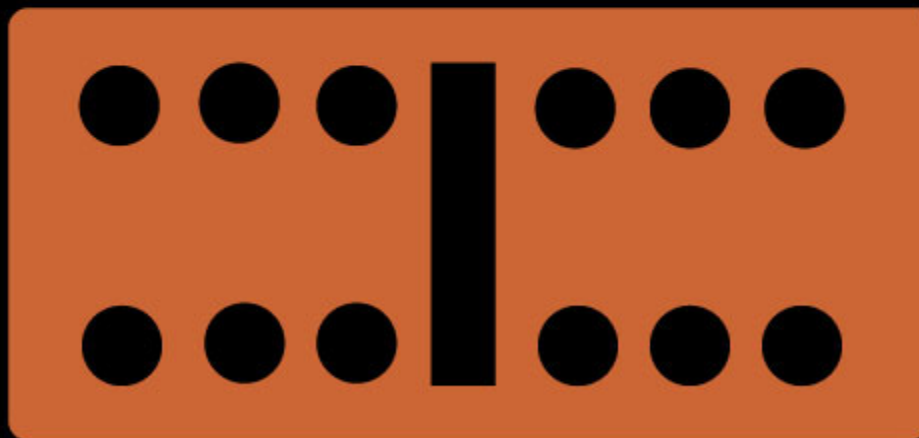


DUST AND BONES



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By V. A. Jeffrey

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Evening was falling. Preacher pulled his wedding ring off and set it on a table, pulled his favorite cufflinks from the top dresser drawer and fixed them to his sleeves. He walked to the windows and peered out from the heavy drapes of his hotel suite. The sun was sinking down into a sea of deep colors over a dry, colorless mountain range. Preacher smiled and sipped his scotch. He'd be leaving within the hour to go play the game. He had his million dollars to add to the pot and he planned to win 100 times that before tomorrow. Just the thought made him hard. He pulled out the card from a gold case in his inside pocket and turned it over. The card was printed on cheap stock and it was simple. There was a name and a phone number under it: Angel. 702.000.0007. *Strange number*: he had thought when he first saw it, but someone had answered when he called and he got his slot. Henry, an old friend, had first told him about it and promised to get him in. *Ol' Henry was as good as his word*. It was the invitation Preacher had been wanting for years - an exclusive game only for those who could afford to play. He put the card away, sipped again and enjoyed the view of the Las Vegas skyline. *One of the most beautiful cities in the world*. he thought. The glitz, the loud lights of many colors, he loved it. The phone rang. The front desk was calling to let him know his ride had arrived. He glanced at his watch. It was 8:00 pm. *'Bout damn time somebody got here!* Preacher turned off the lights, grabbed his briefcase and took the elevator down to the lobby. He could hear the distant, sing-song chittering of thousands of casino machines down in the gaming rooms. *That music!* He sauntered through the luxurious, air conditioned lobby and stepped out into the heat outside. The front entrance was a sea of cabs.

He saw the '57 black Cadillac with the white top pulling in. It looked like a killer whale lumbering behind shiny yellow bees. Preacher looked it up and down and sniffed. He waved and the driver nodded as he pulled the car up to the entrance of the Bellagio's hotel. Preacher got in, preferring to sit in the back seat, and sat his briefcase on the floor. He watched the righthand side view mirror as they drove away, the hotel fleeing into the distance. He saw a shapely girl in high, wedge heels and a black micro skirt walking down the street. Preacher rubbed his crotch, thinking about the many places he could find a girl before he left Vegas. He rubbed and rubbed in rhythmic strokes. It bulged grossly under his pants. *Money first*. From what Angel had told him, the place was near the old strip and the driver was some employee of his who knew where to go. Both men were silent on the ride there.

