

This Ain't Vegas

by

Darren J Seeley

FADE IN:

EXT. APPLE GROVE CEMETERY - NIGHT

An owl in a barren tree observes RAY (50s) as he hikes up. Ray's suit and tie could use a good dry-cleaning. His face gaunt, hair partially combed. Looks up, winks at the owl. His smile reveals a crooked tooth.

RAY
Evening, Mister Quigley, Going to
the tournament tonight?

The bird flies off towards a Mausoleum.

RAY
Yes sir, good old bird. Knew you
wouldn't miss out. I'll be with you
in a minute.

He approaches TODD (18) who lies between two headstones that reads "Todd Wicken 1969-1987" and "Justin Wicken 1949-1987". Todd, who dresses like something out an old 'Miami Vice' episode, springs up at the sight of Ray.

TODD
Quigs will have better luck than
you, Ray. And Quig's not even
playing.

RAY
Mister Quigley gives me luck.

TODD
You'll need it. I'm playing
tonight.

RAY
Good. Might be low turnout. That
caretaker, he put in some new dirt,
it hasn't rained in a few nights.

TODD
I got out just fine.

RAY
But you can't get back in, can you?

TODD
Been staying at Char's place.

RAY
That old widow? Shit.

TODD

Hey, she's good company.

RAY

Good company. For shit. You spent so much time with her, you don't even keep up on current events.

TODD

Such as?

RAY

Haven't you been listening to a thing I been saying? He's a pain, that new caretaker.

TODD

He's probably alright.

RAY

Sure he is. Least Lew might be coming tonight, if he ain't swiping the flowers off the virgin's graves.

TODD

Quigs really doesn't give you luck, you know.

RAY

When Quigley hoots three times, I know someone's bluffing. Hoots four, someone's skimming.

TODD

I never knew that. What if he hoots twice?

RAY

I'm not going to give all my tells away.

TODD

You can trust me.

RAY

Not that I don't... It's Mister Quigley. He don't trust you.

TODD

Well, you gave at least two away.

RAY
 Maybe it's two hoots and a step to
 the left that lets me know
 someone's bluffing. I haven't told
 you jack.

EXT. MAUSOLEUM - NIGHT

Ray and Todd stand before the double doors, Ray grasps the
 Elk Door Knockers, and the sound echoes throughout the
 graveyard.

A peephole slot opens. Two bloodshot, bulging eyes peer out.

CRANE
 What's the secret password?

RAY
 Since when did we have a password?

CRANE
 Since now. If you didn't know there
 was one, then you don't know it and
 I can't let you in.

RAY
 Elk Knockers.

The big eyes blink. Confused.

CRANE
 How...?

The slot slams shut. Doors unlock, open up. CRANE (30s),
 whose outfit is more 70s style, and whose face is more
 decayed, drowns on the pair.

CRANE
 If you didn't -

RAY
 Was I right?

CRANE
 You were, but -

RAY
 Let us in Crane.

INT. MAUSOLEUM - MOMENTS LATER

Ray and Todd stroll in. Crane stretches what's left of his head.

RAY

What else are you going to make up on short notice? If it wasn't elk knockers it'd be the name of your ex.

Crane looks around, closes the doors. Slinks behind Ray and Todd. Pats both on the back.

CRANE

You two ready for some cards tonight?

TODD

You bet.

CRANE

No, my dear friends, question is what do you bet? Pot's growing as we speak.

RAY

Folks are already here?

CRANE

Got a special guest player, and excuse the pun, but it's a full house.

TODD

Is that why there's a password?

CRANE

Just can't let anyone walk on up in here. But you two knew it without knowing it and...nevermind. It's not important. What is important are the rules.

TODD

Rules?

CRANE

Don't get out much, do you?

RAY

He's been seeing that old black widow in lot six.

CRANE

Anything's legal in the pot, but flags and medals are frowned on. We don't want to piss off the patriots around here. No family pictures either.

TODD

Flowers?

CRANE

Flowers are fine, so long as they aren't all picked. Copper pennies, cufflinks, shiny pebbles.

TODD

Don't got any of those things.

CRANE

Knives, scissors, scalpels? Machetes?

TODD

Nope.

CRANE

Well, don't worry about that. House will cover you a small bit. Besides, we got ourselves a new item to play with.

They approach the

CARD TABLE

Three flashlights rigged up in the beams. One of them has a low battery.

