

# Ball of Deception©

By JK Savoy

## *Inspired by my memoir, Night Bird*

*This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents either are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to any actual persons living or dead, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.*

Midway through my 10pm to 6am shift at The Castle Diner, I tried in vain to call my dad to ask if my Notice to Report had come in the mail at his place. Until I learned what was actually going on with that Vietnam War mess, I assumed that a hitch in green khakis might be a welcome break from being a night manager of a tiny 24 hour, 13 stool New Jersey greasy spoon. So, no news being good news, greeting the world in a food stained apron and a paper hat will remain as my uniform of the night, until otherwise informed.

The thud of the phone's receiver finding the cradle segued to the sound of Old Jake's stool creaking as he spun away from the pay-phone vestibule. My passing by him on my way to dump my nightly treasure of tips into the Seeburg jukebox led to him asking, "Joey can ya play B-9 fer an ol' veteran?" Jake had been a decorated war hero, battling the Germans from trench to trench throughout France during WWI. His reward was, as he reminded me night after night, "*A pair of French Fried lungs and a few medals Jake Junior lost, a month after I got home.*" Sadly, Jake Junior was to be lost to a sniper's bullet during the battle for Okinawa. During this year of our seemingly AWOL Lord, 1968, the losses continued, namely Jake's VA disability and pension checks. Nonetheless, his patriotic mission of late was to convince me and every post-pubescent male within earshot to sign up to kill strangers as we set foot on their beachheads,

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loaded with state of the art weaponry and misinformation from a government we had been raised to trust. As the survivor of yesteryear's draft boards sopped up every condiment The Castle Diner had to offer plus ketchup with his streusel cake, I answered, "One catch, Jake."

"What's that, Joey?"

"Join me in a cup of coffee? My treat."

"Yer twistin' me arm, Youngblood. But okay."

When the badly worn Andy Williams 1965 ballad, "Moon River," caught the needle, as usual, Jake began to sugar his coffee and the counter as if racing with the lyrics to the song's sweet spot. Finally, he gazed at a darkened window singing what he had waited for: "... *Dream maker, you heart breaker ... Wherever you're going ... I'm going your way ...*" Afterward, as usual, he gulped his coffee, and sighed along with his reflection.

Jake had gotten no checks for the past two months. From what he said, there was a glitch with his file at the Veteran's Administration: The glitch being, they lost his file. According to both the afternoon and day shift servers, Jake had become a fixture at The Castle Diner during those times as well. I had two concerns: I never saw him use the bathroom so much. On top of that, it seemed like he dressed the same every day. On the other hand, from his VFW hat to his 1918 G.I. issued combat boots, Jake always dressed the same every day. I filled his cup then clinked it with mine while saying in my terrible Italian accent, "*A-Salute!*"

Slowly, Jake's right arm rose from the counter. The edge of the index finger of his trembling hand found his forehead as he

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muttered, *“Ah, what the hell ...”* He finished his coffee and streusel, pushed the screen door open and sang, *“’Til the twelfth of never, Youngblood.”* To which I replied, *“And that’s a long, long time.”*

The glow of Mike’s Caddy’s headlights emerged from the smokey cloud caused by the town hooligan, Tony D’s twenty-foot patch of wasted rubber. After parking in his private spot behind the diner, the owner of The Castle Diner entered through the kitchen door saying, “Thank God we won’t have to put up with that Tony shithead’s noise much longer.”

“Why, Mike?”

“That lowlife’s gonna be firing up an M-16 instead of that hot rod ’59 Chevy sooner than you can say, ‘maybe fighting a war will make a man outta that over the hill spoiled brat!’” Pointing to the food prep table, he said, “Joey! Soon, we’re going to use this table for something radically new here, my boy!”

“New? Everyone comes here for fifteen cent burgers and your famous eggs in a skillet. With the same-old, same-old successful as it’s been, why do that?”

