

# The Hollow Leg

As easy as can be seen, a silver dog, outstretched, front legs fully extended forward, back legs horizontally straight spanning seven rows of seats marqueeed the scenic cruiser bus. I stood my backpack upright next to the other luggage where a bus terminal employee was putting them below into the cargo bins. I watched him take the backpack and throw it to the back of the bin and then shove suitcases in front of it. Nothing was said from the driver collecting tickets. The routine was well worn. It was nothing new, another day of asphalt highways, driving passengers from point A to B, then different ones back to A. I was surprised that on this bus from Montreal to Boston there were only about 20 people travelling allowing everyone to have their own double seat. I took one opposite the driver's side so I could watch the luggage guy and the rest of the small but busy terminal. No one seemed to pay much attention to anyone else making me feel quite invisible. I began thinking of Mario's offer for me to bring kilos of cocaine down to Boston. Of course I declined because of the obvious high risk was if I was caught I could and would certainly be sent to prison. There was no intrigue for me there. Mario understood but he gave me his number in case I reconsidered.

Leaving Montreal I was left with an increasing familiar feeling. Leaving always has a certain amount of a Good Riddance attitude coupled with sadness, not realizing an erosion, the innocence lost and having to accept the future of the quest at hand. I could never be sure if I had a good focus on what that was or what was really was. My naivety continued to sneak up on and hijack me. In fact it forever astounded me. I trusted and was deceived. I loved and was rejected. Comradery was mistaken to become advances. I was seduced when my intentions misled desire. I was the open book unread. I was a song with no words.

I began to realize and with good reason that the world was interested mainly in themselves. Without much effort you could slice through it without a trace or barely noticed. People were wrapped up in their own lives, filled with their own drama and crisis. They had doors to their lives and they had locks on their doors. There were no keys hidden on nails for the casual stranger, the exile, to excursion into their world. I searched people's eyes for contact but found none except for the beggar on the street looking for much the same thing I was. I resigned myself out of no other choice to take advantage of this anonymity. I suppose the struggle was to find out how.

The bus slowed down and entered the U.S. Border where it stopped for customs to routinely check things out. The summer Olympics were more than a month away in Montreal and the Canadians were more concerned about incoming than the U.S. was about their incoming. The bus came to a stop where the customs man, fully uniformed, waited for the bus doors to open.

He stepped up, said a few undistinguishable words to the driver upon which they both laughed and then climbed the steps of the scenic cruiser to the main passenger level. Now he must do his job and I was no longer invisible but had nothing to hide. I looked up from my magazine until he made eye contact with me. Our eyes locked and then I looked back down at my magazine. He assumed the alpha dog role here and he needed to know that. I became his submissive bitch and was in place. He gave everyone a good hard look, said more unintelligible words again, more laughing and then off the bus. That was it. No searching fanfare as I had experienced going into Canada at Winnipeg, nothing more than a two minute delay before we were driving on. Contemplation began again concerning Mario and the transportation of kilos but for now I just wanted to get to Boston and re-establish some familiarity to my life. Steven and Mary Ann were there and I was anxious to see them.

The bus arrived in Boston late afternoon, about 4:30. Often bus terminals are in the seediest part of the city but this didn't seem to be the case. After retrieving my backpack and exiting I could see The Hilton Hotel up the street and signs pointing me towards the Public Gardens. I stopped at a phone booth and gave Steve and Mary Ann a call but there was no answer. No surprise there. Who could expect them to be holed up in an apartment on such a beautiful afternoon? It was a bit warmer here than Montreal and with slight humidity not unbearable but as if you were wrapped up in an envelope of fuzzy comfort.

Walking towards the Gardens I passed the Hilton and smiled at the doorman who was wearing the same jacket I had to wear in Cote St. Luc. I wondered what favors, if any, he has to perform to maintain his employment. Mrs. Lychenheim's aged face invaded my brain; the thick lipstick and painted eyebrows, the fumigating perfume, the deflated balloon breasts, the stale smell of her intimacy and the glitzy carnival jewelry all crept back plaguing my senses.

