



Honeymoon Blues

by Harrigan

He had never seen that much cleavage in a wedding dress before.

Suddenly aware that he was staring, Peter Caine made a conscious effort to raise his glance and make eye contact with the chiffon tornado that had stormed the back room of the church. "Lula, calm down," he started, one hand raised placatingly, the other still adjusting his cummerbund. He didn't need to ask why she was in such a fury. He'd been checking his watch with growing frequency, too.

"Where is he? Where is that rat?" She punctuated each question with a flourish of a huge bouquet of gardenias in her left hand, trailing long ivory ribbons. "Is that little weasel gonna scuzz out on me?"

Lula was no shrinking violet, in heels she was as tall as Peter himself, but after stomping across the room until she was practically in his face, all the tension suddenly drained out of her, her shoulders slumped, and Peter was pretty sure he detected a glint of tears in her eyes before she hastily turned away.

"Now, Lula, I'm certain Donny is going to be here. When I took him out last night to celebrate ..." No, best not to get into the details of the bachelor party ... "There wasn't a moment he gave any indication of second thoughts about a lifetime of, wedded, bliss with you." Peter said that with the corner of his mouth curling up in a smile, those hadn't been Donny's exact words. A lifetime "sentence" he'd called it, of "connubial" bliss, but the sentiment was the same. Donny had admitted sheepishly that as sentences go, this one might be rather palatable. He really wasn't planning to chicken out.

Peter didn't figure the calm that had descended in the room was simply the eye of the tornado. But it passed, and Lula whirled back to face him, delivering a right cross that made contact with his cheekbone with a power that decked him. "What was that for?" he demanded, from an undignified sprawl on the hardwood floor.

Lula glowered down at him, hands on hips. "If Donny is late, then, it's because he's in trouble. Probably because he was getting some information for you for some case, and he got caught!"

Peter started to protest, scrambling to his feet, but she cut him short. "I don't care if you've got him looking for something or not. He's always got his ear to the ground, and you just encourage him!"

Peter touched his cheekbone gingerly, it didn't feel broken, but heat radiated from the point of impact and he could feel the swelling start, pulling at the spot where one of her rings had torn the skin. Blood beaded there and came away on his fingertips.

"Maybe he had car trouble?" he suggested.

"You think I'd marry a man too dumb to know how to use the phone?" Her temper wasn't abating. "You're his best man, Caine. You should have brought him with you."

It had occurred to him. But Donny had said, no, he had to pick up Peter's best man gift on the way to the church; he'd meet him there. "I talked to him this morning," Peter explained. (And it definitely had been morning, the sun was already coming up when they had parted company, to go home and catch a shower and a few winks before the wedding at noon.) "He was just going to run one errand on his way here, stop at the arena box office and pick up some hockey tickets."

"Peter ..." Lula's big brown eyes grew even more luminous, and her voice trembled with a new note of distress. "Something really is wrong. When have you ever known Donny to pay full price for anything?"

She had him there. If he'd had any sleep worth mentioning, he would have realized that himself.

"Don't worry, Lula. I'll find him." He thought a moment. "Do you have a picture of him on you?"

"Did that weasel tell you about the tattoo?" she started, and seeing Peter's confusion, she abruptly stopped.



"Oh. Never mind ... you mean, a photo, that you could take with you ... here." She fumbled behind her neck for the clasp to a locket she was wearing, and then let it dribble from her fingers into Peter's open palm. "Here," she said.

He triggered the clasp and the cover sprang open, to reveal one of those snapshots you get in a carnival booth, two giggling faces crammed into a small area, four photos for a dollar.

"You ... you think he's not all right, don't you?" Lula asked. Worry drained the last of her hostility away, and Peter stepped forward to put an arm around her gently. She curled into his chest, and let her head rest on his shoulder for a moment, knocking her veil askew.

And this was the picture that met Kwai Chang Caine's eyes when he stepped into the room. "The congregation, is growing concerned," he stated simply. He cocked his head to one side, noting with curiosity that his son, now dusty and disheveled, with the beginnings of a black eye, appeared to be romantically interested in the bride-to-be of his friend Donny Double D.

