
SCAM A-LAMA DING DONG

“A FUNNY SCAM” Series: Book 1

JINX JAMES

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SCAM A-LAMA DING DONG

noun phr.

A swindle perpetrated against a Rock singer, musician or band usually by a Manager, Agent, Promoter, Producer, Record Company, Music Publisher or some other middleman.

Origin. deriv US 1950's Rock 'n Roll slang

"Rama Lama Ding Dong"

CHAPTER ONE

HALCYON DAZE

At that quiet time, just after midnight, The Gold Coast has always looked and felt fantastic. Lights twinkling as far as you could see. Arc upon thundering arc of creamy-foamed ocean waves endlessly pounding the beach way below. It was a classic still summer's night; warm, but with just the tiniest waft of a sea breeze.

High on the darkened terrace of the Executive Suite, the two of us, my agent Felicity Mandrake and me, were slumped across a pair of casual armchairs. There's always been something really cool about sipping Cointreau over ice from those big Cognac balloons.

'Killer show, Marc,' she said, 'but you know I'm not here to tell you that.'

'Do I?' I said, putting my glass down. 'OK, so why are you here, then? I've been dying to find out.'

'I'm here to warn you,'

'Warn me?'

Even I could hear the disbelief in my voice. 'Warn me about what?' I wanted to know.

She swirled the Cointreau around in her glass.

'Things have changed.'

‘What does that mean?’

I could feel myself already starting to get annoyed, and I could see she felt it too.

‘We had our first Board meeting yesterday,’ she told me, ‘since doing the deal with the Americans. Their new top guy who’s just arrived came right out with it.’

She looked straight at me.

‘He said you’re not making them enough money, Marc.’

‘*Them?* I thought it was *you* and them?’

She shrugged and looked away.

‘You mean you’ve come all the way up here just to tell me that, Fel? Tonight of all bloody nights? After a show and a reception like that one?’ I nodded downwards in the direction of the Hotel ballroom and even began to laugh. But she wasn’t having any.

‘Get real,’ she said, slapping me down hard. ‘This is the first big booking you’ve had in ages and you know it.’

Right. Got the picture. Straight for the jugular, eh?

‘Well, OK, so things have been a bit slow. It’s like that sometimes... you know that—but you still can’t top a night like tonight, Fel!’

She cut across me with an angry sweep of her arm.

‘Do you have any idea how I got you this gig, Marc?’

‘*Any idea at all?*’

‘Oh, come on, baby! You’re sounding like some wacko drama queen! You heard them? The audience? They loved me.’

But by then she was boiling.

‘Look, Marc, forget the frigging audience. It was the clients who didn’t want you, OK? Don’t you get it? It’s not the audience. It’s the clients? *The promoters.*’

‘*THEY-DIDN’T-FUCKING-WANT-YOU!*’ she almost spat, driving it home.

‘Fuck off!’

Now it was me who was doing the yelling.

‘OK,’ she said, switching to a soft voice and shrugging, ‘Say and think what you like, but it’s still the truth.’

Then, all at once, she flipped back again and began jabbing her finger at me.

‘There were five other singers they preferred to you, Marc, all of them years younger than you are. That’s FIVE, Marc. The only reason you were here tonight is because I, *ME!* Felicity Mandrake, got them to do me a favour, right?’

She glared at me for a second and then put the boot in.

‘A-BIG-FAT-FAVOUR.’

I could see she was genuinely angry.

‘I had to do a deal,’ she told me, ‘and for them it’s the deal of a frigging lifetime. They get Morgana, our biggest artist, for their Christmas program. And I did that for YOU, OK?’

Jesus! Were things really as bad as that?

‘Something’s going on with this new set-up in Sydney, Marc... I’m not sure what, yet. But, the thing is, Cory Mariano, that’s the name of this new American guy, seems to have you in his sights.’

‘Oh, fuck off, Fel. What are you telling me? That he’s trying to *fire* me or something?’

She gave me the hard eye.

‘Listen carefully to what I’m saying, Marc. I swear to you that’s what it sounded like. He was talking about you having a month or so to “*turn things around*”.’

Now, that one got right through the defenses.

Right at that moment, I was almost speechless.

‘But... I thought *you* were supposed to be the boss?’ I mumbled.

‘I am, but it’s...’

She stopped and then shook her head in annoyance.

‘It’s not as clear-cut as that anymore, Marc.’

By then, Felicity looked and was sounding genuinely frustrated. ‘Things have changed. You have to try to understand,’ she said. ‘We’re International now. Mandrake’s has got more than a dozen Aussie artists currently working in Hollywood, and mostly on Big Time movies. We need the support of these Americans. We really do. Try to understand, Marc, I can’t just ignore this guy.’

She closed her eyes, gently nodding.

‘Believe me,’ she told me, leaning right over and kissing me full on the lips. ‘It’s real. This little prick is laying it right on the line; He really means it.’

She paused.

‘Please,’ she whispered, ‘Don’t kid yourself. I’m telling you, baby, *the knives are out!*’

When you’ve been a Rock Star for as long as I have, it’s disconcerting to wake up one morning and suddenly discover you’ve turned into a Rock Dinosaur. But then, in some odd kind of way, it begins sinking in that maybe that’s quite a cool thing to be after all. The way I see it, at the very least you’re in pretty good company.

