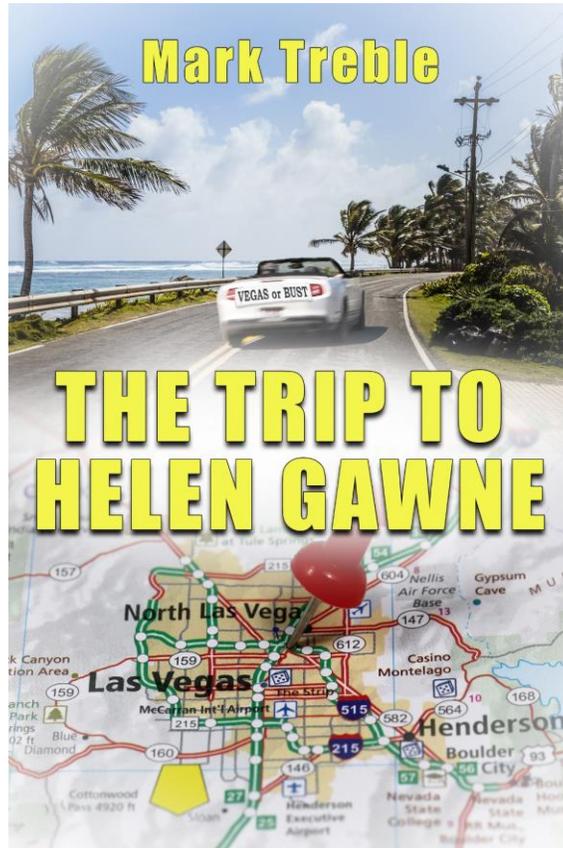


The Trip to Helen Gawne



SAMPLE

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Book 1 of the *Gulfside City* series

Woody

There's the Waffle House. I'm almost there. Now it's just three blocks left and one block, ah, no, it's three blocks right and two blocks, oh never mind. I think I'll just go in and get a cup of coffee from Tamika. That girl is so cute and nice. Not like my niece, Tamika, who makes fun of me every time I can't find something.

"Hey, Tamika, get me a coffee, black, one sugar. Thanks!" Maybe I can remember where my sister's place is while I drink the coffee. It always helps me to think better.

"Honey, Tamika works at the other Waffle House." The woman was smiling, but I suspected it was a frickin-stupid- baby-walked-into-the-damned-wall-again smile instead of a what-a-cute-baby smile.

"When Tamika gets in, ask her to bring me my coffee." That should fix it.

I've been coming to this Waffle House for more years than I can remember. Then again, I've been collecting Social Security for more years than I can remember. And I'm just sixty-three. Or sixty-four. I forget.

I need a vacation. My life consists of going to the Waffle House and forgetting things.

A skinny young man whose name tag read "Peggy" brought me my coffee. Honestly, the things people name their kids these days. "How's it going, old timer?"

"What old timer, boy? Do you know who I am?" I'm gonna put this guy in his place. I was the quarterback on the winningest football team in school history. Everybody knows me.

"Yeah, you're an old guy who's lost and thinks he's in another Waffle House. Coffee's on me." Smart-ass kid, I bet he couldn't win thirty-seven games in four years. Or thirty-five. Or at least more than thirty.

Now, I just need to remember where my sister's place is. I know I walk out of the Waffle House and then turn, ah, turn. Oh, shit.

"Hey, Alessandro! Como vai?" Must be a good day. I remember my Portuguese.

“Woody, what’s up? I’m kind of busy here.” Alessandro was always busy. He should do like I did and retire. Of course, I’ve got all my football trophies from high school. All he’s got is some crappy “Certificate of Participation” from our shitty high school basketball team. Guess he needs to do something to be proud of before he retires.

“Ah, Alessandro, buddy, where does my sister live?” He knows everything.

“Where are you, Woody?” Alessandro sure has a lot of questions.

“I’m at the Waffle House. Some dude named Peggy is getting smart with me, they say Tamika doesn’t work here.” Alessandro has it easy, he has a secretary to remind him of stuff. Like, where he’s at.

“Please put on Peggy.” OK, so I put on Peggy.

