

Part 1: A night like no other

*I want a new drug
One that won't go away
One that won't keep me up all night
Or make me sleep all day
-Huey Lewis and the News*

Charles

His head was exploding. The cacophony of bells, buzzers, sirens, and the incessant clinging of change spilling into metal trays overwhelmed him. The carpet was a vibrant confetti pattern that swirled up at him when he looked at it. He kept his eyes off the floor as it threatened to rise up and engulf him in a sea of color. Charles DeCroix leaned up against a bank of slot machines and tried to remember how much acid he had eaten.

"I can't take this shit anymore. I have to get out of here," ~~h~~He drawled in his Cajun accent. He looked around vainly around for an exit. There was a sign down the hall, but the letters from the words kept falling off the panel before he could read them. He closed his eyes tightly and slid down into a chair in front of a video poker machine.

"Focus, maintain, put it together, man." He couldn't. *"Got to."* ~~h~~He told himself, then added, *"Did I say that out loud?"*

He smelled cigarette smoke. Charles had never bought a pack of cigarettes in his life, but he never had a problem bumming one now and again.

He turned to the person sitting next to him and looked into the eyes of somebody's grandmother. ~~She was~~ one of the endless hordes of geriatrics ~~that~~ ~~who~~truly populated Nevada's casinos. All the ads for Vegas showing young hip people were a lie.

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The elderly woman ~~next to him~~ looked up at him curiously, questioningly, as he leered at her trying to make the words work in his mouth. “Bonsoir, Mamie.” ~~h~~He started and then the words stopped coming out.

Comment [J2]: You just explained “next to him above; no need to repeat.

He knew what he wanted to say ~~—~~, hell, he had said it to himself twenty times already ~~—~~, but acid makes words funny. He could talk for hours with anyone tripping with him, but he couldn’t talk for shit with anyone who wasn’t as high as he was. The words just didn’t work; they didn’t come out, or they came out all wrong.

He started to laugh, softly at first, because it really was quite funny.

“Here I am in the bowels of some casino. I am really not sure which one anymore, and I have gone through a few, right?” The laughter started to grow inside him. He couldn’t keep it in anymore. “Did I say that out loud?” ~~h~~He asked her.

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That was it; the laughter erupted from him, and he knew he was in trouble.

He knew that any minute now a dozen or so security guards or even Las Vegas Metro ~~cops~~ would nab him up and escort him off to jail. He knew that they would find all his shit ~~—~~; the other half a sheet of acid, the guns, and the debit cards ~~in —~~ back in his room. Everything would come out and it would be over, but he couldn’t stop.

They would have him just because he couldn’t stop laughing in the face of this stupid old grandma. She was still just staring at him with a confused look on her face.

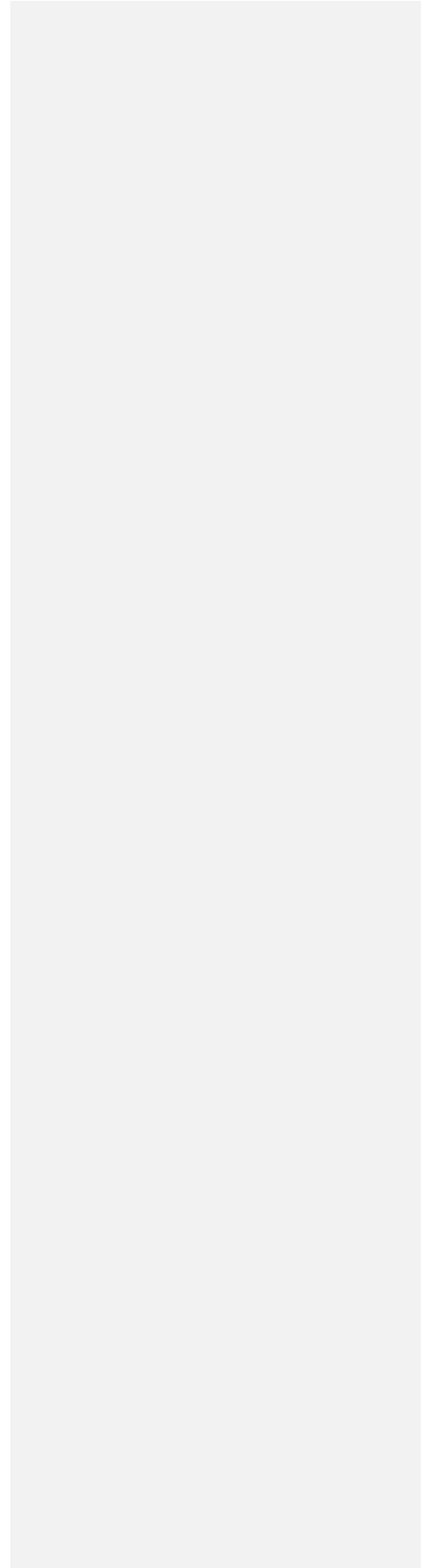
~~Then s~~She frowned at him and made a clicking noise with her mouth, and ~~then she stood-got~~ up.

