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Getting the Boot

His boot came down on my face like a jackhammer. I didn't feel pain; all I felt was the California sun beating down on my skin, like some warm ray of pleasantness through the blur of violence. It slammed down so many times that the whole world seemed to slow down, so much so that I could actually read *Made In Italy* on the sole. As I squinted, trying harder to read more, I could make out smaller writing, *Verd Cuoio, 43*, Italian for real leather, and 43 is a size 10 in the U.S., I believe.

Blood began to trickle from my nose, or what was left of my nose, kind of like maple syrup; runny, sticky, but strangely cold, as if it were straight from the fridge.

Everything was in slow motion, from the boot hitting my face, to my face quivering from the impact. Even the blood seemed to move slowly as it splattered. The whole scene looked like something from some Hollywood 'B' movie. I knew this because for a moment or two it was like I was watching the whole thing. I was witnessing me, myself, getting the almighty crap knocked out of me, and I could see this in splendid, crystal

clear Technicolor. It was like some out of body experience that only people who come back from death feel. Minus the white light of course.

Suddenly, I was back in my body, no longer a third party witness. I could hear a muted voice through what had been silence. I tried to focus on the voice. It was unmistakably Reno; thick, New York, Italian.

“Why you punk ass limey, you think you can get away with this?”

That relentless boot must have hit me with such force right then that my hearing was sucked right out of my ears. I didn't hear a word after that. However, I could see Reno's face: ugly, distorted, hair jet black, from a bottle, and cold blue eyes, like some wicked caricature of Tony Curtis.

As I looked up at his ugliness, I just had to laugh. And laugh I did to his fury. It must have been so loud that even though my hearing had gone I could still feel the vibrations in my mush of a face.

Wait a minute. This sounds like the end of the story, but it's not. Before I get to what happens next, I have to take you right back to the inception of when my sweet F.A. (fuck all) of a life turned...turned upside-down, I should say.

Firstly, let me introduce myself. I'm not a man of wealth and taste – well, maybe a little taste. I'm a DJ. Yes, a disc jockey to use the old-fashioned term. However, I'm not your average disc jockey who is fortunate enough to work for a radio station and collect a decent salary every fortnight. I'm not the guy who does barmitzvahs for snotty teenagers, or weddings, and plays yesterday's hits for today's matrimonial lambs.

No, I'm definitely not one of those. I am Harrison Bingham...call me Harry! I not only work as a DJ in a club, but I work as a DJ in a STRIP CLUB.

Yes, you've got it – I work with *exotic dancers*, as they like to be called. I work with all the baggage and trash and drama that goes along with them. Most men dream of having such a job, but not me. And what's more – I work in Hollywood, California. Tinseltown. Ground Zero for hookers, freaks, junkies, rock stars, wanna-be rock stars, movie stars, porno stars, models and madams. Yessirree!!! Hollywood – where the losers bite the nails of success. Here I am, smack dab in the middle of it all. Right in the proverbial armpit of all clubs, where all the above peoples converge, like cattle at some urban watering hole.

The club I'm talking about is situated on *THEE* Hollywood Boulevard, across from *THEE* world famous Chinese Theatre, between La Brea and Highland Avenues. It's a little place where everyone knows your name, depending on who you are and how far up the social ladder you've crawled. POPPA CHERRY'S is *THEE* place I've been telling you about. Formally known as Klub Kabaret, and later as Psycho Bitch, which I personally think is the more fitting of the three names. Anyway, more about that later.

So there I was, sitting in the DJ booth. Another night, another shift, another exercise in keeping my emotions deep down inside. My job is all about controlling your emotions. I have seen far greater DJ's than myself get torn to shreds because of flagrant use of their emotions. Women in this business have an unseen license to scream, shout, and over-emotionalize. DJ's do not. Rookie DJ's heed my words.

Anyway, as I was saying – there I was, in the DJ booth, *my office*, as I sometimes call it. It's where I do business. I've got a reasonably comfortable bar stool to sit on. I have some amps and a mixer and a rack, reminiscent of a bookcase, where I keep my beloved CD collection. When I say beloved, I mean it. My CD collection is not only my livelihood and my bread and butter, but it is to me what a collection of vintage baseball cards is to a man

who has been collecting them all his life. Or what a Stradivarius would be to a violinist.

I know every track on every disc. I know who wrote which songs and who produced what album. I know the running times, the breaks, and the intros that need cutting just before someone utters the “F” word. They truly are my life. And in my business, if you don’t own CD’s, it’s like being a plumber with no tools. You arrive at a job, and you say, “Got any tools I can borrow?” And they say, “Are you serious? You’re supposed to be a professional. Professionals have their own tools!”

“Hey, Harry! Listen, I got a new chick coming in tonight. By the name of Kelly.”

There he was in all his glory – Reno, my boss, my royal pain in the goolies.

“Are you hearing me, kid?!?” he shouted.

