



ZIGZAG



Gehla S. Knight



ZIG ZAG is a raucous ride with truck-stop cowboys bent on revenge, bored housewives curing the blahs with motel trysts and a motley crew of wannabe baddies who are sure a Commie led invasion across the Canadian border is due any day. Their wacky plot to blow up a Reno casino and finance a backwoods revolt makes for hilarious fun, murder and romance.

Zig Zag

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First Edition

One

After all these years, she finally knew what her mother meant when she said that some men were only interesting to a woman once their britches were off. Marsha rubbed her cheek and took a good, long look at the long-hauler standing a little off kilter under the bare bulb. He was stark naked except for the striped socks. Marsha asked that he keep those on. Nothing was uglier than male feet with all those scaly patches, bumps and green toenails. Put her out of the mood entirely.

“Well?” he asked with a sloppy smile.

“I’m thinking.” She studied his bottom half. The pulpy knob between his thighs was keeping time with his unsteady stance. It bobbed like a conductor’s baton, jutting out from his hairy belly like the stump of a fifth limb. She considered it definitely a grade or two above the average in size. Not crooked at least like some that took a right turn and aimed their slant eye off in the corner somewhere. His was plump and pink like a fresh farm sausage about to burst its skin. Maybe worth the trouble of having to put up with his fleshy lips slobbering all over her and the tang of tobacco juice which melted on her tongue like creosote when they kissed.

The scene was about as good as it would get she decided, starting the zipper down on her Lee’s jeans. Johnny Cash was crooning on the alarm-radio by the iron-frame bed. Marsha always wanted the twangy, country music in her ears when she did it. It was a cheap touch that added a pinch of seaminess to it all. The bubbles in the champagne. Red chilies in the dip.

“You gonna make up your mind, Darlin’? I’m gettin’ a helluva chill standin’ here bare-assed naked with you tryin’ to figger out what the hell’s on your mind.”

Outside, semis and pickup trucks hissed past on the Interstate. The ratty drapes framed Sugar Loaf Butte perched like a giant gingerbread above the queued, long-haul rigs blurring in the haze. It was already eighty degrees in the Lullaby Motel. The whole schmeer was not nearly romantic enough to suit her she concluded with a final look around. But it would have to do.

“Tell you what . . .” She wiped another slug of whiskey from her chin. “I’ll make a deal with you, Hank.” She tipped the Jack Daniels in his direction. “You’re not bad. Lord knows I’ve seen worse. So how’s twenty dollars sound?”

She was a strange one. But it was almost twelve, and his rig would be gassed and ready to hit the road in another half hour. He didn’t have much time to waste playing patty-cake games with this lady. They were bored housewives mostly, truck-stop groupies hanging around the cafe just asking to get laid. Played all hard-to-get and stuck-up, but as soon as ol’ Hank started layin’ pipe, don’tch ya know, he boasted, they turned into real tame pussycats.

He reached for the bottle, took a healthy slug and set it on the dresser. “Well, lemme see whatch ya got yourself, Lady. What’s the big secret anyways? I seen it all a time or two.” He winked, or at least his droopy left eye twitched in a semblance of his sexiest leer. “Why don’tcha take off them damn jeans for starters?”

“Tell me, Hank, you ever done it standing up?”

“Hell’s bells. I done it ever which ways but wrong, Honey.” He grabbed his balls. They hung as heavy as green apples. “Come on over here an’ show me somethin’, Sugar. You got a pair a knockers like to make a man go blind.”

When he reached, she skittered backward on the linoleum. “Christ, it’s hot. I don’t think the air conditioner in this dump works.” She yanked the drapery cords. “I could fry an egg on the window sill.”

He took one step forward and laid a half Nelson on her. “Ain’t no AC could cool you off, Darlin’, cuz I’m gonna heat you up till you boil clean over. Comere.”

He smelled like stale sweat. The stink of a man was his résumé – Hank reeked of chewing tobacco, Diesel fuel, unwashed underwear and cheap bourbon. As he unbuttoned her blouse and wedged his hand down the front of her bell-bottoms, she shut her eyes. It was going to happen. She could already tell her assessment had been right on – old Hank was going to be a one-minute man. Might as well get it over with then.

