

A Train Called ‘The City of New Orleans’

The Illinois Central *‘City of New Orleans’* runs regular schedules between Chicago and New Orleans. The 926 miles takes almost twenty hours, and offers deluxe accommodations for all class of travelers. Operating two trains, the southbound *City of New Orleans* departs Chicago at 5 PM on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. The northbound departs New Orleans at 5:30 PM on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturdays. The trains make numerous stops, some of which are unscheduled and required by reservations made by travelers at the numerous small stations along the route. The Chicago/New Orleans scheduled stops are Gary, Indiana, Cape Girardeau, Missouri, Memphis, Tennessee and numerous stops in Mississippi – including Batesville, Grenada, Winona, Canton and Jackson. After crossing Lake Ponchartrain, the southbound passengers arrive at the New Orleans terminal at 1:00 PM Central Time – completing their twenty-hour journey.



Our client, *‘Black Diamond Insurance’*, was prepared to forfeit on a bond policy held by Jarrett Savings and Loan. Their semi-annual audit had uncovered over \$500,000 in missing funds, and they had no concrete information on who the embezzler might be. Attention focused on a Mr. Temple Truett, an employee who had the access and ability to steal the money, but they had no proof. Compounding the problem, a check of Mr. Truett’s personal affairs found no appearance of the funds or any evidence of wrongdoing. They hit a wall, and that’s when *‘Black Diamond Insurance’* came to *‘Drake Detective Agency’* for assistance.

My associate, Joe Richardson, had been working the case for several weeks and was running into that same wall. Joe was also getting nowhere, until he luckily observed Mr. Truett during one of his weaker moments!

Mr. Temple Truett seemed to be a happily married man, and had two grown children. Those children had families of their own. His wife, Harriet, didn’t work and, on the surface,

they led a very simple and normal life from their home in Germantown. However, things were not as they appeared. Mr. Temple Truett had another life, one that neither his family nor Jarrett Savings was aware of.

Joe's surveillance had followed Mr. Temple Truett to numerous Memphis nightclubs, one of which was my favorite, the *'Starlight Lounge'*. His rendezvous were always with a very attractive lady, Sandy Scarlet Rogers. Scarlet had some previous minor troubles with the law, but never anything serious. But, finally it seemed she had found a 'sugar daddy' and had set her sights on finally landing the 'big fish'.

Now, all this was good news, but where was the money? If Mr. Temple Truett had the money, it was well hidden. Also, if he were ever going to make use of the money, it certainly wasn't going to happen in Memphis and probably not with his wife, Harriet.

Joe is the best; his surveillance was relentless. It paid off.

On Wednesday of last week, Mr. Temple Truett used his lunch hour to visit an 'out of the way' travel agency on Front Street. There, he purchased two train tickets – one for a Mr. Tommy Brown, travel from Memphis to New Orleans. The second for a Mrs. Sandy Brown, travel from Jackson, Mississippi to New Orleans. These were booked on the *'City of New Orleans'* for travel on Tuesday - tomorrow. He also purchased two airline tickets for Mr. and Mrs. Brown from New Orleans to South America. We had him, maybe. We just needed to find a way to catch him with the money!

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*M*y office address is officially listed as 149 Union Avenue – L6, which means I occupy office 6, located just off the lobby of The Peabody Hotel – Memphis, Tennessee. I actually would consider my address to be 3rd Avenue – not Union, but the address has its perks.

The location itself is also handy. All my phone calls come through the hotel operator, which is also my answering service. I eat lunch and breakfast in the employee dining room at a great price. I have a beautiful lobby to greet potential clients - and please don't forget the duck show, it happens twice a day. Aside from the perverts who hang out in the lobby restrooms, I can't find a lot of fault with my office arrangements.



Besides, this is 1962 and people are accustomed to the modern ways of doing business. Appearance is everything, or at least a close second to whatever is first. The new real estate buzz is 'location, location, location' – I think I have one of the best.

The hotel directory and telephone yellow pages show L6 occupied by the *'Drake Detective Agency'*. That can be confusing, because the name on my office door reads:

Carson Reno – Private and Confidential Investigations

I am Carson Reno and always have been. There has never been a Drake working from this office, or any other in Memphis, that I am aware of. However, when I opened the agency I just could not find any rhyme or rhythm in ‘The Reno Detective Agency’. Besides, everybody who has watched Perry Mason knows Paul Drake, and who knows, people may think this is a branch office or something! A little free publicity and promotion never hurt any business, just as long as they call or show-up with money.

