

The Fucking Policia!

By Brian Murphy

Maybe it was the girls: every shape – long, tall, movie star tits, fashion magazine faces, street hustle smiles, angelic, demonic, flat out ugly, pimpin', deluxe, princess perfect and step-sister red haired – the girls. Everywhere. Maybe the casino sounds were dim and colorless because of the girls. There was more rush and tremble – stomach somersaulting from 'quick, shaky, elevator-like' to 'rollercoaster wild', but that was all the nervous connection your stomach was making from the visuals of all that flesh, not the closeness of the casino tables.

They were all fixed anyways. Central American-style. Nothing Vegas about the small casino at the Del-Rey. Maybe down the street at the Gran Hotel – big and spacious, without the girls. But the Del-Rey was girls. And soft color. Girls everywhere at 8:00 p.m. This was girl's corner.

The Del-Rey, San Jose, Costa Rica. Safe. All the girls' check in at the front. Any of them who had police trouble wouldn't get in. Not unless they'd sorted it out or had different identification cards.

The Del-Rey. Fifteen bucks back up the elevator to your room, then whatever the girl charged.

Sal watched. First, through the window at the cigar hustlers. The too-expensive coke pushers. The girls who couldn't get inside and worked the corner, preying on drunk gringo's stumbling out of cabs or out the doors of the Del-Rey. Then his eyes swept the bar. He sat with his back to the wall. It was something he always did, whenever he had to spend time in public places, a habit which usually annoyed people he was out with. He was sure that getting killed would probably annoy them more.

He soaked up the street comedy – the drama. Waving sinisterly at a few transsexuals who winked at him, then followed two fat, cigar-chewing, waddling gringos like wolves. Boxing them in and pulling them along, moving them further from civilization and the safety of that corner - drawing them like magnets towards the park.

Dumb fucking tourists. They'd get their surprise, then a beating, and stumble back towards the Del-Rey, if they were lucky enough to find it, bloody, sore and wallet-less. After making a report to sneering Polica, they'd have to come up with some story for their wives' at home – some lame reason to explain why they weren't already at their hotel in Quapos on the coast where they had a fishing arrangement with a captain of a sport-fishing rig.

Sal looked over his shoulder at the backside of the roulette table. One of the whores, a coffee and crème complected Dominicana was whistling and slapping her financier, a goofy looking middle age gringo who had a wall to wall smile. Maybe he was trying to remember the minute as if his life depended on the memory - and it probably did, Sal thought, grinning to himself. It probably did. Something he could tell the other slobs at the office.

Sal shook his head back, like a thoroughbred did before allowing the jockey to maneuver him into the shoot. A black, jagged mane of hair sailed free through the cigar and cigarette smoke-filled air, landing on his tattooed shoulders, covering the pictures and the muscle that made up the top layer of his back.

He tossed down a shot of tequila, still keeping his eye on the Dominicana. She had started to lean forward to grab at her pile of winning chips. Looking up, she smiled at Sal. He still held the empty shot glass in his hand alongside his chin, one finger that wasn't wrapped around the glass, pointing in her direction. She set her chin down into the hollow of her neck and looked at how much tit she'd allowed her blouse to fall away from. With one hand still pulling chips towards her, her other hand pushed against the bottom of her breast, sending the fat, dark nipple out from behind the flimsy purple cotton so Sal could see it. He brought that hand with the shot glass to his lips and kissed his fingers. She laughed.

Tapping his foot to the Stones tune, *Moonlight Mile*, he set the shot glass down, took a swig of Heineken, then pulled the filter off a cigarette with his teeth. He expertly spit it across his table, landing it standing up alongside the wall under the window he'd been looking through for the last half an hour. He then lit the cigarette with a stick match and flicked the match towards two tall blondes who were slowly making their way to his table, navigating their stiletto heels around broken glass and crumpled paper objects that littered the bar room floor.

He kept singing along with The Stones, ignoring them both. They had made a bet with another of their friends, who was now watching them from where she stood at the bar. He'd already noticed the three earlier. He wished that it had been the brunette on her way over, not these blondes. Talking out the side of his mouth, out through lips curled up in more a snarl than a smile, he told them in Spanish that he hated blondes.

