

Three old guys are sitting in the booth of a gritty bar on an autumn day. Their names are Tom, Bob and Hank. Tom and Bob are widowers in their late 60s and live alone in old houses in an old section of Toledo, Ohio. It is what is called a “mixed” neighborhood of rich and poor; the poor in turn are blacks in hopeless project housing with gangs and drugs, and the other half consists of whites in decaying ramshackle houses who lost their jobs to Asia and are equally consigned to despair. Given their common lot in life, it is sad that so many of these people hate each other on the basis of race.

Tom and Bob lived years ago in better times and are housed in islands of preserved loveliness within the greater despair of their broader environs they know nothing about and hence are oblivious to. They are, after all, old.

Although the two men manage life all right so far on their own, their grown children have been increasingly pressing them to sell their houses and move into a retirement home. Their motives, as in all such aging parent situations where the old must in any scenario make way for the young, are often ambiguous and questionable. But inevitable.

Tom, Bob and Hank are best friends since grade school. Hank lives alone in a trailer in the woods with his hunting dog, a friendly Irish setter, with his wife having left him decades ago without going through the business of divorce. That was the last thing they could still agree on.

Hank does not like Tom’s and Bob’s children, mainly because when he asked his friends how often their kids would come and visit them at the “home,” they looked down and wouldn’t answer. They knew the truth.

When it comes to where a person spends his last days on the planet, Hank often tells Tom and Bob he would rather eat his shotgun than wind up in any one of those places where they warehouse old people and serve you tasteless runny slop for dinner you can’t identify as food you ever ate. They count on old people being too feeble and drugged-up to rebel. They put you in chairs in a common room in front of a TV and expect you to nod off into oblivion. And if the inmates could organize and rebel, who’d listen or care?

“It’s the fate of Auschwitz,” Hank would say, giving his words a flourish with his index finger circling the air above him. *“Arbeit Macht Frei!”*

Tom says his kids took him to an old folks place that had a bowling alley, movie theater, a dining room that looks more like a fancy restaurant, and an Olympic swimming pool (though when he visited nobody was in it). All the women working in the place looked young and sexy in white tight-fitting nurse pantsuits with their name embroidered over one of their tits. The male attendants could have just as easily worked in one of those male stripper dives.

The brochure said anyone under 55 need not apply. As if anyone under 55 would.

Tom says since his kids are willing to pay for what his savings and Social Security won't cover, he's thinking that doesn't look like such a bad deal, though if he sold his house that would probably fetch over a million dollars, so there was that, too. His kids would be the trustees of whatever the house sold for.

Bob says, more than once in their weekly pre-lunch meetings at their booth in the bar, reserved for them by custom much like the ass-dent in a well-worn leather chair — he says he'd rather live in a trailer like Hank and take his chances with dog farts and Pop-tarts than wind up in some place where you don't know what they're slipping into your pills and nobody ever comes to visit you.

Part of the ritual in these geriatric weekly meetings in this “bar and grill” is to smoke one shared forbidden cigarette they pass around like pot smokers, and share a glass of bourbon they're also not supposed to be drinking. To mask that sin, they always also order two glasses of club soda in order to avoid embarrassment, but their usual waitress long ago figured out what they were doing but quietly went along with the club soda ruse. In fact, those club soda glasses were invariably untouched.

Today, Hank says, almost out of the blue but planned for days now, “Hey, you guys. Instead of waiting around to die somewhere where nobody even gives a shit, why don't we go out in a blaze of glory and do something truly spectacular and memorable? Like rob some banks? It's a no-lose situation. Either we succeed and have some real walking-around money and do stuff

we never dreamed of doing, or we get caught and then the State of Ohio has to feed, clothe and house us until we die. We win no matter how you look at it. And we give whatever we have now to our kids before we become criminals, and that way we don't become a burden to them, either. What's not to like here?"

Hank thought his pitch wasn't exactly a 10, but judging by Tom's and Bob's wrinkled brows and eyes pointed right into Hank's, he knew he got far enough into the ballpark.

The other guys laugh, but then the conversation gets serious and they start talking about details and asking questions. Where would they get the masks, should they use guns, should they really go after banks, what if they hurt somebody, what if they get hurt? You can tell this has become a major topic now, because now all three are talking at once and not one of them is listening.

But due to an ancient habit ingrained in this trio, Hank had the status of chairman today on this neutral turf since he was the one who came up with the idea first. Months later, he would deny that. But for now, he was in charge by default. He knew that and ran with it.