“Donuts are gonna be the next big thing! Joey my boy, The Castle Diner’s gonna be Jersey’s donut mecca! Easy as hell to make em’. Just heat up the oil; plop in the dough-rings, roll ‘em over, sugar ‘em up, or dip ‘em in anything chewy or gooey. We can add a dough stem to the donut ring for ‘easy dunkin’! Oil’s good for a coupla more days. Tons of profit in them greasy little devils. Gonna be bigger than The Castle’s hot apple pie or even

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our eggs in the skillet!” With his finger in my face, he added, “There’s a big future for a young man like you in donuts, Joey! Gotta think of the future. Speaking of the future, what’s with you and the Army?”

“I’m still waiting to be called or hopefully forgotten. Status quo on that.”

“Joey, if you do have to go in, there will always be the opportunity for you to grow at The Castle Diner when you get out.”

“At New Jersey’s donut making mecca, right Mike?”

“You betcha!”

Grateful for a future beyond my wildest dreams, I said, “Thanks, Mike.”

“Another thing, Joey, how are you holding up with your mom and all?”

“Like Dad said, “*Grief’s a day to day thing.*” Yeah ... I guess I’ll be okay.”

“A lot of people of her’s and my generation dealt with some tough stuff. What, with The War and The Great Depression.” After bringing the subject back to Mike, he plopped his butt on the food prep table and slid a stool to me as I poured my soul out about Mom’s hardscrabble life, leading to an early demise. As if we crossed the fifty minute mark of a therapist-hour, Mike looked at his watch, unseated himself from the prep table and said, “Joey, bad as all of that sounds, you have to see it all from a different point of view: Life does go on!”

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“Mike, I just lost my Mom. Grief sure as hell ain’t like an Etch A Sketch!”

“Son! There comes a time when people have to move on, downshift hard from the pain cycle then floor the sucker! Come out from the darkness and see things in the light of day! If you manage to hang on or live long enough, every bad break you get can become an opportunity! It’s a matter of how you choose to see it, what you do with it and some plain old luck. Luck! The mortar of life’s brickwork. If there’s anything we do in this world, it’s to allow any bit of luck that lands in our laps to become that amazing elixir of The Universe ... Opportunity!”

I thought, ‘It’s just another leadup for one of his commercials.’ Cutting to the chase I shouted, “Hell, yeah! Opportunity is the magic, Mike! So, the future’s gonna be donuts for those lucky enough to seize that opportunity, ay Mike?”

“Damn right, Joey! Donuts are the hole in one opportunity in our hands, and donuts are The Castle Diner’s future!”

A vision of Mike, me and a brass band floating down a cooking oil river resting in chocolate glazed inner tubes was shattered when he poked feverishly around in the large refrigerator. While I dwelled on his statement: “*See things in a better light. Every bad break you get can become an opportunity ... Come out from the darkness...*” he shut the fridge and shouted, “Found it!” then dropped a ten pound blob of chopped-chuck on to the prep table while bellowing, “Dammit! Lucky, I caught this in time. That bakery delivery idiot hid the meat behind a bag of kaiser rolls. Shit, it seems like it’s getting kinda spoiled, Joey.”

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“So, is time to chuck the good ol’ chuck?”

“Hell no, Joey! Good thing is, ground beef rots from the outside in. Gives us a chance to scrape it down and at least make a few bucks on it.”

After gagging from what could only be likened to a King Kong mega-fart, I said, “Whew! That there meat smells and looks pretty damn rotted, Mike. Aside from a quick burial, it’s hard to believe there’s anything that can be done with it.”

“Have faith, Joey! Believe it, conceive it and achieve it! Success is realized when we find that certain something that will change anything! This something is an easy one. When it comes to fringe-beef, I learned a trick or two at Shorty’s Burger-Baloo back in the day. That runt never threw anything out! Before you do what you usually do with meat, I need you to scrape away the muck then salt this one down. Salt always gets the stench out. Never use a flavor enhancer like MSG, ‘cause flavor enhancers go both ways ... Hey, New Jersey! Meatloaf’s The Castle’s lunch special for today!”

