

Daytime Drunks

By Nolan Knight

The front for the job was one of those hipster clothing junkets for cutting edge toddlers, the ones that only drooled pea stains on shirts blaring The Stooges or Velvet Underground. It was located right off Vermont in Los Feliz, next to a pricey French Bistro that types like Kiefer and Keanu went for streetside exposure. Linus got the call overnight that his services were needed first thing in the morning. It was his first job in six months and he welcomed the fresh pockets of green. He gunned the Subaru down the rear alley of the store and saw Clancy lifting the loading door, waving at him to pull on through into the warehouse.

Clancy was one of those clean-cut fucks whose color-coordinated closet screamed obsessive compulsive with its clustered rows of Easter-tint Polos. He was hoisting a two-year-old in his arms, slobbering like a bloodhound in a Tom Waits sweatshirt. Linus stepped out into the warehouse stacked five high with boxes and shook his hand.

“You got something good lined up for me or you just looking for a babysitter?”

Clancy smiled, placing the child onto the floor. They watched as he waddled back into the store, babbling gibberish. The moment the kid breached the doorway, Clancy said, “You bet your slick fucking ass I got something good.” He went around a small wood crate set in front of the car and popped the top, exposing World War III in a box.

Linus’s eyes didn’t flinch. “Guns, huh?”

“Yup, this is just the shit of the litter too. Now, I can’t tell you who or how but a nice amount of this shit was ganked from the Convention Center last night—the whole lot is already sitting in Vegas, waiting for the buyer. Thing is, they need the score pinned on someone else pronto—buyer won’t bite unless the heat is off. So, they’re paying me to transfer that heat and that’s why I called your girly face.” He tossed Linus a taut envelope stuffed with twenty G’s.

Linus said, “Same as last time? Sell it to the Mexicans and tip-off the cops?”

“No, can’t be the Mexicans this time. There’s a turf war boiling off Alvarado and I don’t want you driving with these anywhere near there—cop city, man. You gotta find a new client, that’s why the pay is so large this time out. Now, get a move on and find me some patsies.”

Linus stashed the dough in his pocket and helped Clancy load the crate into the Subaru’s trunk. The toddler waddled back into the warehouse, sucking on a Hot Wheel. Clancy picked him up. “Call the shop as soon as everything works out. I’ll be screening Pantera onesies all day.”

Linus smiled, “All in a days work, eh?”

They say that marriage is bliss when you share it with a soulmate, but as Manny eyeballed the slick bacon grease lining a pan still on the stove from last week, he thought the usual, “What a fuckin’ bitch.” It was better for him to think it than say it, keeping that boulder of reality from smashing down onto his decade of loveless matrimony. He

could almost taste the bacon than once graced that sticky pan while gnashing on a stale Pop Tart in skidded undies. Stupid pan. Lucky bastard.

The clock blinked 7:56AM as he rifled through a mound of soiled laundry, searching and sniffing for something less rank to wear for a possible job interview. There wasn't one lined up today, but that's what she thought since that's what he told her.

Anything to get out of the apartment, her domain. A day of solitude awaited, filled with empty hours to reflect on life's important things. The Dodgers. The Lakers. He'd be down at the bar in no time.

He fished out a shirt only worn once last week and slid into it. It read: *Luke, yo soy tu padre*. His eyes popped as he heard the clock click to 7:57. The dragon would awaken soon and if he wasn't out that door in three minutes, his ass was gonna get scorched. One leg plunged into his cargoes while the other hopped him into the next room. His flip-flops slid on while he carefully unlatched the front door and gently shut it behind him. A sigh of relief expelled once the elevator doors opened. He hopped inside with a smile as they closed, a smile that curved south once his hand reached back to feel for his wallet.

"Fuck!"

She was coming from the restroom as he re-entered. The toilet flush was struggling. A Chihuahua with borderline Downs Syndrome yapped at her heels. She cradled him from the ground and whispered, "*Mi amor*", into his retarded ear. Manny closed the door a little too loud.

"The fuck you doing home, Manny? You're supposed to be at that Disneyland interview in a half hour!"

He rolled his eyes and grabbed his wallet from the counter. "Forgot this."

The phone began to ring, postponing the lashing. It didn't stop her from muttering, "Stoopid", under her breath as she answered it.

He turned to exit until he heard her.

"Oh, he's here. He just can't speak with you right now. He's gonna get on and try to find his broke ass a job."

He could hear a voice shouting through the receiver, "Jackie, please! This is important!" It was Sam. She hung up.

"Sam's wife is cheating on him again. Big surprise."

He stared at her giant head as if it was a watermelon and his thoughts were a sledgehammer. "Great."

"Well," she said, "get the fuck on already and find me some cheddar."

He was careful not to slam the door on his way out.

