funeral... I went a long with it.

Carissa didn't talk much about business anymore. Actually there was little talk about anything. We were on our fourth glass of wine and we were loosening up. Carissa started the subject again about the Nugget Casino.

"So, what are you and your aunt's plans with the Nugget, Frank?" I had to think again... 'Why is she so interested in the Nugget'..?

"I told you Carissa. It was Ted and Bobby's dream to expand the casino, and also to build on the Northwest side of town. Why are you so interested in it?" I was getting a little bugged that she kept bringing it up.

"I'm sorry Frank. Maybe it's the wine talking. I've always had my eye on that little place. Sorry, I won't bring it up anymore. Okay?" Carissa gave me a gentle kiss on the cheek as I just stood still looking at the city lights... "I'll get us a couple of more." She went to refill our wine glasses.

Why has she had her eye on that place? It's a dump compared to what she's got. Maybe I'm thinking too much into this. Anyway, I have to admit, this environment is very soothing.

"Here you go Frank...enjoy." Carissa hands me a glass, and we click glasses for good luck. It must work because look where I'm at? Carissa put her glass down and took me over to the pool lounge chair. I sat down and she sat next to me. It seemed like a rerun. But I don't mind reruns. I just have to be careful of her. She knows how to be in control.

We started kissing and getting passionate. I was still a little

cautious because I don't know her motive. Oh what the hell. We got more passionate and took off our clothes. Now she's getting the best of me, and she's knows how to do it. We were fondling one another all over our body. Man, if I worked here, is this how it would be all the time? I can't be thinking of that now. We continued side by side caressing and kissing all over. I was hot! All of a sudden, the fucking phone rings and Carissa jumps to get it. Is this woman in control or what? Why is it, the phone always has priority?

"Sorry Frank... I have to get that. It's my private business line." Private business line..?

"Sure Carissa. Business always comes first." Jesus Christ! I just sat there in the lounge chair and waited for her to get back. She was taking a long time and I could barely hear her talking as she was heavy into the conversation. I decided to get into the pool for a swim until she finished talking business. After all, I had a lot of energy. Carissa's voice became a little louder and I felt like I was overhearing her business. I just continued to swim.

"What do you mean it's going to take a little longer, Tony? You said we would see a profit in a few months! It's been a few months!" Anthony Martinez tries to explain his situation.

"I'm sorry Carissa, but the merchandise isn't moving as fast as we anticipated. My brother Randall just had surgery. He has prosthesis legs now and he'll be able to control the sales soon."

"Are you relying solely on your brother, and is he the reason for the delay? Because if you are, I'm going to have to call in your notes! I'm not going to depend on an invalid, Tony!"

"He's not an invalid, Carissa. He just had a successful operation. I'm taking care of his territory and mine as well. I just need a little more time."

"Okay, Tony... But I want to see \$15 million in two months! I'm buying a piece of property soon."

"I'll have it Carissa. Can we lay off the business right now? I want you to come out to my beach house for the week. Can you do that?" Anthony asks as he tries to persuade her so he can continue his sexual affair with her.

"Tony... How quickly you curve the topic. I don't know. I have some important business I have to take care of."

"Carissa, I want you to come and meet the members. I think you'll

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feel a lot better about your investment when you hear about our new approach to the business.”

“I’ll let you know, Tony. I have to find out when my husband is coming back to Vegas. I need to get rid of him for good. Every fucking time I want to do something, I have to get his signature. You might be able to help me on that matter, sweetheart.

“Sure baby... Anything for you,” says Anthony as he sounds like he’s drooling on the phone.

“I’ve got to go, Tony. I have company,” she says in a bitchy tone.

“I hope its business, Carissa. You know how jealous I get.”

“You just keep flattering me, Tony. Of course it’s business. I’ll let you know about the trip to the beach house. Good night.” Carissa hangs up the phone and thinks for a moment, almost forgetting her company out in the pool. She walks out onto the patio.

“How’s the water, Frank?”

“It’s nice and cool, Carissa. Is everything okay with your business call?”

“Of course... There’s nothing I can’t handle.” Carissa steps into the pool as she’s still totally naked... and my engines just kicked into gear again.

“It’s about time. You don’t mix business with pleasure, do you Carissa?” She chuckles a little and keeps the diva smile.

“Frankie... Business is a pleasure.” She then plants a hot steamy kiss on me, and the night goes down in history.

Chapter 27

Is Fear A Moment To Celebrate?

The next morning, I had breakfast with Aunt Mary and Patti Lou. Patti was anxious to get back to Parker Dam in Arizona. Actually I was kind of anxious for her to get back there also. She doesn't seem to be all together.

"Good morning, Frankie," greets Mary with a little cheer in her voice. "Today we are going to add new life to our casino. We're going to open next Friday and celebrate the re-grand opening, in honor of Ted and Bobby. I've structured the new administration and you're going to be vice president in charge of operations Frankie. Vanessa Myles will be casino manager and remember, she can still teach you a few things. We have a trust fund for Patti, and she will be taken care of for the rest of her life. She also has shares in this company."

I thought about the new structure for a moment, and it sounded like I was going to excel faster than I thought. "This sounds good, Mary. Are you up to dealing with all this?"

"What do you mean, Frankie? It sounds like you might have doubts!"

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to sound like that. I think I just can't

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believe all this is happening to me. I think you are handling this like a professional business woman. Please forgive me.” I hope I didn’t make her feel bad.

“Thanks Frankie, but there’s nothing to forgive. We’re going to make it! Remember that little talk we had at the funeral?”

“Which talk?” I said like my mind was elsewhere and feeling ignorant. Mary took me into the living room where Patti couldn’t hear us.

“The talk about finding out who killed Ted and Bobby.”

“Yes, I remember. I can’t do anything until we get back into the Nugget. I need to get the videos that recorded everything in the casino for the past month.”

“Okay. If you find out who it is, I want to know right away.” Mary started to get angrier talking about it.

“Sure Mary. What do you want me to do if I find out who it is? Tell Metro?” I was just trying to feel out what Mary had on her mind.

“No, were not going to tell Metro! Just let me know Frankie.” My aunt is starting to scare me. I think some of her old neighborhood gang days from East Los Angeles, is still in her blood.

“I will Mary.” I wasn’t sure what else to say to her. It was getting tense in my aunt’s house. I had to get out of there. I’m just as mad as she is, but her emotions are getting the best of her. I headed on over to the Majestic Palace sports book. The only friends I knew to watch sports with are Scottish John McTarbet and Jimmy Mills. I walked into the casino and there was John in his usual seat with a tall double VO and 7up, and a beer chaser.

“Hi John... How are the ball games treating you?”

“Oh, hi Frank... It’s been awhile since I’ve seen you. How’s your shoulder?” He asked as a concerned friend.

“It’s okay John. I was lucky it healed real well.” I was waiting for the waitress to order a beer.

“Say Frank, I heard about the Fager brother’s car exploding at the Nugget. I’m really sorry. I’ve met Bobby Fager when he was managing one of the casinos up the strip years ago. Do the cops know what happened?”

“No John, it’s being investigated right now. We’ll find out who did it... How’s your wife Nancy? Is she still working at the hospital?”

“Oh yeah, she’s going to retire soon. It keeps her busy, but she

wants to spend more time with our grandchildren.”

“That’s nice. And soon she’ll be able to watch games with you here, I suppose...” I said with a grin. John let out a cautious laugh...

“I don’t think so Frank. First, she doesn’t know anything about sports and second, the marriage is just fine the way it is.” John laughs a little again. I was thinking about the job Carissa offered me which I should be whipped at the cross for thinking it.

“John... Do you know who Carissa Kingman is?”

“Everyone knows who she is, Frank. She was one of the top showgirls here in town for a long time. Mark Kingman was a regular patron at the topless show in the Dunes casino. They started dating, and he asked her to marry him. It was the big news of Vegas almost 20 years ago. He’s about 25 years her senior. Another match in Heaven...Ha! Why do you ask, Frank?”

“She offered me a job here at the Palace. I was kind of suspicious on why she would ask me.” Scottish John was someone you could confide in and talk open with.

“I’ll tell you Frank... Don’t trust anyone in management here. My daughter, Laura, works here, and I hear things.”

“What kind of things?” I was getting curious. He takes a quick look to see if anyone is listening to our conversation.

“When Carissa’s husband is in the Cayman Islands, which is most of the time, she throws these wild parties for very rich men. She uses a place outside the city, and I hear it’s like a King’s brothel.”

“A brothel,” I said. “I know there’s legalized prostitution in Nye County. Is that where it’s at?” John looks around to see if anyone is in hearing distance again.

“No Frank. It’s just a few miles southwest of here. Now, I haven’t been there, but some of the cocktail girls from here at the Palace, also work there. The little mansion they use is owned by_____” Just as John was starting to tell me who owned the mansion, a security guard walked up to us casually.

“How are you gentlemen doing tonight?” John knew who it was right away.

“Hi Tommy, how are you doing tonight?” Tommy just smiled.

“I’m doing fine John.”

“By the way Tommy, I want you to meet a friend of mine. This is Frank. Frank this is Tommy. He’s been here for about 12 years.”

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“Actually 14 years, and I’ve known John ever since. Say John, can you get one in for me before the game starts?” Tommy looked around to see if anyone was watching.

“Sure Tommy. What do you need?” John asked like it was routine with Tommy. He slipped him a piece of folded paper.

“It’s there John with the bill inside.” John has a few friends here and they rely on him to get their bets in since it’s against the house rules for employees to make bets for themselves. John took the note and headed for the ticket writer in sports. It didn’t bother me any. John came back, and as he shook Tommy’s hand, he slipped the ticket into his palm.

“Thanks John. Willie might need you later.” Tommy left and went to continue his regular job...a security guard.

“Sorry Frank. I do this all the time. Over the years, some of the employees and I have become friends, and who knows when I might need them.” John just laughed and nursed his drink. I was still anxious to find out about the whore house.

“So John, you started to tell me who owned the brothel.” I got more nosey. John looked around slowly, and then bent over to me and whispered...

“The Mayor of Vegas owns the house.” John paused for a moment and takes another look around. “And Carissa Kingman runs the whole operation. She is making money from very, very rich men around the world. But Mayor Lindsey Cantwell wants her to stop having it at her place, which is her second home. It’s election year and there’s rumors that the word is starting to leak out.”

“So what’s Carissa want to do?” My curiosity was getting the best of me. John looks around the casino sports book again...

“The word is she’s looking for another place, and it’s going to be an exclusive club with a private casino. She’s going to have hookers with a casino, for high rollers. She’s going to make a fortune!” says John with sly chuckle as he takes a sip of his VO.

I listened to John and it made me think a lot. Why does she want me to work for her, and why does she want to buy the Nugget? I watched the rest of the ball game as John and I had small chit chat. John liked to talk about politics. He hated it and I think that was the attraction. One thing for sure is that if I needed any info on the local politics, he was the guy to ask.

“John, I had a good time chatting with you tonight, but I have to go.”

“Okay Frank. You know where I’ll be sitting when you come back in.” Scottish John was right at home at the Majestic Palace.

It was Friday. Aunt Mary and the rest of the employees of the Nugget Junction Casino were ready to celebrate the re-opening of the casino. We had Ted and Bobby Fager’s portraits on the wall of the casino. Mary was nervous, but Vanessa and I were in control in making sure everything would go smooth. I pretty much forgot about Carissa’s offer of having me work for her at the Palace. It was big money, but I do feel an obligation to Aunt Mary and the employees. We had most of them back to work, except the few who were afraid to come back because of the explosion, and the murder of Ted and Bobby. I wasn’t bothered and I was going to do my own investigating.

I took over Ted’s office, and the first thing I did was to get the video tapes for the last few weeks. All I heard from the Metro police is that they’re still working on it and there wasn’t any new information. The detectives I talked to were just pacifying us with excuses. Aunt Mary wanted results, and that’s what I’m going to get. Because of the re-opening of the casino, I wasn’t able to look at the tapes in the office. I was going to take them home and see if I could come up with anything. Vanessa and Mary came into the office.

“Are you ready to open the doors, Frankie?” says Mary with a cheery attitude.

“I am ready ladies.” I was a little nervous, but I was ready to open a casino that I am somewhat in control of, thanks to ‘Nepotism’...in a positive way.

It was 12 noon and there were a lot of customers outside in lines just waiting for the doors to open. One thing about the locals of Las Vegas, they love grand openings, especially because of the potential giveaways. We are giving out key chains and 25 cent beers along with 25 cent hot dogs. If that don’t get’um coming, nothing will.

Aunt Mary had the honors of cutting the ribbon and opening the front doors... And here comes the herd. There were at least 20 people that only took two steps and hit the nearest slot machines. I was glad to see people come to the bar and get the cheap beer and hotdogs.

I took a stroll through the casino to make sure everyone was having a good time. Vanessa was watching the gaming tables. She was

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in full control. I looked over to Dee and Paul at the bar. They were non-stop serving alcohol and soft drinks. It was a pretty good start. Yeah, I miss Ted and Bobby. I learned a lot from them. They were always concerned about treating the customers like family. But if you crossed them, you were in trouble.

“Dee, I’ve never seen you so busy.” I commented to her as she practically ignored me and continued to draw the beers. I couldn’t read her lips too clearly as she looked my way and said something.

“Frankie.” Mary came up to me and put her arm around mine. “I’m very happy about the re-opening of the Nugget. The brothers would be proud.”

“They would be proud of you, Mary. We’re going to make this work,” I said.

“Have you got any information yet?” she asked with a firm voice.

“Metro hadn’t said anything, but I’m taking the video tapes home tonight to see if I can find something that will give us any leads.” Mary started to get upset again...

“Thank you dear. I’m going to walk around.”

“Please leave it up to me, Mary. Concentrate on the casino and I’ll try my best to find out who did it.”

Mary left and continued to greet the customers. Some of the locals expressed their belated condolences to Mary as they passed her walking around. They’ve known her for a while. I also went to greet the customers as well, and introduced myself to let them know who I am. The one thing Bobby told me was to always be on alert and watch what was going on. Always know where your employees are supposed to be. This is a small intimate casino, so it wasn’t hard to do. I also wanted to get to know the locals better. I’ve met quite a few since I’ve started working here, but there are many faces I don’t recognize.

The video cameras are on in the casino and this is only the beginning for me. I went up to my office and looked out the two way mirror overlooking the casino. This is really the new beginning of my journey. I seem to be running into many forks in the road. I started thinking again of the offer Carissa made to me. She has a lot of interest in this property. I don’t know why, but it bothers me.

I got home after midnight. Mary was already in bed from a long day. Vanessa has the new graveyard manager, Jazelle Spain, watch the

casino. Jazelle is an old friend of Vanessa from working on the casino strip. She's 31 years old, and a good looking. She was a casino dealer for many years... and she graduated from the University of Nevada Las Vegas with a Bachelor Arts degree in business. Vanessa feels comfortable with her. Jazelle has been a floor manager for the last couple of years at the 'Sun N' Sand' Casino, which is off the main Vegas strip. She hates the politics in larger casinos. Vanessa convinced her to work here. Mary gave her the approval.

I stayed up the next couple of hours and studied the casino video tapes to see if there was any lead to Ted and Bobby's murder. There were sure a lot of good looking women that came into this place. Why I haven't seen or got to know them is a mystery to me. I also saw many strangers walk in and out of the casino. I was particularly looking for the man that looked like Jason Adams.

I was getting very sleepy and I rubbed my temples as I closed my eyes. I had a minor headache from watching the video tapes, so I made myself a drink to relax from a long day. I tilted my head back... and passed out.

Chapter 28

Toss a Man onto the Craps Table ~ I'll Show You Snake Eyes!

I had a quick power nap in the middle of the night. I continued to go over the video tapes from inside the casino and unfortunately, we didn't have cameras hooked up outside overlooking the parking area. The Nugget Junction Casino was so small that it seemed like we didn't need any security specifically just for the parking lot at all.

I saw the man that Dee Hutton was talking about. He was sitting at the bar by himself a few times during the week before the car explosion. I didn't recognize him as a past customer, but this guy always looked like he was searching for someone. He kept to himself and didn't talk to anyone. And yes, he did look a little like Jason Adams.

I continued to watch his moves in the casino. He didn't gamble at all, and just walked around like he was casing out the place. He didn't do anything suspicious that would make me think he had something to do with killing the Fager brothers. There was a commotion on the crap table. I saw a beautiful Asian girl in her early twenties, who was built like she was ready for the Olympic competition in gymnastics. There wasn't an ounce of fat on her body. I saw a gambler who put his hand on her ass and squeezed. She punched him with her fist square in the

jaw, and he fell onto the crap table.

The dealers and uniformed security jumped in right away and yanked the slightly drunk player off the table. They checked him to see if he took any chips when he fell on the table. He was clean. The girl was checked by the female security guard and everything was back to normal. The gambler was taken to the coffee shop and given strong coffee to sober up. The girl left the casino as she was considered to be sober. I didn't see the guy that looked like Jason Adams anymore. He just disappeared.

I went on to the next video tape that was taping continuously throughout the day of the explosion. I looked carefully throughout the casino. Nothing was out of the ordinary. Wait... I do see the guy that looks like Adams. He looks like about a couple of years older. He walked around the casino with his hands in his pocket, and just looked at the players.

I see the time bar code under the video, and this character was there between 4 and 5 p.m. I didn't see him around anymore. I sat back and had his picture on pause... I might try to see if any of the employees know him. I was very tired and went to bed thinking about the whole day. Tomorrow is another day, and I had my work cut out for me.

The next late morning I was having coffee with Aunt Mary and telling her about the video tapes I had seen. She didn't know about any brother Jason Adams had. I turned on the VCR and showed her this particular guy. She looked real close.

"No— I've never seen him before Frankie. He does look a little like Jason. But I've never seen him." Mary watched as this guy walk around the casino. I put the VCR in slow motion. We were both watching video I haven't seen yet. I picked up where I left off from last night.

"Look!" Mary says as she got closer to the TV set. "He started to go up the stairs towards the offices and bumps into Bobby. Bobby's showing him directions to somewhere else." I saw Bobby pointing his finger in a couple of directions like this guy was lost.

"Look Mary— Bobby is walking away and the guy starts to go in another direction. He stops and looks back at Bobby." I really need to know who this guy is now. Mary sat back in deep thought for a moment.

"We need to talk to some of the employees who knew Adams.

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Maybe they know who this guy is. Maybe it's his brother." I had to ask Mary about the night Jason was caught.

"Whatever happened to Jason after he was caught stealing, Mary..?"

"This is Nevada Frankie. Since the early 1950's when I moved here, if you were caught stealing or cheating from a casino, you were taken for a ride out to the desert, or they simply just smashed your hands and clubbed you with a baseball bat on the legs. The police never would really follow up if a missing person was reported, especially if they thought it had anything to do with gambling. Either there were too many suicides, or the gamblers wanted to get lost from having big casino markers they couldn't pay back. The police were taken care of by the casinos for protection from the crooks, cheaters or robbers. This is the 'good ol' boys' town where everyone knew your name."

"But what about the situation with Adams..? Do you think that Ted and Bobby took him for a ride to the desert?" Mary knew them well.

"If they took him for a ride to the desert, they probably scared the hell out of him and let him walk back to town. However, they probably gave him a wrap on the knuckles. But they wouldn't kill him."

"Do you think Jason had something to do with the bombing?" I asked.

"I don't know, Frankie. I would think that he would get out of town as fast as he could, because the rest of the casino owners get all the information if an employee steals from a casino." Mary really knows the Vegas rules.

I got ready and left for the casino. Mary was staying home today. I took the video tapes with me because I wanted to show some employees to see if they knew who this guy was. I got to the Nugget about 9 a.m. and everything was running smooth for a Saturday in a small local casino. I'm starting to feel at home. Vanessa was in the pit supervising. I can say one thing—she is professional about her job.

"Good morning, Vanessa... I see you have the place in control as usual."