"The first thing we have to do, we got to learn how to rob banks," Hank said. "And it makes sense to pick some small rural bank that is pretty laid back. We won't get any big scores, but I've seen this TV show where this guy kept getting away with small bank robberies even though he did all kinds of dumb things, because he would just take the large bills and make sure the tellers were spread out on the floor before they could touch anything. I think he also did something about getting them to remove the dye packs in the drawers, so after he walked out with the money and he'd be driving down the freeway, he wouldn't suddenly get sprayed with red paint all over him. I gotta go on YouTube and see if I can find that again."

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The scene shifts to the tiny breakfast nook in Hank's trailer. It's just after dawn and they're drinking coffee and eating donuts out of a bag with a lot of donuts.

Bob raises his hand, and Hank calls on him just like their teachers did back in grade school, "Yes, Bob?"

Bob: "So how do we learn how to rob banks, do you think there's a book about that on Amazon? They have books on everything." Tom says you get better info by surfing the Internet, and there's no sales receipt to show you bought a book about robbing banks. Bob argues Amazon wouldn't say anything because they have a privacy policy.

And so it starts. They argue as usual and then agree that probably the best way to start is to rent a bunch of movies that have bank robberies in the plot. But then there's a big debate about whether or not movies in black-and-white going back so many years would qualify, since banks are not built the same way anymore and a lot of those bank robbery movies from the 30s into the 50s were pretty fakey.

At Bob's spacious house with a huge LCD TV and every gadget imaginable, they watch some old movies in color and soon realize that most of the robberies are done by young people who can jump up and down and credibly intimidate everybody in the bank by the threat of physically overpowering them, or these movie robbers are not afraid to shoot off their guns. Now the arguments shift to whether or not to use real guns or fake ones, what the hell do they know about guns, and that really offends Hank because he is a pretty good shot with a shotgun when it comes to shooting at ducks or grouse.

So at Hank's insistence, the three visit a few gun stores, But it soon becomes apparent there are too many forms to sign, the guns are way too heavy and oily, and they cost a whole lot of money. While at Toys-R-Us, they find some cheap toy guns that look very real, and they find some old Ronald Reagan rubber face masks stuck in an old box near the loading dock as well. They try those on and head to the checkout counter, where the sales lady, seeing them approach with the masks on and brandishing the toy guns, screams and faints after yelling, "I don't know the combination to the safe! il don't know the combination to the safe!"

Tom tries to explain to the lady who is sprawled out unconscious on the floor that they just want to buy these toy items, but someone in the store

has already tripped an alarm that has gone off. In a panic of their own, the three men run out of the store and take off in Hank's pick-up truck.

Hank takes off his mask and starts laughing like hell, but Bob is squealing like a pig and barely able to say that he can't breathe. Tom takes off his mask, and then Bob's. Hank says they should celebrate, they just pulled off their first heist.

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They are back at their bar for the weekly meeting. But this time they all three order three glasses of bourbon and no club soda, much to the real surprise of Katie, their server. Of course she asks what's going on to change the long-standing habit. Hank says, "Can't you see the difference in us? We just went through a rite of passage yesterday, and now you are looking at some real men, darlin'. Cheers!"

Two hours later and several empty glasses on the table, the men are asleep in their booth and snoring. Katie wakes them up and tells them they have to go, the lunch crowd is coming in. They empty their wallets and realize they have just barely enough for the tab with nothing left to tip Katie. Tom scribbles on a napkin, 'IOU Ms. Katie \$100, Tom, Bob and Hank,' using Katie's pen with a flourish, and then he says, "Katie, hon', we will be making this good to you soon, honest Injun," and hands it to her.

"Oh sure you are," she laughs, and hustles them out. Bob soon has to come back briefly to collect his Ronald Reagan mask that fell under the table.

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Scene is now in Tom's basement amid all kinds of plumbing, heat ducts and assorted junk. What was once a den decades ago can now be only guessed at by the presence of dirty, faded fake knotty pine walls where some of the panels have come loose, exposing gray rough concrete behind them.

Since it is his house, Tom is now the chairman. They are down in his basement because he is convinced the crazy old lady next door has planted listening devices throughout his house. But he knew the loony old bag would never make it down the basement stairs, so where they were now was a safe haven.

After several cups of instant coffee and numerous trips to the bathroom, it took an hour for them to agree that their guns would look more real and menacing if the handles were wound in duct tape. The question then became whether it would be cheaper to buy duct tape online or get it from their guy at the hardware store who every now and then threw something in their bag for free. They would stand before him in the checkout line with more items than they could afford, and then they would take off the counter something that wasn't too expensive and ask the checkout guy to take it back to the shelves because they didn't have the extra \$.75 they were short to pay for it. The guy was used to this ruse by now, but he went along with it anyway because he didn't want to walk all the way to the back of the store to re-shelve the item. But Tom once again won that argument by pointing out they shouldn't leave any evidence of their purchases behind that could come back to haunt them if the police ever started looking for them. The guy ("That guy, you know, that guy" — they could never remember his name) could maybe remember the duct tape con and get these guys into prison.