Linus used both hands to wiggle his meat with fury, careful of two things; not sprinkling piss on his trousers or breathing in the rancid stank of the men's shitter. The Drawing Room was a murky gin mill off Hillhurst, legendary for its AIDS-ridden restrooms and three dollar hefty pours. He burst through the door back into the living without rinsing his hands in fear of infection. Two men, a middle-aged loser and a blind duffer, sat slouched at opposite corners of the winding bartop, reminiscent of a wimpy W. They didn't even look at him as he expelled his lungs to vacuum in fresh dust. The only

thing on their minds was pickling cold livers, so as long as he was anything less than 80-proof, they could give two shits.

He walked along the golden dragon adorning the far wall and sidled up to the counter, resuming a slouch that completed the drunkard trifecta. The pregnant barkeep polished snifter bulbs behind towers of clean, stacked pints. She focused in on the mid-morning news from out a mounted flatscreen. Lights from the tube bounced through the towered crystal, forcing beams to dance in pinpoint spectrums. Linus beheld the steadfast glimmer as he rose to order another round. It was gorgeous, the stained glass at his morning mass. The barkeep slung him another Bud as the TV spouted out today's top story.

They listened in on the details to an intricate heist executed down at the L.A. Convention Center shortly after the midnight closing of the Guns & Ammo show. Plenty of guns, all stolen, swiped from multiple cargo vans right from under the vendor's noses. Linus paid no mind, focusing in on the red dime-sized patches of carpet that had once hugged the entire floor. A shit grin washed across his face the moment the anchor proclaimed that officials were baffled and turning to the public for leads. It was turning out to be a great day.

Almost.

It only took two phone calls earlier to find out that his Koreatown connection went bust and that any semblance of potential clients he had left, all but dried up. He was at an arms length with every tough in Los Angeles. He sipped on the beer and contemplated if he could fare better with the undergrounds in Frisco or San Diego.

The old man at the end of the bar stood and swilled a giant slug of Cutty before shuffling on out the back door. Some ugly cop was now on the tube, reiterating the force's harebrained speculations as to who swiped the guns. The fortysomething loser was the only soul left in the dive. He could see Linus was in deep thought but turned to him anyway and pointed at the screen.

"I guess there's still a few scumbags smarter than all the rest, huh?"

Linus nodded, hoisting his Bud in cheers. "God blessum." He got a kick out of the guy's shirt, a Star Wars quote in Spanish.

The barkeep rubbed at her tummy as she flipped the channel to The Price Is Right. Just as a leggy blonde canoodled with a brand new washer and drier, the front door opened, blanketing the room with hot white light. A short beardo sidled up next to the loser and ordered a tumbler of Cazadores before blasting into a tirade.

"He's fucking her right this second, Manny! That's why I tried to call you. Fuckin' bitch—fuckin' cock trollin' whore!"

"Who the fuck you talkin' about, Sam?"

"Captain America, man! Don't you remember? I went over all this shit yesterday about how my old lady is fuckin' some dude—works at Universal Studios."

"Oh yeah, 'cause you got the axe from Costco, right?"

"Shit, I get laid off and she gets laid on—I bet the fucker gets full benefits too—come over there with me and help kill the bastard!"

The bartender smiled at Linus.

"I can't do shit," Manny said. "I'm supposed to be out looking for a job just like your broke ass. My wife catches me out and about with the likes of you—" He thumbed at his chest "—then you got one more body to dispose of."

Sam slunk into his tequila as tears welled in his eyes. Linus shook his head in disgust. Two brokedown heels seeking solace in a daytime drunk. And here he was, celebrating a sudden rush of income. It just wasn't right.

He ordered them a round and said, "Couldn't help but overhear your dilemma, friend. You say this guy's over at your house, plowin' the wife as we speak?"

The beardo began to bawl as Manny patted his back and said, "Appears so."

"You guys want a little help with that?"

Sam raised his head. "I was only bullshitting about the killing stuff, mister."

"I kinda figured that by looking at you. Now, I'm not talking about killin' either. I'm asking if you want me to help get rid of this bastard, once and for all."

Their eyes perked. The barkeep tended to the ladies room and shut the door.

Sam said, "What you got in mind, man?"

"Just take me to the place and do exactly as I say. I'll take care of the rest."

Linus wasn't that big a lug, but sandwiched between the two heels, he felt like Rowdy Roddy Piper. It was hot outside, easily 85 and rising, but they lit smokes anyway. Manny and Sam leaned against the bar's brick exterior under a yellow Cocktails sign and puffed away as Linus shuffled through the trunk of his Subaru. From where they were standing, he knew they couldn't see him sifting through the wood crate arsenal, gathering up as much contraband as possible. He loaded up a duffel bags worth of supplies, threw it over his shoulder, and slammed the hood.

"Alright, where we headed?"

