

VENGEANCE IN VEGAS

A Minuscule Mystery by Hal Glatzer, Copyright 2003

CAST OF CHARACTERS

MARK MARKHEIM, the Hollywood hawkshaw

OLLIE OWENS, owner of sporting-goods stores

SHEILA SHELBY, a distaff detective

VIVECA VICKERY, a big-league bowler

CASPAR COOPER, a great golfer

1

SFX – *Knock. Knock.*

2

OLLIE

“Markheim?”

3

MARK

“My office is open.”

4

OLLIE

“Mark Markheim, the Hollywood hawkshaw?”

5

MARK

“Yeah, yeah. Who’re you?”

6

OLLIE

“Ollie Owens.”

7

MARK

“Oh.”

Owens owned sixty sporting-goods stores in sixteen states, fronted by famous figures from spectator sports.

“Sit. Sit.”

8

OLLIE

“Hey – heard of Fred Filbert?”

9

MARK

“Mmm hmm. Fabulous fullback. Bounced by the Bruins for breaking bones. Muscleman, now?”

10

OLLIE

“Bodyguard for big-time sports stars.”

11

MARK

“Right, right.”

12

OLLIE

“The guy’s guarding Viveca Vickery, the big-league bowler, and her exhibitionist ex-husband Caspar Cooper, the golf great. But the bodyguard and the babe have become best buddies, all arm-in-arm and kissy-kissy. The prince of putters is pissed, and there’s been bad blood between both of ‘em before. But now my man’s missing.

13

MARK

“Vanished?”

14

OLLIE

“In Vegas. Various men mentioned Markheim to me, as a master man-hunter. Find Fred Filbert fast, for a fat four-figure fee.”

15

MARK

“For the *fastest* fellow-finding, figure *five* figures.”

The seven succeeding seconds were silent.

“Okay, Owens?”

16

OLLIE

“Okay.”

17

SFX [transition] – *automobile*

18

MARK

I'm a slick sleuth in LaLaLand, so various violent Vegas vermin know my mug, might mistake my mission and murder me. Mindful, I rented a red Caddy convertible, ditched my day-to-day duds, and donned a disguise: a hoary old houndstooth jacket jerked from the junkpile, plus a pair of plaid pants and penny-loafers. I laced up a lariat tie, too, and brushed down my brown crown with Brylcreem.

Driving the desert I nudged ninety. At nine at night I started seeking the strongman on the Strip – that Vegas viaduct that some assert is scenic. But by four forty-five, I'd hit half the hotels and a quarter of the casinos without contacting my quarry.

I'd inquired indoors and outdoors, checked cheap chopouses, and plumbed pricy, pretentious palaces, eying everyone. Saw several drunken debutantes downing doubles; sleek, slim chicks checking out hunky homeboys, and hairy hustlers making merry with married matrons, but couldn't connect with the missing man.

19

SFX – *Crowd/indoors*

20

MARK

Wearily, I walked into Underwater Wonderland, a humungous hotel fabricated like a fishbowl, but glittering and glowing with enough electricity to light every lightbulb burning on a couple of continents, and where everything, everywhere, there, was named with nautical nomenclature.

Underwater Wonderworld wasn't a high spot for high-rollers, but its Barracuda Bar brought in big business from boys barred from betting in ballparks. Booths brimmed full of fat football fans, second-guessing stadium scrimages re-run on various vivid video screens.

I saw the spreads, took a ten-spot and put it on Pittsburgh, in advance of asking around for Fred Filbert. Attired in an appropriately artless style, like a Vegas vacationer, I believed I'd blended in, but—

21 SHEILA
“Mark? Mark Markheim?”

22 MARK
“Shhh!”

I swiveled, and saw Sheila Shelby: a distaff detective and a damn good gumshoe, who I'd dated and – dumbly – I'd dumped.

“Still a sleuth, Sheila?”

She shuttled us aside, swiftly.