“This is Banks. What can I do for you? ... No, sir, I’m not giving anybody a hard time ... *That* Woody Wilson with the pictures all over the school? ... No shit? ... Yeah, the new Waffle House. Sure, I’ll have him outside. ... OK, here’s Mr. Wilson.”

“Woody, it’s too warm to be walking a lot. I’m sending a taxi to pick you up and take you to your sister’s house, OK? Peggy will make sure you’re ready.” Alessandro was always so nice to me.

TDP

I needed to get away. I was two rich kids' DUI arrests and three sniveling wannabe divorce candidates short of killing somebody. Unfortunately, the leading candidate for "somebody" was me.

The brochure was slick and colorful and filled with smiling happy people. The clinic in Mexico guaranteed results or your money back. Unfortunately, the money back only applied to the actual treatments, which were laughably cheap. The cost of staying in the clinic's luxury resort was not refundable. You had to stay at the resort to get the treatments.

The injections were described as "producing mild discomfort." I bet. Not sure "mild" was the right term for a needle going into one's manhood. The wonder drug Hardaghin was discovered by some (probably mythical) marine biologist working with a safari operator (equally mythical, no doubt). It was concocted of ground rhinoceros horn combined with pureed octopus penis. It probably won't work, but the Viagra's not helping these days either.

My sister called. "Alessandro, tomorrow is the anniversary of poor Pedro's death. Will you come with me to the cemetery?" Had the cemetery not been in California and I not been in Florida I might consider it. I took a pass.

Poor Pedro's death was tragic. He had proudly served twenty-one years in the U.S. Navy, reaching the rank of Petty Officer First Class. We were all very proud of him, and I flew to California for my brother's retirement ceremony. It would have been far better for everyone had the ceremony taken place on the date of his retirement instead of two days later. Even earlier in the day would have been a real improvement.

PO1 Pedro Coelho could hardly stand he was so drunk. The Captain pinned a medal on his uniform and saluted. Pedro waved back, sort of. There were photographers and friends and fellow Navy types all aboard the ship to congratulate him. His speech was memorable for its brevity. "As lulas são deliciosas." Yes, the squid are delicious. That was all he got out before he was helped to a seat. He then stood up and decided to walk off the ship.

Walk off the ship is what he did. The vessel was secured to a dock and there was a sturdy gangway with handrails. Pedro walked off the other side. DOA. Over many beers

that night, his Navy buddies tried to explain the humorous side of it all. Years later, I could crack a small smile. And I did so again as I gave Umbelina my regrets.

Anyway, his death was our parents' fault. If they had just named him Paulo or Patricio he would not have been bullied so badly in school. In Portuguese, "Pedro Coelho" is "Peter Rabbit." He joined the Navy to escape the bullying. The guy had been condemned to death at his christening.

OK, so I found a flight on the internet that connects through Mexico City to Cojones Perdidos. No, the cost of the resort stay ruled out first class. Three separate alimony payments might also have had something to do with it. So, an economy flight. Seat selection ...

"Mr. Wilson is on the line for you. Says it's urgent." Thank you Marcella. *Please* remember to tell Woody that I'm in a meeting with a client.

Mr. Wilson is Woodrow Wilson IV. No relation, it's a family tradition. Woody called me several times a week.

"I can't find my car keys."

"I lost my glasses."

"What year is it again?"

If I want to kill somebody, Woody might not be a bad choice. And the other lawyer in town (ambulance-chasing shyster that she is) would probably help me assert justifiable homicide. All she'd have to do is introduce the phone records.

Elvis

“Let me know if you strike oil.” I’d never heard that one before. Actually, it came out more like “Wumma mo foo sigh coil.”

The stale dentist jokes weren’t the worst of it, but they were bad enough. I needed to get away before I killed someone. Preferably a smart-ass patient (yes, there were other kinds, but most seemed to belong to the Smart-Ass Tribe). Maybe I could kill Irene. Now, there’s an idea.

The judge had awarded her the furniture and the house (and the mortgage), her paid-for car, (2014 Lexus,), and \$100 a month in alimony. I kept everything else. She sold the car and got a used Kia. She had put the house on the market and applied for a job as a greeter at WalMart.

And, Yew don’t come around much anymore.

Yeah, the kid’s name was Yew. Chinese in origin I think. He was part oriental and part something else. Irene had hired him as a gardener after I gave away the lawn mower, the gardening tools, and anything else to do with the outdoors. When I turned sixty, I vowed never again to do any yard work.

