

JEFF STANGER

Episode 1

TALES

FROM A

ROUNDAABOUT



BLUE TROLLEY PRESS

TALES FROM A ROUNDABOUT: EPISODE I

PERFORMANCE ART

JEFF STANGER



Copyright © 2021 by Jeff Stanger

All rights reserved.

No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means, including information storage and retrieval systems, without written permission from the author, except for the use of brief quotations in a book review.

Publisher's Note: This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are a product of the author's imagination. Locales and public names are sometimes used for atmospheric purposes. Any resemblance to actual people, living or dead, or to businesses, companies, events, institutions, or locales is completely coincidental.

Edited by Terry Sowka

✿ Created with Vellum

CONTENTS

1. Episode I: Performance Art

Also by Jeff Stanger

"Deviant," Sonny Kagan mumbled out loud to no one in particular. "Call me a deviant, I'll show you deviant." He stepped out of his blue Ford pickup truck and watched traffic go by. "Y'all should pull over and watch the show," he said to a family in a silver BMW. The family, not being accustomed to muttering old men in this part of Carmel (or any part of Carmel, Indiana for that matter), ignored him. "It's gonna be a doozy." He laughed as he pulled an old lawn chair from the back of his truck. "Although, not suitable for the kiddies."

Sonny Kagan stepped into the crosswalk just as George Fillmore's shiny white Buick SUV entered the roundabout. Sonny walked slowly, intentionally dragging his tattered lawn chair behind him. He liked the irritating sound it made scraping across the pavement.

George couldn't hear the scraping, but he could see Sonny, now that he had rounded the west side of the roundabout and had his car pointing east. The old man stopped halfway through the crosswalk, forcing the city councilman to stop his car. Sonny looked taller and more defiant than the last time George had seen him. Then, his six-foot frame had been hunched over like a defeated prize fighter when the Carmel City Council had voted seven to two to prevent him from opening up a strip club in Indiana's perfect city. It would have been his second in Central Indiana.

But now Sonny was standing tall. In the middle of the roundabout crosswalk. And giving George the finger. Where was this crazy old man going, the councilman wondered? Sonny seemed satisfied with the duration of his obscene gesture and continued walking. George took another lap around the roundabout, watched Sonny step inside the center circle, cross the manicured grass, then climb some decorative limestone blocks. He unfolded the tattered lawn chair and sat down.

The councilman stopped again and was about to roll down his window and question Sonny when the sound of horns alerted him that the cars behind him didn't care what the old man was doing. George moved along and vowed to come back this way after he finished lunch and returned to work. As he pulled away, he noticed a bright red '80s Camaro (fully restored) slide into the street parking next to the cemetery southeast of the roundabout. The license plate said "GLTRGRL."



MATT MOLLER COULDN'T BELIEVE what he saw from the back seat of his mom's three-row Volvo SUV. To his right, a bright red car from when his

mom and dad were in college was blasting the kind of rock music ('80s metal) his dad played when his buddies came to stay with them every May for the race. It wasn't rap music, so Matt couldn't come close to telling you who it was or what they were singing. Rap music was all his friends listened to, and that meant it was all he listened to. It didn't matter that rap lyrics were as far as you could get from the life experience of the upper middle class to super wealthy kids in Carmel. They all listened to rap. They all drove Jeeps or luxury hand-me-down SUVs.

So, the red car was a mystery to Matt. So was the Def Leppard. And so was the blonde in the driver's seat. She wore a white tank top which was a size too small and had a tattoo of the *Pyromania* album cover on her left shoulder. Not that Matt had any idea what that was. He did know he could see part way down her tank top from his angle and he could see her tan legs. And for the first time in his adolescent life, he wished beyond all hope a traffic light would break and stay red forever. It didn't.

His mother, completely oblivious to the object of Matt's desire, accelerated slowly. This let the Camaro get ahead by a full car length and out of Matt's sight. He pleaded with his mother to speed up, but she was talking with a friend on her phone and intermittently telling Matt's twin sisters to stop shouting. Matt usually enjoyed the buffer of his siblings between him and his mother in the front, but today he wished he were in the front passenger seat.

To his surprise and delight, the Camaro's right turn signal came on, indicating that it, too, was getting off on 106th Street. Matt's hopes began to soar. Maybe she was heading towards his neighborhood. His mother was catching up to her on the off-ramp from Keystone Avenue and he stretched to catch even a glimpse of what was stretching out her tank top.