Then there was a discussion whether the duct tape should look like it's really sloppily wrapped around the gun handles or whether it should be really neatly done to suggest they were very professional bank robbers. The argument got so heated that at one point Hank said, "Let's just fuck the fuckin' duct tape already!" So a compromise was reached: the duct tape would look neatly wrapped around the toy guns, but not too neatly. Some of the duct tape would look dirty and worn, like the gun had been used in dozens of robberies.

Next on the agenda was the topic of whether to simply give a teller a note that said the bank was being robbed so don't pull any funny stuff. They rejected that because they looked so old they were afraid the teller would just laugh, and what then?

Then Bob came up with something that later Hank would insist was his idea: They would put on grease paint and beards and act Muslim, say all kinds of things in fake Arabic and then follow it with “Allahu Akbar!” They bought Santa Claus beards at a novelty shop and died them black, and when it became robbery time they would pop on gigantic Hollywood sunglasses to make the tellers think they were really crazy and would do just about anything. Tom bought a bunch of DC batteries to attach to his belt and all sorts of wires that would dangle from them, so when he flipped open his butcher’s frock he’d look like a suicide bomber.

They studied news clips of what the jihadists in ISIS looked and acted like. No problem, just act really, really crazy.

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Their first robbery was in a town of 8,000 people 120 miles to the nearest big city, where they hit a small suburban bank that was tiny and most customers did transactions at a drive-through window or at an ATM right at the driver’s window. Mostly old people would walk inside to do their banking business, either because the ATM confused them or they didn’t trust it, but mostly so they could take some time out of their long boring days and maybe chat a little with the cute young girl or guy who usually worked alone behind the counter.

The Three Guys, as they wanted history to call them, had cased the place a week before. The bank manager was in then, but after a hushed phone call with a woman they suspected was the kind of conversation a married man doesn’t have with his wife, the manager was gone and didn’t come back. On the day when they’d don their Muslim jihadist costumes (the Ronald Reagan masks would still get their use later) and did their hit, they waited until Romeo took off in his Mazda Miata and squealed out of the strip mall parking lot in his quest for poontang. Only pimply-faced 19-year-old Randy stood between them and who knew how much money.

The note that Hank slipped Randy said, in big block letters, “IN THE NAME OF ALLAH THE MOST MERCIFUL, HAND OVER ALL YOUR FUCKING MONEY, TWENTIES, FIFTIES AND HUNDREDS ONLY, AND IF WE FIND

YOU SLIPPED A DYE OR YOU PRESS AN ALARM, WE WILL COME BACK AND CUT YOUR HEAD OFF ON TELEVISION AND THEN EAT IT.”

But Randy got as far as “Allah” in the note and went into cardiac arrest. Tom jumped over the counter and, realizing what had happened, started giving Randy CPR. Hank jumped over the counter at almost the same time and emptied all the cash drawers, almost pushing the button that would have the cops there in no time. He filled a pillow case with the money while Bob urinated all over the little bank branch’s linoleum floor, muttering Hail Marys.

“Some Muslim you make,” Hank said, adding: “You gotta clean that up, there is DNA in piss and the cops’ll find you.” Bob took off his butcher’s frock he used to wear at work and wiped up the pee with it, then he went to the drinking fountain to wet an unused portion of the frock and wiped up the spot some more.

Hank bellowed, “OK, good enough, nobody’s really gonna think somebody pissed himself in here, anyway,” and as Hank started moving to the door and pushing Bob in front of him, Randy started coming to, at which point Tom, still winded from jumping over the counter, took the long way around the counter and through the tellers’ door, and at last he leaped into Hank’s pickup as they roared out of there, juiced to the max with adrenalin.

They laughed the laugh of the kind only those given reprieve from a death sentence can laugh. They screamed, they hollered, they sang — that is, until they started to smell urine in the car and realized Bob still had his butcher’s frock all rolled up in his lap.

Hank slammed on the brakes and ordered the frock out of the car, and as fate would have it, it lands on a homeless guy, and somehow nearly a \$1,000 dollars with it that had spilled into its folds, leaving the homeless man speechless. He holds up the money to them in disbelief and infinite gratitude, and almost in unison The Three Guys shout back at him, “Allahu Akbar!”

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Normally the next meeting would logically take place at Bob's house, which among the three old friends was by far the nicest and biggest, and if the weather was nice the meeting would be out on his deck that had a decent view of the Toledo skyline, and on a really nice weather day and with the help of binoculars, a view of a woman sunbathing nude on her second-floor bedroom balcony.

