

Happy birthday, Jonny! v4

by Sean T. Clark

(a.k.a., your loving father)

A man, Dr. JOE NUH, 30 with medium-length brown hair and a fit body, wades in calm

water near the shore of a tropical island. He wears a snorkel

mask, flippers, and wetsuit with the name Nuh on the left breast.

A wave breaks. Joe notices plastic waste, a blot on the otherwise idyllic setting, brushing up against his leg.

He pushes his prescription snorkel mask to the top of his head and stares with disgust at the planet-killing garbage.

A Seagull swoops to divebomb him.

Startled, he flails, falls backward, and strikes his head on a rock.

JOE sits up, AND Sstares Through fuzzy eyesight as A sealion loudly barks at him.

He hears a thunderous voice coming from the sealion,

“Joe, you must go to Las Vegas and tell the sinners to repent, or I will rain down fiery destruction upon them, for they have sinned against me, their God!”

For three days, Joe wanders the desert in the blazing sun carrying flippers, snorkel, and

mask. Until, finally one night, Joe’s flippered feet flap onto a sidewalk on the Vegas strip.

And that is where the focus of much of our story comes in:

Born and raised in Las Vegas, Nevada, USA, Vic figured he had seen it all.

“Raised,” that is to say, largely left to fend for himself by his exotic dancer single mother, Janise (Juh niece) and, before the Spilotro brothers planted him in the desert, her card sharp boyfriend, Larry, who was only around long enough to show the boy a few survival sleight-of-hand moves.

And seen it all, Vic had. That was, until the day he and Wanda encountered a more-unusual-than-most jamoke wandering the strip, decked out in, of all things, complete scuba gear. Though that, too, was eclipsed later the same day when the volcano erupted. Yes, it was quite the day.

Regardless, the close magic trickery of Vic’s father figure proved vital for the boy when, inevitably, Larry and Wanda’s addictions made it necessary to take matters literally into Vic’s own hands.

Such tricks helped Vic to avoid beatings and to pilfer needed items whilst in juvee, and before that on the casino floors where Vic had charmed or sneaked his way into reasonable proximity to allow for the stealing of a few silver dollars from patrons’ slot coin buckets, or the occasional purse or pocket (Hey! Don’t judge: a growing boy needs to eat).

But the inevitable arc of the broken family and incarceration systems framing Vic’s existence inevitably molded what started as a sensitive young lad into an ignorant, callous, amoral brutish survivor.

And, despite his skill with prestidigitation, Vic’s face showed the scars of several less-than-successful campaigns. And arguably made him even more handsome, which lead to his second major downfall - an affinity for gorgeous, enabling women (all right, Mr. Freud, spare me your pop psychology. Yes, he did spend much of his life metaphorically and repeatedly “killing” parental substitutes).

But the tricks? The tricks helped him entertain or appease most of the more malignant co-incarcerees of his several stints as a guest of the state. Those he couldn’t, merely added to the tapestry of his scars.

Before the incarcerations, the boy came of age in the dressing rooms of the smaller, seedier halls on The Vegas Strip.

At twelve years old, he saw his first in-person pair of breasts, and was transfixed. So much so, that he was blissfully unaware that the fleshy miracles were cantilevered over the stretchmarked paunch of a forty five year-old dancer

with a lot of miles on her. To Vic, nothing mattered except those miraculous orbs of flesh.

Those dressing rooms afforded him a welcomed education both in human anatomy and in how to read people; a little time with his struggling mother; and with a respite from the barkers and emcees his mother was too beleaguered or besotted to protect him from.

And, one day, he met his “partner in crime,” Wanda, a fallen angel, if ever there were one, herself a Vegas “orphan.”

In this melange of characters and settings, Vic found an ad hoc family to replace the one he lacked.

As usual, Vic was drunk and high on coke the day he met Joe coming the opposite way on the sidewalk underneath the marquee of the Kit Kat club. The flashing sign intermittently and garishly lighted the stranger’s face and reflected off his wetsuit as giggling, Wanda asked the stranger for a light, and Vic grabbed the man’s face and pushed him to the ground.

Aimlessly walking down the sidewalk, Wanda asked Vic as she removed his hand from her brassiere, “Why’d ya do that to the poor weirdo?”. “Don’t worry about it.” growled Vic.

His demeanor brightened after refueling with a bump and a Chivas at the two top he soon shared with Wanda in the club.

“Well, where does he get off telling me to repent? I’m a helluva guy.” Vic barked as he scratched a nipple inside his shiny purple club shirt which was unbuttoned to his navel to afford a look at his eight pack abdominal muscles and hairless chest.

“Keep ‘em comin’, honey.” Vic said, indicating his empty glass and Wanda’s nearly drained old fashioned glass. To ensure prompt, consistent service, he pressed a stolen fifty dollar chip from The Grand into the waitress’s palm.

Knowing the struggles of dive waitstaff life, Wanda quickly tried to atone for Vic’s brusqueness by shooting the clearly overwhelmed server a smile and a cheerful, almost sincere, “You’re doll.”

Vic looked on in amusement as the sidewalk stranger shrunk in a front row seat at the beginning of the pole dancers’ performance.

He was less amused when the stranger interrupted the show just as the ladies neared the point of gyrating nakedness that never seemed to get old.

“No, listen!” cried the schlub into the Emcee’s mic as the bouncers dragged the chump off the stage. “God sent me to tell you to repent or he’ll destroy Vegas!”

Vic joined the cacophony of boos as the outraged patrons expressed their displeasure.

“Get that jagoff off the stage, for fug zake!” shrilled Wanda as the goons were doing just that.

To Wanda's amazement, a rumble and a floor-heaving wave knocked every table free of glasses which shattered on the floor joining several befuddled patrons. Adding to the din were the high pitched screams of the patrons as they ran toward the exits.

"Da fuh?!" blurted Wanda. Vic decisively grabbed Wanda's wrist, and dragged her toward a little-used exit at a wing of the stage.

"Come on, we're getting the hell outta here!" he shouted as they beat the surging throng to the exit sign.

To the blare of the emergency alarm, Vic dramatically and needlessly kicked open the door and pulled Wanda outside.

Pushed along by the crowd, which included the emcee, a buffoonish comedy duo, and the half-naked dancing girls, Vic and Wanda emerged into an alley lit at two in the morning as bright as day by a sky on fire.

Propelled by the stampeding crowd, they passed a seated, bruised, and crying Joe to merge with similar throngs from other nearby clubs and from the casinos.

Wanda's newborn fawn-like progress in her stiletto heels eventually left them trailing the fleeing pack of fellow Vegas veterans.

Passing a patio lounge, Vic abruptly yanked Wanda over to an empty table, "Might as well prepare for the end," he laughed, spinning Wanda into the seat across the table from him.

"Three whiskies!" he yelled at the distracted waitress, holding a hundred dollar bill aloft. As soon as the drinks were delivered to the center of the table, he downed one, and dragged one in front of himself while slipping two fifty dollar chips into the waitress's sweaty palm as she frightenedly eyed the roaring chasm opening outside the patio, which swallowed the street, all its cars, and the sidewalk and most of the crowd.

Joe skidded to a halt that would have impressed any animated Warner Brothers character, nervously eyed the victims in the pit, and waved his arms to steady his skirting of the gaping maw.

The sea lion from earlier in our tale scampered up the gang plank onto the deck of Joe's research ship just ahead of the magma hissing evilly as it met the sea, and just in time for Joe to put the hammer down and head out to open ocean.