Rubio – no mi gusta.

They had a bet. Which of the two would pull the handsome gringo. Now it was obvious that just getting him to buy them beers would be difficult enough. Getting him to purchase services suddenly began to seem impossible.

Shakita, the tall beauty at the bar with the ink black hair, smiled like her horse had just come in at the track. Earlier, after watching Sal turn down six or seven girls of varying beauty, shooing them away, the blondes had laughed at Shakita and then practically in unison had chirped that it would be like stealing candy from a baby – getting the gringo to fall for their charms, as they both were surely the finest woman at the bar that night.

Lean and muscled, he was definitely not the average gringo on vacation. In fact, he wasn't on vacation at all. If any of the girls had watched him earlier, pulling up to the parking lot across the street from the Del-Rey on his chopped Harley Sturgis, they wouldn't have even bothered with the bet. He wasn't at the Del-Rey looking for a woman to buy.

Now, up close, these two who had just sat down and ordered their own drinks from the waitress could see that there was no desire – nothing anxious or foolish in his eyes. The pupils were wild and dilated, taking his eyes and the rest of him, far away from the Del-Rey. Waiting. He was waiting for something. Not a woman. They could see for themselves now how Shakita had tricked them. They could see now that this gringo didn't pay for his women. They were not oblivious to the street or to its warriors, and here - before their own two eyes - sat a prince of warriors - a very self contained man. Dangerous. Shakita must have known this.

That was okay. The night was still young and it was true - they were two of the most desirable women to ever come into the Del-Rey. They were hundred dollar girls. Even Shakita had a hard time demanding that much money.

They decided to sit and see what it was that he was waiting for. When their drinks came he made no move to pay. He looked over their heads at Shakita. Raising his beer bottle, he silently toasted her wasted mischief. These two at the table? They had lost their bet.

Before Sal could order another beer, or tell another joke to the two blondes who had finally been joined by Shakita...outside on the busy street, just coming into view, a red Chevy Caprice rolled up.

There were four dark shapes bouncing their heads in time to what Sal figured would be reggae – probably Bob Marley - *No Woman, No Cry*.

Taking a small baggie out from his leather vest side pocket, he reached for a straw on the table and flicked open a switchblade knife, cutting it in half as he slowly stood. With his back to the bar, looking intently out of the window - hoping the boys would look over at the building and see him, he stuck the small straw into the opened bag and dug it in deep, up to his knuckles. The entire straw packed with cocaine. Out it came.

He brushed off his hands, knocking stuck powder and small rocks back into the bag. He stashed it in the vest pocket and brought the straw up to his nose. One finger on the bottom and the rest of the straw now inside his one good nostril, he shotgunned the load of coke, popping his finger off the straw as the coke sailed up into his head. Stumbling backwards a few inches, leather slanted heels from his Lizard boots scrapping the floor, his head shot back while he gagged, almost tossing coke, snot, and Heineken out from his throat. He started to cough. “Smooth! Fucking A.”

His eyes teared and his nose screamed. Pushing back the hair that tangled wetly to his forehead, he smiled at the ladies then grabbed his pack of cigarettes from the table. Still holding his hair in the back, he balled it up in his one hand while he wiped sweat from his brow and started towards the side door. The leather vest tilted up from his tight Levis, leaving a swatch of back naked. Along his lower spine ran an angry, knuckle-tight white scar with a darker hole in the middle. A hole in his back from when he left his back open. Open to trust. To poor choices. He let loose the bunch of hair he’d been holding.

The three ladies watched him leave, six sets of eyes following the swing and swish of his ass and the snake-like movement of tight back muscles as he stomped pointed cowboy boot toes outward and pounded the hard heels against the tiled floor.

Shakita knew she’d remember this gringo – the tattoos, the fine lines webbing out from eyes as big as houses. Eyes ringed with dark circles, blending down on high cheekbones. Remember his tall lean body. But most of all, she’d remember the smile that broke off at the corner of upturned lips and ended in a snarl that seemed to challenge the world, that seemed to tell the world that he’d already seen enough and dared just one motherfucker to try and show him something different.