"Good morning, Frank... We did good last night, and believe it or not, some of the players are still here," she says with a smile.

“How is Jazelle doing?”

“She is doing real good and the dealers like her. That’s a good sign.”

“Good Vanessa, I’m going upstairs to look at more tapes. I think we need to ask the employees who knew Jason Adams, to come up and see if they recognize anyone on the tape.”

“I’ll ask around and find out who was close to him, and get back to you.” Vanessa was pretty efficient. I went upstairs to my new office and overlooked the casino from my two way mirror. I felt a bit of voyeurism setting in, but this is the way it is in money land.

It was almost 4 o’clock in the afternoon, and there was a knock on my door.

“Come in.” A young kid about 18 came in with a vase of flowers. “What’s this?” I said.

“I’m from the florist, and I have a delivery for Frank Scorpio. The lady down stairs told me to come up to your office.” The shy kid was amused by the way a casino operations manager’s office looked.

“That’s me. You can put the flowers down on my desk.” As I opened the gift envelop, he walks over to the two way mirror and looked down at the crowd.

“Wow”, says the kid. “Are you spying on all those people down there?” I thought for a second.

“I wouldn’t call it spying, sonny. I look for cheaters and crooks. I can see them, but they can’t see me.” I figured I’d tell the kid how it really is since he’s on the verge of being able to legally gamble.

“Wow... Is this a secret mister?” The kid is still in amazement and making me feel old at the same time by calling me mister.

“It’s really not a secret Ace. As a matter of fact, I’d like gamblers to think someone is always watching them. As long as they play a straight game, they’ll never be bothered by us. It also puts the potential cheaters on guard that they’re being watched. Well, listen—I gotta get back to work. Here’s a tip.” The kid looked at the \$5 dollar tip and thought I was a big shot.

“Gosh, thanks mister.” At least it put a smile on his face.

“Here’s another tip kid... Stay away from gambling! It’ll stunt your growth...” The kid didn’t know exactly what I meant, but he said thanks again and left. I thought for a moment... Why didn’t I take my own advice..?

‘It stunts your growth as a person, especially when you have something to offer life with your God given talents.’

Anyway I opened the card to see who it was from. It read, ‘Good luck in your new endeavors. You’ll make a great casino boss. Someday you will achieve the success that you’ve always wanted... Love, Carissa.’

I sure wasn’t expecting this. The girl seems to have a heart. I called her at the Majestic Palace, and left a message on her phone recorder to thank her. Actually I was so busy with the Nugget Casino that I didn’t have time for anyone. I think Dee was thinking that I was being aloof towards her. I guess I was. After all, I was working six and sometimes seven days a week now.

“May I speak to Anthony Martinez please? Tell him it’s Carissa Kingman.” Carissa was checking on her investment. “Hello Tony, are you going to have the \$15 million dollars this coming month? I see... I’ll tell you what Tony... I have a problem and I need your services. I am willing to extend you another month or two. How soon can you fly out here? All right, I’ll see you at the end of the week.” Carissa was anxious for one of her financial plans to start moving fast. She got on the phone again and made another call... “Malia, I want you to find out if there was any change of ownership to the land that the Nugget Junction Casino is on...right away!” Malia was her personal business assistant. If Carissa wanted something done, Malia was the person to carry it out...at all costs! “Get back to me as soon as you can.” Carissa had something on her mind and she was puffing real hard on the lit cigarette. It’s as if she was losing her patience about something.

The phone rang on her private line. “Hello. Thanks for getting back to me quickly Lindsey. I’m trying to get this piece of land to conduct my business. Can I have a little more time with your place? I have some pretty big clients coming in this weekend... I know... I understand its election year... Who contributes to your campaign the most? Come on Lindsey... There are no threats here... You were hooking on Fremont Street when you were a teenager, while I was still in show business at the Dunes Casino. We almost come from the same neighborhood. Those fucking pit bosses made me go with those fucking high rollers anytime they wanted me too, or lose my fucking job! So bottom line Mayor Lindsey Cantwell, are we going to help

each other? Good... I know you will win re-election. I'll see you this week. I'm bringing in a special guest from Orange County, California. The bastard loves the young darlings...Chow." Carissa hung up and poured herself a Crown Royal on the rocks. The private line rings again...

"Hello."

"Hello Carissa. This is Frank Scorpio."

"Well, hello sweetheart. How's the casino life treating you?" she asked in a very sweet way.

"The casino life is good so far, and we're building up a clientele every day. How's the Majestic Palace? Still raking in the millions?" I started talking like I was already part of the 'Good ol' Boys' club of Vegas.

"I don't know about the millions, Frank. But we're doing pretty well. So, I suppose you've made enough money to buy that property outright now from the Fager trust?"

"No Carissa, I haven't got that kind of money. Besides, I don't have anything to do with the property," I said as there was a different tone to her voice.

"Oh, I was just kidding you, Frank. Why don't we get together tomorrow night? I want to show you 'Valley of the Fire' national park. It's a nice place for a small picnic." I didn't think Carissa was into picnics.

"You want to go on a picnic, Carissa?"

"Well, maybe just a drive and I'll bring a couple of bottles of the best wine," she says with still a seductive voice. Now that sounds like the real Carissa.

"It sounds very nice, Carissa. I'll tell my aunt that I need a day off and she can cover me. I'll call you tonight." I hung up the phone and was wondering why I was getting so much attention from a very rich woman who is much older than me? What the hell... I must be lacking confidence.

There was a knock on the door to Carissa's penthouse suite. "Come in." A beautiful Asian, with a deep tan, and somewhat muscular girl walks in...

"You wanted to see me, Mrs. Kingman?"

"Yes Malia. I have one more job for you. Do you think you can

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handle it as well as the last one?" Malia smiles at her.

"You have to ask, Carissa? Just tell me what you want, and when... And it's done." Carissa takes a sip of her drink...smiles and pours Malia a drink.

"You're a real charmer, Malia. Here's a toast to your attributes."

"You know I don't drink, Carissa, but I appreciate you taking care of me." Malia gives her a slow gentle kiss on the lips. Carissa just stays still as if she is not sure whether she likes the idea of bisexuality. She gives Malia an envelope with instructions on it.

"And make sure after you read it, that you burn it! No one else is to know about this."

"It's as good as done. Now, may I exercise in your pool, Mrs. Kingman?"

"Of course you can sweetheart." Carissa is intrigued by her poise. Malia takes off her loose chiffon pleated pant suit as she walks towards the pool. She doesn't wear under garments, so it was right into the swimming pool she went. She has, what is considered to be the perfect body. A very well toned Asian girl. And yes... She is the girl who threw the drunk onto the crap table at the Nugget Junction Casino.

I told Aunt Mary that I needed tomorrow off and she agreed. I was working a lot and I deserved some time off. She said she would go in and take care of the paper work, and that she was happy to be there. I called Carissa later at night, and told her that I was looking forward to see the 'Valley of Fire' national park out by the American Native Indian reservation. I've never been there, but I've seen post card pictures of it. I would pick her up about six tomorrow evening.

The next morning I got up and went to talk to Mary before she left for the Nugget. She got all dolled up for work. She looked like a professional business woman.

"Aunt Mary... You look like you own a casino." I just smiled, and she smiled back.

"Thank you, dear. I feel good and it's funny, but I actually feel like I'm contributing something to my investment. I should have done something a long time ago. Keeping busy gives you energy." Mary was feeling real good.

“I understand what you’re saying, Mary. I also feel good, and I owe it to you and my family back in California.”

“That’s what a family is for, Frankie. Make sure you teach your children well. We have to take care of each other in this very short life God gave us. Well, I have to go now. You have a good day and rest.” I couldn’t tell her what my plans were with Carissa. Mary knew she was an ex-showgirl. She never cast judgment on her, but Carissa did marry a casino owner a lot older than her. And now she has her own casino. When opportunity knocks, go for it. Mary drove off and I actually went back to bed for a short nap.

Mary arrived at the Nugget Casino. She parked in Ted’s old parking spot. She doesn’t scare easy and besides, no one has anything against her. She just started being a full time business woman. She walked through the casino a little nervous, on her way to the office.

“Good morning, Vanessa.”

“Good morning, Mary. I hear you gave Frank the day off.”

“Yes. My little man is tired and he has done a good job,” Mary says with pride.

“Yes he has. Let’s have lunch on my break,” Vanessa says cheerfully.

“That would be real nice, Vanessa. I’ll see you soon.” As Mary went on to her office, she was greeting the employees, and that’s what makes a business like family. She and the Fager brothers always took time to say hello to their fellow employees.

Chapter 29

Talk to My Heart... It Will Give You an Honest Answer

I took my usual power nap, and got ready for my date with Carissa. I was feeling vigorous and frisky. It was a nice warm evening and I was looking forward to seeing her. I think she is really growing on me. I gave myself a double dose of the expensive evening cologne. Of course I had to splash it around the most important parts of my body. Win or lose—I'm ready!

Carissa called and wanted me to meet her at the Bootlegger Restaurant. I'm getting used to that place. I think they're getting to know me as well. I arrived there right at 6 p.m., and I couldn't believe she was already there at the bar talking to her favorite bartender.

I said as I walked up to her.

"Hi good looking..." She gave me a kiss on the cheek. "You remember Frenchy?"

"Yes I do. How are you Frenchy?" I extended my hand to shake his.

"I'm fine, Mr. Scorpio. Will you have the usual?" This guy already knows what my usual is? "Sure, I'll have the usual." I still feel uneasy

about this guy.

“Let’s sit for a moment, Frank. We’ll leave after this drink.” Carissa lights up one more cigarette. Here comes Frenchy with a mix drink. If I remember correctly, I ordered a Heineken beer from him the last time I was here, because I didn’t trust him to mix me a good drink.

“Here you go Mr. Scorpio, Blue Sapphire and tonic.” He sets the drink down and attends to other customers.

“How does he know that I drink Sapphire and tonic? I’ve never ordered that from him,” I said to Carissa who just kept smiling.

“I told him Frank. That’s what you like to drink, isn’t it?” I just looked at her and laughed.

“Thanks for remembering, Carissa.” We really talked about nothing as we sat there listening to the piano music. I was busier looking around at the other people. We finished our drinks and I suggested we leave. Carissa and I walked out to the valet.

“Let’s take my car Frank. The top is down and it’s a nice warm night.” It was okay with me. She has a \$200 thousand dollar car, and I was in love with it. But I wouldn’t tell her that. The valet brought the car to the front, and since he already opened the car door for her, I started to get into the passenger side.

“Here Frank...” She tosses me the keys. “You drive, big guy,” she says as my face began to light up with a big smile. I very nonchalantly say...

“Sure Carissa. I don’t mind.” I practically wet my pants—just a figure of speech. I put this macho machine in gear, and I pulled out and headed for Interstate 15. Valley of the Fire Park was about 50 miles north of Vegas. The Lamborghini sports car was the best machine I’ve ever driven in my life. It glided up the highway as if you were riding on a cloud of cotton. But I acted like I did this all the time. Carissa still had a smile on her face...and of course, I had a big smile on mine.

“Why don’t you open her up, Frank?” she blurts out like she was on a high. I looked at her and replied...

“You mean open it up like, ‘Put the pedal to the metal’?”

“Yes! Put the pedal to the metal!” she laughingly shouts. I was thinking, for an older gal, she’s pretty cool.

“Carissa... Hang on to your bra. We’re going to fly like a soaring eagle.”

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“Okay Frank, but I’m not wearing a bra,” she says as she laughs out loud. Am I in heaven or what? I floored it, and I hit 147 mph. It was faster than I wanted to go. But the timing was right. I kept looking back to see if there were any cops. The highway was practically deserted and I thought I was pressing it. I would glance over to her just to see the look on her face. She looked as though she wanted to go a lot faster. I thought for a minute, but I didn’t want to get us killed. So I slowed down. The turn off was a few more miles. What a thrill it was.

I slowed down to 80 mph. I felt like I had come to a complete stop. We pulled off at the exit ramp and headed east to the national park. I could already see the red statuesque sandstone mountains. It was beautiful. The unique thing was that the heat from the hot sun would settle into the sandstone in the evening. It would illuminate with a reddish orange glow.

We picked out a parking spot in one of the picnic areas. It was about 85 degrees with a slight breeze. Frankly, it was perfect. We sat in the car on a small hill that overlooked the Valley. Everyone should come here at least once in his or her life.

“Well Frank, I got a bucket of ice in the cooler, and I brought us a bottle of Blue Sapphire and tonic. Let’s get started and enjoy the view.” This was too romantic. I wasn’t sure what her motivation was. We already did the ‘Nasty’... Is she having feelings for me? I’m getting carried away with this. The 1960’s music group, ‘The Grass Roots’ said it best— *‘Live for today, and don’t worry about tomorrow’*.

Our eyes glared at the sculptured looking sandstone mountains of **‘The Valley of the Fire’** state park. Then we began the small talk. She wanted to know about my past, and I wasn’t about to tell her anything. I don’t care how much booze I, or she, gets into me. However, I would like to hear about her past. But it seemed she refrained from that also. I poured us another drink.

“Frank, I wish you would reconsider coming to work for me.” I looked at her and was surprised to hear her ask me again.

“Carissa... You know I have an obligation to stay at the Nugget. Why do you want me to work for you?” She looked at me with those cat eyes.

“I think you would be a good asset to the casino team. I want to expand my business, and I could use someone like you. You have ambition and drive for success. I need that in a manager for my future plans.” I stared at the incandescent mountain. How tempting is her

offer? There is no way I could give up the Nugget. It would kill Aunt Mary. I owe her everything.

“What about your husband, Carissa? Doesn’t he have anything to say about what you do with the business?”

“My husband is getting a little too old and besides, he has a heart condition. He doesn’t have much time left. Unless he gets a heart transplant, he might have a little over a year. I’m sorry I sound so callus but it’s the truth. He doesn’t share my interest and he does what he wants. He loves living on the Islands.”

It was going on 9:20 p.m., and the mountain continued to glow. I put my arm around her as we drank, and enjoyed the romantic view.

Mary’s day at the casino was a long one. She’s working overtime because she likes it and is happy. There’s a knock at her office door as she’s shuffling papers. “Come in.”

“Mary... How come you’re still here?” asked Jazelle Spain, the nightshift floor manager.

“Hi Jazelle. How’s the pit?”

“It’s doing fine, but why are you still here? You should have gone home a couple of hours ago.” Jazelle grew fond of Mary in a short time.

“Yes I know, Jazelle. But I wanted to make the paper work a little easier for Frank. He’s been working too hard and he need’s a break.” Jazelle continues the small talk...

“If there is anything you need help with Mary, just let me know. I enjoy working here and the management has made me feel like family. That’s rare in this town!” Mary just laughed a little.

“Well were happy to have you here, Jazelle. I’m just going to finish this paper work, and then I’m going home.”

“Okay Mary. Let me know if you need anything. Have a good night.” Jazelle went back to the casino pit.

Mary got ready to leave and suddenly, she had a smile on her face. She would stare at the furniture in the office that Ted and Bobby had. She missed them and the lesson she learned a long time ago... ‘Just keep moving forward’. She turned out the lights and went down stairs to the casino pit. She let Jazelle know that she was leaving. She passed by the bar where Dee was working.

“Good night Dee. Have a wonderful shift.”

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“Good night, Mary. It was nice to have you in for the day. Tell Frankie to let you come in for him more often,” Dee says with an affectionate smile.

“I will honey.” Mary walked out of the casino and headed towards her car that was parked in Ted’s old spot. She stopped and stared for a moment reflecting on the past years that they were close friends. She got into her car and put the key into the ignition of her 1957 Thunderbird. She went into deep thought for a moment. She was hesitating to start up the engine. She realized she was being ridiculous. Again she hesitated. Finally she turns on the ignition. The radio blasted out loud as the volume was turned up. Mary jumped and felt like she skipped 10 heart beats. She forgot to turn the radio back down when she parked her car this morning. She laughed out loud at first, and then started to cry... The tears rolled down her face for a brief moment. She put the gear into drive, and off she went up Boulder Highway heading back home.

Boulder highway is a long highway of small bars and motels here and there. The area is the wave of the future for new homes, condos, and apartments. There are probably two or three stop light signals from the Nugget to her home near Frenchman’s mountain. She stopped at a gas station to fill her tank. It was a summer night, and quiet with one attendant on duty. Mary thought to herself about the good old days when a gas station attendant used to put the gas in for you, not to mention check the tires and oil, and of course clean the windows... *‘What in the hell is this world coming too’?* She thought...

Mary topped off her car with a ridiculous price per gallon, without personal service. The attendant collected the money from a trucker first, and then a motorcyclist. Mary looked at the motorcyclist and thought how funny that she couldn’t tell if it was a guy or a girl on the souped up chopper.

**I was thinking, ‘as he finally came to me... I gave the young gas station attendant my money, and I don’t think he ever saw the days of a real service station.*

Finally, I was on my way, and I was getting tired... and a little sleepy. I continued up the highway, and the motorcycle chopper was in front of me. I always felt they were dangerous on the road. Sometimes it was hard to see them, and that’s why I always gave a signal if I was going to change lanes, whether I saw another car or not.

I was wondering if Frankie was having a nice time on his night off. He sure has a lot of energy like his dad had. Frank Sr. was a party animal as well as a comedian.

It's easy to get caught up with speeding on Boulder highway. I was going about 70 mph. It was smooth sailing until I came to a red light. The motorcyclist also came to a complete stop. It's about time they wore protective helmets. I was about four feet away from him as I waited for the light to turn green. I heard the motorcyclist say something to me, but I wasn't sure what he said, because his engine was so loud. The top to my car cover was down, which made it worse to hear.

"I'm sorry. I didn't hear you," I said aloud. The cyclist turned to me again and raised his smoked covered helmet face cover and says...

"I said... it's a nice night for a killing." The cyclist aimed a pistol at me and shot off two rounds. My body became numb and my mind fell into darkness.

The trucker that was traveling behind me with his rig turned on his bright lights and pulled the chain to his blow horn repeatedly. As he approached the signal where I'm shot, the chopper fled into the dark night. The trucker ran to my aid, got on the CB radio, and called for help. My eyes were open, but I couldn't see anything. My hearing faded. The paramedics arrived and then took me to UMC hospital.

"Well one thing for sure Frank, I've never made love in this Valley of the Fire Park before," Carissa says as she throws her head back, and stares at the stars while she's on top of me. Finally, I've become totally exhausted after reaching ecstasy.

"Yeah, it was different for me," I said as I sat back and relaxed... "It's pretty late. We better get back, Carissa. I've got to get up early and go into the Nugget tomorrow morning." *Get me— Mr. Responsible.*

"Okay Frank. If you ever think about changing your mind working with me, just let me know." Carissa wasn't giving up.

We left the park and it was still a great sight; the red sandstone glowing with a dark sky in the background. I didn't realize that it was so late. We headed back to the Bootlegger Restaurant to pick up my car. We arrived and I said my good byes to her. She just smiled and gave me a nice good night kiss. I went home.

I arrived home about midnight, and Dee was on my Aunt Mary's

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door step. I got out of my car and she ran up to me crying hysterically...

"Where have you've been!!!" She screams. I had to yell back as she didn't seem to have any control of what she was saying.

"What the hell are you screaming about?!!"

"Your Aunt Mary has been shot, and she's in the hospital!" Dee continued crying. I grabbed her as hard as I could and screamed...

"What are you talking about?!!"

"Mary was shot on Boulder highway, and she's in the hospital! We have to go there now!"

"Is she still alive?!!" My mind was shooting in different directions.

"I don't know!!! Yes! I don't know! Let's go!!!" Dee was in bad shape and still hysterical.

We got to the UMC emergency room and Vanessa was there in the waiting room. I looked at her as if I was waiting for some kind of bad answer...

"Vanessa..?" as there was a quiver in my voice.

"Mary is still in surgery, Frankie. She's been in there about two and a half hours." Vanessa started crying. I put my arms around her. She continued, "The police want to talk to you. The trucker that saw the shooting is also here. He called the police and ambulance."

