



## Episode 27

### Have an Eggroll, Mr. Goldstone

The night is like a ripe mango. Soft. Warm. A little too sweet. The moon stands high over the neon-lighted motel like a slightly askew dot on a bright letter "i." The street is littered with cast-off shadows, abandoned by their daytime owners, left to fade in the tunnel of the ending of the day.

It is a typical September night in Miami.

And the night belongs to him.

His slow footsteps pad softly on the pavement as he moves away from the gaudy hotel. Inside, where he left them, some of them are asleep. The older ones. The tired ones. Most of them are awake. The younger ones. The lively ones.

The man doesn't care. He is on his own now. None of the others exist.

The night belongs to him.

The cars drive by, speeding like wild animals fleeing the jungle of the city. As they pass, their headlights flash across the man's walking form, making his actions seem jerky, uncontrolled. He is like a living piece of film noir, black-and-white, menacing, coming from nowhere, going nowhere, bound to get into trouble before he arrives there.

He can feel the trouble in his fingertips. And he loves it. His thumb rolls across the middle finger of his right hand.

Trouble.

Right here in Miami city.

The cold streets of the hot night are deserted except for the one man and the passing cars. Ahead, a string of traffic lights turns from green to red, one light after the other, orchestrated by some unseen urban stage manager. The man keeps walking, a drop of sweat forming on the back of his neck, rolling slowly past his collar, down his back: the subtropical heat is having its way with him.

He walks even slower. He is in no rush. He will get there soon enough. There is no point in sweating himself into a sodden ball. No point at all.

There will be time enough for that later.

The hotel fades into the distance, and the man keeps walking. He seems to have a direction in mind, a memory of where to go that pushes him forward, a mystic seeking the oneness that he knows is right around the next corner. And when he turns that corner, and it's the wrong one, then the next corner will suffice, or the one after that.

The man is a seeker. A seeker of life, of experience. He wants to hold life in his hand, to poke at it, taste it, smell it, to clench his fist around it, to make it his.

A bus passes by, honking its horn at some unseen obstacle, its sharp cry bringing the man to a halt. Across the street, a neon sign fizzes loudly, a cocktail of inert gas laced with electricity. DINER is what the sign reads, in big block letters. Not a diner with a name, just a diner. Because places like this don't have names, they just have descriptions, and their descriptions become their names, and their names become their descriptions. All meanings are stripped away except the primal meaning, the meaning at the bottom, the meaning of the meaning.

And the man knows this as he stares at the fizzing orange neon.

DINER.

And the man is hungry. But not for food. Hungrier than that. His hunger is for meaning, the seeking of the mystic.

Or maybe something more.

Only time will tell.

And still the man stands there, watching. The door and windows below the sign are dark, and the diner is closed. Closed for the night, or maybe closed for the millennium. Maybe it was never open. Maybe it's only a sign, a sign signifying nothing, a sign only of itself, the kind of sign only a modern French philosopher could love.

The man stands and watches the sign, lost in the memory of this street and the scent of standing here other nights in the past, watching the cars speed past.

And now a convertible rumbles by, the top down, the driver young and female, long blond hair streaming away from her laughing face in the wind, the music pounding from her car stereo.

"Stuck in the middle with you..."

The words fly out of the open car as it zooms away. The man watches the car, and the blonde, and the song, as they disappear. And then he turns back to the sign of the diner.

And no longer is he the only person on the street.

She is standing beneath the sign, sending her own message, a message louder than neon, a message more powerful than the chance of finding a diner, a hash house, a beanery.

Her message speaks to appetites, but not to the appetites of the stomach. Because there are other appetites on a steamy Miami street on a dark night under the knowing leer of the winking moon.

And the man can feel those appetites down in the hard, hot core of his soul. And he is not a mystic anymore, he is not a seeker. For he has found his goal. It is within his grasp.

And it is time to reach for it.

Another car speeds by, and another, and then the street is clear. The man walks across, no faster than before, but more deliberate. It is a wide street, a boulevard, four lanes of clammy blacktop.

The woman watches the man approach. Her hair is dark and curly, frizzled by the tropical heat. She holds a small white purse over her right shoulder, her right hand resting on the clasp. She could have anything in that purse: a gun, a fortune, a secret worth dying for. Her dress is black, short, halfway up her thighs, spaghetti straps across her white shoulders, black high heels on her feet.