A large number of my clients consist of damaged spouses looking for dirt and evidence on the unfaithful partner. It is possible that infidelity has made me what I am today – not a rich man, but I can pay my bills. Occasionally, I get some insurance investigation work – searching for someone who has successfully snookered the insurance company for their own goodwill, or some poor schmuck who filed false claims and skipped. But, mostly I deal with the underbelly of our society – where you find some very bad people and never make friends with anyone.

When I’m not specifically working on a case, I try to spend as much time as possible in or near the office. Another advantage of the Peabody is having access to restaurants, bars, shops and the downtown activity. So, staying close is never a problem.

Afternoons and early evenings will usually find me at the ‘*Starlight Lounge*’ – just off Winchester. Not only is it a good place to ‘hang-out’, it’s a great place to look for clients or, in fact, look for those my clients have hired me to find! The ‘*Starlight*’ has live entertainment starting at noon daily. Yes, I said noon. Everyday it is loaded with housewives who use the early part of the afternoon and evening to visit The ‘*Starlight*’ for some drink and dance before the husband comes home from work. They cook dinner early, put it in the oven and dance on over to the ‘*Starlight*’ for an afternoon of wine and martinis. I have a friend who calls the place “Club Menopause” – I think that is an appropriate name.



Of course with the ladies come the men, generally just in search of some companionship, but sometimes in search for much more. Regardless, these are my clients, or potential clients, and I see no harm in getting to know as many of them as possible.

Rita is the head hostess at the ‘*Starlight*’ and works some unbelievable hours. In fact, I don’t remember a time when she wasn’t the first to greet me – regardless of the time. She was once crowned Miss Memphis and, as I understand, had a brief acting career. This lady hasn’t lost a thing with age; she still has those terrific looks and manner that won her so many awards and titles. No question, she is one knockout and a classy lady who knows her stuff and knows her customers. Rita always makes sure I get an opportunity to ‘meet and greet’ those who are in ‘distress’ and might need my services. She’s so good at it that I

should put her on the payroll – assuming I had a payroll! However, I do make sure she gets tipped properly – whenever I get the opportunity.

My other hangout is home, or close to it. Home is a 12th floor, one-bedroom apartment at the 750 Adams complex on Manassas. A great place to call home - they have a small grocery/deli on the ground floor and a little bar in the basement called *'The Down Under'*. Regardless of your condition, it is always just a short elevator ride home, and sometimes that makes good sense. Every weekend they offer live entertainment to a usually packed house, and being small, space is always limited. But my friend, 'Andy' the bartender, can always seem to find me room.

DOWN UNDER BAR

Today is Monday, and Liz had already informed me that she had no work scheduled and would be in Memphis all week. She also informed me that I needed to plan on 'being around' and offering entertainment during her week of leisure! My current lady friend is an airline stewardess named Elizabeth Teague. She flies for Chicago Southern/Delta Airlines, and maintains an apartment in both Memphis and Humboldt. We met during one of my recent adventures involving a *'Murder in Humboldt'*, and Liz is definitely one classy lady. Frankly, Liz is a little 'too classy' for my 'down to earth' and 'hardheaded' ways, but her looks overcame any handicap I could possibly think of. Liz is taller than I am, and she actually accents that by always wearing heels - but I didn't care. Her long blonde hair, hourglass figure and a tan you could almost smell, make Liz a strikingly beautiful woman. To hell with the height!

I wasn't sure how this case with *'Black Diamond Insurance'* would interfere with Liz's plans, but I was confident that she probably wouldn't be pleased with the most recent developments. As usual, I was wrong.

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Mason 'Booker-T' Brown is the headman around the Peabody, and nobody questions that. The labor union just describes him as 'Head Porter' – but Mason takes care of everything. In addition to being totally responsible for the ducks, he makes and coordinates all work schedules for the doormen, elevator operators, porters and parking garage workers. If you aren't a maid or a cook, you best look to Mason for instructions – he is the man.

As always, Mason was wearing his 'Peabody' uniform of gray coat, gray slacks with red leg stripes, white shirt, black tie and a polished gold nametag – reading MASON BROWN–PEABODY HOTEL.

