

# The Adventures of Tequila Kitty: Chapter 3 - by Brian Lepire

*by* Darren Cormier

## **Chapter 3**

I promised myself I would never come back to this city.

After my last trip to Vegas, I knew the only thing this city had to offer me was trouble and bad credit. I told myself it was time for a fresh start. I'd put down the tequila and put away the sombrero.

But here I was again, with a bottle in my paws and women by my side, making more bad decisions.

I had come back to town to wish an old friend good luck. She was a good woman who didn't deserve the hell I put her through when we knew each other, so when I heard she had run away to find a better life, I wanted her to know I wished her only the best. The fact she ran away to the place I was running from was an irony that tasted like a bad omen, but I went anyway.

She was giving everything she had to be a comedienne and had managed to get a show at the Venetian lounge room. After her set, I decided to bolt out before she had a chance to corner me. Awkward moments smell like rotten mice — I can smell them for miles. I was also hoping that no one recognized my tail. The last time I was at this particular casino, I hadn't left the best impression. Probably because I didn't leave as much money as I owed.

The place was crowded. There was a convention of seniors in town

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playing the slot machines and a poker tournament that was getting some national air time, so I thought the staff was busy enough that a cat wearing a sombrero minding his own business could go unnoticed. The girls and I walked quickly, careful not to make eye contact with anyone who might give a damn that I was back in town for a one time occasion.

There's a trick to walking fast across the casino floor. The joint is set up so that you can't get ten feet without stopping to spend more money, but you just have to keep the slots to your right at all times and keep your eyes out for old timers. They're the ones who usually get blinded by the whirring cherries and sounds of emptying machines and might accidentally step on your tail, then keel over from the unexpected sound of a cat screeching and clawing their ankles. Blind fools have it coming though.

We were almost to the doors when I thought I saw someone swing their heads around for a second glimpse. I was hoping it was just someone getting a better view of the beauties I had picked up earlier that night at the bar down the strip. Or did I meet them at the bar this morning? I think their names were Tina and Emily.

The fresh air tasted cool and sweet. I took a fresh swig of my tequila.

"Where to now, Teqs?" asked Emily, the brunette in a perfect blue dress.

"Oh, oh, oh, let's go to the Palace! I haven't been there yet," Tina exclaimed. She was obviously new to town.

"I think this might be where we go our separate ways, girls. I think I'm gonna call it a night."

"What? It's still early though. There's still so much trouble we could

get into," Emily said in a way I'd heard so many times before, like a lady who expected me to keep her warm tonight. Damn if she didn't look good in that dress though.

"Yeah. I wanna go to all the nice places," Tina said.

"First off, the Palace ain't as nice as you might think. Be careful over there. That place can shed your fur. They especially like to ruin blondes, Tina. And Emily, I've had my share of trouble in this town. I'm ready to call it a night on Vegas. Give me a call tomorrow."

They pouted a bit, but when they realized I'd made up my mind, they headed off towards Caesar's.

I didn't want them around when trouble came.

I was holed up under a dumpster outside a cheap motel at the end of the strip; a far cry from the penthouse apartments and ritz'd up houses I usually worked my way into when I was in town. Lonely ladies had a thing for taking me in, and I didn't mind taking advantage of their desperation every now and then. But this time I chose a place further off the radar, away from the lights that might give me away to any of a number of people who I didn't have time for.

I'd made it to the motel parking lot when I heard the footsteps. A sombrero may make me look good, but it does shit for my hearing, so the bastards were able to scoop me up real quick. The first one gave me a hard slap on the top of the head with an opened palm. The bottle crashed to the ground, shattering like so many dreams do in this city. While I was still reeling, another one came up from behind with a burlap sack. The last thing I saw before they cinched the sack closed was an oversized neon cowboy wink at me.

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Dried blood on burlap has a weird smell to it.

Whoever had sent these goons to pick me up had forgotten to mention I didn't have all my nine lives anymore. They'd gingerly tossed me into the back of their van and laughed as the sack bounced off the interior walls. By that time I was so groggy I didn't know how long we drove for. I assumed we were just going out to the desert to dig a well, so it didn't really matter how long it took.