A taxicab horn honked and the driver yelled out in curse admonishment. I was crossing across a red light and wasn't paying attention. I really needed more focus here. I had cartoon images of Wiley Coyote flattened by The Roadrunner, his pancaked body steamrolled across the desert asphalt. Across the street were the Public Gardens. On my side was The Hollow Leg, a bar with a Carlings Black Label light up high in the front window. Not really a place where I might regain my focus but a cold beer did sound inviting and not one to fight this type of temptation --- in I went.

A few steps into the Leg it quickly became dark as the door swung shut. Smoke hovered in a large cumulus over the length of the bar. It was crowded to the max at the bar as well as at the 2 pool tables. A waitress was serving free hor d'oeuvres I supposed because of the big Happy Hour sign floating in the smoke. 4:30 – 6:00. Why is happy hour never an hour but who can complain? There were no stools open at the bar so I set my backpack on the chair facing me at a tiny cocktail table.

The waitress immediately came over. She was probably about 30, too thin for her height with sunken cheeks sucking on a cigarette.

"Whudda you havin'?" she asked as she wiped the table with a wet towel more out of habit than effectiveness.

"Black Label" I said as if I was a regular.

"Bottle or tap?"

"Tap please."

"And whudabout your friend?" she asked nodding at the backpack sitting in the chair. She laughed for her own amusement and went off to the bar before I could say anything.

It wasn't a typical neighborhood bar with the usual regulars but a downtown bar full of workers and travelers. The workers might have been regulars on a stopover before home or the next destination. Actually it was hard to differentiate between who was a regular and who was not. I wondered how many at the bar came in for daily sustenance if not maintenance, those who at 5 pm each day are on an automatic track. Your vehicle is entering the car wash, let go of the steering wheel, you are no longer in control of the vehicle. You can close your eyes, you can even sleep if you wish and you can wish all the riches in the world and the outcome will be the same. A cleansing will have taken place. Washed away are the dirt and grime, the road kill splatters, the high altitude bird evacuations and the songbird in the grill. Emerging you're once again set to go with all but the most stubborn of sap and road tar erased. And then a half a block from the car wash you hit a pothole splashing muddy water up your cleanside, a reminder of the inevitable return to the car wash.

"One dollar" the waitress said setting down the mug of beer. I gave her 5 and handed me back 4 but the transfer was sloppy and I dropped one of the ones on the floor. Both of us went for it at the same time and we knocked our heads together pretty hard and she reeled back and steadied herself on a chair at the next cocktail table.

"YOW! Now that's a head rush." she said putting her free hand to her forehead gripping the dollars in her other hand.

"You ok?" I automatically asked.

"FUCK NO! I just banged my fuckin' head into your fuckin' head!" She just looked at me like it was my entire fault. My head didn't feel so fantastic either.

"Sorry" I offered up but that didn't look like that was enough. "Can I buy you a drink?"

"Naw --- can't drink while I'm working. What else you got?"

I didn't know what she meant. "I have some aspirin in my backpack."

She seemed to perk up a bit eyeing the sky blue backpack. "What other kind of drugs you got in there?"

"None --- I don't carry when I'm traveling. Too Risky."

Hiding her disappointment not very well she asked "Whereya from?"

“California, North of San Francisco.”

“Shitloads of drugs there” she said

She wanted to enter the car wash but she had no car. I looked her over. Her face had high mileage but her body was trim outside of being on the almost too thin side. I imagined her standing vertically naked gliding on the automatic track in the car wash her arms outstretched like wings in da Vinci’s Vitruvian Man with the big roller brushes on each side of her, through a fine steam spray and pulsating jets of warm water rolling off in rivulets down the contours of her body.

“What’s your name anyway?”

“Anyway?”

“Yeah --- what is your name?”

“Camille --- Cammy, what’s yours?”

“Trace.”

“Well Trace I get off at 8 and if you’re still here you can buy me that drink.”

I glanced up at the illuminated Belfast Water clock. It said five thirty, which probably meant five fifteen real time. That calculated out to about 4 or 5 beers, very doable but not without food. I hadn’t eaten since Montreal this morning.

“Sounds good Cammy. Hey is there any food served here?”

“Nah --- but the grinder shop will send over subs ‘till 6 so you got ‘bout half an hour.”

“Splendid.”