“Hey,” she grunted as he pushed her onto the squawking bed, “do me a favor, Hank.” His prodigious tool smacked against her thigh while he wrestled her out of her clothes. This was more like a WWF

title match than the romantic interlude she had hoped for. She'd have to throw in some ground rules just to make this asshole tolerable for two minutes. "Don't grunt when you come, okay? Just don't make any animal noises."

He stole all three bases and was sliding toward home, squeezing both eyes shut and thinking about a bleached-blonde teenager named DonnaLu who had given him his first real blowjob when he was fifteen-years old. Behind the Flying A gas station in Caldwell, Idaho. Every time he did it, DonnaLu was the first face he saw in his mind – her cheeks popped out with his pecker, making his eyes bug. His heart had almost stopped when she siphoned the scalding juice out of him. Nothing since ever came quite as close as DonnaLu's cherry-red lips sinking down on his wannabe manhood with enough suction to strip the bark off a tree.

He humped her a few times, feeling Marsha's hipbones clunk against his. In six seconds flat, his body stiffened like an ironing board. His feet kicked the bed frame while his stubbly cheeks rubbed a sore spot on her face. Squirring on top of her, flopping and contorting like a chicken caught in barbed wire, he hog-snorted through his nose. She turned her face away to avoid the gush of rotten exhaust he blew into the pillow when the last drop of lust had spilled inside her.

Before he could open his eyes, she had pushed him off, scrambled to her feet and pulled on her panties.

"Hey, Darlin' . . ." he panted, lifting himself on one elbow.

"Get out," she growled, retrieving her jeans from under his ass. "Get your damn shit and take off."

"Say what, Honey?"

"I said to get the hell out of my room."

"Well, I'll be damned. What's got into you, Darlin'?"

"Just get the hell out. *Now*." She overhanded his jeans that slapped him in the face.

"Hey, Missy, that ain't what I call even half-ass polite. I ain't no two-bit john you can toss out 'fore his pecker's dried off."

"I said out, and I mean out! You stink, Hank baby. Now git!"

He swung both legs free and grabbed for her. "You goddamn little cock-teasin' chippie. Who you throwin' out, Honey?"

His cock was shriveled to the size of a green bean, and he smelled like the back end of a plow horse. She was careful to keep herself near the door and the open window as he bounced off the bed. Hank didn't look the least bit friendly anymore. In the better light, she noticed the tattoo on his bicep. It was a KW cab, its grille autographed "*Li'l Dickens*" with red flames shooting out both stacks.

"You little bitch." Even with wobbly legs and fuzz strung between his ears, he was menacing as he blocked out the sunlight. "Who the hell ya think you are, huh?"

"Get out right now, or I'll start to scream."

"What the hell is this?"

"I mean it, Hank. Get your goddamn clothes on and get outta here."

"You little bitch!" His raised hand curled into a fist inches from her face.

"Don't you dare touch me, you sonuvabitch! Get out!" She pressed against the door and turned the knob with her free hand. In her other hand, she gripped the Smith and Wesson revolver that made Hank backtrack faster than a fox at a hound convention.

"Hell's bells, you damn bitch! Don't go pointin' that thing where it might just go off an' hurt somebody."

"I said to get out."

"I'm goin'. Damn! I'm goin' – you just calm down an' put that pea shooter away."

He grabbed his shorts, hopped into his Levi's and set a few new records before he got his boots on. This was the lousiest damn lay he'd had in this crummy state since he'd been making over-the-road pit stops on I-84. Fastest ride since he'd rolled clean off that redheaded hooker in Tampa and broke two teeth hitting the concrete, and it was the first time a damn woman had pulled a gun on him *after* he'd tossed her on the mat.

"Jesus Kee-rist, Honey. What the hell's wrong with your head, huh? I ain't got nothin' on my mind but that damn door. Put that pop gun away for crissakes 'fore ya hurt somebody."

She leveled the barrel of her .32 at his navel. "My money. Don't forget my money, you bastard."

"Whatever you say, Honey." He dug out a twenty from his over-stuffed wallet and flipped it onto the bed. Then he rescued his hat

from the lampshade where he'd tossed it and headed for the door she jerked open. "Ya know what, Lady? You're one certifiable nut case."