That particular night in Surfers Paradise was such a blast. As the final chord of my biggest Seventies Number One, “*Passion*”, chaaanged off into the ether, the entire audience went into meltdown. The crowd noise was deafening. My two guitarists battled away like they always do, with feedback and their whammy bars. They just *had* to try to claim the very last note of the concert for themselves.

But then the loudest ever thunderclap of a drum-fill from Bob the Blob on the kit settled it once and for all.

THWAPP-A-TAKK-ATTA- BOOOOOOM!

After that, the whole place erupted yet again into chaos. Total mayhem.

Wave after wave of frenzied applause from the audience almost flattened me. I could just about hear the announcer yelling his head off from the side of the stage.

‘Marc Charles, Ladies and Gentlemen!’

‘Miss-ter Maaaarc Chaaaarles!’

For any Rock Star, Dinosaur or not, *that...* is always the moment. That's when you get the slam-bam, genuine show-biz rush.

Standing there, centre stage at the Grand Maxima Breakers Hotel in Surfers Paradise, Queensland, at the climax of the show was fantastic. Even after a career as long as mine, I was utterly blown away.

Humbled and bowing low into the spotlight with my head of almost perfect hair, the deafening roar of clapping, stomping, and cheering all around me was unbelievable.

I could feel the entire auditorium gently melting off into a deep wash of lush, Midnight-Blue coloured light as I slowly strode off stage. Waving to the fans through the pizzaz and bedlam felt awesome. I was in my stunning black Zain del Paso jacket plus a dark red silk shirt, black pants, and matching shoes. Around my neck was slung Annabel, my beautiful honey-coloured acoustic guitar. But then, as I finally moved out of the spotlight towards the side of the stage apron, who did I nearly walk slap bang into? Almost invisible, tucked away in the gloom of the wings, was my Agent Felicity.

'Shit, Fel! What are *you* doing here?' I said, amazed to suddenly see her.

The blinding strobe lights still zoomed all around the auditorium as the crowd continued chanting and cheering away.

'I called you earlier,' she shouted to me above the ruckus. 'Your phone was off.'

I was way too busy getting off on the horny, coral-coloured glitter dress she was wearing to wonder why she was really here.

The roadie lovingly took Annabel, my gorgeous 1959 Gibson J-200 guitar, from me. First, he cradled her in the crook of his arm. Then he nestled her priceless blonde body deep down into the red plush-lined guitar case before clicking it shut.

'Sorry Fel,' I yelled, as the horns kicked in with the intro to my final encore number, the Soul classic, "Hold on I'm Coming"

Buddup, bup, baaa-da daa, Buddup, bup, baaa-da daa, Buddup, bup, baaa-da daa, Buddup, bup, baaa-da daa, over and over and over.

I nodded towards the crowd and the waiting blazing white spotlight.

‘I have to nail this one first, baby,’ I told her, pecking her on the cheek.

This has been my final “leave ‘em wanting more” go-to song for years. The roadie handed me “*Steve*”, my battered, white ’57 Fender Telecaster with the original pots. I’ve had that baby for quite a few decades, too.

So there I was, true to form, acting out the stereotype. A Rock ‘n Roll Dinosaur wallowing in Rock Heaven!

Felicity even flashed me that same smile she’s been giving me for most of those years.

‘Just watch this, kid.’ I said, slinging on *Steve*, then turning and doing my power-walk straight back out into the glitz and dazzle.

The second I hit the spotlight, the audience exploded once again.

Looking amazing in their sizzling Garnet-Red Silk Shantung gowns, the three girl singers from “The Glass Ceiling” shook their beautiful booties to the killer beat. Through the din, Paul, one of the guitarists, dressed all in black like a gunfighter, tossed a guitar cord over to me. With a loud “blaaark”, right on the beat, I plugged “*Steve*” into Paul’s towering Marshall stack.

“Posture, posture, posture,” I silently lectured myself.

Striding up to the mike, I gave my stunning, ancient, road-tested Tele a humongous, raking, G# thrash chord, *changggg!*... right on the beat yet again. But I wasn’t just doing it to nail the key. Oh, no. At that particular moment, this Rock Dinosaur needed to feel the burn too.

Giving the crowd a quick flash of my best Rock Star smile, with the entire band peaking at eleven, it was lead vocal time.

I hadn't felt that good in a long time. But then again, that was way before Felicity got to lay all of her shit on me.

After a gig is always a panic. That morning, two minibuses had brought us out to the airport. Me, the band and the girl singers were all piled into one, and the roadies, lighting and sound guys, plus the gear in the other.

Felicity was long gone. She'd been up at the crack-of-dawn and on the Red-Eye back to Sydney.

After our little chat last night, she'd slipped off to her own room to "get some rest".

No shagging for Madame, which was a bit of a relief for me. Fortunately, I was booked on this later flight with the guys.

After what she'd told me about the Americans, I couldn't see myself getting too much sleep either so I headed back downstairs to the Hotel bar and guess what? Half an hour or so later, I found myself getting comfy in young Emma's room. She's one of the back-up singers from "The Glass Ceiling", the one with the kinky specs. Somebody had told her I'd said she wasn't my type. Well, she is, as we both spectacularly discovered over the next couple of hours.

Slumped in the minibuses, the rest of the band guys looked like shit. Jeez, what a mess. After the gig last night, they'd gone off to a club and sat in with the band. From the state of them, they must've sunk more than just a couple of drinks with the locals. The other two girl singers, Rhonda and Nikki, had gone with them. They weren't looking that hot either.

The Bourbon'll do that to you every time.