“Splendid?” she drew out slowly “Jeez you are from California” as she walked back to the bar picked up some drinks for another table and dropped off a one sheet menu to me on the way.

“Zoë’s Zinger is great Mr. Splendid if you like peppers.”

I looked at the menu --- *Zorba’s Grinders* down to #6 *Zoë’s Zinger* --- *A Zesty Zensation* --- *Poor Boy with Pepperoncinis Aplenty* --- *Extra Peppers – Don’t even ask.*

The order went through and the Zinger came half way through the third beer, Cammy and I being cautious on the money exchange. She purposely dropped a penny from her tray and she looked right at me and not the penny rolling away.

“I don’t go down for pennies but I will go down for drugs.”

I couldn’t believe she was so out front and blatant about her desire of drugs. And what kind of drugs was she talking about. I felt like I was in the Fishing Tackle Shop inquiring about bait. Do I ask about flies, lures, eggs or live bait?”

“Well --- what’s your pleasure? I propositioned.

Cammy smiled the first real smile I had seen yet. Her eyes rolled back then focused right at me her smile now gone. It was almost scary.

“White lines --- long and fat.”

Of course, one might assume but you never know. This cocaine thing was getting ridiculous. Everyone, everywhere and increasing exponentially. Everyone was nuts about it but the women

exceedingly so from my observation. It was a safe commitment that kept you in the room contrary to the psychoactive drugs that blew off the ceiling into space with you hanging on the chandelier on for your life.

"I'll see what I can do."

"Tonight?"

"Oh I really don't think so." It was an answer that didn't seem to satisfy her very readily. "I just arrived here from Montreal. I know two people living here and a cocktail waitress I bumped into, literally. Scoring tonight would be a magical trick beyond my powers especially not knowing who to score it from is actually where it's at." This seemed to back her off considerably.

"Yeh I figured as much." She now looked slightly disgusted but resigned and sauntered off through the smoke.

After I finished the Zinger I didn't see much reason to stick around. Waiting for Cammy to get off work seemed to be a losing proposition seeing how put off she was about my inability to provide her cocaine. I would have loved to do a Harry Houdini with Camille as my lovely assistant. In my tux with tails and the lovely Camille in the glittering sequin bodysuit, I would wave my wand with many a bow and tipping of top hat that doves and rabbits would abound from with profusion. After sawing the lovely Camille in half and running exotic sabers and machetes through her torso I would wave my wand again and a black cloud emerges and hovers around her turning red, then pink, then white until the cloud dissolves raining white powder. Camille emerges unscathed floating spread eagle on giant round mirror with 12 white lines emanating around her head in a circumspect aura. She turns her head one-way and snorts and then to the other side and snorts. She lifts off the mirror still horizontal and spins slowly like a rotisserie snorting another line and then another on each revolution. Upon completion, floating upright to the ground with a gripped smile, we take our bows to the roaring and applause of the now quenched crowd. With still one more act to complete we climb into the oversize Magic Coffin, her first then me on top closing the lid --- no curtain calls, no encores, no problems.

"Hey this ones on me dream boy." Cammy said as she set down another mug of beer.

"Oh thanks," I said, "I guess I was spacin' out."

"Don't know 'bout that but you look happy enough" and she tailed off into the smoke again.

I was happy. I had no keys on my key ring and I didn't have to be anywhere. I was wholly unaccountable. On the juke box Janis Joplin was singing *Me and Bobby McGee*.

*Freedoms just another word*

*For nothing left to lose ---*

After all this time I think I finally was able to comprehend that line. I had my backpack with very little in it sitting across from me, a sleeping bag, a down jacket and some clothes. Outside of that I had nothing left. I had sold or given away all my possessions. My detours in Montana and Montreal seemed more like station stops on the way to the destination. Boston felt like my

