

“What? And give up show business?”—roadie for Kazoo quartet

Three Chords and the Truth **Gustavo Bondoni**

The car slammed into a concrete light pole and we all piled out. Well, four of us got out. We didn't worry about Jimmy; it was obvious Jimmy was dead. His head was sticking out of the windshield, bathed in steam from the burst radiator.

It didn't matter. We'd made it past the barricades, caught the snipers napping and brought home the shit. Pity about the car, but that hadn't been ours in the first place, so the loss was relative.

“Yeah!” Hetty crowed, arcing her head back and screeching into the night. “Take that fatboys!”

A half-hearted barrage of machine-gun fire plinked into the concrete above our heads, but we paid it no heed. Firing lines didn't work for this position.

We were all sass and swagger as we entered the Presence. Old Smith might run the East River Bank, but we got him his stuff, so he had to eat our attitude.

“Yo,” I said as we entered his house-cum HQ. “What's up.”

Smith eyed us. “Hello, Worm. Thought you guys had bought it for sure this time. What did you bring?”

“Coupla kilos of shit and a case of pills. Should be enough to keep us all skied for a month. Unless some asshole goes and sells it.”

“Watch it, kiddo,” Smith said. “Don't want to get that pretty face all broken, do we?” But he said it automatically. He wouldn't actually hurt me. “Where's Jimbo?”

“Jimmy? He's outside. Didn't want to come in. He ain't feeling so hot.”

The three beside me laughed hard, blue and pink hair bobbed.

“You're gonna need a new drummer.”

“Cat can do it.”

“I thought you only kept her around for the sex.”

“Nah. She's not really into men. Or women. Besides, it's not like Jimmy was much of a drummer.”

“He was perfect for the group.”

“Be careful or I won't give you your stuff.”

He smiled at that. We both knew the stuff would stay here whether I wanted it or not. The only question was if we'd walk out the front or be tossed out the back of the building to feed the fish.

Smith's place had once been a restaurant built to resemble a boat on the East River. It had specialized in lobster lunch and dinner. The tanks were still there, but Smith must have had them reinforced; I'd seen people drowned in the tanks, trying to kick their way out before they died.

From behind, just loud enough to hear, Hetty's voice reached me. “Bet you're too chicken to walk on him,” she said.

I nearly turned to ask her what she was trying to pull, but that wouldn't get me anywhere but dead, so I hastily concluded business, turned over all the merchandise and accepted Smith's pay without bothering to check the validation on the blockchain. Once outside, I turned on Hetty.

“What the fuck did you mean by that? Trying to get us killed?”

She shrugged. “The whole thing was bogus. You know what’s in that case as well as we do.”

“You growing a conscience on me, Het?”

“Nah. But—”

“Good, because if you are, I’ll keep your cut.”

“And I’ll cut your balls off.” A switchblade appeared in her hand and disappeared as quickly as it had come. “You’ll look really nice, singing about how the world is going to hell without balls, won’t you?” She leered at me. “And when someone asks how you lost your nuts, I’ll tell them that the reason the world is going to hell is that people like you are selling gene-targeted hallucinations out on the street. That should do wonders for your reputation as a prophet of the truth.”

“I thought we agreed to face life as it came. No one said anything about changing it so that only good guys need apply. We deal with this stuff so we don’t have to use it. I’ll write a song about it if you like. Call it Staying Alive.”

“I think that title’s taken,” Bob the Slob, our Rasta-haired bass player rumbled. He always seemed to speak when no one was expecting it, usually tossing in comments that showed he was too high to know what the rest of us were really talking about.

“And I think you’re full of it,” Hetty said. She turned to storm off, and I let her. She was headed north, towards the old UN building, so I let her walk. She’d calm down soon enough, or she wouldn’t. Would be hell replacing her guitar work, though. I only knew three chords. She knew chords that didn’t even exist, especially when she was skied.

I breathed a sigh of relief when I saw her charging back down the street in our direction. She really was the heart of the band.

She stood in front of me, the top of her blue-spiked hair barely reaching my nose and poked me in the chest. “I’m done with this.”

“Done with what?”

“Don’t be more of an asshole than usual. Done with the drug running.”

“You were fine with it this morning.”

“This morning we hadn’t sold shit that would make a third of the users get high and the rest go sideways. You know how bad gene incompatible can get.”

“Yeah, I know. And so do the slugs who buy the stuff. Buyer beware and all that crap.”

“That’s not how it works, Worm. I’m out.”

“Out of the drugs?”

“Yeah. And the band. And your life. You can forget about me.” She turned to go and this time I grabbed her arm.

“What do you want us to do?”

“Walk. Smith’s a piece of shit.”

“Most people are.”

“Just walk. Or do you want to end up like Jimmy?”

“Never really thought about that. The way things are, maybe Jimmy’s the lucky one.”

“Yeah. Well I don’t mind you killing yourself, if you feel like it. Hell, I’ll come along for the rush most times. But we’re not supposed to be the ones who do that to the poor stiffs who watch our shows. Those guys have it bad enough without us making it worse by putting bad shit on the street.”

I stood there with my mouth open for a couple of seconds. “Wow. And I thought you were in it for the adrenalin. Run in, run out, bust some heads, shoot some dealers. Here one day, dead the next. What happened to you, Hetty?”

“Nothing. Just got to thinking, that’s all.”

Then I smiled. “You know. I’m getting to thinking, too. I hear there’s a nice scene in Midtown. There’s supposed to be a nice bowl theater in one of the craters.”

Now Cat jumped in. “Midtown? We’ll never get across that border. Fuckin’ bazookas on the fences.”

“We can jump it from the roof of the parking warehouse.”

“Hard landing.”

“I wasn’t thinking of taking one of our cars.”

“You don’t have a car,” Hetty said. Now that she understood where this was going, she was smiling.

“We’ll need to steal one, then. How about Smith’s Caddie?”

“We take that one, we can never show our faces here again.”

“When’s that ever stopped you?” Cat said. She was new, probably wanted to catch up on the crazy stuff.

I laughed. How did I get stuck with all the loonies?

“Aren’t any of you concerned that we’re probably going to die if we do this?”

“No,” Cat said.

“Isn’t that the whole point? Not knowing if we’ll see dawn makes everything else so much more delicious, doesn’t it?” Hetty said, popping something pink.

We stopped by the locked container we called home, grabbed out instruments and marched towards the warehouse.

About halfway there, Bob the Slob spoke. “I’m in,” he said.

THE END?

Senor Bondoni has made several appearances in another realm. His work is often challenging, frequently outrageous, and always entertaining. With this piece we can add the term “provocative.” I want to know what happens to these folks next. Do you? Comments to our BBS, please. -- GAM