His sisters shouted in unison, "Mommy, look at the old man!" This caused his mother to slow down and Matt watched the Camaro enter the traffic circle behind a Buick. Then it signaled and pulled into a parking space by the cemetery adjacent to the roundabout. Matt was beyond excited. He began texting his friends in the neighborhood, "Get on your bikes and get to my house as fast as you can."



MANDY PEPPERHORNS STOPPED HER CAR, turned off the ignition, and

laughed. She'd caught sight of her boss as she entered the roundabout, sitting like a king on his throne on the limestone blocks. This was going to be the easiest money she'd made in a long time. Mandy's real name was Melissa Hewitt, which is fine if you're a realtor or an accountant. It's rather dull if you're a stripper. At least that's what her boss told her when she got her first job dancing. She'd always loved the movie *The Sandlot* and after she went blond, everyone told her she looked like Wendy Peffercorn, the lifeguard in the movie. She decided on a stage name that was a play on the movie character. She even performed in a red swimsuit and sunglasses which more or less matched Wendy's.

But today she didn't have to strip. Well, not all of her clothes anyway. She did have to take off her tank top and her denim shorts and lay out on the grass in the roundabout. But she was planning on laying by the pool anyway. No water here to jump in, but \$50 an hour wasn't bad to do nothing.

She opened the trunk of her car and pulled out a large beach towel and the small cooler she had packed with ice and bottled water. Mandy knew the other girls would bring alcohol, but something told her that despite the innocuous nature of the job, she should have her wits about her today.

"Hi, Sonny," she called as she crossed the street into the roundabout.

"Hi, doll." Sonny called all the women at his club, "doll." One of the dancers pointed out it was sexist and demeaning. Mandy responded, "What part of the job isn't?" That particular woman doesn't point things out to Mandy anymore.

Mandy found Sonny endearing. He didn't hit on the women like the other club owners. He didn't go back into the dressing room when they were changing. He kept his hands to himself. Sonny actually had a wife, and he never cheated on her, as far as Mandy could tell. For him, boobs were business. Nothing else.

"Any place in particular you want us to lay out?"

He pointed to a patch of grass and said, "Right there will be fine." The location was strategic. Anyone coming off Keystone from the south would have to look left to see if another car was coming in the roundabout. She would be in their line of sight.

She set her cooler down and spread out the towel on the grass. "Did you bring anything to drink?"

It occurred to Sonny there might be some details he had forgotten when he came up with this idea. "No, doll. Can't say that I did."

Mandy pulled out a bottle of water and walked it over to him. "On

the house," she said with a grin. She loved poking at his quirks, and this was one of them. One phrase the rest of the women at the Neon Boudoir had heard Sonny say a thousand times was "Nothing is on the house." Even when the rapper Ice Pudding came in with 20 members of his entourage, Sonny didn't comp them a thing. In Sonny's mind, the VIPs should be paying *more* than the regulars, not getting everything comped for free. This didn't sit well with Ice Pudding. He took his entourage and his business elsewhere. The way Sonny saw it, his competitor was filled with nonpaying deadbeats. And the people who couldn't get into *that* club came to his place with money to spend.

Sonny laughed at the joke. "Nothing is on the house, doll. Nothing."

"You can pay me a dollar later," she said. She slid off her shorts and tank top, adjusted her swimsuit, and put in her earbuds. Then she laid face up on her towel and got lost in her Def Leppard. She got so into it, she didn't hear her friends arrive. When she finally opened her eyes and sat up to turn over, there were women on either side of her. She also noticed four teenage boys on bikes who had stopped on the sidewalk just across from them on the outside of the roundabout. One boy in particular was staring only at her. Mandy pulled her shades down and gave the boy the same look from the movie that she had given countless customers at the club. The boy nearly dropped his bicycle.



MAYOR THEODORE "TEDDY" Wiggins always took the same route from the City Center to the Carmel Police Department shooting range on the second Thursday of the month. Sonny was counting on this to be the case again. The mayor drove south on Rangeline Road until it intersected with 106th street and then east on 106th. This route allowed him to monitor the progress of a construction project that he had long hoped to be completed. It was years behind schedule, and he was starting to hear from disgruntled constituents. Teddy liked to have his voters grunted at all times.

And why should they ever be disgruntled, he thought on that sunny day. Urban/Rural Magazine had voted Carmel the best city to live in two years in a row. It had low crime, good schools, a world-class performing arts center, with parks and art around every corner. At least the intersections which still had corners. Carmel leadership had vowed to make Carmel the city with the most roundabouts in the United States.