But now, after three more successful robberies pulled off much more easily than the first one, where even the media figured these robberies were an ISIS-inspired set of attacks meant to terrorize America, Bob's place couldn't be trusted, he had too many hangers-on who had house keys who ate his food, drank his liquor (now that he had a well-stocked bar again) and slept in the guest bedrooms. Getting Bob to sell the house, shut out the gypsy visitors and move him into a retirement home before his nice house got trashed was the main reason his kids wanted him out of there and into a home and everything safe for their inheritance. Even Hank and Tom had to agree, these moochers could be trouble.

So the next meeting was at Hank's trailer, which also had the benefit of Rex as guard dog. Though he was an Irish setter with a sweet temperament and knew how to retrieve recently killed ducks and grouse, they were determined to make him mean. Tom searched web sites all week to see what sorts of meanness could be inculcated into this pussy breed, and how.

Unlike every meeting among The Three Guys in their entire history, two Major Agenda Items under Hank's chairmanship were agreed to with amazing alacrity. One, no more Muslim shit. The FBI and Homeland Security and probably the NSA was all over this, not to mention that TV asshole Bill O'Reilly who kept whining that he had the best solution if anybody would listen to him, etc., etc. The heat was on, and even though their take from the robberies now amounted to \$87,000, not a whole lot in bank robbery lore, the manhunt was on.

They burned everything that might be evidence in an old incinerator in Tom's basement: the dyed Santa Claus beards, the Mardi Gras beads, the wax candy false teeth, the Hollywood sunglasses (very odorous when burned), the Radio Shack DC batteries and wires (ditto), even the paper and pen they used for their Allah notes — but they fretted that the urine-

soaked butcher's frock might show up in a Dollar Store somewhere and questions would be asked.

So to set the record straight, they went to a check-cashing place in the poorest part of Toledo where mostly black people live who get victimized by places like that (but where there is also an impressive Black Muslim community), and they hit it at 10 PM when it was still open with their toy guns out and their Ronald Reagan masks on. The man behind the metal-barred latticework in front of the thick bullet-proof glass with only a small hole through which he could talk was unimpressed. Just by the way these old guys walked, he knew he was looking at some crazy-ass ofey cracker motherfuckers.

The Three Guys had unanimously voted at one of their meetings that Hank was the one who came across best as the most intimidating of them in voice and gesture, perhaps because of the three men he was the only one who was in OK physical shape.

Knowing where he was and what he had to say, Hank yelled, "OK you motherfucker cocksucker, give me what you got right there in the drawer and we're done, you don't have to be a hero — ya know what I'm sayin'?" (giving it a black intonation) — and we be gone!"

The small old man from Nigeria on a stool behind his wall said slowly, "Go. Fuck. Yourself."

Hank used the Tom back-up plan they always had at the ready for something like this, while Bob stayed near the door, acting as lookout and still unsure of his bladder, though he was getting used to robberies and had peed three times that day without drinking anything.

Hank: "OK, smartypants (immediately regretting using such a silly word), er..., um..., fuckface, we used to be the Allahu Akbar gang but we fooled them, see, but we can take those explosives on my colleague here (damn, wrong word again) and blow them up after we leave, see? Look, here's the note we use as the Allah Akbar gang and it works every time, so don't make us do this. Hand over your cash!"

With that, Hank placed the note into the revolving tray where usually people get money back after putting their paycheck there.

So maybe you get the point of this now: The Three Guys just wanted to leave enough evidence that the Allahu Akbar gang were really The Three Guys, so call off the feds, it was all just in fun and there are no terrorists here.

Nigerian again, predictably: “Go. Fuck. Yourself.”

So with that our three geriatrics left in a hurry, leaving behind the evidence they wanted to leave behind (“The feds will surely see a match in the handwritten notes!”), but not without this parting shot from Hank: “We will back, you can bet on it, and it won’t be nice!” He had the last word.

As soon as they left, Ngo-Buru took the note that Hank had put in the tray and threw it in the trashcan. He didn’t bother calling the police. This kind of shit happened every week.

The Second Agenda Topic that resulted in a quickly arrived-at decision in Hank’s trailer was to spend some money wildly on themselves and live it up, otherwise what was really the point of all this? They surely didn’t expect to salt the money away for a rainy day. The rainy days were all in the past. *Gaudeamus igitur*, spend the dough before your time is spent.

