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Searching for Elvis - The Aaron Sivle Story

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To Elvis Presley, the biggest rock star (of 18), of whom I forged their autograph.

Thank you for the opportunity to make nine of my clients very happy without looking like a poseur and bothering you on June 28, 1974, in Milwaukee.

— Lou Volpano

“The music business is a cruel and shallow money trench, a long plastic hallway where thieves and pimps run free, and good men die like dogs. There's also a negative side.”

— Hunter S. Thompson

FOREWORD  
THE GUY WHO SAW IT ALL

Let me tell you something about show business. You think you know crazy? You don't know crazy. I know crazy. If you want to know what this life is really about—the egos, the drugs, the sex, unadulterated insanity of rock 'n roll—talk to the author, Lou Volpano.

There is no one better qualified to write this book. He's an award-winning rock n' roll manager who didn't just produce the shows; he survived them. Sinatra. The Blues Brothers. Areatha. Jerry Lee. The Beach Boys. A couple of thousand classic rock shows during its heyday. And I'm not talking about small potatoes in the middle of nowhere. I'm talking about three of the world's largest music festivals—Chicago, Milwaukee, and Memphis. Lou was exposed to a sheer volume of rock artists that would make an ordinary roadie's head spin. He saw it all, and he wrote it down.

I first met the author back in 1993. He was in the trenches, handling the bookings and the contracts for the dozens of superstars at the Bob Dylan Tribute at Madison Square Garden. It was a zoo. We were backstage, and who do we run into? Donald Trump. He was Lou Reed's guest, if you can believe that. We're standing there, amidst the menagerie of sycophants and their egos, looking at each other, nonplussed by the pandemonium. Later, at dinner, we're sitting there talking. *Is there a limit to this backstage insanity?*

We got our answer soon enough. Because of the history he made with The Dylan Deal, Elvis Presley Enterprises calls up. They want a show. *Tribute to the King*. We joined forces. We put one small blurb—one tiny item—in a column in *USA Today* mentioning the event. Just a tentative title. And then the floodgates opened. Thousands of letters arrived at our office. Some were asking questions, sure, but most of them contained checks. Cold, hard cash from fans paying for tickets to a concert that didn't even exist yet. They were convinced. They believed this wasn't a tribute. They thought it was *IT*. The Comeback. They knew Elvis was still alive.

I know a lot of you are saying, “Another fucking Elvis book?” There have been over 400. But Lou dug into the gossip, his family, and his entourage. He tracked the fanaticism, and he found the truth. He kept notes on all of it. I can say without a doubt that the author has seen it all. And lucky for you, he decided to tell the story.



— Jerry Weintraub Jr.

## INTRODUCTION

We were deep into the foul year of Our Lord 1987, caught in a savage feedback loop of tabloid filth and mass hysteria. A nation of swine, addicted to the *National Enquirer*, trapped in a paranoia so thick you could cut it with a rusted Bowie knife. Suspicious minds? You bet your ass.

The rumors were coming in over the wire like bad acid flashbacks: The King was alive. He was hallucinated in a Dairy Queen in Kalamazoo; he was spotted buying power tools at a Sears in Kansas City; he was seen gorging on shrimp at a Birmingham Sizzler and feeding quarters into the one-armed bandits at Caesars Palace with the desperate rhythm of a man on the run.

The truth, as usual, was stranger than the lies. The King hadn't checked out. He'd simply fled the coop. He couldn't take the rat race—that meat-grinder of fame—so he ditched the Memphis sarcophagus for the nomadic existence of a low-key gypsy.

He spent a few years drifting through the American night incognito, sweating out the demons, trying to break the iron chain of a lifelong addiction to adulation and Percocet. Finally, in a stroke of twisted genius, he decided to drop anchor in the belly of the beast itself: Las Vegas.

It was the perfect camouflage. A sanctuary for the terminally weird. Vegas offered an old-school tribe of musicians and the beautiful, hideous cover of a hundred-plus "Tribute Artists." In a town drowning in clones, the genuine article could move freely, a ghost in the machine, free to indulge his atavistic lust for gaudy jewelry and karate without the hounds of the press baying at his heels.

The downside, of course, was that Vegas was a major whistle-stop on the very Crazy Train he used to engineer.

And now the bill has come due. The King has failed to keep the wolf from the door. He is broke, busted, and realizing with a sinking heart that he must claw his way back to the stage. He has to pay his blood debts to the vultures at the TV Shopping Network and provide a better life for a girlfriend who indulges his specific brand of madness, albeit with serious doubts.

There is no choice left but to stomp on the gas.



Lou Volpano — Author  
Las Vegas, Nevada, August 2025

Chapter 1

A FORAY BACK INTO THE ABYSS . . .  
KERMIT THE FROG ON STEROIDS

December 31, 1987

The air in Nevada was still vibrating with the psychotic aftershocks of the apocalypse. Just months prior, the goons at the test site had detonated a nuclear bomb with the force of 150,000 tons of TNT—the Military Industrial Complex’s legalized atom-smashing earth-shaker packing eleven times the caloric heat of the Fat Man that fried Nagasaki.

It was a scam that permeated the infrastructure. In the penthouse of The Mint, a thermal pane window the size of a squash court—installed specifically for wealthy voyeurs to watch the mushroom clouds rise—had shattered into a billion glittering shards. They sold the debris as "zirconium diamonds" to tourists too drunk to know the difference. Meanwhile, out at Nellis, six hundred government chimps were gibbering in their cages, their brains turned to oatmeal by PTSD.

And here we were, in the bowels of the desert, preparing to ring in the New Year.

In five years, from 1982 to 1987, Heavy Metal music rose from filthy dive bars in Pacoima, reached a fever pitch of noise and hairspray, and culminated in selling out colossal stadiums. But in the neon heart of the strip, the rot was old-school. The question on everyone’s mind was simple: Why in the name of God is Wayne Newton headlining Caesars Palace?

The rumors were dark. They said Frank Sinatra—the Chairman, the Voice, the Old God—had finally cracked. For the first time in history, he was taken out of the running. Reports of an on-stage "Alzheimer’s foible" in Chicago had drifted west like a poison cloud. Frank was out.