"Just get out."

"Ya better watch where ya point that thing, Girlie. I didn't know better, I'd take that water pistol an' rack you up like a messa baby-back ribs an' save somebody the trouble."

She slammed the door inches from his backside and watched from the window until the lime-green and red-flamed Kenworth farted out of the parking lot and smoked its way onto the slow lane westbound. Old Smokey Hank was just another statistic now, and she knew he'd be forgotten by the time his semi rolled across the State line.

She fastened the chain lock on the door, drew the curtains closed and filled the tub.

She dribbled in the lilac bath beads she'd stashed in her purse, sank in the comforting water and slipped her hand beneath the bubbles. Trucks belched and honked outside on the oily tarmac. Plumbing pipes banged and gurgled while she pleased herself and transformed Hank into a sweet-smelling hunk who knew all the words to Neil Diamond's hits and rocked her in his arms all damn night long.

When the water cooled, she got out and dripped her way to the bed where she dressed, brushed her hair and painted on a fresh coat of Ruby Rouge lipstick. Then she checked out, walked next door to the cafe and ordered a cottage cheese fruit plate and a jumbo iced tea.

"Hi ya, Darlin'." A burly trucker sat in the booth across from hers and smiled.

Before she could decide whether it had been a mistake to give up the motel room, he began to chat up the wide-bottomed waitress.

She finished the last slippery peach slice and left a fifty-cent tip. Time to go home. It was Thursday which meant meatloaf and mashed potatoes with her parents. Before turning the ignition switch on her Dodge station wagon, she checked her makeup in the rearview mirror and then snapped open her purse. In her address book, she flipped to "H" and wrote in tiny, neat letters H-A-N-K. He was number thirty-seven and the third H in her inventory.

As she backed out of her parking space, she made a decision. She needed a P. P and M were the only letters she hadn't sampled besides Y and Z – X didn't count since she doubted she'd have the chance to pick up Xerxes or Xavier, not in this hick backwater. But she had a Q – Quentin from Eugene. That ought to count double.

A cab-over White semi honked at her as she pulled out onto the Interstate. She caught a glimpse of the driver before changing lanes. "Larry" was painted on the door in red lacquer. She already had two Larry's. Not worth her time.

She was still running down the list of possibilities to complete her alphabet soup when she took the Payette exit, drove up Cherry Avenue, pulled onto her driveway and saw his car.

"Damn," she muttered, setting the brake. Her husband Daryl was home early.

Two

Hank Bodie was still steamed as he horsed his rig off the weigh scales just west of the Interstate junction and geared up. In his side mirror, he caught a glimpse of the glittery sparks marking the outbound reflection of Payette, Idaho, a border berg astride the Snake River cutting a sandy swath between Ontario, Oregon, and the spud state. Used to be Conestoga wagon tracks peeled into the banks right by the bridge, reminders of the pioneers who for some unknown reason struggled across this harsh country and decided to call it quits right here in the heart of the Malheur. Didn't make much sense to Hank. He hailed from Coeur d'Alene, Idaho. Had real forests, leek-green lawns and an alpine lake. What a long-haul trucker didn't want to have to look at once he got off the road was a hunk of desert and dried up scrub with miles and miles of nothing between pee pots.

His CB crackled, and he reached for his mike. "This here's Li'l Dickens comin' back at ya." That damn bitch back at the Lullaby Motel outside of Boise still stuck in his craw. Made him feel like some kinda gigolo – whatever the hell that was. Hank wasn't quite sure, but he figured it was one way for a woman to cut a man's nuts off and throw him back like sucker bait. Didn't sit well with Hank. Good thing it was his old roadrunner buddy Bobby Fudd on the CB.

"Hey, ya old fart," Bobby chuckled. "How come you're just now pullin' outta Payette? I musta gained a hour on ya, Buddy."

Hank was shifting. "I stopped at the Lullaby this mornin'. Had me some fairly good fries an' a piece a peach pie tasted like damn packin' boxes."

"That ain't all ya et, Buddy. I seen ya with a pretty nice lookin' piece a somethin' juicy when I pulled out. How ya make out?"

