

# I Remember Florida

By Dave Olson

*Note: This story uses several lines from the fine Canadian band, Blue Rodeo's album "Diamond Mine" which served as a departure point so to speak. Cheers to them 'eh.*

Mostly now, I just masturbate. I'm not particularly attracted to my own sexuality or body, but a questionnaire I filled out in Cosmopolitan magazine said it would be both beneficial, and enjoyable. In this day and age, it's not unclean or unruly, they said. There were also suggestion tips.

This fondling is mostly on account of my man being back in Florida. I do keep it under control however, I certainly don't want to prefer it. I haven't ever used foreign objects in my arousals, I've heard too many stories about women having problems. I would prefer to keep my private parts clean and in fine working order. Barry would agree, him being my man and all, and an arousing one at that.

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He first attracted my attention by dropping a quarter near my feet at a pizza restaurant in Tallahassee. He bent over to pick it up and bumped his head on the edge of the table. The pitcher of root-beer spilled all over his shiny shirt and I said, "Nice try."

"Darlin', you got the wrong guy," he said back, he looked right into my eyes, sort of squinting.

"Nice try," I said again.

He put the quarter in a juke-box with big, silver stars and played a Nat King Cole song about the rain and clouds. He asked me to dance. "There is no one else dancing because you aren't supposed to in a restaurant of this kind," I said. My cousin nodded and rolled her eyes.

Then he whispered in my ear, "My senses have been shocked and I'm alive to every pain, your quiet laughter comes to me , it echoes in the rain."

"Holy smokes, that was lovely," I said. We left my cousin at the restaurant with Nat King Cole and the silver stars and wandered off into the stale air with the neon lights.

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Florida looks like old Elvis movies with convertibles and blondes and people smiling and giving high-fives. We bought ice

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cream cones and went to his home. He called me his Mona Lisa and I blushed. My head bumped on the edge of the vinyl siding when he carried me through the door, "You make me so clumsy darlin'," he smoothed my hair and kissed the bruise.

While we were kissing, he stopped, looked me in the eyes, paused and whispered, "Make love with me," like they say in movies. The shadows were right and his voice was soft and husky. The blue freeway lights came through the window and the trucks downshifted loudly. His skin smelled peppery and clean. I fell back on the couch and he covered me warmly.

After it was done, he held me and whispered in my ear. He told me not to go back to Gary, Indiana, not to cheat destiny and to stay with him. He said he'd build me a white picket fence or something. I told him it was very important that he come visit me but I have my life back home to think about, I have my job and all.

"Sometimes you get what you want so be careful what you ask for," he said sighing.

"I'll be tossing my pennies in the wishing well everyday Barry baby." I slept soundly and smiling.

We went to a diner in the morning for a late breakfast. Everyone knew him and the waitress knew right what he wanted. She winked and nudged me when we sat down. He rubbed my feet under the table and fed me homefries off his fork.

I left and thought about his promise on the busride home.

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My cousin had said he was a dime a dozen and I told her if that was the case, here's my dime and she could have the other eleven. She laughed and said I'd never learn. "You can't hurry love, you just have to wait," I said back.

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Barry was there waiting for me when I got home, "I was in the neighborhood and thought I'd drop by," he smiled like Clint Eastwood and looked at the ground like a little boy.

"You crazy you!" I said and hugged and kissed and hugged him. "You must of drove like a bandit, you fool."

"Just a fool in love, a bandit out to steal your heart," he said as he carried me through my front door.

The next morning, he got up early to make coffee and scramble up eggs and bacon-bits. I told him to stay and not to go back to Tallahassee. He liked his coffee the same as he liked his women, blond and sweet. He did the dishes and stacked them to dry.

"But Gary is so ugly and wet," he said.

"They say its on the upswing with the economy," I said.

"One day I will baby, one day I will. In the meantime, can't let the world pass me by."

After breakfast the next day, he threw his duffel bag in the bench seat of his El Camino and headed south.

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I told my best girlfriend, Cherice about Barry, she said he sounded wonderful. I think it might have been just because there wasn't much else to say. I told my co-workers at the catalog order center that one day I will be set free, one day I will. They were mostly indifferent but I worked harder to make some extra money.

I got blue and warm at the same time thinking about drinking in those air-conditioned bars and putting the quarters in the juke-box and what Barry looked like naked, all strong and sinewy and with those coarse black hairs making a line down his chest. I hadn't even realized that it had been forever ago. I wrote him a postcard with a spray of perfume on it and teased him about all the suntanned, college girls he was probably hitting on.

The next day, he arrived into town like a cowboy, "Barry, baby, you're the magic man." We were passionate and both laid in bed for two days telling stories about childhoods and relatives.

"Come meet my girlfriends," I said to Barry.

"Darlin', I've met all the girls I need to meet," he said twirling my hair between his fingers.

"Oh, don't be selfish with your time," I slapped his hand,

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"I've told them all about you at work, you're half-way a legend."