The decision was quickly made to book three normal rooms at the Bellagio in Las Vegas, and to splurge on one huge penthouse suite in the same hotel under the name “Tres Amigos International, Ltd.” with an address in Barbados where they figured out how to open an account online and wire cash there. But they used an even simpler way of transferring the money they had stolen. You no longer had to go to Barbados like James Bond and talk to Ricardo Montalban and lie about a lot of things. They tested the First Trust Commercial Import-Export Bank of Barbados by depositing \$1,000 online at first, and then using that account to buy Hank an electric shaver from Amazon he thought would be fun to try out. It worked, and so they put in the full \$87,000 in cash by sending it FedEx to the bank, crossing their

fingers, and that worked, too. They were really lucky because whatever scanners the feds or FedEx use to detect money laundering were not working that day, and some clerk sent off the package to Barbados, anyway.

The bank manager in Barbados was highly tempted to run off with the cash rather than deposit it, but he decided it was easier to embezzle gangsters' money once they get rubbed out or sent to prison for the rest of their lives.

Tom and Bob had done online research regarding where the best casino breakfasts in Las Vegas were, some were free, some were only \$2.99 for all you could eat. That was of course a come-on to keep the suckers in the casino, but there was no meal more satisfying to two of The Three Guys than the Super Grand Slam at Denny's, and they figured Vegas could top that. So that was a priority to Tom and Bob.

Hank, though, despite his trailer life and protein mostly in the form of duck with shotgun pellets mixed in, had at one time known some of the sublimer ways of the world, mainly Vegas, now remote these last 20 years of his life where his living quarters was reduced to the space an old GulfStream trailer built in the 1950s. It smelled of mold and old coffee grounds.

Hank bristled at no-account Vegas casino breakfast deals and grandly announced, "You old depressing farts, don't you know we can show up as high rollers and get comped everything, even hookers and limos? What you do is you put your dough into chips at the cage and they go nuts giving you stuff hoping you gamble that all away and the house wins even after its investment in comped stuff."

It took Hank about 45 minutes to explain all that and, no, they would gamble at most \$500 of their wealth, he promised, and then they'd cash out at the end and Bellagio will have popped for the best time they ever had in all their lives and they would return home with smiles.

"We can do that? For real?" Bob wanted to know, and Tom asked the same questions milliseconds later like an echo from the other side of the room. They both had the same thought at the same time: "We could just do this instead of robbing banks, why didn't Hank say anything about this before?"

The good news prompted a spontaneous trip in Hank's pickup to the bar where Katie worked and where they hadn't been in weeks. They smoked cigars this time, handed \$200 in two crisp Benjamins to Katie and demanded she bring the best bottle of brandy she had with three glasses and just leave the bottle.

They claimed Bob had just sold his house and planned to drink himself to death with the proceeds, starting now,

Life had definitely turned for the better. Hank had been going to a tanning salon, and along with his newly tailored-coiffed hair and tan and better cut of clothes, he looked a man fifteen years younger. Tom and Bob changed nothing in their lives or appearance, which is what all the bank robber movies said you had to do or you'd draw too much attention if you start throwing money around. Besides, they really didn't want anything they couldn't have afforded without the robbery money.

Hank delivered. He said to his partners it was worth the \$12,000 to lease the private jet and tell the concierge at the Bellagio to send a limo to pick them up. Not only were the four rooms they reserved comped, so were all their meals and liquor at the hotel's best restaurant, and out of nowhere three gorgeous "escorts" were going to have their own rooms in the same gigantic penthouse suite to "assist them in all their needs."

There was no time for a strategy meeting now, and none would have been held anyway because the ancient rules of procedure for the aging trio did not cover spacious hotel suites or how to manage the fair allocation of hookers. So they just let it roll, went to their respective rooms while the young and graceful hookers quietly took to their rooms as well, and they napped.

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An important point overlooked in this narrative: Hank, who was well versed in all things Vegas, knew there was one carte blanche instantly available in one material object, an abracadabra master key that opened all doors in that phoniest of all phony places, the most money-craven of all cravens,

that swamp of sin called Las Vegas: a tuxedo. You can wear it all hours of the day, and it says you are off to get an award or to perform a show or lie in bed with a Liberace or Roy or that other guy with the tigers...it was your *passe-partout*, nobody will question who you are or what you intend. So of the \$86,000 now in Barbados (actually, \$85,100, since Barbados banks of their sort charge a negative interest rate for the privilege of hiding your money), \$3,800 was spent on three tailor-made tuxedos for our friends, and that is how they arrived on their Learjet and how they would show themselves in public at all times while in Vegas.

Their comped first dinner after their arrival and naps was Chez Jacques, a Michelin three-star restaurant that serves only the finest cuts of meats, accompanied by vegetables or starches or nuts or fruits that get so pureed and sauced-over that nobody knows what they are and nobody would dare ask. These sides to meats that must arrive in diplomatic pouches are given French names that mean nothing, served on big white square plates with colorful liquids drizzled over them as if they were Jackson Pollack paintings or jizz from an elephant.