The two chubby tourists that had followed the transsexuals stumbled past Sal as he stopped at the curb to light a cigarette. They were both bleeding from the face, dripping scarlet reminders all over their Polo shirts. Police sirens sounded somewhere around the corner. Sal pounded on the roof of the Caprice. The driver’s side back door opened up, letting out slow, rhythmic beats. Jimmy Cliff - *The Harder They Come*.

Leaning on the Chevy roof, Sal screamed out at a young kid sitting in the lot across the street. He told the kid in Spanish that he'd be back in a couple of hours and to make sure he stayed by the Harley. The kid's toothless mouth opened in a grin. He shook his head up and down. The gringo had always made it worth his while. He'd stay with that bike hours, days – it didn't matter. The gringo was a prince. He was royalty. He'd given the kid several fat joints – not the shit they sold on the streets. This stuff had gotten the kid so high already that he almost started crying as he prayed to his saints to help him come down. Fuck it, he'd wait forever.

Sal jumped in the back seat and the car took off before he could shut the back door. Ernie, the driver - a broad shouldered mountain of muscle and ugly vengeance - turned the tape player down. Jimmy Cliff got quiet. They all spoke in Spanish. The four black men were Columbians from Bienventurra, on the Atlantic side. They were what Sal called his Sweet Mountains of Anger...his Ready Kill Boys.

“Where the fuck is Patrick?”

Ernie braked for two whores, drunk and fighting in the middle of the street. David, his partner next to him, reached his long arm out the window and smacked one of the girls on her tight ass. She howled and spun around as Ernie swerved and hit the gas. The car resonated with: “Fuckin' dickhead.” Everyone in the car laughed.

Ernie lighted a fat bomber, took a deep pull, then passed it to David.

“Mon, Patrick he gonna see you at the American Mall. Alajulita, mon. You can go drink at the American Bar there. He be coming. Maybe he there already, mon.”

Sal was digging the straw into his bag of coke. He did another shotgun, screamed “Whooooooweee!!” and handed the straw and bag to Seguro, the huge man next to him.

For a second, Sal wondered about Patrick, about all the trouble they both suddenly seemed to be having back in Alajuala, but that was seconds. Then the coke hit him somewhere in the back of his brain.

He was pressed so hard against the rear door from Seguro's massive shoulders, that after the blast, he thought his lungs would cave in. He opened the window all the way down and hitched himself up in the seat. Finally, he had his left shoulder and head out the window so that he could breath.

He could see Ernie watching him in his side mirror, smiling a mouthful of gold that sparkled from headlights behind. Seguro passed the bag of coke to the man sitting next to him.

This one – Apache - a little smaller than the rest of the four, started to sing as he grabbed the baggie. All together, Sal figured, there must be close to a thousand pounds of muscle in the car. He and Apache were the smallest men there. Size had nothing to do with courage, Sal always reminded himself. It's what he told the lifeless bodies of the two convicts he'd killed while locked up.

Seguro started to howl after that hit of coke made its connection with his brain. Apache joined in. The car was loud with noise. Maybe it was louder with the buzz and hum that is the electrical storm of five dangerous men together in purpose.

They came to a tire-screeching, shoulder-yanking stop at the next intersection, where the light had just decided to turn red. Ernie must have just decided to stop. A group of scraggly kids at the corner were scoping out the Chevy. They were street punks that prowled the downtown night, preying on drunks, or lost tourists. They would overpower their mark by sheer numbers, like wolves. Dog eat dog.

They'd already clocked Sal's gold watch. While he screamed over the wall of shoulders to Apache, he kept his left eye on the group of kids. The light was still red. All in one sudden burst, they were at the side of the Chevy. One scrawny arm shot out and a dirty, skeletal hand grabbed at Sal's wrist. But he had seen it coming. He'd been playing possum. He dipped his hand under the kid's wrist. Before the walking skeleton could get a grip on Sal, on his watch, Sal was already holding the kid's wrist and balled-up fist, pulling him closer to the side of the car, twisting. The light was still red.