It was fitting, perhaps. Caesars Palace wasn’t built by the sweaty, leg-breaking Italian mobs of yore. No, this was the brainchild of the "Supermob"—a cadre of sharp-eyed Ashkenazi attorneys from Beverly Hills. Men who had traded their *tallits* in Chicago, Brooklyn, Miami, Cleveland, and Detroit for law degrees at Yeshiva University and sharkskin suits in Los Angeles.

There, they hatched a plan to build a secret nationwide network that would provide lawful guidance to businesses and politicians seeking to exploit ambiguities that would be extremely profitable. Their legal fees would be paid in cash or gold, or stocks and bonds issued in their wives’ mothers’ names.

Unlike the Mafia, which ruled by brass knuckles and the shallow grave, these Jewish investors ruled by *auctoritas*—prestige, wisdom, and the terrifying power of compound interest.

They named it “Caesars: as a tribute to Augustus Caesar. The ruler whose financial power was unrivaled, derived from his immense private fortune and a broad network of patron-client relationships, referred to as *auctoritas*; influence based on prestige, wisdom, and moral standing, rather than threats of violence. And that’s the point. The difference between the Mafia’s command and control management structure and the Jewish investors from the Hills of Beverly was *Judaica auctoritas*.

They erected a thirty-foot statue of Augustus in a fountain the size of a football field, spewing a million gallons of water an hour into the arid desert air to demonstrate their preference for proper management. It was an *auctoritas* totem pole. The first Cathedral of Hebrew Capitalism, built with legit money, was designed to separate the suckers from their cash with the efficiency of a slaughterhouse.

Opened in 1966, the Caesars brand was so revered that for over twenty years, tens of millions of American showoffs, who’d basked within its’ Roman glory, could brag about it to golf partners, holiday relatives, business peers, and their personal clergy, who’d never been.

Caesars was the only joint in town that required gentlemen to wear jackets. The Uniform of the Damned. It was a dog whistle, a class-warfare tactic to keep out the riff-raff and the soul brothers in purple tracksuits. It was the clothing of rank for the crap-shooting *Paisans*, a signal that this was a place for serious, suicidal wagering.

The casino floor was a sea of black crushed-velvet tuxedos—a trend started in ’73 by a local tailor named Giovanni Parente, who stole the look from Tom Jones, mass-produced them in Tijuana, and sold them locally for \$59.99. It allowed the common man to feel like a land-owner, if only for a night, before the house stripped him clean.

This was the "Straight Vegas." No Chicago loan sharks breaking thumbs in the alley. If you tapped out here, you dealt with credit checks and civil debt collection. The gamblers whined about the paperwork, but the Pit Bosses were firm: “*It takes longer, kid, but it beats being eighty-sixed.*” And in this town, "eighty-sixed" meant eight miles out into the desert and six feet under.

Above board, that’s how the echelon of Beverly Hills was planning it. Self-financing was the ticket. Freedom from The Rosato Brothers, The Lakefield Road Gang, and The Outfit. Their

Romanesque landmark would provide liberation so they would not end up like their landsman Bugsy Siegel, shot in the eye by a sniper using a high-powered rifle, in Beverly Hills.

So why Newton? When the management tapped Mr. Las Vegas for the big night, Sinatra's people screamed bloody murder. "*You have to respect Frank!*" they howled, citing his defection from The Sands to Caesars back when Howard Hughes bought The Sands and starved out La Costa Nostra.

But Frankie had no juice left. He tried to lean on Sidney Korshak, the fixer in Beverly Hills, but Sid was already playing a different game. Korshak was using Wayne Newton as a headhunter to procure showgirls for his private poker games, which were populated by the crème de la crème of local wealthy Jews; attorneys, bankers, and real estate developers, who were major stockholders in El Dorado Resorts Inc., dba Caesars Palace. The fix was in.

A deal was cut. Newton would sing for his supper to work off a \$33,000 marker he'd dropped in a poker game two years prior. The marquee told the whole sad story of American decline:

*WAYNE NEWTON*

*Shrimp Cocktail: \$1.99*

*All-You-Can-Eat Prime Rib: \$3.99*

*Steve & Eydie in the Lounge*

The Bimbos descended on the desert like a locust plague. They'd start planning their Roman fashion foray to the casino floor at Caesars the day after they confirmed their plane reservations. Exclusivity made it a target-rich environment for chicks who preferred Armani-wearing prey, including movie and music stars who embraced this upper-class ethos.

A vital component of any woman's mission to successfully troll at Caesars was to have a sexy pick-up strategy that relied on current and popular glamour-baits being used in L.A., New York, or Chicago, where the richer men came from.

For example, fashions in Chicago were more ethnic, lower-cut, and flashier than in New York. Darker-skinned beauties like Sophia Loren and Raquel Welch were very big stars in Chicago because of its Italian demographics.

The New York girls were W.A.S.P.s and Jews, and modeled themselves after a more sophisticated elegance, Ingrid Bergman, Ellen Burstyn, and Jill Clayburgh. Chicago men were never motivated by these women, they said, who looked like “realtors”.

Gold Diggers trolled the showroom entrance like it was a contact sport. That’s where the big action was.

A Maître d’ wrote a Penthouse Forum letter that he’d had his joint copped in the coat room for paging a working girl who needed public relations.

“Phone Call for Donna Linardo” was broadcast throughout the casino. Strutting her six-inch Manolos, clicking on the marble, she paraded through up to the showroom entrance like Napoleon conquering Moscow to answer a fake phone. Las Vegas performance art for the audience of schmucks in line.

Raising her eyebrows, she smiled smugly at the less experienced *trollops* who were groveling around the showroom entrance in a snit, gawking at her audacity.

Then she trolled, "Frank, I know you're in town..." Acting annoyed as she handed the phone back to the doorman, sucking her front teeth with her tongue. “He’s so ’70s. And that toupee." Now she had social notoriety publicly broadcast to four thousand ears in the casino. This would provide her with heightened recognition for months thereafter whenever she was introduced to someone. All for 10cc’s.