Hank flapped his pudgy lips. Sounded like Trigger as more than one woman had reminded him. "Damndest thing, Bobby. That gal was crazy. Pulled a gun on me for crissakes. Wanted to blow my balls off."

"Kee-rist! What the hell'd ya do?"

"Not a goddam thing she didn't ask for. She just like went crazy once we done it. Didn't even gimme a chance to pull out – just jumps up an' pulls a gun then tries to shoot my ass off."

“Crazy goddam cunt. What’d ya do, Hank? Call the cops or what?”

“Cops? You nuts? She woulda shot my balls off. I got the fuck outta there. Held me up, too.”

“Bitch.”

“Cleaned out my wallet. Oughtta go back an’ wring her goddam neck for her.”

The radio crackled as Hank’s dash fan started up.

“Say, there, Li’l Dickens,” Bobby hollered as the connection began to fade, “what say we go back an’ teach that little gal a lesson she won’t soon forget?”

Hank considered it. He would like to see that crazy witch with her ass hanging out and a man-sized fist in her face. Serve her right. Probably a shill for some damn pimp working the truck stops, preying on honest, hard-working truckers like himself. Causing nothing but trouble. Ought to put a stop to it. Sooner rather than later.

“Well, Hank? You listenin’?”

“I’m thinkin’. I don’t want no trouble.”

“Hey, let’s figger this here thing out. I’m only a half hour from the river. How’s about we palaver? Pull in at Ontario. I’m hungry as a junkyard dog anyhow.”

“You got it, Big Brother. Keep the hammer down. You seen any Smokies?”

“Naw. Clear sailin’, Li’l Dickens. Catch ya five by five.”

Hank switched off the radio. No sense in listening to the usual road chatter today. He was in no mood to be razzed by his fellow rig riders about some crazy female ripping him off. Treated him like a dog. Spit in his face. Tried to shoot his balls off. Hell, he decided as he thought more about it, he was damn lucky to get outta there in one piece. She probably had some nigger pimp with a big-ass shiv hid in the closet. Snapping pictures of Hank’s hairy ass while he was drilling her – he’d swear to it on the good book, by gawd.

Christ almighty, he cursed as he aimed a spit out the side vent. There might be pictures of him being developed right now. Their game was pretty slick alright. The bitch and her nigger sold the pictures most likely. And Hank would have to buy ’em back since his wife Dolly had already given him his last second chance a few

months ago. That was after she found those red lace panties in the sleeper.

It was always this way for a working man as far as Hank Bodie could see. Busted his balls every day, year after year to keep Dolly and his kids living the good life. She had a new Pontiac TransAm, got her hair done up at the beauty parlor once a week and went to Reno to play the slots every New Year's. All three kids had new sneakers, new bikes – whatever the hell their mom said they needed, Hank got the dough for it. And the thing was, even though he wasn't perfect, screwed around on the road like every other red-blooded American, he loved Dolly, and he sure as hell loved those kids. One, the oldest boy Frankie, looked just like his dad. He could throw a fast ball that made the coaches' jaws drop. That boy was something alright. There wasn't anything old Hank Bodie wouldn't do to keep his family together.

And now this Marsha bitch was gonna try to tear it all down. Shame him in front of his wife and kids and probably even shock the pastor although the whole congregation at the Hillside Baptist Church knew damn well that Reverend Tinkle had been caught red-peckered with that widow from Snohomish. Sorta put the holy padre in a separate category – a reformed sinner begging to be saved from the temptations of the flesh just like his lowly flock. Tinkle was doing her doggie-style behind the second pew. With all the commotion going on, the reverend shouting Hallelujah! and the widow chanting Amens!, most folks thought it was just a healthy prayer meeting. That is until little Teddy Smits peeked around the choir rail and got an eyeful. Pastor Tinkle told the kid the widow'd lost her car keys, and he was looking for 'em. Sounded reasonable to a five-year old, so he tried to stick a finger in to see what he could come up with, and that's when his mother showed up and damn near drop-kicked the reverend halfway to Christmas.

By the time Hank spied Bobby Fudd's rig steaming in the sunshine as he pulled into the lot, it was close enough to supertime for a steak and Texas fries.