“What?!?” I shouted back, pretending not to hear. I always did this because when he becomes uncomfortable his shoulder twitches. And, boy, did I love to see him twitch. He obliged me with a short jerk.

I smiled.

He saw me.

“Turn that fricken racket down and listen!”

I turned the music down half a notch.

“Like I was saying, I got a new chick,” he continued.

“Yeah, I heard you the first time,” I interjected. “Kelly, the new girl.”

Reno collected himself in his ridiculous Hawaiian shirt.

“Yeah, well make sure you send her back to my office as soon as she gets here.”

I nodded my head. Reno turned away from the door of the DJ booth and began to walk away.

“Nice shirt!” I shouted, as he looked back at me with a scowl.

I looked at my watch. 7:30 p.m. on the dot. My shift started at 7:00. I was there on time spinning discs and all I had was three girls; Leeta, Logan, and the queen of the scene herself – the Baroness of Bitches; in fact, the psycho'est of psycho bitches, the one and only STELLA! I mean, this girl is infamous in the 90024 zip code. That, for your information, is the local post code. Stella is the quintessential blonde bombshell: slim, but with curves, dangerous ones at that. Her long hair flows down her back wildly, like a lion's main – purposely unkempt. Her face is that of a complete angel.

“What the fuck are you doing, you fuckin' asshole” she squawked.

Oh, I forgot to mention she looks like an angel, but she is actually possessed by Satan. Oh, and she loves using the “F” word.

“What's wrong, Stella?” I asked her in a calm, soft voice. I used to shout back, but I learned not to over the years. Besides, she always tipped me well.

“Leeta's on stage and I got here before her, man! I'm the one who should be up there right now!”

“Yeah, you are absolutely right, Stella, but she was ready before you. And I needed someone on stage. Besides, there's only one customer at the stage.”

“Well, I'm not following her all night, so get it together, dude!”

Her voice was so loud that it could be heard above the loudness of the music. She stormed off towards the dressing room.

I'm not just a DJ. I'm also somewhat of an amateur psychologist. I mean, you have to be in this job. Case in point – Stella! She didn't want to follow Leeta on stage because Leeta is attractive and an excellent dancer to boot. This makes Stella feel

insecure, thus threatened. No matter how large or small the audience, Stella is worried that they will think that her dancing skills aren't quite as good as Leeta's, thus somehow causing her tips to fall and her insecurities to rise. I knew Stella's theory to be complete crap and told her so on many occasions. I mean, the customers didn't give a rat's arse about a girl's dancing skills; all they wanted was to see a girl's titties jiggling around as she did pole tricks. And, boy, did Leeta know some pole tricks. She twirls and spins around the almighty pole like a trained monkey in some erotic circus. Anyway, lovely Leeta's song was coming to an end, so I put a break song on for her while she collected her tips.

"Alrighty then, gentlemen, make sure you show your appreciation to lovely Leeta. Tips and tips alone, that's what the girls work for, fellas," I announced in my best DJ voice. One of the first rules of strip club DJ'ing is to remind the customers to tip the ladies. Some customers automatically know that this is required, but others seem to get so caught up in watching the show that they actually go into some kind of trance-like state, and it's a DJ's job to wake up the cheap bastards. If they remain cheap, you promptly tell them to not sit at the front of the stage. Meanwhile, the girl who happens to be gracing the stage, not getting tipped, invariably goes into a complete, unbridled rage and screams at said customers. It's not a pretty sight, I can tell you. The girls virtually turn from serene beauties into snarling, rabid beasts.

"Hi, you sexy Englishman!"

Logan was standing next to me – one of my favorite dancers, may I add.

"Hi, Logan," I said, cheerily.

She was probably one of the nicest girls in the club. Her face was a kind one with a personality to match. And I always

loved her fiery red hair and freckles. She reminded me of an Irish princess.

“So, what’ll it be?”

She thought for a moment before answering. “Young Lust,” she replied.

I detected a slight playfulness in her voice.

“Good choice. Young and lusty like you, Logan.”

She smiled as she looked me up and down. Perched on my barstool, feeling naked to her eyes, I smiled back. I scanned my CD rack for *Pink Floyd, The Wall*. What a record and what a classic song – *Young Lust!* It’s about a lonely man in a lonely town, looking for female attention; it sounds like most of Poppa Cherry’s customers. I put the CD in the player and cranked up the music. I sang along to the chorus.

“Ooh, I need a dirty woman, ooh, I need a dirty girl!”

A voice interrupted me mid-song.

“Excuse me,” it said.

I didn’t recognize it. I turned towards the door of my booth. A girl stood there smiling nervously at me. I could tell she sensed I was a little embarrassed for singing out loud.

“Looks like you’re having fun,” she said, smiling slightly.

“Trying to...yeah!” I stammered.