At some point I had finally passed out and didn't wake up until the van door slammed open. One of the bastards stepped in to grab the sack. I let my claws peek through just enough to give him a nasty surprise when he wrapped his hand around the knot.

"Sonofabitch!" the unlucky one said.

"What's your problem, Joe?"

"Bastard clawed me!"

"Haha. Pussy."

"Shut up, Brad!"

I chuckled a bit too, until Joe's boot met my ribs. I passed out again.

The next time I woke up the bag had been opened and I was surprised to find I wasn't in the desert next to a fresh grave. Instead, I was in a large room without windows. It was covered in blood red wallpaper, which did nothing for the lack of light in the place. Shadows danced around the room from hanging incandescent lights.

There were two men standing behind me making sure I didn't try anything stupid like bolt for the door. Joe was a bit shorter than most

guys in his line of work, but had shoulders to make up for it. I could tell it was him from the fresh blood still speckled on his hand. Brad was a bit taller and better off in the looks department. It'd looked like someone had busted his nose at one point, but the damn thing gave his prep boy face even more character.

At the other end of the room was a glass desk that reflected the weird blue glow of twelve computer screens mounted to the back wall. There was a chair facing the screens, but I already knew who had picked me up.

I coughed up a hairball and some blood.

"Is that the infamous Tequila Kitty I hear? It can't be. I thought he was long gone by now, especially after the shit he pulled last time he was here."

The chair spun around to reveal a young guy who still dressed like he was in college, even if he did have more money than most actors in their prime. Craig Irvin had a specific look: zipped-up hoodies, jeans, and sandals. Didn't matter where he was or who he was meeting with, whether it was the Prime Minister of Russia or the founder of the world's largest tech company - he always wore sandals. He also had a nickname to match his curly red hair, but I refused to call him "Big Red".

"It's nice to see you again, Craig," I said, trying to hide any signs of pain.

"Oh, it's nice to see you too, Tequila. I assume you have my money."

"Your friends there picked me up in the parking lot of a motel I couldn't afford a room in, so, no. I don't have your money at this moment."

Craig wanted to kick me himself, but couldn't because of his sandals, so he looked at Joe. A familiar boot met my sore ribs and I let out a loud yelp.

"Who the hell do you think you are, you mangy alley cat?!" Craig was on his hands and knees, pushing his beat red face against mine. Spit sprayed my eyes as he spoke. "Do you think the rules don't apply to you? I want my money!"

I felt as good as I could in a situation like that. He wanted his money, which meant I might be able to walk out of this room if I could promise I could give back everything he'd lent me during my last bender in Vegas.

"Or maybe I'll just make myself a new pair of fur-lined sandals. What do you think, Teqs? Those sound nice."

I didn't feel so sure about this anymore.

"Craig, I think I can-

Joe stepped on my tail, twisting his foot as if he was crushing out a cigarette. I hissed and took a swipe at his ankle which caused him to jump back. He started to wind up for another kick.

"Not yet!" Craig said. "Little runt was about to say something. Hopefully he was about to tell us the code to his bank account, which conveniently has the \$5500 he owes me, plus interest."

"Craig, if you don't mind me saying, what's \$5500 to a guy like you? Don't you make \$5 million a day from your websites alone? Is it really worth killing me over?" Probably not the best thing I could've said at that moment, but I had three broken ribs and a concussion. I was doing the best I could to figure out how to give him what he wanted.

"Vegas is an interesting place when it comes to debt," Craig said, letting the anger on his face transform into malice. "Did you know they found a body in the desert last week of an old gangster killed over \$50?"

Craig sat back down at the wall of computer screens and began pulling up files.

"Tequila, let's summarize what's going on here so you and I are on the same page. You came to town a few months ago driving a nice looking Corvette and swigging straight from the bottle. You and your loser buddies start playing the tables and you're having some luck. You hit a couple places around town, running tables until they get cold.

