

## Lousy Cons

By Nolan Knight

The twat wouldn't shut the fuck up so I plugged her - and not with my cock either, with a bullet from a .45, silenced by a strawberry Shasta two-liter, straight through the side of her right titty. The burn from the lead shut her up right quick. Her face gave some Marcel Marceau impressions and then she passed out. I couldn't believe everything was all Murphy's Law tonight, but what do you expect when you're pulling a job and the getaway driver gets pussy feet? I checked the broad's pulse to make sure that if I get pinched I wouldn't have a murder wrap on my hands on top of burglary. I like to dodge my felonies one at a time. She'd pull through.

Her apartment was pretty nice for downtown Los Angeles, but the view was still shopping cart bums and desperate strumpets. Red neon pulsed inside the place from a nearby diner. Its cheeseburger smoke helped mask the smell of piss and aged wood. Exactly twelve minutes had past since Edgar and I tripped the alarm, busted out of the jewelry store onto Broadway and realized Wallace had chumped out. A two pack a day habit had us huffing through darkened back alleys and scrambling for refuge during the middle of the night. It was hard to see through the sweaty Universal Monsters masks but we made due. We separated on Main and that's how I wound up inside this dump. It was all part of the fallback plan if shit happened to clog the fan. She was Wallace's strung out ex.

Not telling anyone about the score was key, so the poor gal didn't even know what hit her when I smashed through the front door and shoved the gun in her face. It's funny how diamonds can take most chicks' breath away but a Glock to the nose by a guy in a mask turned them all into werewolves. Well, I had plenty of diamonds on me and this cunt wasn't getting to see a single one. It was strange that I was the one wearing the Lawrence Talbot mask and she was the one howling. Fuck it, I told her to keep quiet.

I grabbed the remote to her scrawny TV and tried to see if the news had picked up on the heist. Nothing but Wally George and an old Twilight Zone with Lee Marvin came in clear. I left on the Twilight Zone, figuring it to be the more ironic at the moment. Just then, a gentle wrapping came at the door. I tore off the mask and lunged toward the peephole. It was Frankenstein. I guess Edgar made it after all.

I opened the door quickly and said, "Get the fuck in."

He slid in back first and ripped off the mask, sucking in wind with every part of his lungs.

"We in the clear?"

He nodded, coughing, unable to speak.

Edgar and I went way back. He was a thick, swarthy man who was loyal to the bone and great under pressure. His favorite movie was *The Sadist*. We had been pulling decent sized jobs for almost fifteen years and not once had anything gotten this fucked. Fifteen years, eight states, and zero jail time had made us a pretty dynamic duo. The key was to never get greedy and to always keep moving. We always knew that prison would kill us; so being thorough about every move was never an issue before going out on the take. This jewelry heist was six months in the making. Six months and maybe for nothing.

Wallace joined on about four weeks out. We needed a driver, and Rudy - a barkeep at the Frolic Room on Hollywood - referred him. Rudy had always proven reliable in the past, but I think the problem that arose almost eighteen minutes ago spawned from the blinds of nepotism. Wallace was Rudy's nephew. To him, he must have been tits for the job, but to us he was questionable at best. We kept a close eye on him constantly, testing his driving skills and personality, searching for any unknown vices that provided him an Achilles heel. In the end, he checked out. As of now, he was a dead man.

Edgar caught wind of the bloody brunette sprawled on the ground. Her hair was fanned in a shiny red pool.

He said, "You got the goods, Izzy?"

"Half of it. I had already thrown the first case into the car before I went back in to clean the rest."

"The punk's got half the take then?"

"Yup."

"So now what?"

Sirens sparked in the distance. We had to act fast.

"The bedroom. See if the closet has any of Wallace's old clothes."

Edgar ransacked the place but only came back with a Levi's jacket and a red Hawaiian shirt featuring pineapples and blooming Polynesians. He chose the jacket. I took off my black turtleneck and slid it on. I felt like a tropical Spam-craving piece of shit.

The sirens got louder and the brunette began to moan. I wrapped up the jewels in my turtleneck and decided we should ditch the masks. Edgar rifled through her purse. Bingo.

"We got keys, man. The bitch drives a Toyota."

I stuck my head out the window to see if the heat coming down was visible. Across the street in a metered slot was a powder blue Corolla, filthy with tickets splayed on the windshield. I shoved the diamonds down the front of my pants next my jewels and slid the gun down the back.

"I think we're good. Let's go."