"Pop!" Peter stepped back, one hand lingering on Lula's elbow till he felt her pull herself together. Then he reached into the breast pocket of his tux, and pulled out a small jewelry box. "Something's come up, looks like Donny is a little late. I'm going to go look for him; you take care of things here, okay?" Caine followed his look toward Lula, and he nodded understanding. Peter dropped the ring box in his father's hand as he passed him going out the door. "Take this," he said, "in case Donny shows up while I'm gone. You can be best man." Caine's eyes widened, and the door swung shut behind his son, and he found himself alone with an agitated young bride.

Could Donny have really chickened out? The thought did cross Peter's mind as he circled the hockey arena in his Stealth. Traffic was light, the box office may have been open, but it would be several hours before the crowds started to arrive. If Donny had ...

Detective Caine had better things to do on his day off than play hide'n'seek with a nervous groom. Of course, this did beat all the kneeling he'd otherwise be enduring at this moment at one of those huge (and long!) Catholic masses. It was worse than the lotus position he'd practiced at the temple. He didn't know how Skalany put up with it every week ...

There was Donny's car. It was parked near a door in the back of the arena, a door clearly marked "No Admittance." That sounded like Donny. Peter pulled his car up alongside, got out, and approached the forbidden entrance. Maybe he should have brought his dad, he didn't have any tools with him for picking locks, but Pop seemed to be able to manage it with nothing more than a little qigong energy from his palm. He'd have to get Pop to teach him that, one of these days!

He was in luck. The door wasn't locked. Peter stepped inside, and had to wait a moment after the door closed behind him to let his eyes adjust to the near total darkness.

It was dark and damp and ageless, and he felt a flicker of remembered fear from the caves near the temple when he was very young ... but he dismissed the cold chill down his spine, and sharpened his senses. Still nearly blind, he made out a sound, the creak of a rusty wheel, something wood banging against metal, a soft thud. And repeated, a moment later. And again. Right hand skimming the concrete block surface of the wall, he made his way cautiously forward.

Where the wall ended there was an intersection, and Peter saw a pool of light at the far end of a corridor stretching off to his left. Breaking into a soft-footed jog, it only took moments to reach the light, and discover a janitor there, swabbing the floors with a mop and a metal bucket on wheels. Peter drew his badge with one hand, the locket with the other. "I'm looking for the man in this picture. Have you seen him?"

"Ya." The janitor was thin and stooped, and a heavy German accent descended from behind the gray walrus mustache that drooped over his lip. "I see dat fellow yust dis morning. He go in dat locker room dere. More men follow later." He pointed, and Caine thanked him with a nod and moved on.

He reached the door that had been pointed out to him, and looked around. This part of the building was old, far from the expansion that now accommodated the ice rink. These wouldn't be players' locker rooms,



they must have been used for something else. He pushed the door open, and found only an eerie silence on the other side. His left hand fumbled along the wall for a light switch, and when he found it and flipped it, the room became illuminated with nothing more than a bare 60 watt bulb hanging in the center of the room. One solitary bench faced a row of olive green lockers, tucked back in the shadows. Showers, long unused, filled a corner of the room.

"Donny?"

There was no answer other than the echo of his voice reverberating off the metal lockers.

In the dim light, Peter explored the room, looking for clues. The janitor must not be responsible for this room, there was a heavy layer of dust that had been disturbed on the floor, on the bench. He had no doubt that people used this room rarely, but had recently. Halfway around the circumference of the room, he asked "Donny?" again, but still heard no response.

Completing his circuit, he found himself in the shadows that fell across the lockers, and he began to examine them as closely as he could in the available light. At the far end, something caught his attention. Something different about the handle.

Up close, he could see that something had fastened it shut ... possibly a broken-off piece of wire coat hanger, threaded through the opening and then the ends twisted together to keep the locker closed. Of course, Peter thought, blinking away fatigue, this wouldn't be very effective in keeping people on the outside from getting into the locker. But it would work in keeping something inside from getting out ...

