

# Going to Valhalla

By James Walton Langolf

Every time Carolyn called, I set my jaw, bracing for a blow, but she always aimed so much lower.

Ah well, what are you gonna do?

“Baby, I wanna come home,” she said and I could hear the tequila in her voice, almost smell the salt and the lime on her skin.

“You don’t live here anymore Carolyn.”

“Don’t be like that honey.”

I opened one eye to check the time. 3:28 AM. “I’m hanging up.”

“No you aren’t.”

I wasn’t. “Okay Carolyn, what’s the trouble?”

“Trouble? I didn’t say anything about trouble.”

I let it spin out and I heard the clink of ice in the glass over the wires. Whiskey, not tequila. It was worse than I thought.

“He hit you?”

“Who’s he? There’s no he.”

I sighed. “Are you hurt?”

“I’ll live. Not that you care.”

I loved this part. Where she played the petulant like I was the one who’d gone for a girls’ night three years ago, again for cigarettes a year and a half ago. Then, what was it, nine months ago? Oh yeah, she was going to buy shoes at the mall last time I’d seen her.

“Where are you?” She told me and I said, “Stay put. I’ll come get you.”

She giggled, a low throaty laugh that always started to get me undone. “Thanks baby. You’re the best. Hey there’s Bobby at the door. I’ve gotta go. Oh and Aaron?”

“Yeah?”

“He says to tell you, you should bring enough money to make my bail.”

Bobby was Carolyn’s insanely protective older brother. I’d met him twice. On one occasion I’d punched him in the mouth. On the other, he’d punched me in the throat. We just didn’t see eye to eye.

The sun was coming up when I walked into the little jailhouse. Bobby was asleep in a chair wearing a rumpled charcoal suit and a hideous red tie with the knot pulled low. He had three days’ patchy beard stubble and his red curly hair - the same as Carolyn’s - stood up in crazy question mark curls.

He had his boots up on the desk and the chair tipped back so far it could have balanced on the edge of a playing card.

I kicked the door closed and cleared my throat loudly before I said, “Arresting your own sister? That’s low, man.”

He didn’t even open his eyes and his lips barely moved when he answered. “That girl’s been nothing but trouble since the day she was born. You shoulda stayed at home, friend.”

I wanted to punch him again but I couldn’t remember if it was my turn to hit him or his turn to hit me. I just stood there glaring around at everything.

Bobby appeared to go back to sleep. I could see the slow rise and fall of his chest, hear the soft whistle of his breath past a slightly deviated septum. But at his temple, a thick black vein writhed. He was just waiting to see how I would play it.

Me too.

“Well?” I said.

The front legs of the chair thumped down. I heard the crackle of his spine, the twin pops of his knees as Bobby stood and started around towards me.

“Well what?” he asked.

“Are you going to tell me what you’re holding her for or not?”

We were nose to nose, maybe thinking we’d stare each other down, but his coffee breath was as old as his beard. Then I noticed the ugly brown splotches under his eyes and I took a step back. That sleeping thing hadn’t been all a sham then.

“What?” I said.

“She killed Monkey.”

“A monkey? Where the fuck did she find a monkey and what the hell did it ever do to her?”

“Not a monkey. Monkey. That was the dude’s name. I don’t fucking know. I didn’t make it up. He was her pimp.”

Huh. Well. That was new.

We walked down a short hallway and a kid in a neatly pressed uniform sat working yesterday’s crossword.

“Go grab chow Jay. I got this,” Bobby said. The kid nearly saluted as he backed out of the room.

Carolyn sat on a bunk with her feet dangling over the edge, her back pressed to the wall. They’d taken her shoes and given her blue paper slippers to wear. Her hair was in two braids that had started to unravel and she looked like a lost and lonely child.

“Hey baby,” she said.

She stood up and when she smiled, I noticed a new scar on her cheek, a thin line from the corner of her eye down to her jaw like the track of a silvery tear. Rather than taking away from her looks, the flaw seemed to set them off, dragging the eyelid down in a half wink I found almost unbearably erotic. I wanted to run my thumb along that ridge even as I buried my teeth in her treacherous throat.

“Thanks for coming,” she said. She shifted her weight from foot to foot, rustling the paper slippers.