The heat was wicked. The air rippled and twisted in sweltering waves. The sky was deep violet and the emerging evening stars were drowned out by the never ending strips of casino and hotel lights. After some minutes, the driver slowed down and began to parallel park in front of an old building. The building was non-descript, concrete thing and ugly like a building in an old strip mall. It was a grayish cream color with tall, black, tinted windows and a glass door. *I left my air conditioned suite for this mess? Looks like some hole-in-the-wall porn video shop!* As if he had heard Preacher's thoughts, the driver spoke up.

“This is it. Don't look like much, but what goes on inside is what counts. Easy fortunes are made

here.”

“Humph.” Preacher said, giving the driver a look. The driver got out and circled around the car. *Well, I guess. . . if Henry came here to play and he's the one told me about this place. . .* Preacher thought. He picked up his briefcase as the driver opened the door for him.

“How much do I owe you?”

“You don't. Ride's free.” The driver said. Preacher grunted and stepped out of the car and walked up to the door. The heat was so bad it felt like it was searing off the bottom of his shoes. He pushed open the door and was immediately greeted with air conditioned comfort. It was a liquor store. There were shelves and shelves and rows and rows of everything; the expensive stuff on the top shelves down to the rot gut stuff on the bottom shelves. A thin, stooped man with a short white beard and watery blue eyes stood behind the counter. His eyes were alert and quick and he seemed to get Preacher's measure before he even opened his mouth.

“Here for the game?”

“I'm here to see Angel.” Preacher strolled up to the counter and dropped the card in front of him. The man picked it up, glanced over it and then looked him over quickly. He motioned to a younger man standing at a counter on the other side of the room, organizing bottles of rum. The young man came to his side immediately.

“Show him.” He said to the younger one.

“Come this way. They're meeting downstairs.” The young man lead Preacher to the back of the store through a doorway behind faded, black curtains that led to a narrow staircase. It was dim and dingy. The greyish walls and the rail were flecked with cracked paint. It's only virtue in Preacher's eyes was that it was also blessedly cool and the air got cooler as they descended. The man knocked on the door at the bottom of the stair, a heavy, black wooden door with frowning and weeping gargoyle faces carved into the wood. As Preacher reached the bottom he could see their faces staring out at him, sightless faces full of pain and scowls with painted gold eyes. The man knocked again, loudly. After a few seconds, the door opened and the young man introduced Preacher.

“Angel, one of your guests.” A tall, imposing man nodded to the young man and he ascended quickly back up the stair.

Angel. Preacher looked him up and down slowly. Angel was a very tall man, well muscled with deep copper skin and long, straight hair as black as night. He had high cheek bones and dark eyes. He wore a black t-shirt and black jeans. The room under the store was a far cry from the store itself. The walls were cream and the ceiling was covered in copper leaf and the plush, lush carpet was also cream. It was as nice as his hotel suite, Preacher noted. The room was luxurious but simple in decoration. There was a bar to his left and to his right, another door in the far right wall and a cropping of furniture; a leather sectional, several leather and wood wing chairs and a few brass lamps and occasional tables. A large fireplace with a stone hearth and mantel had been built into the corner. In front of him was a long, cherrywood table and along the wall in front of him a massive cherrywood bookcase filled with artifacts and *objets d'art*. On the table sat a small, black urn and beside it a giant hourglass of crystal and copper. It easily stood four feet in length and a foot in width. Sand drained lazily down into the bottom bulb. In the bottom was a tiny pittance of sand. Angel grinned.

“Glad to see you came, Preacher.”

“Uh-huh. I got the cash. Where's the game?”

“Right in here.” Angel motioned for him to follow. The door to the right led to the game room. The game room was tiled from ceiling to floor with bright blue and green mosaics. There was a pool table off to one side and a massive wooden gaming table with green lining in the middle. The other players were already there, sitting around the table drinking scotch and smoking cigars. A young black man lounged over by the pool table, dressed in black like Angel, watching. He looked like a security guard. Preacher nodded to him and the man nodded back.

