

JERSEY

JUSTICE



VINNE

SORCE

The hot, humid New Jersey afternoon stung my nasal passages more than usual. That always happened when I traveled on the Turnpike. Getting to Newark Airport was always a pain in the ass. It was about as much fun as free bat day at Yankee stadium. Whose idea was that anyway, to give out free bats to drunken fans in the middle of the Bronx?

My life was shittier than usual these days and going to Newark was not the high point of my day. Why couldn't she come next month like I asked her to? My baby sister. The perfect one. Perfect my ass, if Mom only knew what I knew. She'd slept with more guys in high school than a Sealy Posturepedic mattress. Who was I to condemn her, though? I'm certainly no saint. I used to be. That was a long time ago now.

Fucking Turnpike, trucks all over the place, and it always smelled like a sewer. The 98% humidity and lack of air conditioning were quite enough to put me over the edge.

Exit 14A to the airport was jammed as usual. Traffic was backed up for at least two miles. I can be a patient man, but when it comes to traffic, Jimmy Vincent becomes a raving maniac. At that point, it all becomes just sport to me. You cut me off, and I'll follow you. You crawl up my tail pipe, and I'll stop my car and get out with a baseball bat.

Jesus Christ, when did I get like this? I was the goody-goody in school who wore glasses, always had the homework done, and got the crap kicked out of me on a daily basis. One day, it finally just took its toll I guess. Except I

didn't climb a bell tower and start taking people out with an AK-47.

Oh, no, I keep it inside and fight battles with scumbags who shouldn't be on the streets anyway. I deal with the assholes that the cops don't have time for. I deal in street justice. You do wrong, you pay. *Simple*. I'm the judge, jury, and executioner. Getting on my bad side is extremely bad for your health.

"God dammit!" I yelled. Son-of-a-bitch limo driver trying to climb into my trunk. I shoved the car into park right on the exit ramp, and hopping out of my filthy Jeep, I slowly walked toward the black Cadillac limo. I smiled as I got to the front driver's side door, not able to see through the tinted windshield, and raising my arm I gave the one fingered salute *Jersey* style. I turned and calmly walked back to my car as the large, angry limo driver exited and started after me. He was a big ape, with no speed or dexterity. When he got to within three feet of me, I back kicked him in the balls and kept walking. Those karate classes have come in handy many times now.

I climbed back into my chariot and merged into traffic, laughing while the Neanderthal lay on the shoulder screaming in pain, and his passenger exited the vehicle unsure what to do.

Finally, the congestion broke enough for me to get off the Turnpike and onto the next tangle of roadways that led to the airport. Looking at my watch, I realized I was early. I'd have to park in an hourly lot instead of just getting Carmen at arrivals.

Newark Airport was not an engineering marvel in the least. It seemed

simple enough from a distance: one big circle and three terminals, but the simplicity ended there. There were roads leading to departures, arrivals, short-term parking, long-term parking, rental cars, and all sorts of other crap. If you weren't paying attention you'd end up going around in circles forever.

Unfortunately, I'd done this loop too many times to get lost now. I parked outside Terminal 3 and started my hike to the Continental Airlines arrival area. There was new construction now since my last visit, some sort of parking structure. It was causing detours and havoc for all the dysfunctional family units trying to pretend that they were the Brady Bunch.

Carmen's plane was thirty minutes late according to the big board. I'll just get a beer and watch some T&A action, I thought to myself. My little sister, quite a character she was. She was married at 19, divorced at 20, married again at 22, divorced at 23, took the plunge again at 25 and dumped him at 27, one more time at 28; that only lasted for six months. A revolving door in her apartment couldn't get them in and out fast enough. Lust 'em, leash 'em, and leave 'em was her motto. Of course she took every dime from those poor suckers too.

Hell, I'd hit the sheets with her if she weren't my sister. Her silky blond locks hung to her waist, her misty green eyes and pouting lips called to you from across the room, "Oh baby please, I want you now." Her tanned body had an athletic shape with legs to her neck and a pair of 36Cs that stood proud and begged for attention. She was attracting men, not boys, before she was

sixteen. She was smooth too, boy. She could talk you into giving up sex, turn around and sell you a case of condoms and have you heading for a convent positive you'd use them all.

My cell phone chirped in my jacket pocket. I got all dressed up for Carmen today. Jeans with no holes, a mostly clean blue t-shirt, and a Salvation Army sports coat that was frayed at the collar. "Yo," I said after taking the phone from my pocket.

"Is this Jimmy Vincent?" a female voice asked in a low whisper.

"Who wants to know?" I asked.

"You were recommended by a friend of mine. Eric Mathews," still speaking very softly.

I put my beer down and froze. Eric Mathews was a name I had not heard for many years now.