The house was nearby. One of those puny Spanish piles, smothered with cheap drywall, boasting an overgrown front yard and an elongated side driveway. They stood out front, admiring Captain America's blue Mini Cooper, customized with a red and white racing stripe, jutting out over the sidewalk. Sam kept asking Linus about what he planned on doing. Linus just stared at Manny.

"This guy ever stop talking?"

Sam said, "That's my pussy in their getting stuffed, man. I just want to make sure that you're not some psycho, that's all."

Linus floated a smile between the two of them, pulled a strange-looking pistol from out his pants, and headed for the front door. Sam's knees went noodle.

"Wait," Manny said. "Let's just head back to the Drawing Room and call it a day, huh?"

The front door was unlocked and swung open as if hinged by butter. The living room was a mess, clothes and fast food wrappers strewn everywhere. Three creepy Jesus portraits clung to the walls; their eyes followed him like vagrants begging for change. He tossed the duffel onto the sofa.

The squeaking of bedsprings and slapping of flesh could be heard in the distance, he followed it to the back bedroom. He kicked open the door, exposing the rippling white skin of a whale of a woman. She was ass up, gnawing on a blanket while being slammed from behind by a blonde boy with a thong tan. He figured the kid couldn't be more than a year out of high school. They stared back at him as if he were an active grenade. He raised the pistol.

Sam and Manny shouted, “Stop,” as they ran down the hallway before hearing two distinct bursts of air followed by the thumps of two bodies smacking the floor.

Linus approached them holding up the weapon.

“It’s just a tranquilizer gun, guys – relax.”

They sighed in relief before realizing that this was actually happening. Their shoulders rose and fell with the onset of hyperventilation. Before Sam could burst out more questions, Linus put them both to work.

“Manny, I need you to grab the boy’s belongings and get him dressed the best you can. Do it fast and grab his car keys—bring them to me, alright?”

He nodded and ran into the bedroom. Linus grabbed Sam by the shoulders.

“I saw there were two other cars in the side driveway. Which one’s yours?”

“The Dodge piece of shit.”

“Okay, I need you to grab me the keys for that and then help me prop your wife on the bed. She’s gonna be sleeping one off for a while.”

His eyes welled. “She’s okay, right?”

“She’ll be fine. There’s enough juice in those darts to scramble her recollections of this whole ordeal. She’ll wake up feeling saucy and wondering what the fuck happened.”

Sam nodded and began rifling through her purse for his keys.

Manny did a poor job of sliding the kid back into his work costume, but at least the blue mask fit snug. He laid the kid face-down in the hallway and tossed Linus the Mini keys. Sam kicked at Captain America’s thong tan while Linus told them what to expect next.

“Manny, you and I are gonna carry this bastard through the kitchen—out the side door and then toss him in the trunk of the Dodge. Sam, your job is to pull out the other cars blocking the driveway so that we can get out, then you’re gonna follow us in the Mini.” He pulled out a pair of driver’s gloves from his back pocket. “Wear these.”

“Where are we headed?”

“Not far—Griffith Park. Let’s get a move on.”

The Dodge sat idling in midday gridlock along Los Feliz Boulevard. They were waiting to turn into Griffith Park, watching a dozen Mexican kids splashing each other inside the Mulholland Memorial as if it were a swimming pool. Manny checked in the rearview to see how Sam was doing in the Mini. He watched his eyes dart throughout the car in contempt, only to stop on the passenger seat and begin laughing. He noticed Manny watching and hoisted up a pair of red Speedos, shaking his head.

“What a fruit.”

Linus said, “What?”

“Captain America—what a cocksucker.”

The light turned green and traffic slugged towards it. Within minutes they were overwhelmed by dense foliage and homeless colonies along the L.A. River as they slowly slugged upwards into the park. The stereo in the Dodge poured out some grinding garage band doing a version of “Gloria”.

Linus said, “Who is this? They’re not that bad.”

Manny smiled, “That’s our old band, man—The Runs. That’s Sam on vocals and me on bass. We broke up almost eight years ago.”

“Rock ‘n’ Roll takes its toll, huh? Oh shit, at the next stop turn right and park at the far end of that parking lot.”

Sam pulled in beside them on the asphalt and got out. There was one of those elaborate plastic playgrounds in the distance, and luckily no one frolicking in it with their shit kids yet. School would be out soon so Linus knew they had to hurry. Manny swooped the kid from the trunk and placed him in the driver’s seat of the Mini. Linus grabbed the duffel from out the Dodge and started peppering the car’s interior with dozens of semi-automatic weapons, hundreds of active rounds, and even a few army knives. Sam and Manny looked on with sour faces, both wondering who the fuck this guy was and what exactly was going down.

“Pull the dude’s pants down, guys.”

They hesitated for a beat.

“Do it right this fucking second!”