“Hey, fellas.” Preacher greeted them. He recognized a few of them. A small chorus of greetings and

nods came up as Preacher approached the table. A black lacquered box sat on the table in the center. Five men sat around the table. To the right of the box in a neat, fat pyramid was the money. \$105 million dollars. One of the men grinned, showing gold capped teeth. He motioned to the pile.

“We was waitin' for you, Preacher. What we gon' do with \$105 million?”

“I can do a whole lot with that, Lester.” Preacher laughed. The others laughed too. No one wanted to seem too eager but as soon as he had entered the room everyone sat a little straighter in their seats. The game was about to begin. Preacher slapped his briefcase on the table and took out his share – \$1 million dollars in crisp, one hundred dollar bills, rolled up in rubber bands. He placed them around the pile.

“There you go, Lester!” Lester and the others laughed heartily.

“Alright. \$106 million. Let's get started!” Angel clasped his hands together. “Any of you gentlemen want anything more to drink?”

“I'll have a scotch, if you please.” Said Preacher. Angel turned to the young man.

“Dre, let's get the man a scotch.” Dre left the room and headed towards the bar. Angel moved with the silent, predatory grace of a big cat through the room and positioned himself at the head of the gaming table, his dark eyes examining each man. He opened the box and dumped the bones out on the table. They were white, mother of pearl with ebony pips. A beautiful double six set.

“Just to reiterate the terms of the game and why we are all here: each man has put in his million - \$6 million from all of you together. I've added \$100 million to the pot. \$106 million dollars all together goes to the winner. We play six rounds and the game is a draw game. The man who earns the most points after all 6 rounds, wins the pot. These are the terms, these are the rules. Any man not wanting to risk losing his money can pull out and leave now.” Angel looked around the table, his voice hard like granite. The men all stared coolly at him, smoking their cigars quietly. No one budged.

“Let's play.” He said. He turned the bones all face down and began shuffling.

“Now that's what I'm talkin' 'bout!” Said Lester. Preacher laughed. He knew Lester from way back. They went to the same church when they were boys. Later, Lester formed his own church and grew his ministry into a profitable mega-church in Alabama. J.J. was here too. He saw J.J. from time to time, who came to his services every now and then, and ran a number of stripclubs down south. He always supplied the sweetest, youngest girls. *Expensive though*. He didn't know the others. It was just as well. As far as Preacher was concerned, he was away on “church” business. The less people he had in his business, the better. Dre came in and set the drink down by his arm. Angel distributed six bones to each man with lightening quickness. The room grew quiet for a few seconds as each man studied his hand. Everyone set up their bones. A white man with icy, pale, blue eyes, and a long scar down his left cheek drew a double 5. Preacher drew a double 6. Angel pulled out a pen and pad and tallied points and nodded at Preacher to start the game. Around they went, laying down bones or drawing from the boneyard. A dark skinned black man wearing a red and white striped suit and red fedora named Kane, played a 5-6, and so on. Angel silently took notes.

“I ain't seen you in a while, Lester. Whatchu been up to?” Asked Preacher.

“Gettin' rich. Whatchu think?” Everybody laughed. “Yup. Gotta flourishing ministry down in Birmingham. We're expanding into a bigger place. Much bigger. Building a McDonald's in the new property too, extra wide stadium seats. Several big screens for congregants sitting in the back. Nice.” Lester said, studying the layout.

“That's the way to do it.” Said Kane, taking a drink.

“How 'bout you, Hector?” Lester asked. Hector studied his hand for a few seconds then put down a bone.

“I'm just now getting into this ministry thing. It's slow work. My businesses in Warez carry me over right now.” Hector said.

“What kinda businesses you got down there?” Asked Preacher. Hector grinned and gave him an even look.

“Businesses.”

“Just keep at it with the ministry. People are hungry and scared. They got nothin' and they need people to tell 'em somethin'. Things they wanna hear to make 'em feel good. Just remember, it's straight up business. They want a feel-good message? They want social connections? And whatever else? Just make sure they tithe.” Kane said.