What a night that was. That was when it all changed for me. Eric and I were grammar school buddies. We grew up together all the way through high school. Dated the same girls (what few there were), went to community college together. That's where it happened, Bergen Community College in Paramus.

Eric and I were both geekoid nerds for the better part of our young lives. Picked on, beat up, swirlies, wedgies, you name it, it had been done to us. It continued through high school right into college.

That night—I *still* have nightmares. It happened so quickly, so

effortlessly. Walking to our cars in the far parking lot one fall night, we were jumped from behind. Eric hit the pavement quickly with a gash on his head. Blood trickled down his ear and he was dazed. I looked up to see the attackers. One was a large Puerto Rican kid, over six feet tall, who had hit Eric on the head with a piece of pipe. Even in the chilly air, he was wearing only a black muscle t-shirt and jeans. An American flag bandana covered his head and a diamond stud decorated his left ear. A snake tattoo on his right arm completed the picture. His accomplice was an overweight black man of medium height with no distinguishing features. He wore a Yankees cap and a black leather jacket. His pants were riding low, and his boxers showed in the rear. I didn't know what kind it was, but a gun of some sort was stuck in his waistband.

As they came at me, I just stood there, frozen. I wasn't terrified like I thought I should be. My breathing was calm and easy, my eyes focused on the six-footer first.

I was angry.

I was sick and tired of the world being this way for me, and for others like me. It had finally become time to fight back. The attacker raised his club, but he was too slow. I kicked him in the knee and heard a loud pop just before he let out an ear-piercing scream and fell hard to the ground.

I grabbed for the club and gave his buddy some unexpected dental work before he could even reach for his piece. He dropped to his knees and then

fell face first to the pavement unconscious.

I felt under Tubbo and removed his weapon. I'd never held a gun before. It molded to my hand like it had always belonged there. Suddenly—I felt like I should never be without it again. The feeling was overwhelming and calming at the same time.

Without thinking twice, I stepped behind my unconscious mugger and fired two shots into the back of his head. It was easy, no remorse at all. I couldn't believe how simple it was. The Puerto Rican kid tried to get up and run on his shattered knee after he saw this, his eyes wild with fear. He didn't get far. Two shots to the back of his head made it a very short trip.

What had I done?

Eric was now on his feet, not sure what he had just seen.

“What the hell did you do?” he asked in dismay, hand to his head and covered in blood.

“I fought back,” was all I said calmly with a smile as I walked away, tucking the pistol into my jacket pocket. From now on, it would always be with me. This was a message to the scum of the world. From now on, it would be different.

“Mr. Vincent?” I heard as I realized where I was and that a phone was still to my ear.

“Y..Yes, I'm here. What did you say your name was?” I asked, stalling for a minute to compose myself.

“My name is Noreen MacFarland. Eric is a co-worker of mine. He says that you, umm, help people.”

Eric and I had not spoken since that last fateful night. I walked away, he walked away, and that was that. He would never turn me in, because we were like brothers. But he could never forgive me either. It'd been eleven years now since we had spoken.

“Exactly what kind of help is it that you need, Noreen?” Still trying to get my act together.

“I'd rather not discuss it on the phone. Can we meet somewhere tonight?” she asked, hurriedly now.

“I'm not sure I can do that tonight. I'm at the airport right now about to pick up my sister and—”

Cutting me off, “Mr. Vincent I don't have time to explain. Please meet me at Lisa's Pizza in Westwood at 8:30.” Click. She was gone. Eric Mathews recommended me to this chick. What was going on? He must know my business through the grapevine. I know he was working in computers somewhere. I tried to keep tabs on him. I really did miss him. How did she get my cell phone number?

“Flight 322 from Miami is deplaning,” boomed the loud speaker in the tiny airport bar. My thoughts left Ms. MacFarland for now and turned back to my younger sibling. Why exactly was she visiting now? The signature on her last divorce was still wet. Can't go to the gate anymore like the old days. I

guess I'll see her from here.

Oh, yes, see her from here I did! Strutting down the hallway like a peacock on parade. A deep tan showed off her blond hair, and her attire showed off the rest of her. Her blood red dress hung just low enough to cover her pubic hair and her braless tits were creating whiplash victims heading toward their planes.

She spotted me. Yelling over the crowd she was attracting, "Jimmy!" in her shrill voice and waving wildly.

Waving back, I paid the bartender and walked toward her fan club.

"Nice outfit, sis," I said, as I broke up her male admirers waiting for her to bend over. "Have you forgotten where you are? Riots break out for less than this around here. I suggest you sling those puppies up while you're here." I gestured to her overexposed breasts whose nipples protruded through the material so much that *I* could not help but hope that she would bend over. That's wrong, isn't it? Wanting to see your sister's knockers? I mean that's not a good thing, is it? Not getting any in six months wasn't helping the situation. I pried my eyes away from those luscious melons, gave myself a mental slap, and started to lead her toward baggage claim.

