

## I'm For You, If You're For Me

The first time Rex heard the song he was in the car alone. He flipped out. He wanted to pull over, rip the damn radio out of the dash and beat it to death with a hammer. The second time he and his girlfriend, Angie, were hanging out on a blanket on the state park lake beach. He got up yelled, "Fuck You Rugbeaters" and threw his transistor radio into Seneca Lake .

Angie thought he was mad. He was. And it was the Rugbeaters who drove him. He was their roadie once. Set up the kit, tuned the guitars, sound-checked the mics. It was a good gig. The best thing about it was that he met Angie. She was smokin' hot, smart, fun, tough and way out of his league. Waist-length black hair and big brown come hither eyes.

The Rugbeaters were the hottest cover band in the Finger Lakes and even up to Niagara. They averaged five gigs a week playing bars, wineries and private parties. They had a loyal fan base. The Wells brothers, Jam and Yancey, fronted the band, playing bass and lead and singing. Sure they were real pros compared to Rex, but all they did was cover songs. Rex, though all could do was strum a few chords, was a dreamer. The chords and melody came to him one night sitting alone in his apartment after a couple hits on a bong. He jotted down some lyrics and a title, "I'm for You, If You're for Me."

He played it for Jam and Yancey one night after a bar gig. They laughed and Yancey said, "Rex you're a regular Willie Nelson?" Rex didn't say anything, but quietly he seethed. They didn't like the song, ok, but why the snarky comment?

Rex got a real day job working construction and told Jam and Yancey he couldn't handle the late nights anymore. They didn't seem unhappy to let him go, without so much as a thanks. A

month later he and Angie went to hear the Rugbeaters at Arnie's Roadhouse. Yancey stepped to the mic and said, "Hey, we got something original we've been working on, we call it 'If Not for You, There'd Be no Me. ' ' "

Rex only needed to hear a verse. He didn't know what to do. He grabbed Angie's hand.

"Damn it, that's my song. We gotta get out of here now."

Well, it turns out, Scepter, a new label out of New York City, was looking for new bands. They sent a scout to Hammondsport to hear the Rugbeaters and he recommended giving them a contract. They recorded the song in a real studio in the City and Scepter released it. The Syracuse University radio station picked it up and the next thing anyone knew, everybody's favorite bar cover band had a regional Upstate hit. A Binghamton DJ told Rex the band probably made 40, 50 grand on the song — his song.

Rex tried to confront Jam and Yancey. Called them, numbers changed. Went to their old half double on Rand Street. Moved. Drove out to the family farm a couple times. Never anybody around. Went to a few gigs, tried to get backstage. Stopped by bikers.

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"So, tell me more about Wellstock," Angie said as she and Rex passed a joint and sipped on homemade wine poolside of the apartment complex where she lived with her parents.

"We were there last year, right? You remember the Wells' family farm. It really is the middle of nowhere. 15 miles back a dirt road off 29. No neighbors for five miles. They cut a grove back there and left a buffer of woods all around. They built a stage. Parking in the cow fields for hundreds of cars. Been running this thing for five years. Nothing but word of mouth buzz."

“What do you figure they rake in?”

“Last year they sold 4,000 tickets, \$10 a piece. That’s 40 grand right there. And they sell beer and weed. They pay the bands cash. Small bills, dirty money,” Rex said.

“Dirty?” Angie said.

“Yeah, no permits, no advertising, no checks, no tickets, no paper, except for the money, singles, five, tens, 20s maybe even some 50s, all collected at the door day-of, or from slinging the weed and beer.”

“How do they get away with it?”

“Local cops gotta know, but as long as there’s no major trouble they don’t give a shit.”

“How do they handle the money?”

Rex explained and Angie said, “You make it sound like there’s like 40 grand laying in a pile ripe for pickin’.”

“I guess you could say there pretty much there is”

“So let’s go get it,” she said.

