

A COTTONWOOD KILL

A short story written by The Classy Alcoholic

Part 1

Fire Mountain Wines – Cottonwood, AZ

Located at 1010 N Main St, Cottonwood, AZ 86326

Open Sun-Thurs 12p-7p; Fri-Sat 12p-9p

<http://firemountainwines.com>



The historic town of Cottonwood is in the heart of Verde Valley wine country. The place sits an hour south of Flagstaff and about ninety minutes north of Phoenix. There's a business strip downtown with several places to eat and shop as well as four wine tasting rooms. Normally The Classy Alcoholic would be traveling to this lovely town to highlight and review any wine to be found but today he was on a very different mission.

The Classy Alcoholic has been blogging about Arizona microbreweries and wineries for well over a year and he built a considerable amount of fame, fortune and legitimacy throughout the state in that short time. But just as Icarus fell into the sea because he tried to fly after getting super drunk The Classy Alcoholic reached a point where he squandered his fame and legitimacy. He used almost all his celebrity clout to get himself into the VIP areas of the shittiest Phoenix strip clubs for free every weekend because it sounded like a good idea at the time, before he realized just what kind of damage a year's worth of strip club meals would do to his body. Also most of that fortune had to legally go to his goddamn ex-wives.

Anyway, The Classy Alcoholic found a chance to recapture his legitimacy when an FBI agent approached him for his expertise. And by "approached him for his expertise," I mean, "tossed him into the trunk of a car, tied him to a chair and punched him in the

face until he agreed to lend his expertise.”

Old Town Cottonwood is a peaceful, welcoming place where tourists from all across the state go to spend a relaxing weekend. But any quiet town can have a dark side. The Classy Alcoholic walked into the Fire Mountain Wines tasting room on Main Street wearing his traditional suit, tie and pocket square. He stood at the bar as he waited for his contact to arrive.



The interior of Fire Mountain Wines was adorned with art that highlights the Native and southwestern traditions embraced by the winery. Wine tastings here were \$10 for a sample of four and you could choose white, red or a combination of the two. The Classy Alcoholic was perusing the menu when a beautiful blonde woman walked into the tasting room. She wore calf-high boots with a black-and-white dress under a red blazer. She sat at the bar stool next to The Classy Alcoholic and slid a manila envelope to him without looking him in the eye.

“Mr. Classy, I presume,” she said. “I’m your contact. My superiors asked me to deliver this package to you.”

“Thank you. This is exactly what I needed, Miss...?”

The woman shook her head and bit her lip in clear frustration.

“Please don’t tell me you’re such an amateur that you don’t know better than to ask for a real name, sir. I was told to call myself The Classy Lady.”

“A perfect name for a woman as lovely as yourself.”

The Classy Lady was not fazed. She was all business and he was ready to get down to it. He realized that would make a killer line.

“Very well, Ms. Classy Lady. You’re clearly all business and I’m ready to get down to it.” Nailed it. “First things first. Let’s have a drink.”

“I’m not here to drink, sir. I’m here to do a job and I take that very seriously. I’m supposed to brief you on a multimillion-dollar diamond heist that just happened in California yesterday. My agency knows the diamonds are here in Cottonwood and they’re being transported to the buyer some time tonight. We’re short on time and I’m not about to waste it getting hit on by some shady consultant no one’s ever heard of.”

“Well first of all I’m gonna have to take offense to that. My beer and wine blog is actually quite popular online and I’m a regular fixture in Arizona’s wine country, which is why your bosses hired me. I already know about the jewelry heist and I also know that you’re not just here to brief me, you’re also here as my cover. We’re supposed to be posing as a married couple on vacation for our anniversary so if you don’t want to tip off the guy transporting the jewels you’ll chill out for a second and have a drink with me.”

The Classy Lady looked annoyed but knew he was right.

“I only drink white wines.”

“Because they’re so acidic?”

“Very funny. I suppose you only drink reds because they’re strong and bold and you think you identify with them?”

“Ummm...yeah, actually, that’s exactly right.”

“People aren’t wine, Mr. Classy. We’re far less complex.”

Fire Mountain’s wines were produced with grapes from Arizona, New Mexico and California. There was a tasting menu of four Arizona-only wines. Two white, two red. It was a fitting choice. The bartender poured drinks for the couple.



The Classy Lady took a sip, turned to her new partner and gave him a wide smile.

"The wine is lovely, babe. Thanks for recommending this place. This is the best anniversary yet!"

She grabbed The Classy Alcoholic's hand on top of the bar and kissed him on the cheek. Holy shit, this lady was good. For a brief second he almost believed she was being sincere. Maybe she was a little better at undercover work than he initially thought.

"Okay, now that I've been debriefed and we're on the same page you should take a look at the young Latino guy sitting across the room over my left shoulder. He's right next to the bathroom. Do you see him?"

"Yes, he's got a shaved head, plaid shirt and a neck tattoo. If I had to guess I'd say he's of the cholo persuasion."

"His name is Lucius."

"His neck tattoo says 'luscious' though."

"Yeah, I don't think he knows his name is spelled wrong. You can't exactly look down at your own neck."

"And the letter I is dotted with a crown."

"It's a Mexican thing. Doesn't matter. What else do you see?"

"He's got a tiny piñata donkey sitting on the table for some reason."

"Exactly. The diamonds are in that tiny piñata donkey."

"He's the transporter? How do you know that?"

"Lucius has been friends with my cousin Chico for years. They came up together doing petty crimes. They started off stealing car stereos, selling counterfeit Russian sex dolls out the back of a trunk, small time shit like that. But Chico said Lucius recently became the upwardly mobile type. He's been trying to get bigger and better paying jobs from the bosses in his crew. And he's about to take a big step up-

"By delivering the diamonds!"

"He doesn't know there are diamonds in that tiny piñata donkey. He just knows he has to deliver it. So we're gonna take him down and find out where he's meeting the guy."

"Do you have a weapon on you?"

"I do now, thanks to you."

The Classy Alcoholic opened the manila envelope she handed to him at the bar. There was a white handkerchief in it, folded into a small square.

"You can't be serious."

"What? I can do a lot of damage with something little." He gave The Classy Lady a wink. She smirked but quickly recovered. She looked embarrassed, even. Maybe this smile was more genuine than the last one she gave him.

"So what's the plan?"

"Lucius is gonna get a text from the guy telling him where to meet. When that happens you're gonna go into the bathroom and wait for me."

"Okay, what do we do in the meantime?"

"I'm thinking we should have another drink."

The Classy Alcoholic asked for the remaining two tastes in the wine flight. He got his red and the Lady got her white. They walked around the tasting room admiring the art

on the wall and holding hands. The Classy Lady laughed as he made jokes and leaned against him once or twice, resting her head on his shoulder.



It felt odd touring a wine tasting room with someone else. The Classy Alcoholic usually roamed the state's breweries and wineries by himself. It was hard to find a partner who could keep up with his heavy drinking schedule and all of the previous women in his life decided they wanted to make an honest living instead of following him around from bar to bar. He knew The Classy Lady was putting on an act but for a brief moment he decided to just enjoy the charade. Her stunning outfit certainly made her look like she belonged by his side.

The couple heard a beep from a cell phone behind them. Lucius was getting his directions for the diamond transfer. The Classy Lady went into the bathroom and waited as The Classy Alcoholic grabbed the handkerchief from his pocket. Lucius stood up with his tiny piñata donkey and was about to head for the door.