"What's wrong with my outfit?" she asked, fully knowing what kind of reaction she would get, especially in the middle of Newark.

"Don't play dumb with me, Carm, it doesn't work anymore," I said, wanting her to know up front I didn't need any of her shit this trip.

“What do you mean, play dumb?” she asked, playing dumb and batting her eyelashes.

Ignoring her, I continued on to baggage claim. “Do I dare ask how many bags we’re waiting for?” I questioned, not really wanting to know the answer.

“Well, I’m only really allowed two but the nice man in Miami let me get all five on for some reason...,” she said with a smile. She just can’t help herself. She’s got it, she flaunts it, and she uses it to get what she wants. Nothing wrong with using all of your *assets*, I guess. Just seems unfair that women have all of the assets.

“Five? Jeez, how long are you planning on staying?” I asked, very nervous because I had a feeling I knew the answer.

“Well, actually... Umm, I’m...” She shifted her feet and looked at me with that, I-need-a-favor smile. “I’m moving back to Jersey,” she finally blurted out.

I knew it was coming, but I still wasn’t prepared for it. I started to get light headed. Having Carmen around was like asking Michael Jackson to chaperone the Vienna Boys Choir. I wished I could warn all the men in North Jersey that they should hurry and hide their money. I mean, yeah, she is my sister, but I have some responsibility to warn my own sex, don’t I?

I asked the next question with dread. “Really? Um... Who will you be staying with?”

“You, silly,” she said matter of factly as if I’d asked an absurd question.

“Oh, that’s one of my bags,” she pointed to a turquoise bag that could have held my entire wardrobe.

“Please tell me that’s the biggest one…” I begged. Before she could answer, I saw one of its mates slide down the ramp. It was as big as the bathroom in my apartment. How was I gonna get all of this in my Jeep? I struggled with the first item and let the larger one take another spin on the belt. I gave Carmen ten bucks to get two carts to load all of this crap onto.

By the time she wheeled back with a luggage cart I had found all five pieces containing an entire department store of clothing and had broken my back in the process.

“Any trouble?” She waited for me to load the bags on the cart.

“Nothing a good chiropractor can’t fix,” I said dryly. She started walking away. “Ahem… Do you expect me to take both carts?”

“I didn’t want to chip a nail,” she replied with a pout.

Drawing in a long, slow breath, I said, “Carm, you break more nails on guys’ backs screwing ‘em, so take the damn cart and follow me.” I walked toward short-term parking, leaving her there struggling with the cart. Not to worry though, at least two-dozen guys offered to help her and she picked the biggest, dumbest looking one for her insta-slave. They followed me to the car, and I let King Kong load the bags. He tried to get her number, but she just got in the car and didn’t say a word. Gotta hand it to her, she was a cool customer.

Getting back to her move home, I asked, “So... exactly how long had you planned on staying with me?” I backed out of the spot.

She looked somewhat hurt when she replied, “I really don’t know, Jimmy. My life is all mixed up right now, and I just need to find a place and get settled. So, I’ll be with you until that happens, okay?” Heaving a heavy sigh.

I almost felt sorry for her. She sounded sincerely in pain. Maybe she was finally growing up, and this latest divorce was the straw that broke the camel’s back. Getting on the Turnpike North, I put my hand on hers, “Carm, you know you’re welcome to stay as long as you need to.”

“Thanks, Jimmy, I really appreciate that.” She sounded grateful, “And I don’t think Rico will think of looking for me here,” she added quickly.

Looking very confused, I turned to her and asked, “Rico Sanchez? Your latest ex-husband whom you just left, like, ten minutes ago? That Rico? Why would he be looking for you?” I demanded.

“He wants to kill me,” she stated flatly.

“What?” I screamed as I pulled off the Turnpike onto the shoulder to the honking and finger flying of the North Jersey driving public. Trying to keep calm, which was quite difficult at this point, I asked, “Why is it that he wants to kill you?”

“Well... He, Rico that is, wasn’t very happy about me leaving.”

“That’s no reason to want you dead,” I commented, knowing that it was

not the whole story.

“Yeah, you would think so, huh? But, uh... well...” she stammered, nervously looking out the window.

Getting pissed off now, but still remaining calm I asked again, “Why is it that he wants to kill you?”

“Okay, okay. It turns out that Rico is a drug lord in Miami,” she spat out quickly.

“So that’s why he wants to kill you, because you left?”

“Actually, it’s because of what I left with.”

Totally losing it now, I shouted, “And what was that?”

“Ten million dollars,” she blurted out quickly.

“Oh, shit,” I whispered softly, moving my hand to my 9mm pistol for security.