

Lost Wages, Nevada â€¦ so it goes

by Jason_Love

My wife Yahaira and I decided to visit Las Vegas. We hadnâ€™t gone in so long that I forgot how much it hurt the last time. That is always the criterion for going to Vegas.

â€œWeâ€™ll only be gone for a day,â€• said Yahaira. â€œWhat could it hurt?â€•

Do you ever get the feeling that some twisted spirit is writing your script?

At midnight, we arrived in the city that never loses. We strolled into the Rio, where the jingle of quarters tickled our avarice. There is something intoxicating about a casino: the lights, the coins, the absence of morals.

Yahaira had never played blackjack, so we started there. I stood behind her whispering directions: Stay â€¦ no, hitâ€¦ no, hit-stayâ€¦ lots of queens left, definitely lots of queensâ€¦

The pit boss watched me like a pit bull. So long as we kept losing money, he was okay with the arrangement.

Yahaira lost \$50 before I could time it. The dealer had a knack for turning 6â€™s into 21â€™s, especially when everyone was sitting on twenty. This is because the dealer was Asian: he knew things about the cards.

Yahaira flipped a chip to the dealer and stepped away from the carnage. In this town, youâ€™re supposed to tip anyone who looks at you. You tip the valet for parking your car, the bellhop for taking your bags, the waitress for bringing your drinkâ€¦ By the time we left, I was tipping people for telling me the time.

Yahaira concluded that blackjack was for suckers and that the real money was to be made at the slots. So it goes.

Yahaira rubbed the side of each machine as we passed. Evidently, thatâ€™s how you determine its ripeness. She found one that promised to pay off. It was The Wheel of Fortune.

Quarters began to flow from my rivulet to the Las Vegas Sea. Once in a while, Yahaira hit a Spin and was permitted to twirl the Wheel of Fortune. Even though the Wheel never paid off, it inspired in Yahaira such a fervor that she would give anything to keep playing.

In psychology, they call it operant conditioning. In Vegas, they call it a living.

When \$100 was over, Yahaira asked for \$100 more. I tried to talk sense into her, but her eyes were spinning, spinning, spinning. On the bright side, it all washed over me like so much rum and Coke.

At length I lured my love to a wheel that never stops spinning and that guarantees riches beyond her wildest dreams: roulette.

In roulette, there are 36 numbers and two green zeroes. The amazing part is how, with one in 19 odds, green comes up every other turn. The only time it doesn't hit is when you bet it.

The croupier (spinner guy) raked in two weeks pay before I received my cocktail. By the time my waitress arrived, I had nothing left to tip her. She smiled but only because she was thinking of spitting in my next order.

Yahaira and I lost so much money in so little time that I started to develop new tics. We had to get our money back, and there was only one way about it—the sports book.

I know more about hockey than I do about math, science, and history combined, so I figured this was my opening. I scanned the games as a food critic does a menu. Ah, there it is: Maple Leafs vs. Islanders. The Leafs were due, and I was due, and I bet everything in our account.

Three hours later, I was a different man: I was kicking and cursing and loathing the world from Big Bang to

present.

“How could they DO that to me? They didn’t even score one bloody goal!”

That was followed by expletives and Biblical references. Yahaira took the keys because I was in no shape to drive. The alcohol had worn off, but I was under the influence of rage.

As we drove the I15, I flipped off every billboard in sight. Vegas, Fun and Fortune! Take Your Riches to Go! Lava coursed through my veins. I stuck my head out the window and screamed for 50 miles. Between bursts, I visualized running into the sand and hugging a cactus to make myself feel better.

Nighttime fell, and somewhere near Nowhere, Yahaira pulled off the freeway and parked. She led me to a clearing, dropped a blanket, and pushed me onto my back. There the two of us lay star-gazing.

Away from the lights, you could see the stars with a clearness that inspires mythology. In time, my temper conceded to a feeling of oneness. My mind grew as big as God. There was a deaf-defying silence.

Suddenly, I felt silly before the Infinite. If I were on Venus, I could see that all of my troubles amounted to naught on this tiny blue-green planet, which is itself a speck in the universe. How lucky I was to be lying beside the woman of my dreams. How rich I was that she’d hold my hand after all the antics. I had spun the cosmic wheel and hit three sevens.

We returned to the car in a beatified state. Yahaira didnâ€™t know what that meant, but I assured her she was feeling it. The desert seemed somehow more lovely, and I was happy to be me.

Of course, the Leafs could have scored one lousy goal.

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