

DAY 2

Street Performer

If you walk by Paris Las Vegas at the right time, you'll see Elvis, Darth Vader, Wonder Woman, a silver boxer, a green toy soldier, and a guy wearing a pink bra and white go-go boots. He's got the words "MANWHORE FOR TIPS" painted on his stomach in black capital letters, and, for a dollar, he'll take a picture with you.

"My wife's supportive," he says.

The casinos used to kick street performers like these off the strip, but after several rounds of litigation, the performers figured out that the casinos didn't have the right.

Civil rights attorney Maggie McLetchie tells me, "For over thirteen years, the ACLU has been litigating the question of how the First Amendment applies on Fremont Street and on the Strip. And the courts have repeatedly held that each area is a public forum."

"So I can perform there, for tips?" I ask.

"You can't obstruct foot traffic and you can't beg aggressively, but aside from that, yes, performing for tips is legal."

With the law on my side, I take to the Strip alongside professional busker/personal friend Jungle Josh. He brought with him a sound system, a folding table, and a six-foot long Colombian Red Tail Boa Constrictor.

Her name is Isabelle.

I don't like snakes. I don't have an irrational fear of them; I'm not afraid they're going to slither into my apartment at night and pin me to my bed. I have a *rational* fear of them. They're dangerous. But Josh assures me that Isabelle is different—"Very nice, very friendly."

At 7 p.m., we arrive at his spot, 15 or 20 feet from the Mon Ami Gabi restaurant. It's 100 degrees out and I'm wearing a collared shirt, a tie, and a vest. I'm sweating. As we unpack our tricks, some guy asks me, "Where's the nearest Half Price Ticket booth?"

"I have no idea," I say.

He rolls his eyes and mutters, "Asshole."

Josh removes Isabelle from her red bag and sets her on the folding table.

"I'm going to go grab some water," Josh tells me, and before I can object, he's gone.

So there I am, standing on Las Vegas Boulevard with a snake I've only just met.

Almost instantly, I learn the most important thing about snake ownership: *If you've got a snake with you, you don't matter.* Rather, you matter only in that you're the guy who can answer three questions.