We nearly broke our necks tripping over the junkie passed out on the exit stairway. By the time we hit the street, our rapid scurry turned into nonchalant strides, attempting to tone down our presence in this glorified wasteland, figuring my shirt was loud enough. The Corolla purred up Main as Edgar gunned it for the 101 Freeway. Heading westbound, we could see three more patrol cars exiting eastbound on Temple. We couldn't help but smile at each other.

Edgar said, "We would have made lousy cons anyway."

I popped a smoke in each of our mouths and lit them. It wasn't over yet. The CD in the stereo started to play Heart's "Crazy On You." My mind was racing.

"How 'bout a stop off at the Frolic. Let's see if old Rudy's pouring...tell him thanks."

The marquee from the Pantages Theater lit up the tarnished stars on the Walk of Fame in front of the Frolic Room. There were plenty of people out at this hour, even if all the local bars were closed. A limousine with drunken prom couples pouring out the

top screamed through the Vine intersection. They parked the car next to Rudy's gold Plymouth, still cold in the adjacent parking lot. The multi-colored neon sign above the entrance was off, and if you wanted in the place after hours, you had to knock some stupid Phantom of the Opera notes on the door.

Rudy was cleaning up the bathroom when he let us in. The red and yellow mushroom-cap ceiling lamps were only half lit. The Hirschfeld mural on the right wall depicting 1940's Hollywood always added a welcoming touch. Rudy stood wearing a black bowtie with a beer-stained white apron protecting the rest of his classy uniform. He pointed to the TV.

"Can you believe this? A couple hoods went out and knocked-off a jewelry store in downtown."

I said, "Naw."

Edgar grabbed a bottle of Chivas Regal from the other side of the bar and popped the metal pourer off the top. He took a slug.

Rudy smiled, holding the mop and said, "So, how'd the boy do?"

"He was good, man. Didn't stick around too long though."

"What'ya mean?"

Edgar passed me the bottle and said, "He means your boy grew a vagina halfway through the job."

Rudy tried his best to look surprised but his eyes couldn't lie. I shoved the gun in his face while Edgar walked around him slowly. He picked up a corkscrew from atop the bar and put it up to his throat.

I said, "Where is he?"

The mop dropped in panic.

"I don't know, Izzy. I'm sorry. The kid takes after his bitch mother. I'll straighten him out, guys, I promise."

His eyes twitched. Edgar grabbed his hair and pressed the corkscrew hard enough to break skin.

"Rudy, come on now. Every time you lie to me, Edgar's gonna stab you three fuckin' times. Now, I don't know where he'll stab you, but I'm sure it'll be in unhappy places."

"Izzy, I'm telling you that I don't know where he's--"

The corkscrew entered his abdomen, kidney, and forearm all within ten seconds. He shrieked. I grabbed a well bottle of vodka and splashed it on his arm.

"How does that feel, Rudy? You know where he is now?"

He didn't say a word this time, just shook his head. Edgar gave him one in the back of each thigh, sending him to his knees. Rudy put his right hand on the bar to brace himself and Edgar Christ-ed it, leaving the corkscrew jammed into the mahogany. Blood flowed across the varnished wood as Edgar slowly turned the screw deeper and deeper. The old man caved.

"It wasn't the boy's fault! It was Hunn!"

Edgar gave me a perplexed look. I knew it didn't sound right either.

I said, "Bruno Hunn?"

The old man nodded in agony.

Edgar said, "Now, where and why would a two-bit loan shark figure into this scenario, Rudy?"

“Wallace owed him big green from last week’s fights and told him about the gig to hold him off a few more days. Hunn probably took the initiative to intercept.”

Now, if there is one thing I know inside and out, it’s fighting; MMA, boxing, dogs, cocks, whatever. After spending four weeks with Wallace, I knew enough about him to be certain he didn’t know shit about sports in general. He was a dull and squeamish grease monkey who knew how to wrench on motors and drive like McQueen. That was about it. Not to mention he avoided picking up checks the same way I avoided eating foul snatch. So, why would a cheap bastard be placing huge bets on shit that was completely off his radar?

I grabbed a lemon slice from the cocktail garnishing tray and squeezed the pulp onto Rudy’s paw. Before he could finish the yelp, I squeezed his fat cheeks and looked him straight in the eyes. Edgar picked up the round plastic dish with coarse Margarita salt.

I said, “Don’t fuck around, old man. You get one more shot. Why Hunn?”