The older pros, the aged-out showgirls, pulled the oldest trick in the book. They wore loose panties beneath their gowns, executing a swift "foot-flick" to drop them on the stairs in front of the guys who were there to pay-to-play. On busy nights, like tonight, there could be a dozen drawers dropped, scooped up by Mexican busboys to take home as gifts for the *familia*.

Then there were the LA girls. The Playboy veterans in Peg Bundy wigs. They were the real mercenaries. They skipped the theatrics at the showroom and stalked the elevators, hunting greaseball-Johns or stars like Robert Goulet. They drank water disguised as vodka and bought protection by servicing the security guards.

It was a zoo—a savage, desperate pit of commerce and flesh. Just last week, a Mexican redhead in a see-through Pucci gown got into a claw-fight with a star from *The Lido de Paris*. Nails were broken. Blood was spilled. The Mexican paid off a Pit Boss with a hundred bucks and was back in business the next day. The Lido girl was banished to The Sands.

Around the corner from the elevator hornet's nest, amidst the screeching, metallic hellscape of seediness and bad luck in the casino, stood a ghost, standing two rows deep at the slots, camouflaged by the flashy machinery and the desperate shuffling of the mob of pigs.

Peering at the showroom entrance through his blue-tinted aviators was a seventy-five-year-old, two-hundred-and-forty-five-pound specter in a crushed black velvet tuxedo. Elvis (Aaron Sivle) Presley. Salt-and-pepper hair slicked back like a badger in a rainstorm, leaned against a hundred-dollar Wheel of Fortune machine with the casual menace of a man who knows too much. He was scouting the perimeter. A stalker in his own kingdom, preparing to stage a raid on the showroom's main entrance, his only angle into the showroom.

He couldn't use the backstage door because it was locked down tighter than a Nixon press conference. The clampdown was absolute. It was the fallout from the Merle Haggard Incident during rodeo week—a hideous scene. "The Hag" took a whiskey bottle to the skull of a backstage gatekeeper when she laughed in his face after he told her, "Willie told me to come by and sit in."

When Willie heard, he ran over to Metro Jail, bailed out "The Hag," and took him back to Austin on his bus, after scoring a quarter ounce of blow as a peace offering

Since then, Caesars hired ex-Rolling Stones security. Professionals who could spot a fraud or a madman before he reached for a weapon.

For Elvis Aaron Presley, the front door was the only way in.

Three Maitre d's, their skins tanned to the color of expensive luggage, stood at the showroom entrance like gatekeepers to the underworld. Theirs were a caste system based on the grease of the palm. The "Joe Blows" waited in line like cattle, while the Italians and Jews from Chicago and New York bypassed the herd.

The Handshake: It was a subtle art. A hug, a fifty-dollar bill passed with the grace of a sacrament, and a few murmured words in Italian. Then, they were whisked past the red velvet ropes to the front rows, leaving the plebeians to wait in line for seats in the back.

Visitors to Vegas casinos all agree on one thing: the smell—a sour, psychic miasma of stale smoke and sticky, red industrial carpet. Shecky Green used to joke about it: *If you smelt it, you dealt it*—but this was no joke. It was the scent of depression and anxiety, and it made Elvis's nostrils flare because, for the first time in his life, he was breathing the air of the common man, and it made him twitchy.

“This place smells worse than a shithouse at the Texas State Fair,” he muttered.

He was vibrating with excitement and terror. The Fear was creeping in. He was caught in the whirlwind of ten thousand slot machines—winners screaming, bells ringing, and flashing lights inducing a near-epileptic fugue. Relying on the hard-edge showbiz logic he was famous for in thirty-one movies, he focused. Tonight, he would take the stage again, whether he liked it or not. For the first time in over ten years, he would pave the way back to earning a living from performing. He was here to reclaim his throne, to usurp Wayne Newton, to make his comeback to pay off his Home Shopping Network debt before his girlfriend flayed him alive.

He’ll crash the stage to bask in the roar of the crowd. But the waiting was killing him. He picked tonight because New Year's Eve is a timely occasion. Number One, he could easily blend in with the crowds, and Number Two, he could outsmart a nemesis who deserved a spanking for the blatant disrespect of naming himself Mister Las Vegas. This combination equaled a conquest.

Then he flashed back, thinking about what his usual lair backstage on New Year's would be like. His good ole boys’d be a chucklin’, hearing the Borsht Belt *Take My Wife* schtick, then the familiar applause that segued into a rolling tympani and flourish of the orchestra’s “Two-Thousand-and-One” overture. It’s fired him up a couple of hundred times.

But tonight, he’s solo. Anxiety is creeping in, his head is spinning, and he’s confused. Fight or flight? The feeling is between puking and chomping at the bit, and casinos aren’t designed for relaxed decision-making. Elvis has never been one for standing around waiting, much less in public. Now, if he can finally endure this torture, he could... sing again? Could he earn again?

There are no clocks in casinos, and Elvis hocked his last watch. He’s curious about the time left in Newton’s show. Time was a melted concept in this windowless cavern.

*Jesus Christ? ‘Quando Quando?’ He must have an hour left, he thinks.*

Next, another song of the wicked, “When the Saints Go Marching In.” Then, “See See Rider,” which really pisses him off because he heard Newton’s been singing his *Elvisized* version in his show since the day The King died. He got away with it then because he introduced it as *A Tribute to My Old Friend*. Now it’s a regular in the set, without copping to the blatant rip-off.

Walking out from behind the slots, he reels on his heels when he hears a stunning insult blasted from inside the showroom. “Ladies and Gentlemen, thank you for coming. I love Vegas. You know Elvis is still alive, right? Yeah, I saw him the other day, going into a jewelry store, and then a Pawn Shop, and then a gun range”.

Elvis stiffened. A trumpet blasted. "Dixie Land." The bastard was doing The American Trilogy. He was butchering the South.

Without the slot machine cover, he was naked, and the tide was out. His head felt thickened, realizing rock 'n roll blasphemy is almost more than he can endure.

He's relieved by a distraction, a sexy blonde cocktail waitress who saunters by, glancing at him, asking, "Cocktails? Cocktails?"

"No Thank You, NoThankyou, NoThankyouverymuch. Did anyone ever tell you that you look like Sharon Stone?"

She looked him over like he was a side of bad beef. "Don't you think that whole Elvis-thing has been overdone?"

