

THE PROMISE TO DELIVER

Cocaine had already killed Ralph, at least his body, for all that remained was a voice and his eyes. The three-ton clay bed vibrated with an institutional hum, supposedly preventing the oozing bedsores that wracked his once perfect physique. The drug had filled his mind with power, its greed havoc in his judgment, and a California gun-store owner had been quicker on the draw.

A bullet lodged in his vertebrae held him stillborn, while the law looked for others of his kind, leaving his carcass to rot like a seal on an iceflow. During the years he'd been missing, I presumed the Cartel had executed him for ronin trafficking, but a Federal Prison Hospital kept him chained despite his paraplegic state. After all therapy failed a California Judge released him to Hawaii to vegetate in meditation on the remains of his errant life.

Newspapers throughout the Islands carried a five-edition, front-page story on Lahaina's Global Coke Connection, and the legitimacy of Ralph's legend became apparent. Amazed as I was with the vast empire he directed, I'd always known him capable of such monstrous feats. Only his criminal mind lurked on as his body slowly shriveled away...but he was still capable of terrifying evil and manipulation of entire worlds. He'd crossed the line long ago. Moral fiber was not on his menu.

He'd been taken into a fraternity far beyond my comprehension. In dark Bogota chambers, faceless mafiosi observed his initiation. Two long, white lines on the ornate table in Papa Grande's chambers spoke worlds...heroin for death or cocaine for life. He snorted them both and sneered to await his fate, only to hear quiet applause and acceptance. Then he became a viper and knew no fear...a rare and deadly creature.

Oh, he'd changed since then alright, in body, mind, and method. Stripped of physical form, his solitary digression now sought vengeance on an uncaring world, and knew no bounds in retribution. From the moment I laid eyes on him that day, I considered him the most dangerous man on earth.

No longer young and darkly handsome, he was withered and stone cold. We'd been formed by drugs together and our thoughts were linked like twins. I could see clearly into his soul through those vapid eyes, but when I peered into their depths, I found no bottom. Covered with goose bumps and a heartache I couldn't fathom, I glanced quickly away.

How in the world had this sensitive prince of psychedelphia been transformed into such a diabolical creature? I was to discover his special path of degeneration myself, taking cocaine's promise as truth, entreating from

its proviso the hoped-for payoff it professed to deliver...nearly joining him where he waits now with the rest moaning in that quiescent nether. Shortly after my visit, he committed suicide with a massive overdose.

Taking a parting gift from him, I rode a roller coaster of intensity equal to my whole progression over the rainbow, for at this stage anything was possible, but in greater power and at an enhanced pace. I was past the high point of its arc now, curving back toward earth with gravity's aid like the rest of my late pals. That last chaotic transit took me through an off-colored Maui of far different dimensions than the one of my naive beginnings. Like voyagers before me, I came to realize why they hadn't come out to play.

This wasn't magic! It was utter sensation...raw, electric, and stultifying...more exhilarating than life itself! My initiation to shooting pure cocaine and the empowerment it offered beyond the dreamworld of smack probably only lasted a month, but it twisted me around like an exorcist, almost taking my life, and leaving me a different kind of cripple than my pal...possibly in worse condition than him.

Lisa shuddered when introduced to Ralph. His forehead seemed to pulse, and his body just a prop for this talking head before us. He accepted my offering of Mama-san's China white, muttering compliments on Lisa's beauty, while his atrophied hands shook through the motions of fixing a syringe and getting it into a vein with the help of balancing bars and counterweights.

Syndicate figures who paid tribute to their godfather told the real story. Dark forces were drawn from all quarters as if to a spectral magnet through some global mandate's sine qua non...his word now life and death...thoughts merciless, out of reach, and utterly reprobate.

He was operating past all restraint, abandoned by God and any link to possible enlightenment, all life's promises broken. He had nowhere to go and nothing to fear...a pariah unto his own self-loathing. His very existence gave me the horrors as I grasped his state of mind, and once I'd done so, he smiled in simple recognition. We knew each other too well to say any more, and let it go at that.

The grin...I'd seen it on Shelley as he'd peered into his mirror. It was the Devil gazing upon Himself. The syphilitic ulcer that gnawed like a rat on Shelley's spine resembled at its festering edges the bedsores which now covered my friend. I sat on the floor in moot fear of what I beheld, and a welling sorrow nearly choked me. We both knew he wasn't gonna stick around...