"Please pray Vanessa... Please pray." I didn't know whether to fall to the floor. Have a nervous breakdown. Or scream at the top of my lungs..! The drool and runny nose was pouring out of me with sorrow. I grabbed a box of tissue and just buried my face into it, and cried. Dee was holding onto me as she wept. Here comes Metro Police. They're starting to become a habit in my environment.

"Mr. Scorpio..." Det. Selenak and Det. Hurtado were on the investigating scene. I remembered that they were supposed to be working on the Fager brother's murder case.

"First, I want to say I'm sorry for your aunt... But we need to find out what the hell is going on," says Det. Selenak.

"You tell me detectives!" You haven't found out who killed the Fager brothers yet, and now my aunt is shot!!!" I was extremely mad.

The detective just looked at me as if they were trying to see through me. Det. Hurtado continued... "We're sorry Mr. Scorpio, but we don't have any solid leads. We need your help. Do you have any idea why anyone wants to hurt the Fager brothers or your aunt?"

"I can't think straight right now detective! Let's talk in a bit. My aunt is on her death bed."

"We're going to put a guard at her door, Mr. Scorpio. At this point, she'll be guarded 24 hours around the clock," says Det. Selenak. I agreed with the detectives and went into the emergency waiting room. Another hour went by, and I couldn't get any information from the nurses. Mary was still in the operating room. I saw the detectives talking to a large burly man who must have been the truck driver. I wanted to talk to him, but I decided to let the detectives finish talking with him first.

A few of the employees from the Nugget showed up at the hospital, not only to show their support, but they had a warm affection for Mary. Guess who else showed up? The TV news reporters... Of course there was my old friend, Ben Correa from news 7. I wouldn't talk to anyone. All I could do was look at the clock on the wall... and wait.

The reporters were trying to get a statement from me, but I asked Metro Police to keep them away. They honored my request. The reporters were pretty aggressive, but I noticed Ben Correa backed off. He must think that I am in the path of a curse.

It was 3:47 a.m., and I was looking at the clock on the wall. Dee was still at my side. I told Vanessa to go home and get some sleep since she had to be at work in the morning. I would call her if I heard anything. Finally, the attending physician came out and looked my way. A nurse told him that I was the only relative she had here in Las Vegas.

"I understand you are Mary Torres' nephew?" comments the doctor. I stood up, nodded to him, and said yes at the same time. I was afraid to say anything, so I just stared into his eyes. "Come over here sir... by the nurse's desk," he says. I followed the Doc a few feet away from the others.

"Yes doctor..." I held my hands together practically squeezing all the blood out.

"Mary suffered a pierced 'Trachea' from a gunshot and a pierced 'Cranial Nerve' that affects the muscles on either side of the neck and
"

"What are you trying to tell me doctor? I don't understand what you're saying!" I was about to lose my composure. The doctor took a second to talk in layman's terms...

"I'm sorry sir... What I'm trying to say is that Mary Torres is

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suffering from a pierced wind pipe and cranial nerve problems that will affect the muscles in her upper part of her neck. There's a thin layer of cartilage in the throat that makes it easy to swallow when you ingest something. Mary's cartilage is damaged. She may be paralyzed on some parts of her face. She is in a coma and if she comes out of it, she will need extensive surgery. Her 'Vagus' nerve, or as it is also called, the cranial nerve may also be damaged. Bottom line sir is that she may be an invalid... I'm sorry."

"Doctor, please do what you can and the money is no object. I want her to have whatever it takes to get well. Whatever you can do, or recommend a specialist. I don't care! Please take care of her!" I felt like I was in a black hole sinking. "Can I see her now?"

"You can't see her now. Go home and get some rest. I will call you if there's any change. Just leave your information with the nurse and we'll call you when we get more tests back." The doctor left and the attending nurse gave me forms to fill out.

"Is Mary okay Frankie?" Dee came up to me quietly and put her hand on my shoulder.

"She's in a coma right now, but I know she's going to be okay. Will you help me fill out this form? I have to talk to the cops. I'll be back to finish it up."

I saw Detectives Selenak and Hurtado were still talking to the truck driver. I went up to them and butted into their conversation. "Is there anything you found out detectives? Det. Selenak turned to the trucker...

"This is Mr. Frank Scorpio. And this is the truck driver who witnessed the shooting. Mr. Andy Rubalcava. Mary Torres is Frank's aunt. The truck driver extended his hand to me...

"I'm sorry for the harm to your aunt, Frank. I saw her gas up at the service station and there was a motor cycle on the next island gassing up also. I paid the attendant when I was finished, and that was it. I never saw the biker take off the helmet. I thought he walked kind of funny though.

"How so," I asked.

"He had very good posture, and was thin. It wasn't your ordinary biker. He actually walked like— a girl... if you know what I mean," Andy says while looking into the air thinking hard. Detective Hurtado cut right into the conversation.

“That’ll be all for right now, Mr. Rubalcava. Are you going to be in town for a while?

“I have to get the rig up to Salt Lake City by tomorrow, but I come back this way. If you need anything, here’s my card with my pager number.” Andy was very cooperative and friendly. I went to shake his hand again.

“Thank you Andy... Thank you for being there when my aunt was hurt.”

“I’m real sorry, Frank. Just let me know if there is anything I can do.” Andy left and

I turned to the detectives...

“Something is going on here, and I can’t believe you haven’t come up with anything. Is there something I don’t know about the Nugget Casino?”

“We don’t know anymore than you do, Frank. All we know is that someone is going to extremes to hurt people that have something to do with that property. You don’t have any idea why, do you?” I just gave him a hard look. He gave me a look right back... “We’ll get in touch with you.”

I went back inside to the emergency waiting room. The reporters were gone except for Ben Correa. Does this guy have a life? “Why are you still around, Correa?” I came on a little strong towards him.

“I just wanted to say I was sorry about your aunt. You guys are sure going through some shit! What’s going on? You’ve been shot. The Fager brothers are dead. And now your aunt’s been shot. What is it?” Ben wasn’t just doing his reporting job, he sincerely seemed to be interested and baffled as I was.

“I don’t know. I just don’t know. I am totally exhausted Ben. I’m not sure why you’re still here. I don’t see your camera crew.”

“I sent them home. I want to find out about this as much as you do, Frank. I don’t know much about you, but you seem to be in the path of destruction,” Ben says as he gazes into the mid-morning sky. “Well, here’s my card. If I can help or you need to find out something from past news history here in town, let me know.”

I took his TV News 7 business card. “Thanks Ben... I’ll let you know.” We shook hands good bye, and I think I might have seen a human side to him. A reporter, who might be able to get me some answers... I went to check on Dee... “Are you ready to go Dee?”

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“There’s just a couple of questions I couldn’t answer Frank.” I took a look at all these questions that I didn’t have patience for. I told the nurse I would be back in a few hours to finish it. She said it was okay and she had enough information right now. I took one more look towards the recovery room door. I know Aunt Mary was going to make it, and she is tough enough to have a complete recovery. I have to call the family in California... Fuck the mob!

I got home and I didn’t feel like talking and Dee was totally exhausted... “Thanks for coming Dee. You always seem to be there for Mary and me.”

“You’re welcome Frank. You have a good aunt. Although it’s morning now, I need to sleep.” Dee spent the rest of the morning and slept in the guest room.

“Good night Dee. Thank you again... Dee?”

“Yes, Frankie.”

“If you don’t mind, would you mention a little prayer in your thoughts for my aunt, before you go to sleep?” Dee came up to me and gave me a big hug, and then went to her room. I turned out the light and sat by the fire place.



Aunt Mary with Frankie on right—Aunt Margaret with Cousin Armando on left



Frankie's Grand Parents



Mary with her Dad, Frank, on Mother's Day

Chapter 30

Take My Rose...

But be Nice to the Thorn

“Gentlemen... I called this meeting to bring you up to date on the status of our production. We are going to dramatically excel this quarter with great profits. Our sources in Las Vegas have extended us additional time, and I want to show you a wonderful surprise.” Anthony Martinez held a membership meeting for the syndicate and he wanted to share a moment. “I want the board to know that we are expanding our investments into the city of Las Vegas. I will show you the plans after I confirm it with the largest investor we have.”

The members were excited about the project Anthony was going to reveal. One of the members blurted out a question.

“Anthony, this sounds like a great opportunity. Are you going to give us an idea what we will be dealing with?”

“Sergio, I can only tell you that we are adding to our portfolio of investments, and in due time, we will have more capital than we know what to do with,” Martinez says in a victorious speech. Sal Valencia was sitting quietly with a smile as he had to look like he was also celebrating the new venture. If the syndicate knew that he was the inside source for Frank Santos, now Frank Scorpio, they would

execute him. Anthony continued his speech...

"I want to now share a special moment for the family." He turns to Carlos.

"Carlos, please open the door and introduce our guest," motions Anthony. Carlos walks over to the board room door entrance and opens it. Randall De LaParra is sitting in a wheel chair. Carlos gets behind him and escorts him to the middle of the room. Randall gets up from a wheel chair, and with the help of a four legged cane, walks over to join the members. At first everyone was quiet and watching. The surgery for the prosthesis on his legs was successful. One member started clapping his hands together, and then all joined in. Randall stood at the head of the table next to his brother Anthony, and started a speech.

"First of all, I want to thank my brother, Tony, for his support. Not only emotionally, but financially. I want to thank the members also for their support in keeping the organization above water. After talking to my brother, I believe there will be no limit to the organization's success. I want to apologize to our brotherhood for the problems with Frank Santos. I was out of control emotionally, and I did not handle it in a professional manner. We are moving forward... But if I ever run into the little bastard, then I will take care of that problem!" Randall finally gives a small chuckle and a few members follow. "But I am here because I am part of this family, and that is what's important. So please accept my apology and let's continue on." Randall De LaParra talked with sincerity, but he still didn't fool a member— Sal Valencia. Sal has known Randall for nearly 40 years. De LaParra was a man who would steal from his own mother and brother— and has.

The members stood up and gave Randall a personal welcome by shaking his hand, and with an affectionate hug. Sal went a long with what he felt was a sham. De LaParra still had an evil deceptive look in his eye. Anthony brought the meeting back to order and he explained to the members a little about the Las Vegas investment. Randall had ideas of his own, but was keeping quiet, and Sal Valencia would watch his every move. The meeting came to an end, and the best Tequila and cigars were served. Randall went up to Sal Valencia... "How are you Sal?"

"I'm fine Randall. Congratulations on your surgery," he comments with a feeling of a thorn stuck in his finger.

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“Thank you. Have you seen any of Frank Santos’ family lately?” Randall continues to probe. Sal pauses and looks into his eyes...

“Not for a lot of years Randall. Have a great day.” Sal walked away and joined the others.

The weather was warm and I got back to the hospital early in the morning. Dee came along.

“Nurse, I’m Frank Scorpio, and I am here to see my aunt, Mary Torres.” The nurse pulls out her chart.

“The doctor will be right with you Mr. Scorpio.” Dee and I waited for a few minutes as we both kept checking our watches. The doctor finally came with Mary’s chart.

“Hello Mr. Scorpio.”

“How is my aunt, doctor?”

“She is still in a coma. The test showed that she had extensive damage with the gunshots in the throat, and there was a fragment of the bullet lodged behind her brain. We are going to take more X-rays later. Does she have immediate family here in Las Vegas?” I thought for a moment... “I’m the only family she has doctor. Why?”

“There are consent forms that have to be signed by a family member,” he says with a concerned look.

“I can sign for her. She’s my aunt, godmother, and we live together. She takes care of me and I take care of her.” The doctor nodded his head and asked that I sign all the forms with the nurse. “When can I see her doctor?” I anxiously asked.

“The nurse will take you to her room, but only one visitor at a time for now.” The doctor gave the nurse the okay to let me see her.

“I’ll be back, Dee.” I followed the nurse to intensive care. Mary had tubes coming out of her from every direction. The bandages covered most of her neck and the left side of her face. I became very angry and was ready to explode! Who would want to kill her? It can’t be the same person that killed the Fager brothers. It wouldn’t make any sense. Am I next? I got enough troubles in California. I leaned over and gave her a gentle kiss on the forehead. Her eyes are closed as though she’s just getting some sleep. There wasn’t much I could do. I had to get back to the casino. I left the room and went back out into the lobby.

“Go ahead Dee... Take a few minutes with her. I’m going to finish

this paper work, and then I have to get back to the casino.” Dee was still weeping a little and went to see Mary. I called Vanessa at the Nugget and told her that I was coming in right away.

I dropped Dee off at home and then went directly to the Nugget. All the employees were concerned but I didn’t feel like talking much about it, especially during business. I gave them a ‘thumbs up’ and cracked a half ass smile and then proceeded to my office. I walked in and just stared for a moment. I sat there and stared at the wall trying to find some kind of answer. The phone rang.

“Hello? How are you? Yes, she’s going to make it. She is on the critical list, but she’s stable. I don’t know who would want to hurt her... Carissa, you know a lot people in this town. Does this violence sound like someone is trying to interrupt our business here? Could you please ask around... if you don’t mind? I’m starting to get suspicious of people... Just people in general... Thank you... I have to run Carissa... Thanks for your concern... Mary will be fine. Good bye.”

After I hung up the phone, I started thinking and went into a deep thought— Then decided to call Leo who’s back in East L.A.

“Leo..? Guess who, vato? You’re still alive? And Mondo? Good... That’s real good... Yeah, it’s been a long time. I have lots to tell you. Can you come to Vegas? Like yesterday... Hey man, I’m running a casino. Listen bro, I have a problem. My Aunt Mary has been shot... No... She’s in a coma. I need you and Mondo to come out right away... I have a place for you to stay. Tell you more later... Okay man... Adios.”

I walked over to the two way mirror that overlooks the casino. I just stared at everyone below me. They seem to be having a good time. Who would want to hurt us here? I went back to look at the video tapes from last night. We have security cameras in the parking lot now. I also had to look at the tapes again on the night that Ted and Bobby were murdered.

“Come to my penthouse, Malia!” Carissa hangs up the phone and is very upset. She pours herself a drink, and paces back and forth around the living room with a lit cigarette. There’s a knock on the door, and Malia enters the room with a big smile. Carissa smiles at her, and then takes another big puff of her cigarette. She exhales the

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smoke.

“Come here sweetheart,” she says very softly. Malia seductively walks up to Carissa and slowly gestures about giving her a kiss on the lips. Carissa looks into her eyes for a moment... She rears back and slaps Malia as hard as she could.

“You god damn fucking bitch!!! You fucked up! It was the perfect plan, and you fucked it up!” Malia first jumped right back at her as if to punch her, because that’s her nature. But she hesitated for a moment, and held back. “That bitch... Mary Torres is still alive! Why did you fail?!! Tell me!!!” Carissa lost control of her temper. She looks at Malia with fire in her eyes. What happened?” Malia didn’t have an answer...

“I did exactly what you said, Carissa. I pulled the trigger as I stood next to her. Then a truck was coming fast on the highway with bright lights blowing the horn, and I had to get out of there. I’m sorry I failed you...” Malia was talking very calm as usual. “I will finish the order.” Carissa just looked at her.

“Just wait ‘til further instructions!”

“Yes, Mrs. Kingman.” Without hesitation, Malia goes directly to the pool. She takes off her clothes, and dives in nude. Carissa shakes her head. She’s not sure if she’s dealing with a human or a robot.

I was watching the tapes very carefully in my office. I saw the man that looked like Jason Adams. He doesn’t seem like the killer type, but I guess those people are the most dangerous. I never saw anything in the parking lot that looked suspicious. I see Mary getting into her car and driving off. I need to find out if this guy is Adams’ brother.

A week later, Leo and Mondo arrived in Vegas. They called me, and I gave them directions to my house. I greeted them as they came up the driveway.

“Leo... Mondo... You guys must be eating good back home. How’s the wound Mondo?” We all gave the best buddy hug and walked into the house as we talked.

“I’m in great shape, Frankie. It’s been a long time man.” Mondo goes the refrigerator. “Got some beer?” Leo jumps right in...

“Hey Mondo, where are your manners, man? You come into a man’s house, and in 30 seconds you just go to his refrigerator and ask for a beer?”

“Uh, yeah man... You want one?” he says as he pops off the bottle cap.

“Damn rights! Hey Frankie... We’re sorry about Mary. Is she going to be all right?” asked Leo with sorrow in his voice.

“Yeah... She’s going to make it, but she may be paralyzed around the neck and face. She needs major surgery. Did you tell the family back home?” Mondo went to put his hand on my shoulder.

“Yeah... We told Amos, Sonny, and your mom. I didn’t tell her how serious it was because she would probably have a heart attack.”

“Thanks Mondo.”

“Amos and Sonny wanted me to give you a message, Frankie. Randall De LaParra is still looking for you. He’s trying to convince his brother Anthony, that he’s putting the matter aside to give more attention to the syndicate’s business.” Leo goes on to give me all the information from back home.

We had a long talk around the kitchen table. I explained to them on what has been happening at the Nugget Junction Casino starting with the murder of the Fager brothers. I told them about all the people I’ve met here in Vegas, especially Carissa Kingman. We drank down our beers, and I got ready to take them to the Nugget casino. They were going to be my body guards as well as security guards for the casino.

“By the way guys, my name is Frank Scorpio here in Vegas. Don’t call me Santos.”

“Scorpio..? It sounds pretty suspicious to me,” says Leo as he laughs a little.

“Anyway, only my aunt and you two know who I really am. We are on the verge of building an empire starting with the little casino we have. I want to eventually own property on the strip.”

“Sounds good to us... Scorpio,” laughs Mondo.

“Okay you guys. Let’s go to the casino and I’ll show you around.” I thought the first thing I had to do is to get the boys some new suits. They think they’re still in East L.A. We arrived at the Nugget, and I took them into the casino from the back entrance way. I wasn’t ready to introduce them to anyone yet. We got into my office and I showed them the two way mirror.

“There you are guys. I run this place thanks to Aunt Mary.” Leo and Mondo were amazed and speechless. They looked out the two way mirror and felt they were spying on the world.

The Desert has no King

“Are we going to be working here, Frankie?” says Mondo as he still stares out into the casino.

“Yeah man. You and Leo will be my official body guards as well as Aunt Mary’s. As a matter of fact, I want you to take care of everyone that works here. You’re also going to be plain clothes security men. Tell me if you see anything out of line. If you suspect someone of stealing, tell me. But we do have a good group here. We had a dealer that was stealing from us a few months ago. I’m not sure if he’s dead or alive. We suspect there is vengeance on this casino that may indicate him. I’ll tell you more about that later.”

“We’re with you all the way, Frankie,” says Leo as he is still looking out the two way mirror.

“We’re going to the hospital now, and we’re going to walk through the casino as we leave. Just look friendly because the employees are going to wonder who you are. But I need to let my pit boss know that I’ll be gone. Let’s go.” We walked through the casino and as I suspected, some employees were wondering who Leo and Mondo are. I stopped by the pit to tell Vanessa that I was going to the hospital—the boys and I left.

Anthony Martinez arrived in Las Vegas for his business meeting with Carissa. He went directly to the Majestic Palace, and got his usual penthouse suite. He got out of his business suit and put on the summer wear. He always liked those Hawaiian shirts with the white pants. Anthony first poured himself a drink, and then called Carissa.

“Carissa Kingman, please... Anthony Martinez... I see... Please leave her a message that Anthony Martinez is here... Thank you.”

Martinez was getting a little ancy just sitting there waiting for a phone call. He decided to go down to the casino. Anthony loves to gamble, but he learned his lesson the hard way from the old neighborhood in Los Angeles. Too many broken fingers... He saw the lounge and heard some music. He was in for a big weekend. He sat at one of the lounge tables, and called over the waitress.

“Can I help you sir?” asked the cocktail waitress.

“Yes honey... I would like a very dry Martini, on the rocks.”

“Thank you, sir. Will that be cash or charge?”