He dismissed her insult, "Is this the last song in the show, little mama?"

"No Elvis. That's Danke Schoen," she laughed.

Jesus. The disrespect was total.

Suddenly, the orchestra swelled. "Viva Las Vegas." The war cry. But it was wrong. It was shrill. It was Newton.

Elvis bolted. He smashed through the doors of the Men's Room, seeking refuge in the bright fluorescence and the smell of Paco Rabanne. He clawed at the sink—panic in the Tile Room. A Puerto Rican attendant—a calm figure in the midst of the chaos—ran the water. "Colder, will ya?" Elvis sputtered. He splashed his face, trying to wash away the freak tonight has unleashed. He handed the man a buck. "Thank you. Thankyouverymuch."

He caught his reflection. He didn't look like a King. He looked like a waiter—a waiter with ADHD.

He mule-kicked the door open—he never touches handles, never touches the germs—and came face-to-face with two tourists in powder-blue leisure suits. They were raving about Newton. "Kermit the Frog on Steroids," Elvis snarled at them. The tourists froze. "Another impersonator? They're everywhere." Then, the kill shot: "Hey buddy, your fly's open."

Elvis zipped up his crushed velvet trousers with as much dignity as he could muster. "I used to have people to do this for me," he said, staring them down. "Ask Tom Jones."

He wiped his face with a hanky and marched back into the fray of the casino. It was almost midnight. 1987 was on its last legs, dying. A few degenerates were fleeing the showroom

early, eager to lose their mortgage payments at the craps tables, but having avoided another tiff with wifey by taking them to see Wayne.

Then, he froze. A commotion near the stairs. Screams. An entourage. A group of security guards surrounded a small man. Sinatra. The Chairman himself. He heard Wayne butchering "My Way" from inside and stopped. He spat on the stairs, a gesture of supreme contempt. "He's a fucking poseur," a lackey sneered. Frank waved a hand—*Let's go*—and vanished into the smoke.

*It was a sign. The Old Gods were with him,* he thought.

Elvis adjusted his jacket, buttoned his velvet shield, and jogged up the stairs. He threw a karate chop at the Maître d's, who looked at him not with reverence, but with the weary calculation of men wondering what this specific *Impersonator* was going to do.

The doorman said, "Good evening, Sir."

"Thank you. Thankyou. Thankyouverymuch," The King announced.

From inside, the lyrics drifted out: "*And now, the end is near...*" "Oy vey," Elvis mumbled.

Peering into the maw of the showroom, he said, "Happy New Year, Gentlemen," which was met with them staring, wondering, stone-faced, what he would say or do next. Hey, it's Vegas, and that always means money.

Few civilians ever enter a Vegas showroom during a show. It's discouraged by the doormen, who recite, *Sir, the artists prefer no seating during their show, but if you insist*, which is code for you to cough up a significant tip.

They stared him down, waiting for his next move. They know better than anyone that in Vegas, insanity is just another form of intelligence provided you have the cash to back it up.

He greased the palm of the showroom boss with two crisp C-notes. A necessary toll to cross the River Styx. With the steely resolve of General George S. Patton surveying the ruins of Carthage, he pointed a trembling finger toward the theater doors and announced, "I'm going in."

The red velvet ropes—those flimsy barriers designed to keep the Hoi polloi at bay—parted like the Red Sea. The doorman, a conspirator in this irrationality, muttered to his underlings, "I know it's the last song, but he made me take it." Money talks in this town, usually in a whisper that screams.

He stepped into the darkness. Into the Belly of the Beast. For the first time in a decade, he was seeing the animal from the wrong end: the back of the house. His eyes, shielded by gold-framed aviators, struggled to adjust to the cavernous gloom. And then—WHAM.

The stage erupted in a radioactive blaze of red, blue, and yellow corona rings. And there he was. Wayne Newton. Standing in the white light like a Hindu sacrificial goat.

But the horror wasn't only on stage; it was all around Elvis Aaron. A sea of teased blonde clouds. Over-sprayed bouffants and beehives shimmering in the dark like a field of toxic golden wheat. Glittering dresses of candy-apple-red metal flake and lamé in gold, silver, and green. It was a kaleidoscope of tacky, a retina-searing that would make a blind man vomit.

The Fear took hold. He was alone. No flunkies to flank him. Just Elvis Aaron Presley, floating in a void of five hundred mesmerized suburbanites. He started sweating like a whore in church.

He locked eyes with the target. Newton looked grotesque. His mouth was unhinged, neck veins bulging like garden hoses, straining to hit a high note that didn't exist. The man did look like *Kermit the Frog* on high-grade anabolic steroids.

The mental calculus was breaking down. *I look ridiculous?* He needed a buffer. Dr. Nick's pharma aids. But the die was cast. He swaggered down the aisle, an impression in crushed velvet.

A spotlight hit him. *Thwack*. Like a deer caught in the high beams of a semi-truck on a lonely highway. Instinct took over—he waved. Silence. No screams. No panties thrown. Just the dull, bovine stare of an intoxicated audience. To them, he was just another waiter. With delusions of grandeur.

On stage, Wayne was butchering the anthem. “Regrets, I’ve had a few...” His blue velvet suit was straining to contain the carcass within.

Elvis Aaron mounted the stairs on the side of the stage. The band played on, fueled by muscle memory and union scale. Wayne squinted into the glare. He sensed a disturbance in the Force. A glitch in the Matrix. But Newton is a pro; he knows the First Rule of the Strip: Don't let the bastards see you bleed.

“To think I did all that... And may I say, not in a shy way...”

Ten feet away, Elvis Aaron bowed and extended a hand in peace. Wayne, the fool, went for the handshake. Psych. He pulled the old fake-shake, a move he learned in the Memphis

schoolyards. In one fluid motion, he snatched the gold microphone from Newton's manicured grip like taking candy from a brain-damaged baby.

He planted his feet. He owned the light. Wayne was a shadow behind him. Elvis Aaron didn't just sing the song; he crushed it. "FOR WHAT IS A MAN, WHAT HAS HE GOT? IF NOT HIMSELF, THEN HE HAS NOT!" He dropped to his knees, a dramatic genuflection to the gods of chaos. "YES! IT WAS MY WAY!"