He barely talked about the robbery or the slug in his neck, but when he did, it was in terms I could appreciate, concerning a phenomenon we both recognized, that flash of light near the afterlife we'd come so close to in our

experiments. He couldn't wait to get back there, he said, and was bored with the maintenance mission of "getting off," eliminating, and eating.

What a bunch of wasted energy he proclaimed to Lisa, who was quite incapable of this level of thinking. She coyly giggled when he claimed to be the greatest "tongue fuck" in the world. She could follow this much and looked at me for an answer. If it made them happy, I was all for it.

Ours was a friendship of immeasurable looks that spirits convey their feelings with, and chuckling at my approval he pointed to a clay pot and a box of needles. "Premiere uno de Presidente di Bolivia," he smiled, "the finest cocaine in the world." Without preamble, I crossed the last barrier to my ultimate madness. I shot my first cocaine in the corner of his dungeon, near the transformer and electrical connections to his artificial world...entering my own, while Lisa smiled down, legs spread and pussy open, from his bed tray holding the rubbery head with his best organ, that priapic tongue which gave her so much pleasure she squirted all over him.

"Wheeeesh!" My voice came out in whistled distortion, "This stuff's unreal!"

He turned from the fun he was having to grin. "It'll catch ya if it can." I knew from his trite warning that this was what had killed him. The rush of sensation came on like an orgasm at the center of my being, leaving an observing mind clear witness.

Here was an extraordinary formula, allowing your ego a real part in the play. It operated with reason geared to sensation, and permitted a stretching of altered states past all built-in limits. It was essential psychosis...and I recognized this immediately, yet prepared larger doses like a scientist gone berserk in his lab at first inkling of some great discovery.

Moment by moment it grew on me, faster and more furious than anything in my life...a compendium of all I stood for or could get away with, and a double gemini's wet dream! It wasn't at all like the fantasy world of heroin...more a monstrous exaggeration of the entire scheme of things. Like monkeys pulling levers in experiments with pleasure center stimuli, I'd probably keep this up 'til I died, reason hard pressed to stop me.

The taste in my mouth as I pushed the plunger was equal to the rush up my back, and sound warbled in an arrayal like a symphony in the sky. This was no dream state or hallucination...just the rush of your very essence multiplied in proportion to the amount you put into a vein.

A gaggle of ducks quacked over the edge of the universe off to my left, and my jeans hissed when I touched them. Wow, no wonder these guys scoffed at sniffing coke, you were supposed to shoot this stuff! Exposed to its full force, I sensed for all the throbbing promise, it might turn the exponential power of your mind against your very existence.

I laughed at first...and cried later.

He gave me a rock the size of an apple, and I put this pink boulder in my saddlebags and thanked him in exit, as shrouded vapors closed around the miasma he would die in. Waiting in the corridor hovered the scourge of society...hit men, dealers, and power brokers intent upon his blessing.

I shuddered once and shook off the memory of my visit, but not the affliction I carried with me...a seemingly dormant gift from the Devil himself, my once-closest friend, now the Dark Lord, loose in his nightmare. For this introduction to the lie that nearly killed me, even with his warning, I forgive him in memoriam.

We are responsible for our decisions, be it in a car, with a gun, or through abuse of substance supplied us by God or the Devil. There's no one else to blame. I went straight on my way with an imprint so similar to his it scares me. I just didn't get shot, kill anyone else, and got stopped before I died. The roll began there, and I was on its steep side from the start. It wouldn't take long to hit bottom.

The world glistened in a brilliance I hadn't noticed before...an almost surreal sheen. The Harley sounded like a rocket ship, its chrome tingled to my touch, and on the slippery ocean beyond, whales blew clouds of mist over a glassine surface of unprecedented clarity.

I laughed through the tunnels halfway to Lahaina, and pulled over to try another hit in the daylight. Balanced on cliffs above the roaring surf, I registered a good-sized shot from the bottle of liquid I'd prepared. Sure enough, the waves all lined up and hissed at me, while the warmth of a thousand suns went up my spine and infinity lapped on its shores. This was the greatest...simply the cat's meow!