Mason was cleaning around the duck fountain when I entered the lobby; I stopped to chat.

"Mason?" I asked looking around. "Where are the ducks?"

I normally paid little attention to this well-known attraction in the Peabody Hotel lobby, but for some reason their absence today had grabbed my attention.

“Well sur, Mr. Reno,” Mason responded in his southern colored dialect. “All them ducks has gone to see the doctor today.”

“Doctor? What, are they sick?” I was surprised.

“I sure hope not, Mr. Reno. They jest getting their monthly examination by the veterinarian. I can’t believe you noticed they weren’t here,” Mason laughed.

“I can’t believe I noticed either, but I also didn’t know they got a monthly physical! Does the veterinarian come over every month?” Now I was curious.

“Yes sur, he sure does. We has to make sure them ducks are healthy, but we also has to make sure they not carrying some kind of disease that might affect our hotel guests.”

“Damn,” I exclaimed. “Maybe we should have him examine some of the other creatures that hang out in this lobby! I’m sure they are much sicker than those ducks!”

“Ha,” Mason laughed. “You shore got a good point there, Mr. Reno! I’ll talk to the veterinarian when he finishes with my ducks.”

“Let me know what he says,” I said laughing as I walked toward Marcie’s desk.

Marcie was on the phone and held up one finger, letting me know that she would be available in a minute and that she needed to speak to me.

“Carson,” Marcie said quickly as she hung up her phone. “Bert Sappington is in Joe’s office and they both need to see you immediately.”

“Yeah, Joe has already called me this morning. I guess this might get interesting,” I said to no one.

“Well, I’m not sure what it is, but they sure seem excited about something,” Marcie offered.

“Marcie, I need you to call Liz Teague and tell her that I’m in a meeting and won’t be available for several hours.”

“It’s too late,” Marcie said shaking her head.

“Too late? What do you mean too late?”

“She’s already called this morning and left a message. You want it now?” Marcie asked offering a sarcastic smile.

“Oh shit,” I frowned. “Okay, what was the message?”

“She said to tell you to meet her for lunch at the *‘Rendezvous’* at noon. That’s exactly 45 minutes from now.”

“Great. That’s just great!” I huffed as I headed to Joe’s office.

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Bert Sappington represented *‘Black Diamond Insurance’*, and I had successfully handled several cases for them. They paid a 10% recovery fee plus all expenses, whether a recovery was made or not. It was good work when I could get it.

Bert and I exchanged greetings, and I sat down on Joe’s couch. They wasted no time, and quickly brought me up to date with the latest on Mr. Temple Truett and the events of the last few days.

“So what do you think?” I asked them both.

“I think he’s running,” Bert answered. “Since we have been unable to find any evidence or trail of the money, then it makes sense that he has an accomplice to help and to hide the money. Based upon Joe’s investigation, I believe Sandy Scarlet Rogers is that accomplice, and I believe if he ever gets on that plane to South America, we’ll never see them or the money again.”

“But, why the funny games with the train tickets? I don’t get it.” I asked them both.

“He’s being cautious,” Joe answered. “It’ll be the early morning hours when he boards the train here in Memphis, and that makes it easy for him to spot a tail. I believe Sandy Rogers has the money and has already left town headed to Jackson, Mississippi. If Truett spots a tail or smells a rat, he’ll somehow signal her and she’ll never board the train in Jackson. If that happens, we’re right back where we started.”

“Why not just pick up this Sandy Rogers?” I asked them both.

“What if we’re wrong?” Bert answered. “In that case, we would still have nothing. But, I’ll bet my pet Labrador that if she boards that train in Jackson, she will have the money with her. Does that make sense?”

“Yes, it does,” I nodded. “And, I bet you two guys have already formulated a plan - right?”

“We’ve got a dandy!” Bert exclaimed. “Tell him about it, Joe.”

“Boss, the chances are good that Temple Truett would recognize me if I were on that train. I’ve been tailing him for two weeks and he’s had plenty of chances to get a good look at me. However, he has no idea who you are; you should be able to watch him without giving him or Sandy Rogers’s concern. But to be safe, we can’t risk your boarding the train in an early morning hour here in Memphis. So, our plan is to take my father’s plane and fly you to Chicago to board the ‘*City of New Orleans*’ this afternoon. That way, you’ll already be on the train when he gets on it early Tuesday morning. We know he’s suspicious and cautious, but he would never figure this one! Then, Bert and I will fly directly from Chicago to New Orleans and meet the train when it arrives Tuesday afternoon. If it all goes according to plan, you will have retrieved the money, and Bert can take them both into custody when they get off the train. What do you think?”