Mike grabbed two cans from a shelf as I shouted, “Cat food, Mike? You can’t be serious!”

“Hell no Joey! It’s for the cats.” He headed for the basement while saying, “Anyways, if the salt don’t quite do it with the meat, give it an extra few pinches of sweet basil and black pepper. Lots of onions and garlic too. I might be downstairs for quite a spell, kiddo.”

Not only did the meat stink, the ground up carcass stuck to my fingers as I began to remove any outer grayish and greenish matter, I wondered, ‘Maybe donuts won’t be the future Mike

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believes they'll be. Bullshit! He sure nailed it with eggs in the skillet and hot apple pie. Who am I to argue? Mike's a culinary genius. He sees the next big thing and comes out on top, while guys like me go along for the ride. Okay, making this basket case into a tasty, tangy meatloaf is a challenge,' and remembered what Mike once told me, *"Joey, challenge is a road paved with both opportunities and potholes. It's the bold who take the ride to success, failure or another chance!"*

'Damn right! Every journey on every road begins with a first step.' Looking at the sad state the lump of meat was in, I saw my challenge and said to its better parts, "Why should I limit my future to donuts? It reeks now, but stench is aroma without the benefit of rejuvenating ingredients. Here lies the opportunity to sculpt my culinary creation and add a page to my chef in training resume."

Like a mortician with a mutilated crash victim, I accepted the challenge to do what I usually did with marginal meat but in this case, with the added goal of its resurrection! Not only would I make a great tasting meatloaf out of beef beyond its use-by date, this critter's sacrifice will count for something. I grabbed a box of salt, minced a large onion and pushed a couple bags of stale bread and burger bun crumbs I'd been collecting through the grinder. Together with an array of garlic, herbs and spices, some fresh, I was ready to roll out my meatloaf masterpiece!

'Donuts may not have to be my future after all!' Adding more salt, I said to the ground up critter on the table, "Like my dad once told me, *'Three things people should know about diners: Rule One-Never order meatloaf. Rule Two-Never order*

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*a western omelet. Rule Three-Never send anything back'.*

When you send something back, your fate lies in the hands of a cook's ethics or sense of retribution. Western omelets may be eggs mixed with ham scraps and pepper slices left on customer's plates. Speaking to the spiced, salted and garnished form before me, I said aloud, "And you my aging, mixed up friend are my contribution to Rule One. Step right up world, I give you Tuesday's Lunch Special for a measly seventy five cents; including fries; a veggie and a slice or two of bread-n-butter!"

As I placed my oven ready work of art into four baking dishes, I heard the sound of a bumper hitting the pothole in the driveway followed by the noise of a familiar broken exhaust system. Suddenly, the rear door burst open and my love interest, who was on her way to her speaking gig at an off-shore hippie, pirate radio station, shouted, "Yuk! What's that fuckin' stench?"

"Aimee? Only workers are allowed back here. Mike will be coming upstairs as soon as he feeds the cats."

From beneath her flame-red afro she asked, "And those cats fled to the fresher air of a filthy litter box? Did something fuckin' die in here?"

"For your information, I'm making meatloaf!"

"From what, dog shit?"

"No! It's made from ground beef and other ... stuff."

"If it's supposed to be edible, why does it smell so fuckin' awful, Joey?"

Was it something about her question that caused me to recall *the look* she had that could burn a hole right through your head and land you in places of your mind that you never dared

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go on your own? Whatever it was, truth gushed from my lips as I confessed, “The meat was ... a little nasty ... just a little. I fixed it up with salt, herbs and spices. It’s okay now,” in an act of contrition, I tossed a piece of the raw concoction into my mouth and said, “You see, Aimee? It’s totally fine.”