~~Now~~ Charles was a big man; big enough that ~~when~~ on the rare occasion ~~when~~ he had to look up at someone it made an impression on him. As the little old lady stood, she rose above him until he was looking up at her. She ~~was~~ towered above him.

He stopped laughing.

The room dimmed, first the lights, then the noise. The darkness started in the corners and closed around him, blocking out everything: lights, buzzers, sirens, and the incessant clinging of change, everything until they stood there together, alone in the dark.

“God damn acid.” Charles cursed clearly, out loud.



Jeff

“Clubs are designed to provide all sorts of entertainment.” Jeff Heaven explained to the kid sitting in his booth. He was a little high and when he got high he often got philosophical. The way Jeff figured it, the education was a perk of buying from him.

“The music, lights, dance floor, and booze are important, but in modern societies most club-goers are looking for something more. In a chemical world every vice must be pandered to.” He winked at the kid. Jeff was over thirty so all these new clubbers seemed really young to him. Jeff thought his duty was to let them in on the knowledge he had accumulated over the years.

“The people who design, run, and manage clubs understand that. Ever since Studio 54 exploded onto the scene in the seventies all the best clubs realized that to be truly successful a certain amount of illicit activity needs to occur on premises. All the best clubs provide areas for dealers to work: Dark corners, high bars, tables tucked away in odd places. Places where cash can discretely be exchanged for goods, all away from the prying eye of the public.”

“Do you have any Sunshines?” The kid butted in.

“How many you want?” Jeff asked.

“Five.” The kid said nervously, obviously he wasn't used to making drug deals.

“That's one-twenty.” Jeff started again as the kid dug in his pockets for his money. “All good clubs have places for people to find what they want, what they need to make their evening special. Those who know where to look can always find what they desire. A good dealer knows where people look when they want drugs and he makes a point of being there when they do.”

“Like here.” The kid said.

“Like right here.” Jeff smiled. His table was a booth near the back of the club.

“Don’t be so nervous. This booth is perfect. The lights overhead shine onto the dance floor creating a shadow around this table where we can see out but nobody can really see in. You notice that?”

The kid shook his head no.

“Sure, in the flash of the strobes, someone could tell that someone was sitting here, but not what we’re doing, or in this case, selling. By the same token the dance floor, DJ booth, and the bar across the dance floor are all in plain view.”

“Yeah, they are, huh.” The kid agreed.

“Places like this exist in nearly every club I’ve ever been in. That’s too good to be coincidence.”

“I guess so.” The kid replied distractedly, obviously paying closer attention to what was going on down on the floor than to what he was saying.

Jeff stared at him, shrugged, and handed him his pills under the table, taking his money at the same time. “Get out of here. Go have fun.” Jeff smiled and shoved the cash into his pocket.

He reached across the table and ~~picked up~~grabbed the pack of Newports, ~~and~~ pulled out a cigarette and his lighter. He lit his Newport and sucked in the cool mentholated smoke, ~~and~~ languished in it for a second before exhaling. As he blew the smoke up into the air he surveyed the club.

It was a good night; the DJ was working up to something. He could tell. This DJ wanted to be somebody and he was out to prove it tonight. The dance floor was full, drugs were kicking in, and the energy was building. He loved it; this is what he lived for.

Jeff reached into his cargo pant pockets and took a quick inventory of what he had left: ~~t~~Two gram bindles of coke, an eighth ~~of a~~ bag of weed, and two tic-tac dispensers ~~that~~~~which~~ contained ~~four~~4 pills of “~~b~~Baby Tylenol” Ecstasy and ~~three~~3 hits of “Sunshine” Ecstasy, respectively.

He dealt mainly ~~e~~Ecstasy, and he stuck to named pills. Different pill manufacturers took to stamping their pills to distinguish their product. -Jeff believed that by selling only stamped and branded pills he was offering a higher quality product, something his repeat customers seemed to agree with ~~him on~~.

He had started the night with ten bindles of coke, an ounce of weed, and ~~forty~~40 hits of ~~E~~. ~~It~~ had been a good night, and if it kept up he would have to make a dash back to the house to get some more ~~e~~Ecstasy. ~~w~~Which would suck; he lived way up in North Las Vegas and no matter how he did it, he would be gone for at least an hour and he didn’t want to miss an hour tonight.

