

Vicki Mallard Bends Las Vegas

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Vicki Mallard is able to bend the odds to win any game of chance. But when a dark black cloud takes residence above the skies of Las Vegas, she realizes the consequences of her actions. This is a story I wrote for a contest on TheNextBigWriter.com. I combined my interest in quantum physics and parallel universes with games of chance. Let me know if the story works.



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I didn't want to go to Vegas again but I have to if I want to save the world.

It's not that I don't like Vegas, because I do. I love the blinking lights, the spinning slots, the tumbling craps, the smell of desperation, and the scent of hope. It makes me giddy and even, I must admit a little bit hot.

Most of all I like winning, and I always, always win in Vegas. But now, that's the problem.

During the past year I have won over \$750,000. It could have been more, an unlimited amount, but I didn't want to arouse suspicion. I've heard how card counters get banned from casinos from getting greedy and winning too much. When I'm in the zone, I can win any hand, any game at will.

My favorite is blackjack but I tend to win the biggest on the roulette wheel or craps. I wish I hadn't pushed it so far on our last visit. It was right after the dealer spun the roulette wheel that I felt the tear, the slight tug. I know that was the moment the Cloud began to spill into this world. People don't notice at the time but now we can all see that the Cloud is getting bigger.

Normally Vegas gets just 44 cloudy days per year. I looked it up on the Internet after I started hearing the news reports. So far, the Cloud has remained perched over the city for 17 consecutive days. But I didn't need the stats to tell me something was wrong. I knew it that first day, looking up and realizing the Cloud was not natural, was not of this world. I knew it the same way I knew the next hand dealt would be an ace or the roulette wheel was going to stop on red.

But most disturbing to me was the realization that I had caused The Cloud to appear.

We walk into our room and it's beautiful. We get the best in Vegas. The bedroom in the suite has a huge king-sized bed with gold sheets. On one wall is an enormous plasma screen. The floor is white Venetian marble with a plush rug to one side. On the other side is a hot tub. The bathroom is almost as big with an oversized shower and a huge tub sitting on gold clawed feet. A crystal chandelier hangs down over the rug.

I don't want to go to the casino yet. I lie down on the huge bed and watch Ted stare out the window. Sometimes he stares for hours. When I ask him why, he says:

â I can't believe I had the good fortune of meeting you Vicki. Sometimes, I just can't believe it. It doesn't seem real.â

â What are you looking at?â He smiles.

â The Cloud. I don't know why everyone is so concerned.â Ted is laid back, he doesn't sweat life that much and I love him for it. I wish some of his mellowness could rub off on me.

â I know.â

â I was thinking about the weekend we met. It was cloudy like this that weekend, remember?â That's not how I remembered it. It was scorching hot and I felt like a piece of bacon on a hot skillet walking down the strip.

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I met him at the blackjack table. It was the weekend I learned I could â bendâ the cards in my favor. Thinking back, I met him after the first hand, the first time I bent it. My sister had been sitting to my right and the seat to my left had been empty. I remember that because an Asian guy had been ogling me from the seat several hands before. I had been relieved when he left.

On the next hand I felt a tingle in my brain. I had felt it before but ignored it. This time, I knew what the tingle meant; if I tried I could make the right card appear. So I did it. I pictured the dealer giving me a 10, a 3 and then an 8. Iâ ve always had a good imagination so visualizing the scene was easy. I felt a small tug at the base of my neck, and presto, thatâ s what the dealer whisked across the table - a 10 and then a 3 and then an eight. Blackjack.

My sister clapped me on the shoulder.

â Nice hand.â I turned and a man with sandy brown hair and blue eyes was laughing at me. Where did he come from? I realized he was laughing at my good fortune, enjoying it. He had average looks but his smile was warm and his eyes looked kind, almost like the buttons on the stuffed bear I had as a kid.

â Thanks.â I proceeded to win another three hands in a row. I had attracted quite a group, including interest from the dealerâ s pit boss, who scrutinized my playing.

â Youâ re either quite good or the luckiest woman Iâ ve ever seen,â my sandy-haired neighbor said.

â Maybe youâ re my good luck charm. I didnâ t start winning until you showed up.â He gave a hearty laugh.

â Iâ m Ted,â he said, giving me a hearty shake.

â Vicki.â I felt bold. After winning another hand I decided to speak to him. I had become a minor celebrity and had never been shy. I believed in getting what you wanted out of life.

â Hey Mr. Good Luck, why donâ t you join me and my sis for lunch?â He flashed that smile, and tipped his ten gallon hat.

â I think I earned a lunch,â he said, â acting as your good luck charm.â The three of us went to get some eats and my sister soon left. She must have sensed the attraction. After a delicious salmon salad, we took a walk down the strip in the blazing Vegas sun. We wound up diving into the Venetian pool and then humping like two rabbits come springtime. The walk down the Elvis alter with my sister as bridesmaid happened the next day. Yeah, Iâ m a bit impulsive.