With the silence of a coiling cobra, her sheer presence regurgitated the fleshy mass to my back teeth, then to the floor. As if she had floated above the prep table, she was in my face shouting, “Yeah, I see. I see what you’re doing as being the basic problem with this fucked up country! It’s like, even though the lies that the creeps in Washington shove down our throats stink to high heaven, Americans willingly swallow the shit. Just look at you, Joey: You’re shoving what you know to be an Establishment fraud down your own throat without question. Come on, you know right from wrong and you’re fuckin’ better than this!”

“Why are you here? What do you want from me?”

“Joey, I don’t want anything from you other than truthfulness. You promised me that, remember? I’m never wrong about people’s auras. When we met, I knew I could always trust you because you glowed with sincerity. Joey, whatever we say or do with one another, it’s gotta be about trust.” glancing at the meatloaf, her nose wrinkled, then she said, “But this shit? Joey, how could you?”

“How could I what?”

“Joey, how could you let some pig talk you into ripping off other people by doctoring up a rotting ball of deception and call it meatloaf? All you’re doing here is masking the truth at the

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expense of others. Going along with this criminal act is another example of how The Establishment gets us to sell out. We don't even see it coming, but little by little we do their bidding. Then they throw us a few pennies for our time. Next thing, we're poisoning one another's air, water and crops."

"Or meatloaf?"

"So, since the manager of the night shift finally sees the light of day, when does he finally take a stand and speak his beautiful mind? Joey, if there's to be an *us* in the future, it can't be founded on bullshit like this."

Before I could respond, the brake lights from Mike's Caddy flashed as he yielded to Darren the cop's Harley entering the driveway. I put thirty-five cents from my tip jar into the register for Aimee's pancakes and tea. Just as I cranked Alison Steele, the Night Bird up a bit, Aimee asked, "Did you ever check out that pirate radio station I turned you on to? The truth is out there for the listening."

"What station?"

"Joey, I gave you a card that said, 'Stay Tuned' with my Shore address, Keyport 117. Never mind," she reached into her pocket, took out another card with the same messages and said, "Here."

As the front door slapped shut behind Darren, he gave a glaring cop look at Aimee sitting at Jake's stool, placed his mirrored Ray Bans over his eyes, and asked, "Is that your VW Mini-Bus 'round back?"

"Why yes it is, Officer. Something wrong?"

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“You passed me back on Route 21. I couldn’t help but hear your muffler. Wasn’t loud enough to ticket you, but I should tell you to get it fixed.”

“Thanks, Officer.”

“Try to stay off the local streets. Some cops won’t warn you. They’ll just write you up.”

“Okay, thank you Officer. I’ll remember that.”

After signaling for his usual, Darren asked, “Say, didn’t some long haired, bearded guy come around here with that VW? It was a while back.”

“Yeah. He used to be my old man. The VW’s mine.”

“Oh, okay,” said Darren as he glanced at The Times on the counter, and then back at Aimee. Tapping his finger on the paper, he took a long look at her and said, “Wait a minute. Didn’t I see his picture and yours a while back in the paper?”

“Oh, that. Truth is, we were at an anti-war protest near Chicago and got hassled for trespassing. They escorted us down the block then let us go. You won’t hold that against me, will you? I’ve stayed out of trouble since then.”

“Where’s your friend now?”

“After the bust, he moved on to his own thing. I’m not sure where he’s at.”

“Try to stay out of trouble, young lady and fix the muffler.”

Aimee leaned her elbows on the counter resting her chin within her palms, gazing at her reflection in Darren’s mirrored Ray Bans. Darren asked, “Is there something wrong, Miss?”

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Aimee's head tilted slightly as she said, "Ya know, for a cop, you have a very peaceful aura. It's truly amazing! There's this nearly crystal like glow that emanates from your upper body, travels south and then, the whole vibe gets like ... kinda strange?"

"What in hell are you talking about?"

"Don't you know about auras? Although distinct, everybody has one."

