

## THE BOOKIE

The knock on the door was more like a tap, like a toddler was on the other side. But, when I opened, a giant stood before me. His Brute Cologne entered prior to the door opening. His hair was well groomed, slicked over like a cow licked his head. I looked into his icy blue eyes, there was no soul behind them. We exchanged no words, I nodded my head and he tipped his hat in return.

I left the cleaner to do his business, and I had a smoke on the Patio. I took a long hard pull of the cuban, then pored another shot of the bitter brown Bourbon. A loud thump came from behind the bathroom door, then another, I slammed the glass door.

It startled me when The Cleaner tapped on the glass. The door squeaked as it opened.

“It is done,” he said.

The room was perfect. There was no glass, blood or gore to be found. Turpentine hit my nostrils as soon as I walked in. Another man, much larger than the cleaner stood at the door carrying two duffle bags. I handed the Cleaner a Manila envelope, he took it and stuffed it inside his coat pocket; then picked up the third bag and walked towards the door. He turned back and stared at me oddly.

“If I were you, I’d get out of town.” he said.

He slammed the door and I locked it.

It's a seven and a half hour drive from Reno to Las Vegas. I called ahead to inform Betty to get our things packed. The word would surely have gotten back east about Fat Sal and Evelyn mysteriously disappearing, and I'd be the first person they'd question. I had some friends in Wyoming who would put us up until better days. But, Wyoming was so far away.

When I pulled into the driveway the lights were out. I opened my glove compartment and pulled out the closest thing to a weapon I could find. Gravel crunched under my feet with every step I took. My heavy breathing emitted clouds in the brisk air. The walkway may as well been one hundred miles that night. When I finally reached the door I turned the knob, it was locked.

The moans of children crying came from the other side. I thrust my shoulder into the door, knocking it off of it's hinges.

"Peter, is that you?" asked Betty. She was standing in the living room with a shotgun aimed in my direction.

"Yes, it is me." I said. I turned on the flashlight and then the phone rang.

"Don't answer that," said Peter junior. His eyes were wide and bloodshot and tears had began to dry upon his face. He ran over and grabbed hold of my leg.

"Why not, son?" I asked.

"Bad men called, Daddy," He said. " They said they're "gonna send you sleeping with the fishes," he said.

“And what did you say?” asked Betty.

“Peaty said a bad word, Daddy,” Said Judith. While she aimed both pointer fingers at her brother and crossed him in shame.

Peaty started to back away, he bumped into the nightstand where the phone sat nearly knocking it over, if I hadn't caught it. The ringing commenced. The little red strobe light blinked repeatedly, it made the walls look rosemary red.

“ What did you say, Peter?” I asked. I snatched his fidget stick from his hand and slammed it on the table.

“ I told them, that if they ever came near our family, I'd bury all of them Sons of Bitches.” he said.

I burst into laughter. Betty was mortified.

The lights flickered for a moment, then there was a buzz and the house was lit up. I took the shotgun from Betty and kissed her cheek. I removed the phone's receiver from its base. The humming of the dial tone sounded better than the ring. I retrieved my cigar and lighter from my shirt pocket, but before I could spark it. I felt Judith's baby blue's piercing my conscious. She wrapped her arms around me as I hoisted her up.

“Go help your mother get packed,” I said. She complied and scurried away.

My house rumbled as tires slid into my driveway. Headlights blazed through the curtains, seemingly igniting my world into flames.

“ Honey, take the kids to the cellar, now!” I said. Then I marched out the front door to face my demons.