She wears her heart on her sleeve. And her heart is for sale.

The man walks up to her.

"Hello," he says. He deepens his already low voice. It sounds as if the word can barely find its way out of him from the depths.

She tilts her head. "Hello, there."

"You look good," he says. "Real good."

"I am real good."

He looks up behind her. DINER is fizzling even louder now, and it's more orangey. It bathes the pavement in its strange hue. "You new here?" he asks. The orange light makes her hair glisten. "I don't remember you from before."

"I've been here. I've been there. I've been a lot of places."

"I expected someone else. This used to be her spot."

"There's lots of spots. There are lots of hers. This is a big city."

He nods. "That it is." He steps closer. He is only a foot away, and she looks even better to him. Young. Fresh. A flower on the streets, a night bloomer. "So what do you say?" he asks.

"What do I say about what?"

"About you and me."

The hand on her purse quickly reaches in for a cigarette, but she doesn't light it. "What about you and me?"

"We could... go somewhere. Get it on."

"Get what on?"

"Us. You and me." He lifts his right hand and again rubs his thumb against the tip of his middle finger. "I can spell it out for you if you want."

"I want," she says.

"S. E. X."

She lights the cigarette. "And why would I want to do that?"

"The girl who used to be here, she had her reasons. About a hundred dollars worth of reasons."

"You're offering me a hundred dollars to have sex with you?"

"I can negotiate," the man says. "I'm very willing."

The woman drops the cigarette. "That's too bad," she says. She reaches into her bag again and this time pulls out her wallet. "Miami P.D.," she says, barking the words and flashing her badge at the man.

Two other men appear out of nowhere. Seth B. Obomash is pulled around and handcuffed before he realizes they are there.

"I'm going to read you your rights," the woman begins.

"That won't be necessary," Obomash tells her. "I know all about rights."

"I'm going to tell you anyhow." And she reads the Miranda warning word for word as Obomash is turned and frisked by the two male policemen.

"This corner isn't what it used to be, pal," one of the cops tells Obomash when they're finished as they lead him toward their unmarked police car.

"Since when do you arrest people for his?" Obomash asks. "This is an outrage. Don't you have any real crimes you could be stopping?"

"This is a real crime, pal." The cop puts his hand on Obomash's head and pushes him down to the car. "In you go."

And a minute later they are off. While they drive the short distance to the station the talkative cop explains to Obomash about the upcoming mayoral election and the Democratic incumbent's city-street clean-up campaign, in which Obomash has become an unwitting participant.

It's enough to make him want to vote Republican.

"We picked up seven gals and four johns an hour ago at the diner sign," the cop adds. "We just thought we'd give it one last shot before closing shop. Who would have thought we'd reel in another one?"

"Who would have thought?" Obomash echoes.

The drive to the police station is short, and the brightly lighted building belies the hour of the night. Official cars and vans are lined in front of the door, their occupants in various stages of the trip inside to incarceration. Men and women who an hour ago had other thoughts than the law on their minds, some in suits, some in hot pants, all in handcuffs. An army of cops, in and out of uniform. The cops are all laughing and smoking and drinking coffee out of Styrofoam cups and talking it up for the audience.

The audience.

Because the democratic mayor with clean-up on his mind knows that a DINER sign does not light in the forest if no one sees it. So his office has alerted the press, and there are as many news vehicles as there are police vehicles. Video cameras are whirring, bulbs are flashing, interviewees are being probed, reports are being filed.

And Seth B. Obomash is thrust suddenly into the middle of it. The noise. The lights. The infamy.

The infamy. Oh my God, the infamy.

Pearl Harbor has nothing on this date, as far as Seth B. Obomash is concerned.

**Mother of Mercy, is this the end of Obomash?**

**Will the news get back to the Messerschmitt tournament?**

**Will Obomash get back to the Messerschmitt tournament?**

**Who in the name of all that is holy votes for these LD topics that are absolute stinkers?**

**I doubt if any of the answers will be in our next installment: "Tubers: Saviors at the root or nature's underground revolutionaries?"**