So how could he remember that day as cloudy? I decide itâ s just Ted being Ted. He can be loopy sometimes but his bizarre recollection fits my mood. The whole day is disquieting.

â Come here and sit with me?â He comes over from the window, a smile on his face. The smile I love more than anything and cherish above any amount of money.

Ted gives me a hug. â Youâ re shaking.â

â Hold me Ted.â

â Whatâ s wrong?â I donâ t want to tell him about my fears and the Cloud. Do I tell him that I suspect I have single handedly broken the space-time continuum? I look out the window expecting to see

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bright sunlight but itâs dim and dark. I feel like crying. I look up and kiss him. He gently kisses me back and then I pull him down on the bed. I need Ted right now like never before. I need to feel his strong hands around me, to kiss him and feel his breathe on my face.

* * *

In the elevator down to the casino floor, a tall, thin guy in shorts is talking to two friends.

ââ That cloud is weirding me out. Iâm going to ask the hotel for some of my money back. I didnât come to Vegas for cloudy weather every day.ââ His two companions nod.

â I heard it was some strange low pressure from California,â a bald white guy with a goatee says.

â No, itâs the devil,â the thin guy laughs. â The devil has finally come to finish Vegas.

Yeah, itâs the devil, and thatâs me.

We step into the lobby and itâs busy with people, but something is missing. Itâs not as vibrant as usual. The pulse and throb that is Vegas seems to have diminished a bit. A bunch of heavy, buffet loving blondes go walking by. Three Asian men stare at my long legs and then disappear into the banks of blinking, blonking, hooting slot machines.

The blackjack tables are set up in the middle of the floor and ringing them are the slot machines. I hear a bunch of coins come whirring out of one.

Ted must sense my apprehension.

â Vick, you sure there is nothing wrong?â I nod.

â I want to try the slots,â I hear myself say.â We walk over to a machine that says â Super Winnerâ and has a look-alike Superman on the front. If you get three S badges you can earn up to \$10,000. I want to see if I still have it. Maybe my powers are gone and this whole trip was for naught. Maybe I didnât cause the Cloud.

My hands are shaking as I feed the bill into the eater. Thereâs a tug and then a whir as itâs sucked into the slot mouth. The red button starts to pulse and I watch it for second.

I close my eyes and imagine the red button. I see the ridged edge, the glow spread and then recede, and the translucent plastic that covers it. The vision couldnât be clearer. Now I see the slots. There is a lemon, a dollar sign, and a pickle. I give a little push and the slots change. Now there are three Jâs â jokers, \$500 in quarters are about to spill out. Itâs a mini-jackpot. I could have won the whole \$10,000 but I didnât want to attract attention.

Done visualizing the reality I want to create, I open my eyes and the red button is pulsing. The slots show a lemon, a dollar sign, and pickle. I reach over and push the red button and feel that slight tug in the back of my neck. The machine lets out a little chime and the slots spin. The first slot stops at a J, the second is also a J, and the third is the same.

Now the machine is really dinging and donging, like R2D2 on drugs. Quarters start spilling out its mouth.

Ted has a bag ready and positions it to catch the flow.

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“ Vicki, it’s not natural what you do,” Ted says. I know he didn’t want to come here and that he gets freaked by my “ good luck.”

I feel goosebumps on my arms and try to smile a bit for Ted.

At the beginning I’d woop and holler like a hillbilly that struck oil in her backyard, which in some ways I’d had. The first time had been a thrill like the first time having sex in the back of Tommy Doyle’s father’s car.. I remember taking in lungfulls of air, feeling a heaviness, an excitement pressing against my chest. I knew there was something wonderful and mysterious about my ability.

I figured out “ my talent” while gambling and I tried doing it for other things “ imagine winning the jackpot, or changing other things in life “ but it only seemed to work for cards, or slots, or other games of chance. I don’t know why, but that’s how it is.

The only other person besides Ted that knows about the talent is my nephew Jonas. He has a Phd in physics so when he was over one Thanksgiving, I cornered him and explained what was going on. I thought he would laugh but he didn’t.

“ Aunt Vicki, can you explain exactly what you feel when you win the slots?”

I told him how I visualize the scene and then imagine the outcome I want. And then I feel that tug.

“ It only works in Vegas?”

“ No, it only seems to work with games of chance. Games with odds in them.” He considered that.

“ Have you ever heard of quantum physics or string theory Aunt Vicki?”

“ The terms sound familiar but I have no idea.” I was good at math but had never followed physics.

“ It’s a field of study in physics. Quantum physics explains how the world works at the tiniest levels while string theory deals with both the small and with cosmic-sized dimensions. Both seem to indicate that there are millions of parallel universes. Every time we make a choice, or are faced with a decision, or a chance of something happening, these branches impact all of these parallel universes differently. In some cases, new instances of universes may even be created, branching off based on a decision that you made or didn’t make or could have made.”

According to quantum physics, if you flip a coin, in half of the universes it would land on heads, and in the other half it would land on tails.”

