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THE COLLISION

by William C. Anderson

It all started when we were driving along the famous Las Vegas Strip, gazing goggle-eyed at the lush hotels that had sprung up like toadstools in a cow pasture since our last visit to Sin City.

Coming to Caesar's Palace, I decided to make a lap through the driveway, just to see how this old testimony to man's debauchery was holding up. I reined Rocinante off the street and turned into the fountain-splashed driveway that leads to the hotel. While the distaff ogled the fountain statuary that guards the lush grounds in various states of undress, we cruised by the front portals. I was just turning back on the curving exit road when the crash came. It was a jolting, neck-snapping impact that seemed to have its origin somewhere in Rocinante's posterior section.

I slammed on the brakes, stopped and quickly checked my copilot for injuries. Finding none, I told Dortha to stay in the motorhome, then dismounted with blood in my eye.

I found myself face to vest pocket with a massive, rough-hewn gentleman, who had also dismounted from his steed — a very large Cadillac. The Caddy, unhappily, had just completed a merger with the rear end of Rocinante. I suddenly found my right hand in an embrace with a warm, moist vice. I looked up past an expensive Cuban cigar, into a pair of brown, bloodshot eyes that seemed to be afflicted with a slight focusing problem.

"Name's Flannigan," said deep-voiced words that had obviously been well marinated in Scotch. "Ah'm in oil."

"Correction, my friend," I said, figuring under the circumstances the best defense was a good offense, "you're in hot water."

I received a stunning slap on the back. "That's what ah like. A sense of humor. Always like to run into a man with a sense of humor."

"I'm very sorry," I said humorously, "that you had to run into this one." I went back to survey the damage. Rocinante's right rear had been violated by the rear bumper of the Cadillac, resulting in a

large, gaping hole. A puddle was forming under the rear wheel, signifying our motorhome had suffered a compound fracture of the water tank, accompanied by severe lacerations. I resisted the urge to bend down and apply a tourniquet to the afflicted artery. "Look what you've done to our home," I said. "It's leaking."

"Sho 'nuff," said the man, laboriously getting down on all fours to survey the damage. "Ah trust that's water."

"Fortunately it is. The sewer tank is on the other side of the coach."

"Glory be!" he said, standing up. "We've always got something to be thankful fo'." I found a beefy arm had encircled my shoulders. "Mah good man, ah'm sure this whole affair can be handled to your satisfaction. It is obvious that ah was backin' out of mah parkin' place in too much of a hurry. Ah accept the blame fo' the whole incident."

"I scarcely call it an incident," I said, choking on the Cuban incinerator that was burning near my nose. "I have just traveled 8,000 miles, over the Canadian Rockies, only to get done in by a drunk in front of a 'Lost Wages' gambling den."

"Now, mah good man." The hand belonging to the beefy arm around my shoulder started patting. "Ah know exactly how you feel. But ah want to show you something." He removed his stogie and used it to point in the direction of his car. "See that?" I sighted along his cigar in the direction indicated. I noticed the blonde coiffured head in the front seat of his Cadillac. It was trying to burrow down inconspicuously into the collar of an elegant mink coat. "That," said the man in a confidential tone, "is not my wife."

"That's too bad," I said.

"Ain't it, though," he said sadly. He gave me a kittenish gouge in the kidneys with his elbow. "And ah'm not too sure mah wife would understand what she's doin' in that mink coat I just bought her."

"Some wives," I said, massaging the hole in my

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