“What!” Was all I could think of to say!

“We’ll discuss on the way to the airport,” Bert said hurriedly. “We’ve already got your ticket, Joe has his father’s plane at the airport and it’s gassed and ready to go. But, if you’re going to make that train, we need to be moving.”

“Oh shit,” I said for the second time this morning. “Okay, pick me up in the alley in front of the ‘*Rendezvous*’. And before you do, have Marcie get another train ticket for Liz. Either she’ll kill me or be coming with me; I’ll know which one in the next five minutes!”

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I survived the initial conversation, but I’m not sure if it was the shock of what I said or the fact that I made her leave her lunch on the table – untouched! Liz talked non-stop during our short drive between the ‘*Rendezvous*’ and the airport – most of it unrecognizable. However, I did hear the same two words repeated over and over again – MAKE-UP and CLOTHES. Meaning, she had neither and was simply not prepared to travel – PERIOD. Finally, when our plane was somewhere over southern Illinois, she settled down and agreed to listen to the story and plan.

“Carson, now let me get this straight,” she said in a very serious voice. “You and I are flying from Memphis to Chicago to get on a train and travel back to Memphis?”

“Right, but we’re not stopping in Memphis. We’ll be going on to New Orleans.” I was trying to smile.

“And while we’re on the train, you’re going to be working and trying to catch a bad guy?”

“Right again, and I need your help. We’re traveling ‘undercover’ and don’t want the bad guy to know who we are.” I was trying.

Liz sat in silence for several minutes and then looked at me and nodded. “Okay, but only on my conditions. Do you want to hear what they are?”

Bert Sappington interrupted, “Liz, whatever you want, we’ll make it happen.”

“First, we travel first class and have a private sleeper compartment on the train,” she began. “Second, you give me time in Chicago to get some make-up and a change of clothes. Finally, in New Orleans, I want a night at the Monteleone Hotel and breakfast at Bennan’s. If you can’t handle those, then I’ll be riding this plane back to Memphis!”

“Consider it DONE, Miss Teague,” Bert laughed.

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We had an hour at Chicago’s Grand Central Station before time to board the train. I didn’t know it was possible to spend that much money in an hour; but I got some first hand experience. Clothes, make-up, luggage, purses, jewelry, and lots of soft silky things I didn’t recognize, were all purchased, bagged and entrusted to a ‘Red Cap’ for transfer to our train. Compartment 6 on Pullman Car D of the southbound ‘*City of New Orleans*’ was completely full of Liz’s new purchases when we finally pulled out of the station. It was Monday evening at 5:15 PM.



We had a wonderful evening, exploring the various amenities on the ‘*City of New Orleans*’ and sharing an overdue dinner in the dining car. Finishing our day at the bar, I promised to enjoy myself on this trip and extract some fun from this profession that usually didn’t offer those opportunities.

Back in Memphis I wasn’t aware of were the frantic, excited and urgent phone calls that Marcie was receiving from Henry Walker. Sheriff Leroy Epsee was being extremely nice in giving Henry the opportunities and latitude to try to locate me. Finally, in desperation, Leroy contacted my lawyer/partner Jack Logan. Jack wasn’t really my partner, but we did work together on numerous cases and were the best of friends. Unfortunately, Jack didn’t

know how to reach me either, but he did speak with Henry and promised to find me, and get involved as soon as possible.

However, this was nothing more than sticking a finger in the dike and Sheriff Leroy Epsee knew it. Leroy had a situation that neither Jack nor I were experienced with, and he didn't have a lot of time to make decisions. Decisions that could possibly split a community, and would certainly expose feelings that nobody wanted exposed. Leroy and I have been friends for years, and I have the highest respect for him and that friendship. I'm sure Leroy feels the same way about me. We were going to need all that respect and friendship in the coming days.

Having drinks in the bar, I never imagined that my fun would soon turn into something much more serious and much more dangerous.