“That's right. They don't tithe, they need to go elsewhere. Tithing is where the money is.” Said Lester. J.J. made a sucking sound with his teeth and shook his head.

“Whatchu suckin' yo teeth for, J.J.?” Preacher gave him a look.

“Shit. You preachers are somthin' else.” said J.J., drawing from the boneyard.

“You know it.” Said Lester.

“Huh. Tithing. I go further than that. I *expect* the tithe. They ain't doin' nothin' special, tithin'. At my church, they give above and beyond the tithe.” Preacher said with pride.

“Now see, that's what I'm talkin' 'bout.” said Lester.

“Bones!” said Preacher, slapping his last bone down. The first round was finished amid sworls of cigar smoke and another round of scotch. Preacher's throat felt dry as old bones. He began a fit of coughing.

“Hey, son, I need some ice water.” He finally managed to cough up the words. Angel noted the win and reshuffled and redistributed the bones for the next round. Hector drew the double 6 and went first. Water, in a tall, crystal glass was placed by his arm. Large beads of water glistened like diamonds, sliding down the glass. He drank deep.

“So,” Preacher nodded at icy, blue eyes after he finished drinking, “you gotta ministry too?”

“Nah. Just a gamblin' man. The name's Gerald.” Gerald said.

“Good to meet 'cha. Hey, Lester, you heard from Henry recently?” Preacher asked.

“No? Henry? I ain't seen or heard from him in a while.”

“Huh. Must have won and took his money and went to the Cayman Islands somewhere.”

“Or Panama. Bastard! One of them places you don't have to pay no damned taxes!” J.J. said. A round of guttural laughter erupted around the table. The bones bent and twisted in a layout along the table like a cubist serpent, branching out every which way.

“Well, wherever he is, he ain't broke!” Said Gerald.

“Too true.” Agreed J.J.

“So, Angel? Why here? Why not host this game in a hotel somewhere?” Preacher asked.

“Police. IRS. Other people too nosy to mind their own business. Everybody wants to be in your business. I like to keep my business private, know what I mean? What goes on in here ain't their business.”

“Mmm-hmm, I know that's right.” Agreement from the group. Preacher cleared his dry throat.

“As far as my congregation is concerned, Preacher is on the Lord's business. Ain't they business what I'm doin'. I heard you got a new jet, Lester.” Preacher eyed him, playing a 2-6. J.J. examined his hand and drew a bone, looked at it, shook his head and passed. Hector was down to two bones, Preacher noted.

“Yeah. We call it *Prosperity*. I need it to bring the Good News to the four corners of the earth.” They all laughed out loud.

“I set up a payment plan for church members to make it easy. Got me my jet. Might get another one some day. But that's what you can achieve when you market your ministry to the right people. Broke men don't belong in my church, no sir! If they ain't tithing, don't make no difference to me if they *can't* tithe or if they *won't* tithe. I let 'em know this ain't the church for them.” Lester said and put down a 2-1. Dre smiled, all pearly white teeth. He gave Angel a wry look.

“I go further than that. At my church, I set up a situation called The Row. Right by the main entrance there's a row for VIP parking, my car of course, is in the first space. Every car in that row better be a Benz, a Jag, BMW, a Cadillac or somethin' on that caliber. If you can't afford a car on The Row, don't

even drive into the parking lot. I have ushers that will send you right on out the door if your car ain't right, and here you are, comin' in to my church!" Whoops and whistles came up and more laughter.

"And don't try to drive no old car either. Old Benz's and Cadillacs don't count. Can't be older than five years." Preacher said, looking pointedly at Angel. Angel didn't appear to notice. Gerald arched his brow.

"You guys are rough."

"You go to church?" Preacher asked, pointedly.

"Hell no." Gerald said.

"Hell no? Whatchu mean?"

"I mean I'll keep my money in my pocket."