destination even though I would be going to Spain to hook up with Ken on the 95-foot excursion boat. This felt like I had arrived even though I wasn't really sure what for. All the people all over trying to be something, to get somewhere, to have something and I felt I was in limbo and so far away from the rat in the maze struggle. Wouldn't it be so suitable if life's achievements and accomplishments were worn like military medals and badges displayed like your heart on your sleeve. This medal commemorates Education denoted by the number of years endured in the center. The crosshatch stripes above my medals enumerate the number of wives I've had accented in black by the infidelities while still under the oaths of marriage. These special commemorative crosses I wear in respect to those I've trampled upon and climbed over to achieve my present status. If you look closely you can see the squashed heads of these unfortunate souls who fell at my expense. The houses sewn on my sleeve signify just that and remember if you get three in a row you can build a Hotel. These dangling gold rings were presented to me for relentless greed and squalor in the face of over consumption i.e. excessive car ownership, palatial houses, flamboyant fashions and elite club privileges. And those rows of tiny stars represent in multiples of ten the friends I no longer have due to self-aggrandizement and deferred maintenance. I suppose the beer was starting to sing a cynical and bitter song in my head of exaggerated stereotypes. But one has to wonder if it was not easier and so much simpler when we were running around in animal hides with sticks and bones for weapons, where vocabulary was limited, where we foraged for sustenance and hunted if we were able. Out of hunger and survival came plunder --- the idea that I want what they have and I'm going to take it. And after the plunder when the hunger is satiated, carnal pleasures begin to manifest themselves giving rise to envy. As desire becomes the stepchild of envy, man pushes to have what he doesn't. Look at that guys huge wooden club --- I want that. Look at that woman he's screwin' --- I want that. Or someday I'm gonna have his woman and his cave! And damn just one wooden club --- I can have four men with 4 massive clubs and I can control a group of people and I will set up rules to live by or there will be consequences, hell to pay. Someone must lead these clubmen and the consensus of power will always breed an outcast. The outcast has his choices --- to remain and live by the rules as an angry submissive or to go out on his own and form a new clan or go out and hitchhike across the continent ending up at The Hollow Leg 6 beers the better.

Finally the Belfast clock showed 8 o'clock and shortly after Cammy came over, her purse slung over her shoulder, pulled a chair over and sat down next to my backpack. Brown hair parted down the middle, using both hands she pushed her hanging hair behind her ears, pulled a cigarette from her purse and lit up. She took a long draw, exhaling slow in a smooth long exhaust.

"Didn't make shit in tips tonight." looking at me "I mean outside of you."

I wasn't really sure but I probably sent at least ten bucks her way especially after happy hour and inebriation increased. My money was kept in different places, most of it in my belt that

Sharon made for me while still living in Oakland. There was more money stashed in my backpack and the rest in my wallet. I figured if my backpack came up missing like it did on the short flight in Montana I wouldn't be at a total loss. Money was one of those things that if you worried about it too much it would drive you crazy. Of the 35 hundred I started out with I still had 3 grand because of the doorman's wages I earned for the 2 weeks I endured that job.

"Well let me buy you that drink Cammy --- hey how's your head feel?"

"It'll be better after a couple. I'll have a double Tanqueray over ice in a chimney glass with lime."

"Yeah sure." I hadn't met that many people that drink gin. The stuffs like rocket fuel, stuff that movie characters drank, like Bogart and Bacall. It was for Martini people much more established and older than me, for the business execs to down at lunch in multiples and never return to the office. Howard Smedley swiped a bottle of Beefeaters from his parents in 8<sup>th</sup> grade and we had no idea on how much to drink so we split it 50/50 and preceded to vomit all over his parents house before we made it to the backyard where we lay in the ivy. I remember lying there for the longest time with the back porch light on watching a snail crawl towards my face. Even though it was blurry and my head was spinning I watched until it was a few inches from my nose and then it stopped. I had never really scrutinized a common garden snail before this. I had tossed many and stepped on others by accident but here was one approaching me and probably with revenge in his snail heart for all my collective crimes against snails. Were those horns sticking up its ears or antennae or what? Did they emanate an inaudible radio frequency to other snails? If this was true I was in a very vulnerable position for him and about 100 of his buddies to do a major number on me. It was a Gulliver moment. I wanted to move but was too drunk and was in any eminent danger as of yet. If the snail platoons were advancing it would be a slow process by their very nature. Without warning I threw up again or whatever was left of my stomach insides, probably stomach bile while completely napalming the innocent snail. He never knew what hit him and I'm sure it was relayed back to headquarters that Operation Slimeboy should be aborted. If I hadn't felt so miserable my remorse might have tried to save the poor bastard, rinse him off with the garden hose, raise him up from the poor huddling masses and set him on an Azalea or a Tiger Lily on the upper terrace of Howard's backyard. I could have been his savior and skipped 2 steps in the reincarnation rotation.