“Sure Carolyn. You bet. So, what’s new?”

“Bobby told you,” she said, as if she was on the right side of the bars for making accusations. “He’s got it all wrong.”

“What’s that? The whoring or the murder?”

She had the grace to blush, and her scar stood out whiter than before. “I didn’t kill him.”

This is where they say, “Of course she didn’t.” I knew it all along. She wasn’t capable of it.

But I’d quit trying to guess what Carolyn might be capable of about five minutes ago. So I said, “Uh-huh.”

“I liked Monkey. He was a good guy.”

“For a pimp you mean?”

She shrugged. “Well, yeah, that.”

“Three witnesses observed Carolyn standing over the guy with a bloody tire iron,” Bobby said from too close to my back.

“A tire iron? That’s kinda intense, isn’t it?”

Carolyn rocked back a little on her heels like someone was leaning against her and she was pushing back.

“No shit it was intense! Bashed his fucking brains in!”

“Nice language, Carolyn,” Bobby said.

That stale coffee breath wafted over my shoulder right into my face. I could smell about forty million cigarettes on his cheap suit jacket.

Carolyn leaned towards me, her fingers hooked through the bars. Pressed between the two of them like that, each with their own psychosis, mine pressing down on me from the top, it was getting a little hard to breathe.

“Fuck you Bobby!” Carolyn shrieked.

I could feel the migraine starting like the bones of my skull were tectonic plates shifting. Soon there’d be an earthquake inside my head, maybe a tsunami or two.

“You little bitch! If you didn’t spread your fucking legs for every swinging dick with ten goddamn dollars to his name, maybe we wouldn’t fucking be here.”

“Let me out Bobby! Please! I can’t stand it in here anymore!” Carolyn started to cry. “The bed smells like piss!” She laid her head against the bars and sobbed quietly.

If I had to listen to these two much longer, *I’d* be looking for a tire iron.

“Carolyn?” I said.

“What?” her voice was thick and snotty. She didn’t look up.

“Carolyn, honey, did you hit Monkey with the tire iron?”

“No. Aaron I told you...”

“Carolyn?”

“What?”

“Can you tell me *who* hit Monkey with the tire iron? Please.”

“Oh,” she said, and this time she raised her head, pretty black mascara streaks smudging her cheeks, her freckles standing out dark brown against her pale skin. Even in the crappy yellow fluorescent lighting I could see her eyes going through all their different shades from caramel to coffee with just a splash of cream. “That was Victor Moon.”

The name didn’t mean a goddamn thing to me.

We didn’t say anything for a minute. I reached around Bobby for a box of tissues off the desk and handed them through the bars to Carolyn. She blew her nose long and wet.

I said, “Who the fuck is Victor Moon?”

Carolyn laughed but it wasn’t a ha-ha, more like she was choking on a plastic toy somebody had baked into her birthday cake.

“He’s my crazy ex-boyfriend,” she answered.

Maybe we could start a support group. Learn twelve new steps to this tired old dance.

Bobby looked like he was going to puke.

“Remember that time I went to the mall to buy those shoes?” Carolyn said. “I couldn’t find any, so then I went uptown to some club where a guy I knew was playing piano.”

Note the complete absence of shock in my expression.

“He was nothing baby, I swear. I don’t even remember his name.”

Great. Was that supposed to make it better? Why wasn’t he standing outside this jail cell with Bobby’s gun pointed at his liver?

“But the owner of the club? He was somebody. Sitting by himself at the end of the bar drinking one after another. Fast as the girl behind the bar could pour them. Jesus she was gorgeous too, like her face shoulda been on magazine covers from here to Hollywood. Tits that oughta be bronzed and worshipped. I mean, they were big but not huge, you know? Firm but...”

“Carolyn?”

“Oh. Right. Victor. So there he was, pounding them back, but he never seemed to get drunk. Not a bit. Just sat there looking around at everybody. I was listening to the kid play...”

“He any good?” I asked.

“What?”

“Nothing.”

“But I’m watching the guy at the bar too. Then I notice he’s staring at *me* like I’m bare-ass naked. Like I’m made of water and he’s the only motherfucker in the desert. So I ask him if he wants to buy me a drink. The crazy son of a bitch says no. Says he wants to give me the bar. Call his lawyers, have them sign over the papers. Free and clear if only I’d go home with him.”