LEW (40s) a pale, gaunt bald man with a black suit places his red roses on the pile of knickknacks, meat cleavers, knives and nails.

And ALEX, (20s) a living person, his ankles shackled to the chair. Dog collar around his neck, chained to the table. He's in a sweat, nervous.

CRANE

The bane of our troubles, Alex, our new grounds keeper. But don't call him Alex. Call him 'The Meat'.

LEW

Bit harsh, don't you think? I mean,
if he loses, he can always come
back the next game.

Lew's chuckle, off key and scratchy, only scares Alex more.
Nudges Alex in the shoulder.

LEW

Bet you never thought this was part
of the midnight shift. Yes sir.

CRANE

Excuse me for a moment. Got to get
the snacks.

A coffin opens up, STAN (30s) emerges. Cowboy hat. Nice suit.
Alex coughs as the dust kicks up.

RAY

Who's that?

LEW

New fella. Stan Queesee. Used to be
a bookie at the tracks. High
roller. He's from Texas.

Crane returns with a bowl of potato chips. Lew scoops up a
bunch with his skeletal hand. Munches. Bits of crumbs
sprinkle through his neck and left shoulder.

LEW

Now you all be good to Stan. He's
my protégé.

Mister Quigley swoops in, flashlights rattle. Mister Quigley
takes a perch high up.

CRANE

One of these days I'm going to eat
that thing.

RAY

Nobody eats Mister Quigley.

Crane nudges Alex.

CRANE

Guess you'll have to do, right?

Stan reaches in his pocket, pulls out a cigar and a lighter.
Puffs away.

ALEX

I...I...

STAN

Say it!

CRANE

Spit it out, meat!

ALEX

I don't have any cuff links or roses.

CRANE

Oh, I'm sorry. You aren't playing. No. See, you're playing a different game. But at the same time.

Points to Todd.

CRANE

See here. House covers Todd. If Todd loses, well, here. Step up, Todd.

Todd takes a seat at the table. His eyes fall on the assortment of knives and nails.

TODD

Oh man...

CRANE

Put out the left hand.

Todd frowns, puts his left hand on the table. Crane swipes up the cleaver and chops off Todd's thumb. Holds up the thumb like a worm and drops it onto the pile.

CRANE

Now, Todd's got a chance to win back his thumb.

Stares at Alex. An uncomfortable silence.

CRANE

Okay, meat. Here's the deal. If Todd wins his thumb back, your thumb goes into the pot in the next round. If he loses, he loses another digit. If he wins both back...

Alex looks at his hands.

CRANE

That's what I like. A quick study!
So, after ten rounds, if he loses
all but the last round, you lose
both your hands.

Reconsiders.

CRANE

Well, maybe you'll keep a pinky.

RAY

Don't worry, Caretaker. I don't
like you, but I got your back.
Mister Quigley's keeping watch.

Alex looks him in the eye.

ALEX

Got my back? I'm chained up, how
are you or that bird helping me
out?

Crane and Todd exchange looks when Alex mentions Mister
Quigley. Ray doesn't notice.

RAY

Never lost a card game, meat. Ask
anyone here. Got me a reputation.
One I intend to keep.

TODD

I think I'm making him nervous.

CRANE

Can't imagine why.

TODD

Last thing I want is this fool
screaming his lungs out. He'll
distract me from my game.

CRANE

Good idea. Scooch over some.

TODD

How come?

Crane motions for him to do it. Todd picks up his chair,
slides apart from Ray. Crane grabs Alex's chair, pulls him
back, staggers Alex and his chair between Ray and Todd.

Swoops the table chain over Todd's head. Pats Alex on the shoulder.

CRANE
There we go.

STAN
Enough of this. Let's play some cards.

CRANE
No jokers. Five card strip.

INT. MAUSOLEUM - NIGHT

Smoke fills the room. Crane wears a green Las Vegas casino visor hat. Five cards to each player.

Stan plays with his cigar.

Mister Quigley watches down on the players. Hoots twice.

Todd scapes the edge, for a hit. He's missing three more fingers. Crane deals him two more cards.

RAY
Been staying with that wrench too long. Todd. Need to get out more.

Some laughter. Alex is the only one who doesn't share the joy.

STAN
You aren't losing on purpose, are you? Next thing you know, you're thinking we're playing...Old Maid or something.

CRANE
If he wants to save Meat's fingers, that's his choice.