I hit myself again and the patterns increased, my heart along with them, and guessed with each bigger dose they'd dance faster until, entering Shiva's electric whirl, I'd become part and parcel to return no more. That's what cocaine became for me, a game of roulette to look closer and closer at the Divine Ground without quite entering it...a delicate balancing act to be sure.

It's in no way a sacrament...actually the most unspiritual drug I know of. The only way to use that word with cocaine is in reference to its finality...for the only Holy power you hold is life and death each time you slam it home. The rest is dosage, cut, accumulation, and pure chance.

My steel stallion swept through a glowing sunset painted with feathery rainbows, while Lisa held me tighter, frightened by what she'd seen, remaining with her choice...the other dream we shared. Idling like a rumbling cannon, the bike trundled past the old fort down Prison Street and under the sprawling banyan tree at the harbor. I turned the vibrating beast off in front of the bar at the Pioneer Inn and wobbled past the carved whaler, life-sized

and leaning at the doorway, into the lopsided bathroom to take a monstrous whiz.

Where in former times, salt-encrusted seamen had rowdied with naked natives amidst harpoons, kegs, and blubber pots, now leather-covered hooligans drank in raucous discord, fighting amongst themselves. If only I could be witness to all the carved whaler had seen, I wished, but current events with my sexual sirens and this throng of trolls precluded daydreams. Lisa and I tooted a few lines near the Carthaginian, an old whaling ship tethered in time and skirted with years of seaweed.

Keeping an eye on my machine from the bar, I tossed down vodka tonics maintaining a droll appearance among the surly inebriants around us, chuckling how different things would be if they knew there was fifty-grand in smack and flake in my saddlebags. As it was, several were drooling over Lisa already, and I fiddled with the Colt for comfort. I leaned out the door with the phone cupped to my ear, hoping to get the latest news from the 86 Club.

The old wooden sailor grinned at me as Herod assured me all was well. An inticingly slinky blonde approached, and I bowed to let her by, but she took up the other phone and leaned out like me, and the peg-legged seaman, and grinned in mimicked posture. I watched her near-naked movements in a sequined top and leather skirt slit right up to her quim, and poured a pile of coke directly on her open palm. She giggled and got it all over her face.

I tried to listen to Herod's story about some bozo they'd taken hostage in their pot patch, but it was all I could do to watch this creature's pulsing beaver beside me. Before she squirmed her little buns back inside, she purred something about seeing me at the party.

Sliding back to my station at the bar, I scanned the room to find her with the leaders of this renegade clutch of mongoloids, scraping and pawing at her like drooling Huns in another rowdy tavern I'd known. Lisa, meanwhile, had taken up with some cross-bred cretin by the name of Shank, which I wrongly presumed meant he was a knife expert. When she told him we were in the bungalow by the Sheraton's pool, my eyes rolled, and I gave her signals to go pee-pee right away.

Shit, that's all I needed, a Shank in my life right now! I scolded her all the way back. Couldn't these dumb chicks perceive culture, class, and dignity...and the difference between common and cosmic sex? Besides they mostly thought with their cunts, and that meant trouble every goddam time!

As if this wasn't enough for one evening, we got to the bungalow, and it was obvious something was underway in our bed. Lisa and I crept closer to hear Myra moaning her way to another first orgasm. I slit the screen and moved the curtain slightly so we could see, and there she was, going at it hot and heavy with the lifeguard from the pool.

We realized it was making us pretty horny. I quietly

made a pad of damp towels, which Lisa kneeled on with her skirt flipped over her back. With my second or third thrust we came in a mutual heartbeat. Then I pounded on the front door, sending Don Juan fleeing naked into the night. We pounced on Myra, tied her up, and tortured her until we couldn't play anymore and fell into a deep sleep.

The lifeguard couldn't keep his cool by the pool in the morning, and we kept a waitress constantly circling for vodka tonics, while the girls flirted coyly, and I feigned total ignorance. The phone call from Ralph disturbed an otherwise idyllic day, for whether I wanted to or not I'd promised him assistance.

So off to the airport I went on the scooter only to find a huge box at the freight office. What the fuck, over? I couldn't leave the Harley unguarded so I gave the clerk ten bucks to strap the crate on my back as I sat balanced on the machine. I had no idea what I'd do at the other end, and fell over in a heap at Ralph's when I stopped.