Bobby and Hank sat in a back booth with their doughy guts spilling over the tabletop. They wore plaid shirts with sweat moons under the arms, hats stained with axle grease and shit-kicker boots.

Two plates of chicken-fried steaks drenched in country gravy, thick-cut fries as big as fir logs and chocolate pudding dishes were scraped clean by the time they had come up with a plan.

“You think the nigger was in the damn closet?” Bobby asked, wiping a smear of whipped cream off his mustache. His sideburns were speckled with woolly fuzz balls, and a crooked knife scar contorted his face in a perpetual leer. Caused him more than one black eye from some tavern Romeo who figured Bobby was making a move on his woman. Thing was, Bobby explained, couldn’t nobody tell when he was or when he wasn’t sniffing up some skirt.

“Musta been,” Hank answered with a burp. “The whole thing was a setup from the get-go. I tried to help the lady out, don’tcha know. Gave her twenty bucks to catch the bus for home cuz I figured she was down on her luck. Damn bitch tries to shoot my balls off. I took off ’fore they could pull their scam, see.”

“Uh huh. If ya hadn’t run off when ya had the chance there, the damn nigger woulda popped outta the closet then held ya up for all ya got.”

“Hell, Bobby, I just got the damn pink slip on the KW.” He had made his last payment. Three years and thirteen months’ work of ball-busting labor to make the lime-green, Kenworth tractor his own. And he had almost lost it right there at the Lullaby.

“Jesus, ya come close, Buddy.”

“Yeah, but now, they’re gonna go for the resta the scam.”

Bobby blinked hard but it didn’t help clear the cobwebs. Fact was, he was stupid. Nothing to account for it – he had gone to a good school, did his homework when his stepdad beat the shit out of his hide and tried to keep up. Didn’t help. Bobby Fudd got a scupper full of his daddy’s genes dipped from the shallow end of the smart pool. The plodder was out of his depth in a pothole puddle. Couldn’t count past ten with his boots on. Little Bobby never had a chance. He was stuck on the bottom rung of the IQ ladder. But he could drive any kind of big rig there was on the road. Fair mechanic, too. Couldn’t spell carburetor. Hell, he couldn’t even pronounce it – “Car-breather” he called it – but he sure as hell knew how to take it apart busted and put it back together again good as new.

“So what do ya think they’ll do now since ya run off, Hank? Ya think they’ll call Dolly or kidnap one a the kids?”

“I figger they got pitchures, Bobby.”

“Guess they got ya by the balls alright, Buddy.”

Hank stared back with his good eye. The other one had a permanent squint from a left jab he'd failed to duck as a corporal in the Army. Put him in the stockade and ended what had been a feeble attempt to adjust to military life. Hank had got off the first punch that smashed the nose of a Major Smedlovsky who just happened to be drilling Hank's girlfriend at the time. Didn't make any difference she was married to the prick. That was a piss poor excuse as far as Hank was concerned.

“Dolly finds out ya been messin' around again, hell, she'll take them kids a yours an' probly marry up with some peckerwood sellin' insurance. This ain't good, Hank. Real bad-ass bad. Damn.” This much Bobby could imagine for himself: old Hank in action on the Lullaby mattress. Chances were damn good that Dolly would do more than burn up Hank's clothes in the backyard if she got a gander at those snapshots – she'd friggin' kill his ass. “Figgers, don't it? The nigger was snappin' shots like crazy in the closet while you an' her was screwin'.”

“I figger. And since I run off, now they gotta call up an' blackmail me for 'em.”

Bobby surprised himself and Hank with his astute rebuttal. “But how're they gonna know your phone number, Hank?”

“Cuz I had my wallet right there on the dresser by the closet while I was diddlin' her.”

“Oh, yeah.”

“And the nigger had plenty a time to sneak out an' have a long damn look. Hell, he coulda gone through my whole shootin' match while I was gettin' my rocks off. I musta drilled that cunt a half dozen times 'fore she bucked me off.”

No way would Hank Bodie ever believe his performance from penetration to pull out was only slightly longer than a finger snap. Seemed likely, as he told it, that the African brigand would have had plenty of time to go through his wallet, make copies of all his keys, sew a missing button on his shirt and develop the damn film if he'd felt like it while ol' Hank was bee-bopping on the sack with that nutty broad.

