

My Vegas Nightmare

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It was a balmy, neon-flooded night in a seedy little corner of a town called, Las Vegas. The city of lovers, winners and losers. The playground of America.

I was one of the thousands crawling the palm tree-lined streets in search of some excitement. If I'd only known...

After sampling complimentary rum and cokes at several well-known gambling joints, I found myself walking in the area commonly referred to as "downtown." I hadn't noticed the sporty sunglasses still perched across the bridge of my slightly reddened nose. They spared my ocular orbs from squinting at the screaming neon, for my path was as brightly lit as Arizona at high noon in July.

I recall the clanking of coins ringing rudely and the shrill blaring of the slot sirens. Suddenly, I felt a chilling grip on my spine. I stopped dead. Blinking widely, I scanned the area. What was it? My nostrils flared with the alert caution of an animal that had just caught the scent of danger. What was it? Then I heard it again...

There was a shattering, blood-freezing scream piercing the hot, heavy air like a soldering iron through a tub of Ben & Jerry's. I jumped and found myself sprinting up the sidewalk toward the cold heart of "Glitter Gulch" like a scared action star. Against every iota of common sense I possessed, I tried to locate the source of that horrible cry, never thinking how awful the discovery could actually be.

The street was bustling with wide-eyed tourists and weary locals, yet no one appeared to have noticed the hideous howl. After running about eleven feet I stopped short, breathing heavily from the unaccustomed exertion. Sweat rivulets left a salty, gritty trail down the left side of my face, trickling to my shirt collar. *That'll stain*, I muttered under my breath.

Looking around once again, I couldn't believe no one had heard that chilling cry, no one had noticed. Was I going mad? Was the heat baking what brain cells alcohol hadn't yet killed? No! I was sure I had heard that soul-wrenching wail.

Continuing my dogged pursuit, I had only made it another half block or so and I pulled up short, again. I was wrong. Others had heard. There was a crowd slowly gathering outside a small, glistening, noise-infested gaming house.

I noticed the casino was open to the street, beckoning, prostituting herself to every passerby willing to pay. It was in this open area that everyone seemed to be drawn.

Breathing raggedly, this time from the fear gnawing at my gut, I pushed my way impatiently through the growing wall of on-lookers. Immediately the sheer horror of the scene filled me with nausea. I became dizzy, swaying in front of the image before me. I just couldn't believe my eyes. I still can't...

There, at the foot of a hulking, shrieking, menacing one-armed bandit lay another tragic tourist-victim of the Vegas Jackpot, and the tax man cometh...