"Donny?" He rapped his knuckles on the metal locker sharply. A second of silence, and then a definite groan.

"Donny, you in there?" Peter didn't bother knocking again, he bent to work trying to pry apart the coat hanger knot. The groan became a mumble, and when Peter finally flung the door open, Donny Double D, in a tuxedo in worse shape than Peter's, tumbled out onto the floor.

Peter hauled him to his feet, and then dragged him to the wobbly bench, where he sat his groggy friend down. "What happened?"

"I've got a helluva hangover," Donny moaned, elbows on his knees, holding his head between two hands.

"You're going to have to come up with something better than that when you face Lula," Peter told him somberly, taking a seat beside him.

Donny straightened with alarm. "Lula! Oh my God, Pete!" In an instant, he knew what Lula must be thinking. "I wasn't ditchin' her, honest!"

"I can think of better places to hide, myself," Peter told him. "What are you doing here?"

"Oh. That." Donny looked around, relaxed a shade when he became convinced they were alone. "Well. I had the idea that our marriage might start out more propitiously if we had a honeymoon that would put Lula in a magnanimous mood for the next twenty years. Ya know what I mean? Perchance, Hawaii? Of course, Hawaii is a bit beyond my current means, shall we say."

Peter nodded. "Go on ..."

"Well, I had heard on the street that a certain athletic competition, vis-a-vis tonight's hockey game, was gonna be fixed. The deal was gonna go down this morning. I figured if I got here first and procured a place of concealment, I might discover the agreed-upon point spread and other relevant details. Then, it would simply be a matter of a little judicious down payment with my bookie before the opening face-off, and I'd be able to collect the necessary funds tonight after the game, to cover our trip."

Peter shook his head. "And?"

"I guess I dozed off." Donny turned an accusing eye on his savior. "It's your fault, Pete. You should have made me go home last night, when I didn't want to. I dozed off, and they heard me snoring ... and apprehended me."

"Who did, Donny?"



"We'd rather keep that information quiet." A new voice broke into the conversation, authoritative and surly. That authoritative tone was backed up by a .45 pointed in their direction. "Hans told me a cop was looking around. Asking questions." He gestured impatiently with the gun. "Get up."

Peter cast a mental eye back on recent mug books in memory. The voice wasn't familiar, but the face was, Tony Zito. Local mobster. Another gunman, Jimmy Licata, hovered behind him.

Donny stumbled to his feet first. "There's no reason to be hasty, man. I got nothin' to gain by squealing on you."

"That's what we figured when we dumped you in the locker," Zito said. "We just wanted to keep you out of the way until after the game; didn't want to run the risk of you raising any suspicions that would lower our odds. After the game, you'd have nothing to gain by turning us in. And a lot to lose," he added pointedly, waving the gun.

"So ... you want us back in the locker?" Donny suggested helpfully, looking to Pete for cooperation.

"I'm afraid it's not so easy now. Unless you're a cop that can be bought?" Zito posed the question to Peter, who was now standing beside Donny at the other end of the bench. "Nice uniform," Zito added, with a nod of approval at the detective's black tux. "I'd hate to bloody it up."

"Me, too," Peter answered. Before Zito had a chance to twitch his trigger finger, the detective exploded into action, jumping on his end of the bench. The other end flew up, smashing into Zito's forearm with bone-numbing force that caused him to drop the gun.

Donny dove toward the gun on the floor as Licata opened fire. Peter dropped and rolled, surging back to his feet within kicking range. Licata got off one more shot before Peter sprung high in the air, his foot lashing out to snap Licata's head back. He dropped like a stone.

Donny's hand was just closing around the gun when Zito came up behind him and delivered a swift kick of his own, the steel-toed boot connecting just behind Donny's ear. As he bent to take the gun from Donny's now limp fingers, he heard the detective's voice, calmly instructing him, "Leave it there, Zito." He looked back over his shoulder, into the barrel of his partner's gun, and saw Licata now sprawled unconscious across the overturned bench. Zito sighed, sat back on his haunches, and put his hands behind his neck in surrender.