The Classy Alcoholic felt for the glass capsule sewn into the middle of the handkerchief. He cracked it open with his thumb and let the chloroform seep into the cotton.

"Yo, Lucius! What up, dawg?" Lucius stopped dead in his tracks with the tiny piñata donkey in his hand. "Is Cousin Chico with you? That fool owes me a counterfeit Russian sex doll. I sent him the money for that shit weeks ago!" That last part wasn't even a lie.

"Excuse me, do I know you, homeboy?"

"Of course you do, asshole."

The Classy Alcoholic lunged and shoved the handkerchief into Lucius' face. He

struggled a bit but the chloroform acted fast. He quickly dragged Lucius' unconscious body and tiny piñata donkey into the bathroom without anyone in the tasting room noticing a thing.

"Holy shit!" The Classy Lady said, panicking. "Did you kill him?"

"No, he's fine, he's just taking a nap. Grab his phone."

The Classy Alcoholic broke open the tiny piñata donkey and pulled a black pouch out of it. There were dozens of flawless diamonds inside. He took Lucius' limp thumb and pressed it onto his iPhone, unlocking it. The last text was from a contact saved only as "J." It read:

**Meet next door at Pillsbury wine company in 15mins.
[Smiling Emoji with tongue sticking out]**

"Okay, Classy Lady, we know the location so we have to move fast. How good are you at writing in Old English?" He handed her a Sharpie that he pulled from his pocket.

"What? Why?"

"Because you need to draw Lucius' tattoo on my neck. We're going into that meeting next door and I'm gonna pretend to be him."

"That's insane! You're gonna get yourself killed. We have to call this in. The FBI can interrogate Lucius and get him to give up information on the people behind all this."

"Trust me, Lucius is a lot of things but he's definitely not a rat. This one time in high school Cousin Chico had sex with a fat chick named Betty and asked Lucius not to say anything. That was almost fifteen years ago and Lucius never told a single person except me and Chico's dad. But he didn't even mean to tell me. I just happened to be in the room when he told his dad. Uncle Frankie was proud as hell. And besides, we don't have time for an interrogation so start drawing."

"Okay, but does it have to be Old English?"

"He's Mexican. OF COURSE it has to be Old English!"

The Classy Lady drew as best as she could while trying to keep her hands from shaking. She was about to get deeper into this mess than she expected. The Classy Alcoholic grabbed her hand and looked her in the eyes.

"Take a breath, my Classy Lady. You can do this. We're gonna get through this together. By the end of the day you're gonna make somebody very proud."

She took his words to heart. She gathered her composure and finished drawing the fake tattoo. She walked out of the restroom and texted her FBI handler to tell him there was an unconscious body that needed to be cleaned up.

The Classy Couple left Fire Mountain Wines and walked to Pillsbury Wine Company right next door. They looked at each other but said nothing. They didn't need words. They just knew they needed to be ready for whatever came next.



To be continued...

Part 2

Pillsbury Wine Company – Cottonwood, AZ

Located at 1012 N Main St, Cottonwood, AZ 86326

Open Sun-Thurs 11a-6p; Fri & Sat 11a-9p

<http://www.pillsburywine.com>



The Pillsbury Wine Company tasting room was immediately next door to Fire Mountain Wines. The Classy Alcoholic and The Classy Lady walked inside while trying to keep their cool. They were both nervous as hell but didn't want the other to see it. The Classy Alcoholic grabbed The Lady's hand to try and maintain their cover as a married couple vacationing in wine country. But something was off. He could feel her hand shaking and saw her eyes shifting back and forth. She wasn't ready for this operation. He leaned in to whisper in her ear and she flinched.

"Relax," he said. "I need you here with me. I promise I won't let anything happen to you. But I can't get through this mission alone. If you wanna get your man at the end of the day then we need to stick together."

The Classy Lady nodded and wrapped her arms around him. She pressed her face against his chest and breathed in the Drakkar Noir he picked up at Walgreens the other day. She loved that smell. It reminded her of when she was a little girl and saw her uncles dressed up for drug court in their fanciest wife-beaters and solid gold chains with the Virgin Mary on them. She calmed down a bit and gave The Classy Alcoholic a smile. She was ready.

The couple walked up to the bar and looked at Pillsbury's menu. The Classy

Alcoholic scanned the room for the person he was supposed to be meeting and saw an elderly, gray-haired man wearing a guayabera and a fedora sitting with his back to them.

Pillsbury has been making wine from 100% Arizona-grown fruit for the last 15 years from their vineyards located in Cochise County. Their wines have earned numerous medals throughout Arizona and, in 2016, were awarded a Double Gold medal from the San Francisco Chronicle Wine Competition. The drink menu offered a white wine flight, a red wine flight and a combination of both. There were five wines in each flight and they cost \$10. If you wanted to keep the wine glass with the Pillsbury logo on it you'd have to pay \$12.50.

The Classy Alcoholic ordered a combo flight for him and the Lady and paid the extra charge to keep the glass. He figured it would come in handy. The bartender poured a red wine for him and a white wine for her. The two of them sat on a couch in the back of the tasting room near the old man whose face was covered by the newspaper he was reading.



"Do you think that's the guy?" The Classy Lady whispered.

"I don't know. I'm gonna turn so I can show off my fake neck tattoo. If someone comes in here looking for the guy delivering the jewels I assume they'll know he has the word 'luscious' tattooed on his neck."

"You know how fucking stupid you look wearing a suit with a neck tattoo, kid?" the man in the guayabera said. The Classy Alcoholic instantly recognized the gravelly smoker's voice before the man even showed his face.

“Lennix? I didn’t know you were on this mission.”

The old man lowered the newspaper. His leathery face was stuck in the trademark Lennix grimace that The Classy Alcoholic knew well. After decades of dodging bullets, grenades, attack dogs and diabetes the only thing that annoyed Lennix more than anything was having to give a fuck.

“I wasn’t supposed to be, kid. I’m on vacation! I’m retiring in two weeks and I’m burning off the last few sick days I have left. But when I heard the Bureau roped you into some ridiculous secret mission I had to come here and make sure your dumbass doesn’t get killed!”

“Excuse me,” The Classy Lady said, “but who the hell are you?”

“You don’t know Lennix? He works for the FBI too.”

“Him? But he looks like a middle school janitor who buys weed from the art teacher.”

Lennix threw his head back and laughed hard enough to trigger a coughing fit.

“You’re a funny one, Classy Lady. But I can assure you I’m more than capable of handling myself. I was running covert ops a whole decade before your parents ever got down to business in a Porta Potty at a Bon Jovi concert. I’ve been with the FBI, DEA, CIA and pretty much any other government agency that needs my particular set of skills. And if the two of you have any hope of brining in Jencarlos and Romeo then you’re gonna need me on your side.”

“Woah, hold on a second,” The Classy Alcoholic said. “Who are Jencarlos and Romero?”

The Classy Lady turned away and shifted uncomfortably. Lennix smiled.

“Ah, so your Classy Lady hasn’t given you the whole story on this mission.”

“I was told the identities of the buyers were classified, Lennix, you *asshole*. Clearly you don’t give a damn about confidentiality.”

“I can assure you, Lady, that if there’s one person in the world you can trust with confidential information, it’s The Classy Alcoholic. This man saved my life once so there’s no way in hell I’m gonna let you – or anyone – put him at risk by sending him into a dangerous meeting without knowing exactly what’s going on.”