“What? Whatya mean, like steal it?”

“Yep. Is there some kind of security?”

“Yeah, bikers. They pay ‘em beer and weed. How we going to get around that?”

“Don’t worry, Rex, a plan is already rattling around my head.”

“What’s the plan.”

“Born to be Wild.”

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In the festival office, really a trailer home backed up to the stage, the Rugbeaters gofer, Jerry, sat at a folding table separating cash into piles by denomination, counting and banding it.

Their roadie and doorman, Dan, ran the dough back from the front gate every half hour between 7 and 9 when they closed the gate. "We're making a killing man," Jerry said after Dan had dumped the last of the gate from his shoulder bag. "We're closing in on 50 grand and we still have two joint sellers out there and we're still selling tons of beer. We pay the bands 15 and we'll clear 35.

"We're shutting down the music at 11:15," Dan said.

"Don't pull the plug, they'll be a fucking riot," Jerry said.

As Dan turned and walked down the hall to the door he said, "Not pulling the plug. The Rugbeaters are going to close with a big jam with the other bands and the natives are going to go wild and, hopefully, the natives will be worn out and go home."

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Getting in was easy. Rex and Angie just paid at the gate like everybody else.

"10 freaking bucks, what a rip off," Angie said

Rex looked at her, shook his head and they laughed.

They snaked their way through the crowd, stepping over muddy sleeping bags and around powwows, Rex tried not to check out the girls in cutoffs and halters. They stopped to take tokes on joints passing by. As they got closer to the stage they could hear the Rugbeaters playing "Start Me Up," but were walled off by a 20-deep mob of stoned, drunken, gyrating dancers.

When the song ended Yancey said some “hey how y’all doing” shit over the mic. Gave Rex and Angie just enough time to jostle their way to the front row stage left. To their right three huge, dirty, mean-looking, drunken bikers stood with their arms folded and their backs against the stage. Yancey yammered on and finally yelled the magic words. “This one’s going out for our favorite bikers, the Vulcans.”

Angie said “oh yeah” to herself, as the Beaters broke into “Born To Be Wild.” The bikers turned toward the stage raising their beers and banging their heads while the dancers went wild, spinning, jumping, air guitaring.

Angie reached down pulled up the tarp hiding the stage under pinnings. She ducked under pulling Rex in by the hand. Shit, a freaking maze of 2 x 4 cross section supports, way more than she expected. The bass and drum thundered down on them as they picked their way through the stage infrastructure. Angie, lithe and 120 pounds, moved easily. She looked back and saw Rex. He wasn’t moving. He was stuck in a cross section.

“You fat fuck, I never should brought you.” They both laughed

“Come on it’s not funny, get me the hell out.” They had to scream over the music.

Time was running out on “Born to be Wild” and their plan to get paid for “I’m For You, If You’re For Me.”

Angie got behind him, put her shoulder to his ass and pushed. Didn’t budge him.

“We don’t have time,” Rex said. “Go ahead with the plan, I’ll catch up.”

“You want me to pull this off myself?”

“Sorry babe, you’re on your own until I can squirm out.”

Angie crawled out the back of the stage, as “Born to Be Wild” faded out. Only one more song and 20 musicians were going to go to the trailer for their dough. She had five minutes, give or take, while all the bands jammed on “The Breeze.” Angie ran alongside the trailer, up the front steps, pulled down her ski mask and burst in the door.

“Hey, Dan, that you,” came a voice from behind a curtain in the kitchen down the end of the narrow hall.

Angie ran, ripped down the curtain and jumped on the table below the picture window on the back of the trailer. Just as Rex said, the banded money was piled on the table in front of Jerry. Angie kicked Josh in the chest, he fell back to the floor in the chair, whacked his head and stayed down.