Edgar tilted the dish and Rudy’s eyes got big.

“It was me, alright? I had twenty-four hours to get the cash and I couldn’t come up with it. I just told him about Wallace, you guys are in the clear.”

“So, you sold your nephew up the river?”

Edgar playfully said, “Don’t forget about us, Izzy. Why’d we have to get fucked too?”

“Oh didn’t you get the news, buddy? We’re in the clear.”

Rudy began to sob heavily, knowing the almost childlike demeanor meant certain slow death. Truth be told, we never really wanted to kill anyone - cripple, maim, hobble, sure.

I spoke to Edgar as if we were alone in the room.

“You know, I really want to hear what Wallace says about all this.”

“You think he’ll be upset?”

“I would be more than disappointed.”

“Mad enough to...kill?”

“Sure. Why not?”

“Let’s go find him then. See what he thinks should happen to his poor old uncle.”

Rudy wiped the tears away with his good hand and tried to pull out the corkscrew. He was too weak from the loss of blood. I grabbed a bottle of Bushmills for the road and put the Glock away. Edgar splashed the entire dish of salt onto Rudy’s impaled hand and proceeded to whistle Phantom of the Opera notes over the scream while heading straight out the front door. Things were looking up.

Bruno Hunn’s operation wasn’t exactly small time but he knew exactly how big his britches were. He wasn’t known to step on any big toes in LA, which led us to believe he didn’t know that we were the ones inside rushing the jewels. Odds are, Rudy told the truth for once and Bruno figured Wallace for the mastermind behind the take. It’s the only way shit made sense. If he had known we were the ones inside the monster masks, his best interest would have been to kill us for sure. Last thing in the world he would have wanted was a disgruntled Izzy and Edgar out for blood.

Hunn wasn’t just in the game of lending out juiced green; he had a more than profitable numbers racket that allowed him the wealth to afford such exuberant loans.

The front for the business was an old brick barbershop on Sunset in Los Feliz. Everything took place in the back room. It was filled with plush furniture, flat-screen TV's for the games, a couple of blackjack/poker tables, and a long oak bar. I know this because we took him for thirty large last Super Bowl and a little roughhousing was in order to collect.

It was funny how, after fifteen years of armed robbery, that the most trouble we've ever run into didn't involve the law; it was always with other deadbeat crooks. Criminals either too lazy or thought they were too smart to go out and risk getting caught. Yellow livers who sucked on mommy's tit too long, if you ask me. They figured; why get their hands dirty when they could just go knock off the hoods with big balls who went out and pulled big jobs? None of them ever successfully pulled one over on us though, and we weren't about to let them start now.

We decided to stop by our apartment on the way to Hunn's and mount up an arsenal. A couple more handguns, maybe some shotguns, and we should be ready to roll. You had to be cautious when it came to storming into that barbershop. Who knows what was waiting for us behind all that warm shaving cream and blue comb sanitizer?

As soon as the car pulled up Hillhurst, Edgar parked it a cool two blocks away from our place. We had a Pontiac in the garage, so the big-balling Corolla had served its purpose. It's amazing how much you divert attention and blend into the city while driving a shitcanned vehicle. Once we got in the place, I hurried to transfer the diamonds into an empty bank deposit bag and tried to hightail it out of this Hawaiian Punch shirt. When Edgar went into his bedroom for more ammo, Wallace's whereabouts became known. The prick was sleeping on the bed, cradling a .38. His face was covered in dried blood and a frozen bag of peas was on his head. Someone had worked him over pretty good.

Edgar picked up an old glass filled with spoiled water from atop his nightstand and splashed it across the sleeping beauty's face. He sprang up and pointed the revolver at me, backing slowly up off the bed. Rolled up jeans, red All-Stars, a gray pocket-T, and tattoos bleeding down to his hands made it easy to peg him as 100% greaser. His tightly pumped blonde hair now had red streaks and was slightly disheveled, with a few stragglers dangling over his right eye. He was pissed.

"You back stabbin' motherfuckers! You thought you could cut me out and leave me there to rot, huh?"

The boy was either delirious or had never seen the beatdown coming when Hunn's boys let him have it. They must have ditched him out the car somewhere along the way. Poor fuck.

I said, "As a matter of fact, kid, we've been out trashing the city all night looking for you and them jewels. Luckily, about an hour ago we were put on the straight after a visit with your uncle Rudy. Now, put the fuckin' gun down already."