The Three Guys loved the strange food but hated waiting for long intervals for each course to be served, with some fag French guy with chains and keys thrown around his neck and dangling over his chest and crotch as if he were the mayor of some medieval Belgian city.

This sommelier asked, in what could have been an actor's fake French accent, "Tonight, messieurs, — ", then remembering the three hookers were also at the table, "et aussi mesdames, excusez-moi —, we have a daring Bordeaux for the appetizers, then a calming fruity Vendomes chardonney for the soup which includes asparagus and a creamed mushroom base, followed by a very satisfying 1959 Chateau-Neuf du Pape for the exquisite chateaubriand prepared for you tonight by Jacques himself, — only three of these bottles are left in our cellar, and the beef is from Japan where it was massaged every day into creamy tenderness by unemployed sumo wrestlers."

To which Bob said: "Hey, whatever, sounds good. Pop that sucker."

And Tom: "You got any A-1 steak sauce?"

The Three Guys ate in complete discomfort, from not enjoying their balls getting touched by the maitre'd when putting linen napkins on their laps the size of a tablecloth, to the fag sommelier never pouring enough in the refills and sneering at how our boys slugged back the wine like beer, to tugging on their tux collars that made them sweat sweat-balls that rolled down their back, to watching the hookers secretly pass cocaine to each other in order to put up with all this shit and thinking there is no way we are going to get laid with these dollies, assuming we could do our part.

So that one feast was it as far as the comped meals were concerned, it would be room service from here on out, and they didn't care if that meant they had to pay for it.

Even Hank, the Vegas-savvy guy, had to agree.

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Somebody knocked on the door while the guys and the hookers sat in a giant hot tub that had an expansive sky dome over it where millions of stars and the lights of passing airplanes could be seen. The Three Guys sat on one side, the hookers on the other, each group wondering what was supposed to happen next.

Our guys were in bathing suits, the hookers naked. That didn't help, either.

A knock again on the door, and everybody in the pool is happy for the distraction. Hank gets out, drips water on the carpet, and answers the door.

It's a casino employee, in tux of course, and behind him are around six people: one guy with what looks like a covered blackjack table on wheels, another guy who must be the dealer, another beefy guy with a big case that must have a lot of chips in them, and two other beefy security guys just for the hell of it.

"Mr. Hank Devereaux (his Barbados last name), may I assume, sir?" (Assume, shamume, hell, he had just come from downstairs where he

looked at the photos surreptitiously taken of The Three Guys when they checked in, and he had Hank pegged before he got in the elevator).

Hank: “Yes?”

Tuxedo employee: “Would you like to be gaming in your suite tonight sir? I see you are presently occupied, perhaps later tonight?”

Hank: (gesturing to the hot tub) “Well, yeah, a little busy right now, and I got cables coming in from Singapore through the night, so let me call you tomorrow when the rest of my money makes it to the cage.”

Tuxedo employee: “Very well, sir,” and he and his entourage disappear.

Hank had wired \$70,000 to Bellagio before they flew to Vegas. The Barbados account was at the minimally allowed balance and would be closed in 15 days if the account didn’t get properly replenished. He had emailed the right executive he had known in better times, a certain “Chuck,” saying the 70 grand would cover “initial expenses,” and Hank asked for access to the VIP Explorer’s Club once an additional \$12 million would be wired from a bank in Singapore. Chuck was to confirm arrival of the funds when they were deposited in the cage at Bellagio, because Hank was concerned they may be delayed due to a three-day weekend holiday in Singapore.

So that would buy Hank and his pals three days of debauchery and revelry, most of it free, then they’d get found out and have to fly home and figure out whether this was as good as it gets with the robberies and quit their life of crime.

But one thing at a time.

Meanwhile, the hookers liked the prospect that was unfolding before them that, for once in a long while, they can give their various orifices a rest and humor these old coots. The closest any of the three guys got to actual sex with these ladies of the night was Bob who, stealing a line from a movie he saw called “Bad Grampa,” told Trish (the others were Bambi and Kristal —

yeah, right), “I can’t stir the stew anymore, but I can still lick the spoon!” That got him nowhere.

So every few hours for the next two days these six mismatched people ordered everything on the room service menu along with a steady flow of alcohol-infused beverages, and with the sex now not in the cards because impossible (Hank: “Did the dog chasing the car ever figure out what it’d do if it actually caught it? I don’t think so,” before diving again under the satin sheets), happy drunken food fights and pillow fights and piggy-back joustings (old guy the horse, the naked hooker the knight) took front stage, and everyone fell back into high-school jinx mode and adolescent giggles.