"I heard that." J.J. said .

"What? Y'all gon just give it up to somebody else at some point. I mean, if you gamble you gon' lose it anyway."

"When I run out of money, I go lookin' for another ex-wife. Works for me. Besides, casinos and strip clubs are more fun. You can keep the church." Said Gerald. J.J. chuckled.

"Bones." Hector said slapping his last bone down. The second round was done. Angel took notes and turned the bones all face down and reshuffled. It happened so fast, yet time seemed to float by lazily in a cloud haze of tobacco smoke. They traded jokes, laughed about current wives, new wives, dead wives, ex-wives, mistresses, cars and most of all, money. Money and more money. \$106 million dollars sat before them in green and white notes, some crisp and new, some old and worn, all wrapped neatly and piled into a pyramid with Preacher's rolls placed all around it like a city wall. Third round.

"Angel." Said Gerald.

"Uh-huh?"

"How many times do you invite a man back for the game? I mean, can you only play once?"

"You can play as many times as you can afford to, until you win. Depends on how much money you got to spend." Angel said. Round and round they played; playing, drawing, some passing.

"Bones!" J.J. won the third round.

"Where do you get the money to put up for this game?" Asked Preacher, fixing Angel with a narrow eyed gaze.

"Remember what I told you over the phone: don't ask no questions. I'll tell you this: This is Las Vegas and I'm the luckiest man in this town. Where I hold my game is my business and where I get my money is my business. You playin' private investigator or are you playin' bones, Preacher?" Angel's voice was low and firm with an undercurrent of will that rose through the room like a tidal wave. Preacher didn't ask him any more questions. Nor did he take his eyes off Angel.

"Yeah, I'm playin'." He said after a few seconds of staring him down. Angel grinned but his dark eyes were hard like obsidian and unreadable. Preacher didn't smile back. Preacher finally lowered his eyes studied his new hand and then took a long puff off of his cigar. He once again had a double 6 and played it, starting the game. His throat felt as dry as a cracked, desert road. Cold water came unbidden to him, icy and refreshing. The room grew quiet. Talk fizzled. The game was at the halfway mark. Again, they played, putting down bone after bone or drawing bones. Preacher was ahead of the group.

"Bones!" Lester called out. Angel reshuffled and doled the bones out again. The fourth round started. Time seemed to twist and flip between fast forward and an endless drag between rounds.

"Take your time, man. Nobody's in any hurry." Gerald said to Angel, leaning back with his drink, his eyes on the pyramid. It made no matter. Gerald won the fourth round and Preacher won the fifth and sixth rounds. Angel counted up the points and announced the winner. Preacher. He glared at Angel in naked triumph. Angel smiled back at him and said nothing. The other men nodded at Preacher's win in begrudging acceptance but there was a distinct feeling of hidden hostility in the room, reigned in only by Angel's looming, powerful presence. Dre offered them all fresh cigars and a new bottle of scotch.

"I *receive* it!" Preacher intoned as if he was accepting a gift from the Almighty Himself.

“Shhhhhhooot. Pshaw!” Spat J.J., rolling his eyes. He and Gerald shared a look. Hector flicked his remaining bones back to the boneyard and got up and went over to the pool table.

“Well, I guess I’ll be on my way.” Preacher crowed, his eyes shining with glee. Lester and Kane nodded reluctantly. Gerald and J.J. lit up new cigars. Hector was worrying over the cue sticks. Murmurs of “good luck” and “good job” could be heard over resentful mumblings of other, indecipherable comments of less grace. Preacher didn’t give a damn.

“So, what? Y’all playin’ another game?”

“Yup. Some of us. ‘Till someone else wins. There’ll be another game tomorrow. Guess you won’t be back though.”