“And you went, you stupid, stupid bitch,” Bobby said, but Carolyn ignored him.

She said she went with the guy, back to his place. It was a sweet little beige house in a neighborhood of them. There was a tiny green lawn and a mailbox spotted black and white like a cow. Inside it had been furnished with entire pages of the Ethan Allan catalogue. On the bed, the sheets were pure silk the deep purple color of a fresh bruise.

I don’t know why she threw in that part about the sheets. I guess she just likes to see the look on my face, hear the helpless noise coming from my throat like I’m chewing on glass.

They fucked, she said, but it was nothing spectacular. She tipped me a wink that I guess was supposed to soothe.

In the morning, Moon didn’t ask her to leave, so she stayed.

She said she noticed a lot of guys hanging around, some of them wearing off the rack jackets that showed the bulges of guns in holsters under their arms, but she didn’t really think much about it.

“So I had his credit cards to spend however I wanted,” Carolyn said. “And the keys to his Mercedes so I could go wherever I wanted, as long as I took one of the goons with me. If I wanted to go shopping or to the movies or out to eat a goddamn cheeseburger, there was Johnny or Joey or Thomas. Right there with me. So I started ditching them.”

“Ditching them?” I asked.

“Yeah, you know the old crawling out the lady’s room window trick? Or maybe, ‘Hey Mr. Security Guard, this guy is bothering me’. That kinda thing.”

I nodded knowing just which of her seven zillion helpless expressions she would use and that poor rent-a-cop without even a gun to shoot himself in the groin.

“Of course, they always told Victor and I always got...punished.”

She closed her eyes and licked her lips and I could feel myself already wanting to beat somebody’s ass.

“I thought it was a game. A harmless kink, you know? Spankings. Canings. The occasional night chained to the bed.”

I groaned. She’d better hurry and get to the play. I was definitely coming unglued here.

“On the whole though, it was pretty boring and I missed my friends. I missed you baby.”

My head whipped back and rapped against the concrete wall. That was going to leave a mark.

“So, I told him I was leaving, going home. I thought he’d be mad. Maybe hit me some. But Victor just laughed. He laughed and laughed and laughed until I started to cry.”

Carolyn’s voice dropped to a whisper and she rubbed the scar on her face as she talked, her thumb moving faster and faster, pacing some secret internal rhythm. I don’t think she knew she was doing it.

“He...well, never mind what he did. Anyway, it was just a week or two after that that Honey showed up. Honey. That was the girl’s name. You believe that?”

Honey was eighteen and looked just like it – golden skin, long liquid blonde hair and eyes the violet of clover flowers. She stepped naked out of the shower one afternoon when Carolyn was coming home from another hard day of spending Victor Moon’s money.

Victor was also naked, stretched out on the bed.

Carolyn took it in stride. She said, “Honey? What’s this?”

And Victor Moon said, “She’s the new you baby. Get your things together now.”

If Carolyn was being replaced, she wanted to be sure she left an impression. She smashed some things, tore up the silk sheets. Even took a swing at Moon before the goons managed to grab hold of her.

One of them threw her over his shoulder, carried her outside to the Mercedes and tossed her ass in the trunk.

When it opened and Carolyn was lifted out again, she was standing in the lot at Valhalla.

It was a roadside motel once painted garish teal, but now peeling and faded to dusky blue. There was a cracked pool half-full of scummy green water and a row of palm trees whose fronds looked somehow sad and dispirited.

Monkey stood there holding out a key on a cheap plastic fob.

Carolyn spit into the hairy little simian face that had earned him his nickname.

Guess she was still mad.

He backhanded her hard enough to break her nose.

Valhalla, he said, was the boss’s private stable where he kept girls he “retired” and a few others he didn’t want to sell in the city or overseas. The ones he didn’t think

he could make much money on anyway. Boys that earned themselves a little treat, he sent here to play.

“I’m nobody’s fucking whore,” Caroline had said, blood dripping from her nose onto the cracked asphalt.

“Oh yeah? How’d you work to pay for them pearls around your neck or them diamonds in your ears?”

