



SERIOUS TROUBLE

by owen mould

We apologize for the late issue, but circumstances beyond our control prevented publication: we were in jail.

It was the weekend before that ominous retail splurge known as Valentines Day and there seemed to be no better opportunity to Carpe Diem than to get hog wild before knuckling down to the uncomfortable duties of the holiday.

Well, some ideas turn out to be better than others in retrospect.

Met up with Bear at the local locale The Dog and Pony. Sophie, Bear's main squeeze, was out of town visiting a sick aunt in Humboldt, which resides some 400 miles to the north of here. She left on Friday morning, and Bear, never one for moderation in most things he attempted, already was on a tear by that evening. Cleaned up and tamed by young love, the relationship had aged an entire year and Bear was back in fine form in the Dog and Pony, slinging immense tankards of ale and wearing an already oil-stained sweatshirt over a white shirt with the tails untucked, which had managed to acquire layers of filth in

a matter of hours. Even his beard looked as ratty as an old birds nest and he sported a black eye for he had gotten into at least three fist fights already.

Bear was finishing up an off-color joke about a clergyman and a mule and the bartender was fixing to 86 the boy when I strolled in the door.

"Denby! Let's get on down to the Crazy Horse and pickup some company!" Bear shouted.

Before I could respond with a good evasion tactic -- difficult to achieve since I had come over expressly for the purpose of meeting him -- the red-eyed maniac hooked me by the arm and had me in the cab of his pickup and we were headed over the bridge to that notorious den of iniquity. Now, the Crazy Horse is one of those old-fashioned joints that have been around a long time to provide entertainment to the lovelorn gentleman, traveling businessmen, and all the reverse baseball cap wearing youth of Fremont California, who manage to reproduce their culture wherever they go, whether it be Barrows Alaska, Raleigh, North Carolina, Memphis, Tennessee, or Minot, North Dakota.

Actually Barrows is a rather nice place, so strike that one off of the list.

Anyhoo, Bear blows into the Crazy Horse on a typical Saturday Night and since it is quite clear that he is neither a gentle man nor a traveling salesman from the Corporation, he fell into the third category and they treated him as such.

This being the Weekend celebrating the main focus of places like the Crazy Horse, the Management had done up the hall real nice with hearts and cupids and red strands and lots of those heart-shaped candies with catchphrases therein inscribed. And the music was all about love, love, love. Of course.

While Bear attempted with truly heartbreaking measures to get one of the girls to come home with him, by suggestion, by cajolement, by entreaty, by bribe and by demand, I secluded in a far table which happened to be near the break table for the bar dancers. When I informed one of them I was a journalist covering Valentine's Day festivities one of them said, casually blowing cigarette smoke, "Keep your hands to yourself and you can ask all the questions you want."

The woman's name -- as given -- was Sandra, although these things are somewhat questionable as accurate information under the circumstances. She was a fair brunette of average height. Her act began with a sort of gingham dress reminiscent of farmer's wives in movies of some indeterminate era and this is what she wore. She had one boy child at home attended by a sitter from City College and she was not married. When she smiled a middling gap between her front teeth would appear. Naked dancing was pretty much a way for somebody with barely an high school education to pay the rent and feed herself and her kid. She had been all over, worked the famous strip joint in Borderline, met a guy there and fell in love, as humans are wont to do even in the most extreme circumstances, and wound up pursuing him to Alaska. Where things did not pan out. As jobs went, naked dancing was not so bad and we started talking about the language classes taught there over at City College.

Meanwhile Bear had transitioned from the more lyrical methods to ones involving some physical intervention and I could see that things would not end well as Security appeared.

Let it be known that every strip club, no matter how sordid, follows the most cardinal rule: Look but do not touch. Like many situations in life the transactions are purely financial and illusory.

It was my turn to rise up and seize the wayward Bear and cart him from that old abode in safety -- which was not easy, given that he had fallen into an atavistic frenzy of lust and he beat upon my pate and my schnoz with much severity, tempered only by a great deal of alcohol consumed and a long decade of fraternal association.

