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Pretty Bad Things

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Extract

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Car horns blasted. Engines revved. Lights flashed. Music pumped from roadsters, cabs and ginormous electronic screens called Jumbotrons. It was full-on night-time and we had hit a stream of traffic. This was it—the Las Vegas Strip.

On both sides of the street were these large looming hotels which looked like they'd been designed by children. We were stopping and starting the whole way down the street 'cos of the traffic, like a car in a board game when you keep throwing ones. But for the first time since we managed to escape from LA I was glad. I wanted to take in all the sights, make mental notes of where we should go look for Dad, and maybe have a little fun too.

Beau was goggling it all like his eyes were kaleidoscopes. This big shiny bronze-colored building with the word *Wynn* scrawled across the top of it was definitely the biggest, but then this sprawling Italian-style one came into view and that looked bigger.

'Keep a look out for Caesars,' I said to him, flipping the bird at a cab driver who was giving me the eye through my window. 'Piss off, pervert.'

Along the other side of the Strip there was a ton of building work going on, and presumably they were busy building even bigger and better and more wacky hotels to fill in the gaps between the others. Hundreds of tourists lined the sidewalks.

We halted at the lights and got a good look at them all, swarming like bees in a golden hive. Hawkers peddled portable iceboxes filled with bottled water. Guys and gals strolled hand in hand, some catching buses, others posing for photographs, laughing, stopping to admire and point things out. Everything was busy, everything was loud, everything was big, everything shone like cheap jewelry.

Beau brought his head back inside the car. 'Pais, I just had a thought. We're not gonna be allowed in any of these places. They're casinos and we're totally underage.'

'It's cool, I got a fake ID.'

'Oh. Great.'

The computer equipment at my last school, ICA, was pretty tech-tarded, but I had the basic stuff to cope with this small task. 'It was surprisingly simple. Me and these two other girls did it on Photoshop. Color printer, couple butterfly pouches and a laminator. It got me banned from the computer lab, but it was totally worth it.'

'It can't be very good. They'll suss it a mile off, you'll be slung out.'

'I made you one too.'

'You did?' he said, almost touched but still all paranoid android.

The Paris, Las Vegas hotel loomed over us, looking like some insanely ornate office block with its own Eiffel Tower and big blue hot-air balloon statue out front. That just blew Beau away. Next to Paris was a giant Planet Hollywood hotel, and then we saw the MGM Grand with this gigantic gold lion stood out front.

'They got real lions in there too,' I told him. 'I saw this documentary about Las Vegas on the plane on the way over from Jersey. They got cubs sometimes.'

He looked through the rear window. 'If we can get a room at Paris that'd be way sweet,' said Beau.

'Not if you're gonna go all quoting Sartre and spouting how pathetically pleasing the joint is the whole time. I don't think I can handle that, bro.'

'Not pathetically pleasing, *aesthetically* pleasing.'

I looked at him. ‘I know, Beau.’ I loved it when he corrected me. It made him feel all intelligent and high and mighty, and then all embarrassed when he realized I didn’t need correcting.

‘I wonder if they speak French in there,’ he said, then answered his own question. ‘Maybe not. They might have some French people working there, though. This is Vegas, after all. Anything’s possible.’

Another hotel was shaped exactly like the New York skyline with an Empire State Building, Chrysler Building, Statue of Liberty, Brooklyn Bridge, and there was even a roller coaster looping around the outside of it. I could hear the screams of the passengers as it twisted and zoomed across the front. We had to stop again for some tourists on the crosswalk but we could watch these fountains in front of the Bellagio Hotel dancing to ‘Hey Big Spender’ and on the trumpet parts the water shot up into the air.

‘Oh my God, this place is awesome!’ said Beau. I didn’t think Vegas was going to be Beau’s cappuccino, guessing he’d think it bawdy and seedy, but for some reason he was really soaking it up. I leaned across him to get a better look out his window.

The car rolled on until the Strip became quieter, darker. The hotels became motels and the strolling tourists turned into vagrants sleeping on the sidewalks. I scoped a little pink motel right at the far end, illuminated by a tiny neon sign and a large green shamrock. *The Lucky Inn.*

We pulled into the parking lot. After everything we’d seen on the way, it was pretty disappointing. Beau just stared at me. He obviously had his heart set on a suite somewhere with valet parking and gold taps but we just couldn’t afford it. The buzzing neon sign and the trash can with the cluster of derelicts rifling through it welcomed us to reality. I turned off the engine and went to get the bags from the trunk.

‘You can’t be serious,’ said Beau, shutting his door.

‘The big hotels’ll ask too many questions,’ I said. ‘We’ll stay here so we can be more incognito.’ I handed him the swag bag and his backpack. ‘It’s just until we find Dad. Then we can give him the antiques and he can sell ’em off and we’ll be able to afford something better.’ I waited until Beau had turned his back, before I reached through my window and stuck the keys back in the ignition.