And in only a few years, they had managed to succeed.

I should have the happiest citizens in the country, Teddy thought to himself as he made his way to the shooting range.

Teddy wasn't on his way to shoot, however. The Carmel police had a strict rule about never allowing Mayor Wiggins near firearms. At a political fundraiser in 2003, the mayor had participated in a skeet shooting contest. Teddy shot a mime. Given the general prejudice against mimes by everyday Americans, the incident was largely ignored by the press. It truly was an accident, and Teddy swore he was aiming at the clay pigeon. But the mime's left arm never fully extended again, preventing him from performing his best bit, the trapped-in-a-glass-box routine. He received an undisclosed settlement from the city and now sells replacement windows.

On this day, Mayor Wiggins needed to discuss the upcoming Fourth of July parade with the chief of police. Teddy and the chief liked to hammer things out at the shooting range where there were fewer eyes and ears. There was a lot of pressure on the mayor during parade season. People insisted on staking out their parade spots earlier and earlier each year and local businesses were getting upset. Teddy needed a solution that kept the voters grunted. Police Chief Baxter would have to come up with something, Teddy thought.

As Teddy approached Keystone Avenue, he could see some sort of commotion. Cars were slowing down and there was a lot of traffic backed up. "It looks like there are people in the middle of the roundabout," the mayor thought. "Those aren't city employees either. They look like. Oh, my word, they are strippers ..."

Mayor Wiggins heard the crunch of his front bumper as it scraped over the curb, then a scream from one of the women in the roundabout. His car didn't hit her, but his dislodged driver's side headlight landed on her towel. (She would later tell the news she was pinned under his car, but it was a lie.) The mayor cursed as he got out of his car. This was his fifth accident in seventeen months. The *Carmel Examiner* would gloss over it, but the *Indianapolis Star* and the local TV stations would make it a big deal. They would imply he was drinking again. He would deny it again. Then he would announce another intersection was becoming a roundabout and everyone would take sides on the issue and forget about the crash.

But this crash was different, he thought. *I wasn't texting this time. I was looking at boobs. Why are there boobs in the roundabout?*

One brunette in a yellow bikini immediately approached him and

asked to take a selfie. Before he could think about the electoral impact of such a decision, she had her right arm around his shoulder and her left arm extending the camera. He adjusted his hair and smiled.

The mayor's hair had been a topic for discussion throughout the city for years. He had a dark black mass of hair sitting on top, with gray shooting out the sides and back. Many people thought it was a bad toupee, but nobody had the courage to ask, and none of the stylists in town knew a thing. Mayor Teddy Wiggins took his personal grooming business far outside Hamilton County, Indiana.

After taking the picture, Mayor Wiggins picked up his headlight and asked the woman on the towel if she was okay. "Yeah, I'm good. Mind rubbing some lotion on my back?"

The shock of the crash and the bikini-selfie ambush had caught the mayor off guard. But whereas the proposition to rub lotion on a beautiful woman's back might have caused most men to abandon all reason, Teddy was somehow shocked back into reality. And the reality was all the cleavage made him uncomfortable, even though nobody was actually naked.

Despite the rumors about Mayor Wiggins and his female chief of staff being involved, public displays of flesh brought out the prude in Teddy. Just the previous spring he had agreed to give a little speech to kick off the Carmel High School after-prom party. He was aghast at all the cleavage in the audience and made it a point to let Principal Huff know in no uncertain terms. Huff shared the mayor's thoughts with Associate Vice-Principal Margot Felton-Douglass. She responded with a memo about slut-shaming and sexualizing young girls and demanded to know why the boys weren't held to a higher standard as well. Huff decided he would be better off sitting on the sidelines of this argument and made a note to send the vice principal to speak with the mayor personally.

Mayor Wiggins approached the man in his lawn chair in the center of the roundabout. "Sonny, what is going on?"

"This is a public space. Me and the ladies around you are members of the public. We mean to occupy this space for a while."

"I know what you're trying to do. You're trying to get me back for the council vote last week. It won't work."

Teddy looked around. There were cars everywhere now. Some were honking at the girls. Some were honking at him. He remembered his car was still partially blocking traffic. He jumped back in, put it in reverse, and heard the front bumper crunch some more. Then he put it in drive and made his way to the fire station a block or so to the east. From here

he could regroup and call in reinforcements.