“Please put it on my room charge, Suite 5002,” says Anthony with a friendly smile. As the cocktail waitress went to get his drink,

Martinez checked out the sway of her ass. He just shook his head and wished that he was young again. The music was jazz, and listening to it was comfortable. The waitress brought his drink, and places it in front of him as she gives a big smile.

“Thank you, miss. Uh, I’m Anthony Martinez... and your name, honey?”

“Nina. I’ll keep your tab open, and I’ll check back to see how you’re doing, Mr. Martinez.” Anthony was having a little fantasy of his own just checking her out.

“I thought I’d find you here.” Carissa walks up to Anthony and gives him a hug.

“Carissa, you still look like the homecoming queen that you are,” Anthony says with flattery.

“You’re comfortable in your room, I hope?”

“I’m very comfortable, Carissa. It’s a beautiful suite. Are you ready for a drink?”

“Of course dear...” Carissa waves to the bartender, and he mixes her drink right away.

“Tony, I’m going to take you to a special party tonight. It has to do with the investment, and I want you to be part of it. You have access to people with a lot of money. I want those people to join our club.”

“What kind of club is it, Carissa?” Anthony looks over towards Nina, and gives her the nod to bring them another round of drinks.

“It’s the ultimate club, Tony. I need someone to run it. I think I might have the right man. He’s young and ambitious.” Nina brings Carissa and Anthony their drinks.

“Thank you Nina,” says Carissa. She notices Anthony watching her walk away.

“Careful stallion, she’s too young for you.” Anthony just smiles.

“So what is it you want from me, Carissa? Is it just to drum up clients for you?”

“Tony, this is going to be a club like no other. The richest men in the world will come for this. It’s an adult Disneyland.”

“Are you saying it’s just another whore house?” Tony was losing interest.

“I want you to come to my party tonight and get a sneak preview.”

“Sure Carissa...” Tony just keeps glancing over towards Nina.

The Desert has no King

“I have to run, Tony. We’ll have cocktails at my penthouse and we’ll leave from there. I’ll call you when I’m ready.” Carissa noticed that Tony was still looking at Nina. She looked at Nina’s way, then left the lounge and went back to her office.

It was about 10 p.m. Carissa and Anthony left for the private party. They took her limo, and the ride was about a half hour off the strip. The house was on the southwest side of the city. It was underdeveloped, and many years ago, people would buy a couple of acres for speculation. The current Mayor’s father bought some land about 20 years ago. It was pure hard dirt. Now there is more land development as Las Vegas begins to grow. Mayor Lindsey Cantwell’s father passed away a few years ago, and she built a get-a-way mini mansion when she inherited the land.

They arrived at the mansion. It was a Spanish style hacienda. There were colored flood lights around the home with man made water streams overflowing the rocks and boulders. Anthony just looked and was amazed with the outside décor.

“This is a beautiful place, Carissa. Is it yours?”

“No Tony, it belongs to the Mayor. But she won’t be here. I helped her with her campaign for office, and she loans me this place occasionally. Come on, let’s go inside.”

As they entered the mansion, Tony was extremely impressed... “Where is everybody, Carissa?”

“The party doesn’t begin for about another hour, Tony. But I want to show you around and introduce you to the hosts.” Anthony’s eyes wandered the estate. It had the most expensive looking furniture and paintings on the wall. The chandeliers must have cost a fortune.

“There are 16 master bed rooms and 18 bathrooms... We have three large spacious living rooms, and a 3000 square foot recreation room with a dance floor. Every room is stocked with only premium liquor. What do you think so far, Tony?”

“It’s extremely beautiful Carissa. But what’s all this for? Just high priced call girls for Johns..?” Tony asked as he is still touring the house.

“I want to show you something else.” Carissa took hold of Tony’s hand and led him to the backyard of the seven acre estate. She continued the tour... “We have two large pools. One is for the water

volleyball game. There's a Jacuzzi Spa on top of the red rock above the pool. There are tennis courts, Koi ponds, and lounge chairs everywhere. Think of it as... a 'Man's Country Club'. Oh, did I mention the putting green?" Anthony got himself a drink from the bartender by the pool as he gloats.

"Carissa... It looks like you're all set up."

"Not quite Tony. We are moving to a place where there will be no end to the capital that will be generated. Let's go sit further out by the other pool where no one can hear us talk." Carissa and Anthony walked out towards the palm trees where there was a table and chairs. Carrisa continued to tell Anthony about the plan. "This is what all this is about, Tony. This is an exclusive private country club— members only. There is an annual due of approximately \$1 million dollars a year. So we'll be talking about \$2 to \$4 hundred million dollars a year, just on membership fees. The members will be greeted and hosted by the most beautiful girls, and they will come from all over the world. The members can have any girl they want, anytime they want. We don't charge for the girls services." Anthony looked surprised.

"How do you not charge for those kinds of services?"

"Well Tony, that would be prostitution." Carissa chuckles a little as Tony still is wondering about her plan. "These members will be in paradise with the ladies we have. You know how a man likes to brag about the women and money he has. If they spend some time on the love boat with these girls, wouldn't you want to tip them and make sure they remember you? And we take a percentage of that?" Anthony thought for a moment...

"Yeah, I guess your right."

"That's not all... We will serve free drinks all day, and all night long. If the member wants to make it a vacation here for a week or a month, we'll charge accordingly. The girls will be paid by me, not the members...except for the tips they get which the member will drop into the girls' private mail box. Here's the best part... We will have a casino for members only. Minimum wager is \$100 dollars. Maximum wagers...a half a million dollars. You know what losers these gamblers are..." Anthony was fascinated with Carissa's plan.

"So, what is this tonight we're having?" asked Anthony as his eyes explore all over the club's atmosphere.

"We have parties once a month. It's growing with potential

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members. Every one of the applicants is thoroughly screened. We check their credit and bank rating. If there's a slight doubt, we flag it. The members sign a contract for the year. If they want to renew it, we've succeeded. The real money maker is going to be the gamblers. It would be kind of stupid to go off to another casino for action. Would you leave beautiful girls that are always available for you?" Carissa asked rhetorically. Anthony started agreeing to what she was saying. "Come on Tony, the party's about to begin. The girls are arriving."

Carissa walked Anthony back inside, and right away he noticed the girls that were going to be the hosts. Instantly, he was very impressed. The gentlemen were also arriving for the party. The guests were greeted with the cocktail of their choice. The girl's age ranged from 18 to 50. The 50 year old gals were just as beautiful, and they knew how to handle a man. Some men are more comfortable with matured ladies. This is Vegas, and women are in control. Two hours into the party, Carissa approaches Tony, and finds out what his feelings and thoughts are.

"Tony... What do you think so far? Have you made some new friends?" Anthony was standing with a beautiful girl he had been chatting with the last 15 minutes.

"Carissa, I want you to meet Mia," says Anthony with a shade of modesty.

"Yes, I know Mia. How are you Mia? Are you having a good time talking to Tony?" Carissa asked as the gracious host she is.

"Once again, Carissa," as Mia sets her hand gently on Carissa's forearm. "You have outdone yourself. You seem to know all the handsome gentlemen." Anthony got shy all of a sudden. Carissa gives a smile.

"Yes I do sweetheart. I need to talk to Tony for just one minute, if you don't mind."

"Of course Carissa... You will be back, won't you Tony?" Mia asked as her beautiful hazel green eyes penetrated through his heart. Anthony was starting to break out in tiny beads of sweat.

"I will be right back, Mia. May I refresh your drink?" asked Tony with a smile.

"That would be nice, Tony." Mia is a lady with class, and the way Tony looked at her; he was already falling in love with a call girl. Carissa smiled...

"What do you think of Mia, Tony?"

“I gotta tell you Carissa... She is powerful, and you are on to something.” Carissa continued to give Anthony more information of her future paradise for men.

“Later tonight, I’m going to show you the property I have in mind. There is already a casino there. It’s on 10 to 12 acres of land. We will build the club that will especially envy Mr. Trump... Let’s go back and continue the fun, Tony.”

I went to see the nurse from intensive care. She couldn’t give me any answers. I wanted to see my Aunt Mary. The nurse took me to her room while Leo and Mondo waited out in the hallway. I see her lying there helpless. I started getting angry again. The doctor came into the room. “Hello doctor. How’s my aunt doing?” He picks up her chart that hangs from her bedside, and ponders over it.

“There hasn’t been much change in the past 24 hours. It’s going to take a little time for the body to heal. She is given medicine intravenously on a schedule. There’s not much else we can do. Her vitals are stable.”

“Is there anything I can do? I need to do something, doctor.”

“Right now Mr. Scorpio, we just have to wait until she becomes conscious.” The doctor checked her vital signs again, and that was that.

I went back into the hallway and told Leo and Mondo that the doctor wasn’t letting anyone see her yet. “Let’s get to work guys. I have to find out who did this. Did you pack your pieces?” Anger and determination was settling in.

“Sure did, Frankie,” says Leo like a trooper. “Why, are we going to knock off somebody my first day in Vegas?” I just looked at him, and I had to finally crack a smile as Mondo laughed.

I took the boys to the Fashion mall to buy them some nice suits and shoes. What they wanted was still East L. A. style. So I was going to pick out the style for them. At first they didn’t seem too happy, but when some babes looked through the store windows and smiled, that convinced them that they were finally in the Vegas style. Later I took them to lunch, and they never ate so well.

“By the time I get through with you guys, you are going to be the toast of Vegas!”

The Desert has no King

Leo mutters out as he stuffs his face with more food.

"No one makes toast out of us, man." I just look at him like I had a long job ahead of me. The last task was to get them a haircut. This will probably kill them.

We went back to my place, and again, we had a long talk. I explained that I think someone is holding a grudge, or there's a vengeance on the management at the Nugget. When anyone attacks a family member, they're as good as dead as far as I'm concerned.

"Since I've been in Las Vegas boys, I've learned a lot. This is a brutal town. However, this town is a goldmine. Compared to booking the horses back home, we hit the mother lode. You're going to be part of it because we're bros for life," he says in a sentimental tone.

"You said it right, Frankie. You and Leo saved my life from all that fucking action at the McCracken construction company. And then you left us a lot of money, man. We will never forget that." Mondo was getting sentimental.

"Oh man, the next thing is you're going to start crying," says Leo. They all started laughing, and then did the three way buddy embrace.

"Okay guys, go take a shower! You smell like old menudo," I shouted as we horse played.

"You're going to start on the payroll tonight. I'm going to introduce you to the other employees as my personal assistants. I think they'll understand after what has been happening."

The guys moved into my old room above the garage. I put an extra twin bed in there for them. The rent was right since I wasn't going to charge them anything. I got a glass of wine and sat by the fireplace. I had to think things out. I was a little worried about the Nugget Casino. It's had so much bad publicity this past year that I wondered if it was going to affect the business.

I moved my things into the extra bedroom in the main house. After all, I was going to be the only one living here for awhile. I went to shower, and get ready for tonight. It was Friday night, and I would expect a good crowd. I called the Nugget and talked to Vanessa. She gets off her shift at 7 p.m. Jazelle Spain was going to relieve her. I would probably spend most of the night there because of the weekend crowd.

Chapter 31

*He That Maketh Haste to be Rich...
Shall Not be Innocent...28:20*

It was 6 o'clock in the evening, and I was ready. I yelled out the door to the boys upstairs that it was time to go to work. It was a word that they weren't too familiar with.

"Let's go guys!" I walked back into the kitchen, and I thought that I would let them do a shooter just to inaugurate them. I got out the 1800 Tequila and three shot glasses. Leo pops open the back door.

"Okay man... What do you think?" Leo and Mondo strutted in like they were wearing 'Zoot suits'. They had pin stripe suits with suspenders. It was stylish and I have to admit, they looked good. I looked over their new hair look.

"Man... They would never recognize you back home," I said.

"Are there hookers at your casino, Frankie?" blurts out Leo.

"Just male hookers," I replied with a big grin.

"What!" Mondo's face drops.

"Come on guys. We're going to start out with a little celebration." I poured the Tequila into the shot glasses. "Okay... Grab your weapons." Leo and Mondo had a big smile on their face. "But before we start..." Leo jumps right in—

"Oh come on man. No speeches. Let's drink!"

The Desert has no King

"I just want to say, that there will be no drinking on the job."

"What? I thought this was Vegas... Sin city." says the disappointed Leo.

"Listen bro, you are my body guards, and I've already been shot once. They killed the Fager brothers that owned this casino. And now Aunt Mary is in the hospital." All of a sudden, it got a little quiet. Leo and Mondo got a little serious and thought about it.

"Okay," says Leo. "Then just one more shot, and that's all." I gave him a long stare.

"Okay."

We arrived at the Nugget Casino at 6:47 p.m. It was a decent crowd, but not what I was expecting. I parked in my spot on the north side of the casino. We have such a small casino that we don't require valet parking. Besides, I wonder if we would get any valet boys to work for us after the car bomb explosion...

"Come on guys. I'll introduce you to the management." We walked into the casino and I greeted the employees as I always do. There's still a good atmosphere. Vanessa noticed me, and walked toward my way.

"Hello Frankie. How's Mary?"

"Still the same, Vanessa. The doctor says we have to wait for the medicine to take affect before they do anything else, but she is still in a coma. By the way, I want you to meet a couple of my assistants that will be with me most of the time. They're going to be plain clothes security here at the casino. This is Leo and Mondo... And this is Vanessa, guys.

"Nice to meet you, Leo... Mondo... If you need anything, please ask."

"Nice to meet you Vanessa," say the boys.

"I told them what problems we've had here, Vanessa. If you need anything, just ask these guys and they'll be there for you."

"I understand, Frankie. What shall I tell the others?"

"I will introduce them as we go along, Vanessa. If they get too curious, just tell them that they are working security. If there is big trouble in here, they are to notify Leo and Mondo right after uniformed security."

"That sounds pretty good to me, Frankie." Vanessa smiles, "I have

to get back to the pit. Jazelle should be in soon. You can introduce her.”

“Thanks Vanessa... Come on guys.”

I took the boys up to the office and went over a few things. They are new in town, and I want them to get to know the city a little more each day.

“Okay... First of all, I want you to get to know the employees. We treat them like family here, and they will do the same to you. You just have to get to know them little by little. It’s hard for them to trust a stranger right away, so be patient.” I continued to show them the photos of all our employees. I also showed them where the video tapes were hidden. I took them out the back way, and showed them hidden passage ways. I think they were in amazement at looking from behind the scenes of a real casino.

“Leo... Mondo... This is for real. There are a lot of crooks out there, and they want the casino’s money. Remember, we *don’t* gamble. They do! We don’t lose. They do! If you get caught up in it, we’re dead as a team. If you have to bet, bet sports with small money. Just don’t get out of control. We want our own casino on the strip. That’s where the big money is.” I would hope that I impressed them.

“Okay Frankie,” says Mondo. “We’re with you, man.” Leo speaks up...

“Sure thing, Frankie,” says Leo. “Just don’t cut off our booze man! I’ll have to complain to the union.” Mondo just shakes his head.

I took them through the casino, and they really did look like young business men. I saw Dee working behind the bar.

“Hi Dee, I want you to meet our new security men. They won’t be wearing uniforms. This is Leo and Mondo... Boys, this is one of my closest friends, Dee Hutton.” They shook her hand with a smile. Leo looks my way, and raises his eyebrows a quick three times. I leaned over to Dee.

“If there is any trouble Dee, just call for these guys. For any reason, okay?”

“I will, ‘closest friend’...” Dee gave me that look. “Nice to meet you guys. If you need anything at all, just let me know. After all, I am Frankie’s closest friend here at the Nugget,” she says as she slides her way back to the customers. I got the message that Dee was sending and just let it pass.

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“Okay guys, because you’re wearing suits, you look like executives. I want my employees to know who you are. And don’t tell them where you’re from. Remember, the fucking mob is looking for us!”

“You mean *you*.” says Leo. “Just kidding, man.”

“Walk around and get to know the place, and also walk outside and check the parking lot. If you think anything is fishy, I don’t care what it is, let me know.

It was 2:17 a.m. and Carissa’s party was still going strong at the Mayors mansion. But Carissa wanted to take Anthony to see the property she wants to purchase.

“Tony, are you ready to leave?” Carissa asked Tony as he is involved in a conversation with a beautiful young blonde.

“Go where, Carissa? I’m having an intimate conversation with Heather here. You know Heather, Carissa?” Tony was having a little buzz from the booze and atmosphere.

“Of course I do, Tony. Heather models lingerie privately for our members. Come Tony, I want to show you the property we’re going to get for the club.”

“Oh yes... The club... Okay... I just want to say good bye to this lovely girl.” Tony gives her a big kiss, and feels like he died and went to heaven. What a rich dirty old man can get away with in Las Vegas, is somewhat a blessing...to an old guy.

“Come again soon, Tony. I have special satin laced lingerie I’d like to model for you,” says Heather with the ultimate seductive soft voice.

Carissa smiled and knew that Anthony was hooked on the idea. Why did she need him in this venture? She wanted drugs for her special clients at a very low cost from the manufacturer in Peru. They got into the limo and headed east to the Nugget Junction Casino. Tony wasn’t drunk, but he was getting close to inebriation.

“Are you having a good time Tony?” Carissa seductively asked. He smiles and then gives her a gentle kiss on the neck.

“Carissa... I’m having a great time, and you were right. There is a power women have in this town. You know the power. You were born to be in this town. This idea of yours is going to work. We had a party and there wasn’t any gambling in there. When we do have it, the bastards will be drugged with beautiful women and good liquor.”

Anthony continues to have another drink... “When they lose a couple of hundred grand at the tables, they’re going to need a very good fuck! So really, they are getting fucked twice in one night..! Ha!”

Anthony laughs out loud as all of a sudden, he was feeling no pain. This wasn’t a normal demeanor for his character. Carissa realized that Vegas has a powerful drug in the atmosphere, and she was going to capitalize on it.

They reached the Nugget Casino, and drove by slowly. It wasn’t as crowded as it was earlier. The small casino was too far from the strip for the tourist to even be aware of it. Most of the locals leave early since they reside nearby.

“Park across the street,” Carissa says to the limousine driver. “Look Anthony... It’s way out here in the sticks. You can see the Vegas city lights miles away. It’s like our own little resort...away from everything. The members will only spend their money here,” she says as she continues to admire the view, and pictures the future.

“Yes Carissa. It’s a great location. I want to check out the inside of the casino.” Anthony opens the door to get out.

“No Tony! I don’t want anyone to see us. I still have to get that property, and it’s not going to be easy.”

“Who owns it?” asked Anthony as he looks over the land in the moonlit night.

“Who owns it right now, is unimportant. Who runs it now *is* important. I think I can sway him in another few weeks to let me buy in, or just buy him out.”

“Okay Carissa... It’s your ballgame.” Tony is aware that Carissa is in control.

“Take us back to the Palace,” Carissa tells the driver as she and Anthony take a last look at her future dream club.

The limousine driver makes a U turn on the dark road, and heads back to the strip. As he pulled out, Mondo was watching the suspicious car when it was parked across the street. He kept hidden in the dark wondering what the people in the limo were going to do. After the limousine faded into the dark and towards Boulder Hwy, Mondo went back inside the casino. Leo met up with Mondo.

“Well bro, did you kill anyone tonight?” Leo laughs as he asked Mondo.

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"I saw a limo across the street for awhile. But nobody got out, and they went back into town," Mondo casually informs.

"Did you tell Frankie?"

"No... Should I?"

"I don't know. I guess so. We better ask him about stuff like that." Leo started wondering since it was their first day on the job. They went up to Frankie's office and told him what Mondo saw.

"You did the right thing, Mondo. I need to know everything. Did you get a license plate number?"

"No— sorry man. They were across the street and I stayed out of the parking lot lights. I was just watching them."

"Okay, Mondo. Maybe they were lost. So now you guys are getting a little experience of what's going on here in Vegas." I felt they were beginning to get the feel.

"It's late and time to go home boys. I know you're tired. Good job." I complimented them as they deserved it.