"You realize Dreamboy I'm off work now and if you're buying me a drink you gotta go up to the damn bar and get it."

"Oh yeah --- you bet." I guess she was anxious to get going. I stood at the bar until the big rotundo bald man spotted me came over to me.

"Another beer?" he asked. I guess he knew what I was drinking.

"No I'm buying a drink for Cammy. A double Tanqueray ---"

"Over ice in a chimney glass with lime. Yeah I got this routine down pal --- and whudda 'bout you?"

“Uh --- what the hell --- I’ll have one too.”

“Sure thing Sport” he smiled and started the process. I was thinking that I already felt good but the six or was it seven beers were weighing heavy and this would just be a sippin’ drink while I talked to the lovely Camille. She sure looked a lot better as my bar time increased. That’s the way it usually works but honestly when she wasn’t suckin’ on a cigarette and if you could get her to smile she looked damn cute. She was wearing tight white jeans, so tight you could see the outline of her underwear and somehow that sent my mind into sexual excursions.

“Nine fifty” the bartender said setting the drinks down on two cocktail napkins. I reached for my wallet thinking Wow. Over 4 bucks apiece --- that could be a case of beer I could be drinking for a couple of days or more under the right circumstances. I didn’t say a thing and just gave him two fives and a one for and *I don’t know why* tip and grabbed the drinks.

“Thanks sport” he said tapping the bar and throwing the quarters and then stuffing the dollar bill into a giant beer stein.

Cammy did not waste any time toasting me as soon as I set her drink down. “Thanks Trace” and before I could sit down was draining the initial and most considerable amount of her chimney glass. I took a sip and found myself staring at her tits using my Preferred X-ray Vision afforded me by 7 or 8 I’m not sure beers to remove her shirt and bra. I had definitely passed the threshold into the Carnal Carnival where I had no choice but to succumb to my animal instincts and entertain my horny desires.

“”Uh --- I’m up here Dreamboy” Cammy said trying to direct my focus from her tits to her face. “Talk to me or I’m outta here.”

“Sure” I couldn’t get my mind off of her tits “what do you want to talk about?”

Cammy shoved her chair back hard making a loud noise on the floor and started to get up. She looked annoyed.

“Wait sit down Cammy --- I’m interested in you, I like your edge. I just haven’t figured a way to break through to you yet.”

She sat back down. “Look Trace --- I ain’t no big puzzle and I’m not going to bed with you. I’m just having a drink with you. Look me up when you have party supplies and then I’ll have you over for festivities.”

“So is cocaine the only key that unlocks the door?” I was getting a little fed up with her preoccupation.

“It’s the only key that’ll work for you Dreamboy.”

I was feeling the gin now I thought looking down at the still almost full glass. Impossible I was feeling this drunk after nine or I don’t know how many beers. This Camille wasn’t any fun either, to hell with her but I was curious to find out what kind of wild sex machine she turned into after a few lines.

“So Camille ----“I thought I’d try the formal approach “lets say I did show up at your place with the proper party supplies --- what kind of festivities, I think were your words, would you have in mind?”

“This ain’t the dating game for chrissakes. What kind of stupid ass question is that? You can’t buy sex from me. If you want that go over to the Combat Zone!”

“Combat Zone? What’s that?”

“Over at Washington and Boylston --- it’s where all the whores and queers hang out.”

“Oh I might have to miss that.”

“What --- is the Dreamboy scared of a little cock and pussy?”

“No, not at all. But what fun is it you’re just buying it. I kinda like the passion part.

“So you’re some hot Casanova in bed are you?”

“I didn’t say that or did I --- no I didn’t. Just want the good time to be mutual, don’t you?”

“Well yeah I take care of things but at 32 I make damn sure I get off even if I have to do it myself even if Romeo can’t. I got lots of stories like that!” She downed the rest of her drink. “Mister Cock and Balls Big Talker comes in my mouth and the fuckin’ show is over --- Jesus!!”