Darren moved two stools closer to her, crossed his leg and said, "I've heard of them. What do you mean by, strange?"

"I think you know."

"Why would you say that?"

"After I said that your aura got strange as it traveled south, now correct me if I'm wrong, you seemed to block your gun from my sight with your hand. Now, you're holding my attention with your eyes while your crossed leg is blocking my view of your shootin' iron. So tell me. Am I wrong, Officer?"

"So, what color is the aura around my gun?"

"Good move, Officer. Answer one question with another. Allow me to answer yours with one of mine. How can I tell? I can't because you're blocking my view of the gun with your knee. For the record, if a loaded gun could have an aura, it would be red."

"Listen up young lady, I'm not going to forget about that muffler no matter what you try." With a half-smile, he winked at her then thumbed casually through *The Times* while Aimee continued to stare.

"What is it now?" He asked.

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“Something I wonder about. May I be blunt, Officer? I promise not to cuss.”

“Do you mean to tell me that you haven’t been blunt up until now?”

“Really, can I ask you a question without you going all cop on me? I mean, freedom of speech and all that stuff.”

“I suppose so. Speak freely and ask away.”

“Well, you seem like a really nice guy.”

“Uh-oh! That’s the opener that’s always followed by, but ... ”

“No Officer! Really, like I mean that. I’m not just saying it. Straight out, I mean, okay, obviously you’re a Black dude and all ... I guess what I’m getting to is ... I mean, does it ever bother you that yours and my ancestors were enslaved by the ancestors of the people who gave you that gun? I mean, it’s their orders that sanction your power over life and death.”

“Wow! That’s blunt. Now let me be blunt. Lady, when I get my orders, I don’t have time to look up the family tree of the person who’s giving them. I took an oath to follow the orders I’m given,” putting his Ray Bans back on, He went on to say, “Black, White or whatever, a cop’s job is to see things as they are and carry out the law to the letter.”

“Officer, I mean ... some laws go deeper than those that are written. Everybody has a job to do. But we also have to think about who we are. Today, people are seeing their rights taken away and rules put in their place. When people speak out, Black, White or whatever, their rights are trampled on by the rule-makers in power. The same mindset that wrote the Bill of

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Rights, which was intended solely for White male property owners by the way, still makes the rules; calls the shots and gives the orders. Now that the Bill of Rights is supposed to extend to every American, it seems like certain parts of it have become confetti for Inauguration Day celebrations. I'm just sayin' ... ”

“Okay, Lady. I read the papers too. Where are you going with all this?”

“Officer, you seem like an open minded man. What will you do if the day comes when people demonstrate in your own backyard and they ask you to ...?”

“Just get that muffler fixed, young lady. Got it?”

“Yes. I'll be sure to get the muffler fixed. But Officer, remember, I told you that I was going to be blunt and you promised not to go all cop on me. I don't mean to be offensive, but if people don't ask one another questions, how do we all get to learn anything?”

“Okay, if they ask me to do what?”

“Officer, you've been really nice about this, so instead of asking you a difficult question, let me describe a situation.”

“Okay, I'm all ears.”

“When I'm in a demonstration and I see cops walking at us, I make eye contact with them because I hope that they can see what's happening before them as a people to people thing. Then someone gives an order and they lower their visors. The people to people stuff changes as they march at us, lock-stepped. In their visor's reflection, I see some of us running from them

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while others seem to grow larger. I mean, during the craziness, I know what goes through *my* mind ...”

“Okay, young lady. Is there a question in this situation, as you call it?”

“Okay, yes. I do have a specific question.”

“Lady, ask me what you want; in case I ever have to face you at a protest.”

“Okay Officer. Since we’re open minded people, and I told you how I see things, here’s the question: What goes through the minds of the people inside the plastic shields when they’re ordered to bludgeon us?”

“Now hold it right there, young lady! If I knew you were going to ask a question like that, I would have told you to shut up and leave me the hell alone!”