We went down to the casino area. Leo and Mondo didn't get a chance to meet Jazelle Spain earlier, so I took them by the pit. "Jazelle, I want you to meet my new security men."

"I heard about them." Jazelle throws on a smile and extends her hand to shake theirs.

"Nice to meet you gentlemen, and if you need help with anything, please let me know."

"And if you have a problem, make sure you uh, ask for me," stutters Leo as his eyes light up, and he becomes quickly infatuated with her. She smiles back.

"Let's go guys. We're leaving, Jazelle. You have my pager and home number, right?" I asked with a tired sigh.

"I got it Frank. See you fellas later." She goes back to the Blackjack and Crap tables.

"Man, she is hot Frankie," says Leo as he seems to still be drooling.

"She's not your type, Leo." Frankie starts to head for the exit.

"So, nobody here's my type?" Leo asked with a little concern.

"Just one, maybe— I'll introduce you to Becky tomorrow."

"Becky..? It sounds like somebody's homely crazy cousin," sneers Leo.

I took the guys home, and we we're totally exhausted. It was a long day. Tomorrow is Saturday, and we have another big night. I was thinking on the way home that there weren't as many gamblers as we've had in the past. I have to check the intake tomorrow from the cage. It's just a feeling.

I poured Leo and Mondo a shot of Tequila for a night cap. Down the hatch it went. They poured themselves another shot and went upstairs to their room. I wound down by watching late night television. I was thinking of the violence that's been going on in my life. I don't know what to make of it. There has to be a change for the better. Maybe I should have taken Carissa's offer. The Nugget is probably cursed. That's it! I'm thinking crazy now... Damn... I'm going to bed.

It was 9:27 Saturday morning, and Carissa wakes up next to Anthony Martinez in her bed. She has a pissed off look, and just lays her head back on the pillow. She's in deep thought while staring out the sliding door that leads to the veranda. She thought about going out there for a cigarette. She was sensing something... Like someone was watching her. Her eyes panned the room. Then she turned her face towards Anthony. He was still asleep facing the opposite way.

"Good morning." The voice came from the opposite side of the bedroom. Carissa quickly turned to the doorway. It was Mark Kingman staring at her... and then he turned and went into the living room and toward the patio. She got up and put on a robe as Anthony continued to sleep and snore. She went into the living room and straight to the kitchen, directly to the automatic coffee percolator.

It was mildly quiet between them as Carissa poured herself, as well as Mark, a cup of coffee. And casually, they both walked out to the pool. Carissa sat at the patio glass table.

"Why are you here, Mark?" she says as she lit up a cigarette.

"I want a divorce. My attorney has drawn the papers and I've left you a generous settlement. After all, I've already given you a great percentage of the Palace," he says in a gentle tone. Carissa sat on the lounge chair, and was calm in talking.

"Are you involved with another one of your whores, Mark?"

"It really doesn't matter, Carissa. I can't stay long. I've signed the divorce papers, and I would like you to sign them also. I'm leaving in three hours. You have the Palace, the cars, the mansion in Seven Hills.

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There's an additional \$30 million dollars in your Swiss account. If you feel you're still poor, sell the Palace."

"And what are you going to do Mark, without your first love?" Carissa says in a snide way as she sips her coffee.

"My first love, Carissa..?"

"Yes! Dee Hutton. I believe she was your real first love when she was about 10 years old." Mark walked up to her, and gave her a look that gave a new meaning to, 'If looks could kill'.

"Shall we bring up the prostitute that you were? Oh, I'm sorry—that you *are*, Carissa. I believe that's how we met. I spent a lot of money playing in a private poker game and having a good time with the other casino owners, but I finally hit the jack pot, and I got lucky. I won you! Tell me, was I the only big winner at the table that night? How many diamonds and rubies did you come into that evening? You were a whore then, and you're a whore now! It would be so nice if I never saw you again— dear." Mark starts to leave and stops... "By the way, sign the papers today or I will withdraw the money from your Swiss account by this evening. It's under a different account number. I'll give it to you when my attorney receives your signature. Have a nice day."

Carissa stayed by the pool and stared at Sunrise Mountain. For the second time in her life, she felt abandoned. The first time was by her father. The tears rolled down her cheeks as she wept quietly staring towards the East Mountains.

"What's the matter Carissa?" Anthony walked out to the pool where Carissa was sitting.

"Nothing's the matter, Tony."

"Was that Mark? What did he want?" Carissa takes a puff of her cigarette and looks into the sky.

"He wanted his freedom." Carissa loosely laughs. "The old man wanted his freedom from me!" Anthony just sat next to her and kept quiet. Carissa didn't say anything for a couple of minutes. "Tony... There's going to be a lot of changes in my life. You and I are going to build a great empire. Are you in?"

Tony wasn't sure what to say. He was in pretty good shape back in California. He took a deep breath and thought for a moment... *'The women in this town have some kind of power over us men.'* Finally, "Sure Carissa, I'm with you. You had a great idea last night. Let's put

it to work.” Carissa smiled.

“Okay Mr. Anthony Martinez. To begin with, I need two of your best muscle from Los Angeles to take care of some problems I have.” Anthony’s eyes got real wide. He’s never been given orders by a woman to kill anyone.

“If it’ll help the organization, sure Carissa.” She gives a toast jester to Anthony with her coffee cup.

“Good, Tony sweetheart. Now, how about a good fuck right here on the lounge?”

Chapter 32

Who's Your Dance Partner Now?

Almost four weeks have past by, and Aunt Mary was still in a coma. The bad publicity we've been getting from the television news station has affected our business. The tourists that come from the south have not stopped at the Nugget on their way to Vegas. We are starting to lose money.

"I called this meeting to give you an update of the financial situation here at the Nugget Casino." I held a meeting in my office with Vanessa, Jazelle, along with four other floor supervisors. I was worried that we were below our quota for the month. The casino accountant gave me the monthly figures, and I had to get answers.

"Vanessa... Will you tell us what you feel the problem is on the day shift?"

"Well Frank. On the day shift, we seem to get the regular customers, but after 5 p.m., it seems to drop off. I believe the follow ups on the news about the car bombing, and Mary getting shot in her car, is really harming us."

"Jazelle... What are you noticing that's different on the night shift?"

"What I see Frank, is that by sundown, it seems that everyone just leaves. Even the bar is quiet. I'll comp the players to the coffee shop for a dinner, but that doesn't keep them here."

“Dee... Do you hear any talk at the bar?” I asked Dee to be here, because bartenders usually see and hear everything.

“No Frankie. I haven’t seen that suspicious guy that looks like Jason Adams come around anymore,” says Dee with a scared concern. I continued to ask questions to all the managers and briefed them on our monthly financial quota. I could only compare it from the time of the car bombing. The meeting came to an end.

“Okay everybody. Thanks for coming in, and let’s continue to keep an eye open. Let me know if you have any suggestions to get the customers in here. Again, thank you.” I asked Leo and Mondo to stay with me in the office for a minute.

“Leo, Mondo. I haven’t heard a word from the Metro Police about any suspects on the car bombing. It’s like they just forgot about it. We have to find this guy that was on the tape the night of the car bombing. Here’s a photo copy headshot of him from the video, and I want you to keep it in your pocket. I think he still comes around here in a different disguise. He’s either looking for Adams, or he’s out to get someone.”

“Sure Frankie. We’re getting to know most of the employees now, and I think they’ll open up to us,” says Mondo.

“Good. Go ahead and watch the place. I have to figure out how long we can last without making a profit for the day. We still have bills to pay.” It’s hard for me to believe that I’m in this position so fast.

I called the casino accountant, Cy Viccari, and had him come in for a talk. We went over the books and he says we might be able to last a couple of more months, maybe three, if there’s a rise on our profit margin.

“Thanks, Cy. Keep me updated if you can see a change for these coming months on the ‘Profit and Loss’ statement.”

“I will Frank. I believe you and your aunt have done real good here with the employees and all, so don’t let it get you down. I’ll do everything I can and try to cut unnecessary cost. And you’re right; the publicity has damaged us because no other casino in the valley has had a problem in the past few months. I will do some more research around town and I’ll get back to you later.”

Cy left, and I had to think of the worst case scenario that could happen to this casino. I still had a lot of the mob money in the security

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deposit box at the bank. There was about \$375 thousand dollars left after I bought the Corvette and clothes etc. I don't know if that would be enough to save this place. I'll worry about it later.

As I was looking out the two way mirror over the casino, my in house phone rang. It was Leo.

"Hey Frankie, I have someone here that recognizes the dude's photo. Shall I bring her up?"

"Who is it, Leo?"

"Yolanda," he says.

"Yolanda..? Yeah, have her come up." I know Yolanda real well... but how would she know this guy? Leo brings Yolanda into the office.

"Hi Yolanda, how are you?"

"Good Frankie. What's going on?"

"Leo says you recognize this guy. Do you know him?" Frank shows her the photo again.

"Kind of... I've seen him with Jason Adams a few times. I think it's his brother. He had been in prison for a year or two. He came by a couple of months ago and picked up Jason after he got off his shift," she says while still looking at the photo.

"What was he in prison for, Yolanda?" I got very concerned.

"Jason came with Becky and me to the Buckaroo Club once, and he was talking about his brother taking care of his mother and sister when they were young. Their dad left home, and never came back. I'm trying to think of his name. I think it was... Chris... Yeah, that's it! Christopher."

I took the photo from Yolanda, and looked at it again. "That figures... Jason and Christopher. There is a resemblance. Did he say why Chris was in prison?" Yolanda keeps staring at the photo while trying to remember a little of his past.

"I know he was a slot technician, and I think he got caught stealing some coins or bills from the bigger slot machines. It was something like that. I can't remember it all."

"Thanks, Yolanda. You were a big help. If you think of anything else, see me anytime."

"Hey Frankie... When are we going to the Buckaroo again?"

"Not for a while, Yoli. But we will get together soon." Yolanda left and gave me some good information. Leo had to ask...

"Buckaroo..? What the hell is the Buckaroo?"

“It’s a shit kicking club where all girls seem to have an ex-husband or boyfriend.”

“It sounds like my kind of place.” Leo was up for the party.

“We have to find this guy, Leo. I really need to find out if Adams is alive or dead. There might be some retaliation here.”

“You think he might be the killer?” Leo asked.

“I don’t think Jason’s the type to kill, but I don’t know his brother either. See if you and Mondo can find out anything about Chris Adams. Maybe he keeps in touch with someone that works here. No matter how you leave a job, you always keep in touch with someone who is still with the company.” I sat back and had to look at the video tapes again.

Leo went back into the casino, and informed Mondo about our conversation. I watched this Christopher guy on the tape again. He just kept to himself. Jason must be missing. Why would Chris be hanging around? Did Bobby really have him taken to the desert... and bury him there?

Anthony finally left Carissa’s penthouse, and went back to his suite. He thought for a minute of what Carissa asked of him. He picked up the phone and called Rico in California.

“Rico... I’m still in Vegas. Tell Randall that I need you out here right away... I’ll tell him the reason later. I’m booking a flight for you and Charlie for tonight... Just come straight to the Majestic Palace Hotel... I’ll call you in an hour with your flight information... Come prepared... That’s right...” Anthony hung up the phone and poured himself a drink. He was thinking about Carissa. What was on her mind? Who does she want terminated?

Rico and Charlie flew into Vegas about 8 p.m. They went directly to the Majestic Palace Hotel and Casino. They phoned Anthony’s suite, and he told them to meet him in the Emperor’s lounge after they checked in. They have a reserved room under his name, and to give the bellman their baggage.

“Rico... Charlie... Over here.” The muscle sat with Anthony as he ordered them a drink from the cocktail waitress.

“How are you, Mr. Martinez?” asked Rico.

“I’m fine Rico. Charlie, how’s Randall? Staying out of trouble, I hope?”

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“Yes sir, but he is getting a little irritated that he’s not here with you in Las Vegas,” Charlie says as he looks around if someone is watching...an old habit.

“Yes. Well, we know how out of control he could be in this town.” Anthony chuckles as the drinks arrive. He looks up at the cocktail waitress, and recognizes Nina. She just came on back from her break.

“Oh, hello Nina... you seem to work a lot of hours.” Anthony portrays a loveable matured man with a grand smile.

“It’s nice to see you again, Mr. Martinez,” Nina says with a flash of her angel smile. Anthony was not only surprised by her memory, he was impressed.

“I can’t believe you remembered my name, dear.” He had an ear to ear grin.

“That’s our business. We always remember our nice guests. Anything else, sir?”

“No. Thank you very much, Nina.” Anthony watches her walk away, as does Rico and Charlie. “What are you guys looking at?”

Anthony Martinez told Rico and Charlie of the plans about the club that Carissa wanted to open. Some certain people would have to be taken care of. There’s a meeting at 10 p.m. in Carissa’s penthouse, on the top floor. She would explain the plan and the organization would have to execute it.

“So you boys are playing a very important part in all this, and we are depending on you,” says Anthony in a low tone as he watches if anyone is looking at him. Charlie spoke up as he was about to drink his beer...

“Rico and I are with you Mr. Martinez, and we won’t let you down, sir.”

“Thanks boys. That’s what I wanted to hear. Why don’t you guys go to your room and freshen up. Meet me at Carissa’s penthouse at 10 p.m. Here’s the pass key to the elevator. It’s coded to get you to the top floors.”

Martinez continued enjoying the music and the scenery of beautiful women in the Emperor’s lounge. He did have an eye on Nina. But he realized that she was too young for him... in a dating way— *‘Oh, to be young again’*.

It was 8:47 p.m. and Leo and Mondo went up to Frank’s office.

"I think it's about time to leave, Frankie," says Leo with some energy.

"Yeah, Frankie," also says Mondo. "We haven't been out in this town for real action since we got here." I sat back and laughed.

"Okay guys... I'm going to call the hospital and see how Mary is doing. Then I have a nice lounge to take you to, and they have the most beautiful cocktail waitresses."

"Now you're talking, Frankie!" the pumped up Leo shouts out with excitement.

"You guys take one last look around the casino parking lot and make sure everything is okay, and tell the uniformed security you're leaving. I'll catch up with you."

I called the hospital and talked to the nurse on duty in intensive care. Aunt Mary was still in a coma. But she is no worse. I told the nurse that I can be paged 24 hours, and that I will be there tomorrow. Since Leo, Mondo, and I were already slicked up in our suits, we headed right for the Majestic Palace casino. The boys have never been there... and I was hoping that Nina would be working tonight. Leo and Mondo came to Vegas in a car that would be considered a jalopy; A 1963 Chevy Impala with fuzzy dice on the rearview mirror. The décor would be perfect in East L.A. We all couldn't fit in my Vette, so they followed me.

We got to the Palace, and we parked all the way to the top of the garage. I took up two spaces trying to avoid somebody putting dings on my Corvette. Leo and Mondo parked next to me which was perhaps a little protection. We went down the elevator to the casino floor. As the elevators doors opened, you could already hear the different types of music throughout the casino.

"Okay guys, remember... They're not all hookers in here. So be nice." I was being humorous with them, and at the same time, being serious. We walked through the sports book to get to the Emperor's Lounge. I looked over to see if Scottish John was in his usual seat. At this hour, just about every ballgame was over, and the sports book was practically empty.

We finally got to the lounge where there was entertainment. Tonight a trio is playing classic rock music. There was a good crowd here and the babes were looking good. I saw Nina working, and what luck. I looked for three seats in her section, but the lounge was filled to capacity.

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“Come on, let’s get some beers,” says Leo as he’s up and ready for a party.

“Go ahead Leo, and I’ll try to get us a table,” I said. I was trying hard to see if anyone was leaving in Nina’s section.

As Nina was walking back to the bar, she looked my way, and gave me a wave. I waved back and put three fingers up to let her know that’s how many seats I needed. She gave me the wait sign. It looked like some people were leaving. Nina wiped off the table and put a reserve sign on it. She waved for me to come over. Now I am really turned on with her attention. Leo came back with the beers and we all went to the reserved table.

“Thank you, Nina. This was really great of you. I want you to meet friends of mine. This is Leo and Mondo. Guys, this is the best Palace waitress here... Nina.” They shook hands, and we sat down. I thought I’d better order more drinks since she went to a lot of trouble getting us this table.

“Oh, Nina, please bring us another round of beers, and keep my tab open.” I thought we would be here for a while...as long as she’s here anyway.

“You’re not having Blue Sapphire and tonic tonight, Frank?” She remembered.

“Not tonight... just beer. And thank you for remembering. You are a sharp cocktail waitress.” Nina left with our order and the boys and I begin the party. There was a small wood floor for people to dance on. Leo and Mondo were checking all the girls out.

“Hey Frankie,” whispers Mondo. “That Nina is some honey. You got the hots for her man?”

“The hots?” I said like it was a ridiculous question. “Hell yes!” We clicked our beers and continued to have a good time. Leo actually got out on the dance floor. The only problem is... he didn’t have a dance partner.

I continued to watch Nina and I felt it was time to make a move on her. I don’t know anything about her, and yet, I feel like I’ve known her forever. She carried herself with class. She gets hit on by a lot of guys...all ages. She rejects their advances with a firm friendly smile. I like her.

The meeting was exactly 10 p.m. in Carissa’s penthouse. Anthony,

Rico, Charlie, Malia, and Malia's girlfriend, Kiko... also a great athlete of the Asian culture, and the host, Carissa, are all present. There were also three business associates of Carissa's.

"Thank you for being here on time. Punctuality is a great virtue. Some of you already know of my plans for a member's only exclusive club. I met and talked to Rico and Charlie from California, and briefed them. There are certain necessary steps to achieve before we break ground on the new resort. You will all be given specific instructions individually, inside an envelope. No one else will know what your assignment is. I liked to keep the team small; less loose lips."

Carissa led the team into another part of the room. There was an architectural model on a large table with a light material cover over it.

"Please gather around the table," requested Carissa with a soft voice. She turned off the lights, and flicked on another low lit lamp. There was a switch under the table that she flicked, and at the same time removed the cover from the model. It was a model of her plans for the private club that she wants to build... "I present— Club Venus de Verticordia"... which translates to *'PROTECTOR OF FEMININE CHASTITY'*. Venus is the Goddess of Love. "This is the beginning of an empire," Carissa says as with a low soft tone in her voice.

Everyone else that was viewing the model was fascinated with the structure, as well as the amenities of the future amorous club. It had everything that Carissa described to Anthony. The chosen viewers applauded. Carissa's maid brought in glasses filled with champagne... they toasted.

"Now, I'm going to pass out these envelopes to Rico, Charlie, Malia, and Kiko." Carissa hands them each one as she continues talking... "You will take them with you tonight, and within 48 hours, you must have a full proof plan. This will give you plenty of time to plan the execution of your assignment. If there is any doubt, I need to know. I will be by my private phone line between the hours of 9 and 10 a.m. tomorrow morning. You will call in and acknowledge that the assignment is as good as gold. Is everyone clear?"

Anthony Martinez watched as Carissa gave instructions. She practically put the fear of god into him. They put their envelopes into their pockets and left the penthouse. Carissa's business associates also left. Anthony stuck around, and poured himself a scotch and a Crown Royal for Carissa. Carissa told the maid that she could leave for the

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rest of the night. She and Anthony went out to the patio and sat on the lounge chairs next to the pool. Her associates continued to mingle and admire the designed model of the future club.

"I have to tell you Carissa... I knew I was coming out to Las Vegas for a business proposition, but I had no idea that all this was going to happen."

"Are you sorry you came, Tony?" He thought for a moment.

"No, I'm not sorry... just astounded. I don't know what orders you have inside the envelopes, but I can tell you that Rico and Charlie are my best men. They will get the assignments done. I am going back to Los Angeles in the morning. I have to take care of business. I want you to call me when the assignments are executed. And I want Rico and Charlie on the first plane out of Vegas." Anthony talked with concern. It's rare that he feels out of control. "I want to compliment you on your club, Carissa. You got me convinced that it's going to work. But why do you want me involved?" Carissa took a sip of her drink, and a puff of her cigarette.