I wasn’t sure what he was getting at but I loved Jonas and smiled and nodded like I understood. I could see he was getting excited.

“ In general, these parallel universes don’t interact. You can’t go into another parallel universe or meet a parallel you. But there is a field of physics that recognizes that our brains are quantum computers, providing some people with the ability to get glimpses of these parallel worlds. One explanation of ghosts is that they are glimpses into these parallel places. Some rare people might even be able to move in and out of these universes.”

“ Jonas, I’m not really sure I understand.” He smiled.

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“I’m sorry Aunt Vicki, I’m not explaining this well.” He thought for a moment. “Aunt Vicki, when you imagine the outcome you want, I don’t think you are creating a vision, you are merely seeing into a parallel universe where that outcome is going to happen. You are finding the outcome you want and then somehow moving yourself into that world.”

How much did my sister pay for his college education?

“You haven’t figured out how to change the results on the slot machine, you have figured out how to be in a world where the slots give the outcome you want.”

“So, I’m leaving my world and traveling into another one?”

“Yes, but the world you move into is probably virtually identical to the one you left. The only difference is how the slot machine will land.” And then he said the ominous sentence.

“Of course, there may be differences. You might land in a world that was totally different. And it’s not clear what jumping universes might do to the fabric of space-time.” At the time, I ignored all of this.

He gushed on a bit more and then asked if I would be willing to meet his professor. I loved my nephew so I said I’d be willing to think about it. Being paraded about like a lab experiment wasn’t high on my to-do list. Plus, I didn’t want too many people knowing about my “magic.” I didn’t want to kill the golden goose after all.

* * *

Ted finishes putting the quarters into a bag and I rise from the slot machine.

“Ted, I love you,” I say and give him a tender kiss on the lips. He smiles and caresses my arm.

“I love you too Vick. Happy Anniversary.” I can feel the tears streaming down my face. “Come on Vick, let’s get out of here.”

“No, I’m okay, really.”

The blackjack table hasn’t changed at all in five years. It’s three tables in on the \$25 hands. I’d played there several times in the last couple of years, since it was my “lucky” table. Today, there are three people playing on it—a tall man with a beer gut, a Indian guy, and an old lady with large gold rings around her fingers and big, old lady glasses. She is sipping a drink and cursing the dealer about the hand she just lost.

Ted and I saddle up to the table. I’m having difficulty breathing and feel unsteady on my feet so I’m relieved to plop into the chair. I motion to the dealer that I’m in.

He deals the first round of cards—one down and one up. My face card is a 6 and I’m holding a three. The Indian guy has an ace, so his hand looks good. The others have nothing special. Ted doesn’t play, but sits behind me, rubbing my shoulders.

How am I going to do this?

I decide to put in a few more chips and play out the hand. I’m not really playing yet.

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The dealer starts the next round and the Indian and the old lady bust. I get a 6 and decide to get one more card. My total is 23, too high. The Indian guy gets a 20 and the dealer breaks. Indian guy wins. Good for him.

We all decide to stay for the next game. I pull Ted towards me and give him a kiss. The Indian scrunches his face, unhappy about my PDA. I bite my lip and let out a little sob.

“Vick, what’s wrong?” I wipe away a tear.

“Ted, I love you.”

“You gonna play or be in love,” the Indian guy says. I nod to Ted that it was okay.

It’s time. I put ten \$25 chips on the table. The dealer shuffles the deck and hands it to me. I cut it. He takes it back.

“Here we go folks,” I swallow. He deals the cards and I focus on my hand. The table gasps when the dealer flips over two aces in front of me.

“Ya, ya, ya,” says the old lady. “What they don’t know is that this was the exact same hand I had five years ago. I split the hand.”

Am I really going to do this? Do I want to change my life? I’m rich, I’m happy, and I have Ted. Since when did I become a superhero, fighting to save the world from a dark Cloud?

“I’m splitting,” I declare, replicating the words I said in another world at another time.

The dealer splits my aces and I place 10 chips on each hand for a total of 20 chips.

The dealer, his nametag says Gus, deals the next round of cards. It’s time. I concentrate, visualizing the world that I came from, and then watch it unfold.

The table gasps as Gus slides two tens in front of me.

“Dios mio,” old Lady sighs.

“That’s impossible,” Indian man adds. Gus stares for a moment and then smiles.

“You won.” I take a deep breathe and turn around to look where Ted has been sitting.

He was still there, his expression a bit more relaxed. I give him a sly smile and grab his hand.

“It’s okay baby. Let’s get our chips and split.” We scoop them into a cup, cash them in for our \$500, and then head to the lobby.

“Let’s go outside for a minute.” He shrugs. We walk across the lobby holding hands. The bag boy opens gold gilded doors and we step out. Up above, the Cloud swirls in the sky, dark pudding, an ink stain, a curse.

I like my life too much; I’m not ready to leave this world, Cloud or not.

“Come on Ted, let’s grab some expensive lunch and then spend the rest of the day screwing.”

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â Sounds good to me.â

â The world will have to deal with the Cloud.

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