“Officer, do you see what I mean? I ask you about something off the top of my head, and you go all cop on me. How can anyone tell what the wrong question may be unless she asks it? Why should some people in a free society need permission to ask anything? Like, according to law, we have the right to say what we think and the right to assemble just to say it. When we get together with the press to speak our minds, what gives you guys the right to silence us and haul us away? Free speech shouldn’t be filtered through some minister of truth in Washington? Or should it?”

The moment Aimee said the word *filtered*; Darren became speechless. I recalled his own words about how racism and hate were pervasive: “*When the hammer falls, things that are woven*

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*into every cell of our brains just jump on out! It's like the hammer smashes our filters."*

Darren sat there thinking while Aimee sat there saying, "When you cops lower your visors, does it change anything? We're still free people like yourselves. We're speaking out about a lousy illegal war. We're telling the world about guys dying for a morally wounded president who caved in to his cabinet members and lives with the results. We're just telling it like it is. See? I didn't cuss!"

Slowly, Darren pressed his Ray Bans to his face and rose from his stool. After securing his helmet strap, Aimee's reflection grew larger and larger in his mirrored lenses as he said, "I'm just going to say this: Everybody should have rights. People should have the right to say what they want, as long as they don't hurt anyone. If they become a threat to the safety and security of the public, other people have to give orders to stop them and some of us have to carry them out. So if you ever see me coming at you remember the day I told you this, young lady."

As the door slapped shut behind Darren, Aimee set her granny glasses over the tip of her nose and said, "Fuckin' pigs hide behind mirrors and plastic the same damn way they hide behind an order. Orders or visors, they're things that allow people to partition their perception from their conscience. Ain't no different than a magistrate's powdered wig or an executioner's black hood. They're fabrications that set people apart and above their own guilt: Or so they think ..."

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Sliding her a glass of ice water, I asked, “Has anyone ever told you that you’re totally inappropriate?”

“Fuck, yeah! Just about everyone.”

“So?”

“So what’s the big deal? I say what’s on my mind. Should I fuckin’ lie?”

“No. Just be considerate. You have a way of putting people on the spot.”

“Joey, I don’t put anyone where they ain’t at already. Joey-Joey; my sweet virgin baby boy...get something straight with yourself. Take a stand!”

As the sweat beaded on my forehead, I redirected the narrative to, “You never told me too much about what you say at your gig down the Shore.”

“No, I didn’t. Take a trip on down to Keyport 117, any Friday at 6PM. We might get a little cozy, then go out on the boat where I tell it like it is.”

After my shift, as I plopped down on Old Jake’s usual stool, I said, “Mike, ya gotta see it the way I’m seein’ it. This is friggin’ mess is such bullshit!”

Aiming his finger at a streaky window, he said, “You’re right. So clean it! It’s from your shift.”

“No Mike! The whole thing going on right in here in The Castle is the bullshit! Okay, bottom line, I’m outta here! I need distance so I can figure things out on my own. I’ll be splitting in about a week. Is that enough notice for you?”

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“What’s happening here? Did you get your ‘letter to report’ or what, Joey? Whatever it is, can it be fixed?”

“They sent me a for-shit lottery number so it’s just a matter of time now. It might be a short tic-toc or a long one, who knows? It kinda made me realize, my future is now!” Gazing through the streaked window, I flashed on myself behind the wheel of my vintage English sports car, its top removed, with the wind ripping my paper hat away. There was only freedom and the screech of a night bird as we fled from the rising sun. Turning to Mike, I said, “No, Mike, it can’t be fixed. It’s time I face the music and dance the dance of my life: Like the Kingston Trio sings: *‘I done laid ‘round, done stayed ‘round this ol’ town too long ... I gotta travel on ...’* What with Mom having passed, and war drums beating in my head, there’s been too many changes, ya know?”