He leaped up, adrenaline surging through his veins. "Happy New Year, everyone. God Bless Y'all." Mechanically, he reached down, grabbed a napkin from a woman in the front row, mopped the holy sweat from his brow, and handed it back—a relic for the faithful.

Wayne stood there, naked without his amplification. He had been upstaged on New Year's Eve by an Elvis Impersonator, with nary a security guard in sight—a Technical Knockout.

Seasoned Las Vegas performers live and die by one main rule: showmanship. They all know there is a direct correlation between their acting cool and potential sexual encounters. This intense focus on themselves, no matter what's happening, is a vital skill all singers learn. The night a drunk Eydie Gorme heckled, "Hey, Mr. Las Vegas, doesn't it hurt to hold your stomach in that long?" he made an atom-bomb noise into the mic and ad-libbed, cutting a fart to a standing ovation as security hustled Gorme out.

His conductor tossed him a spare mic. The band vamped. Wayne laughed, a hollow, desperate sound. "I read the marquee on the way in. It said Caesars, not Graceland!" Point: Newton.

The trumpets blared. Wayne mocked Elvis's karate stance, but his movements were stiff and wimpy. He sang on, "And Yes, He's Hit the Highway! ... Anybody seen Priscilla?" Point: Newton. The crowd ate it up. They love a cage match.

Then chaos erupted in the center of the theater. Flashlights waved like lightsabers. The flock of Maître ds was teeming, looking terrified. They knew their heads were on the block. After the George Carlin blackface fiasco, where he crashed a show high on coke, doing an impersonation of Mike Tyson's baby drivel, the Beverly Hills lawyers had threatened to fire the whole lot of them and replace them with Israelis—ruthless efficiency experts who couldn't be bribed with a fifty-dollar bill, if anyone ever crashed another show.

Wayne went for the nuclear option. He called up the Maître d's—his Praetorian Guard. "Let me introduce you to the boys who run this place!" They locked arms, a line of tuxedoed

Rockettes, goose-stepping behind Wayne as the orchestra launched into the accursed melody of “Danke Schoen.” It was a nightmare surrealist tableau of lounge lizard bootlicking.

Stage right: a flashbulb popped. Paparazzi. A scab with a camera. He was snapping shots of Elvis Aaron. Proof. Evidence. Elvis Aaron is onstage at Caesars.

A uniformed security guard arrived and tugged the photog toward the door. “Hey, man, please let that guy stay,” said the King. Met with a no-nod from the guard, Elvis Aaron urgently needed to score a knockout. He, too, has a few tricks up his sleeve.

Elvis needed a finisher and lunged into a karate stance. *Hiyah!* Another one. *Hiyah!* He leaped to the center stage. *Danke Schoen* in your face, Newton.

The orchestra conductor looked to Wayne for direction, who signaled, “*Keep playing.*” Then, Elvis realized he had crossed the line; it was pointless. There is no height of crescendo in “Danke Schoen” to seize ala “My Way.”

Raising his right arm, he saluted the audience, extending his index, middle, and thumb fingers while bending his ring and little fingers, gesturing his motto, “Taking Care of Business,” which represented his work ethic, his band, and a “brotherhood” with his inner circle.

And the band played on.

He walked off stage left, stepping back into the shadows from whence he came and grabbed a lady from the audience—a human shield, or perhaps just a companion for the long walk home—and waltzed up the aisle with her.

Back on stage, Wayne was sweating so heavily that it was the only thing keeping his hairpiece from catching fire. An Elvis impersonator ruined his New Year's Eve.

He turned to look at his wife. She was looking at Elvis. Her back was turned to her husband for the first time in history.

In the wings, the stagehands—the grizzled veterans of a thousand bad shows—watched the exodus. One of them, a man with a face like a dried apple, lit a cigarette in the dark. “I worked five hundred of his shows,” he croaked. “That’s him.”

The curtain fell. “Good night, everyone. You too, Elvis,” said Newton.

And just like that, it was done. A couple of hundred dollars lighter, his identity confirmed by a stagehand, his dignity questioned, but his existence undeniable. On film.

He started moving toward the exit with the velocity of a man fleeing a burning orphanage. A massive, tingling rush of high-voltage adrenaline surged through his nervous

system. This was a *first*—a genuine, unauthorized, off-the-books strike against the Establishment.

The Old Elvis—a prisoner of the International Hotel—could never have pulled a stunt like this. The Colonel’s blood-sucking contracts explicitly forbade it. It was a Vegas power play, a blockade designed to starve the other casinos of the royal presence. He remembered the old days: Ann-Margret would be in town, flashing those eyes that could melt a Cadillac bumper, begging for a walk-on. The insatiable demand for "Viva Las Vegas." But Elvis Aaron had to decline. The lawyers, the jealous husband—it was a cage.

But tonight? Tonight, he became a free agent. A rogue variable in the equation.

The curtain fell on Newton’s shame, and then the ultimate horror occurred: The house lights came up.

There is no sight more depressing in the American West than a casino showroom under full illumination. The magic evaporates, leaving only stained carpet and the ravaged faces of the desperate.

The Harpies Descended. A couple of women—giddy, gin-soaked, and escaping the dull gravity of their husbands—spotted him. They moved with the predatory speed of carrion birds. The leader was a biological disaster area: a buxom blonde encased in a New York Femme Fatale gold lamé gown. Her hair was teased into a bouffant of structural instability. She was drunk, loud, and closing fast.

“Elvis!? Elvis!!!”

She shoved a program and a pen into his hand with the force of a mugging. He signed the damn thing—what else could he do?—and kissed her cheek. It tasted of hairspray and thick rouge.

Her wingman was a sixty-year-old casualty of the culture wars, painted in enough Miami tanning salon lacquer to waterproof a boat. She wore a rainbow rhinestone denim leisure suit that defied all laws of God and fashion. She was hyperventilating, clutching her chest in a religious fervor.

“Oh my God, Elvis. OH MY GOD. I knew he’d come back. I knew it!”

He handed the program back, a generous god granting a boon to the faithful, and prepared to make his exit, to vanish into the night.

