



by
Kathy Holmes

Viva Las Vegas

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Dumped by her husband for his gay hairdresser, Donna cashes in her cruise tickets for two for a solo flight to Sin City to celebrate her 50th birthday. Hoping to discover her true self, she discovers Habanero Margaritas, Elvis, Cilla, Ann-Margret, and the real meaning of Viva Las Vegas.

VIVA LAS VEGAS

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Dedication

To my husband and soulmate, my biggest fan and supporter.

VIVA LAS VEGAS

The neon sign flashed “Cantina” just off the West Tower Entrance of the Las Vegas Hilton. Hoping it wasn’t a mirage, I placed my order for a “Havana Margarita on the rocks and a bowl of chips and salsa.” I could already taste the salt on the chips.

The overworked server looked puzzled as she glanced up at the board listing the choice of Margaritas available.

I wanted to shout, “Hurry.” After that long flight from Cincinnati, the long cab line at the airport, and the even longer line to check into my room, I was ready for some R & R. I glanced around and saw signs that said “The Elvis Impersonators Convention” and knew I had chosen the right place. The hotel was conveniently located next to the Convention Center,

so I felt safe being all alone in Sin City.

An assistant appeared from the back, “Do you mean the Habañero?” I shook my head yes. If I’d known how to pronounce it, I would have just said so. What did I know about Spanish words anyway? I was from Ohio. I didn’t usually drink Margaritas, and my soon-to-be-ex husband drank Scotch, and Scotch only. Many times, I tried to get him to join a tequila tasting class, but he refused saying, “I’m a Scotch man.”

I sat down at the bar, and she placed a bowl of chips and a second bowl with salsa in front of me. “I’ll take care of this,” the second woman said to the first woman.

She began to fill a Margarita glass full of ice, and I mentally began to take notes. Next, she poured a shot of Tequila and half a shot of Triple Sec into the glass, followed by a squeeze of lime, and then threw the used lime into the glass. She surprised me when she splashed a bit of freshly squeezed orange juice on top, changing the color of the cocktail slightly. Then, she poured the entire mixture into a shaker, placed her hand on top and shook her entire body, causing a rumble of giggles from the men in line next to me.

I may have to get a job making Margaritas—maybe shaking my goodies would shake up my love life.

She dipped the rim of the glass with salt, poured the drink back into the glass, and placed it on a napkin. Those waiting in line applauded.

“Looks like she’s done this before,” the man wearing a convention badge said, as he counted out change from his one hundred- dollar bill.

All too quickly, I found myself sizing him up. Rather

short, but dark and handsome, mysterious foreigner, yep that was my type. Had been ever since I met my husband, Jim. Correction: had been ever since Sam—I hadn't thought about him in years. He was my real Moondoggie—everybody called him Moondoggie and me Gidget that summer I turned twenty-one, when I hung out on Newport Beach, working in my aunt's boutique. The irony was he was two years my junior and, while two years wasn't much, it was more unusual back then—especially at such a young age. Whatever happened to Sam, I couldn't help but wonder. Ever since my plane landed, my mind couldn't help but return to the past and the last time I was in Las Vegas.

“Yes,” was my brilliant reply. Oh, boy, was I out of practice flirting. Well, not that I was flirting, but I had to start somewhere interacting with men, available men. Even if he was probably twenty years younger than I. Maybe more—who knew anymore? Here to celebrate my fiftieth birthday one year early. I couldn't bear to turn fifty, so I was going to celebrate turning forty-nine—the last birthday I would ever officially have. Forty-nine sounded so much younger than fifty—forty-something—I liked the sound of that. But fifty? I couldn't bear to think of it, even if fifty was the new forty. And if it was, why bother getting any older? I refused to leave my forties. Besides, most people I met thought I was about thirty-five—at least, that's what they said to my face. But whatever my age, I was open to meeting anyone and everyone. For once, I had to think I could attract another man—any man—even if he was only twenty. Well, maybe not twenty—that would be younger than my daughter, who was twenty-five. Okay, any man over

twenty-five was fair game then.

I would only think of Sam as the surfer dude I knew—my Moondoggie—and not some middle-aged businessman. But the last I'd heard, he'd succumbed to the family pressure and began working in his father's plumbing business. Funny how I hadn't thought about that since then, but now the memories came rushing back to me like the crashing surf as we made love on the beach. Whew! Such powerful memories, I almost lost sight of where I was walking and tripped slightly as I stepped back from the counter.

I recovered and took my drink, chips, and salsa and headed over to the bistro tables overlooking the casino. Couples sat at most of the tables—male and female, male and male, and female and female. I was the only one sitting alone. I pretended not to care.

I dug into the wet and spicy salsa, licked the salt on the chips, and moaned. Tell me I hadn't really just moaned aloud. I licked the salt on the rim of the glass, and practically guzzled the Margarita, until the frozen headache slowed me down. The buzz I was getting after only coffee and a breakfast cookie on the flight from Cincinnati felt good. I only hoped I wouldn't make a fool of myself.