Angie shoved the money in her backpack, jumped off the table and turned toward the hallway. A door flew open. A huge, greasy-haired pockmarked biker stepped out of the toilet looking down, hitching his belt, blocking the hall. He looked up in time to swing his forearm to knock away the folding metal chair Angie threw at him. He growled and ran toward her, but got his feet tangled up in the chair and he went down. Here came Rex, in the door and down the hall, running right over the prone biker. He grabbed another chair and threw it through the bay window behind the table. Angie jumped through the opening just as Josh, groggy from whacking his head, stood up and made a futile swipe for her legs. She landed on some shards, but got up, scrambled under the snow fence and sprinted for the tree line and into the woods.

It must have been quite a sight if anyone could see it. A lone figure wearing a backpack sprinting into the dark woods from a moonlit pasture, 20 musicians, some wielding mic stands, and a half dozen sloppy bikers running after her.

It was dark in the woods, but Angie knew the trail. She'd run it training for the Lakes Half Marathon and the training was paying off. Her tach light would give away her position, but she switched it on. She couldn't afford to fall. She was in better shape than the musicians and bikers and she was sober — hopefully not for long. In a couple minutes she was a mile ahead. She heard a distant roar of engines. The bikers must have broken off the chase and went back to the main gate for their hogs.

The trail dumped her out on 29, the car was there where they had left it. But Rex had the GD key and where the fuck was he anyway. She figured he'd be right behind her, but he wasn't. She crossed 29 and picked up the trail again on the other side of the road. She heard bikes coming up 29. She ducked into the woods 20 feet off the trail, crawled to the edge of the road, hid in the trees and peeked through the brush. Three bikes slowed as they approached the car. They stopped. Holy crap, it was Rex! He climbed off one of the bikes and waved like he was saying thanks. Two of the bikes rode away slowly, shining flashlights into the woods. The third turned onto the trail, he rode so close she could taste the damned exhaust. She ate dirt until the bike disappeared around a bend.

As Rex opened the car door Angie came up behind him. "Open the other side."

"Jeez," he said, as he flung his arms around in a bear hug, "you about gave me a heart attack."

"We better get going," she said. She got in shotgun and put the backpack between her legs.

"So what happened? Where the hell were you? And how did you get a ride from a biker?"

"I ducked back under the stage before Jam and Yancy got to the trailer. Went back out the front and fell in with the crowd walking out. Got to the main gate. Some bikers came running

and gunning yelling about killing some asshole thief. I knew one of them from the Cat and Canary pool league. Told him I was out of gas on 29. He told me to hop on. He even gave me a can of generator gas.”

“Out of gas?”

“How was I supposed to explain the car out here.

“He bought it?”

“He’s a biker, duh. “How much we get?” Rex said.

“We? I did all the dirty work.”

“Hey, I couldn’t help it.”

They both laughed

“So where we going?”

“You’ll see.”

“What about our stuff, my apartment?

“My brother is going to take care of everything. For a price, of course.”

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Jam counted the left behind money. A couple grand out of 50.

“It was Angie, wasn’t it?”

“Well, she had a mask, but yeah, Jerry is 95 percent it was her,” Yancey said.

“From what I hear she’s on the warpath over the song. Telling everybody we ripped Rex off, ”

Jam said.

“So what do we do?”



“Nothing.”

“Nothing?” Jam said.

“We can’t call the cops,” Yancey said.

“We could look for them.”

“Where the hell are we going to look, she’s not going to go home. She’s probably heading out to California as we speak. Her and her Remy.”

“The Vulcans aren’t gonna give up.”

“They can’t find their own asses.”

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There’s a part of North Central Pennsylvania nicknamed “The Wilds.” Endless mountains rolling with state game lands, national forests, and parks. There’s even an elk herd, one of the few this side of the Rockies, and elk tourism is a thing around one of the little towns. A decent restaurant, winery, brewpub, a B and B.

Nice place to buy a little business with your boyfriend and call it the Antler Inn, sit on the patio and watch elk, maybe write he’ll even write a couple songs.