But the blonde stopped him. She squinted at the paper. She examined the signature with the cold, dead eyes of a forensic accountant. The air in the showroom froze.

“No, honey,” she announced to her hyperventilating redhead, her voice dripping with sudden, sobering disappointment. “I don’t think so.”

She looked at Elvis Aaron, then back at the paper. “It’s not him. Elvis always looped his Y’s.”

With a sneer of supreme disgust, she threw the signed program onto the dirty carpet. It hit the floor with the silence of a dying dream. “Come on,” she barked.

The Miami-two sashayed toward the door, leaving the King of Rock and Roll standing there, rejected by the very people he had come to save, all because of an autograph marred by an illegible consonant.

A close encounter of the Elvis kind? Maybe. Or maybe just another hallucination in a town built on radioactive sand and bad checks.

Chapter 2  
TAPIOCA IN SIN CITY . . .  
WHY CAN'T I BE THE MAN WHO SAYS NO?

January 1, 1988

Las Vegas has three categories of addiction recovery meetings. All other cities have two.

Ninety-five percent of the so-called 'Anonymous' meetings in America are secret, sweating confessionals for the scurvy-ridden drunks and drug addicts—wretched, busted-out doctors, trophy wives, repairmen, thieves, and clergy, all trying to claw their way back from the edge of the pill or booze bottle.

Then there's a subset of five percent for sex addicts. The twisted tribe of hyper-tense perverts fighting to keep their zippers welded shut and their panties on. In Vegas, it's four percent. Which leaves the fallen angels at one percent.

The residual *One Percenters* are unique addicts and exist only in Sin City. Here, in the psychotic toilet bowl of Glitter Gulch, is the only city in America where you can find a sliver of humanity afflicted with the terminal, incurable sickness of *Celebrity Addiction*.

It makes perfect sense. Las Vegas was invented to use the burned-out husks of Hollywood to play to its masses. The entertainers who ruined their careers because of poor parenting and their insatiable appetite for forbidden fruit.

The painful insecurity that performing artists feel once they get off booze and drugs shocks them to their core, and a lot of them never really regain any sanity.

The Strip provides a dozen welcoming stages for these cracked actors, crooners, and hoofers. The pay is garbage compared to a Paramount contract, but the booze is free, and the suites are comped, provided you can show a theatre full of Asian tourists, magic, song, dance, pyrotechnics and dogs in 55 minutes.

Look at Debbie Reynolds. A tragic case. Sobered up and broke, she had to sell her Beverly Hills estate and cut a lease deal with a third-class motel, where she opened a show and displayed her memorabilia in the lobby like a demented garage sale. Her act was so tired it made the busboys weep. Her daughter was so embarrassed she had to use her *Star Wars* blood money to move Mommy home, just to stop the gossip at the "Rodeo Drive Group of Alcoholics Anonymous." Liz Taylor was laughing, again.

Joey Bishop? Christ, what a mess. Thrown out of the Rat Pack like a used condom, he played shows so blind drunk he didn't know the room was nearly empty. He'd milk an encore, and the only soul left in the seats was his Aunt Mimi. When the fog lifted, the only gig he could get was as a greeter for high rollers at the airport.

Very few of these poor bastards realized that the booze isn't the problem. It's the drug of **Fame**. They are junkies for the applause, dying to go day-tripping as glitterati. But their garden turned brown, fertilized with black beauties and usually multiple divorces.

When the first *Las Vegas Celebrities Anonymous* meeting was held, it was a grim affair in the employee cafeteria at The Riviera. Two living corpses showed up: a famous Negro comedian who shot smack to endure his forty-minute yodeling-tribute to The Jackson Five, and a contortionist lounge singer who sang "Over the Rainbow" with her ankles behind her ears.

The sheer embarrassment of their acts drove them deeper into the pit—a cocktail of downers and cheap vodka. Both broke and homeless, they found relief in L.V.C.A. She came out and married her glam-dyke manager, who booked LGBTQ talent for Miami's cruise ships. He moved back to Atlanta and was elected to the school board.

Initially, Celebrities Anonymous in Vegas was called into serious question by the A.A. elders, understandably, because there was never anything anonymous about celebrities fucking, drinking, or drugging. In fact, stars paid flacks a lot to sell their sordid stories to magazines, promoting their prowess and broadcasting their specific desires. But the movement grew. It had to. The 1980s were an open-air abattoir for the terminally hopeless.

The Celebrities Anonymous organization finally provided a modicum of confidentiality, so these people didn't have to wear the nose-and-glasses disguise like Richard Burton, who once tried to get sober in A.A. after losing his ninth wife. She'd caught him in a pool cabana, pants down, diddling another au pair.

Celebrities Anonymous saw them all.

**The Jewish Comedian:** Bottomed out in a Manischewitz blackout, insulted a casino owner's wife, and French-kissed a tire iron thrown through his windshield. Twenty grand in dental work, gone in a second. Then he got his nose flattened by an Elvis impersonator, who he really thought was "my old friend Elvis" in the throes of a slightly homosexual delirium tremens.

**The Hungarian Violinist:** Dragged in unconscious by three topless showgirls from *Folies Bergere* after trying to demonstrate the virtues of Vaseline on stage during the Mother's Day

family show. He got barred from Celebrities Anonymous after one meeting, for making hooker jokes and heckling the host, still locked in the psychotic cycle of desperation to promote the act that he moaned he overpaid Rich Little to write for him. They never seem to stop trying to relive past glory.

The Chick Singer: Married to a fossilized Israeli octogenarian casino owner when she was 19. She was banished to hostess in the Baccarat pit after *The New York Times* saw her act and called her “a midget sausage stuffed into a Bob Mackie hog casing.” Savage. Vic Damone threatened to cancel his dates at Moishe’s casino just to avoid being seen near her.

The Blonde Rock ’n’ roll Mama from Malibu: Who had to take the job in Vegas as a magician’s assistant when her Hollywood TV offers dried up, and she was forced into Chapter 11 to pay her breast implant debts. She surfaced at C.A. after seeing herself on Extra TV, slipping a nipple with white powder dusting her schnoz. She thought she’d get fired, but they asked her back because the video was gold, reaching their target market of trailer trash in Arkansas.