The Classy Lady turned sheepish. She didn’t know this Classy Alcoholic asshole she’d been putting up with was held in such high regard by a fellow agent.

“You really saved his life?” she asked him.

“Yeah but Lennix has hated being alive since the early 90’s so I didn’t exactly do him any favors.”

The Classy Lady let out another one of those smiles that took her by surprise. She knew she shouldn’t be smiling during such a serious, dangerous operation but she couldn’t help herself. And she decided to stop trying.

“Okay, fine, I’ll tell you what I know, Mr. Classy. Jencarlos and Romeo are brothers and international criminals tied to bank robberies, drug smuggling and gang murders all across the U.S. and Mexico. They’re the ones buying the diamonds from yesterday’s heist. Well...Romeo is. He’s the kingpin. Jencarlos is his younger brother and second-in-command but Romeo is the one I’m after. I’ve been tracking him all across the country for over a year and my intel says he’s in Cottonwood today.”

“So where did these guys come from?”

“Same place you and Lucius did. From nothing. They started out doing petty crimes like robbing liquor stores and paying for lap dances with Sacagawea dollars, which wasn’t illegal but the strippers absolutely fucking hated it. And at some point they decided they wanted more. They focused their talents on bigger scores and pretty soon they ended up being some of the most notorious crime lords in the country. They make a point of reaching out to the poorest neighborhoods and finding small time crooks that they can mold into organized criminals.”

“That’s how they got Lucius on board to transport those diamonds.”

“Exactly. A lot of these petty thieves see the brothers as heroes. They see a lot more potential in working for Romeo’s organization than they do in any of their other job prospects. Hell, you almost have to admire Romeo’s ability to go from a nobody to a major crime boss in just a few years. It takes a special kind of dedication.”

“I appreciate you telling me all this. I promise I’ll do whatever I can to help you bring Romeo in.”

“Thank you, Mr. Classy. Now, if you don’t mind, I think I’m in need of another drink.”

“Go for it, Ms. Classy. I already paid for a whole flight.”

The Classy Lady walked back up to the bar and got another sample of Pillsbury’s white wines. The Classy Alcoholic watched her stride confidently across the tasting room and admired the way the edges of her dress swayed back and forth under her beautiful red blazer. He noticed how she crossed her ankles as she leaned across the bar to hold out her wine glass for the bartender to pour the next drink. The bottom of her dress rose slightly – no more than an inch, surely – as she leaned forward...but that was enough to show off an extra inch of her smooth, toned legs. She really was fucking gorgeous.



“You look different,” Lennix said, breaking his concentration.

“Yeah, I know. I’m fatter than the last time you saw me. Why you gotta bring up obvious shit?”

“That’s not what I mean, you idiot. I’m saying you look different around her. She brings something out in you that I haven’t seen in years.”

Now it was The Classy Alcoholic’s turn to look sheepish. He watched The Classy Lady pull her cell phone out of her blazer’s pocket and take a call.

“I’ve heard about her back at the Bureau,” Lennix continued. “She’s a lot like you. She’s smart, she’s driven and she’s stubborn as hell. Did you know this is her first time in the field? She has weapons and combat training but she’s always just been an analyst. Her career skyrocketed thanks to her ability to track Romeo down this past year when nobody else could. And somehow she was able to convince her asshole of a boss to let her join the mission with you because she had to see this assignment through herself. You’ve got a tough Lady by your side. Don’t let her down.”

The Classy Lady walked back to the couch where The Classy Alcoholic and Lennix were sitting while holding her hand over her cell phone’s speaker.

“Hey, guys, sorry, I have to take this call outside. I’ll be right back.”

The Classy Alcoholic continued to admire her as she walked out of the Pillsbury tasting room. Lennix saw the look in his eyes and knew just what was happening.

“Can I tell you something else, Mr. Classy? I think she’s starting to like you too.”

“I don’t know, Lennix. She was a bit of an ice queen when I met her.”

“Oh come on, you should know you’re not the kind of guy who ever makes a good first impression. You have to grow on people. Hell, I hated the shit out of you for six

months after I met you.”

The phone inside The Classy Alcoholic’s suit jacket pocket started ringing. It wasn’t his phone because his ringtone had been “It’s Raining Men” for years now. This generic ring was from Lucius’ phone that he brought with him from Fire Mountain Wines. The diamond buyer was calling. He answered and tried his best Lucius impression.

“Yo. ‘Sup? Dis Lucius...dawg.”

“You got my diamonds?” said a man’s voice on the other end of the phone.

“Damn right, fool. I got that shit. You gonna meet me or what?”

“I was gonna...till I realized that you ain’t Lucius.” The look on The Classy Alcoholic’s face was enough to make Lennix realize something was wrong. “Somebody told me Lucius had a neck tattoo that said ‘Luscious.’ But then I saw you in the Pillsbury Wine tasting room and I saw the letter L on your neck isn’t dotted with a crown. That’s a typical Mexican thing.”

Shit. The Classy Lady must’ve forgotten to dot the letter L with a crown instead of just a dot. He didn’t realize it because you can’t exactly look down at your own neck.

“So I don’t know who the fuck you are but here’s what’s gonna happen,” the man on the phone continued. “You’re gonna bring the diamonds to the Arizona Stronghold Vineyards tasting room across the street. You’ll come alone. No weapons. And just so you don’t get any crazy ideas, I bagged myself a little bit of leverage.”

There was silence for a beat. The Classy Alcoholic knew exactly what he was going to hear next but for a brief second he hoped he was wrong. He didn’t want it to be true...

“Help me, Mr. Classy! HELP!”

It was The Classy Lady’s voice. Just as he expected.

“Don’t you touch her, you piece of shit! If you hurt her I swear I will fucking kill you!”

The man on the phone chuckled.

“Don’t threaten me, kid. Not unless you want me to take your girlfriend and send her back to you with a total butterface. She’s hot. This chick’s a nine. But she’ll be a three at best when I’m done with her. So bring me my diamonds right the fuck now.”

“Who the hell are you?”

“They call me Jencarlos. But you can call me ‘Daddy.’”

The phone went silent.

“Lennix, get the FBI here. Tell them Jencarlos is at Arizona Stronghold Vineyards.”

The Classy Alcoholic went for the front door but Lennix grabbed him by the arm and pulled him back.

“Don’t go out there, Classy.”

“Fuck you, Lennix! He has The Classy Lady. I promised I wouldn’t let anything happen to her. I have to get her back!”

“Of course you do, asshole, but you can’t just walk into a dangerous situation without a plan. Romeo’s the man in charge but Jencarlos is the crazy motherfucker who does all the dirty work. He’s the one who shoots guys in the face when the brothers need a rival or a witness taken out. Romeo doesn’t even get close to that shit but Jencarlos won’t hesitate to pop you and The Lady right in the middle of Main Street if he wants to. That’s who you’re up against right now.”

The Classy Alcoholic’s heart rate was jacked to shit but he took a breath and

listened to Lennix.

“Alright, so tell me what I need to know about this guy.”

“He’s got even more impulse control issues than you do, for one. He’ll have his piece pointed at you the second you walk in the door so don’t give him a reason to use it. He’s cocky and he runs on raw emotion. But he follows his big brother around like a puppy dog because he doesn’t have the self-confidence to make any big decisions himself. Jencarlos thinks small.”