I was actually trying to pull myself together. I had never felt quite like this before. I was rendered speechless, at least for a second, as I took in her beauty. Such delicate features, her nose was so dainty. Her eyes were big with an air of cheek to them, and her chestnut brown hair fell past her shoulders, perfect in a messy kind of way.

“I’m Kelly,” she said, holding out her hand to me. “Kelly Young.”

As I shook her hand, it felt smooth to the touch and fragile like a child’s.

“Young lust,” I muttered.

“No, Young. Kelly Young. Without the lust bit at the end.”

I felt like a complete bumbling idiot. I squeezed her hand tighter, making things even worse. She pulled her hand away from my grasp.

“Down, boy.” She said, jokingly. We both laughed nervously.

“I’m so sorry, I’m a complete idiot! I was thinking about the song I’m playing – Young Lust by Pink Floyd.”

“Yeah, I like this one,” she said, rubbing her freshly squeezed hand.

Thank God, I thought! She knows the song. A first meeting with someone so special should not be blown. She could have thought I was some sex maniac lusting after her. Well, I am a sex maniac, and I definitely was lusting after this girl, but she didn’t need to know this so early in our relationship.

“So, now you know my name – Kelly YOUNGLUST. What’s yours?”

We both cracked up laughing.

“Harry,” I replied, through my laughter.

“Dirty Harry, more like!” she blurted. We laughed even more, except this time straight from the belly. I hadn’t laughed like that since I was a kid.

As our laughter faded into chuckles and we finally simmered down, Kelly asked me out of the blue, “Hey, I was wondering, would you like to get together later tonight?”

I was completely taken aback and a little intrigued. I promptly answered, or as promptly as any man in the same situation, faced by a beautiful woman, would answer.

“Yes,” I blabbed, “I really, really would.”

I’m so easy sometimes, but what can you do?

“Good!” she said confidently, before pausing for a moment.

“So, Harry, who do I talk to about the job?”

“Reno,” I replied. “In fact, he’s in his office expecting you.”

So off she went towards the office. I'd sent what seemed like a thousand girls to Reno's lair before, but this time it was different. I felt like I was sending Kelly to the Lion's den. She seemed vulnerable, not in an inexperienced way, but more in a nice person kind of way. Believe me when I tell you that if you are too nice in this business you cannot survive. I liked this girl – A LOT! She was different from the others. I didn't know why at this point, but I was looking forward to finding out.

“Hey, dickwad! What do you think you're doing, dude?”

It was Stella again.

“What do you mean?” I replied in my usual collected tone.

“Logan's on stage...I thought I was after Leeta?”

“You said you didn't want to follow Leeta!” My tone was becoming a little strained.

“I said I didn't want to follow her all night.”

“Why does it matter, Stella?” I asked, impatiently.

“Matters to me because there are people out there,” she replied, barking like a trailer-park dog.

I glanced over the top of the booth to see if indeed there was an audience. Of course she was right; there were people there, about ten in all.

“I'll put you up next.”

“Fine, Harry! Make it snappy!”

Stella's disrespect of me after five years of working with her had stretched my patience to the limit. It had changed from irritating me to complete unadulterated torture. Simply put, I had had it with her shit. And everyone else's for that matter. My only problem was that if I stood up to her she would run straight to Reno. For some unknown reason he worshipped the ground she walked on. I had always suspected that they had had a sexual encounter in the past that Reno didn't want anyone to know about, or maybe Stella supplied him with his 'nose candy' (Yes, I mean cocaine for the uninformed). Either way, she had

something on him. He was under her control and that meant I was under her control. I didn't want to lose my job, or at least not yet, so I kept my mouth shut and bit my tongue. Actually, it felt more like chewing my tongue.

Stella handed me her CD; as usual it was some Euro-techno dance trance song by some Dutch dude who spins wax in every cool club in London that nobody ever seems to have heard of. Not my favorite kind of music as you can probably gather.

"Come on, man. Hurry, she's almost off stage! Put me on," she squawked.

I looked Stella dead in the eye with the most contemptuous look I could muster.

"ALMOST, is the key word," I said.

"Yeah, well you better change your tone with me NOW! Or else I might ALMOST get Reno to fire your ass! Now put me on that stage, idiot."

Logan stepped down off the stage like a Victorian lady. I started the techno music and Stella took the stage like the self-absorbed prima donna she was.

"And here she comes gentlemen, the one and only SENSATIONAL STELLA!"

I could have puked right there on the floor of my booth after those words had crossed my tongue. Stella wrote her own script when it came to me introducing her. I had said those words a thousand times, but this time would be the last. She didn't deserve the respect and patience I had given her anymore.

"So, Harry, put Kelly here up after Stella, okay?" Reno said, as he stood there with his arm around Kelly in a dirty-old-man kind of way.

Now I really did want to puke. The object of my affection was standing there in her bra and panties being touched by the Don of Filth himself, my boss, Reno Valentine.

"Okay." I choked.