If I'd known what was in it I would've hired an armed escort but that's another story. I ended up at the Pioneer coming down from that hairy delivery with about ten doubles and a few trips to the john for snorts. What a fuckhead my friend had turned into...I could've been killed for those kilos of coke in a heartbeat!

I worked myself into a drunken rage, and that's how I got in the drag race down Front Street that'll be remembered for years. The guy I beat insisted on buying some more rounds, so we went back and drank ourselves into oblivion. The coke must have tricked me for I was close to the blackout stage, but took no notice...or who was at the wheel.

Hundreds of cycles were converging on the docks as I blazed off for the girls, almost dropping my machine when it broke loose as I gunned out of town. I was so screwed up it was unreal! I wasn't totally gonzo, as I spotted the Harley near my bungalow before getting off the highway, and coasted across the golf course in the early darkness to creep up on the slit in the screen.

They call him Shank for other reasons than weapons, but beyond the size of his schlong, it was a delicate stab of pain I felt watching the way the girls moved with whomever was at hand that sent me away. It wasn't jealousy. I just went looking for the blonde at the payphone. As I tore through the night, leaving them felt better and better, they were trouble waiting to happen, and were costing too much anyway.

The gathered mass of tattoos and beards had begun to gain momentum, and I immediately gobbled some codeine to ease the pain of such company. I knew some of them, and there were comments about my string of ears and automatic weapons. When everyone was thoroughly ripped, we started the machines in a cacophonous blaze of fire, and proceeded to terrorize Front Street both ways, several-hundred strong, before

setting out on the run to the party at an old sugar mill in the middle of the island.

We swept in a mile-long formation through the tunnels and along the coastline in the moonlight...insulated in leather, smoke, and the aura of our thundering herd. Like stalking gooks in the jungle, it was one of life's specially fabricated moments. My bottle of black Johnnie kept me warm, and the codeine kept pain and thoughts of unfaithful women at bay, as I concentrated on my sequined target somewhere up ahead.

I didn't get what I went for, and was escorted off by several unfriendly sorts at gunpoint after getting my throat raggedly cut by some chosen bodyguard with a dull knife. Evidently these furry beasts thought it wrong of me to pull the lead singer off stage...there being no time to explain that their jewel and I were previously engaged at a payphone. Nothing could straighten things out...and I think my auto-pilot kicked on about then, for I remember little of my departure from their ranks.

I do recall portions of my ride through the canefields, alone and not giving a fuck...but it's what I did out there that shocks me. Somewhere near the silver slurry of an irrigation flume's outfall, I slammed the first shots of my short excursion into Belushi's favorite combo, the speedball.

Erratic, massive doses of heroin and cocaine were mixed by moonlight in a cut-off soda can, and shot with a bent needle sharpened on a matchbook. Then they came...gooks in the swaying cane, a patrol in black pajamas, and other phantoms I shot as I slithered away. There are lucid stages of that ride past the pin on the speedo, a series of vibrations where I thought the bike would come apart, and finally clear sailing at a speed unknown before, not even on Honda's Suzuka Circuit. I wasn't running from anything, or to anything...it's just that nothing mattered.

In the morning, my rear view mirrors and one whole exhaust manifold were missing, but it wasn't 'til I tried to get my shirt off that I noticed caked blood around the scratched cut stretching from ear to ear. I sat in the tiny cabin I'd found at the end of Ulupalakua and inspected huge welts on my arms where I'd stabbed around, missing veins entirely. I tried to put peices of the puzzle together. Where were the girls and the blonde who'd jumped offstage to ride away with me?

I downed the rest of the Scotch and pain pills, connected with a few good speedballs, and headed, without thought, for the docks and home. I checked the machine on the barge to the big island, and caught a cab to the airport with my saddlebags over my shoulder. Fuck the girls, the nightriders, and those gooks in the canefield!

People cut a wide berth around me as I glared through eyes of a madman. When I awoke, the plane was on the lava flows of Kona and there was the '86 Club limo, an escort of

iron horses, and Iris to hide me. It wouldn't have mattered if I crawled under a rock in the Himalayas. There was no way out...wherever you go there you are.