“Okay, I can work with that.”

“One more thing. I can assure you The Classy Lady isn’t with him. She’s offsite and if he sees any of my agents he’ll give the order to have her killed. If we want to get The Lady back it’ll have to be just you and me. You walk in the front door and stall him. I’ll sneak into Arizona Stronghold’s tasting room through the back.”

“Okay, that’s perfect. No one will suspect you’re a government agent because you look like Santana’s older brother who somehow did twice as much acid as he did.”

“Fuck you, Classy.”

“Fuck you too, Lennix. I need you on this. Don’t let me down.”

Lennix nodded, adjusted his stupid fedora and walked out of the Pillsbury tasting room. The Classy Alcoholic took his wine glass with the Pillsbury logo on it into the bathroom. He broke the bowl and base off of it, leaving only the thin, crystal stem with sharp edges on either end. He carefully slid the stem under his left sleeve until it was fully hidden under the dress shirt’s cuff. Moments like these reminded him why he never wore short sleeves.



The Classy Alcoholic walked out of Pillsbury Wine Company's tasting room and eyed the Arizona Stronghold Vineyards tasting room across the street. He knew he had to keep his promise. He wasn't going to let anything happen to The Classy Lady.

To be continued...

Part 3

Arizona Stronghold Vineyards – Cottonwood, AZ

Located at 1023 N Main St, Cottonwood, AZ 86326

Open Sun-Thurs 12p-7p; Fri & Sat 12p-9p

<http://www.azstronghold.com>



The Classy Alcoholic walked into the Arizona Stronghold tasting room. It wasn't very busy this day. There were only a few customers laughing and having a good time as they got their drinks poured by the bartenders. The Classy Alcoholic came in slowly, scanning the area. The place was stocked with wine racks and shelves displaying merchandise like t-shirts, hats and glasses with the Stronghold logo on them. There was a door in the back of the tasting room leading to a patio.

Normally he would walk up to the bar and order a wine flight but he immediately saw the person he was looking for. There was a young Hispanic guy sitting at a table with his back to the open patio door wearing a suit jacket that was a bit too big for him. He looked like he was swimming in it. He didn't have a pocket square, which was just one step above being naked in public. There was an open bottle of wine on the table in front of him that he poured into a glass with his left hand while he kept his right one below the table. That was probably where he was keeping the gun.

The Classy Alcoholic knew this had to be Jencarlos, the person he was supposed to be meeting. The young Hispanic guy beckoned him over with his finger and a smirk on his face. The two men stared at each other for a minute. Jencarlos kept smirking like an asshole.

"Where is she?" The Classy Alcoholic broke the silence.

Jencarlos chuckled. He knew he had the upper hand because he didn't have to talk first.

"You don't ask me anything, kid," he said, despite the fact that he looked ten years younger than The Classy Alcoholic with his oversized suit jacket. "You tell me who you are and what the hell you think you're doing sticking your nose in my business."

"They call me The Classy Alcoholic."

Jencarlos laughed again, harder this time.

"No fucking way! That's who you are? I know you! My niece has your poster up in her bedroom wall. She and her friends all read your stupid blog religiously. You look fatter than your picture."

"Yeah. I know. Why you gotta bring up obvious shit?"

"Okay, now I have to know what some beer and wine blogger is doing trying to fuck up my diamond delivery. Last time I heard about you, you were getting bounced from a south Phoenix strip club on Plus-Size Lady Night. I can't even remember the last time you wrote a blog post. Now you're sitting across from me about to get your dumbass shot. This ain't you. You don't put yourself in danger except for what you do to your liver. So how did you end up here?"

Jencarlos obviously hadn't realized that The Classy Alcoholic was in Cottonwood working with the FBI. He remembered what Lennix said to him. Jencarlos thinks small.

"Well, I've been writing my blog for over a year now and it's made me immensely popular all over the internet. But I think I've been writing the same kind of stuff for a while. I wanted to do something different with my life and not feel stuck. At some point you have to want more, right? I'm a lot like you that way."

"Woah, don't talk to me like you know me, bitch."

"I'm not saying that to piss you off. But I know a little bit about you too. I know you and your brother started out from nothing. And now the two of you are badass crime bosses. There must've been a point when the two of you decided you wanted things to be different?"

The Classy Alcoholic knew he had to play to Jencarlos' ego. There were two wine glasses on the table where they were sitting. Jencarlos turned the open bottle of wine he was drinking so that he could show off the label. He poured wine into the two glasses and slid one across the table.

"Drink that shit." The Classy Alcoholic did as he was told. He wasn't ready to make any sudden moves. "This wine's called Provisioner. It's a new label from the people at AZ Stronghold. It's cheap. Like, \$10 a bottle. Everybody thinks you gotta buy expensive if you want it to be good. But if you make something good then why not make sure more people can afford it? This is wine for the people."



The Classy Alcoholic savored the sip. He got hints of a spice on the nose and a light, crisp mouthfeel. The fruit flavor got stronger as the wine coated his palate with some more lingering spice on the finish. The dryness from the tannins was light but made itself known.

“And you’re a man of the people too, aren’t you Jencarlos?”

“I’ve always been. All those guys I grew up with didn’t go nowhere with their gas station jobs or their community college. I give them something to look up to.”

“I admire that. But something tells me you’re not really being true to yourself. I mean, that suit doesn’t look like your style. Did you pick that out?”

“Nah, my brother did. I don’t dress up in this bullshit. But Romeo says we have to have a certain look in this job. He says our image is just as important as what we do.”

“I can’t say I disagree. But that’s not for everybody. What would you wear if you could dress however you wanted?”

“Shit, I’d be sitting here in just my Batman t-shirt if I could.”

“Respect. Who’s your favorite Batman? Mine’s Kevin Conroy.”

“No fucking way! Mine too, bro!” Jencarlos actually smiled. “Hell, I wouldn’t even be sitting here if I had a choice. We’re in this town because Romeo wanted to come here. Can I tell you something? I fucking hate wine, bro. I do. It all tastes the same to me!”

The Classy Alcoholic could see the tasting room’s patio from where he was sitting. He saw Lennix peeking his head over the wooden fence in the back. He started to climb over the fence but was having a bit of trouble because he was old as shit. The Classy Alcoholic knew he had to stall a bit longer.



"I have to tell you something too, Jencarlos. I don't really know what I'm doing here. I got word on a job out in Cottonwood and I came without thinking about it, really. I just knew I had to get out of my usual rut. I was willing to try anything as long as it was different than normal. But sitting in front of you right now is helping me realize what I really want."

"How's that?"

"Well...having a gun pointed at you definitely brings things into perspective right quick."

"Cheers to that, dawg!"

The men clinked their wine glasses and took another sip. Lennix got himself over the patio fence and landed on his face. His stupid fedora flew off his head and his gun slipped out of his holster. The Classy Alcoholic could see Lennix chasing after the damn hat without realizing he dropped the gun. Sonofabitch. He had no way to warn him he was walking into the tasting room unarmed.

"So are you gonna tell me what it is you want or not?" Jencarlos asked.

"I want The Classy Lady back. I came here trying to get myself on your radar with the diamonds but I don't care about that anymore. I thought I knew who I was but after I met her I realized I was wrong. All I want now is her."