She put the glass up to mouth again shaking the ice but the drink was gone. Now I really don’t know how women talk to women about sex but when talking to men they typically seem to be less explicit and reserved as to not to show their hand or appear to be philandering. Maybe her loose talk was a gesture construed as a come on that I should be acting on. I certainly wasn’t taking it that way. I certainly did want to be that guy in her mouth but I would use all my powers and stamina to resist the expressed outcome and release only after taking her to Kingdom Come.

She tried once again to get more drink out of the empty glass. There wasn’t even any ice left in it and she set the glass down hard and gazed at me. I was pretty sure that that look was not a come fuck me look but more like if you want me to stay here you better buy me another drink. I felt empty in response.

“Well Trace it’s been nice” which meant nothing “come back and see me sometime.”

I didn’t want to see her go and I didn’t want to see her again but I had to surrender any thoughts of getting into her pants, not tonight anyway. “Yeah maybe I’ll bump into you again.”

She laughed and actually gave me a genuine smile. “Hey --- that’s funny.”

“Do you know any good places to stay?” Earlier I had thought it would have been with her.

“The Hilton’s right there or you could just crash in the commons. It’s a nice night.”

“Can you do that?”

“Yeah --- no restrictions there” as she was walking away. “Check it out” and she was out the door. I was sorry to see her go and glad she left. She was a coke whore and a bit on the slutty side but I liked her for her lack of pretention. If you hooked up with her you knew what you were getting. You might get VD or genital herpes that seemed to be the suppressed epidemic. Oh well --- it comes with the territory. It’s all in the contract. Read the small print.

Engaging in sexual contact may result in orgasm and general short termed elation. However, the combination of dissimilar personal hygiene and bodily fluids could also produce catastrophic microbial cataclysms manifesting in urinary discomfort, open oozing genital sores and discharge of pus and blood. Sores in and around the mouth may occur if engaging in oral sex. Also please be advised that in the moment of passion these tiny words will be but specks of sand blowing away on an endless tropical beach in paradise. Proceed.

After a certain point I could never read the small print. That was a problem. It was all too blurry. I looked at my drink and decided I better finish it before the ice melted. I'd finish this damn gin, check out The Commons and then get a room at the Hilton, splurge for the night, take a long shower and well maybe indulge in some room service, maybe another late night cocktail and a tasty snack. After downing the gin I lugged my backpack to the bathroom not only to piss but also to transfer my money and passport to my body just in case.

All changes in order and with my backpack on I glided across the floor of The Hollow Leg waving at the bartender and getting a "Good Luck Sport!" send off. The doors closed sealing off Sly Stones *Thank you for letting me be myself again* (Thank You Falletime Be Mice Elf Agin) playing inside to the sound of the neon Hollow Leg sign broadcasting an eerie static hum as cars whizzed by much faster now in the night than in the afternoon congestion.

Crossing over into The Commons there were lighted paths or service roads fading into vast dark expanses of grass with occasional stands of trees. The night weather was absolutely perfect and comfortable. I picked a tree up on a small slope to sit down and lean against with my backpack still on. I would just sit here for a while before I check into the Hilton. For being smack damn in the middle of the city the sky was clear and filled with an outstanding amount of stars much too blurry for me to make out. Elton John's *Come Down in Time* burst into my head ---

*There are women, women and  
some hold you tight  
while some leave you  
counting stars in the night ---*

I drifted off to sleep or passed out either or. I woke up late in the night to the sound of loud talking. I had fallen over on my side backpack still intact. It was much cooler now. There were 3 young guys walking on the path sloping below me. I lay still at the tree and they passed on

probably not seeing me. Soon afterward there was yelling and some type of scuffle in the distance. I don't know what it was but now I was awake. I got my down jacket out of my pack, put it on and slipped my camping knife into my pocket. I should have picked up and left but this seemed like as good a place as any, well maybe not the Hilton but it was too late for that. 4 a.m. on my watch. I was alone, warm now and half scared but charged up. I felt completely detached. This was a new feeling for me and I let it take hold of me like new drugs not knowing what effect it might have on me. I, again, was an explorer of my psyche.