

## RED-EYE TO THE STONES

A grave anger welled up in me then, and I took it out on everything around me, caring nothing for those I abused, and trying to beat life at its own remote game. I don't like to remember these times when I used the world as a personal roulette wheel and people in it for my own benefit, but it's not as if I'm alone. My confusion seems typical of the sixties with all its broken marriages, drugged and drunken suicides, and shattered dreams.

I did what we all did...buried my disenchantment, tried to make it work with stronger drugs, and continued on the trail we'd set out on initially...the one which seemed to have disappeared along with our future. Like the cowboy's song, "the straight and narrow path my daddy taught to me turned into a thousand winding roads as strange as they could be." Mine seemed more like a maze.

I drank Scotch, gobbled codeine, and sniffed coke, while I plotted my way into an adventure big enough to distract the hurt that wrapped me like a blanket. My artist friends cared for me, no one asked where my wife was, but temporal moments with them were full of embarrassing vacant spots. We seemed strangers now. They left me alone. I read my mail with Limpy curled by my side, Sheeba on my lap, and the melancholy cloak of Tim Hardin's music draped over my soul. My eye caught a clipping about Mick and Bianca Jagger's wedding in St. Tropez, and I was gone.

Dressed in my velvet finest, the soft Afghani vest, and blue boots, I stopped in Honolulu just long enough to draw a bank draft on my life's savings, and caught the red-eye flight to Paris without looking back. Although I had no real plan, it was all or nothing this time, for I didn't care anymore. Maybe that's why I dove so deep my first time without any questions. A scheme formed up as I flew into destiny's hands, and its plot thickened with a devil-may-care overview that grew on me by the minute, making anything I thought of seem possible. I was indestructable, as I'd challenged life to beat me, so couldn't lose.

I tipped the valet at the Hotel Byblos to hold my bags, and strolled the docks admiring topless women, million-dollar yachts, and world-class travellers mulling about in the early morning. No Rolling Stone camaraderie worth their salt would be found in this bright reality. I settled on a stone wall above the harbor, whiffed a line of coke, smoked a joint of ganja, and waited for afternoon, when they'd emerge from their drugged reverie to seek food and drink in the cool shadows of St. Tropez's grottos.

Some extravagant women took notice of my presence, and I knew this feeling of power was real. I was James Bond



crossed with Humphrey Bogart, international playboy and agent provocateur. I could feel the muscles of my face pull at my smile, contorting to a sneer of contempt for the ordinary world, then relaxing back to the fisherboy with wide eyes piercing the water's surface in search of barracuda. The diamond of my consciousness was showing through...a collection of facets from many lifetimes. Like Birte had showed me in Macao, it was only an attitude. I rolled the Afghani vest and lace shirt into a pillow and dreamed of intrigue, sex, and violence.

The hum of humanity awoke me refreshed. My intricate plans, dreamed up as I went, were about to unfold. I had to force myself to eat, even though the crepes and strawberries were great. It was always this way with cocaine...you had to remember to eat and take care of your body. Two fancy birds passed my table, and I beckoned them over, inquiring of the Stones and getting back in exuberant French enough to know that those who remained were within the adobe walls of the Byblos.

I found a sailmaker who understood what I needed, and paid him well to stop everything he was doing to create a masterpiece out of canvas. By week's end the custom vest's tiny pouches would hold twenty-pounds of pure gold, each of the little bars marked with a distinct 222 and insulated from one another. Gold was worth three times its price in India. I was gonna double my Vietnam paycheck with my man there, Ramalpinder, en route to Laos. I chuckled to myself and snorted a gram in two hits, pleased with the bits and pieces as they came together. I strolled into the plush bar at the Byblos like Zorba the Greek.

It's like luck in Las Vegas...when you're on a roll go with it. My smile came from Errol Flynn, my walk from David Niven, and the silent witness in my soul watched with satisfaction as the drama unfolded. Down the corridors of time and through the architectural kaleidoscope that was the Byblos I strutted, sure of my role and capable of anything. There were eyes on me, women of the world expecting dramatic men to touch their lives and make them whole, and I was one to do it.

I settled on Karena, a striking Dutch blond, like a fly on whipped cream. We were totally engrossed in each other from the moment our eyes met, and without so much as an introduction to mar the majesty of our meeting, melted into each other as if a camera had followed our paths to this stage for the act upcoming. Around us swirled hold-overs from the party, sparkling in the flash of paparazzi's bulbs. Who they thought I was never entered my mind, as I changed like a chameleon minute by minute, with a reptilian gaze that froze startled young beauties in their tracks. "It'll never happen again" flashed in my mind, but I didn't care. It's just as well no one recognized me...it might've cracked my fragile spell.

Karena was so striking, and I so utterly cocksure, that the world moved aside for us. Chauffeurs bowed, doormen doffed tophats, even policemen deferred in our wake...and this was the whole idea. If I could keep her straight--for she had a drug problem--we could take on any roles together and overcome any obstacles. Waiting out there in the midst of war, a monstrous challenge provoked me. Slowly and deliberately, I manipulated my captive actress for a role she'd never dreamed of, on a stage too broad for her to grasp.