Wallace turned to Edgar, "What the hell is he babblin' about, man? You two tried to fuck me on the take, right?" He turned back to me. "...Dude, are you wearing my shirt?"

Edgar shook his head and said, "Not even close. Calm the fuck down, drop the gun, and take a seat in the living room. We'll fill you in on the whole damn mess."

The spoked asshole of dawn came beaming in through the wooden blinds, so I got up and shut them. The Bushmills came in handy after we laid the whole debacle out for

Wallace. Part of him couldn't believe it, but his gut knew it to be true. I casually omitted the part about shooting up his ex's big titty and Edgar perforating his uncle with gaping shanks. His brain was too busy throbbing, anyway. Edgar stood above him while he was seated on the couch and attempted to close the gash on the top of his head with Super Glue. After he washed all the blood off his face, the bright purple bruises under his eyes began to surface. He was a battered raccoon with whiskey for milk.

"Fuckin' Rudy, man. Stupid fat fuck. We gonna get even with him or what?"

Edgar and I both shook off the quick glances we made at each other.

"I think we're gonna let you deal with him, man. Getting back the rest of the loot from Hunn is our top priority - that and skipping town for awhile to let the heat die down."

The kid's eager eyes panned at both of us.

"You know where he's at?"

Edgar said, "We were in route and stopped by for ammo. Didn't plan on you being in the equation."

I said, "We do need a driver, though. Think you can handle a '69 GTO?"

He smirked and took another slug off the bottle.

We stopped for coffee at Tang's Donuts after loading the trunk of the Pontiac with our suitcases, jewels, and a pair of sawed-off shotguns. I was back to myself again once I changed into jeans and a flannel. We sat outside on an empty chessboard table surrounded by other tables filled with street geniuses exchanging pawns for kings. After two long-johns, a cruller, and a simple strategy for attack, we started towards Bruno's Barbershop. The plan was to walk straight in the front door and barge into the backroom, aiming for the kneecaps of anyone standing in our way. Wallace was to have the car idling as quiet as possible around the side of the rear exit. In a worst-case scenario, we told him to wait five minutes after he heard any gunshots, and if we weren't out by then, to flee. He stopped on Sunset a couple of stores down to let us out.

Edgar lowered his head back through the window and said, "You better fuckin' be there this time."

Wallace shook his head, said, "Fuck you," and then roared off.

We headed for the spiraling barber poll and cased the place first through the large front window. It had BRUNO'S painted on it in large gold circus letters. There was an uproar ensuing inside. Gruff patrons set down their sports sections to hammer out trivial opinions as white-coated barbers waived razors and shavers in boisterous retort. Those getting chopped in the seats looked nervous as they sat, lathered and hairy, hoping not to lose an ear or have to get a crew cut instead of the fade they came for. From the sound of it, the topic of dire concern was on Joe Torre leaving The Skankees to coach the Dodgers. Momentous shit.

The moment we walked in, the doorbell chimed with little attention brought on us...that was until a few of them noticed the guns; one in each hand, both of us. The place turned into church after that. There were mirrors on every wall, making the shop seem four times the size. We headed straight for the back room door and then hesitated a moment. I turned to the closest barber, who by now had both hands in the air, and twitched my head towards the door twice to see if Hunn was in. The barber nodded and winced.

I pointed both Glock at the door and stood to the side. The doorbell chimed repeatedly as every customer rifled out the joint. Edgar backed up about three feet and lunged his foot at the base of the golden handle. The door burst open on the second try, catching Hunn and a tiny outfit of hoods off-guard, relaxing. It was just after seven in the morning and these guys looked like drugged zombies. They sat behind a long glass table with a few pistols strewn about it. We had four guns on all five of them before they could even think of grabbing for one. I was quick to notice that the flat-screens mounted around the room were playing porno; Belladonna was knelt down, enjoying a cum storm of bukakke on each. We tried our best to remain composed.

Three of the bastards were pure lugs, straight muscle for hire. They had to be the ones responsible for Wallace's facelift. There was a small Chinaman at the far end, equipped with a diamond magnifier on his left eye. He was lurched behind the briefcase I filled earlier with the first round of the score. Hunn sat wide-mouthed in front of a mirrored plate speckled with coke dregs in utter shock. His red nostrils and black moustache looked like they just devoured a powdered jelly donut. We must have broken up the celebration.

"Hands in the air, everyone!" I smiled. "What's the matter, Bruno, you don't look happy to see us?"