"Don't you be selfish by depriving me of a single moment of being alone with you." He said with his steady eyes looking into mine.

"You're always so poetic." He certainly was.

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"Baby, this town is full of losers and its dragging me down." I didn't bother to argue, I figured he was a lonesome wanderer just like he had told me. I told him he wasn't lonesome or didn't need to be anyhow.

It was then that we ended up in a trailer park outside of Reno. We drove out in a rented truck with a picture of the beach on the side. He drove the whole way and I tuned the radio.

We arrived at night when the lights were bright, the machines were noisy, and people were having fun.

"Darlin', this is a town that knows how to swing. This is our town and our oyster!" Barry knew his way around and we went right to gambling.

"Barry baby, this is the biggest little city in America if not the whole world!" It reminded me of Pleasure Island from the Pinocchio movie I had seen two years before.

"Darlin'," he said as we walked to our room at the motel, "I don't want you working any of those two-bit, floozie jobs like those cocktail girls."

"And I don't want you packing a side-arm," I said.

"I love you baby, don't ever die."

"Damn, Barry, you could make any girl blush with a line like that."

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Barry said if I earn the potatoes, he'll earn the gravy. He spent the day being a gambling advisor to tourists looking to be high-rollers. He told them how to play five-card stud, set them up with sports bookies, and how to beat the odds at this and that. He mostly just spent their money for them. I worked selling time-shares to pre-fabricated condominiums. Barry said it was the only job in the town that doesn't require showing cleavage. "How do you know I don't, baby?" He came to visit me more often after that.

I teased him that his was the only job in the town that didn't exist. "I'm a redneck stockbroker," he said. (He eventually put that on his business card.)

"And life is grand." I smiled and helped him count his pile of change, crumpled bills and I.O.U.'s on cocktail napkins. I gave away three car rentals as incentives to view the properties

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and made a note of it on my graph chart Barry made for me. He made salisbury steak and peas with butter for dinner. I looked at the lights through the window of the mobile home. You could see the waving cowboy and the giant clown a ways off.

"Take me dancing, swing me like a cowgirl, get me drunk on those blue drinks with umbrellas and cherries," I said, I was tired of lounge acts.

"Darlin', you ain't no cowgirl and I'm trying far too hard to be a cowboy and those drinks taste like antifreeze."

"If there was such thing as a cowgirl, I'd be one. There aren't even real cowboys anymore."

"Are you disappointed darlin'? I could go find you some cattle rustlers with dusty hats and leather chaps, guys named Lefty and Slim. Maybe I'll invite them over for pork and beans."

"You're right, there's only rednecks and old men in Winnebagos or those shiny pick-ups with four wheels on the back. No real cowboy would eat at Howard Johnson's or have embroidery on their pockets."

"There might not be surfer boys in California either."

"Barry baby," I said with my head in his lap, "you know my favorite part in old cowboy movies? It's when the boys would ride into town and go right to the bath house and pay good money for a warm bath. They'd pour in those sweet smelling powders from the glass jars and just as they were getting clean, someone

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would come in to shoot them. They'd leap into action, pull a gun from nowhere, shoot the bad guy and say something clever. But they would always get out and pull on their dirty, dusty clothes and just be all wet and muddy. I guess they'd go over to the bar or ride out of town or something. It happened everytime. It was so sad."

"Goddamn, ain't it the truth."

"You're so poetic Barry."

We had sex again, it being more interesting than shooting pool or playing bridge with the neighbors, and then Barry fell asleep with his hand cupped between my legs humming a Blue Rodeo tune.

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"This towns full of deviants, cheats and fools," he said frying eggs and potato pancakes. It had been raining for three days which was probably to blame.

"That's why we fit in so well baby."

"It's dragging me down. You see darlin', my uncle owns a trailer park off the freeway right near Sacramento, California's capital city. It's a real town, no phoney's. Not too far from the coast either, we could go to the beach sometime. I think they have a big mall and maybe a zoo or something."

"Baby, the mountains are so pretty here, besides, we've

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barely been here long enough to meet our neighbors," I didn't particularly care either way.

"All the more reason." He flicked the frying pan up and flipped the pancakes over. He knew I was watching.

I knew what was next. He looked out the window and said, "Darlin', maybe what I need is a temporary diversion, I think I need a stiff drink and a drive down to Florida to visit the alligators and the silver stars."

Perhaps it would be healthy and beneficial for him. "What do you want to go for, baby. It's a bog down there."

"It's a swamp darlin', the water comes in and goes out, in a bog it just sits there until it smells." He was probably right.

"Barry baby, don't leave me being so poetic, you'll drive me loopy crazy." I touched his sinewy forearm, the dark hair was still there but the tan had faded some.

He put steak sauce on his eggs and touched my nose and smiled. After that, he drove off like a cowboy again except with the sunset on his back.

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1990, written in SLC, UT