“Joey, there’s something you’re not telling me. Come on. Speak up so we can get it out in the open and take care of it.”

“Okay, since you brought it up: It’s goes to what you said about donuts being my future ... and what you made me do with that ... meatloaf. Mike, it all got me thinking.”

“What the hell are you talking about, Joey?”

“Mike, let’s get that donut thing out there! How in God’s green shithole of this Earth can donuts be my hope for a future? Donuts? I mean, if I live through ‘Nam, what kind of life is there for me if all I can look forward to is a career of deep frying perforated dough balls for one minute on one side and one minute on the other? Hold on! I stand corrected. You’re right, Mike! Maybe there is a big future for me in donuts. I forgot all

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about dipping, sprinkling and packing them twelve to a box ... Really?"

"Now you're being plain sarcastic, Joey. That's not quite what I ... "

"No, man! That's what I heard. Do you think all I want to look forward to is being forty years older, my body dusted with donut flour and my head topped with powder-sugared hair? There's gotta be more to living than being crowned with coconut sprinkles before becoming worm food. It's time I go and find it!"

"No-no, Joey. What I meant by the future was ... Listen, Lois and I never had kids. Maybe, one day, you could take over when we head for Arizona. You get what I'm saying? With or without us, The Castle Diner will go on."

"Mike! It goes a whole lot deeper than a for shit job."

"Deeper?"

"Oh yeah! Big time. It goes to truth."

"What do you mean by truth, Joey?"

"What do I mean by truth? What the fuck, Mike? Shouldn't you know by now? Truth is truth! Okay, I gotta give you this right up front: My problem with you and your lies goes to your goddamn, stinkin' meatloaf! Yeah, it goes to meatloaf. Your over the hill meatloaf is a total lie!"

"Huh?"

As I stood with one foot out of the front door, I said, "Mike, you're ripping your customers off and endangering them. Those people trust you! Don't get me wrong. I'd go to the wall for you and Lois. Mostly everything you do here is on the up an'

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up. The food you serve is, usually, top of the line. But you killed the whole deal with that meatloaf you have me make.” I held my paper hat to my head as a north wind blew the for sale sign from my sports car, Watching it fly to the south, I said, “Mike, your meatloaf is made from flavor boosted rotting beef! The whole damn thing is dead wrong, noxious and a lie!”

“Joey, I never thought of it that way. You know something, you’re right! Listen son, if you reconsider, I’ll give you a thirty cent an hour raise, okay?”

“No Mike, it ain’t okay.”

“What do you mean?”

“Thirty cents an hour is two dollars and forty cents a night. For what I throw away into your Seeburg, you’re getting all of that back and then some, while I dance the night and my life away. Mike, I’m better than that.”

“Of course you are, son!” Staring at Jake’s stool, his eyes lit up as he said, “Lois and I will most definitely write you in as the head man at The Castle Diner after your hitch and when we go to Arizona! It’ll be just like your own business, and you can make the meatloaf any way you want to. How’s that, son?”

“So, if I survive ‘Nam and decide to come back and be the boss of the other two bosses, nobody at The Castle Diner makes meatloaf from rotting meat, never again! No matter who makes the meatloaf, it’s to be made only from fresh meat from then on ... right?”

“You got it, Joey, from then on ... Only fresh!”

“Another thing Mike, the same would go for western omelets ... Okay?”

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“Better than that, Joey .... everything from the customer’s plates over two days old goes into the garbage ...From the very day you take over. Okay, son?”

“When I take over, everything fresh ...wow, never thought I’d see the day. ”

“Yes, you have my word, The Castle Diner will be where fresh meatloaf is king and reigns supreme! Now close the door Joey, there’s a chill ...”

As a sudden gust of wind took my paper hat, it was as though I could hear Old Jake singing in the breeze, “*Wherever you’re going I’m going your way...*” as I belted out, “...two drifters, out to see the world...”



# Ball of Deception©

By JK Savoy



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