But the Management is much used to such outbursts. They are old hands at this game of pay and be teased and they have their forces ever ready with tasers, pepper spray, the simple riot baton, and the old fashioned kick to the nuts. I have spent many hours with practitioners of this more practical of martial arts and I can say with conviction that they are far more practiced and efficient at it than any of you.

Knowing these things, I got him outside where he glommed upon yet another plan which was more direct than the previous one. Still, he was much put out on having to surrender his affections upon one particular dancer.

Which one, I asked with some innocence.

"The one with the tattoo." He said, as if that answered everything.

Since all of them possess tats, I let the matter ride as unpursuable and unlikely to bear fruit.

We wound up back in Oaktown on the one and only San Pablo Avenue. You know exactly the set of blocks I am talking about. Everyone out there has a place exactly like this. Even Orem, Utah has a street just like it.

Bear stopped his pickup along the curb and soon they were all around us, appearing out of the night like bats or some supernatural species. Women and men dressed as women, all in skimpy skirts and platform heels, their skins pale from lack of sunlight. For a brief moment I flashed upon an image in George Romero's "Night of the Living Dead", when zombies pull the two bodies from a burning pickup truck and eat them.

But even these people are people. They are people of the night but they have day lives and concerns and ways that have nothing to do with this time on the Avenue. And each one of them, also, longs for love and some kind of release. Perhaps a release different from what you might imagine.

While Bear chatted up a group of likely prospects, negotiating terms I would guess, I went into journalist mode again and began interviewing what I took to be hookers. Found a charming lady, dressed a bit conservatively in a mid-length black skirt and simple blouse who appeared willing to talk at length. She called herself Erica, a clear pseudonym for I would have found her a better Sandra.

The conversation did not proceed for long, for Bear suddenly shouted with great energy, "DON'T TALK TO THAT LADY; SHE AINT NO HO!"

"Well, how do you know," innocent me inquired, not considering what a woman who was not a whore would be doing down there.

"SHE'S GOT ALL OF HER TEETH, YOU DUMBASS!"

This produced an unfortunate series of events. First, every hooker and tranny on the Avenue disappeared as if sucked up into a massive metaphysical vacuum cleaner.

Second, the charming and sweet Erica whipped out a snub-nosed .38 caliber pistol, pointed at me, and shouted, "FREEZE MUTHERFUCKER!"

Thirdly, an entire army -- it seemed -- of police cruisers appeared out of nowhere as suddenly as the hookers had disappeared and we, Bear and I, were immediately arrested and thrown in jail on Seventh Street not several blocks away.

Now there we were on Valentines Weekend, Bear and I, spending Saturday Night in the Clink, arrested on charges of Interfering with Official Police Business in the form of the Luscious Sting Program, designed to rid the Avenue of prostitution, which it has failed to do for many seasons. Even though it may never succeed all the cops were really put out by our interference.

It was a long, cold night in the Clink on Seventh Street and since we were tossed in after hours, we had no benefit of the free Saturday popcorn, dinner, or extra blankets. So the entire affair was entirely without the usual advantages.

But we had a fine time in there talking with the other criminals about all sorts of criminal antisocial stuff like loitering, littering, public urination and acting Republican -- all of which is highly illegal in this part of California.

In the morning the Judge fined us both fifty dollars and told us never to be seen about these regions again at that hour -- or better yet, any hour at all -- and

the Significant Other had to come down and bail us out for we had charges of Being a Nuisance, Solicitation, and Interference with Police Procedure still outstanding and she was not pleased at all and both of us -- me and Bear -- had to endure a most grievous session of complaint and diatribe. She was not happy at all. No she was not.

Let it be known that if any one of you speaks of this Valentines Day, you shall not expect a positive response from this quarter and for good reason. Next year, we plan on spending a week in bed with the entire extended version of Peter Jackson's "Lord of the Rings" and a good bottle of whiskey.

Still, its too bad we never got the real name of that Sandra. She was real cute for a policelady.

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