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FAST EDDIE'S LUCKY 7 A-GO-GO

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by David Young

Sample Chapter One

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One

On a warm night at the beginning of September, “Fast” Eddie McDermott lay upon the floor of his bar and gazed lovingly at the ceiling.

Though he had never doubted its existence above him, this marked the first time he looked upon it as a whole. He found it beautiful like the last day of summer or some long forgotten Christmas morning. There were the faded paper flowers, the deflated balloons, and the mirrored stars that hung at various lengths. It was these stars that caught the colored fluorescence and threw it around the bar like candy-coated popcorn. The overall effect was much better than that of a disco ball. Disco balls had outlived their time. There was a certain magic in the random sparkles of light that danced through this bar. Not something you saw every day in Southeast Asia. Certainly not in the Northern Thai city of Chiang Mai.

It gave him something to think about as he lay dying. And then there was light of a different kind. Brilliant, blinding light. Was this his life flashing before his eyes? He couldn't remember it being so bright.

The silver stars were still twinkling, only they seemed to be fading in and out of reality now. Eddie focused on his ceiling and tried to stay in the Now. It wasn't easy. Especially when his bar was filled with too much then, too much Could Have Been. By dying, Eddie realized he too would be joining the line-up of faces that contributed to the rise and fall and rise again of the Lucky 7. Dying on the floor of the place only made it more poetic. The police would outline his body in white. Future customers would stand next to “the spot,” look down, and shake their heads. Some jerk would say “He's with us in spirit,” and the mood would be too somber for anyone to punch him in the mouth. Bottles would be raised “To Fast Eddie,” and then raised no more.

Next there was movement. Noise. The retrospective of his life was failing to materialize. For a moment (or a long time, it was difficult to say), Eddie thought he saw the naked body of a long lost whore. The body looked like all the others but the face stirred something in him. He knew this girl. He had given her a job after she demonstrated her amazing talent for shoot-

ing ping-pong balls from her vagina. Why she should appear before him now, he hadn't a clue. Her name was – Poey? Toey? Something oey. It must have been five years since she up and left town. She still wore the face of a poor girl from the Northeast who wouldn't get far on looks, talent or her odd-sounding name. She had a flat nose and outrageous cheekbones, framed by a parted curtain of black hair, already spoiled by too many nights of burning bulbs and cigarette smoke. In addition to this, she had a hard scar on her belly that had been the result of either childbirth or miscarriage. Eddie was never sure which. In his dream of death (or dream of life, tough call once again) the long lost whore was moving towards him in a field of light, cradling something in her arms. A small bundle wrapped in red cloth. She threw her hair back over her shoulder and shouted to him over the noise of the brightness. Eddie couldn't figure out why she of all people was hogging his light. She probably just wanted a tip. She was probably just mumbling about her sick mother or her mean landlord or her two-year old daughter that didn't have shoes to wear. As Ray Malone would say, that was all prostitutes ever talked about.

The girl was this close now. She held out the package in her arms and looked at him with sad, beseeching eyes. Eddie took it from her. It was the size of three golf balls. Too small to be a baby but – maybe not. He felt something move inside and nearly dropped it. Fear gripped him; a sensation rarely felt by a man like Eddie. With trembling fingers, he located an edge and started to unwrap the loose cloth of the woman's bundle. The material fell away easily. Eddie's fear turned to panic. He wouldn't find a normal human baby. He would find a mutant. A twisted alien that swallowed its head and blew bubbles through its navel. He would find something really awful. Really horrible.

He would find the refuse of his night with her.

So he had fucked her, so what? He had fucked a lot of women. Some who had worked for him, some who didn't. The girls always got a fair deal and a good tip. Eddie wasn't a troublemaker. Even if he didn't have his bar and his reputation to consider, it wasn't in him to cheat a working girl. For this reason, he always paid the tab, tipped generously, and walked away without the charade of exchanging phone numbers or promises.

Only now –

the four corners of the girl's bundle lay hanging from his palm like ribbons of blood frozen in midair. Eddie looked at what lay inside. It was a toad. Not the three-eyed saber-toothed variety, but a common garden toad that didn't speak or cry or call him daddy.

He didn't think to ask why the girl had given him a toad. He felt too relieved.

“Jesus I thought you were going to hand me some kind of mutant alien baby.”

His eyes met those of the long lost hooker. She looked different now. Was it her makeup? Her hair? No, it was her scar. The one across her belly. It had changed somehow, changed into an open wound with the skin popping and sizzling around it. It was as though a sadistic madman was pressing an invisible cigar against her stomach. If she were in pain, she was hiding it well, thought Eddie. Another one appeared, just like it, on her left breast. Then another on her cheek. One on her arm and one on her shoulder. Each new wound looked worse than the one before. She'd really have to search to find another paying customer.

The girl took a step backwards. A humming like a refrigerator working overtime filled his ears. She opened her mouth, not as if to speak but rather to show him that it was empty. Then she stood there as the humming got louder.

He turned away from the bizarre sight, and looked across his dreamscape to find a clue as to what it meant. The light was fading. Everything was fading. He felt the toad hop from the red cloth in his hand and disappear in the darkness. Eddie tried to hang on to his vision, but there was nothing to grasp, nothing to get a foothold on. It was like trying to wrestle a shadow. He got down on his knees and groped in the blackness for his toad.

And so he died. All that he was ceased to be. All that he could have been was left untold. On top of this, the boys would probably carve “Fast Eddie” between the first and last names marking his tombstone, thinking it to be the way he wanted to be remembered.

Remembered and forgotten. Odd how death worked like that.