I finished licking the salt from my fingers, washed it down with the last drop of the Margarita, and started to fiddle with my cell phone. Maybe I'd check my e-mail. That would give me something to do and relieve some of the awkwardness of sitting here alone, especially now that my snack was finished. Just as I started to push the "Connect to email" button, my cell phone rang. I couldn't see who was calling, so I

quickly hit the Cancel button and answered.

“Hello.”

“Mom, Mom, where are you?”

“Hi, Carrie. It’s you.” My married daughter sounded frantic, as if the tables were turned, and I was the teenager who had stayed out too late.

“Who were you expecting? Where are you?”

“I told you, dear, I’ve gone to Las Vegas.” Slot machines were clanging so loudly, I could barely hear her. But when I heard her threatening to fly to Las Vegas to “rescue me,” I knew I had to step in, and assert my motherly authority.

“No, Carrie, no. You’ll do no such thing. And your father may have left me, but I am still your mother.” It was good to be able to pull that one out of my maternal arsenal when desperate.

“So, what are your plans? Where are you staying? What will you do?”

“I’m at the Las Vegas Hilton. You know that, dear. I emailed you my itinerary.” The man turned and looked directly at me—at least it felt that way. And that’s not all I felt—tingling in my lower region—the kind of tingling I hadn’t felt in so long.

My self-esteem may have plummeted when my husband left me for another man, but it seemed I still had something going on in the attractive department. If my daughter was afraid I’d go off and do something similar—like meet some woman in Las Vegas—well, she would be right. I wanted to meet a woman all right—the woman inside me who was somebody other than a wife and mother.

I clicked off my cell phone, and got down off that stool, ready to meet my fate, grab the brass ring or the brass balls or whatever the hell I needed to grab.

I almost crashed into the poor man when he stopped suddenly in front of me, with his cell phone in one ear, talking to the one standing in front of him. When I finally hit the brakes on my feet, and stepped sideways in order to not run over the man, felt the heat emanating off of him, and saw the look on his face, I knew I had almost made a big fool out of myself—the one thing I vowed not to do.

No, he was not Sam—my Sam, my Moondoggie. I hadn't realized he had been on my mind so much that I was hallucinating.

“Oh, hello, pardon me. I'm sorry, I didn't know I was standing that close to you.” Too late, I *had* embarrassed myself.

A tall, woman with shiny Ann-Margret in *Viva Las Vegas* coppery kind of hair, approached me, “The Elvis Impersonators Convention—are you here for that?” She said it as if she were a celebrity of some kind—as if she were Ann-Margret, and I wondered if part of the “Elvis Impersonators Convention” was also Ann-Margret impersonators. *Why single me out?* I looked down at my bag with Elvis' TCB insignia on it—as in “Taking Care of Business” and said, “Oh, yes, I'm here for the convention.”

The man I had almost run over looked at me, grinned as if he were tolerating a favorite aunt. And then he took off with that hot-looking woman in the leather mini-skirt, the kind of woman every woman wanted to be. Beautiful, confident,

sexy. The kind of woman who looked familiar to me.

The Ann-Margret woman introduced herself as “Bebe,” and started asking me questions about the convention. “You’re a bit early, aren’t you? I mean, I thought the convention didn’t start until next week.”

“Well, actually, I’m here for my, uh,” and I looked around and then said in a lower voice, “forty-ninth birthday.”

“You’re kidding.” And when she noticed I was not kidding, she said, “Ah, I get it. Forever forty, is that right? You certainly don’t look a day older than forty. Are you here alone?”

I was pleased to receive the compliment on my age. It was harder to admit I was here alone.

“Only until the others start to arrive. Did I tell you my aunt is coming? She’s from southern California, you know.” Surely, that would give me some clout, as if anybody from southern California could come and go at will—unlike some dumpee from Ohio, who felt like she had no right to be there—especially alone. How pathetic.

“Did you know that guy you almost ran into?”

Shit, shit, shit. So she had noticed me making a fool of myself. I laughed, trying to cover my embarrassment. “Oh, that, well, no. I mean, I thought I did, and then when I got up close, I realized it wasn’t him.”

“Oh, you looked so disappointed. Was it somebody special?”

Oh, crap. How much should I say? Was it true that what happened in Vegas stayed in Vegas, or was that true only if you didn’t tell the truth and pretended to be somebody else? But never really able to hide my emotions, I blurted it all

out—how I had been dumped, how I had traded in my cruise tickets for two for a lonely ticket to Vegas, and how I had almost thought that hunky guy could be, in fact, my Moondoggie from that last carefree summer of my youth before I settled down, got married, and bore the child of my lying, cheating, now gay husband. How mortifying.

“Hey, girlfriend, you need something to drink. Then, I think I’ve got just the plan for tonight.” And then, she filled me in on a most delicious plan.

Bebe led me to Benihana’s. “This is one of my favorite restaurants in all of Las Vegas,” she said. I looked around, but I couldn’t see why. What was different about this one and the one back in Cincinnati? Benihana’s was Benihana’s.