23 SHEILA
“Hired by the hotel on a matter of murder. What's with the hideous hairstyle and houndstooth? Hung over?”

24 MARK
“Here on a hunt to find Fred Filbert.”

25 SHEILA
“Fine. He's found.”

26 MARK

“Where? What—”

27 SHEILA

“That matter of murder I mentioned. And if you’re following Fred, fill me in, now. Who wanted to whack him?”

28 MARK

“Almost anybody. But tentatively, two snarling sporting-goods store stars in the Owens organization who’re vacationing in Vegas. Help me hunt ‘em, honey. If *either* enterprised his exit, and I name the nemesis, I can keep my client’s cash.”

29 SHEILA

“I could cooperate. How about half your finder’s fee?”

30 MARK

“Sheila, Sheila, love of my life—”

31 SHEILA

“You lack leads! Cops and coroner are keeping it quiet till the body’s borne away, but *I* know when and how the huge he-man was murdered. Fifty-fifty.”

32 MARK

“Vegas is very vast. First, find me Caspar Cooper and Viveca Vickery.”

33 SHEILA

“Ha-a! Ha-a! He and she are hanging out here in the hotel. Handshake, handsome.”

34 MARK

“Okay, okay. How was he hit?”

35

SHEILA

“Hard. On the head, first, and found face-down, marinating in the Mediterranean Marina.”

36

MARK

“Marina? In a dry desert?”

37

SHEILA

“A most magnificent man-made marina, with waving, fifty-foot fountains. Underwater Wonderland’s underground aquifer feeds an aqueduct for aquatic activities and aquacades – according to a big billboard.”

38

MARK

“When was he wiped out?”

39

SHEILA

“Oh, one or so. Sighted sloshing by tired tourists who went to watch the waves at two-twenty.”

40

MARK

“Tonight?”

41

SHEILA

“Hence the hotel’s haste in hiring me, Mark, to pinpoint possible perpetrators.”

42

MARK

“What’s the word on the wound in the cadaver’s cracked cranium? Cooper carries clubs. And the Vickery vixen brandishes a bowling ball.”

43

SHEILA

“Till Forensics finishes, no one knows.”

44

MARK

“Then tonight’s the time to talk to them, sister. Someone might say something suspicious.”

45

SHEILA

“Suppose neither knows Fred’s dead, either.”

46

MARK

“Well, we won’t divulge we’re detectives.”

47

SHEILA

“Cool! Come on, comrade.”

SFX [transition] – *Casino/crowd*

48

MARK

The Catfish Casino was centrally situated: its four faraway corners connecting it to the Barracuda Bar, the Mediterranean Marina, the Seashell Showbar, and Neptune’s Nuptial Niche: a charming chapel of connubial convenience, and quite crowded.

Crossing the casino only confirmed my memory: compulsive customers are cuckoo. Blackjack buffs can’t count cards; couples with kids kill time at keno; rubes run risks at roulette; poker players piddle away pots; and pitiful people in wobbly wheelchairs are suckers for slots.

49

SFX – *showbar/music in background*

50

MARK

Sheila and I were shoe-horned into the Seashell Showbar, where fifty-five floodlights flickered, and seventeen sexy glamour-girls bounded around, bumping their booties in see-through slippers, feathers, frillery, and frou-frou.

Couldn’t complain, but I wondered why we were watching. Sheila smiled.

51

SHEILA

“Scores in strikes and spares are slipping, so the league’s leading lady’s creating a completely new career.”

52

MARK

Viveca Vickery loomed large in the limelight, center stage, in a brief bikini-bottom, balancing on a bowling ball. Her bare bust bounced buoyantly as she wriggled to the rhythm, finished the finale, and fluttered away, acknowledging abundant applause. Sheila stayed put, politely, as I sidled up to the side of the stage.

“Very vivacious, Viveca.”

She eyed my awful apparel, appalled. After all, I looked like another bug-eyed bumpkin with a yen for young, firm flesh.

53

VIVECA

“Drop dead!”

54

MARK

“Hold on. I’m hoping to hire a heavyweight for personal protection, and wondered whether your bodyguard’s too busy to—”

55

VIVECA

“Beat it!”