“Don’t worry honey, the boss drops by. He don’t never forget about none of ya’ll. And everything you need, we got right here. I makes sure of it. Manicures, pedicures, massages? You got something you want waxed? We got a little Asian girl with the lightest touch you ever saw. I swear you won’t feel a damn thing. You gonna like it here just fine.”

“What if I don’t?” Carolyn asked. “What if I wanna leave?”

Monkey had shaken his head sadly, and reached out to touch the scar on her cheek.

“Oh now girl, I can’t recommend that.”

So she stayed, settled in, met the girls. Most, she said, were all right. It was a little like boarding school or Girl Scout camp. They all ate together in the common room. There was a TV where they could hang out and watch movies, a game chest full of old Monopoly and Life boards with half the pieces gone. They were well fed and tended to.

All they had to do was fuck.

Most of the johns weren’t bad either. They had enough of violence. When it came to getting laid, they were just looking for a little sweetness. There were a few freaks couldn’t shoulder their own shame. But those were easy to handle too. She had this special ping pong paddle with holes drilled in it to maximize the sting.

Carolyn never spared the details.

Monkey had a special account funded by Moon which he was supposed to use to keep things at Valhalla running smoothly. He used it to pay the doctor who came every Tuesday to check out all the snatch as well as offering on-site abortions when the need arose.

The doctor was a drunk and a pill addict who’d lost his license to practice when he got busted selling a prescription pad to an undercover cop.

He and Monkey reached an arrangement. The doctor took his payment in pussy and drugs and Monkey pocketed the cash.

I guess it seemed like a good idea at the time.

Moon found out and paid a visit. Beat Monkey to death with the tire iron in front of his own joint. It was just bad luck that a cop happened to be dropping by at the same time for his weekly thrust. Of course, the cop could not, in good conscience, just leave the pimp laying there in his own blood.

Monkey was still dying and Carolyn had her hands over her eyes when Victor passed her the tire iron. It felt damp, so she peeked between her fingers at the blood and clots of brain on her skin and she started to scream.

She was still screaming when Moon ushered her back to her room to fix her a drink. He fixed her another while several of the girls told the cop that yes, they had seen, with their own eyes, Carolyn beating Monkey to death. The cop called for backup. Carolyn called me.

Bad luck all around.

Bobby hadn't said anything in a while but I could still feel his glare heavy on my neck. It was starting to get on my nerves.

"Well?" I asked him.

"Well," he gave it back to me.

"What're you gonna do now?"

"What do you mean?"

"She's your sister. Aren't you gonna let her out?"

"Can't."

"Can't?"

"She's got to see the judge and I can tell you right now, it doesn't look good."

Carolyn was sitting on the bunk again, her elbows on her knees and her head in her hands. Her hair covered her face but I didn't need to see it to know her lip was trembling.

"What if we go talk to the guy?" I asked.

"What guy?" Bobby said, and Jesus if he wasn't begging for another sock in the puss.

I counted to three.

"Victor Moon."

Bobby said, "If you're going, I'm going too."

"Fair enough."

To Carolyn behind bars I said, "You just stay right here."

We loaded up in my old truck. We could have taken the cruiser but we wanted Moon to know this was personal. Bobby got in the passenger side and glared at me until I buckled my seatbelt. I backed out of the lot and made sure I used my signal when I turned onto the street.

"Aaron, this guy is not who you think. It's not just girls and dope man. He's big time. Small arms dealing, shady real estate deals – Moon's got a finger in all of it. And he's got a lot of fingers."

"Sounds like a fun guy."

"I want him to pay for what he did to Carolyn. You see her face? What kind of guy does that?"

I didn't say anything, but I don't think Bobby could have heard me anyway. His eyes were shut and he'd bitten down on his bottom lip hard enough to draw blood. His tongue snaked out to lick the drop and when he spoke again his teeth were smeared pink.

"Aaron, you got a piece?"

I jammed the button on the glove box and the door dropped open revealing a rat's nest of papers, some slightly used napkins and condoms that probably expired just after I graduated from high school ten years ago. I shoved those aside and there lay my .22. It was a delicate, almost dainty looking gun, bright silver with shiny black grips. It looked made of plastic.

Bobby arched an eyebrow.