The maître d’ approached us, and Bebe, asserting herself, said, “Cilla’s expecting us.” The maître d’ glanced over at a table grouping for eight, and I recognized the woman I had seen earlier. Cilla as in Priscilla? That would explain why she looked familiar. She had those dramatically beautiful looks, but not all made up fake like Priscilla when she married Elvis in Vegas.

The Elvis-looking guy I had mistaken for my Moondoggie said to the Cilla woman, “Shall we skip the cocktails and get right to the meat?” As if they were the only two in the booth, Elvis cocked his head and grinned over the menu. “Let me choose the steak and you can choose the Margaritas. How’s that?”

“Agreed.”

Elvis ordered two bone-in rib eyes with baked pota-

toes.

“Good choice.”

The waiter turned to me and asked what I would have. I'd barely looked at the menu, but my Benihana's didn't have steak and baked potato on the menu like some steakhouse. And Margaritas were definitely not on the menu.

I stumbled, so he turned back to the Cilla woman, “Yes, Miss Cilla.”

“We'll have a pitcher of Habañero Margaritas.” What was this—the official cocktail of the Las Vegas Hilton? I felt like I was in a movie—something totally opposite to “Pleasantville”—more like “Vegasville.”

“And you, miss?”

“We,” Bebe jumped in and pointed to the two of us as if we were a couple, “We'll have the same—make it four.”

Ignoring us, Elvis said to Cilla, “So how's the Elvis Impersonators Convention coming along? Everything squared away?”

“Oh, that's Bebe's department.” For the first time, we were acknowledged.

The waiter poured a small sampling of Margarita into two glasses, to taste, as if it were a fine wine. Elvis held up the glass, inhaled the nose of it, swirled the glass and took a small sip.

“Very good, Cilla,” as if she were personally responsible for the drink.

The waiter poured two full glasses and another sample into two more glasses. Bebe took a sip, taking her time, swirling, inhaling like a professional cocktail taster, and pro-

nounced it drinkable.

“So, tell me, Bebe, who’s your friend here?” pointing to me.

Before I had a chance to answer, our steaks were delivered in record time and placed in front of us. Whatever happened to the whole exhibition, knife throwing, cook before your eyes kind of Benihana’s I was used to? One thing was for sure— everything was different in Vegas.

The three of them tore into their steaks and then looked at me, expecting an answer.

“Oh, I’m Donna. And I have a grown daughter, married, trying to get pregnant.” Now I felt like a total idiot, feeling my face grow warm, spreading down my neck, onto my shoulders and arms. Was this what a hot flash felt like? My friends had already gone through menopause, but it happened late in life in my family. When I looked at the red blush on my hands, I let go of the glass and held my hands in my lap.

“Married then?” Just the question I’d been dreading, but I had to learn how to get past this. Push on. Start my life over.

“I was, or I still am, until the divorce is final. My husband ran off with his hairdresser.”

“And you just let him? Couldn’t you do something about her?”

“Him. He ran off with a man.”

“Oh.” I knew how to end a conversation, that’s for sure. Wondering how to save face, I stumbled around trying to change the conversation, but I needn’t have bothered.

Elvis suggested we all go dancing and led us to an ultra-hip lounge. When the bouncer recognized Elvis, he led

the four of us to a private table—if there is such a thing as privacy in a hot Vegas nightclub.

A cocktail waitress dressed in a mini-skirt-length black tuxedo, black tights and heels arrived immediately to take our drink order. Elvis ordered a pitcher of Margaritas—what else? This time Elvis poured us each a glass, raised his glass in a toast, “To Vegas.” We all clinked glasses and took a sip of the Margarita. Spicy, but I was getting used to the spice and wanted more—not only in my drink but in my love life, too.

We tried talking, but the decibel level of the music made conversation so impossible that we gave up. And just when we considered getting up and dancing, a spotlight searched the crowd with the merrymakers cheering wildly as an Elvis impersonator jumped up on the stage and began performing.

I couldn’t believe my eyes when the Elvis impersonator gyrated over to where we were sitting, pulled me up from the couch, and invited me to dance with him. He reached around me and pulled me close as our bodies swayed in rhythm to “Hurt,” as if deep down inside, he were personally hurt to think I had lied to him.

And that’s when I knew the very man who had swept me off my feet thirty years ago was sweeping me off my feet again. And I knew this time I wasn’t imagining my Moondoggie.

So when Elvis, Cilla, and Ann-Margret snuck out of there, I didn’t run after them. I swayed to the music like I was in high school. It was one helluva first night in Las Vegas. I could only imagine what the rest of the “Elvis Impersonator

Convention” and the rest of my life would bring. Viva Las Vegas. Viva Las Margaritas. Viva Las Margarita Mama.

THE END

Note from Author:

I hope you enjoyed this short story originally published in *A Shaker of Margaritas: Cougars on the Prowl*, by Mozark Press..

To continue your Las Vegas vacation, you might want to read [*The Tom Jones Club*](#); a full-length novel.

Other Novels by Kathy Holmes:

[*Real Women Wear Red*](#)

[*Letters on Balboa Island*](#)

For more information, see:

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