"Ernie. I caught a little fuckin' piranha. Better shove off – real nice and slow. Don't wanna--"

The kid started to scream. Sal twisted his thin wrist, breaking it with a jerk, then leaned further out and smashed the boy's head up against the car. He had him by the elbow now, pulling him up close enough to smell the rot coming from broken teeth in his mouth.

The others had fallen back and away from the car as it began to move. David turned the music up to drown out the kid's screams. Sal had already broken the boy's wrist; now he worked on his dirty, grimy arm as the car slowly rolled through the intersection. The green light just started blinking a fresh *Let's go!!!* at the snarl of nighttime San Jose traffic.

There were no cars in front of the Chevy now. The kid was screaming bloody murder.

"Hit it my guy. Jellyroll!!"

Sal dragged the kid another twenty or thirty feet, then dropped the twisted lump of dirty rags and anguished flesh back onto the street. Seguro and Apache were howling like lunatics – worse than the kid. Sal screamed out the window in Spanish, "If you want to run with the wolves, dickhead, you have to learn to howl like one."

He pulled his hand in the car and wiped the filth on his thigh, then stuck his arm out the window. Everyone in the car laughed. Jimmy Cliff had somehow found his way back on. Replay. *The Harder They Come*.

Sal thought: *It's a hard fucking lesson that kid just learned. Stealing is all he knows. Maybe now he'll find another profession. Maybe.*

Ernie wheeled the Chevy with relaxed expertise, darting in and out of traffic, sometimes going up over the curb where the street narrowed. Everyone in the car all talking or singing at once gave Sal the feeling that he was sitting in a four-wheel, three-ring circus. Outside, the air had found a cooler notch on the thermostat to hang onto. The sky was a pale dark against the gleam and sparkle of homes and bars, restaurants up and down the mountains.

"Ernie, why Patrick - he doesn't come this time? Why I gotta wait at this bar? You all coming in with me?"

"You gotta talk wit Patrick, mon. We waiting outside. Protection."

So that was why Patrick hadn't come to San Jose. He was covering his ass. Dangerous for the two of them to be together. One hand chopped off, at least there's the other to pull a trigger. Both chopped off, that's when the nightmare begins – it begins once you're helpless.

He knew calling Patrick was a waste of time. Phones were like woman. He always had a new one.

Sal hated to admit to himself, but he was beginning to feel a bit jumpy. He started to think about The Down, Down.

The Down, Down, also called The Infernero – Little Hell, was a road that wound through the Barrio San Jose at the outskirts of Alajuala. The Down, Down was an infamous area where twenty-four hour crews stood out on the streets in front of dilapidated shacks selling coke, crack and pot. It was ten minutes from Sal's bar in the Villa Bonita – a neighborhood by the International airport. Sal had just recently begun supplying one of the largest outfits down the Infernero - the Zamora crew - with cocaine.

Patrick, Sal's closest friend and oldest partner in Costa Rica, wanted Sal to start selling them his product – green bud from Columbia. So far, it had been slow going Down, Down. In the meantime, he had posts down the road from his bar where his own crews sold Patrick's weed and coke.

He had greased the palms of the Comandante from the Alajuala Policia Barracks. Even the regulars who had been at the barracks for the last ten or more years were running the weed for Sal. Things were going as well as could be expected in a country where jealousy was the national past time. When it came down to it, when the legal shit hit the fan or the neighbors all started to complain at once, Sal knew that he'd be thrown to the wolves and the Comandante himself would do the interview for the Costa Rican dailies. That's why The Down, Down was so important. There were no neighbors on that stretch of road, just dope crews outside the shacks. And the Zamora gang ran the action. Until just days ago, that is.

One of Patrick's deliveries had been rumbled outside the Barrio San Jose. It never made it down into The Infernero. No one had seen the men. Patrick suspected some of Zamora's boys. Sal doubted this. A day later, his own posts had disappeared out by the bar. Both his men and his product. The Policia hadn't a clue, but at a hasty meeting later that evening at a twenty-four hour cantina, when Sal met with the Commandante and several of his lieutenants, they showed him some photos.