“Nope. I came, I won, I’m gone.” Preacher chuckled. He began clearing his throat again. The dryness came on suddenly and with fierceness. He was so thirsty he thought his throat would crack open and bleed. He motioned at Dre and Dre refilled his glass with water. He and Angel counted the money out while the others got up and made their way to the pool table. Then they laid all \$106 million dollars into Preacher’s briefcase. Preacher whistled at it, snapped it closed and put out his cigar. He nodded to the other men. A couple of them nodded back and went back to their cigars, drinks and a game of pool.

“Dre will show you out, Preacher. Good game. We’ll see you again.” He said pleasantly. Preacher gave him a look.

“Nah. Don’t think you will.” He sneered, turned and left.

“As you wish.” Angel said and turned his attention to the game of pool. Dre followed him out of the game room. Preacher suddenly grabbed his throat. He was so thirsty this time that it hurt to breathe.

“Could I trou. . . trouble you for another glass of. . . water before I leave? I don’t know what the hell. . . the hell. . .” He could barely get the last few words out.

“No problem, Preacher.” Dre said pleasantly. Dre went to the bar and poured a tall glass of ice cold water. Preacher stared at the giant hourglass on the table, its grains of sand slowly slipping into the bottom bulb. *One....two.....three.....so many millions of them. Like dust motes. As many as there are stars in the heavens. . . .*

“Preacher, here you go!” Preacher jumped with a start and glared at the young man. Beads of sweat slid down his temples. He took the glass, drank it down and handed it back. *Better.*

“You ok?” Dre asked, concern on his face. Preacher grunted and waved him off and set off towards the black door. He grabbed a handkerchief from his pocket and wiped his temples. Dre got the door for him. It swung open silently.

“I called the driver for you. He’s waiting outside.” Dre informed him.

“Thanks, son.” Preacher started back up the stair. Behind him he heard the door shut close with a thunderous boom. Up he ascended. The stairwell, once flooded by the light coming from the room was now so dim Preacher could barely see. His heart started to thump hard in his chest. He didn’t remember it being this dark coming down. He felt closed in and trapped. He just needed to get to the room at the top and he’d be away from this place. He could see faint light at the top of the staircase filtering in through the curtains. He was sweating again. His knees started to ache. Up, he pulled himself, until he was finally on the last stair and then he turned and looked back down. The way down descended into near, complete darkness, but he thought he could make out the faces of the gargoyles carved in the door, hanging in the air. The faces, with their gaping, black maws seemed to grin and laugh, their gleaming, gold eyes like pools of light. Or stars shining out at him. He didn’t remember grinning, laughing faces when he came in. Preacher shivered and turned towards the doorway. *Let me get the hell up on outta here!* He pulled away the curtain.

He was outside. Not in the liquor store as he had expected, but out in the open desert. He looked down the stairway again. He saw nothing. Not even gargoyles.

“Hey! Hey! Angel! Hey, man! What the hell is going on?!” He saw no door, nothing but blackness deeper and deeper down. The light outside was as blinding as an electric white sun. The heat rippled and curved in great waves. His throat was a raging fire and he could hear a buzzing in his ears, like

millions of hornets pouring out of a nest. A memory flashed up in his mind from ages ago of him and a childhood friend as boys, beating and throwing rocks at a hornets' nest. The little devils all came rushing out like tiny banshees! Everywhere he looked there was nothing but desert. No city, no cool night, no beautiful lights, no comforting music of the slot machines that sing all day and all night. Only desert and raging hot, blinding sunlight. The soles on his shoes were melting into the ground. He staggered here, there.

“Oh Lord! Oh, my God! Please save me! Don't let me die out there! I was decieved by the devil himself!” He cried.

“I'm sorry! I'm so sorry! God, I know I've done wrong! Please help me! Help me get outta here!” He cried, staggering aimlessly, looking for a door, for anything to grab hold of. Was there a door? There was nothing. Only desert and the terrible sunlight. His thirst could not be slaked. The dryness was a torment and there was no water. The pain was electric white.