56

MARK

“But—”

57

VIVECA

“See? See?”

58

MARK

She showed me shiners, mostly masked by makeup,
but black-and-blue beneath.

59 VIVECA

“The bruiser battered me!”

60 MARK

“Bad behavior for a bodyguard.”

61 VIVECA

“*Bridegroom*, buddy! Fred Filbert married me at
midnight.”

62 MARK

Sheila shuffled over.

63 SHEILA

“Batterers are bad enough, but *whoa!* Wife-beaters
are bastards.”

64 VIVECA

“Believe it. I gotta go.”

65 SHEILA

“Wait – where’s the big bully now?”

66 VIVECA

“The bum bolted away.”

67 SHEILA

“When?”

68 VIVECA

“One, one-thirty, I think.”

69 MARK

“Could he conceivably have connected with Caspar
Cooper in the casino?”

70 VIVECA
“No way!”

71 MARK
“Why?”

72 VIVECA
“He skipped straight from Neptune’s Nuptial Niche to the Barracuda Bar, and I ain’t seen him since – which is wonderful! So, ‘scuse me, I gotta go get set for my next number.”

73 SFX [transition] – *Casino/crowd*

74 MARK
Caspar Cooper was ensconced in the Catfish Casino, comfortably committed to craps. He saw Sheila, smiled sweetly and displayed dice.

75 CASPAR
“Blow on the bones, beautiful, and make ’em make my point, please.”

76 SHEILA
“Unh unh. I’d make ‘em miss.”

77 MARK
He peered at my plug-ugly, un-glamorous getup.

78 CASPAR
(laughs) “Where’s home, weirdo? Walla-Walla? Whitehorse? The White House?”

79 MARK
“Wherever.”

80 CASPAR
“Whatever.”

81

MARK

He slid his starched shirt-sleeves up, baring both ruddy wrists, and concentrated keenly on the dice dancing in his hand.

82

CASPAR

“What d’you want?”

83

MARK

“I’m a friend of Fred Filbert’s. Seen him?”

He dropped the dice, but kept his cool, calmly counted his chips, and cheerfully chucked one to a waiting waitress.

84

CASPAR

“Someone suggested I saw him, maybe?”

85

SHEILA

“Maybe. The man was married at midnight, too, so they said.”

86

CASPAR

“So the guy’s a gadabout groom. So what? Him and me, we played poker till two-ten, when he left, losing.”

87

MARK

“You sure?”

88

CASPAR

“Sure I’m sure.”

89

MARK

“Seen him subsequently?”

90

CASPAR

“Unh unh. Told you: your man marched in at one oh-one and tottered out at two-ten.”

91 MARK

I seized his sleeve.

“Pretty precise. Where’s your watch?”

92 CASPAR

“Took the time from the casino clock catty-corner to the cashier. Can I cut out, now?”

93 MARK

“Nope. Sorry, sport. Handcuff him, Sheila.”

94 SHEILA

“Sure!”

95 MARK

Her metal manacles had hold of his hands in a heartbeat.

96 SHEILA

“Done, my dear. And I’ll have the hotel’s security service pick up his pretty partner in criminal conspiracy.”

97 SFX [transition] – *Music*

98 MARK

The next night, we owned up to Ollie Owens, and pocketed the payoff.

“The guy was a gifted golfer and the babe was a brilliant bowler. But being hot-heads and lousy liars is what busted ‘em both.”

99 SHEILA

“The boorish bodyguard hit and hurt his bare-breasted bride. So she knocked in his noggin and

convinced Caspar to come in on a cover-up. The two together threw the thug in the murky marina.”

100

OLLIE

“How’d you two happen to hang it on her and him so hastily? And drop the double-talk, too!”

101

SHEILA

“It was obvious. You can’t get from one function-room to another in Las Vegas without going through a casino.”

102

MARK

“And casinos don’t have clocks.”

103

SFX – Music [under ANNCR/credits]