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I awoke when the train stopped in Memphis for the routine crew change and loading of passengers – it was 12:30 AM. Without disturbing Liz, I peeked out the window in an effort to see the Memphis boarding passengers, but my view was blocked by another railcar on a sidetrack. If Temple Truett boarded the train, I was unable to see him. Guess I would find out at breakfast.



I was getting a close look at each passenger as we shared a late breakfast of scrambled eggs and toast in the dining car. Liz's words were falling on my deaf ears, and I was nodding at her words and adding an 'okay' or 'really' when it fit. Liz jumped like she had been shot when I tapped her leg with my foot; Temple Truett had just walked past our table and into the lounge and bar car.

"Is that him?" she leaned toward me and asked in a whisper.

I didn't answer and just nodded to affirm her question.

"He looks like a nerd!" Liz added as she sat back straight up.

“Probably, but we need to make contact with him if possible. We’ll buy him a drink or do something to make conversation. If things go according to plan, Sandy Rogers will board and join him when we make our stop in Jackson, Mississippi. That should happen about 10:00, so we’ve got about a half-hour. Are you ready?” I asked.

Liz’s eyes were as large as saucers and I needed to calm her down. “Okay, Liz. We’re going into the bar, have a Bloody Mary and be the happy couple. Now, again, are you ready?”

She didn’t speak, but just nodded. We both got up and quickly made our way into the lounge and bar car.

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With exception of the bartender and Temple Truett, the bar was empty. He was sitting at the bar and we took a table in the corner near the door. Temple briefly glanced at us as we walked in and then went back to his drink, which I suspected to be a Vodka/Tonic. He was acting very nervous; constantly glancing at his watch and then looking out the large window between sips of his drink. I casually walked up to the bar and signaled the bartender, who quickly took my order for two Bloody Mary’s.

“I love train travel, don’t you?” I said to Temple as I waited on our drinks.

He looked at me, then back at his watch before speaking. “I prefer flying, it’s much quicker,” he said while looking at no one.

“I know, but it’s so romantic. Are you traveling alone?” I asked.

He again looked at me, and then glanced over at Liz. “No...no not really. I’m meeting someone who will be boarding in Jackson. But it seems we’ll never get there!” He was frustrated.

“Well, this is fun and I DO hope we never get there,” I joked as I picked up my drinks and walked back over to our table.

“What did he say?” Liz whispered.

“He said you were HOT!” I answered quietly, and just before Liz put a large bruise on my shin with her newly purchased high heels.

“Ouch! That hurt!” I gritted my teeth and tried to pretend it didn’t happen.

We had just started on our drinks when the train began to slow for Jackson, Mississippi. I needed to see Sandy Rogers when she boarded and what kind of luggage she was carrying, so I excused myself and told Liz to stay put until I returned.



From the window in our compartment, I watched the woman I knew to be Sandy Scarlet Rogers approach the train with a short husky Red Cap pushing a cart behind her. She had short black hair covered by a weird hat and was wearing a short blue skirt with matching shoes, a white blouse and sunglasses. Sandy Rogers appeared to be very nervous as she talked to the Red Cap porter and I noticed she only had two pieces of luggage, a medium size footlocker and a standard suitcase. The Red Cap boarded the train with the luggage and placed them on an overhead shelf in the coach section of the adjoining passenger car; she complimented him with a healthy tip and then he left.

The stop lasted less than 15 minutes and we were quickly rolling again, on our route toward New Orleans. Sandy had briefly taken a seat under her baggage, but was up and headed to the lounge car as soon as the train started moving. I waited outside my compartment for the conductor to pass through collecting boarding passes from the newly arrived Jackson passengers. When he walked past, I asked him to step into the compartment, where I showed him my badge and explained the situation. It took a \$100 bill, but that convinced him to remove the luggage Sandy Rogers had boarded with and move it in the baggage car. I promised another \$100 when we arrived in New Orleans, and watched him move the bags before I made my way back to where I had left Liz and Temple Truett.

I had been away from Liz for too long, and I quickly realized that when I finally reentered the lounge car. She was standing at the bar talking to a very irritated Temple Truett, who was trying to ignore her and question the recently arrived Sandy Scarlet Rogers. As I approached this verbal wrestling match, I heard him say to Sandy, "Where is the goddamn footlocker?"

Before she could respond, I answered for her. "I have it. Could I buy you guys a drink?"