“The money! My money! Oh God, help me! Hear my prayer like you heard king David! Let me get home and I promise you I 'll do right! Please, God, hear my prayer!” He could feel a blistering wind against his head and face, pushing his body forward. He gripped his briefcase tightly, the only anchor he had. He danced along awkwardly in the gales of wind, helpless as an old sheet of newspaper. The wind kicked up so much dust that he could barely breathe. Swept sands and dust motes swirled through the air in columns and waves, tearing at the soft flesh of his eyes. He could feel the soles of his feet burning away; the bottoms of his shoes already gone. He felt himself falling in a strange way. The ground was rising up slowly to meet him. He lifted his hand to look at it through the one eye he had left. He laughed. He heard laughter? He heard nothing but the howling wind scouring his flesh away. The last sound he made was a ragged, agonized howl. The flesh tore and dissolved into motes of dust, millions and millions of motes, carried along with the blowing sands. First his fingers, then his hand, then the arm under his sleeve. All of the flesh, blood and bone dissolved and flew away becoming one with the desert until there was nothing but dust amongst the sand, a soiled suit, gold cufflinks and a leather briefcase.

The hour was late; it was just a few hours before sunrise. Dre carefully put away each bone back into the box and straightened up the room. He emptied the ash trays, put away glasses, racked the billiard balls and put away the cue sticks. The men had all finally left but would be back the next night to play again. Angel had just come in from outside. He had the small black urn with him. Dre came out to the front room with an armful of glasses.

“Another winner.” Dre said, shaking his head. “It's just too easy sometimes, man.”

“I know it seems that way, Dre. But no one is forcing anyone's hand.” Angel's face was solemn. He twisted open the top bulb of the hourglass and poured the contents in. The money was sitting on the table beside it and the briefcase and the suit and cufflinks were on the floor.

“I never forget what brings them. You would think playing for \$6 million was enough, but when they hear the entire pitch, \$6 million is never enough. Always, they have to go for the \$106 million. Every time. They'll rob, cheat, kill, embezzle or go broke to put some money in to win that \$106 million. Burn the briefcase, the cufflinks and the suit, Dre.”

“Right. But you know, that's a mighty nice case. Good, fine leather. And those cufflinks . . .”

“Burn it. He was marked and judged. We keep nothing that belongs to them. When you keep such things it defiles your own soul. Devote it to the fire. Remember that, Dre. Also, take his million and burn that as well.”

“Right away, right away. Who's next on the list?” Dre asked. He dutifully pitched the things into the fireplace and started a fire.

“A man in Texas. He'll be here in the morning. He'll be staying at the Luxor.” Angel stared at the hourglass as the dust slipped silently to the bottom.

“Wonder who the lucky winner will be tomorrow.”

“Always one of the six. When they come back, once again they'll be playin' on dead men's time.”

“Amen.” Dre said quietly. He went to the kitchen to clean the glasses. Angel set the urn down in its place and crossed the room and sat down on the sectional and stretched out his legs. He watched the briefcase, the clothes, the cufflinks and the money burn in the fire. The heat from the tongues of flame, the dancing light reminded him of home, yet, infinitely dimmer. He closed his eyes and thought of distant, strange stars never seen by any man. He thought of his place back home where he stood and sang. The flames in the fireplace suddenly blazed with white fire for a few seconds and then died down to orange-gold flames. He had a lot of work to do before he could go home and Dre was young and had much to learn. His mind focused on the licking, crackling sounds of the fire. He heard Dre somewhere distantly say “goodbye” and leave for home by the hidden, blue-tiled door in the game room. He nodded gently and heard the door close. He sat for a long time, feeling the heat on his face and arms. As the last embers burned down into ashes he got up and went to the game room. He took a final look around. Everything was just so. He turned out the lights and closed the door. He took one last look at the hourglass. The slipping sands and dust had all drained into the bottom bulb. He would flip it over tomorrow and time would be reset. He looked around in solemn satisfaction. Everything was in its place once again.

The End

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