Edgar took off around the room to secure the rest of the perimeter. We wanted the jewels and no surprises.

Hunn said, "What the fuck do you think you're doing, Izzy? Do you know how bad you're fucking yourself right now?"

Two of the lugs lunged for their pistols. I squeezed twice and gave them each a busted shoulder. The bullets sent them hard to the ground, flat on their backs. Edgar rushed to close the briefcase after making sure it was all there. I pointed a .45 at the third lug. His eyes were on a pistol that slid closer to him after the action jarred the table. I shook my head *No* to answer his brain's contemplation.

I retorted to Hunn, "Don't go worrying about us now, baby. If I were you, I'd clinch my asshole 'cause you just fucked yourself by having this briefcase."

"So what? I muscled a punk kid for his shit. Why do you give a fuck?"

"That kid was with us."

Edgar said, "You got our car too."

Hunn tried to scoff after realizing what was going on.

I said, "You can keep it though. Now you and Rudy are square."

His demeanor changed drastically after I said that. Somehow the edge subsided. He picked up a credit card from the table and began to wrangle up one last line on the plate.

Edgar turned around and screamed, "*Floby!*"

Floby was a little safe word we picked up over the years to notify each other that someone was creeping up. It stood for **F**ucking **L**ook **O**ut **B**ehind **Y**ou; and I did, just in time to miss the meat of a blade from one of the barbers slashing at my throat. He tackled me and I lost one of the Glocks. All four hands were on the last one, with it pointed just away from my face. I wrestled for position to blow the hair tonic off the top of his head. Thin, mustachioed men weren't supposed to be this strong. I wondered what the fuck was going on with Edgar, and then Hunn broke up the scuffle.

"Let him up, Arturo."

The fucker got off of me but confiscated the .45. Hunn walked around to Edgar and retrieved the briefcase as all three lugs, two bleeding heavily, had their pistols beaded on us. The Chinaman had taken cover behind the bar. Hunn slowly walked back behind the table.

“I told you when you came barging in here that you were fucking yourself and you thought I was bullshitting. Do you believe me now?”

The anger in the bleeding lugs’ faces had me overanxious, and the roar of the GTO’s motor outside didn’t help any optimistic thoughts. Had it been five minutes already? Hunn began to berate us some more, but only had two seconds to articulate before the back exit burst open from the impact of the Pontiac’s rear bumper. Wallace stormed in with both double-barreled sawed-offs. Before we could completely hit the deck, he unloaded the first two rounds into the backs of everyone at the table and then took cover. The third and fourth blasts sprayed the room with more buckshot, leveling everyone else still standing and temporarily creating a window for escape. We charged the exit as the room writhed in agony, taking the briefcase along with us. Hunn sprang out with my dropped .45 and fired. Edgar took a grazed shot to the ribs as we dove into the car and Wallace hightailed it up the alley onto Sunset.

Wallace yelled, “*Holy-fucking-shit!*”

Edgar grunted when I elbowed him and said, “Can you believe it? The kid’s actually got a fuckin’ pair on him.” He looked a little pale. “You okay, man?” His rib was seeping but not too bad.

“Yeah, just a tender spot. Gonna need you to stitch me up later.”

Wallace said, “Where to next - my uncle’s?”

I said, “Naw, he’s square.”

“You two fucked him up already, huh?”

Edgar said, “He’ll live.”

I told him, “Hit the 110 south to the 10 east and get on the 5. We’re headed for San Diego. Got a fence out there - Linus Roeg - been workin’ with us for years.”

Edgar said, “If the heat comes down, we’re going to Rosarito.”

The kid looked almost as pale as Edgar beneath all the black and blue. It probably just sunk in that this was all really happening.

I said, “You can get out here if you like, man. Don’t have to get in any deeper if you don’t want to.”

Without hesitation, the kid punched the gas, opened the engine and said, “Fuck it - let’s go.”

Edgar grimaced from the pain and tried to get comfortable for the haul.

I opened the briefcase, took out a peanut-sized diamond, and held it up to dance with the sunlight.

“Hot damn, fellas! Now the real fun begins.”

*Nolan Knight holds a degree in Creative Writing from Cal State University Long Beach and currently writes for an alternative Los Angeles newsweekly. His main passion is crime fiction and the majority of my writings revolve around everything hardboiled. Lousy Cons was written specifically for Thug Lit after stumbling across it online and becoming enamored with its true grit. His favorite breakfast is a bowl of scotch.*