MATT HAD PROMISED the rest of the guys there was a really hot blond at the cemetery, and they should all ride their bikes over and see. He said she looked like a Hooters waitress, or what he imagined a Hooters waitress looked like. Carmel didn't have a Hooters or anything like one. There had been rumors a Twin Peaks was coming to town, but it never happened.

But on this day, Matt Moller would become a legend in the eyes of the teenage boys of Lakeshore Estates. For it wasn't one hot woman mourning in the cemetery that Matt had brought them to see. It was twelve strippers in the skimpiest of swimsuits sunbathing in the roundabout.

Of course, the boys were all too scared and awkward to approach the ladies. Instead, they hung back on the sidewalks surrounding the roundabout, giggled and took pictures with their smartphones. A couple of strippers waved, and Mandy Pepperhorns even lowered her sunglasses and gave Matt the same look Wendy gave Squints in the movie. She even offered to let one of them rub lotion on her back. Neither their tongues nor their legs were capable of movement at that point.

William Davis, the youngest and most inexperienced of the boys, suddenly had feelings and questions which had never occurred to him before that day. This made for an enlightening and somewhat awkward conversation later at dinner when Willy shared those feelings with his mother and her new boyfriend, Timothy, who was having dinner with the family for the first time. Timothy, though amused, decided he wasn't ready for raising boys at the onset of puberty. It was his last dinner at the Davis house. And for that, William's mom Marissa vowed to get even with the women of the Neon Boudoir.



THE MAYOR RETURNED with the police chief and the entire fire department who, when they learned there were strippers in the roundabout, decided that on a hot day like this, heat stroke might be imminent. "Public safety must be priority number one," they told the mayor. And they followed him on foot to the scene. They arrived at the same time as Councilman

George Fillmore, who was shocked to find the chaos which had unfolded since he had left earlier in the day. He and the mayor pleaded with Sonny to send the strippers home.

The mayor ordered the police chief to remove them all, but Sonny pointed out that he wasn't breaking any laws. Using his iPad, Councilman Fillmore searched frantically in the city codes and regulations for the pertinent language that would end this display. But alas, he was unable to find a single decision by the City Council preventing strippers from sunbathing in the middle of a roundabout. Such contingencies had never been contemplated by anyone in city government. He would draft a resolution this very afternoon, he decided.



THE SCENE STAYED DEADLOCKED until 4 p.m., mostly because the beleaguered police and firemen who arrived didn't want it to end. But as rush hour approached, the officials finally convinced Sonny to move along. The women had had enough sun anyway, and some had shifts starting soon at the Neon Boudoir. Mandy pulled out her last water and opened the bottle. She took a few drinks as she walked on the crosswalk to the outside of the roundabout. After one last sip, she handed it to the boy on the bike who had stayed transfixed on her the entire afternoon. "Here, you look like you could use a drink."

He ducked his head, turned beet red, and said thanks. Mandy chuckled and walked to her car. She rolled down the window, started the Camaro, and cranked up Def Leppard's *Pyromania* album. Matt watched her leave and mentally recorded the album cover he had seen tattooed on her shoulder. He finished the water slowly. He thought about her lips being on the same ring of plastic and, as he finished drinking, imagined what it would be like to kiss her. Then he put the bottle in his backpack and rode home.

When Matt's dad got home, he peeked in on his son. The framed Derek Jeter baseball jersey which normally sat on a shelf above his bed had been replaced by a water bottle. "How was your day?"

"Amazing."

"Really?"

"Can you tell me about it?"

"No, but it was amazing."

Matt's dad paused. Something was off. He couldn't place it at first. But something was out of place. Not a thing. But a sound. What was it?

Music. No, he played that station all the time. He listened to the classic rock station so much, it was just background noise to him. He never gave it a thought. But now, it was playing in this room. In Matt's room. And it wasn't the radio. Matt was streaming Def Leppard.

"Def Leppard, huh? Your friend Tony's dad Alex has an entire shed dedicated to them."

"Yeah, I found it on Spotify."

"You hate classic rock."

"Not anymore. Def Leppard is in; don't you know anything, Dad?"

"Since when?"

"Since today."

Get Episodes II - V

ALSO BY JEFF STANGER



Quick Mystery Novels

The Fungo Society

Tangled In The Web

Quick Mystery Short Stories

72 Hours in Savannah

Sexy Shoes

Keep Your Eye On The Money

Other Novels

Trolley Dodgers

Kansaska