-People were already stacking on him, coming back for another hit, and if tonight shaped up the way he thought it was going to, people wouldn’t want to stop the party until they absolutely had to.

Yeah, he would have to make a run back to the house. He had 150 pills back home and he cursed himself for not bringing all of them. It wasn’t like the “intent to sell” wasn’t there with what he was ~~already~~ carrying ~~anyway~~, but having that much shit on him made him nervous.

He wasn’t what he would call a big time dealer; he was a club dealer, really just a club kid who was there to provide other club kids with their candy. The people he bought from, now they were big time. He did buy in bulk ~~---~~ that was the only way to make money doing this ~~---~~; but there was bulk and there was *bulk*.

Movies always make drug dealers out to be multi-millionaires or gangstas ~~that~~ who roll around town in Escalades. While he knew dealers ~~that-who matched~~ the stereo-types, most of the people he knew ~~that-who~~ sold drugs were as shitty-ass broke as he was.

He drove a crappy Dodge Neon and lived in a North Las Vegas shit hole. Not exactly the glamorous Hollywood lifestyle his profession should have entitled him to. Still he hadn't had a "job" in four years and he did have a swimming pool. Jeff chuckled to himself and took another pull on his Newport.

He watched Clarissa exit the packed dance floor and glide up to his table. She drew the eye of every guy around her as she stalked up to the booth and slid in beside him.

She was one of the prettiest girls he knew in Vegas. She came from Kentucky or Ohio or someplace like that, a farm girl with dreams. She wanted to be a showgirl. Why, he could never figure out. She should have ~~gone~~ went to New York and walked runways or Los Angeles and become an actress. She had everything: looks, grace, and personality. He guessed that she lacked the self confidence to shoot for the stars.

She was currently cocktailing at the Rio and auditioning for every show that came up. Jeff was sure that in short time she would be in a line with ~~fifty~~ 50 other girls just like her, half naked with a big-ass feather tiara or some shit.

Tonight, however, she was pushing for him. Not everyone who goes out looking for fun knows where to look. That skill comes with time and experience. For the neophytes or the grossly incompetent he needed ~~a~~ sed a pusher. A pusher is someone who approaches potential customers and feels them out. She finds out if they are looking for anything and if they are: supplies them with it.

Pushing is always a bit more dangerous than waiting for people to come to you. There is always the chance of trying to push the wrong thing on the wrong person. Not just cops either, although that is the worst possible situation. There are also people who for some reason or another will report a pusher to the police or a bouncer or a security guard. Any of which can result in a very unpleasant evening.

Jeff liked to use girls to push for that very reason. Few people wanted to see a pretty girl get hurt or taken downtown.

“How’s it going down there, Rissa?” Jeff asked, as she slid her away around the booth and pressed up against him. She was hot from dancing and Jeff could feel the heat of her body radiating off her. She grabbed a bottle of water from the table and took a giant swig off it.

“It’s fucking awesome down there! People are getting insane! Who is that DJ?” She panted, still breathless from dancing.

Jeff was mesmerized for a second by a bead of sweat rolling down into the abyss of her cleavage. It picked up bits of glitter that she had sprinkled on her chest and dragged them down with it. She was wearing what he would call a bikini top or even a bra with a gossamer jacket and she had been driving him crazy all night.

“Don’t know. I didn’t look at the flyer.” He pulled his eyes up to hers. “He is definitely building up to something, though.”

She ran her hand through his mop of brown hair and caressed the back of his neck with her slender fingers. “Why don’t you come down and dance with us then, Heaven?” She knew he wanted her. Hell, she knew everybody wanted her, but Jeff was sure she took extra pleasure in tormenting him.

“Probably will.” He smiled into her eyes. They were a dark green in the daylight, but right now they were huge saucers of black. Clarissa’s only problem as a

pusher ~~was~~ that she dealt while she partied, almost as a diversion; he was paying her in pills and she was as high as a kite right now. “In a minute anyway.” He took another drag off his Newport and extinguished it in an ashtray.

“Come on, Heaven, come play with us.” Clarissa purred into his ear, her fingers still tickling the back of his neck. She pulled a long leg up onto his lap. She had come with some other girls, ~~who~~ they were all stunning; he could see them all dancing right now. They mostly danced with each other. At least a dozen guys were vying to get attention or to get one of ~~them~~ the girls to dance specifically with him.