Donnie Double D didn't come around until later that afternoon, when he woke up in the Emergency Room.

His lashes fluttered open, his light brown eyes blinked in confusion. "Donny?" He heard Peter's voice, sounding concerned.

"Pete?"

"Do you know where you are?" Caine asked him, all too familiar with the routine when concussion was suspected.

"Church?" Donny asked weakly. He vaguely remembered that's where he was supposed to be, but he didn't remember why. The eyes fluttered shut again.

Peter shook his head. "Donny. Stay awake. No, you're in the hospital. You never made it to the church."

"Funny. I hear church bells." Donny opened his eyes again with a grimace, and struggled to a sitting position. His head pounded. He discovered he was on a hospital gurney; Peter Caine (slightly out of focus) sat on the edge of the neighboring gurney, one leg hooked under him, the other dangling comfortably. Peter was wearing a dirty black tux. Donny looked down at himself. So was he! In a minute, he would remember why, he was sure. There was blood on one of his sleeves. His fingers plucked at it, marveling that his arm didn't hurt.

"That's mine," Peter told him calmly.

Donny looked at him again, waited for his head to stop swimming so he could keep his friend in focus for a minute. Peter was holding a dark compress against his right arm, and the hand holding it in place was stained with blood. "I'm okay," Peter reassured him.



There was a commotion in the hall then, and before Donny could get his wits about him, two more people entered the room. Lula, in her wedding ensemble (that showed even more leg than cleavage, Peter realized now that he saw the full effect, including the blue garter peeking out below the skimpy hem). Trailing behind her in his own Oriental finery was Kwai Chang Caine.

They must have turned a few heads in the lobby, Peter thought to himself. He caught Caine looking at him, as if he could read his mind, and Peter ducked his head.

"Oh, Donny," Lula gushed, pulling his aching head against her bosom and running her long crimson nails through his hair. "Peter called and explained everything! Poor baby, are you all right?"

The rough handling made his head ache worse, but this tender and nurturing side of Lula was worth the discomfort. If only he could remember what had happened. The last thing he remembered was the bachelor party ... "Lula! Baby! The wedding ...?"

"It's okay, snookums. I know all about the honeymoon you were planning for us. You are so sweet!" She snapped her gum, and caressed his cheek. "And then Peter told me you helped apprehend a couple of mobsters who were gonna to fix a hockey game. Can you imagine anything so horrible? Think of all the innocent people who had money on the game who would have been cheated!" She would no doubt have continued blabbering, but an ER nurse came in then, armed with two clipboards.

"I see you're awake," she told Donny, smiling, quickly checking his pupils and adding a few more notes to his chart. "The doctors have decided to admit you both for observation, just overnight. You'll be sharing a room, and if everything continues to go well, you'll be able to go home in the morning. I'll go get an orderly to help."

She disappeared back out into the hall.

"But ... " Donny was still having trouble assimilating all the facts. "I was supposed to get hitched today!"

"It's all right," Lula crooned. "There's no hurry."

No hurry? This from the woman who had threatened to skin him alive if he didn't propose?

"Master Caine was very kind to me while we were waiting," she explained. "He taught me a wise saying ..." she stopped and looked toward the ceiling, as if she would find the words engraved there. "'Rushing into action, you fail'," she quoted. "'Trying to grasp things, you lose them'." She beamed a sunny smile at Caine, and he nodded his approval. "Master Caine made me see that rushing doesn't help anything. I can learn to be more patient."

Donny ran a hand through his already ruffled hair, carefully skipping the swollen egg behind his ear. It had not been his experience that impatient people could turn over a new leaf. Why, he'd known this girl named Jeanne once ... No, better not bring up old girl friends. Not now.

Peter interrupted his thoughts with a cheerful comment. "Hey! My Pop's a priest! He can marry you today if you still want!"

Donny turned horrified eyes at his friend, not certain if he was kidding. Lula's hand curled around his own. "Trust me, Pete," he said, tightening his hand on Lula's. "I had big plans for my wedding night, and they do not include spending the night with you! This is not the honeymoon I had planned!"

Peter just grinned.