

At eleven that evening, one of Squid's neighbors from the Glen, who went by "KO," called to ask if I wanted to help him "deliver a car."

"In the middle of the night?"

"I got a job with KJ. He wants me to drive his limo to Denver."

"I can't go to Colorado. I've got school on Thursday."

"KJ said to put gas, food, hotel, and plane tickets home on his credit card."

"I can't run out the door on a moment's notice to take a thousand-mile drive."

"I got a bag of killer buds. I'll twist us a few numbers for the first leg. To Vegas."

"Vegas?" My eyes spun like slot machine reels coming up jokers on the center line. "How soon can you pick me up?" My stomach swirled at the thought of a spontaneous road trip.

Two hours later, we torqued up a reefer in the Cajon Pass. Orange carpet in the back cab brightened up the stretched-out wagon's dull wood panels. We flew past the Tower Casino at the state line, which advertised "Bar . . . Café . . . Slots . . . Gas," and a dirty sunrise welcomed us to windy Vegas. I figured I had forgotten something in my haste but didn't know what.

We parked downtown, ate a greasy breakfast, and threw coins in slots. I watched for security because I was six months shy of the legal age. The machines sucked in the thirty bucks I'd brought and KO's fifty, so we shot northeast on I-15 through barren Mesquite. In St. George, Utah, KO turned over command of the plush ride. From the shotgun position, he snored.

A tad north of Cedar City, almost halfway to Denver, I noticed an unwelcome sight in my rear view: scary-cherry bowel-moving cop-car lights.

"KO, a pig's pulling me over. Wake up." I shook his arm. "Take the wheel. I've got a warrant out." I smacked his leg. "KO, where's the shluue?" I slowed and pulled to the side of the road.

The state trooper strutted over. "You old enough to drive?"

My heart skipped like a roulette ball. "Yes, officer." I handed the black-haired dude in the uniform my driver's license. "Our boss paid us to deliver this limo to Denver."

"What's with your buddy?" The cop stuck his head in the window. "Hey, get up."

KO opened his droopy eyes and flicked his brown hair off his forehead. "What's the haps?"

"We need your registration."

My thoughts centered on the bag o' buds, which were probably punishable by death in execution-happy Utah.

KO opened the glove compartment. I expected the ganja to tumble out and administered last rites in my mind. KO passed over the registration and the cop took a hike. He returned with a speeding ticket. Great, another one—out of state—for my collection.

"Start your car and follow us to the station."

“Yes, sir, officer.” I turned to KO. “Toss the shluie out the window.” He wiped crust out of the corners of his eyes. “I’ll hide it.”

We parked in front of a one-story public building and went inside to pay the fine, fifty bucks. The problem was, we’d already donated our Mormon tithes to the patron city of lost wages. The PD wouldn’t take a credit card, so KO called KJ’s secretary, who agreed to wire the funds. While we waited, the authorities found a perfect place for us: jail.

Like a county-rock song about the pitfalls of the road, we sat in a cell in Beaver, Utah, a genuinely unfriendly sight to see. With plenty of time to process the predicament, I ruminated on the havoc I’d wreaked on my family: I crashed my dad’s Caddy before my license turned a week old, got arrested for pot in a car at sixteen, and received a ride in the back of a police cruiser because we’d made too much noise at Moxie’s apartment. I was popped because I tried to improve my seat at a Zeppelin concert, earned traffic tickets and a bench warrant for my failure to pay \$65.50, and flunked classes I could’ve passed in my sleep, if I’d deigned to attend them. Which brings us to the topper: incarceration in, of all places, Beaver, Utah.

My poor parents, I thought. They gave me everything and I repay them with grief. I had more worries: the local authorities confiscated our car keys. If they searched the vehicle and found the weed, we’d rot away in jail like the corpse of the dam-building rat-related rodent they had named this forsaken city after.

To his credit, KO kept his composure throughout the ordeal. Unlike my guilt-addled self, he saw the humor. Come on, Beaver, Utah? How could you not laugh? I’ll tell you how: think about what you’re going to say to your apoplectic parents. At one point, KO needed to use the bathroom, so he deadpanned through the bars of the cell, “Can I use my get-out-of-jail-free card?” That casual comment loosened my load.

By late afternoon, the money came in, papers got stamped, and we took off for the local diner. Before we ordered, a server came over and said to KO, “You need to button the top of your shirt or get out.” Welcome to the birthplace of Butch Cassidy. No wonder he left.

We traversed I-70 east through the mountains and I remembered what I'd forgotten. "Shit, I should call my parents." Somewhere before Grand Junction, by a country store miles from civilization, we found a phone booth. Dad answered and accepted the charges. In the background, I heard Mom explode. With the dexterity of a cowboy, he roped her in.

"What in the hell's happened to you? We thought you were dead."

"We left late at night. I didn't want to wake you up. Sorry."

"Don't bother to come back." For a bad connection, the ensuing silence came in loud and clear.

We arrived in Denver, checked into a motel, and flew home the next day. On the way to Stapleton International Airport, we found a seedy bar with strong Coors beer, the local pour. We pounded four each and got giddy on the stroll to the gate. I strapped on the seat belt, closed my eyes, and prayed the plane wouldn't go down. If I died, Mom would never forgive me.