

Dear Reader, Miss Nora has made song suggestions between certain chapters to enhance the mood of that particular section and to share her love of music. These songs can be easily accessed online, should you find yourself interested in listening. Either way, enjoy the story. KK

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Blues Month

I took a slug off a mini bottle of Jameson's I kept in my purse. We weren't supposed to drink or get high in the booth. But I wouldn't call it drinking. Strictly medicinal. For the nerves. I was fairly new to this radio gig. I fidgeted. I fussed. I noticed the phone line blinking. Damn. Only three minutes to show time. I picked it up.

"K-S-E-A."

"Is this Miss Nora?" a woman's timid voice with a Hispanic accent.

"Yes. How may I help you?"

"Am I on the radio?"

"No. I haven't started the show yet. I take on-air calls at one o'clock."

"I need help about my employer."

"Please call back at one. I can't talk right now."

"Okay."

Click.

I squirmed my ass in the chair searching for the sweet spot.

Five... four... three... two... one.

And got on the mic.

"Good evening insomniacs... this is Miss Nora here in the midnight hour. You're tuned to K-S-E-A for Music and Musings to keep the hellhounds away and the darkness at bay."

I pressed the play button and listened through the headset to a New Orleans blues piano riff. Okay five minutes. I pushed the mic from my face, stood up with a soft grunt and scurried down the hall to the kitchen. David Benton came out of the restroom and followed me into the kitchen. He had the global music show just before mine.

"Hey Nora."

I smelled skunky burnt coffee and saw a couple inches of black liquid left in the pot. Something.

David was about 5'9" and lanky. I was shorter by several inches and older by about 30 years. And not lanky. When he spoke, his auburn goatee pointed at me. I blinked a few times and refocused.

"I see you got dressed up for the job." David smiled and scanned me from head to toe.

"Sarcasm? At this hour? You have something against pajamas?" I poured the thick black liquid into a cracked ceramic mug that advertised J & K Development.

“I love it when a straight man notices a woman’s fashion... More importantly, is there any milk around here?” I opened the refrigerator. No luck. I returned my gaze to David. He had dark circles under his eyes.

“You look a little cashed-out, David.” I gave him a motherly smile.

“There’s some of the powder stuff.” He pointed to a brown glass jar.

“I was hoping to avoid that.”

“Have a good show.” David started to walk away and turned around. “Hey, almost forgot... would you come with me to the next Board of Supervisors meeting? They’re making the final decision on Mirabella.”

“When is it?”

“Tuesday. Six o'clock.”

My brain sifted through an imaginary personal calendar and didn't come up with much. “Sure.”

He nodded and left. I was alone. I looked at the clock. 12:04. Shit. I rushed back to the booth just in time and quickly cued down the music to background and got on the mic.

“And that was Champion Jack Dupree opening things up for us tonight. If that doesn’t get you off in a blues groove, then I’m afraid you’re a lost soul my friend... It's blues month and that's what you'll hear on this show for the rest of December. It's twelve o five in the a.m., the hour of truth... and maybe a few necessary lies... I take on-air calls at one... let me know what’s on your mind.”

I typed the song information into the website playlist. After forty minutes of music, I invited callers. And waited for the phone to ring.

And waited.

I began to read some local events from the newspaper. I hoped my sighs weren't audible.

The phone line lit up.

“KSEA, You’re on the air.”

“HEY... MISS NORA!” A loud male voice.

“Yep... That’s me.”

“PLAY SOME JIMI HENDRIX WHY DONCHA?! RED HOUSE!”

“I’ll see if I can find it. Maybe next show.” I hung up.

The phone lines were dark. I went back to the music.

“The next two songs are from the great Lowell Fulson, the classic ‘Reconsider Baby’ and an instrumental tune, ‘Low Society.’”

The music started up and I saw the red phone light blinking. I took off the headset and picked it up.

“KSEA.”

“This is Maria. You tell me to call back.”

“Right.”

“Am I on the radio?”

“Not right now. The music’s playing.”

It was best to screen the calls if I could. I’ve had to hang up quickly many times. There were some whacked out people thumping around between midnight and two and sometimes they liked to call and rant. I needed some kind of control.

“You had a problem with your employer. Are they not paying you?”

“No. They pay me good. They nice to me.”

“Then what?”

“La senora, she has troubles. I worry. She is in her bedroom many hours every day. She don’t come out. Even to see the children. What can I do?”

I knew how far I could go with callers. I didn’t want some agency breathing down my neck.

“First. You need to tell me if the children are in danger.”

“No. I take care. They okay.”

I noticed the song was almost over. “Hold on!” I threw the phone receiver down and cued up the next one and got back on with Maria.

“What would you like me to do about it?” I wasn’t sure what she wanted.

“I hope you can help... I stay awake to call you.”

“Maria, it sounds like she’s depressed. I don’t know the situation in the household but maybe you could talk to her husband or her friends about your concerns?”

“He is not home too much. She has no friends. I think I am her best friend. She has a sister far away. She call on the phone sometimes.”

“Okay. Talk to her sister or to her husband. Let me know if the situation gets worse. Get back to me. Okay?”