STAN
Maybe he just wants to eat meat's brains.

LEW
Yes. You know that's right.

STAN

Suck out his brains through his nose.

More laughter. Alex swallows his spit.

TODD

I'll stay.

Alex twitches. A bead of sweat runs down his head.

Crane puts two cards face down. Stan takes them.

Ray gets rid of one of his cards. Puts it face down.

Alex nervous. Lew gets rid of two.

LEW

I'll take two more.

Likes his new set of cards.

LEW

That's my lucky card there. That's what I'm looking for!

Lays them down. Everyone but him and Alex disappointed.

LEW

Old Quig's not on your side tonight, Ray.

Mister Quigley scans the room. Rests on Alex, who locks eyes with the bird. Nervous, Alex looks away. Mister Quigley steps to the right, distracted by a spider.

Takes his snack.

RAY

He'll come through.

Lew scoops up roses and nails. Todd sighs. Crane grasps the cleaver and swats off one of his fingers.

SUPER : HOUR LATER

Another round. The zombies laugh. Stan blows smoke from his stogie. Lays down a Full House. Takes a rose, frowns. Dangles it in front of Alex's nose, who turns his head away.

Crane takes aim with the cleaver. Chops off Todd's index finger. Worms spill out.

SUPER : HOUR LATER

Alex scared. He looks at Todd's three fingered right hand, which holds the cards. Todd has trouble keeping the cards together. He pushes out from the table just enough to kick out his leg, rests his deformed shoe on the table.

Puts his cards face down, rips off his shoe. Reveals a decayed foot. Puts some cards in between the toes.

RAY

Running out of luck there.

TODD

You're the one to talk. You and that dumb bird.

RAY

Quig hasn't let me down yet.

TODD

Quiggy's let you down four times tonight.

Mister Quigley gives three hoots.

LEW

Bird just gives you the creeps, look at it long enough.

Alex takes a deep breath, exhales.

CRANE

Hey Meat - did you know that The Native Americans consider the owl to be bad luck?

ALEX

No, I didn't know that.

CRANE

Well, now you do.

Stan lays down his cards, everyone throws down their cards down in disgust. Crane scoops up the cleaver...

OVER BLACK

Chop! Chop! Chop!

FADE IN

SUPER: LAST ROUND

Todd has both bare feet on the table. Cards between every toe. All but one finger on his hand remains.

Stan pushes in all his roses, cufflinks and nails.

RAY

Son of a - What are you trying to pull here? No way you're that good. New player, nearly cleaning me out.

STAN

Fold or call.

Ray shoots up a look to Mister Qui -

STAN

- Don't look at the dumb bird! Fold or call!

RAY

Unreal. Even if a good hand were possible, I'd like to know what the hell you were doing with it. What's with the Cuban anyway? Not like you can taste the son of a -

LEW

Just do something.

Ray shoves in his loot.

RAY

There. I did it. I called. Everyone happy.

(to Alex)

You happy?

Alex shakes his head no. Ray looks over to Todd, back to Alex.

RAY

You should be. You should play Vegas with your odds.

Todd lays down his cards.

TODD

He's right. I fold.

Crane raises the cleaver.

RAY
Is that really necessary?

Crane shrugs. Ray lays down his cards. Full boat.

RAY
Your turn, Tex, mister Bookie-Man.

Stan spreads out a straight flush. Ray can't believe it. Stan scoops up the loot.

RAY
How...?

CRANE
Bad night, Ray, everyone has one
once in awhile.

RAY
Impossible. All night.
(to Alex)
And you, I still don't like you.
You better keep the ground soft, so
decent folks can get some sleep.

Ray gets up, leaves. Doors open O.S. Mister Quigley follows.

TODD
Can I have my fingers back?

STAN
Why, you going to miss them?

CRANE
Maybe he needs them to stroke Widow
Charlette's neck.

STAN
Maybe I'll take a turn.

The doors close. They all laugh, everyone but Alex.

CRANE
Oh, my bad.

Digs in his chest, produces a key and unlocks Alex's chains.

CRANE
Alex, you'll fit right in here.
Only next time we're going to have
to be more creative.

LEW

Played your part well, couldn't
have done it without you.

ALEX

I don't think you'll get him next
time.

STAN

But we stung him. That's what
counts.

Stan shrugs, tosses Todd's right thumb over to him. Todd
catches it with his teeth.

FADE OUT.