"It was a gift," I said. "From my mother."

I drove and we tried to make a plan.

When that didn't work, we just pulled up in front of the guy's house and got out. I slipped my gun in the waistband of my jeans and covered it with my shirt.

A goon who looked like he could crush rocks in his fists was watering the grass. He bent to pick a dead leaf from the azalea bushes.

“I need to see Victor Moon,” I said and the guy didn’t look impressed. In fact, he was starting to look downright concerned about those azaleas. Maybe these last few cold nights had been too much for them after all.

The front door burst open and two screaming kids came out. They looked to be about eight and six, armed with squirt guns that looked capable of firing surface to air missiles. They had taken heavy fire, and water ran off their skin slick as oil.

“Die you bastard die!” the younger child screamed, aiming for his brother’s eyes.

Behind them was a handsome gent, clean shaven, his crew cut glistening silver at the temples, a charming hint of laugh lines at the corners of his eyes.

He looked like he’d been expecting us. I kept waiting for him to ask what took us so long.

“Please excuse me. These are my grandchildren. My daughter had an appointment this morning. You two, go on and play now.”

The kids ran circles around the goon. We didn’t say anything and Moon just kept smiling.

“This isn’t the way we usually do things.” Moon said. He looked down at the bulge in my pants that wasn’t my dick.

I grinned and shrugged.

“This is my home.”

Bobby was thinking about shooting the guy’s teeth out. I could feel it in the way he was breathing against my neck, but if the guy was getting nervous, he didn’t show it. The goon had been watering the same patch of grass this whole time and now he stood in a puddle.

“I have a place. Out on Route 17. I believe you know it, don’t you Officer Casey?”

Bobby nodded.

“We can air our grievances there. Four o’clock?”

It was my turn to nod and we started back to the truck. We still hadn’t said a goddamn word when we pulled away.

Bobby lit up another cigarette and said, “We’re still alive.”

He sounded disappointed and I knew how he felt.

“Yep.”

“So’s he.”

“Yep.”

“I meant to shoot him.”

“I know.”

“But I couldn’t. Not in front of those kids.”

“No,” I agreed.

“Guy turned my sister into a whore, man.”

I could have argued the point but now didn’t seem the time.

Bobby asked, “Where we going?”

“Wal-Mart.”

We walked in, the old guy greeted us as if we were long-lost, much-loved sons. I took the cart he offered just because it seemed to mean so much to him.

“What are we here for Aaron? Rope? Duct tape? Maybe one of those little propane torches?”

“I heard about this thing with a car battery and a set of jumper cables. You hook them right to the guy’s nut sack. Hell, he’ll tell you who shot JFK if that’s what you’re after.”

Bobby nodded sagely. I thought about telling him how Gramps at the door would be so disappointed in the both of us, but I didn’t.

I grabbed a paperback western off the rack and a box of cheese Danish and headed back towards the registers. Bobby grabbed the propane torch and chucked it into the cart.

Back in the truck I drove to a little park that overlooked the river. I parked under a tree, opened the box of pastry, cracked the spine on the book and laid my seat back.

“What the fuck are you doing?”

“We got five hours. I’m hungry. Want some?” I said, offering up the box.

He sighed heavily then flipped open his phone.

“Hey Jay, it’s me... Yeah. Listen, how’s Carolyn? What? When? No. Fine. Okay.”

He closed the phone and I’d already set the book aside.

“Released on her own recognizance. Half an hour ago. Right after we left Moon’s in fact.”

“That usual for a murder suspect?”

“Never happen.”

“Shit,” I said.

“Shit,” Bobby agreed.

When we got to Valhalla, the parking lot was empty. The place had the quiet, waiting look of a dead hooker waiting to be found in an alley somewhere.

Bobby made sure to grab his new blowtorch in case he needed to torture somebody too. All I had was my little gun.

All the shades were drawn save one. It was wide open, with the bed center stage. Whatever the drama was, this was the nude scene.

Carolyn was tied to the headboard with some kind of fancy silk ropes. Moon straddled her and held a knife to her throat. She was crying, and there was a new cut under her eye oozing blood. On the table lay a stack of hundred dollar bills.

