

Empty Luck

by
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CHAPTER 1

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Money is the lifeblood of Las Vegas and Tommy Sullivan was bleeding out.

He threw his losing cards onto the felt and muttered “Fuck this,” before storming out of the Silver Comet poker room.

Tommy wasn’t good at much, but he believed he was good at poker. At a card table, he was king. An aggressive bettor, he usually pushed the other players around, but today, they didn’t back down and instead, turned him into a pauper. It was intolerable.

Out in the main casino, he shoved his way through the noise and the crowd and escaped to a quiet bathroom stall. He didn’t need the bathroom, only the silent isolation it afforded. Fully clothed, he sat down on the seat and tried to collect himself.

Not long after settling there, he heard someone enter the stall to his left. A mossy cigar smell filled the air and Tommy wrinkled his nose, turning away from the pungent odor.

With a shake of his head, he glanced down at the

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man's black wingtip shoes that poked out from under a pair of deep blue dress pants. *Just some rich fuck taking a bathroom break*, he thought.

A series of grunts followed by heavy labored breathing emanated from the man. That was enough. Tommy started to leave. But then, as the man's pants fell to the floor, Tommy heard a whoosh and saw a fat black wallet drop to the tile.

He stared at the wallet and his breath quickened. Nothing happened for a moment. The man did not seem to notice it lying there. Then, like a snake seizing its prey, Tommy's left hand shot out and snatched it up, pulling it into his lap. There was no reaction from the owner. Cradling it in both hands, Tommy squeezed the soft leather, testing its heft. His eyes wide, he opened it to reveal a thick sheaf of hundred dollar bills.

Whoa! Any second this guy will notice. Put it back, he thought, but he could not let go of it. *What if I keep it? He won't know. Hell, he can afford it.* Hurrying, Tommy closed the wallet, stood up, and shoved it into his back pocket. A moment later, he bolted from the stall.

In the bright bathroom glare, he glanced once at his flushed face in the mirror and ran out into the lively casino. There he stopped and looked around. Gamblers and waitresses scurried past him. Excited tourists rushed by. The place was abuzz with people talking loudly and having fun. No one paid any attention to him.

The wallet felt like a heavy stone in his pocket, pressing against him, prodding him forward. *I could still give it back. No, he rationalized, I already took it.* He felt a powerful urge to look again at the money. *Not here. They have cameras. Plus the guy could come out any minute. Get outta here right now!*

He walked quickly to an exit and down a long carpeted hallway. The abstract red, yellow, and orange rug screamed at him. *Hurry!* At the end of the hall, he came to an elevator for the parking garage.

Standing there alone and breathing hard, he tapped his right hip rapidly and watched the floor indicator move at a glacial pace. At last, the elevator door opened and he rushed into the cab. He was surrounded by mirrors. Everywhere he turned, he saw his stocky body bobbing back and forth, his arms twitching. The shock of red hair on his head looked like fire above his black clothes. As the door opened, his arms tensed, ready to battle anyone who might confront him.

Fighting came naturally to Tommy. Throughout his childhood, he fought with his father. In school, he bullied other boys and disobeyed his teachers. Then in his teens, he fought with his girlfriend and later, he fought with his boss. For Tommy, life was a battlefield.

At the third floor, he dashed out into the concrete stillness of the cool, dark parking garage. When a distant car started up on another floor, he jumped and quickened

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his pace. His eyes darted everywhere, scanning the wide space. With no one in sight, he rushed up to his rented Ford Fiesta and unlocked the door.

Sitting down in the driver's seat, he exhaled a big breath. A tremor ran through his arms and he put both hands on the steering wheel to steady himself. He could smell the sweat under his clothes.

In the tight confines of the small car, he twisted around and pulled the wallet out of his back pocket. Opening it again, he saw the money and felt a tightening in his chest. He took a deep breath. *This is trouble*, he thought, but he shoved that thought aside. *It's yours*.

He removed the wad of currency. It looked to be all hundred dollar bills. He counted three thousand, three hundred dollars. Staring at the money, he said aloud, "These are the spoils of war." He separated ten bills, a thousand dollars, and put that in his own wallet. The rest went back into the man's wallet. He started to lock the stolen wallet in the glove compartment when he stopped, curious to know more.

He opened it again and riffled through cards and photos, extracting the owner's license. It showed a dark haired man named Fausto D'Angelo, a Nevada resident, date of birth June 6, 1938. Brown eyes, it read, and five feet eight inches tall.

Tommy studied the photo for a moment. *All right, this is the man whose money you stole. Fuck him. It's mine now.*

He put the license back, closed the wallet, and this time locked it in the glove compartment. He swallowed hard and took a deep breath. He was a gladiator, a conqueror, defeating a powerful enemy.

Ricky, my choir boy brother, would never have the balls to do this.