"You're going to be my supplier, Tony. I'm giving you 33% of the net profit. I also expect a generous discount on 'Angel Snow'... for the club of course. Actually, I expect you to donate it." Anthony backed up and looked at her... "Don't give me that look, Tony. I'm offering your syndicate 33%! And that's from the casino income only. Remember, I supply you with the financing for the merchandise. Someday you won't need me anymore. Also, you and your cronies are automatic members... free of charge!"

Anthony took a moment to think... He stood up and walked over to the edge of the rail overlooking the Las Vegas Strip. Carissa walked over to him and rested her arm on his shoulder. Finally—

"You have a deal, Carissa. After all, we've already been partners for a long time." Anthony laughed and gave her a hug. "It's been a hell of a weekend, Carissa. I'm going to bed early tonight, and I will see you in the morning before I leave."

"Thank you for being here, Tony. I'm glad you're aboard." Carissa kisses him goodnight.

Anthony went back to his room thinking about the weekend... 'Am I really able to trust Carissa? At this point, I felt I didn't have a choice. Mark Kingman had married a demon. Carissa is a beautiful woman, but not for me'!

Carissa makes a quick call on the phone... "He's in on the club

deal... Everything will be taken care of within 48 hours... He really is putty, sweetheart... I'll call you tomorrow..." Carissa hangs up her private phone and smiles... 'I believe I will have one more drink'. Men are such_____.

Mondo met a nice girl at the bar, and Leo's talking to a couple of girls on the dance floor. Me? I just sat there like a bump on a log. Can you imagine? I was too hung up watching Nina Vargas. What happened to my macho image? I waved to Nina to bring another round of drinks. God, I hope she doesn't think I'm an alcoholic. I can't believe I'm even thinking this.

"Here you go, Frank. Where are your friends?" Nina asked as she put the drinks on the table.

"There trying to meet girls. They just moved to Vegas, and they need to meet people." At least she and I we're having a mini conversation.

"Well, they should meet people. This is Las Vegas."

"Can I ask you a personal question, Nina?"

"Sure, if it's not about my family history," she says with a smile.

"I'm not sure how to say this, but I see you here all the time, and I'm wondering if you're available for a cup of coffee, or tea, or ice cream soda, or pie, or a buffet?" I felt like a little boy again. Nina starts laughing with the angel smile...

"You're funny, Frank. But I just got out of a marriage a few months ago, and I have to take care of my two boys."

"So, does that mean you want to go out for an ice cream soda?" I'm turning red.

She laughs again... "I have to take some orders. I'll be back to see if you need anything."

She walked over to the next table of people who have been waiting for her. She said she'll be back... I hope it's just not with the check. The ice is broken now. Wait a minute... Divorced... Two kids... What the hell am I getting into? Mondo and Leo came back to the table to grab their beers.

"Hey Frankie, this is a cool place to party. I saw you talking to Nina. I also saw her laughing. What did you do, ask her out?" Leo again with the jokes as he and Mondo just laugh. Well, I thought to myself... I think I was shot down. That fantasy was killed off.

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“Let’s go you guys. I’m tired.” I waved to Nina to bring our bar tab. Here she comes with that sway of a wiggle.

“Here you go, Frank.” She hands me the check, and a bar napkin with her name and number on it. I looked up at her and smiled.

“Thank you for the company, Nina... And thank you for this,” I said as I slipped the napkin into my pocket. “I will call you.”

“Okay, Frank... I would like to talk to you on the phone. Maybe we can get to know one another,” she says with a beautiful smile. Then she turns to Leo and Mondo... “Good-night boys.” We left the Emperor’s Lounge and went back to the hotel parking garage. Leo started making those little boy teasing high pitch voices... “Oh, thank you Nina... Thank you for your phone number, Nina... I will call you, Nina...”

“All right, guys... knock it off,” I said with a hidden great big smile on my face. We got to our cars and left. As I was driving home, I was feeling like a million bucks, thinking about Nina. Then my thoughts slipped into the Nugget Casino. I was still a little confused about it sliding into a bankruptcy.

Chapter 33

Hickory Dickory Dock!

The Clock Struck 12 O'Clock

'Power is the Ultimate Aphrodisiac'

At 9:07 a.m. Carissa's private phone line rings. "Yes..? Excellent..!" Carissa hangs up the phone and goes outside to the patio to enjoy the warm morning atmosphere. It's been almost forty minutes, and she has not heard from the second team. As she sits on her lounge chair, she stares to the east at Frenchman's Mountain. She starts to reminisce about her 'Topless' and 'Can Can' dance show days at the Dune's Casino. That's where she met Mark Kingman, owner of the Majestic Palace Casino.

'Mark was involved with other casino owners with their own private poker games. It was a \$3 million dollar buy in with no limit. I was one of the hosts of girls that were requested to be there for the entertainment. Mark never took his eyes off me. He was a handsome gentleman. I knew he was at least 25 years older than me. I guess having money does make you powerful and sensual. I was attracted to him, and we were together that night. I left him in bed when he fell asleep, and went back to entertain the others who were still playing in the game. And then there was the next night with Mark... and the

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next... The trips to the Grand Cayman Islands and— the *marriage*.’

The door bell rang and it was Anthony Martinez coming to say his good bye before he flies back to California.

“Hello Tony,” as she lets him into the penthouse. “A cup of coffee..?”

“Yes, thank you Carissa. Have you heard from my boys?”

“Yes I have. I’m just waiting to hear from Malia. This is going to work Tony.”

“I know it will, Carissa. Just be careful,” Tony says with a concern tone. It was 9:57 a.m. As Carissa glanced at the clock, she and Tony went out by the pool to have their coffee. It was 10:13 a.m. and Carissa was giving up hope that Malia was not going to be able to execute her plan.

“Tony, we may have a problem.” Just then the phone rang. “Hello... Yes... Are you sure about it? Good... 24 hours...” Carissa hung up the phone, and Anthony remained quiet as Carissa was in deep thought.

“We’re in Tony. The assignments will be executed within 24 hours.”

“I’m impressed Carissa. Call me when you get a chance. I need Rico and Charlie back in California right away.” Anthony finished his coffee, and left for the airport.

It was 11:49 Monday morning and I called the UMC hospital. I talked to the head nurse at the intensive care station. Mary was still in a coma. I was concerned about the medicine that was fed to her intravenously.

“Nurse... I’m sorry, what is your name?” I had to ask since I felt like there were hundreds of nurses everywhere.

“My name is Nurse Carly Guerrero. I am the daytime head RN.”

“Thank you, nurse Guerrero. Is the medicine taking affect at all yet? She’s been on it for over a couple of weeks.” The nurse continued to tell me that the doctor was ‘NOT’ going to change Mary’s medicine.

“It is starting to take affect, Mr. Scorpio. So the doctor wants to leave her on the same medicine for about five more days. There should be improvement by then.

“That sounds encouraging nurse. I will be in tonight to see her.

What time are your visiting hours over?"

"If you come in after 8:30 p.m. tonight, you are exempt from visiting hours Mr. Scorpio, because Mary Torres is in intensive care. There will be a night nurse, Miss Nicholson, on duty. I'll leave her a note that you will be in later."

"You're very kind, Mrs. Guerrero."

"That's Ms. Guerrero, Mr. Scorpio... Ms. Carly Guerrero." She corrected me in an instant. "Just call me if you have any problems, Mr. Scorpio."

"Thank you, Ms. Guerrero." Now, there was a sweet sounding nurse. After I hung up the phone, I wanted to go into work quickly, so I could leave early to see Mary. I had to get the latest report on the numbers from our accountant, Cy Viccari. I went upstairs to tell Leo and Mondo to be at work about 4 p.m. They're going to work late tonight. I walked into the room, and they were still snoring away. I left a message on the kitchen table to come in tonight.

I arrived at the Nugget Junction Casino about 1:30 p.m. For a Monday, it was pretty normal not to be busy. However, we also rely on the tourists that come from Arizona way, to stop in for a drink, rest, or to eat in our coffee shop... and of course gamble a little. When the tourists leave Vegas Sunday night, the next wave of tourist come in for the Sunday thru Thursday deals on the hotels in town. I stopped by the bar.

"Hi Paul. I only see about three people drinking at the bar." He shakes his head.

"I'm sorry Frankie, but it's been this way all day. I had to turn the TV off because the noon news did a follow up on the car bombing, and your aunt's shooting. The only locals hanging around here are the one's waiting for more violent action to happen."

"You're probably right, Paul... You're probably right." I went to my office, and called the accountant to come to my office.

"So tell me Cy... How did we do this weekend?"

"It wasn't bad, Frank. We held our own, and I think it might get better?" Cy says with anticipation.

"What makes you say that, Cy?"

"We need to keep the people coming in for a give away. Like a special on something in the coffee shop, or even a drawing for a car... just something. I think we can build up the clientele again. Maybe in a

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month or two, the bad publicity will have diminished.” He gave me a lot to think about.

“Thank you Cy. You’re doing a fine job.” After Cy left the office, I called the marketing department which consisted of three people. I wanted to have a meeting with all of them the first thing tomorrow morning.

I went to the two way mirror, overlooking the casino. It helps me to think. I kept thinking about Ted and Bobby... and all the heart they put into this casino. I’m trying to think like them. I sat back at my desk shuffling some paper work. I had a couple of flashbacks of Nina from last night. I thought for a minute, and looked at my watch. I wanted to give her a call... I did.

“Hello, Nina? This is Frank... Frank Scorpio from last night... I hope I didn’t catch you at a bad time... Listen, I don’t like talking on the phone much. Do you have to go into work today? Well, you deserve a day off... Have a late lunch with me today... It’ll be daylight, and it’s a free meal... Okay... Sure, I can meet you there... four o’clock is good.” I tried to continue with the small talk, but I was a little nervous.” When I hung up the phone, I was walking on cloud nine. I had to make the rounds in the casino, and talk to Vanessa.

“Vanessa, can you take a break for a minute?”

“Sure Frankie. I only have two tables to watch.”

“Yeah, I’m sorry about that, but we’re going to work on a marketing plan that should bring them back in. We did okay over the weekend, and things will pick up soon. I have to run out about 3:30 today, and then I’ll be back.”

Vanessa was a trooper and she’s sharp. Ted and Bobby knew what they were doing when they hired her. I went for a walk outside which is something I usually don’t do. It was a breezy day, and there wasn’t a cloud in the sky. I took a stroll around the building just to think. I visually panned the ten acre parcel of land we had the casino on. It seemed like it was going to waste. I would think in time, that we could purchase a few more acres, and build about a 500 room hotel. Then tourists, who don’t like the expensive Vegas Strip, could stay here and enjoy the casual lifestyle in our own recreational area. I believe this is a fantastic idea! Now all I need is a loan from the bank. Well, that’s that! We’re not doing that good financially right now. But it’s a good idea. That’s the plan.

I met Nina at the **99th Aero Squadron Restaurant**. It was located on Sunset Road parallel to the runway at McCarran Airport. It was a very unique restaurant. As you entered, there were steps that spiraled downward toward the underground. The walls were covered with burlap sandbags that gave an ambience of World War I. If you wanted to hear the airport tower live of flights, coming and leaving the airport, there was a set of headphones hanging next to your table.

I didn't see Nina yet, so I waited at the bar and had a glass of wine. I really liked this place, and it was just the right time to be here as the dinner crowd hadn't started to come yet.

"Hello." Nina puts her hand on my shoulder to get my attention.

Of course I had a big smile. "Hello Nina. You look nice."

"You also look nice in your suit, Frank. You didn't get dressed up just for me, did you?" she says with a friendly wink.

"Of course I did." She knew I was kidding her, and as the hostess led us to our table, I told her that I came straight from work.

She ordered a glass of white wine from the waitress, and right away we seemed to have a good rapport, and conversation. We talked about anything and everything as we we're both being cautious about revealing too much of our personal life this early. I didn't tell her about my past situation, and she didn't dig at me like most girls do. We ordered our food and another glass of wine. I let her know that I did work for the Nugget Junction Casino outside of town. I just said that I was in management.

"So how long have you worked at the Majestic Palace, Nina?"

"I've been there five years. After my first year, my husband and I were expecting a baby, and I took a few months off. Then I got pregnant the following year and took some more time off. Then I thought I'd better not get pregnant again since my husband started seeing someone else. So now I'm a single parent."

"I'm sorry to hear that." I said as I listened to her open up to me just a little.

"It's not so bad. I have my parents living with me. I got them over here from Mexico last year. Grandparents make the best baby sitters," she laughs. Nina had a good attitude about her situation, and I sure won't tell her about my ex-wife and kid, yet..! I continued to ask about her future with the Palace.

"So Nina, do you have plans with the casino business for the future?"

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“No way, Frank. I’m studying to be a doctor. I want to be a cardiologist.” Well that knocked my socks off...

“A cardiologist..? That’s wonderful, Nina! But how are you doing that with the hours you work? It has to be rough?”

“I usually put in about 30 hours a week at work, but the tips are good at night. I can do it. My parents help me with everything.” I started thinking she may not have time to date me. I just came right out with it.

“I would like to see you again, Nina. It sounds like you’re real busy, and I understand if you are unable.” I was trying not to push it and hoped to ease my way into her heart.

“Why don’t we play it by ear, Frank? I would like to see you again. I have a lot of studying to do, but we can get together occasionally,” Nina says softly.

“That would be nice,” I said as we clicked out wine glasses for luck. I know it works, because right now luck is on my side.

We finished our late lunch and ended a great conversation. Then I escorted her to her car. I opened the car door for her as I thought of her as a princess. I shook her hand as gently as I could... “Have a good night Nina.”

She smiled back at me and then leaned over to give me a kiss on the cheek. She drove off into the sunset, and just as I got to my car, I let out a big scream—I was full of energy! I headed back to the Nugget casino whistling any happy tune I could think of.

It was about 4:45 in the late afternoon. Leo and Mondo were in suits watching the Nugget casino along with the other two uniformed guards. Leo noticed a van in the parking lot with a decal of a big bug painted on the side with the words, ‘Desert Pest Control’ company. They parked next to where the employees park. He went to investigate it, and didn’t see anyone around it. He walked towards the back of the casino, and noticed a man in overalls spraying along side of the building.

“How ya doing?” Leo asked the man with a white baseball cap. He was still spraying bug repellent onto the dirt as well in the corner of the building.

“I’m doing fine, thank you. We should be done out here in a few minutes. Then we’ll shoot a little spray inside the break-room and

offices... and we're finished," he says in a jolly way as he continues to do his business.

Leo looks at him with a little suspicion, but since he wasn't sure of the routine around there, he moved on. As Leo started walking away, he stopped and turned back to the bug man...

"Where's your partner?"

"I think he's in front spraying, or on the other side by the south parking lot," says the bug man with a large spray tank strapped to his back.

"Okay, thanks." Leo walks to the other side to see the bug man's partner. Just then, Mondo walks outside to meet Leo.

"What's going on out here, man?"

"Just the bug guys trying to kill the bugs, I guess." Mondo looks around concerned.

"What kind of bugs they got around here?" Leo looks around.

"Hell, I don't know. But the guy in the back of the building says they're about three feet long."

"Three feet long!" shouts Mondo. Leo continues...

"Yeah, but don't worry, the snakes 'ill swallow them... if they're really hungry." Leo grins from ear to ear.

"Snakes!" shouts Mondo again.

"Come on, let's go inside." Leo continues with his humor. They went inside the casino and questioned one of the uniformed security guards about the Bug men spraying on the lot.

"Hey Dick, do you know about the Bug men spraying on the building and parking lot?" asked Leo. Dick thinks for a second.

"Yeah... They come around about once a week in the summer. The damn bugs are everywhere this time of year."

"Okay," says Leo. "He said they're going to spray in the break room and offices in a while." Dick wasn't that concerned about it. He was retired and just putting in some work time because he was bored at home. He makes a little extra money because he loves to play the slot machines. The overweight guard was a very easy going person, and took life with ease.

"Yeah, sure Leo... I'll escort them up stairs and keep an eye on them.

"Good. Thanks Dick." Leo and Mondo walked around like they were really into this security job. Vanessa noticed, and went to talk

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to them.

“Everything okay, boys?”

“Yeah, Vanessa. We were asking Dick about the Bug guys outside spraying around the building,” says Leo as he continues to look at everyone who’s gambling.

“What did Dick say?” she asked.

“He says they come once a week because of the heat.”

“Okay... Just make sure someone is with them all the time,” says Vanessa with a cautious sense. She went back to her pit.

Dick saw the two bug men come into the casino from the side door. He went to meet them. “Hi, are you guys ready to spray upstairs?”

“Sure are... Is it okay to spray now?” asked the taller guy.

“Yeah... Just follow me.” Dick led the way as Leo and Mondo noticed the Bug men with a large tank on their backs.

Dick escorted them to the hallway administrative offices. They began to give quick shots of spray in the corners, and along the floorboards. As Dick was getting bored with it, he started to go into the break room for a cup of cold water.

“I’ll be right back, guys.” Dick gives them a wave of the hand and left. The two Bug men looked at each other. The tall one checked to see if Frank’s office was locked. It was. The short stockier Bug man tried to open Mary’s office, but that was locked. Dick came back into the hallway.

“Would you like some cold water, guys?” They thought they were almost caught trying to open the doors.

“Sure, that would be nice of you.” Dick went back into the break room and got them some water.

“Here you go gentlemen...nice and cool.”

“Thanks for the water, sir,” the stocky one says with a friendly manner.

“Just call me Dick... Everybody calls me Dick.”

“Okay, Dick!” says the tall one. “Can we get into the offices now so we can spray?”

At first Dick frowns, and then...

“Sure, let me open it for you.” Dick gets one of his many keys from his belt key chain, and opens Frank’s office. “Be careful, this is the boss’ office.”

“Oh, sure thing...” The stocky guy puts his spray tank on the floor as does the tall one.

While they look busy, Dick goes over to the two way mirror, and looks over the casino. The Bug guys look at one another, and need to get him out of there. One has an idea... Dick kept rattling on about anything he could think of to keep a conversation going while looking out at the casino floor. The tall Bug man nods to the shorter one.

“Okay Dick... We need to put these mask on because there’s not much ventilation here. We’re going to open a few spray bombs to kill all the little bugs and rodents.” The short one hands Dick a mask. Dick puts his mask on reluctantly... The short bug man watches him... “Are you okay?” Dick struggles to put the mask on. The Bug men popped open the small canisters and started spraying the whole office. Dick didn’t like the smell of the bug spray. He was starting to break out in a sweat.

“I’ll be outside the door, boys. How long will this take?” Dick asked with a face that looked like he tasted bad milk.

“It should take about three or four minutes, Dick.”

“Okay.” Dick rushed out of the office like the spray was going to kill him.

The two Bug men made sure that they were in the clear. They unscrewed the top of the large spray tanks, and they put the caps back on the small canisters to shut the bug spray off. The taller man carefully pulls out a **‘Make-Shift Bomb’**. It consists of about up to six sticks of dynamite connected to a red and green wire that’s connected to a stop watch. The other guy does the same.

“Hey Rico, where do you want me to plant this?”

“Put it in the vent above the ceiling. I’ll put this one inside the credenza, next to the two way mirror. Hurry..!” Charlie unscrews the vent cover and tapes the bomb inside the air conditioning duct. Rico puts his bomb deep into the credenza that’s under the large clock.

“How you guys doing in there?” yells out Dick from the hallway.

“We’re almost finished. Should be one more minute,” Rico yells back.

The bombs are set to go off at a particular time. Rico and Charlie synchronize the time bomb to their watches. They close up the large spray tanks and re-opened the small canister bug spray. They open the door to the hallway.

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“Okay Dick. Can you open the next office? I’ll take care of that one while my buddy here sprays the back stairs. And then we’ll be out of your hair.”

“Okay... Can I get you guys some more water?”

“That would be real nice of you!” Charlie says cheerfully.

