

Contd from P 17/ The disguised dame somehow slipped through my fingers.

The next afternoon I hoofed it around Plaça Espanya. It was a nightmare. Tourists were everywhere and the gypmeisters were out in force. I was caught between the urge to blow my cover and send some of those flimflammers to the cooler, or put the screws on this kitten. Finally it was early evening and my dogs were barking. I hit a joint across the street from the 3GSM convention center. I needed a slug of Mascaró. Liquid heat.

The place was well-lit and filled with smoke. The patrons yapped like a pack of squirrels on methamphetamines. I sat in a booth near the streetside window and placed my order. I had burned through a Ducado and finished my booze when she walked in. She was sporting an ankle-length sable fur stroller and matching fur hat. Wearing her oversized shades. A mysterious Russian diva. This cagey kitten thought she was going to do some bigtime fleecing. She had another thing coming!

I whipped out my map and walked directly to the *camarera* behind the bar. I made sure my voice was loud enough to cut through the brouhaha and asked the *camarera* how to get to the Ramblas. Sure enough, the good-looking frail approached me and said in a phony Russian accent:

“*Previet meesterrr* I ... I am *sorry*. You speak a *leetle* English, no?”

I blew out smoke and smashed my cig under my sneaker. I glanced at her wise-like and said:

“*Tee vidyelish moyio vodkoo?*” *

Her jaw went slack. “I ... I ...”

“You thought you had it all doped out, didn’t you. Thought you had all the angles on the suckers in this burg. You thought wrong!”

Then she changed tack and tried to wile me with her *encantos*. She subtly opened her coat and revealed a bod that practically changed the shape of my shorts. She took off her shades and for the first time I saw her eyes. Ice-blue, pinpoint pupils which belied the phoney smile she was spreading for me. Her eyes. Wild-looking. Unpredictable.

“So you have me, Mr. Kovaks. I didn’t recognize you in your clever disguise. Ha ha!”

“I don’t care how you know me. Now I know your



angle and ...”

“Mr. Kovaks. Don’t be ridiculous. Every peanut grifter in this barrio knows who you are. You have nothing on me. I have not broken the law.”

She was right, but I swear if she wasn’t a dame I’d have massaged that smug little chin. “You’re good sister. But not that good. I’ll be on your tail wherever you go.”

“But how did you ...”

“It was easy. I knew you had to strike tonight because it was the last night of the mobile phone conference and the wideboys with big scratch were going home. I knew you would strike here because it was the next stop on the green line. You could’ve left a trail of bread crumbs sister, it couldn’t be easier. Liceu, Drassanes, Parallel ... next stops were Poble Sec and Plaça Espanya. You shook me the first day, I don’t know how. That left one stop, kid. The only thing you fooled me on was your disguise. I had you figured next as an Italian bombshell.”

“I admit Mr. Kovaks, you’re good, maybe the best I’ve ever seen. The Russian disguise was a last-minute decision. My Italian bombshell outfit is at the cleaners and I didn’t have time to get it. Well, how ‘bout some hooch?”

She laughed scandalously and several of the patrons stopped talking and looked at us. Mostly her. We pattered into the night. The neon buzzed, the voices got louder. Turns out this dame was a rich American heiress who scammed men for a kick. A soiled dove who made a wrong turn somewhere and ended up with her fingers in a wedge of gypmeister pie. What was I to do. She gave me her word the next time she hit this burg it would be to park with me, not to fleece some tourists. The next day she skipped town and headed south. I’ll toss a mental nickel and say she’s in the Costa del Sol. It’s bursting with tourists!




* Translation: “*Have you seen my vodka?*” A little something I learned when I was in the merchant marines.

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