"I know what you're saying, bro. It's crazy. I think some people spend all their lives looking for something but then they don't even realize it when they've *found* something. That make sense?"

"Yeah, actually, it kinda does."

"Here's the problem, though. You and this Classy Lady got up in our family's

business. And I can't let that stand. Romeo can't let that stand. You can't walk away from this."

"But you're not Romeo. I know he's like a criminal rock star spreading his power around the country with you standing behind him. But if I'm right about you, I know that's not what you want for yourself. You'd rather be back in the old neighborhood with your people. In your Batman t-shirt. Let Romeo keep doing his thing and you can go off and be whoever you want to be. You can be that Provisioner wine for the people. I'll give you the diamonds and you either turn them in or bail with them and start over from scratch. Anything you want. Just let me and The Lady go."

Jencarlos was about to take another sip of wine. He stopped himself and looked down at the glass. He set it back down on the table and sighed. The Classy Alcoholic was getting to him. Lennix got his stupid hat on and started walking slowly into the tasting room, still not realizing he didn't have his gun on him.

"So if I let you and The Classy Lady go you'll give me the diamonds and disappear?"

"Absolutely."

"I can't tell you where she is until I walk out with them though."

"That's fine. But I need proof that she's alive first." The Classy Alcoholic reached into his suit jacket pocket with his right hand and pulled out the black pouch with the diamonds inside. He held his left hand under the table and used his fingers to reach into his dress shirt cuff. He slid out the sharp, crystal stem that he had broken off of the wine glass he bought from Pillsbury Wine Company. He didn't break eye contact as Jencarlos pulled out his cell phone and dialed.



He put the phone on speaker and laid it on the table. A familiar voice answered.
“Yeah, boss?”

The Classy Alcoholic listened closely to the sounds coming from the other end of the call.

“Put the hot chick on the phone,” Jencarlos said.

The Classy Alcoholic could hear faint conversations in the background. Several people were talking and laughing but he couldn’t make out a word they were saying. He knew they were in a public place, though.

“I’m here,” The Classy Lady said, her voice trembling.

“Are you okay, Ms. Classy?”

Just before she answered he heard a very familiar pop on the phone. It was a cork being pulled out of a wine bottle. He’d recognize that sound anywhere.

“Of course I’m okay. I’m still super hot. I’m even hotter than when you met me earlier today.”

“Alright, that’s enough. If I don’t call back in five minutes you go ahead and kill the girl,” Jencarlos said as he grabbed the phone and ended the call.

Lennix came up from behind and grabbed Jencarlos’ shoulder.

“Hey guy, you got any change?” he said, pretending to be drunk or probably actually drunk because Lennix was usually always drunk. The Classy Alcoholic could see him reaching discreetly for his empty holster because the dumbass still didn’t realize he had dropped his gun.

Jencarlos whipped around and shoved the gun he was hiding under the table right into Lennix’s face. His other hand was still on the table, holding the cell phone.

“Get the fuck out of here, old man. You look like everybody’s creepy uncle who never gets invited to Thanksgiving.”

The Classy Alcoholic jammed the wine glass stem into Jencarlos’ hand hard enough to pierce out the other end and lodge itself into the cell phone, cracking the screen. Lennix twisted Jencarlos’ wrist and swiped the gun away before pistol-whipping him.

“Where’s The Classy Lady, you piece of shit?” he said as he jammed the gun barrel into the back of Jencarlos’ neck.

“Doesn’t matter now. The only thing that’ll keep this chick alive is a call from me. And this other idiot just fucked up my cell.”

The Classy Alcoholic grabbed Jencarlos’ phone. It was completely destroyed by the wine glass stem. He started to panic, realizing he couldn’t possibly figure out where The Classy Lady was in five minutes. He thought back to the call. Thought about the sounds he heard. Thought about what she said...

“Wait, Lennix, I think I know where she is. I heard a wine cork popping in the background when she was on the phone. And she said she was still hot. Even hotter than when I first met her.”

“I’m sure that’s true but what the hell does it have to do with anything?”

“I was at the Fire Mountain Wines tasting room when she and I met. And there’s another tasting room across the street from us for a winery called Burning Tree Cellars. She must’ve been trying to tell me she was there.”

“I hope you’re right, kid, because my agents are at least fifteen minutes away right

now and I need to stay here with Jencarlos until they arrive. So you're on your own."

"That's fine. I know exactly who she's with. I think I can handle him."

"Can I say something right quick?" Jencarlos asked. "You know I really thought you and I had a moment there for a bit. Like, we really understood each other. And then you went and did this shit. I just gotta say...you're kind of an asshole, bro."

"I'll be honest, Jencarlos, I actually do feel a little bit bad about that since we bonded over Batman and everything. But you kidnapped the woman I love so you can go straight to hell."

"Holy shit!" Lennix said. "Did you just drop the L-bomb, kid?"

The Classy Alcoholic realized what he just said. It came out so naturally that he didn't even think to question it.

"Yeah, I guess I did. A day like this really puts everything into perspective. And now, more than ever, I know what I really want."

Lennix smiled.

"Go get your Lady back, Mr. Classy."

The Classy Alcoholic walked out of the Arizona Stronghold tasting room and crossed the street. He headed straight toward Burning Tree Cellars and straight toward The Classy Lady.



To be continued...

Part 4

Burning Tree Cellars – Cottonwood, AZ

Located at 1040 N Main St, Cottonwood, AZ 86326

Open Sun-Thurs 12p-7p; Fri & Sat 12p-10p

<http://burningtreecellars.com>



The Classy Alcoholic walked into the Burning Tree Cellars wine tasting room, the last of the four located on Cottonwood's Main Street. Burning Tree made wines with blends of Arizona and California grapes and their flights were \$10 for five wine samples. The tasting room was very inviting with an ample patio outside and a couple couches inside.

The Classy Lady was sitting at one of the tables next to Lucius, the cholo who got chloroformed and left unconscious in a bathroom back in Part 1. The Classy Alcoholic knew he recognized Lucius' voice on the phone. He approached the table slowly.

"Hi again, Ms. Classy. Are you okay?"

"As okay as I can be with a butterfly knife pointed right at my kidney."

Lucius' right hand was hidden under The Lady's red blazer, concealing the knife.

"Don't come any closer, dude," Lucius said, "or I'll cut this chick up."

The Classy Alcoholic didn't know if Lucius was actually dumb enough to hurt her out in public and didn't want to take the chance. But he knew he had to get closer. One of Burning Tree's staff walked up to the group.

"Excuse me, sir, I'm sorry to bother you but you're The Classy Alcoholic, aren't you?"

"Yes, I am. Are you a fan of my wine blog?"

“Oh, no, not really. I find your writing derivative and way too pleased with itself to ever be funny. But my 13-year-old son worships your blog. He even had me buy him that bootleg Chinese action figure of you they sell at the swap meet.”

“Yeah, I was actually gonna sell the action figure at real toy stores at first but there was a manufacturing defect and it ended up looking too much like Lou Diamond Phillips. So we unloaded them for pennies on the dollar and I’m writing it off as losses next year.”

“Well it’s an honor to have you at Burning Tree Cellars. Can I get you and your friends something to drink?”

This was his chance. Lucius wasn’t going to do anything stupid with someone else watching. The Classy Alcoholic pulled up a chair at the table and sat right across from him.