Rico plants the bomb in Mary’s office while Charlie goes to the back administrative office entrance. He tapes the bomb under the lower step of the staircase. The whole plan worked better than expected. They knew only one office was going to be unoccupied. As it turns out, they both were. The only office left was the private gaming room. Rico planted another bomb under the Crap table. He looked at his watch. He was falling behind schedule. He rushed taping the last make shift bomb under the large poker table.

“What are you doing?” Dick walked in while Rico was under the table.

“Oh... Hi Dick...” Rico pops up from under the table, and holds up a bug spray canister. “Just putting the last bomb under the table.”

“Good... I’m ready to clock out for the day,” says Dick. Rico grabbed his large tank and left. As he went out the door, Dick took a last look in the gaming room and saw that the bug spray odor was starting to spread fast. He quickly closed and locked the door.

Rico and Charlie walked at a fast pace leaving the casino. Leo and Mondo saw them leaving, and Dick was waddling behind them.

“Hey Dick... How did it go?” asked Mondo.

“Man, they sprayed the hell out of those offices. If anything is crawling in there, those bug bombs ‘ill kill it!”

It was 5:53 p.m. and I’m on fucking Boulder Highway with a flat tire... Damn! I can’t believe I have a flat tire on my new Vette. I looked under the car to see what I ran over.

It figures... a nail the size of my index finger. I rolled up my sleeves and opened the car trunk. It was pretty quiet on the highway so I figured no trucks were going to whiz by me. I jacked up the car, and went to work changing the tire.

I was almost finished when I heard a speeding car coming from the south. It was just a van with a big Bug decal on it. There are never any cops on this road anymore to ticket these assholes. About 15 minutes later, I was finished. My hands were filthy with dirt and grit from the

blown tire. It was still a great beautiful day that I had... having lunch with Nina. Well; I'm not going to let this bother me. It's fixed and I'm off to the Nugget.

I arrived at the Nugget casino as the sun just dropped over Red Rock Mountain. Vanessa went home early because her mother was ill, and Jazelle was the pit boss for the next 14 hours. I stopped by the bar to talk to Dee about the customers.

"Dee, how are the beverage sales doing?"

"Well, it's Monday and it's a little slow. Where you been all day? You gotta another job?" She's being a little inquisitive.

"Yeah, I'm a mechanic." I showed her my dirty hands from changing the tire on my Corvette. I continued on with a smile and headed for the office. Leo saw me and hurried toward my way.

"Hey Frankie boy... Let me see if I smell any perfume on you?" He sniffs and chuckles at the same time.

"How's everything here, Leo? Any problems?"

"Nah... Mondo and I are getting a lot of exercise walking around here. So what about the dude you're looking for? The guy you think might have killed the brothers."

"Yolanda's been the only one who recognizes Jason Adams' brother, but nobody knows where the guys from or if he lives around here."

"Are you telling the cops?" asked Leo.

"Nope! The fucker's mine... I'm going to the hospital tonight, and how late are you guys going to stay tonight?"

"We came in about 4 o'clock, so we'll stay until midnight, or if it's busy, maybe another five minutes..." Leo still laughs as he always jokes around.

"Okay Leo. I'll be upstairs in my office." I felt like I was ready for a nap.

"Hey Frankie... The bug guys were spraying up there earlier."

"What bug guys, Leo?"

"I don't know about them, but Dick, the security guard, says they come once a week. He went up there with them, so I guess they weren't left alone."

"Where's Dick now?"

"He went home. Is something wrong?" Leo slightly mutters. Frank thinks for a second as he looks around the casino.

"No, as long as someone was up there with them." As Frank goes

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through the casino, he gives Jazelle a wave, and then stops to talk to her.

“Is everything okay, Jaz?”

“It’s a little slow Frankie, but this is Monday.” She shrugs her shoulder a little.

“Okay. I’m going upstairs. Call me if you need anything.” I looked around again, and it was slow, as she said.

I got into my office, and it did stink of spray bug odor. I turned up the air conditioner and kept my office door open. I also have a big fan that I keep in the corner. I turned that on. I looked around and everything looked like it was in its proper place. I played back the security video tapes for the day. I wanted to see if anything seemed out of line.

I saw the guys from the pest company. They both wore glasses. One had a mustache, and the other had a small trimmed Van Dyke beard. They both wore ball caps, and they both looked like bank robbers. There goes my imagination.

Later I walked into the employee’s lounge. Dee was there having her dinner.

“Hi Dee... What’s for dinner?”

“Chicken, want some?” she offers with a drumstick in her mouth. I just grinned as she kept eating.

“Thanks Dee, but I’m not hungry. How’s Sue Ann doing? I haven’t seen too much of her lately.”

“Yeah, I know. She should have given you her body after you took a bullet for her.” Dee was being silly. “I’m sorry, I didn’t mean that.” I just smiled with her.

“I know you didn’t. “How’s your mom, Raylene?”

“She still does the news just like she still does the TV news station owner.”

“Well your mom is... vibrant. She loves her youth.” Dee corrects him.

“You mean she loved her youth. She’s 52. She’s an old lady!” I was really shocked to hear her talk that way about her mom.

“Dee... Are you angry at your mom for some reason?”

“It doesn’t matter. I don’t want to talk about that subject. Hey, do you want to go see a movie this week?” I paused for a split second... I wasn’t going to tell her about Nina.

"I'd like to Dee, but I have to stay close to home. I talked to the nurse today and there might be an improvement soon with Mary. As a matter of fact, I'm going tonight around 9:30. But thanks for the invite."

"Sure. We'll do it some other time," she says in a subtle way.

"It was nice talking to you, Dee. Work things out with your mom. She's not so bad." As I left her, I felt like she was trying to reach out for someone to hear what she has on her mind. I just have too much to deal with now. I went down stairs to the main pit.

Rico and Charlie drove directly to McCarran Airport. The van was left in the airport parking lot. It was stolen earlier from a legitimate pest control company. They were on the next jet heading for Orange County Airport in California.

We arrived at University Medical Center at 8:43 p.m. Leo remained back at the Nugget to keep an eye out for any problems. Mondo came with me to visit Aunt Mary. His mother was close to her when they were kids in East L.A.

"Hello nurse. I'm Frank Scorpio, and my aunt is Mary Torres. She's in intensive care."

"Yes, I was expecting you. I'm nurse Nicholson. You may go in, and please walk quietly. Most of the patients are sleeping."

"Thank you." Mondo and I went into Mary's room. She was still laying there in a coma with an automatic breathing apparatus.

"Man... She looks peaceful, Frankie," says Mondo in a somber mood.

"Yeah... She never hurt anyone. I don't understand it." We sat in the chairs next to her. There wasn't much we could do. She did the same for me when I was in the hospital after being shot. What the hell is this? Why are we always getting shot? First Mondo... Then me... Now Aunt Mary... What the fuck is this all about? I tilted my head forward and rubbed the back of my neck. I was sooo tired. I closed my eyes and thought about my life...

**I'm starting to feel the pain. I slowly opened one eye barely enough to see through my eye lids. All I can see is a blur of people moving around. My senses are coming back. Do I smell, pot...grass...good old plain marijuana? No. I've smelled the same odor*

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of incense for a long time in my deep sleep. Oh God— I feel more pain. I must raise my hand to let them know that I am alive. What's that? Somebody's covering my mouth. Hey! Take it off! Take it off! I can smell the scent of Opium perfume. Nina?

“Frankie... Frankie. Wake up!” Mondo gives me a shove as I must have dozed off. I jumped to my feet.

“What time is it, Mondo?”

“It’s almost 11:45 man. Should we go home?” Mondo was getting sleepy.

“Yeah, in another few minutes, man.” I fell into a deep snooze so I didn’t feel like moving too fast.

“I’m gonna get some coffee. You want some?” asked Mondo as he was digging for change in his pockets.

“Yeah, thanks Mondo— Just black.” Mondo leaves and looks for the vending machine. It’s now close to midnight and it’s very quiet throughout the hospital. He sees a nurse.

“Can you tell me where the vending machine is so I can get some coffee, nurse?”

“Yes. You have to get on the elevator and go up two floors... and turn right when you get out. It’s about ten feet on your right.” She throws in a flirty smile and walks away.

“Damn, she’s hot. I also love those Asian gals,” he says in a whisper, as if anyone was listening. Mondo went into the elevator, and pushed the button for the 5th floor. He gets out expecting to see a vending machine right away. All he saw was half the lights turned out and a couple of night nurses at the far end of the hallway.

“Where in the hell did that chick send me? Must be this way...”

“Hello sir.” The nurse starts to take Mary’s vitals. I opened my eyes.

“Hello nurse Nicholson. Oh, you’re not nurse Nicholson.” I rubbed my eyes being that I was still half asleep.

“No. Nurse Nicholson went on a lunch break, so I’m checking on patients.” She continues to check the I.V. bottle. I thought I’d better say something...

“I’m going to be leaving right now. I’m just waiting for my friend to bring coffee.”

“You don’t have to rush off. I’m just going to change her I.V.

bottle. This medicine should really do the trick for her.”

“You’re giving her different medicine?” I asked.

“Yes. It’s a little stronger and she should get well a lot quicker,” she says with a smile and a nice Asian accent.

Actually, I was too tired too flirt. I guess it’s in my blood and comes natural. I gave Aunt Mary a kiss on the forehead, and then I went outside to the nurse’s station and sat in the waiting area waiting for Mondo. It was sure quiet and spooky with only half of the fluorescent lights on in the building.

“Hello. Is there anything I can get you?” asked another Asian nurse who’s sweet as pie. Well, this is Las Vegas— Land of beautiful women.

“I’m fine, thank you.” I was thinking, ‘Where in the hell is Mondo?’ I sat on the chair waiting for him. I closed my eyes and began thinking to myself again...

** The doctor is **NOT** going to change Mary’s medicine. It’s starting to take effect, Mr. Scorpio. The doctor wants to leave her on the same medicine for five more days. There should be an improvement by then...*

*The doctor **is not** going to change Mary’s medicine...*

*The doctor **is not** going to change Mary’s medicine...*

My eyes popped open as wide as the full moon. I heard a moan behind the nurse’s station desk. I ran over and saw nurse Nicholson with blood on her forehead. I ran as fast as I could to Mary’s room. The Asian nurse was injecting a deep yellow liquid substance using a syringe into the lining of the I.V.

I yelled at the top of my lungs. “What are you doing?!!! She continued to inject the tubular lining. Suddenly I was kicked on the left side of my head by the other Asian nurse. I used all my power and strength to reach and pull the I.V. needle out of Mary’s arm. I got punched and kicked again by the nurse who was injecting the needle. I felt that I had returned to the guts of a major battle zone in Vietnam. I couldn’t see straight and the motion of my eyes was equivalent to 10.9 on the Richter scale.

Mondo couldn’t find the vending machine anywhere. He gave up and then went back down the elevator to Mary’s floor. As Mondo exited

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from the elevator, he heard hollering from the far end of the hallway. As he entered Mary's room, he was attacked and kicked in the groin by Malia. Mondo fell to his knees in pain. Kiko injected the same syringe, which she used on Mary, into my neck. It still contained that yellow fluid. As I tried desperately to get up, I was starting to feel numbness throughout my body. I was starting to pass out as I weakened. Mondo regained his vigor and punched Malia's jaw knocking her into the wall. He then grabbed Kiko as she held the syringe that was sticking out of my neck. He reached from behind her and inserted two fingers into her nose. With all his force, he yanked back and ripped her nostril. Blood spurt in all directions.

Malia grabbed his arm and continuously kicked him in the solar plexus and the rib cage. He twisted and pivoted— then grabbed her by the throat and squeezed. Kiko came back and drove her index knuckle in the back of Mondo's neck, causing him to lose his strength for a moment. They both picked him up and threw him against the wall, forehead first.

They picked him up again and threw him into the corridor. Malia looked over to me as I lay there semi-conscious. Then they turned to Mondo who was struggling to get up. The Asian warriors were ready to finish him off. He saw them coming at him with a syringe. Using his last ounce of strength, he rolled onto his front part of his body to get up. Malia and Kiko were going to put a needle into his spine and inject the poison. As they approach him lying on the floor, he turns and fires his Magnum .357 pistol at them. He empties the chamber— Malia and Kiko's bodies were perforated. The feline warriors lay in their own puddle of blood.

Mondo rushed into Mary's room and pulled out the I.V. needle from her arm. He then saw a syringe dangling from the side of my neck. He pulled it out. Mondo shook me hard to bring me back to consciousness. Although I was semi-conscious, I didn't have the strength to open my eyes.

"Frankie!!! Frankie!!!" Mondo yelled as loud as he could as the nerves in his body made him tremble all over. The hospital security arrived with their guns drawn at Mondo. "I'm with security! I'm security!" Mondo shouts as he shows a security badge that I gave him from working at the Nugget. The emergency doctors and nurses who were on duty, rushed to Mary's room and saw me lying on the floor.

“Doctor, these two nurses injected something into Mary Torres’ I.V. tube. They also injected the same syringe on Frank. Hurry! Do something!” Mondo was anxious and tense. The doctor and two other nurses from a different floor of the hospital took quick action.

There are two Asian girls in nurse’s uniform shot lying in a pool of blood on the floor. No one knew them. A staff member found nurse Nicholson behind the nurse’s station and promptly tried to revive her. She finally became conscious. The doctors rushed to Aunt Mary’s aid as well as mine. I could hear loud voices at the door. Other doctors rushed to see if there was any life left in the wounded Asian soldiers—Malia and Kiko. One of the doctors spoke...

“Time of death for both women— ‘Midnight’.

As I started to fall into unconsciousness, I could faintly hear the voices of the emergency staff trying to keep me alive. I felt like the world was spinning, and that I was free falling into a black hole. All I could hear were mumbled voices and a lot of clanging of tin bowls as well as liquids flowing through tubes. Again, here I am knocking on the door of the grim reaper. Some people believe we are reincarnated soon after our souls leave the body. I often think of who I was in my past life.

A humongous ball of bright red orange fire was seen for miles and miles throughout Clark County. **‘The Nugget Junction Casino’**, at the highest point of Boulder Highway, exploded at midnight. The outskirts of the city of Las Vegas transformed into a cloud of smoke, flames, and ashes that filled the sky as it floated between the full moon and the inferno. Many people died, but it’s not determined who did as the city emergency services have not yet arrived.

High above the Majestic Palace Hotel and Casino Penthouse on the Las Vegas strip, Carissa Kingman is sitting on her lounge chair by the pool overlooking the city. She has a glass of Crown Royal on the rocks, and a cigarette. She stares towards the East Mountain as she sees the black sky with the image of scattered fire flies. After a long five minutes, she finishes her drink, and takes a last puff of her cigarette. Carissa gives an extra long hard crush of her cigarette butt into the ashtray. She smiles seductively as she turns off the lights and goes to bed.

Chapter 34

Explain it to Me, Lord

Breaking news has hit the media. Every TV news station reporter on duty was on their way to the scene. All news station have police radio frequency hooked up to the news room. Most of the news trucks went out to the explosion of the Nugget Junction Casino. News 7 reporter, Ben Correa, was home watching late TV, when it was interrupted by breaking news from his news station. He also heard on the police scanner, which he has in his bedroom, about the shooting incident at UMC hospital. He knew Mary Torres was there, and had a hunch that Frank Scorpio might also be there. Half the city of Las Vegas must be out of there beds after hearing, or feeling the vibration from the explosions of the casino.

By now, most Las Vegans were watching breaking news on television. Correa went to the medical center to find out more information. As he arrives, he sees police cars and ambulances scattered throughout the hospital zone. He flashed his news 7 media badge, and the police allowed him to go into the hospital where the Metro Police public information officer was set up to give the news media updated information.

Ben was listening to the information officer talking to a handful of reporters. He notices the hospital information desk is vacant. He slowly drifts over to it and sees a computer left on by a nurse. Correa

looks around to see if anyone is watching him. He punched in the name of Mary Torres, and found out what room she was in. He looked around again, and everyone was involved with the Metro information officer telling the reporters basically... old news. Ben noticed the stairwell door that led upstairs. He got to the third floor and sees a team of detectives standing at the nurse's station. He looks further towards Mary's room and instantly sees two bodies on the floor covered with a white sheet that was soaked with blood.

"Ben Correa... What the hell are you doing here? Who let you up these stairs?"

"I just came up here, Det. Selenak. No one said I couldn't. I'm just doing my job as a reporter. What happened? Who was killed?" Ben says calmly as a routine. Det. Selenak hesitated for a moment...

"We're not at liberty to say yet, Correa. The Crime Scene Investigators crew just arrived. We'll let you know as soon as we find out anything." He dispenses with Ben and returns to his detective work..

Ben sees Mondo sitting alone in the waiting area, and remembers that he was working for Frank Scorpio. He looks over towards the police who are busy talking, and then walks up to Mondo.

"Hi. My name is Ben Correa. I'm a reporter at channel 7 news, and I'm a friend of Frank Scorpio. Does this have anything to do with him?" he asked Mondo in a low comforting tone. Mondo looked up at him and paused for a moment...

"Yes. First the Asian nurses tried to kill his Aunt Mary, and then tried to kill him and me. Frankie is in emergency right now, and they're also trying to save Mary."

"Who's trying to kill them?" asked Ben with a lot of concern in his voice.

"I don't know."

"Do you know about the explosion at the Nugget Casino?" Ben asked Mondo. Mondo looked at Ben and stared for a moment...

"What are you talking about?" Ben paused for a second and looked over to the cops, and then commenced to tell Mondo about the explosion.

"The explosion was about midnight, and no one knows who was hurt...or killed. Most of the casino employees, as well as the customers, were taken to different medical centers," Ben says with

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compassion. Mondo looked at Ben right in the eye...

"Did you hear anything about Leo Vidaurri? He was also security for Frankie."

"No. I'm sorry. I haven't heard anything. I just came straight here." Ben sat down next to Mondo. He looked over toward the detectives to see if they were watching.

"Mondo... What happened?" Ben asked in a whisper with deep concern and a little fear in his voice.

Mondo Mazon was a little slow in beginning his story, and began to pick it up as he got deeper into the scenario. He didn't know a lot of what was going on with Frankie, Aunt Mary, and the enemies they had, but enough to know that their lives were still in danger.

"That's all I know, Ben. Then Frankie called me and Leo in East L. A. He needed us to come to Vegas and work for him. He said somebody killed the Fager brothers and— here we are."

As Ben and Mondo continued to talk, Leo rushed into the hallway yelling for help in looking for Mondo and Frankie. Two police officers grabbed him and tried to quiet him down. Leo looked as though he might have been in the middle of the casino's inferno. His body covered with scour of blood, cuts, and dirt.

"Frankie! Frankie!" Leo shouted throughout the hallway. The metro police officers were hanging onto him as Det. Selenak approached him.

"Calm down! Calm down! Who are you?" asked Det. Selenak with a raised voice.

"Frankie! Where's Frankie?!" Leo kept asking without patience or control. Just then Mondo and Ben rushed out of the waiting room to help him.

"Leo! Are you okay?" shouts Mondo.

"Yeah man! What's going on? Where's Frankie?!" Leo and Mondo embrace one another as Leo starts to weep a little. "Mondo... They blew up the whole casino! A lot of people are hurt, and some are dead."

"Who died, Leo?! Who died?!" Mondo asked with a tremble in his voice.

"I don't know! I don't know, man! There were bodies everywhere. I was out cold for a while, and then I came too in the ambulance. When I got to the emergency entrance, I jumped out and rushed up

here! Frankie said you guys were coming here to see Mary. Where is he?" Mondo paused for a moment...

"They tried to kill him and Aunt Mary around midnight. There were two Asian nurses, and they tried to kill me too." I shot them both. Now the police are investigating." As Mondo continues, Det. Selenak steps into the conversation.

"I'm sorry. What was your name?" Leo looks at him with caution...

"Leo."