They both jumped and help strip the kid of his shiny blue leotards as Linus got behind the wheel of the Dodge.

The moment their hands yanked at the kid’s pants, he woke up flailing and thrashing with a scream like a banshee.

Manny shouted, “Shit!”

Before he knew it, the kid had lunged at him, blistering his face with elbows and knuckles. All he could see was a bright tornado of comic book patriotism. Sam tackled the kid from behind, pinning him face down on the ground. Manny helped control his kicking legs. They both yelled for Linus but before they could finish, a dart pierced the boy’s bald ass and his body went limp again. They sat for a second, shaking their heads, recovering.

Sam propped the kid back into the Mini as Manny tended to his face. He could taste blood rushing from out his nose, but it didn’t feel broken when he wiped it with a napkin. Sam laid into Linus. “What the hell, man? I thought you said those were some crazy ass tranquilizers. What happened?”

Linus shrugged, “Plunger proly didn’t completely flush. No biggie. It happens.”

“No biggie?”

“Yeah! Now, let’s get outta here before anyone drives by.”

They crammed in and the clunker hauled further upwards into the park.

Manny said, “Where to now?”

“Time to grab a drink and cause some fireworks. Just trust me fellas.”

After several winding turns, a huge golf course became visible in the distance. It was named after Woodrow Wilson, boasting long evergreen holes set between lush California oak trees. They could see a two-story driving range and practice greens inhabited by hordes of Asian business types. The air stank of freshly cut grass and wet cigarettes. Linus led them towards the aging clubhouse, easily built in the twenties and restored to its heightened grandeur. As they walked past the pro shop, Linus stopped at a payphone. The guys stared out at the emerald sea filled with frivolous outfits and two-

tone clanking shoes. Linus stuck his hand out to Sam. “Give me some change. We don’t want this call traced back to a cell.”

They watched as he dialed emergency and waited for the pick-up.

“Yes, hello—I was calling to report some suspicious activity. There was a man in a costume waving a gun near the children’s playground in Griffith Park. He now appears to be pleasuring himself inside of a Mini Cooper—I’m a concerned parent and would like someone dispatched immediately!”

He hung the phone back in place after insisting to remain anonymous and was met by the open mouths of Sam and Manny. He gave them the one-minute finger as he whipped out his cell and walked beyond to the putting greens. Clancy answered after one ring.

“It’s done, man. The heat is off, at least for forty-eight hours or so. Tell your boys in Vegas I said thanks.”

Clancy said, “Wait—how’d it go down?”

“Turn on the news. You can see for yourself in a few minutes.”

He punched the red phone button and sauntered back to the boys, visibly arguing amongst each other in shared confusion. They got silent once he was in front of them. He addressed their blank stares.

“Drinks on me, huh?”

They sat at the small clubhouse bar in front of frosty schooners, still silent in utter disbelief. Linus was upbeat, hamming it up with a group of bingeing tee-timers. Once they left, he sat next to the guys and ordered another round.

Sam said, “I think you got some explaining to do, man. Who are you and why did all that just go down?”

“Yeah,” Manny seconded. “The shooting, the guns, the whole plan—it was just a little too easy for you, man. What’s your deal?”

Linus wiped the beer foam from his lips and smiled. “Answers—right. Well, there ain’t gonna be any answers today, men. Think of me as a fairy godmother or messenger of God, sent down to help pull one random cock out of Sam’s wife’s ass forever.” He smiled. “I dunno, think whatever the hell you want—that’s as close to any answers as your gonna get.”

Both men blurted in rebuttal, wanting to know some sort of truth.

“Fellas, that’s all I’m gonna give you, okay? Just be thankful that our paths crossed and shut the fuck up—I’m celebrating my payday.”

Sam said, “Payday?”

“Shut the fuck up already!”

Just then, the bartender hung a sign behind the counter blaring, HELP WANTED. The guys’ eyes popped. Manny asked for two applications.

Linus laughed. “See fellas, things just keep on lookin’ up.”

They both hoisted their mugs to him.

Sam said, “Thanks, man.”

Manny said, “Cheers!”

Glasses clanked before they dove back into their beers and swilled with gusto. Ghetto birds could be heard hovering in the distance, so Linus got up and flipped the corner TV to the one o’clock news. A *Breaking News* banner flashed at the bottom of the

screen. They just stared and smiled as they watched an army of law enforcement close in on the Mini, guns drawn and twitching with fear.

Nolan Knight is a staff writer for Los Angeles' biggest music publication, the L.A. Record. His short fiction has been featured in Thuglit 25, Out of the Gutter, Pulp Pusher, and The Flash Fiction Offensive, as of late. He is actively seeking representation for his novel, The Bullet Treatment, and can be reached at nknight81@yahoo.com. When not punching the keys, he "Bourdain's it" as a strip club buffet aficionado.