All of the Zamora's sported trademark tattoos – full sleeves and the odd neck tattoo. The men in the photos were different. Not Costa Ricans. Dark, too much Indian blood. And their faces and body were covered with tats. Prevalent on all their faces or foreheads, was the number thirteen. Sal had to think this one out.

When he finally spoke, he felt like something was crawling up his back - goose bumps rising on his neck. The Commandante was smiling, Sal had never altogether trusted the man. No matter how you sliced, diced or julienne fried the motherfucker, he was still the police. And smiling like that, holding the photos, waiting for Sal to take a stab at who these thugs might be, Sal suddenly started to wonder how in the fuck the top cop had gotten a hold of these photos in the first place.

The thirteen had to stand for the M13's. The Commandante also had to know this. The M13's were these completely psychotic, violent Salvadorian gangsters. Some ex-military, leftovers from the CIA's dirty war in El Salvador - others, just very dangerous, don't-give-a-fuck-about-even-life-itself, young punks. Killers. They were nothing nice.

The men Sal had working the weed posts on either side of his bar had just been found that night...well, their bodies had been found. The heads were still missing.

The Commandante finished his beer and slapped Sal on the back. He had already made the deal. It went like this: Either Sal found and stopped the rest of these marauding sons from an El Salvadorian hell and brought back quiet to the streets in Alajuala, or he and Patrick could seriously think of making their final, large donation to the Barracks before leaving the country. For good. The Comandante had a nephew in mind to continue running Sal's nightclub business and the drugs. He already had Beto Zamora in his pocket. He calmly explained to Sal; He wanted the bullshit to stop before an out and out drug war exploded on the streets. He wanted Sal and all his San Jose niggers to either solve the problem or get out of dodge.

Sal squirmed in the back seat while he checked his nine-millimeter. As if following a script, everyone else in the car was locking and loading. He had three extra clips. David must have hit the replay button on the tape player. When he turned the volume up, Jimmy Cliff was back in the car, singing, "*The harder they come, the harder they fall, one and aaaall...*"

Pulling up to the American Bar, Sal noticed two Policia trucks leaving the parking lot from the west end. *Fucking strange*, he thought. But he couldn't explain to himself why. Again, goose bumps crawled up his back and rested on his neck, under his long hair. Ernie slammed on the breaks.

"We be outside watching the lot. Patrick knows what dis is. See ova dare, mon? His brother, Alex. He be standing point by the door. You go in now. We stay out here in dis car, mon. We gonna make some happy." Ernie leaned forward and pulled an AK out from under his legs. That, and a bag of pot. David threw a pack of rolling papers at him. Ernie smiled.

Sal grimaced. He made sure the safety was engaged on his pistol when he got out of the car. Ernie honked on the horn – two slow chirps. The black man at the door waved as the car drove off and parked.

Alex - towering over Sal by at least five inches - hugged him when Sal went in, whispering into his ear, "Everything righty-tighty, mon. Don't worry. Be happy. See ova dare? Patrick, mon...he already order."

Sal turned and smiled briefly, then feeling the smile fade, he listened carefully to the sound of his own two feet hitting the freshly waxed tile floor. He had no idea what was going on. When he reached Patrick's table, he sat down, shaking his head.

"Sal, leave your heat out between your legs. Sorry for all dis fucking mystery, mon. Everyting happin so fast, dis was dee smartest move. You gonna have ta follow mah lead.

"Oh, I'm a for sure dead muthafuckin' fortune teller here Patrick. I don't have a clue."

"Ask me wit a quickness."

"We're setting up? Here in this fuckin' town where we got no protection?"

"Oh Sally kid – we got more den enuff. We got da police, and I got Mr. Big on his way too."

"What choo mean we got the police? I just seen two trucks filled with low ta no payed muthafuckas, leavin' into the moonlight."