“That would be lovely. This is The Classy Lady and this tough-looking guy with a neck tattoo is Lucius. He and I came up together in the same neighborhood. We’ve known each other for years.”

“Thank all of you for coming! So what can I get for you?”

“You tell us. I’m a big fan of red wines, as I’m sure your son can tell you. I need something bold...maybe a nice blend?”

“I’ve got just the thing. Burning Tree specializes in blends, actually. We’ve got this wine called The Impressionist. It’s 95% Syrah, 5% Viognier. It’s got a strong chocolate taste to it with some spice on the nose and a smoky finish.”

“Sounds amazing. We’ll take a bottle for the table and three glasses, please.”

The server walked away and left the trio alone. Lucius looked pissed. The Classy Lady was sweating. He could tell she was nervous even though she tried as hard as she could to hide it.

“You think you’re smart, don’t you?” Lucius asked.

“How do you feel about blended wines, my Classy Lady?” He intentionally ignored Lucius.

“Well...I used to have a negative impression of them,” she said. “A blended wine sounded like bologna to me. I used to think a winery would take a bunch of leftover grapes and toss them together all half-assed so they could just get some use out of them. But I found out recently that making a good blend means taking different types of quality fruit and pairing them in a way that amplifies their taste. A good blended wine is always greater than the sum of its parts.”

Lucius looked increasingly more annoyed.

“I do remember who you are. You’re Chico’s cousin. You’re the punk kid who used to run around our high school in a suit and tie thinking you were hot shit.”

“Yeah. That’s me. And you’re the asshole who used to bully me relentlessly because of how I dressed. You called me the ‘Regis Philbin-wannabe homo,’ remember?”

“Wow, you think I was a dick to you ‘cause you liked to dress fly? I dress fly. I’ve been getting up at 5AM every single day for the past fifteen years just so I can iron the line on my Dickies right. The line on these pants is so straight you can use it to calibrate a level. I respect that you wanna look good. But I was a dick to you ‘cause you thought you were better than everybody else. You walked around in that suit like you made something of yourself even though you were just a sixteen year old who ain’t done shit

in his life. Maybe if you talked to me every now and then instead of just looking down on me and my homies I would've been cool with you."

The server brought the bottle of wine to the table. He poured three glasses and left after asking if anyone needed anything else. They didn't. The Classy Alcoholic and The Lady sipped their wine. Lucius didn't touch his.



"What do you think of this wine, my Classy Lady?"

"It's very good. And you know I normally don't like reds. But I like how the flavor spreads all over the palate and takes you by surprise. It's distractingly good."

"Alright, Lucius. I admit I may have also been an asshole when we were kids. I've made mistakes. But I'm trying to make up for them now. Let The Classy Lady go and I'll let you walk. But if you don't, the FBI will take you in too and you'll rot in a jail cell for the rest of your life right next to Jencarlos and Romeo."

"You're working for the FBI? You expect me to make a deal with a snitch?"

"No. We're not making a deal. The Feds are on their way. You either leave right now or they take you with them. It's pretty cut and dry."

"And what the hell am I supposed to do? Go back and keep living at my mom's place? That woman's still crazy. You remember when she showed up drunk as shit to that school play you were in?"

"Yeah, she threw up on the Assistant Principal. But she did say my portrayal of Danny Zuko was exceptional and that I carried the entire production. It would've been a great compliment if she had just been wearing pants at the time."

"That's what I have to look forward to. This is why I took that delivery job for

Jencarlos and Romeo. Hell, I was even gonna meet Romeo in person tonight at that brewery which he likes. I've been trying to do something better with my life so I don't have to be stuck living with a psycho mom and working a shitty job at the Apple Store. Everybody knows I'm a Windows Phone guy! But you and this girl ruined all that. You ruined my chance to be somebody. So no, I'm not walking away. I'm taking this Lady with me. If the FBI wants her back you can tell them they'll have to pay up."

The Classy Alcoholic kept drinking his wine. He said nothing. He took a few more sips until his glass was totally empty.

"Do something, Mr. Classy!"

"What the hell do you want me to do? I don't have a weapon on me anymore. He's got the knife so he's in charge."

He looked The Classy Lady right in the eyes. She was terrified. Hell, so was he. He held up his empty wine glass and reached for the bottle. He made sure to give The Lady a quick wink as he knocked the bottle on its side, making it look like an accident. The wine spilled out and off the side of the table and onto Lucius' Chino pants. He jumped up out of his chair to try and avoid the wine stream but he wasn't fast enough.

"Dude! You fucked up my Dickies!"

The Classy Lady grabbed Lucius' wrist and kicked his leg out from under him. She twisted his arm and slammed her knee into the back of his elbow, making him drop the knife. She picked it up off the floor and jammed it into his leg. Lucius fell on his back.

The Classy Lady raised the knife and was about to slam it into his chest.

The Classy Alcoholic caught her wrist before it came down. He pulled her away from Lucius.

"It's okay, he's down. We've got him." He took off his necktie and used it to tie Lucius' hands behind his back.

The Classy Lady ran toward The Classy Alcoholic and threw her arms around him. She rested her face on his chest as she caught her breath. He could feel her tears seeping through his dress shirt as he held onto her tightly. His cheek grazed the top of her head and he could still smell the slightest hint of her perfume that didn't get drowned out by her perspiration. She didn't need any perfume, though. Her natural smell was intoxicating.

She looked up at him and put her hands on his cheeks. She smiled through the tear streaks and slowly moved her face closer to his. His heart was beating faster than it had the entire day. Just before their lips touched she whispered...

"I love you, Mr. Classy."

They kissed for what felt like hours while Lucius writhed around the floor right next to them, cursing to himself and bleeding.

"I love you too, Ms. Classy."

Lennix burst into the Burning Tree Cellars tasting room flanked by FBI agents in flak jackets. He saw The Classy Couple kissing and smiled.

"About fucking time, kid! Nice work catching this cholo dude. He and Jencarlos are gonna tell us how to find Romeo if they know what's good for them."

"Actually, Lennix," The Classy Lady said, "I know where Romeo's gonna be later today. I overheard the two of them talking. Mr. Classy, do you mind if I give Lennix the

info really quick?"

"Not at all. You go ahead, I'm gonna grab another sip of that wine."

He kissed her forehead and slowly ran his hands from the small of her back around to her waist before he walked away. He picked up what was left of the Impressionist wine bottle and poured himself another glass. Two agents wrapped Lucius' leg wound and guided him outside, in real handcuffs by then. The Classy Alcoholic raised his glass and gave Lucius a wink. Lennix and The Classy Lady walked over to him.

"Thanks for ruining my vacation, Mr. Classy," Lennix said sarcastically. "But I'm glad the two of you are okay. The agents here want me to join the raid to bring Romeo in so I'll be out of commission for a little bit. But I got a room at the Iron Horse Inn down the block that I'm not gonna get to use. I think the two of you could use a place to relax after everything that happened today."

Lennix reached into his pocket and handed the room key to The Classy Lady.

"Wow, that's very generous of you, Lennix," she said. "You're a good guy. Even if you do look like a reject from a Buena Vista Social Club cover band that only plays casinos on weeknights."

"Fuck you, Ms. Classy."

"Fuck you too, Lennix. And thank you. For everything."

"Hey, you might want to keep this." Lennix handed her Lucius' butterfly knife. "It saved your life. I don't know about you but when something saves my life I make sure to keep it around for a while. It'll bring you good luck. Right, Mr. Classy?"