Few people actually danced ~~as partners~~ to house music ~~as partners~~; everyone just goes out and dances, alone but together. A good DJ and some good chemicals could fuse a dance floor full of people dancing ~~alone~~ together into a whole. It didn’t happen every night, but when it did, ~~happen~~ it was magical. It transcended everything else and was amazing to behold. Jeff knew that was what was happening here tonight ~~—~~; he had seen it often enough. He was excited at the prospect of witnessing it again.

“I will, I will!” ~~h~~He said, reluctantly pushing her leg off his lap. “I promise.”

“Well, then,” Clarissa told him with a little grin. “If you’re not coming right now then I need four more baby T’s and a Sunshine for me.?”

She grabbed Jeff’s pack of Newports off the table and pulled one out for herself, along with his lighter. She gazed with horror for a second at ~~Jeff’s~~ the lighter; Jeff always bought the most hideous ~~lighters~~ ones he could find to keep people from stealing them. He hated losing lighters.

“You outdid yourself this time.” She laughed knowingly as she lit the cigarette. She leaned back in the booth, blowing out mentholated smoke into the air.

-Jeff pulled out his tic-tac cases under the table and shook out the pills. He had peeled the label off the case with the Baby Tylenols so he could distinguish the cases without looking at them. He put the pills in Clarissa's hand under the table while she puffed on the cigarette.

"That's it on the baby T's, Rissa." ~~h~~He told her as he took the folded-up bills she slipped him under the booth. "And we are down to two Sunshines."

"Well, then, I think you should take one and come dance, sweetie!" She pushed his hideous lighter down her cleavage slowly, daring him to get it. She smiled at the consternation on his face. "Tonight is going to be amazing. Are you going to sit up here and watch it or are you going to be a part of it?"

"Maybe I like to watch."

"I am sure you ~~would~~do." She smiled seductively at him. "I am just saying you're out of shit. Save what you got for us." She looked over to her friends on the floor. "And we could have a really, really good time tonight."

"Well, that's just it, isn't it," Jeff said. "If I stop selling what happens to the party? I sold most ~~of~~ my pills hours ago; what happens when people start coming down? ~~T~~here isn't anyone else dealing here, is there?" Jeff pulled out a Newport. "Can I have a light?"

"Maybe, if you're good. And if you come play with us."

~~Okay~~, Jesus Christ, ~~Okay~~, I will in a minute. You happy?"

Clarissa fished Jeff's lighter out of her shirt, lit his cigarette with it, and carefully returned it to her cleavage, watching his eyes follow it down her bra.

"Anyway, that isn't the point. The point is this guy," ~~s~~She pointed at the DJ booth. "~~H~~is spinning his little heart out and you're not going to come out and PLAY!" -She popped her Sunshine into her mouth and chased it with some water. "You know

where I'll be." She taunted him as she slid out of the booth and skipped towards the dance floor.

Jeff was entranced by her swaying form as she left. "God damn! That girl is smokin'!" A deep bass voice toned. Jeff jumped as he saw its source. A giant black man dressed in a dark sport-coat over a tee shirt wearing wraparound sunglasses stood next to his table. Jeff must have been really distracted by Clarissa not to have seen him approach the table.

He squeezed his massive body into the booth and sat next to Jeff. He looked like he could be a football player or a bouncer or even a boxer. His head was shaved bald in what Jeff was beginning to think was the mandatory look for all large black men.

"What's up, Charles?" Jeff asked. He had met Charles about a year ago. He was a New Orleans refugee who had gotten himself a free ride to Vegas from FEMA and somehow had acquired a stack of Katrina Relief ATM cards that he had been supporting himself and his habits with ever since. He reached out and punched Charles' fist and gave him a smile. "I thought you were tripping tonight. You looking to candy flip?"

"Nah, man," Charles chuckled, a comforting laugh that made you want to laugh with him. "I think I am done with the acid. That shit isn't for brothers; I'll leave it for you hippies."

"Sorry to hear that." Jeff replied smiling. He liked Charles; he had an easy way about him like he that seemed to embodied the spirit of his town. He was always quick to smile and generally a fun guy to have around. "I thought you were going to try to go all 'fear and loathing' tonight."

“Nah, mon ami, not tonight. I am selling tonight.” Charles ~~smiled, grinned, and~~ picked up Jeff’s pack of Newports, and looked at him for permission.

Comment [J3]: Try to change up “smile”

Jeff nodded and leaned forward. “Since when do you sell? What are you selling?” ~~h~~He asked shocked. Charles had always been a good customer; he never expected him to be competition.

Charles looked inside the cigarette pack for the lighter and then around the table. “Got a light?”

Jeff handed him his cigarette and Charles lit his with it end to end. “I got something new, mon frère, something fantastique.”

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