The hookers thought these guys were high-roller millionaires, and they plotted to get themselves out of Vegas and into whatever opened up with these codgers. Hell, even marriage. Wait a few years and inherit the castle.

So again, the next night the floating blackjack table showed up again, and despite the debris and dirty dishes everywhere and half-drunk champagne bottles and naked hookers asleep in various positions on couches and on the floor, the suave tuxedo man enquired, “Mr. Devereaux, perhaps some games of chance this evening here in your suite, sir?”

And drunk and disheveled as everybody was, Hank agreed, and as if the squalid residues of debauchery all about were invisible, the six hotel employees entered in a phalanx without a blink of an eye, and a private blackjack table was set up in an unused room of the suite that looked like a library but was nevertheless equipped with an Eye-in-the-Sky camera in the ceiling to catch any cheating that might go on. The minimum bet was \$10,000

Hank spends the night gambling, his winnings up as much as \$2 million, but then he gradually loses all that by dawn, leaving him with still the \$70k the three came with.

It’s now time to leave before his old gambling addiction loses everything again.

The hookers are only aware the high roller Hank survived the evening, and that says all they need to know when The Three Guys ask them if they would like to come to Toledo and live with them and be their housekeepers. They eagerly say yes.

Back in Toledo, the hookers finally figure out they don't have the sugar daddies they were counting on.

Eventually, the three slip up and get arrested. They get caught in a freak-accident kind of way, which we will get to in a minute.

After resting up from the glitter of the casino world and now bored again, The Guys rent a big RV bus that is really more like a rock star's road-trip bus, all decked out with a big lounge area in the back, Pullman-car-style bunk beds behind drapes along the corridor, and a spacious kitchen and dining area. The luggage compartment below could house a couple of large Asian families.

The idea that got instant consensus was to drive to Colorado where marijuana is legal and see if today's weed is what they say it is, better than the harsh stuff they experimented with in college. Given the disaster with the hookers from Vegas, though, there was no bravado macho talk about how they would score with some hippie chicks they could attract with what Hank was now calling the Willie Nelson bus.

And another fight was avoided when Tom and Bob told Hank what the two of them had already decided, so there was no need to take a vote: Every two days the three would shift beds, so everyone got an equal shot at the big king bed in the back with the vibration thingie with a remote control so you could adjust the kind of semi-massage you'd get, and that bed had a comfortable view of the big TV; a smaller one was in the front living room with the swivel chairs so you could do fast 360-degree views of the world as you rode through it. It was OK for news but no fun for movies.

Hank thought the trip required new cowboy outfits with nice leather boots, fit the Willie Nelson motif, but Tom and Bob, feeling the new power of being a voting bloc, nixed that.

Since nobody wanted to drive this thing, Bob figured Miguel his Mexican gardner and all-around handyman would do it, and do it well as with everything Miguel does, always, of course, for cash money on the barrel. Miguel had to take only one look at the shiny big rig and he smiled wide so you could see his gold tooth back in there. “You got it!” he said. That was Miguel’s favorite thing to say, “You got it!” pushed “yes” right out of his ample English vocabulary.

So now to the freak-accident arrest part.

On a warm morning in June, Miguel eased the bus onto the freeway heading west when they get no more than a mile from Bob’s home (the hookers’ one useful act: they managed to scare away the moochers who frequented Bob’s house using some kind of magic, because those moochers were gone for good). Tom had to piss and he forgot to go before leaving. He wants to pull in someplace where he can pee.

Hank: “Whadda we need to stop for, we got the john back there, just go in there.”

Tom: “No way, we’re movin’ and I don’t want to piss on my leg, I did that on a train once and had no change of pants.”

Hank: “Well, I’ll tell Miguel to pull over so you can maintain an undisturbed stream.”

Tom: “Yeah, well, I want a donut, too.”

So right up ahead is a Denny’s, so they stop and go in, and they all order breakfast. They are blissfully unaware they have walked into a spider’s web. Sitting two booths away is the old Nigerian from the check-cashing place who drove half-way across town because he knows nobody gets mugged in a Denny’s parking lot, and he loves pecan-filled pancakes.

Cops regularly check in with check-cashing places because crooks use these places to send Western Union money orders anywhere in the world,

and most of these sleazy shops will take a lot of cash to convert into money orders. Ngo-Buru had a little side business of his own because of that. With a few trusted regulars, he would take a large sum of money and take 10% right off the top and put it in his pocket. With the rest he would spend up to weeks sending modest sums of money to as many as fifty places at a time, all under different names, never his own. The idea was not to draw attention to yourself, and his clients just had to be patient.