“Goddam, Hank,” Bobby commiserated, sniffing into his bandanna. He had a runny coke nose. That and the bennies he popped with his morning java kept him eating up the road and making twice as much money as the jerk who sold him the rig. “Ya think Dolly’ll find out?”

“Damn likely if they call my house. We oughtta go back an’ find that bitch to make damn sure she don’t try no shakedown, Bobby. Could be anybody. Me, you. Hell, ain’t nobody runnin’ the road safe with that kinda crap goin’ on.”

“Right. Nobody. We oughtta do somethin’, Hank.”

“That’s what I say.”

“I’m with ya, Buddy. All the fuckin’ way.”

They locked thumbs.

Hank sopped up his gravy with the last biscuit. “Damn shame I didn’t figger out her business. Shoulda cleaned her clock right there – after I screwed the bitch.”

“Yeah. Say, what d’ya think Dolly would do this time if she found out?”

“Goddam, Bobby! Don’t talk about Dolly findin’ out. We’re talkin’ family here – what’s most sacred to a man, a full-blooded American who fought for his country.” Maybe not technically correct, but he had the spirit of it right anyway. Especially seeing as how the Major he smacked was a goddam Polack.

“Okay. Then what say we go back to the Lullaby an’ find the bitch?”

“And her nigger pimp.”

“Yeah.” Bobby pondered for a moment as he sucked on a toothpick. “Say, Hank, what makes ya so sure she had a nigger in the closet? You ever see any niggers at the Big T?”

“Not exactly. But I figger it was probly a nigger. She’s one a them California hookers. I can tell. Her hole coulda swallowed up the Gran’ Canyon.”

“Izzat right?”

“And these free-lovin’, free-thinkin’ hippie assholes always got niggers.”

“Uh huh. I seen that myself on TV. Rollin’ bare assed in the mud, tits hangin’ out, snortin’ grass. Ever smart-ass, commie-lovin’, un-American hippie witch’s got some nigger for backup.”

“Probly some pimp from LA or Frisco got her out workin’ this scam on us truckers where they figger there’s nobody but redneck assholes too dumb to tumble.”

“More’n likely, ain’t it?” He couldn’t see much of the nefarious plot his buddy was describing except the perplexing picture of a band of Negroes with Afros, tie-dyed threads, felt fedoras and love beads swarming all over the Big T truck stop. “We chase this nigger off, and the rest of them spear-chuckers’ll stay the hell outta here.”

“That’s exactly what I figger, too, Bobby.”

“So let’s roll. I’m runnin’ half-empty up to Vancouver. Got a load a cowhides. I can spare a day.”

“We’ll take my rig, head back to Boise an’ find out what kinda game that little cunt wants to play.”

“Let’s go, Buddy. I’m ready.” Bobby pushed the table back and stood up. A full-blown belly lapped over his belt buckle. When he walked, he swung his thick-muscled arms away from his torso like the Mummy, and his toes turned in – his everyday impression of John Wayne with a bad case of piles and boots two sizes too small.

Hank stayed behind to pay the bill and then climbed up into the KW cab and jammed his cap over a greasy shock of curly hair. The Diesel purred, and the lights winked on as he slammed the door.

“Here we go, Buddy. Let’s get the bitch.”

“Let’s do it,” Bobby seconded, reaching for the matchbox in his pocket and a striped Hornet to fire up his brain for a little action. He swallowed the pill with his spit and cracked open a beer from Hank’s cooler. “Ya know, Hank, that puddin’ wasn’t half bad.”

“Think I’ll ask for more whip cream next time. I think they tried to short me on the toppin’. What ya think, Bobby?”

“Hmmm . . .” He took a swig of beer and let the foam bubble on his lips. “Possible. Hell, more’n possible. Ya didn’t even get a goddam cherry.”

Now Hank had another grievance to chew on as he pulled the rig out onto the freeway and headed east. First a damn chippy tries to bust his family up and rob him blind, and then the goddam restaurant gyps him on his dessert. There was damn little justice in this world for an honest working man. Damn little.



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