"Oh shit, I still have those diamonds in my pocket," The Classy Alcoholic said. "I assume you want them back?"

"Yeah but I'll grab them from you tomorrow. I need to start working on this raid immediately. I'll tell the people in charge the diamonds are with someone I trust with my life."



The Classy Couple left the scene and went to their room at the Iron Horse Inn on Main Street. They hung the Do Not Disturb sign on the door, turned off the lights and closed the curtains to block out as much natural light as possible. They made love. And The Classy Alcoholic was, like, super fucking good at it. Seriously, he was a total badass. He crushed that shit. If his ex-girlfriends tell you anything different they're lying 'cause they're just jealous. Obviously.

Anyway, the couple laid in bed afterwards talking for hours. They shared stories about their jobs, their childhood experiences and the fact that both their dads had the same serious, cocaine-fueled anger issues. The Classy Alcoholic pressed his forehead against The Lady's while they talked and laughed. His eyelids started to grow heavy.

"So what's next for Arizona's #1 beer and wine blogger?" She asked. "How are you gonna top an adventure like this?"

"Honestly, I'm not thinking about any of that right now. All I'm thinking is how much I want to stay in this moment for as long as possible."

"You're not planning on writing any of this down?"

"I'm not. I don't want to share this with anyone else. This moment is just for us."

The Classy Lady noticed he was having trouble keeping his eyes open.

"You're about to crash, babe. You should get some sleep."

"But I don't want to leave you."

"You won't. I won't let you. I'll be right here by your side the whole time. And I'll be here when you wake up. I love you, Mr. Classy."

"I love you too, Ms. Classy."

He closed his eyes. It was a long time since he felt this relaxed.

HOURS LATER

The Classy Alcoholic's cell phone went off. The "It's Raining Men" ringtone echoed through the hotel room. He woke up and flailed for the phone on the nightstand and put it up to his half-asleep face. The clock radio on the nightstand said it was almost midnight.

"Hurrr-awuzzdit?" he slurred into the phone.

"Classy, it's Lennix. Sorry to interrupt your sexy time but I need to talk to The Classy Lady." The Classy Alcoholic rolled over in bed and realized the spot next to him was empty. "She gave me a location just past Cornville where Romeo was gonna be at midnight but there's nothing here. It's basically empty desert. I need to double check the location with her."

The Classy Alcoholic got out of bed and turned on the lights. The bathroom door was open and The Lady wasn't in there either.

"Lennix, she's not in here." He rubbed his eyes and looked around the room once he adjusted to the light.

"What do you mean? Where is she?"

The Classy Lady's clothes were gone. They were all over the floor before the two of them got into bed together. His suit jacket was still hanging on the chair, right where he had left it. There was a small desk in the hotel room up against the wall. The Lady's cell phone was on top of it. He got closer...

"Shit. Lennix, her clothes and purse are gone. She took everything except her cell phone. It's on the desk but...but it's smashed. The screen is destroyed and it doesn't turn on."

"No. Please, don't tell me that, Classy."

The Classy Alcoholic reached slowly into the suit jacket pocket where he was keeping the diamonds. His hand started shaking. He knew exactly what he was going to find but for a brief second he hoped he was wrong. He didn't want it to be true...

The pocket was empty.

"FUCK! Lennix, the diamonds are gone! She must've taken them. She played us. She played me! Getting close to me was just a fucking ruse!"

"Calm down, Classy! We have to figure out where she is. Did she say anything that could lead us to her?"

The Classy Alcoholic tried to think back to their conversations. They talked for hours. She said all kinds of shit. He tried to focus but his anger was clouding his memory. All he could think was that he needed a drink to calm down his thoughts. He needed wine. He needed beer. He needed...

He remembered Lucius. He remembered what Lucius said earlier about meeting with Romeo.

This is why I took that delivery job for Jencarlos and Romeo. Hell, I was even gonna meet Romeo in person tonight at that brewery which he likes.

During his travels for the blog The Classy Alcoholic went to the town of Pine, about two hours northeast of Phoenix. He visited a place called THAT Brewery. He remembered that THAT had another facility in Cottonwood where they did a large

portion of their brewing and their canning. Lucius didn't mean he was going to "a brewery."

"Lennix, I know where Romeo is. He's at THAT Brewery!"

"Which Brewery?"

"I told you. THAT Brewery."

"Yeah but what's it called?"

"What's what called?"

"That Brewery."

"Yes. Exactly. THAT Brewery."

"Fuck you!"

"Look, I'll text you the address. The place is less than ten minutes away from me by car. I'll meet you there."

"Woah, hold on, I'm kinda far outside of Cottonwood, Classy. There's no way I can be there in ten minutes."

"Then you'd better hit the sirens and drive fast. The Classy Lady probably told you to be where you are at midnight because she's meeting Romeo at the same time on the opposite side of town. I need to find her."

"Wait, Classy, don't-"

He hung up the call. He put on his suit and pocket square and left the hotel to find his car. He drove away from Main Street and headed toward THAT Brewery. He spent most of the day chasing after The Classy Lady. Now, more than ever, he was ready to finally catch her.

To be concluded...

Part 5: The Finale

THAT Brewery – Cottonwood, AZ

Located at 300 E Cherry St, Cottonwood, AZ 86326

Open Mon-Thurs 4p-8p; Fri 2p-9p; Sat 12p-9p; Sun 12p-7p

<http://thatbrewery.com>



THAT Brewery's Cottonwood location is less than 10 minutes away from the area on Main Street that's home to all the wine tasting rooms. The facility is significantly larger than THAT's other location in the town of Pine, AZ. It's in a warehouse somewhat removed from the more tourist-y places in Cottonwood. The brewery was closed by the time The Classy Alcoholic arrived. The surrounding area was quiet and there was no foot traffic to be found. It was the perfect place for The Classy Lady to meet whoever she was meeting.

The Classy Alcoholic parked down the block and walked onto the brewery's empty lot. It was quiet enough in Cottonwood that night that he could hear a woman's voice in the distance. It had to be her. He couldn't make out what she was saying but he heard a man's voice respond. He walked closer and peeked around the corner of the building.

The Classy Lady was standing with her back to him in front of a clean-cut man in a white suit jacket. He wore a plain t-shirt under his jacket and a gold chain around his neck. This had to be Romeo, the person she had been tracking all day and over the course of a year. The Classy Alcoholic was finally close enough to hear what they were saying to each other.

"I'm amazed you're even here after all that shit you pulled," Romeo said to The Lady.

"That should tell you something then, shouldn't it?"

"Why would I ever believe a word you say? Do you really think I'm stupid enough to trust you?"

"I know you don't give my words much stock. But I'm here because I care. Otherwise I wouldn't be doing this. You don't have to believe me and you don't have to--"

"Shut up! I don't need you to tell me what I don't have to do. I know I don't have to do shit if I don't want to."

"Okay, okay, you're right, I'm sorry. I shouldn't have said that. I can just show you. Here, I have what I promised."

The Classy Alcoholic saw The Classy Lady reach into her blazer and hold something out to Romeo. He couldn't see what she had in her hand so he peeked his head out a little farther. Just as he realized she was holding out the black pouch with the diamonds in it Romeo noticed him.

"Hey, who the fuck are you?" Romeo pulled a gun out of his holster and pulled the trigger.