As he rests his fork on his plate to chew slowly another bite of pancake, his gaze freezes at the three old clowns who put on such a show for him just so he would hang on to their nutty note. He didn't need to remember their faces, Hank's loud voice and distinct twang took Ngo-Buru instantly back to that night of the Ronald Reagan robbers. Soon after Ngo-Buru threw Hank's "evidence" of a stickup note in the trashcan, he got in the mail a poster of the FBI's Most Wanted, which included the mugs of the elusive terrorists of the Allahu Akbar Gang. The FBI asked him to put the poster on a wall. He threw that in the trash, too.

Recalling the poster now and Hank's voice and putting two and two together, Ngo-Buru slowly went for his cell phone, as if any sudden movement would get the attention of those old fools and they might assault him.

The feds swarmed Denny's in an impressive reaction time, they didn't even wait for the TV cameras to arrive for the usual humiliating perp-walk videos the Fibbies loved so much, so high on the national security scale were these arrests.

Ngo-Buru moved into the shadows as all this was going on, managing to collar a young woman with a blue shirt that had the yellow FBI letters on the back, she got one she must have tailored since it showed off her shapely thorax to great effect. Ngo-Buru gave her several business cards and reminders that "I crack this case for you, you don't screw me now with award. You pay me now award."

It took some red tape and patience, but Ngo-Buru got a stiff-paper stock check the same green color as his Social Security check with the Statue of

Liberty on it, but this one was made out to him for \$1,000,000. His plan now was to head for Las Vegas and to hell with that job he hated.

It would be a kind of grand poetic justice if he then wound up with Trish, Bambi and Kristal and they fleeced him out of his reward, but that didn't happen. Ngo-Buru managed to fund several taco trucks to feed the people in Vegas who do the real work, and he made himself a modest fortune and eventually bought himself his own kind of Willie Nelson bus but went nowhere with it; he made a deal with a local Denny's where he could stay in their parking lot for \$500 a month and use their men's room, and he lived that way for who knows how long.

Anyway, enough of that guy who ratted out our Guys. Back to them.

They wind up in prison but soon become celebrated as heroes. It quickly becomes clear these oldsters were never terrorists, and miraculously the homeless guy who wound up with the urine-soaked butcher's frock and the almost \$1,000 in bills tangled up in it came forward to say it was his fault these men were called the Allahu Akbar Gang because that is what he called them when somehow a local TV station found out about his story and figured it would help their ratings.

So now all the TV stations were pulling strings to interview Tom, Bob and Hank, who now look like sweet ol' grampas on TV after makeup and wardrobe get done with them for their "human interest" story. The TV appearances go viral on YouTube and cause a groundswell of sympathy. Hank loves the limelight and carefully rehearses things to say he know will make him a folk hero.

The Three Grampas become voices for the elderly that have "lamentably been missing from the attentions of the media and politicians for far too long." (Alice Lang of Toledo-5 News, managing a practiced serious face despite the heavy lip gloss and low-cut blouse)

The old buddies start making a fortune on Three Grampas T-Shirts ("I robbed banks and all I got was this stinking T-Shirt with 'Inmate' on it"), coffee mugs, key chains ("works with any deposit box"), hacksaws (cute), baseball caps, playing cards (your choice of a Hank, Bob or Tom deck),

and even a video game where you try to change events so they don't get caught, with young hookers to distract teenage boys into masturbation just as they are about to master the game's last level.

Bob's moochers find a lawyer willing to file a bogus class action suit to see if they can angle into all that money, saying they were all illegally evicted without proper notice and hearings, blah blah blah. The Three Gramps (the name change was dictated by NBC who thought the sitcom needed something folksier in the name) hired a private detective to search for Ngo-Buru, not for revenge, quite the opposite, they wanted him in the sitcom because nobody ever said fuck you better than he did. They wanted him in every episode so he'd close each show by looking into the camera and telling the folks at home what they could go and do to themselves. But the search for the Nigerian led down blind alleys.

The groundswell to free our trio from prison (the sitcom was filmed in the prison) was so great that when the President pardoned them, her approval rating rose 10 points. There was talk of a Rose Garden ceremony for the newly freed prisoners to pump up that favorable rating even more, but our guys were last heard from from somewhere in the French Polynesian islands. Rumor had it they had opened a dance school that doubled as a free dental clinic, and they were back in costume again, mostly of palm leaves and beads, where every night as the sun sets into the ocean, the three can be seen swaying their hips to the sounds of an entire village of drum players with excellent teeth and the wispy sounds of bamboo flutes.

The only discordant note in this warm idyllic native tableau was the faded Ronald Reagan mask on each of the guys' faces. Bob's had a big gaping hole in his so he could breathe better, and as he swayed and sang Aloha-Oe along with his pals, the latex flaps of the mask near his lips would flutter in harmony.