Things taste real sweet as you rake it all in. Then, like pretty much everyone in Las Vegas, you overstay your welcome and lose it all. You think you can still win, so your friends hook you up with a pretty well-off guy: me. We hang out for a bit. I think your hat is weird, but like you enough anyway to front you some money; exactly \$5500.

You head back to the tables and lose it all over Vegas. Then, instead of doing what you agreed to do and hand over the keys to the car, you jump in the Corvette you probably stole from someone and drive back to whatever dirty litter box you came from.

Does that sound about right to you?"

"You've got a good memory."

"And you have a lousy memory. I want my money back. How are you going to get me my money, Tequila?"

When your universe starts to collapse around you, time stands still.

The imminent sense that there is no way to avoid a death you are unprepared for makes the world's axis grind to a halt and all you're able to do is remember the most random moments of your life. As I listened to Craig layout my dilemma, all I could do was remember the most obscure things: my first sombrero, the first time I caught a mouse in Tijuana, the smell of a woman as we laid under the covers on a cold morning. Craig and the others must have seen a drooling cat, because Craig slammed his fist on the desk.

"Tequila! How are you going to get my money?! Better yet, I don't want to know. I just want it back. And I want it back in the next twenty-four hour." Craig swung his chair back to the screens. "And now for some added incentive. You know you weren't the first one we picked up last night, right?"

Craig pulled up a live camera feed of a small empty room, save for two chairs back to back. There were two beautiful women handcuffed to the chairs. Luckily, it looked like Joe had been kinder to Emily and Tina. But their faces were etched in fear.

"You bastards! What have you done to them?!" I spun around and made a quick dash towards Joe. He must have been expecting it though, because as I jumped up to claw his eyes, he reached out and swatted me down. I fell on my back, which took the wind out of me and reminded me I should be in a body cast.

"Calm down. They're fine," Craig said. "You're the one we want, not them. I only had Joe and Brad ask the ladies to join us so that you don't get the idea to run off again without paying back what is mine."

Craig walked over to the spot of floor I was sprawled over. Another bloody hairball came up as he looked down at me.

"Tequila, you don't know me very well, but you should realize by

now that I'm a man of certain principles. Kind of like how computers and science have unbreakable rules, I believe that there is no debt too small worth forgetting. And not only do I value my money, but I value my time. I took the time to help you out of a bad situation, and now I'm taking the time to address this little problem we have. So, basically what I'm saying, if you don't get me my money, and if I feel like you've wasted my time, I am going to be very angry. And Joe likes it when I'm angry, because that means he gets to be angry too, and Joe really likes being angry."

Joe took a step forward, but Craig raised a hand.

"Tequila, here's the deal: you get me my money in the next twenty-four hours, or else the young ladies are not going to win big in Vegas. And please, for their sake, and yours, don't try to leave town. I'll know if you will, and I'll still come after you. Is any of the unclear?"

I gave Craig a big smile, wide enough to show all the pointed teeth I still had, and nodded.

"Be back here tomorrow at 10 am with my \$5500. Joe, Brad, get him out of my sight."

I thought I was going to end up back in the sack and was prepared for an extra kick from Joe for good luck, but instead Brad came over and ran his hand across my back.

"Alright. Grab your sombrero and let's go."

I dragged myself onto all fours and tossed my sombrero on. Joe and Brad escorted me to the elevator. Brad hit the button for the first floor, and the three of us rode down twenty floors in a weird silence normally saved for funerals or in-laws.

"I'm guessing that hat ain't your lucky one," Brad said.

"Ha! Nope. I guess not. Hopefully I can change that though," I replied.

"I doubt it," Joe said with a smirk.

The elevator doors open and sunlight burst through the glass-paneled walls of the reception hall. Brad pointed to the door and gently pushed me towards the exit with one foot.

"We'll see you in the morning, Tequila Kitten," Joe said. He waved as the elevator doors closed.

I stepped out the door and realized we'd never left the Vegas strip. I felt lost.