The Sports Desk: Then came the giants. An NBA superstar took over, leading the meetings to tap into the lucrative market of athletes freaking out over the explosion of "baby-mamas" and the Medellin Cartel’s bulk pricing policies. *Sports Illustrated* reported more illegitimate kids in the league than players—most conceived in a haze of Yayo, Colt 45, and Nyquil.

The seven-foot beast commanding the room started out as a towering monolith of NAACP righteousness, a verified saint. A boy who had clawed his way out of the Philadelphia slum decay on the back of an Olympic Silver Medal and subsequent UNLV scholarship—hurled into the high-dollar meat grinder of the NBA. After three seasons, he gorged himself on the Root of All Evil, swimming in the filth of strip bars and gun ranges, only to be chewed up and spat out by the sex machine—stone cold bankrupt in less than five years. A classic American tragedy.

He said in an interview with Larry King that he was grateful to lead C.A. meetings, and *the NBA was a target-rich environment*. The cager’s backstory was legendary in the Meeting-network. He ruptured an eardrum and a testicle in an endurance contest involving nine tabs of Viagra, two quarts of 151 Rum, and a handful of bad Ecstasy at the Bunny Ranch. EMTs had to use military-grade *Narcan* and four amyl nitrate ampules to restart his heart.

When he woke up from a two-month coma, he read in the paper that foreclosure actions were filed by his mortgage company because his American Socialite / Media Personality / Wife

had emptied the accounts in retaliation for his sexcapade. She spent two million on a *Bugatti Veyron*, four million on a twenty-carat emerald cut diamond ring, and fifteen million on new houses for her and her mother. What paltry assets remained, including his four championship rings, were auctioned off to pay his divorce attorneys. He was left with nothing but incontinence and a gavel to run the meetings.

Before the sports star, *L.V. C.A.* meetings were hosted by a famous Italian singer. Then, the Paisan's tenure crashed when he was arrested for shoplifting \$80 worth of bowling shirts from a department store in Milwaukee. He was carrying \$4,000 in \$100 bills at the time. His attorney argued that he couldn't control his impulse to shoplift due to "his desire to be more normal". The Judge declined to find the defendant guilty and continued the case for a year, on the condition that he attend rehab and weekly Twelve Step Meetings, after which the charges could be dropped. Which is how he got connected to *Las Vegas Celebrities Anonymous*.

It is a hideous twist of fate, but Sammy Davis Jr. is currently the ringmaster of this town's C.A. circuit. The descent began in a lonely fog of Remy Martin—entire months spent marinating his liver in expensive cognac while staring into the abyss of his own living room, paralyzed by the sheer boredom of a warrior without a war.

But the real horror, the trigger that sent him scrambling for the salvage life raft, was the sight of Lou Rawls—*Lou Rawls, for Christ's sake!*—taking top billing in the very showroom where Sammy used to rule like a King. It was a treacherous insult that required heavy intervention to blot out the shame. The limp dick from the NBA told him about C.A.

Now the twist is complete. Sammy is headlining again. The venue has changed to a basement of charred remains, but the crowd is just as hungry. Just like the golden nights at the Copa, the attendance at his *Las Vegas Celebrity Anonymous* gig is Standing Room Only—a packed house of sweating, shaking wrecks, all craning their necks to see Mr. Bojangles tap-dance his way through the Twelve Steps.

And now, January 1, 1988. The biggest day of the year for the desperate. The "Slips" were everywhere. Allergic reactions to *Astroglide*, self-administered *Botox* disasters, and missing teeth. Crippling psychiatric distress that inspires wrongdoers with the frantic courage to resort to anything to relieve the embarrassment, except drink.

The room was a mess of men in two-day-old clothes, smelling of fear and stale champagne. In the back was a new face. Elvis Aaron Sivle.

He had come for absolution. The worst slip a celebrity can make: Performing again, much less for free. He sat there, humming “*We're caught in a trap, and I can't walk out...*”

The room was heavy with fallen idols. Name tags were mandatory for the old-timers—the ultimate humbling for men who used to see their names in lights forty feet high.

*Dean M. (Henderson)*

*Sammy D. (Beverly Hills)*

*Jerry G. (San Francisco)*

*Jim M. (Venice Beach)*

The gossip was flying. Jerry Deadhead’s sister was in cuffs in San Diego. Elvis nodded. He knew the drill. He still owed twenty grand to a Memphis Cadillac dealer for eight El Dorados he’d bought in a guilt-fueled frenzy for a pack of groupies he’d tested with a hatful of barbiturates from Dr. Nick.

Back in the day in Memphis, the Old Man—his daddy Vernon, the keeper of the purse strings—had finally snapped. He saw the ledger, saw the bleeding red ink of a life lived without brakes, and he cut the cord. No more payments.

The response was swift and fascist. The Cadillac dealer, a man with the soul of a lamprey, dispatched his goons. The Repo Men came in the night. Jackbooted thugs with tow trucks dragged four of the eight El Dorados back to the lot right out of the driveways of the Memphis tramps who thought they’d really scored. He knew he was still on the hook for the others, ten years after. \$20k.

The King sat among the ruins, a name tag on his leather jacket, looking like just another bloated juicer in the court of the Candyman, waiting for the coffee to brew.

Sammy Davis Jr. stood at the podium, a one-eyed pirate captain steering a ship of fools. “Hey, Babes. In case you think you stumbled into a Shriners convention, this is the New Year’s Day Meeting of the Las Vegas Chapter of We All Used to Be Really Big-Shot Celebrities Anonymous. This ain’t about the booze anymore.”

The geeks at the Betty Ford Clinic had run the numbers. Two thousand guinea-stars over ten years. The conclusion was terrifying: It was the Fame. That was the mainliner. The booze and the pills were the gasoline they poured on the fire in their brains. They needed to quit Fame, and the substance abuse would subside.

Historically, celebrity drunks circled the drain like spiders in a bathtub. Hank Williams, Marilyn Monroe, Errol Flynn, Keith Moon. Even the mystics weren't safe—Chögyam Trungpa, the Buddhist Master, drank himself into the next Bardo. Toulouse-Lautrec? He ended up dead from cirrhosis because in his day, there wasn't even A.A., much less C.A. Sports stars too. Mickey Mantle and Andre' the Giant.