She expected Yew to trim her bush, plough her garden, and fertilize her field. That sounded OK to me, until I learned that she expected him to do all of those things in bed. Naked.

See, it was a slow day at the office. We only had two appointments booked, and one cancelled. I asked Sharla to call the other patient and reschedule for later. It occurred to me that I hadn’t had an *Afternoon Delight* in a very long time. Irene was at home, and this was my opportunity. The only thing on the schedule was lawn care.

We rarely used the guest room, so I was surprised to hear noises emanating from it. I opened the door. His bare butt was sticking up in the air while his face was buried in her crotch. That’s my *wife*’s crotch, by the way. Now I understood the four-times-a-week lawn treatments. I cleared my throat and Irene went rigid. Her legs spasmed together, and I guess he couldn’t breathe. Not my problem.

“Elvis!” My wife and a small number of friends called me Elvis. Otherwise, I was E. Percy Bramble, DDS. “This isn’t, I mean, I didn’t expect you home so soon, and ...”

She was making little sense, but I didn’t need a narrative here. Yew sprung from the bed, gathered his clothes, and ran out the door. Irene was still rigid, and I have no idea if the kid shared her predicament. I didn’t look.

I turned on my heel, walked out and never went back. First stop was the bank, and everything was put in my name only. Second stop was the lawyer (TDP, one of two attorneys in the town). He offered condolences and started to reminisce about his own divorces. I told him to save it and just get the thing done. Third stop was the new Stoneport Inn and Suites. They ran my AMEX and gave me a room.

Irene tried to contest the divorce. I produced the nanny-cam video; we had installed the camera when Irene’s mother lived with us for a couple of years and there were home health aides coming in. Guess she forgot it was still there. I told TDP to give her \$500 a month in alimony. He said she’d just spend it on gardening services, give her less. Probably true. She took the \$100.

Back to the patient. Harvey had another abscessed tooth, of course. You can lecture a horse on dental hygiene, but you can’t make him floss. I smiled at him, then finished the extraction. Another twenty minutes and we were done. Sharla gave him a prescription for Amoxicillin, another for Vicodin. and a referral to a guy in Gulfside City who did implants. I don’t do implants.

I had a pleasant apartment just outside town. Not that there was much town to begin with, mind you. Stoneport was sort of circular, one mile in diameter. The entire county population was barely over 15,000. So, I was the number-one dentist in the town, in part because I was the only one.

Jake

The kids picked me up to go to the summer church picnic. I got in the back of the minivan with the grandkids and buckled in. Can't be too careful.

Little Braydon was texting his girlfriend. I still thought of him as "little" even though he was half an inch taller than me. Mia was staring at her Eye Phone and making funny noises. Every now and then, she would type something like *LOL*, or *ROFL*, or *IRL no*. They called it "social networking." I call it a social disease.

Speaking of disease, doc said that my diabetes was doing really well. And my arthritis was getting a little worse, not bad enough to need any change in medication. My pacemaker was doing fine. My hip replacement is under study to see if a recall is in order. Something about acute chromium toxicity.

"That's all good news, Dad." Christina looked at me in a manner I chose to interpret as 'fondly.' I had no idea I had said all of that aloud. "Are you going to stop seeing Kamisha and go to the doctor in Gulfside City instead?"

You couldn't pay me to stop seeing Kamisha. Doctor Schmockter, that nurse was all I needed. Unfortunately, my insurance company insisted I see a "real" doctor once a year. I'd like to put that insurance company puke in a locked room with Kamisha for an hour and see who comes out alive.

We pulled up in front of the StoneGulf AME Church right on time. A young kid was playing guitar, and a small group was singing along. "There's something within me that banishes pain..." Whatever it is, I gotta get me some. The gall bladder surgery had left me with a nasty little throbbing in my upper abdomen. I tried to help Little Braydon out of his seat belt.

He laughed. "Thanks, Gramps, I think I can handle this." They grow up so fast.

Kamisha was sitting in the middle of a circle of admirers. The circle was going to have to get bigger. Gil Martin, her 'friend,' and two tall, young, white men were with her. Gil, the white men, me and my brood. Otherwise, everyone was black. And was family.

