

A Letter From Vegas Vic

Max Stone

I'm told I have a brother up north—northeast to be exact.
He lives in a little town called Wendover,
last civilization in Nevada before you hit
the Utah border.
He spends his time waving to travelers,
greeting tourists and long-haul truckers.
Depending on which way you look at him,
he's saying, *hello, welcome to the state
that never sleeps,
wide open skies,
land of gambling, drinking,
and loose laws.*
Or, *come back soon.*

I've got another brother,
way down at the bottom
tip of the state. Name's River Ric.
Fitting because he stands on the edge
of the Colorado River. He looks just like me,
or so I'm told, except he's twenty-some years younger.
Maybe I'm his uncle, not his brother.
Hell, I don't know. I only know the things
I hear, sometimes it seems to come from the wind,
or the heat rising off the pavement. I'm surrounded
by pavement. I'm sometimes jealous of my brothers—
Will surrounded by the cool high desert, and the stars,
I know he sees all of them up there.
I've seen a star here and there, but the city lights
mostly drown them out.
And Ric, he gets to feel the breeze coming
off the river, watch it stir the willow trees, and listen to birdsong.
I've never met my brothers, but it's comforting
to know they're out there,
lighting up their slices of sky,
the same as I light up mine.

I've lived in Glitter Gulch all my life. A permanent fixture.
I used to belong to the Pioneer Club in its heyday—
it's a souvenir shop now.
I watch the people stream past me down on the street.

People. So many people. Day and night.
Fremont is always bombilating with excitement.
I wonder what they're all doing, where they're going.
Some of them look up at me, expectantly, I know they want
me to smile and wave, smile and wave,
and I would wave, gladly,
except my arms broke. It hasn't moved in years,
stuck in the raised position as if I'm about
to wave. But I never do.
I still smile.

I have a wife—had a wife.
Her name was Vegas Vickie, real original I know.
Some called her Sassy Sally,
I wondered, but never asked, if she liked them calling her that.
Our's was quite the opposite of your typical Las Vegas wedding—
for fourteen years after she took residence over
the Girls of Glitter Gulch Strip Club
I tried to catch her eye
from across the street, glowing cigarette in my teeth,
hoping to charm her with my silly grin, and winking eye,
hoping she wouldn't hear the catchphrase I used to repeat
to tourists every fifteen minutes, "Howdy Podner!"
We were finally married in 1994.
It was a beautiful ceremony, that also marked a new era
on our beloved avenue—the opening of the Fremont Street Experience.
I hardly took my eyes off my wife, dressed in her white fringed outfit
with her neon blue eyes peaking out
from under her cowboy hat, her line of bright blond hair,
kicking one of her cowboy boots out into the air.
We glowed at each other across the Gulch night after night,
for twenty-three years.
We spoke sometimes, I think, but our voices mostly got lost
in the sea of people and traffic and sirens and light.
I never get to sleep.