



*"There were  
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When an  
**EVENING OF  
LAUGHTER TURNED**  
into a Night of Terror

»» By: Erik Lewin

**THE** comedy club was quiet, the 10:00 show ended, its last audience member gone. Resident headliner, Butch Bradley, club manager Kelly, one of the marketing guys and I curled around the little bar to knock back honey whiskey shots before heading home. It was all routine, until one of us checked our phone.

"What the hell?" Something about how he said it made us quit our bantering. "What is it?" We asked in unison. "The strip – it's - under attack. There's been a shooting." We all whipped our phones out and announced the reports. "The Mandalay Bay got shot up!" "Nobody can go on the strip!" "Multiple shooters! Shots fired at Paris! They could be anywhere!" They could be anywhere.

We stood in the dimly lit club, eyeing its shut black doors. Suddenly, they were now a divide between

safety and danger. "What the hell are we going to do? We can't just stay in here," the marketing director said. "We can't just go out there with no plan!" Who knows where the shooters are?" I said. The four of us stood still, our rising palpable panic. Wildly conflicting reports continued to trickle into our cell phone feeds. "Maybe we can get up to the needle (the restaurant atop the Stratosphere Hotel with observation windows) and see what the hell is going on out there," Butch said. We slowly opened the doors and stepped out into the hotel's second floor. There was no one around. An eerie absence of life pervaded the space. It was a quick few steps to the elevator which took us to the top. We stepped into the restaurant, which blared dance remixes like it was any other night. There were groups chattering away, drinking and carrying on without concern. The juxtaposition of the tragic events and their behavior was baffling; they couldn't possibly know what was going on.



But the place was filled with towering windows! All you could see were emergency lights! It was shocking to see the strip cleared out, with only first responders coming in. The outbound highways were jammed with traffic. Hotels went dark. It was a wide-scale disruption of the entire strip. How these people could munch away on chicken wings was beyond me.

"Shots fired at Bellagio!" "Chasing a shooter through the lobby!"

We continued to monitor these outrageous reports on our phones. The scene unfolding through the windows presented like a number of lit dots that could not be connected. We didn't know if attacks were still in



progress. In spite of the party atmosphere around us, the terror did not feel distant. It felt all too close. They could be anywhere.

Eventually, Butch and I agreed to try to get home. Butch Bradley had recently relocated to Las Vegas for a stand-up residency at LA Comedy Club. His arrival coincided with my own, though I moved here to live with my girlfriend. Butch and I hit it off right away; we sometimes performed on the same show, and often met up for coffee. We were both jubilant with our new opportunities, and with this city we now called home.

Atop the Stratosphere, we witnessed our new home take an unprecedented sucker punch to its very core. Shortly thereafter, we split from Kelly and the Marketing Director, only to discover the parking garage had been sealed off. Fortunately, Butch was parked elsewhere and lived on the other side of town, which meant we could still travel by local roads. And that's just what we did.

We got into his Jeep and drove out toward Blue Diamond. We rode along the dark desert landscape. I rolled down the window and the windswept air felt thick and suffocating on my neck. An emergency vehicle raced by, its horn shrieking, the sound of an entire city hurting.

Suddenly, as if in a dream, this spectacle cut through the milieu; a blast of rock'n'roll rang out from within a glowing purple light. A shirtless man with dreadlocks sat behind a drum set hitched right on the back of a Jeep, banging away like it was a sold-out show at T-Mobile Arena. We pulled up alongside him at this gas station.

"Whooo! Yeah!" Butch screamed. He leapt out to jump and dance in front of the drummer like he was the biggest fan of this rock god, throwing his arms up and taking snapshots on his phone. I looked on from the passenger seat, bathed in a reflection of purple hues, overtaken by the sheer force of the drums. It was like being sucked into a momentary force-field; the music offered a respite from the fear. In that darkest moment, this drummer kept a vigil lit for all of Las Vegas. We made it to Butch's place and stared at the news reports for what felt like hours, neither of us settled enough to sleep. The images of the Mandalay Bay attack were harrowing. The barest of facts started to come through, such as the shooter's identity, the toll of victims, and the search for a person of interest. The ill-conceived reports of other shooters and coordinated attacks began to be dispelled. It was a great comfort to have my new friend there.

The morning light crept in to find me curled up on Butch's recliner. The night's gruesome images immediately leapt to mind. Over breakfast, our weary eyes communicated one thing – we had survived the night – yet knowing the worst truth – many had not.

The disorientation and horror I felt from that night was reminiscent of 9/11, where I woke up in Manhattan to news of the World Trade Center attacks. I ran up to the roof of my building, and saw the sky engulfed in black smoke.

Much like New York, the people of Las Vegas supported one another remarkably. There's something about tragedy that reveals a basic human kindness. With all the problems in the world, compassion can feel impossibly far from our grasp, as if only coal miners are equipped to take such a deep plunge. But the actions taken in New York and Las Vegas offer irrefutable proof that a universal love is real.

*"I could scarcely look at The Mandalay Bay; it stirred in me such anger and pain to even glimpse at its sign. I'm ashamed of this, but I look away no more".*

There were heroes who literally saved lives at the scene. There were lines at blood banks longer than at the DMV. There were people who provided meals to victims and responders. There were many who gave comfort to the frightened. We were all supported in our vulnerability. I must confess that for months after the shooting, I could scarcely look at The Mandalay Bay; it stirred in me such anger and pain to even glimpse at its sign. I'm ashamed of this, but I look away no more.

It helped that Butch and I spoke with our friend Marty, a local stand-up comedic enthusiast, who was in the line of fire and survived! I am in awe of him and his strength to endure. It's not easy for him to put this horror behind him, but trust me, he still laughs a lot.

Las Vegas may always have to bear this memory, this tragedy, but it can do so, while never losing its spirit, because we are #VegasStrong. 