The Classy Alcoholic hid back behind the wall and heard the bullet ricochet off the side of the building.

"Did you bring the Feds here?!?" Romeo yelled at The Lady.

"No! I wouldn't do that to you, I swear!"

"Whoever you are, come out now or this chick gets a bullet right in the head! I'm gonna count to one!"

Where the hell are you, Lennix? The Classy Alcoholic asked himself. He walked around the corner with his arms held high. Romeo was holding The Classy Lady in front of him like a human shield and his gun was pressed against her temple.

"You don't have to do that, Romeo. I'm unarmed."

"So you know my name, huh? You *are* a Fed."

"No, I'm not. I'm not a Fed. I'm not even a goddamn meter maid. I'm just a blogger."

Romeo was clearly confused by that statement. As he got closer The Classy Alcoholic could see a scar running down the right side of Romeo's face.

"Get out of here, Classy," The Lady said. "You shouldn't be here."

"And you should? What are you doing? Why are you giving Romeo the diamonds after we both almost got killed getting our hands on them today?"

Romeo laughed.

"So you came all the way out here, without a gun, just to follow this chick? Wow, she really got you wrapped didn't she? It's what she's good at bro, trust me. I could've told you to stay away. Too bad it's your last mistake."

Romeo pointed his gun at The Classy Alcoholic. For a moment all he could hear was the sound of his own heart about to beat straight through his chest as he waited for the bang.

The Classy Lady yelled out and threw the pouch of diamonds into the air. They flew out of the bag into every direction, sparkling in the moonlight just before they landed on the dirt lot. The sight of the diamonds distracted Romeo long enough for her to pull the butterfly knife out of her back pocket and jam it into Romeo's stomach.

Romeo grabbed her arm and pulled her toward him. He shoved the barrel of his gun

into her chest and fired three shots.

The Classy Lady went down instantly. The Classy Alcoholic was about to run toward Romeo but he knew right away he was too far. He couldn't reach him and couldn't make it back to cover before the gun went off again.

The two men stared at each other. The knife was still sticking out of Romeo's abdomen.

"You don't even know who this chick really is, do you bro?"

"No. I really don't."

"Lucky you. You're better off that way."

Romeo was about to aim his gun again when his shoulder erupted into a spray of blood and he fell forward.

Lennix was standing behind him, gun drawn, freshly fired. An FBI SWAT team covered the scene and surrounded Romeo.

The Classy Alcoholic ran to The Classy Lady. He held her in his arms as the blood seeped out of her chest. She was still alive but the look on her face was completely blank. He looked in her eyes and saw nothing. Not pain, not fear, not regret. Nothing. He waited for her to speak. He waited for her to say, "I love you." Or maybe, "I'm sorry."

But she only stared back at him in silence.

"Goddammit, SAY SOMETHING!" he yelled at her. But nothing came. Her breath felt softer and softer until she lost the strength to hold her head up. Her body went limp in his arms.

The Classy Alcoholic tried to stand up but his legs failed him. He let himself fall on the ground and bawled as he slammed his fist into the ground over and over. The sound of his screams echoed into the Cottonwood night.

One Hour Later

The Classy Lady's body was bagged and taken away by EMTs. Lennix and a few FBI agents were the only authorities left on the scene. The Classy Alcoholic walked into the steel door of THAT Brewery's taproom. The brewery had been closed for hours now but Lennix was able to work out a deal.

The taproom was empty save for Romeo, tied to a chair with his bullet and knife wounds patched up. The Classy Alcoholic closed the door behind him.

"Lennix got me five minutes alone with you."

Romero was barely able to hold his head up from the pain of his injuries but he still managed a chuckle.

"So what are you gonna do? Kill me?"

"No. I just need you to answer a question. What the hell did you do to The Classy Lady to get her to betray me and the Bureau? What did you have on her? Did you threaten her family? What was it?"

Romeo laughed hard enough for his wounds to cause him excruciating pain but he couldn't stop himself.

"You fucking idiot. You think I made her do this? I've been trying to avoid that nutbag any way I could. She's the one who found me and offered me the diamonds so I would

take her back. She told me the FBI confiscated them but that she could get them to me if I met her here. She lost her goddamn mind when I broke up with her a year ago and she's been stalking me ever since. Hell, she's the one who gave me this scar on my face when I dumped her."

The Classy Alcoholic felt a pressure in his chest. He could feel tears about to well up in his eyes but did everything he could to hold them in.

"She told me she loved me. She told me a lot of things."

"And you believed her? You just met her today! Either she's an excellent liar or you're just as stupid as you look. But no matter what, she played you and she did it well. I'm almost proud of that crazy bit--"

The Classy Alcoholic punched Romeo in the face. He spit out a stream of blood but it only made him laugh harder. His laugh echoed through the brew house. The Classy Alcoholic ran for the door. Before he walked back outside he heard Romeo behind him.

"See you around, Mr. Classy."

Lennix was standing outside smoking a cigarette. He held another one out. The Classy Alcoholic was never much of a smoker but he wasn't picky about what his poison was that night.

"I sure hope Romeo's still in one piece."

"He's the only one." He lit the cigarette and took a drag.

"I know what happened, Classy. You've been a loner ever since I met you and it's served you well. But today you met someone that made you see yourself differently. You met someone that made you want more. Maybe someone you could see yourself sharing your life with. Someone who could be your Classy Lady."

The Classy Alcoholic couldn't hold his tears back anymore. And he decided to stop trying.

"I fucking hate her Lennix. She used me and took advantage of me and I'm such an idiot that I let her. I ate up every word she said. I don't even know who I hate more, her or myself. And I can't even tell her that. I need her to know what she did to me. I want to tell her what a terrible person she was and I want to make her feel the pain and regret I feel. But she got off easy. She's gone and she doesn't even have to live with what she did to me."

"No, she doesn't. So why should you?"

"What, are you saying I should forgive her?"

"Nah, you don't have to do that, man. You can hate her for the rest of your life if you want. What you really have to do is forgive yourself, though. Forgive yourself for letting yourself love someone. For opening yourself up and wanting to trust someone. Forgive yourself for being a human and not a damn robot for once!"

"Thank you, Lennix. You're a good person. One of the few I know. Even if you do look like the kind of guy who would fake a developmental disability just to get out of jury duty."

"Fuck you, Classy."

"Fuck you too, Lennix."

The two men smoked in silence for a minute taking in the Cottonwood breeze.

"So what are you gonna do now?"

“I’m gonna go home. Get drunk by myself. Lose my shit for a few days. You know. The usual.”

“You did great work today, Classy. You brought down some serious guys that the idiots at the Bureau couldn’t touch for years. Plus your love of collared shirts and yelling at people make you a pretty good fit for law enforcement. Call me after you’re done losing your shit. I’ve got a few open cases sitting on my desk that I was planning on ignoring and leaving for the next guy after I retire. But if you’re up for it you can consult on them for me and I can put you back in the field to do what you do best. I can even partner up with you.”

“I’ll take the jobs, Lennix. But I don’t want a partner. The Classy Alcoholic is a solo operation from now on.”

The two men hugged and went their separate ways. The Classy Alcoholic looked down and saw bits of The Classy Lady’s blood dried on his fingers. His head was swimming. A million thoughts were scratching at the inside of his skull at once. He took a second to quiet them all down. He took a deep breath and focused on completing only one single task: washing his hands.

The End