“Okay... But, Ms. Nora, there is something not right here.”

We hung up. Well, that was different. The majority of the callers were bored, high, drunk, lonely, or just plain crazy. I looked at the clock. 1:54 a.m. I’d be home in bed soon enough with Louis snoring beside me. I cued up the last song and got on the mic.

“I’m gonna close with Koko Taylor. This one goes out to Louis.”

I gathered my things and listened to Koko Taylor’s gutsy low-down voice throwing up words from the back of her throat.

“I’m a woman/Ain’t never had enough//I’m a ball of fire/Can make love to a crocodile//I’m a love maker//I’m an earth shaker//I’m a rushing wind/Can cut stone with a pin//hold back lightning with the palm of my hand/Shake hands with the devil/Make him crawl in the sand...”

(Note: Play Lowell Fulson *Low Society* from Hung Down Head album.)

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Another Day Another Finagle

“Looks like ‘Silent Voices’ hasn’t been silent lately.” Jim Grady’s words came chewing out of one side of his mouth. He sat in a tufted maroon leather chair, his pale blue eyes, like vultures circling, scanned the numbers on a spreadsheet in front of him.

Jim’s partner, Karl Fitzpatrick, sat uncomfortably across from him. Together they made up J & K Development, LLC. A Thomas Kinkade painting hung on the wall behind Karl.

They were discussing the Mirabella project. An ambitious proposal by J & K Development to use 14,000 acres of agricultural and open space land to basically create a small city. And an local environmental activist group called Silent Voices opposed the project.

“What is it now?” Karl asked. He was a large man with a weathered face. His skin was like animal hide. He was built for physical work.

“Have you been to the property lately?” Jim scowled.

“Not in the past few days... why?”

“They’ve covered our billboards with graffiti about what greedy pigs we are. About how we’re raping the environment.”

“I’ll ask Tina to call the sign people and have them take care of it,” Karl said. He stared stoically at Jim like a caged animal looks at its keeper.

“More expense. We don’t need that.” Jim sighed and ran his fingers through his thinning dirty blonde hair.

“I know. It probably won’t be that much. You know... To tell you the truth... I’m sick of the mention of Mirabella,” Karl said.

Jim returned his attention to the spreadsheets and spoke without looking up. “We gotta get this project through... I assumed it was a done deal!”

After some fly buzzing silence, Karl asked, “Is there anything I can do?”

Jim didn’t hear him. Lost in his head trying to finagle a way around the mess. When Karl rose from the chair to leave, Jim snapped out of his numbers trance and looked up.

“Wait. Just a minute... The Board of Supervisors meeting is Tuesday. I think it’d be a good idea if we were both there. Maybe make a brief comment.”

“Do you really think it’ll make a difference if I’m there or not?” Karl retorted.

“I think it’ll look better if we’re both there.”

“I’ll get back to you. I need to check with Patti.”

Jim Grady knew Karl wouldn’t be getting back to him. He’d be going to the meeting without his partner. Karl’s hand gripped the doorknob ready to bolt.

"Do that!"

Karl didn’t appreciate Jim’s tone. He shoved open the door and rushed out.

Jim bowed his head and began massaging his temples. Tina, their secretary, was in the doorway holding a bundle of papers.

“The latest report on the Sunset Hills project.” She offered a pile of papers to Jim.

“I don’t want that now! Keep it at your desk!” he barked.

She took the papers, tiptoed out and closed the door behind her.

~ 3 ~

Do I Have to Go?

I was in the office foraging through the pools of mail on the desk. I listened to Louis whistling off key in the shower. It was that old pop song, Sukiyaki. Go figure. I was looking for the holiday party invitation from Patti Fitzpatrick. Got it. I took it and maneuvered through poorly placed furniture into the living room and realized I was a feng shui failure.

Louis emerged wet with a towel around his waist. His long salt & pepper hair still damp was tied back in a ponytail. Water dripped down his torso like rain on an elderberry tree trunk.

We were getting ready to go to the Board of Supervisor's meeting. They were making the final decision on Mirabella. I had promised David I'd go.

I held up the party invitation. "Look... Patti even included the menu on this."

"Let me guess... Sautéed red-legged frog earlobes?"

"Puuh..." I gave him a half laugh. "It's a Victorian menu."

"Oh... right... the Victorians... They did so much for my people..."

Louis was a Hopi Native.

"Okay... here it is: Oysters Rockefeller, consommé with avocado cubes and a dash of sherry..."

Louis appeared to be listening.

I continued, "Roast goose with apple and apricot stuffing, brussel sprouts, mashed potatoes, plum pudding, and Wassail."

"What the hell is Wassail?"

"Basically, it's alcoholic punch."

He changed the subject. "Do I have to go to the meeting tonight?"

I thought for a minute.

"Okay. Here's the deal. The meeting tonight... or Patti's party on Friday. Your decision."

He stared off. I watched while his brain cells tried to figure how he could get out of both events.

"I'll go to the party on Friday."

I knew he was biding for time. You never know what can happen in a few days.

"Okay then..." I got up and went to the front door and put my sweater on. Louis followed me. He gave me a gratitude hug and kiss.

"See ya later."