"What?" he yelled and stood up.

I put my hand on his shoulder and sat him back down.

"You have two choices, and only two. I represent *'Black Diamond Insurance'*, and I have confiscated that luggage. We'll open it later. Now, you can sit here and enjoy the train ride until the authorities greet you in New Orleans, or I can put you both in handcuffs and you can enjoy the ride that way, also until the authorities greet you in New Orleans." I was talking to both of them.

"You stupid bitch," he yelled at Sandy.

"Don't cuss me, asshole," Sandy yelled back. "This was your stupid plan, I told you we would never get away with it!"

Temple jumped up, and I ducked just as he threw his Vodka/Tonic at my face. Luckily he missed, but while I was getting out of the way, Temple pushed his way past Liz and ran out of the lounge car; headed toward the end of the train.

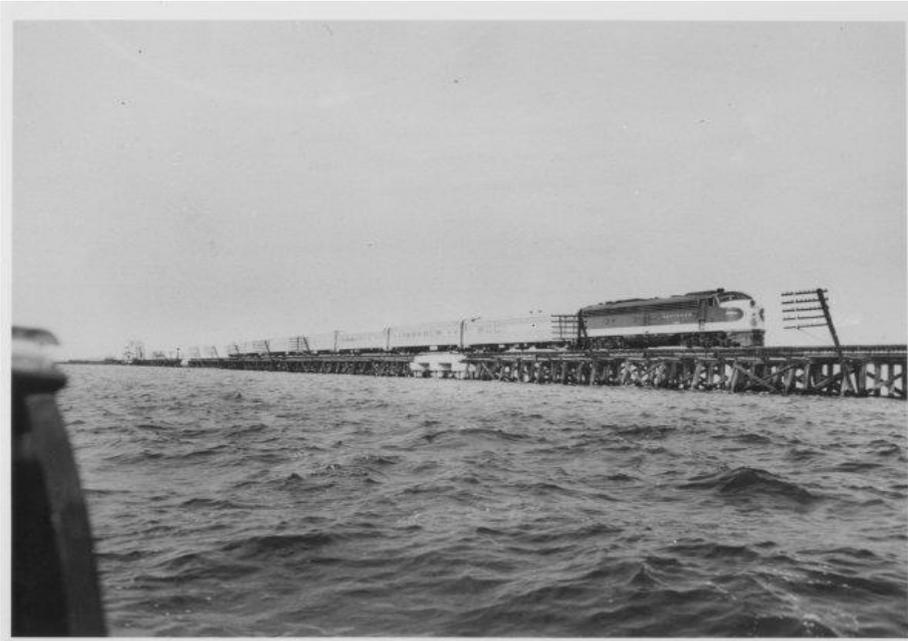
I ordered myself another Bloody Mary.

"Aren't you going to chase him?" Liz shouted. "He's getting away!"

"Why? Where's he going? This is a train; he can run but he certainly can't go anywhere. He might jump off, but that's his bad news. I've got the money, so I really don't care!" I said bluntly.

"Jeez!" Liz said as she took a seat on a barstool.

"Can I buy you a drink Mrs. Rogers?" I asked. She didn't answer!



We crossed Lake Ponchartrain and pulled into the New Orleans terminal on schedule. As promised, Joe and Bert were waiting and they eventually located Temple Truett hiding in a ladies' lavatory in one of the rear cars. Bert opened the footlocker and found just what he had expected – a lot of money! Then he arrested and placed handcuffs on both Temple Truett and Sandy Scarlet Rogers – their train trip was over and had come to a bad ending.

Joe, Liz and I took a taxi to the Monteleone and spent the rest of the day and evening enjoying the food, drink, lights and parties on Bourbon Street.

After breakfast at Brennan's, Joe flew us back to Memphis. If I had known what was waiting for me, I would probably have instructed him to fly in the other direction!

We landed at 10:00 AM and dropped Liz off at her apartment on the way to the Peabody and our office. Today was Wednesday, and Leroy had been trying to reach me since yesterday afternoon.



®

“Life is Cheap – Make Sure You Buy Enough”

Written by: Gerald Darnell
Performed by: Rob Steele
Special Guest voice: Dante Steele
Music: Kevin MacLeod (www.incompetech.com)
Special effects: Free SFX (freesfx.co.uk)