"What? Dis Commandante – he promise back up. Dat's why we is here in Alajaulita, mon. He want dis done away from his town. Say da police he send – they's

back us mon – tear dis fuck up. Othawise, we coulda stilled and baited. We coulda taken care a dis Down da Down, mon. Plenty boys over dare.”

“Yeah Patrick. We bin fronted poorly brotha. Commandante must be getting too big for the pants he’s in. He want our business – buy him a bigger pair. Who we supposed to be killing man?”

“Does it matter?”

“No. I don’t guess so. As long as I get to know ahead of time, so I won’t fuckin’ kill a waitress or something.”

“Sal, any minute, we got four or five honchos from that sick buncha thugs – dat Salvadorian crew. C’min here fer a sitdown,. Our tank outside?”

“Yeah Patrick. The one I rolled here in.”

“Thass right. They gonna light up the parking lot.”

Sal rolled his eyes. He was starting to feel those goose bumps again.

Patrick’s phone rang. He answered and Sal watched the door while he sipped his triple shot of tequila. He did another shotgun of coke.

Angrily, Patrick yelled into the phone in Spanish and flicked it shut.

“Trouble?”

“Mon, dat was Big. They bin roused, mon.

“Police? Our fucking back-up?”

Patrick wagged his head from side to side. “We bin fucked. Big and Little Big sittin’ here waitin’ on Mr. Big, an Mr. Big, he don’t make it to dis party.”

Sal shivered, then shook his head back until he was looking at the dark ceiling. His right hand slowly pulled the gun out of his pants and rested it between his two knees. Knocking back the rest of the tequila, he raised the gun and clicked the safety off. Patrick pulled a Mac-10 out from his backpack, laid it on his lap, and reached down for some extra clips.

That’s when the world outside exploded. The building shook. Sal jumped up, knocking the table over. Patrick was up with the Mac in hand, grabbing the clips and moving towards the door. Waitresses were running past, screaming. The door Alex was standing in front of had blown apart. Glass was everywhere. Outside, the car Sal had driven up in was in flames. Sal could already smell the burning flesh. Friends – tostado. Fucking burnt.

Alex ran over and Patrick threw him a clip. He screamed, “RPfuckin’G, mon”

Sal shouted, “Cover me!”

Patrick ran and grabbed him, pulling him back. Alex sidestepped Sal and hit the floor, sliding on his belly as he opened up with his Mac. A small flame puffed out of the barrel and then just a steady stream of lead. Each clip had 32 rounds. Patrick, already at the doorjamb, sighted on the men he could see moving through the bilious black smoke and orange flames. He fired his Mac over Alex. The men that had come running through the smoke dropped, shredded and bleeding. More followed.

Alex reloaded and continued laying a steely path of death – a steady lead stream. Bullets were chipping brick at the bar entrance, showering the three men with plaster and deadly missiles of rock.

Patrick shook Sal. “Dare is a back door. It’s otha side. Dat be why I choose dis, mon.”

Sal, his face charred black, ducked and lifted Alex. He took his gun and pushed the nine millimeter into Alex's hand. "Drop some clips on the floor!" He was already on his knees, firing out into the lot. He'd just clipped a short tattooed man - shirtless, holding some Russian machine pistol, or maybe an Uzi. The man's shoulder came apart and he went down screaming. There were more stepping past the burning car. From somewhere, may as well have been another world, sirens wailed.

Sal shouted, "Go. I'll follow in a minute. One fucking minute!" He kept firing the Mac, praying it wouldn't jam. Sometimes they did. "Sixty fuckin' seconds!" Already, the brothers were gone. Sal got up, sliding on the broken glass, until he finally got his footing, turned to unload the rest of the clip, then started to run towards the back.

When he got to the door and pushed through and out onto the sidewalk, he almost tripped. Looking down, he saw Alex in a broken pile, drowning in his own blood. Patrick was crawling, holding a bleeding arm.

"Drop the gun, Gringo."

The tingle and the goose bumps on his back reminded him of something.

The Commandante, surrounded by his men in flak jackets, was smiling.

Brian Murphy hates bios.