"Leo what?" questioned Det. Selenak as he is losing his patience. Leo looks at Mondo, and Mondo gives him the okay nod. "Leo Vidaurri. I work security at the Nugget Casino."

"I need to talk to you and Mr. Mazon in a few minutes, if you don't mind."

"Sure Detective," nods Mondo.

"What are you still doing here, Correa?" asked Det. Selenak.

"Come on detective, I knew Frank Scorpio as a friend. And I'm still a reporter. I'm just waiting here and hope you could provide me with some information that the public will want to know. At least whatever you tell me, I won't blow it out of proportion like most of the journalist do that aren't on the scene— Okay detective?" Ben had a way of talking sincere to a cop, and making them feel like they could trust him.

"Okay Ben. Just make sure if you find out anything, that you let me know!"

"Sure detective. We're on the same side." Ben looked at him serious. Det. Selenak goes back to his investigating team. Mondo takes Leo into the waiting room along with Ben so they could talk.

It was now 3:27 in the early morning. The emergency room team of doctors was finished with Mary and Frankie. Mary was still in a coma. The injected poison might have been caught in time before it went throughout her system. Only time will tell at this point. The doctors had nurses around the clock watching her, and monitoring her condition. She was back in the intensive care room. Frank Scorpio was still on the critical list and in the next intensive care room as well.

Det. Selenak's partner, Det. Hurtado, had gone to the explosion site of the Nugget Casino. He was looking for a connection between that

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incident, and the attempted murder at the hospital. Det. Selenak went into the waiting room where Leo, Mondo, and Ben Correa were.

“Okay gentlemen... Mary Torres and Frank Scorpio are out of the emergency room, and put into the intensive care unit. I’m holding onto your gun Mr. Mazon. I’m checking to see if you have a valid permit to carry a pistol. I’ll let you know. The doctor will come in and let you know the condition of them. I’ll need your phone numbers and addresses. I won’t need yours Ben. Det. Hurtado and I will go over this again with you fellas tomorrow in my office. I gotta go over to the Nugget Casino and see if I can get some answers there. Here’s my card, and I’ll see you two fellows there at 10 a.m. Go home and get some sleep. By the way, I’m putting two Metro officers on guard this morning for the victims.” says Det. Selenak. As Det. Selenak leaves, the attending physician comes in and gives the boys the information on Mary and Frankie.

“Good morning, I’m Dr. Rynaski. I just finished with Mary Torres and Frank Scorpio in emergency. Mary is still in a coma. I have the nurses watching her monitor full time. We’ll know more in the next 12 to 16 hours if the antidote is taking effect. As for Frank Scorpio, I’m afraid that there’s a slim chance he’ll make it. The needle that was injected into his neck also punctured his Intervertebral Disk. It also punctured the cerebrospinal fluid path which caused body fluids to drain into his lungs. We tried to vacuum the fluids from his lungs but there was severe damage to his spine... I’m sorry.”

For a long moment, Leo, Mondo, and Ben stayed silent. Ben wasn’t as emotionally involved. He was really just an acquaintance of Frank Scorpio. Ben also feels like he’s known him for a long time because of his association with all the slayings in the past year. However, he knows that Scorpio was the usual target.

“Can we see them, doctor?” asked Leo.

“If you’re family, yes you can.” Mondo speaks right up hoping he will believe him...

“Leo and I are his cousins, Dr. Rynaski. We’re the only family Mary and Frankie have here in Vegas.”

“Then I don’t see a problem. I’ll tell the police and you can go right in,” says the doctor with sensitivity.

“Thanks Doc. Come on Leo.” Mondo stops for a moment and looks back at reporter Ben Correa.

“Hey Ben... Why don’t you wait here, and we’ll talk. Frankie did mention your name to me before. Maybe we can help each other.”

“Sure. You guys go ahead, and I’ll wait right here.” Ben was an investigative reporter with compassion. He felt he was on to the biggest story of the year in Las Vegas.

Leo and Mondo went into the intensive care room to see Frankie. He laid there unconscious with tubes up his nose, and I.V. needles in his veins. His eyes shut tight with a bandage wrapped around covering his left eye. There was nothing that Leo and Mondo could do. About 15 minutes later, they went to see Aunt Mary. She was pretty much in the same condition. Mary never knew what she went through, or how close she came to death in the last few hours.

As Leo and Mondo went out to the hallway, and back to Frankie’s room, they noticed the two Metro police officers having coffee and talking to the nurses at their station. They didn’t seem to realize the danger that existed, or perhaps just didn’t care. There had to be more people involved in the attempted murders of Mary and Frankie.

“Look at those fucking cops, Leo— always trying to fuck the nurses.”

“Yeah, Mondo... Come on. Let’s go back to Frankie’s room,” says Leo with anger in his voice. “Hey Mondo, we gotta do something. I don’t feel good about all this. I think somebody’s going to come back before the sun rises, and try to make sure Mary and Frankie are dead.”

“You might be right man. Have you got your pistol on you?”

“Yeah... I hid it in my ankle holster. What can we do?”

The two just sat next to Frankie in his room as he lies there with the breathing apparatus on him. A nurse walks into the room to check on Scorpio. Just then Leo and Mondo jump to their feet in defense. Leo pulls out the pistol he had hidden strapped around his ankle.

“Hold it right there!” shouted Leo. The nurse froze and looked extremely scared.

“I’m just here to check on Mr. Scorpio.” The nurse’s eyes started to water a little. Leo and Mondo looked at each other, and then relaxed.

“We’re sorry nurse. We thought you were someone else. We’re Mr. Scorpio’s body guards,” says Leo. The nurse calmed down.

“May I check on Mr. Scorpio then?” she nervously asked.

“Yeah sure,” says Mondo. “We’re sorry.”

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The nurse was a Philippine girl. She was about five-foot two-inches tall and beautiful with long brown hair. Mondo kept an eye on her with caution. He's already had a bad experience with two nurses. Both Leo and he watched her as she made notes on the vital statistics of Frank. It was so quiet in the room that you could hear the echoes of the metro cops on guard duty, talking in a low tone to the desk nurse down the hall.

"What's your name, nurse?" Mondo asked as she does her job checking the vitals.

She pauses for a moment... "Lily."

"How's he doing, Lily?" She was looking at the monitor and seemed to have a concerned look on her face. Mondo and Leo noticed it as she didn't give an answer back yet. Mondo asked again...

"How's he doing nurse?!" he says with a little more aggression. Just then there was a high pitch tone on the monitor. Leo grabbed Lily and pulled her away with a force and into the door. Lily screamed with fear as she thought she was going to be attacked. Leo and Mondo were next to Frankie. He started to go in convulsions with his body trembling. Lily ran out into the hospital corridor, and yelled for the doctors. The Metro cops ran into the room and grabbed Leo and Mondo thinking they were going to hurt Scorpio. Mondo began shouting...

"Let's us go!!! Get the doctor, god damn it!" At that moment, the surgeon arrived with two other nurses along with Lily.

"Stand back!" yelled the doctor as the men were in his way. The cops, as well as Leo and Mondo, backed up as Ben rushed from the hallway and stopped at the door. The doctor hurriedly told the nurse to prepare a syringe with a description of fluid that any layman wouldn't understand. The nurse handed him the syringe and he quickly injected it into Frank's heart. His body gradually stopped trembling as the doctor and nurses continue to revive him.

Leo, Mondo, Ben, and the two Metro cops stood in silence against the wall near the door as they were witnessing something that they have never experienced. Then there was a flat liner on the monitor. The doctor began body resuscitation with the defibrillator, a.k.a. electro shock paddles, again... and again. There was no change. The oscillator showed a flat liner. The doctor continues a couple of more times with the defibrillator. Then he, and the 'Code Blue' emergency

staff, stood quiet for a moment... He looks at the clock on the wall... "Time of death— 4:38 a.m."

He turned to Leo and Mondo... "I'm sorry. There was too much damage to the heart from the poison. We administered an antidote that didn't take effect." Lily recorded his expired time.

Leo and Mondo's face stood frozen as they stared at Frankie's body. He laid there without a muscle movement. There were no tears from either one of them. Ben watched everyone's reaction. The two Metro cops went outside, and showed no emotion as perhaps they are adjusted to see violence at its worst on a daily basis.

"I'll leave the family members with the body for a few moments before we prepare him," says the doctor somberly as he leaves the room with the nurses following him out. The Metro police officers went back to the desk, and called headquarters to report the incident.

Leo, Mondo, and Ben remained in silence. Frankie's best friends were reminiscing the past when they were kids in East L.A. — About five minutes later...

"I'll give you a few more minutes, gentlemen," says Nurse Lily. Leo nods his head as he and Mondo stand at Frank's bedside. They each grab Frankie's right and left hand and hold tight. Ben walks out into the hallway. There was a moment of silent prayer from them, as each hung onto Frankie's hand...

**I've awakened my lord. My eyes are opened wide, and I see Nina reaching to me with her hand extended. I reach for her, and yet I cannot touch her. Our fingers are separated by the thread of sliver from spun glass. Why can we not touch? I don't understand what is happening to me. Is my life over? I cannot see light. And yet there is a feeling of 'euphoria' that is starting to go through my body... Wait, what is this happening? My God! My body is accelerating upward to the heavens. The speed is tremendous with continuous acceleration. Please... Please God, help me! I am starting to feel pain.*

The force of travel is colossal... All of a sudden; my body has been slammed as though it was hit by tons of pressure from a massive tidal wave. I have suddenly come to a complete halt! I lay in silence not knowing where I am. I cannot move my body as I try to feel and touch anything. Give me the strength, Lord. There is family you have blessed and bestowed onto me. I need them as I want them to need me. I must

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try with all my strength to move... I am beginning to feel greater pain—

“Leo... Are you ready to go and get the hell out of here?” Mondo says with sadness and emotion.

“Yeah, man... This is bullshit, Mondo,” he says as he rubs a tear away from his eye. As they start to release his hands, they start to feel a movement from his fingers. Then... an increase in pressure from his right hand. It’s as though Frankie was sending a message. They looked at one another. Then... They both looked at his closed eyelids. The boys felt the soul of his body was still there. They see a flinch from Frank’s right eye. Suddenly—

“Quick, Leo... Grab that sheet and cover him.” They put Frank into a wheelchair. Mondo looks out the hallway to see if anyone is around. Ben approached them.

“He’s still alive,” whispers Mondo. They went down the cargo elevator to the back of the hospital. With Ben’s help, they put Frankie’s body into their car.

“Here’s the address to my father’s cabin. It’s about 45 minutes North West of Vegas. Take Hwy 95 north. You’ll see the Mt. Charleston turn off, and just go west into the mountains about 18 miles. When you get to the fork of Mt. Charleston road, veer to the right, and go another half mile. There’s an old small cabin near a dry creek. No one else lives around there. I have a friend who is a retired doctor. He owes me a favor. I’ll take him there as soon as I can.” Ben was getting involved, and Leo and Mondo weren’t sure of his motive. Leo looks at Mondo and then turns to Ben...

“Why are you helping us?” Ben looks at each of them right in the eye...

“I’m a reporter, and something’s very big is about to go down! I have a feeling some big names in this town are behind it. I want the story. Trust me guys. We haven’t got time. Frankie needs medical attention right away. I’ll see you in a couple of hours. Just get to that cabin as fast as you can!” Ben was adamant.

Leo and Mondo looked at one another and agreed. They drive off very slowly leaving the hospital grounds so as not to attract attention. A storm begins to brew up in Las Vegas, as thunder and lightning begin another session at the hands of Mother Nature. The rain started coming down hard as they entered the onramp of the 95 North

freeway. The boys were quiet, as the lightning flashed in the black darkened sky.

It had been almost an hour when they arrived to the Mt. Charleston turn off. The boys weren't familiar with the northwest area. The storm made it more difficult to see. The highway sign read— '**Mt. Charleston 18 miles**'. Mondo turned west and headed into the canyon. They could only average about 30 mph in the rain. It was hard to see while driving in the pitch of darkness... although the lightning from the storm did manage to give them a split second of light. They finally arrived at the fork of the road just as Ben described.

Mondo saw the small cabin on the hill as the headlights from the car beamed through the wet Forrest. The rain was starting to lift and they could feel the chill in the air. They pulled up to the damp cabin and turned off the car engine. It was so quiet that you could hear your heartbeat. Mondo got out of the car and looked around. They opened the cabin door and turned on the lights. The cabin was comfortable looking with one bedroom and a large loft overlooking the road... just the perfect sight for watching any intruders. They brought Frankie inside and laid him on the bed. Leo and Mondo stood by his side and stared at him for a moment...

"Is he still alive, Mondo?" As Mondo checks for a pulse from his neck, he also grabs a small mirror from the dresser, and puts it under Frank's nose to see if there is still breath.

"He's still breathing, Leo. See if you can get some hot water, and I'll get some towels. We need to get his circulation going. He's still white as a ghost. We also need to get the fireplace going." The boys start their own physical therapy and hope that Ben and the doctor arrive soon.

"What time it, Leo?"

"It's going to be 6:20 and it's starting to get bright outside."

"Grab a towel and dip it in the hot water. Then squeeze the excess water out and just make sure it's only damp." They continued for the next few hours to give Frankie a sponge bath to revive his circulation and natural color.

At 10:23 a.m. Ben arrived at the cabin. There was an old man with him who seemed like he hadn't shaven in a few weeks. He was wearing worn wrinkled pants and carrying a black bag. He also walked

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kind of funny like he was on ice.

“Ben.” Mondo muttered as he was looking at the old man standing next to him.

“Is he still alive, Mondo?” Ben asked as he leads the old man toward the bedroom. He starts to quickly introduce the old man. “This is Dr. _____ well, it doesn’t matter. He’s retired and he can be trusted. There he is Doc.” The retired doctor looked like he retired 50 years ago. He has a body odor of old rags and bad booze. The old man stared at Frankie for a moment.

“What have you boys been doing to him?!” He shouts as if it were his last ounce of breath. Mondo and Leo were still faced for a long second.

“We tried to get his circulation moving Doc!” says Leo with a firm voice.

“Good!” blurts the doctor, also with firmness in his voice. “Now leave me a lone with him, and I’ll let you know when I need you.”

Mondo, Leo and Ben exited from the bedroom. The doctor shut the door and commenced to work on Frankie. It was quiet in the living room as the boys had nothing to say due to exhaustion. Occasionally they would glance at the clock. Their eye lids were getting heavy as they heard only the pendulum swing side to side.

It was two months later. I sat on the veranda of the antique cabin staring into the thin air towards the pine trees and mountain region. I was still alive. I hadn’t shaven in all that time. My body was very weak, and the recuperating time was going too slow. However, it gave me plenty of time to think. I have a great deal of stored anger in me. What was I going to do? Mondo tells me that Aunt Mary came out of her coma. She is bed ridden, but will recover. She will be moved to a private and secluded convalescent home in a few weeks. No one, other than her family, will know her whereabouts. Aunt Barbara came out from Los Angeles to take care of her. She has been a nurse for several years, and just retired. Leo and Mondo have been getting information from the Nugget Casino’s accountant, Cy Viccari. The casino attorney, Catherine Hollinger, petitioned for a court injunction to delay the foreclosure on the Nugget. According to the Judge, since Mary Torres was in a coma, or bed ridden, no one could take the property.

Ben Correa, the reporter from news 7, has been investigating the bombing of the Nugget Junction Casino. Who wants Aunt Mary and me dead? Who killed the Fager brothers? Why do they want to kill anyone who has interest in the Nugget? Mary was kept under police protection at UMC. Patti Fager was secluded in Parker Dam, Arizona. No one knew she was there, but Mary and me.

“Frankie.” There was a soft lucid voice that came from the back of my left side. I didn’t turn around. I sat quietly in my lounge chair on the veranda. I stared at the pine trees in the meadow... it was serene. However, I did recognize the low whisper.

“Yes Ben... Talk to me.” I also talked with a low tone as I still felt the weakness with every breath I took. Leo and Mondo were at my side. Ben pulled up a chair and sat next to me as a friend to friend chat. He began to keep his voice very low as his eyes panned the Mt. Charleston range. He had potential leads and suspicions to the people that wanted me dead... and the suspected reasons. I listened and comprehended every word he said.

Leo and Mondo also continued to scan the canyon, as I watched a deer with antlers that reflected the image of a Kings Crown, run through the woods. As Ben concluded his report to me, I thanked him and closed my eyes. I went into a deep sleep.

** I still hear music. The incense of aroma and smoke are becoming stronger as I can hear more clearly the song of an Indian prayer. As I listen, I realize that I am feeling intense pain throughout my body. Please awaken me from this agony, Lord.*

My eyes snapped wide open as I let out a yell that echoed through the frosty pine trees. I saw that I was alone, and that I had a dream I didn’t understand. I inhaled the fresh air fast, and as much as I could. I began to sweat, and I tried to ease my breathing by taking deep slow breaths. I closed my eyes again, and in deep thought... planned vengeance on my predators. I am no longer afraid of danger or fear violence. There is a second chance for me, and as God as my witness, I will get vengeance on those who dared to hurt my family. I looked again into the deep forest. It’s a beautiful feeling to breathe the fresh air from the snow that fell last night. My life has changed forever.

Leo and Mondo are back in East L.A., staying out of sight. The

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police are looking for a missing body... mine. The Nugget Junction Casino continues to look like an old historical war zone. The tourists drive-by as everyone in the county and nearby states has heard about the infamous casino explosion... especially the car bombing.

The media suggests that the management and owners were mixed up with the underworld organization. The investigating detectives have never found answers to the explosion or attacks on Mary, or me. The Las Vegas Metro Police have been trying to locate my body. They brought in Leo and Mondo for questioning several times, but they say that they left the hospital after the doctor declared me dead.

Aunt Mary's accountant and attorney have been taking care of legal matters while she remains in convalescent and seclusion. I have no financial interest of record on the property; therefore the detectives are at a dead end with their suspicions. I have been informed who survived, and who was killed in the Nugget Casino explosion. As for the rest of the Las Vegas mob that have interfered with my life, they're going to find out what kind of a man Frank Santos really is!

Epilogue

Many people believe in ‘**Karma and Reincarnation**’. The kind of person and the way you lived in your previous life will either reward you or hand you down a sentence into your next life’s journey. I believe God put me on this road to see if I would pass the test of the life he has given to me. At this moment, I believe I am not getting a passing grade.

I am the Desert with no King, but God alone—

Frankie Santos

Coming

“The Desert has no King II”

The Scorpio Vengeance

Meet the rest of my Family



Frank and Sister, Linda.
1st Halloween in Norwalk



Christmas on 47th Street



Easter With Cousins



Dad and Grandma



Me and Grandma Santos



Cousin Tony and Richard (Ex Hitman...)and Me



Frankie Jr. and Great Aunt Margaret



Life is a party for Dad.



1st Wedding Anniversary: Cornelio, Connie, Mom, & Dad



A night at the Club: Dad, Mom, Barbara, & John

The next generation



*Now go and celebrate what God
gave you— your family...*

Frederiko Aguilar



Frank Santos served in Vietnam

Frederiko Frank Aguilar was born in Los Angeles, CA. He moved to Norwalk, CA. with his parents and sister when he was six years of age. As well as participating in sports from Little League Baseball to high school football, he pursued his passion for creative writing and drama while attending Excelsior High school and majored in Radio-TV communications at California State University Fresno. He entered the U.S. Navy in 1968. While serving his tour in Vietnam, his duty included the ship journalist. In 1982 Frederiko developed his own public access TV show in Norwalk, CA. He wrote, produced, directed as well as starred in his own comedy show. He joined the Screen Actors Guild Union in 1992 and served on the SAG committee for the union 'Background Artist'. He continued to work in cable TV as a writer, producer, and performer in Seal Beach, CA. In 1997, Frederiko re-located to Las Vegas, Nevada. He worked in television news production as a camera operator, video editor, and master control operator for local network affiliated TV news stations. He is working on his next novel. Learn more about Frederiko Aguilar at www.The-Desert-has-no-King.com