And the rumors... sweet Jesus, the rumors. They whispered that Jimi Hendrix hadn't choked on his own vomit at all. He'd faked the whole scene and was currently working security for Tyson Chicken in Arkansas, protecting the poultry with a Fender Stratocaster and a concealed .38.

The First Rule of the Celebrities Anonymous is: *Shut Your Pie Hole*. The hardest thing for celebrities in recovery to do is to shut up and listen. Newcomers had to ask permission to speak. A cruel torture for people used to eighty-five minutes of unadulterated "Me, Me, Me."

"I have to ask permission to talk?" Elvis Aaron stammered. "Yeah, but you can sing anything," Dino quipped from the front, swirling a cup of lukewarm decaf.

Elvis squirmed. The leather jacket squeaked like a trapped rat. "Uh. Sammy? Can I say something?" "Granted."

"Thank you. Thankyouverymuch. My name is Puh-resley... but I'm using the name Elvis Aaron Sivle. You know, incognito. I used to sing for my supper."

The room murmured. The ritual call-and-response. "Hi, Elvis."

He looked around. A basement of cinder blocks lined with posters reading "Easy Does It." What kind of Zen propaganda was this?

"I've stayed clean out of the limelight for years," he began. "But last night... I had a slip."

The tension in the room spiked. A collective gasp. Had he drunk-dialed Priscilla? Sent a male stripper to Pia Zadora? Elvis Aaron was rambling now, the sweat beading on his forehead. "Before the Army, I was cool. I had a band... Then I came out... OF THE ARMY, I mean, and they made me make thirty-one movies. Thirty-one! I was a racecar driver, a frogman, a crop duster..."

Anyone who has ever been to an A.A. meeting knows that some people are very shy, while others go boldly, where they shouldn't go. When celebrities attend, it's not uncommon to hear stories about kinky group sex in a penthouse suite or getting thrown out of a kid's Bar Mitzva they crashed, wandering the halls at The Beverly Hills Hotel high on Ayahuasca.

They waste years in denial because they got into show business for the partying. The hardest part is admitting they only get invited anywhere because they're famous. They're powerless to understand why anyone wouldn't want them at their party.

Sammy cut him off. He knew a manic episode when he saw one. "Elvis, baby, can we stick to Step One? You're drifting." Elvis blinked. "Sammy. I was obligated to people who weren't helping me. Streisand offered me a movie, and I blew it! That's why I came back to Vegas. To get straight. But now... I need money."

In the corner, Jerry Deadhead snored, a rhythmic rattling of the sinuses. Jim-the-Door kicked his chair.

Elvis flashed the grin—the one that used to make teenage girls wet themselves in 1956. Now, it looked desperate. "You know Fonzie? The guy on TV? Copied my whole act! Made millions! And I can't get a job at a car wash! I slipped, Sammy. I went on stage at Caesar's Palace with Wayne Newton... And it felt good."

He held up the newspaper. The Smoking Gun. Dino stood up, walked over, and peered at the photo through the haze of his own nostalgia. He slammed the paper down on Sammy's podium. "Bad pic," Sammy muttered. "Doesn't even look like you."

"This time it'll be different!" Elvis pleaded. "I saw Oprah! I'm more enlightened now."

Comebacks in entertainment can be a lot like amended surgeries, refinishing furniture, or restoring classic cars. It takes sources (to find the right materials), time (to restore the damage), patience (to build the physicality), and money to pay for a new paint job applied by the right public relations artist who knows how to extract the tumors from a diseased career.

The trick was to avoid the classic Partridge Family Syndrome. The delusion of the comeback. David Cassidy had tried it—spent five years in a ringmaster's outfit at the MGM Grand to pay off debts he accrued shopping like Michael Jackson. He ended up signing autographs at The Crazy Horse for lap dances. His addiction to fame kicked in, and he was dousing his Jones with free shots of Jack Black. His P.F.S. became so massively delusional that even after Danny Bonaduce sent him four cease-and-desist letters, he continued to deliriously promote his addiction. But he never made it. Cirrhosis.

Dino wasn't buying it. "Puh-resley, Aaron, whatever the hell you are. Are you insane? Have you forgotten the pressure? The leeches? The lack of privacy?"

“You did it with Frank!” Elvis countered. “Yeah, and look at the wreckage,” Dino sniffed. “I found out they were cheating me on the first night. I bolted to right here.”

Sammy nodded, his glass eye reflecting the fluorescent horror of the room. “I begged Frank to join us. They prop him up with Adderall and a Teleprompter.”

Then, the Great American Greed, the kind that rots a man's soul faster than stale warm beer in the midday sun. “But the money, man,” Elvis whined.

Jim-the-Door spoke up, a voice from the grave. “Man, art’s not about money. You had more cash than God, and it bought you a private jet to fetch peanut butter sandwiches in Denver. It bought you death.”

Elvis reached into his pocket. He pulled out a brown bottle, shook a handful of vitamins into his palm, and washed them down with a warm Dr. Pepper.

Sammy leaned in. “Keep it real, King. There is no narcotic stronger than the roar of the crowd. It made fools of us all. You have peace now. Do not forget the loneliness of the summit.”

“Yeah, lonely all the way to the bank,” Elvis muttered. “I have another confession. I owe the TV Shopping Network twenty-seven grand.”

Sammy froze. “For what?” Elvis looked at his shoes. “Jewelry, mostly. And uh... some exercise stuff.”

The banality of it was crushing. The King of Rock and Roll, debasing himself for cubic zirconia and a ThighMaster.

“I hear you, King,” Sammy said, his voice soft. “But going back out there? That’s suicide. Keep coming back. It works if you work it.”

“It works if you work it,” the group chanted, a cult of broken psyches.

The meeting broke up. The men shuffled out, eyes on the floor. No one asked for an autograph. No one offered to buy him a coffee. Elvis Aaron stood alone in the center of the room. He zipped up his leather jacket, raised his arm in the TCB salute—and marched out into the cold desert night, a king without a kingdom, looking for a way to pay the bills.