In front of the door, I could feel myself fragmenting. The air had a shimmering sort of opaqueness like a bunch of film strips projected in layers, all showing me and different guys doing the same exact things – husbands, fathers, brothers - all just come for their girls. This wasn’t the first time it had gone down like this here. They raised their guns at the same time I did. Our fingers squeezed the trigger and blew away the knobs.

Carolyn screamed.

I still couldn’t tell if this was now or then, and that orange shag carpeting wasn’t doing me any favors.

Moon opened his mouth to speak and I shot him in the ass. He slapped at the wound like it was a mouthy kid, then he tumbled off the side of the bed cussing.

I untied Carolyn. Bobby was standing over Moon with his gun pointed between the man’s eyes and Bobby’s was definitely no peashooter.

“Don’t,” I said.

He lowered the barrel to the guy’s dick and cocked an eyebrow at me.

I pretended to think it over then shook my head. Bobby just shrugged his shoulders.

Carolyn gathered her clothes. She considered the pile of money on the table. I gave her a look and she left it lay.

Moon was still cussing, and all over the motel we could hear guys taking their time finishing their nuts or their drinks or their smokes before coming out to shoot us in the face.

Pretty soon they clogged our door. Four big guys with big guns and knives. One guy, I swear, had this big fucking curved sword thing like some kind of goddamned ninja.

I heard the hiss and pop of Bobby firing up his blowtorch. Carolyn grabbed a bottle of hairspray off the vanity and tossed it to him. Bobby caught it one-handed and I started to get the feeling these two had done this sort of thing before.

He held the hairspray out in front of the blowtorch and pushed the trigger. A spray of flame shot out and the thugs stumbled back throwing their hands up to shield their eyes. Sword guy was lucky he didn’t knock himself unconscious with the hilt of that thing.

A lick of flame caught the cheap curtain and it started to burn. The wallpaper was bubbling and flaking. The fire ran down the wall. Then the ugly carpet was burning too.

We pushed forward, Bobby in the lead with his flamethrower and the goons backing up ahead of us.

They could have shot but didn’t. I guess they were thinking we were crazy and some people have superstitions about that kind of thing. I can understand it.

“Your boss is in there bleeding on the floor,” I said. “You might want to see to that.”

Bobby dropped the hairspray on the ground and tossed the blowtorch at one of the goons. It hit the guy in the chest and bounced harmlessly to the concrete rolling around, melting the rubber soles of his loafers a little.

We piled in the truck, and I drove away still expecting a bullet to take out the windshield and maybe the top of my head.

“Well that was fun,” Carolyn said and Bobby laughed.

How’s this for an anticlimax?

We went back to the police station and I wondered if this was over. Moon didn’t strike me as the lay down and die type. Not after taking a bullet in the ass, anyway.

I wondered if the mooks had put out the brothel by now or if anybody had bothered to save the whores from burning.

We pulled into the lot and I parked by the door.

“What about Monkey?” I asked.

“I’ll fix it. He was just a pimp for Christ’s sake.” He got out and flipped me the bird as he climbed the steps.

I looked at Carolyn and wondered if she expected me to take her home with me now. I wondered if I wanted to.

She grinned and the cab of the truck grew darker as the area around her face grew brighter like she was back lit by the sun.

I set my jaw, readied for the blow.

She bent forward to kiss me, but missed my mouth.  
“Thanks Aaron. You’re the best!” she breathed against my shirt collar and then,  
“I’ll call you.”  
She bounded out of the truck after her brother.  
Maybe I’d go home, maybe rip the phone out of the wall. Just never answer it  
again no matter how many times it rings.  
Maybe not.

*Yep, she's a girl. A funny little mystery, a charming curiosity, a pretty blue-eyed girl named James, living the wild life out west in Arizona engaging in sun worshipping and various other heathen forms of entertainment when she's not sweating it out in the library. She even has the little black glasses and plaid pleated skirt to prove it. She laughs too loud, drinks too much, sleeps too little and still wonders where all the time and money fly off to. You can catch her erotica work in Cleis Press titles Love at First Sting, Hurts so Good, and Frenzy. She has also published with Surreal Magazine, and Apex Science Fiction and Horror Digest. Contact James at [Jameswlangolf@gmail.com](mailto:Jameswlangolf@gmail.com)"*