

Pass outside of Riverside/San Bernardino. "Jus' you lay back down and relax, Sweetheart," Palmer blared. "You an' me are gonna hit Vegas in a high-roller mode, Jus' a couple o' hours now."

Evelyn did not find this at all comforting. She had no memory of her new escort's unsophisticated pick-up lines, or of the three double bourbon and cokes he'd bought her. All she knew for sure was that she was half-drunk in the back seat of a strange car, a loud man with a large crew-cut head behind the wheel, rolling through God-knows-where on a black star-speckled night. And her warning light — that was normally nonfunctional when her tank was full — blinked back on, brightly: "Let me out, motherfucker." Palmer Cheadle chuckled at this request; he'd heard it before, and never complied, not until he'd gotten them where he wanted them. "I intend to, Darlin', I surely do," he said, his mean grin twinkling in the mirror.

He let her out behind a row of low sandy hills a half a mile off the main highway, and chased her (Damn, she's a feisty one) nearly two hundred yards into the desert before he caught her and — winded to near collapse, so out of shape from the long years of tobacco and drink was he — ended up on the receiving end of a sound thrashing, a cornered weasel attack that featured fingernails to the face and a foot so hard and deep to the groin that it laid him out, incapacitated; a turning of the tables, as it were, for Palmer Cheadle. He was usually the one possessed of his full facilities in these little tussles; it was the ladies who were laid out via several quick punches to the face before he killed them with his bare hands, thumbs sinking deep into crumbling tracheas.

Evelyn didn't have the strength to go the bare hand route, though, so she ran back to the Coupe de Ville and drove it out to the prostrate Palmer and ran him over, back and forth, a dozen times, feeling the vibrations of large bones breaking through the leather upholstery, as the souls of the man's seven previous victims danced over their separate graves in a five-mile radius of Evelyn's victory roll.

FOUR DAYS SLOPPY DRUNK

Palmer Cheadle had been a man of shallow roots, so his disappearance had caused no consternation. He was in the thoughts of not a soul on earth when the scavengers slunk in to work him over as he lay dead in the desert, crushed under the wheels of his own car by a woman who was to be the next victim of his series of sexual attacks that culminated, always, in murder.

He'd underestimated the woman — Evelyn, she'd said her name was. Whippet-thin and as drunk as she could be when he picked her up in that juke-box dive down on the coast route in that dingy little beach town, she seemed the perfect mark. How was he to know that she'd come off that heavy drunk with her senses intact, warning light flickering; and how was he to know that, once he'd finally caught her, she'd put up a fight like a cornered weasel and incapacitate him with a karate kick to the balls?

So Evelyn Lamuraglia survived the attack of Palmer Cheadle, and she had the presence of mind — after she'd run him over back and forth a dozen times — to get out of the Coupe de Ville and take the wallet with damned near five grand, hard cash, from his back pocket. Money that Palmer had stockpiled during a recent two-week stint of running fifty-pound backpacks of marijuana across the border in the desert out east of Tecate in the dead of the night.

So as the ants hollowed out his eye sockets and chewed away his soft swollen tongue, Evelyn Lamuraglia holed herself up in Whiskey Pete's out west of Vegas, got a room with Palmer's fat wad of money and tried to drink her brief relationship with him out of her mind, without success.

After a six-day stay — four days sloppy drunk followed by a short recuperative dry spell — Evelyn located a pit-stopped tour bus coming off a twenty-four-hour Las Vegas turn-around and slipped the driver a twenty to drop her off in Loma Alta on his way down to his Chula Vista home base, leaving Palmer Cheadle, and his Coupe de Ville, to bake out in the desert sun.

— Dan Lenihan

Oceanside CA

HUPI

The beauty of the
idea that you
never accumulate
enough of anything
to ever
retire.

— Hugh Fox

East Lansing MI