The love of my life and my wife for decades was Suzanne. Her grandmother had been a deaconess in the church. She was married to a white man (huge scandal back in the day and actually illegal in Florida at the time), and Suzanne's mother was baptized here.

She married a white man, and Suzanne – one quarter black and three quarters white – was married here. To me. I still can't believe how lucky I was to have her.

So, Christina was one-eighth black and the grandkids were one-sixteenth. Blue eyes and blond hair came from the fifteen-sixteenths. In fact, we're still looking for solid evidence of the one-sixteenth. Especially in Mia. We take her to Kamisha every month, and then to some fancy doctor she knows in Tallahassee every three months, looking for evidence of the lupus that took her mother.

Kamisha takes blood for tests every month and sends samples to a lab at the National Institutes of Health. Dr. Jen gives Mia a good once over every quarter. The blood tests, the drives to Tallahassee, the whole lupus monitoring regime, is costing money. Suzanne's life insurance pays for it all. I didn't need the money, and after losing my wife, I'm not losing my granddaughter as well.

"Mr. Jake!" This was Antoine, Kamisha's nephew. His family often joined the congregation for services and celebrations, but they were Catholic. Today was Saint Something's Day and they were at a service in Stoneport.

"Hi, Mia." Antoine looked shyly at his feet.

"Hi, 'Twan." Mia had a look in her eye. The same look I used to see in the girls in high school who were lined up to get into Alessandro's pants. That's where he got his nickname, TDP – Tall, Dark and Promiscuous. Mia, honey, be careful.

The two young white men joined Antoine and introduced themselves. Logan somebody and Tommy somebody. I politely asked them if they were going to college next fall. Antoine split his sides.

"Mr. Jake, I told you about them. They're going to Dual Carolina University next fall. The athletic director, Dr. Burnside, was one of Coach's students and blew them away. Burnside talked them out of going with me to Duke. I hope his balls fall off."

I wondered briefly if this was little Teddy Burnside. He was in seventh grade when I graduated. God, was that kid a pain in the ass.

"Antoine, it's not nice to use language like that at a church function." I had stepped down as a deacon last month after four years. Time to let new blood course the veins. I still corrected the youngsters when they were out of line.

“OK, Mr. Jake, I hope his dick rots off. Is that better?” No, but I let it pass. “Anyway, Logan and Tommy are going there as a package. Dr. Burnside said they could have a double bed in their dorm room.”

The one I think was Tommy grinned, and the one I think was Logan blushed. Or the other way around. Who knows? “If you’re in love, go for it. If not, save yourselves for the one you love.” Good advice to me from my mother, good advice for them. Not that I expected a couple of horny teenagers to listen, of course.

“Yes, sir, that’s what Coach told us.” I had no clue which one said that; I just needed to sit down before I fell. Deferring a chance for an orgasm was so out of fashion these days. Antoine led me over to his aunt and somebody made room for me next to her.

“Kamisha, I’ve got this pain in my backside.” I really was hoping for some free medical advice.

“OK, stand up, turn around, and I’ll kick it into the next time zone. Otherwise, shut your mouth.” She had the bedside manner of a collection agency.

“Jake, didn’t you say you were taking a vacation this month?” That was Gil Martin, PhD, clinical psychologist, and long-time “special friend” of Kamika. The mental image of 350 pound Kamisha and 150 pound Gil being “special friends” always gave me a headache.

“Yeah, thinking about taking a driving trip out west somewhere. Yellowstone, maybe, or some other place peaceful.” Gil never stopped shrinking people, and I think he suspected I needed a change. Well, I did.

“Your 1983 Olds Cutlass isn’t going to make it to Yellowstone. Anyway, at our age it’s a whole lot more comfortable to fly. And all that distance driving by yourself gives you time to think, but also time to brood. Take somebody with you, or fly. Go to Seattle and see the Space Needle. Go to New Mexico and see the flying saucers.” Gil was always full of advice. Notice, I didn’t say “good advice.”

TDP

If this was Woody again, I was going to scream. Fortunately, it was my next appointment. A couple this time. They had a friend who had this maid, see, and the maid might not be completely legal, sort of, and maybe the friend hadn't paid social security and other taxes. The friend was undergoing a background investigation for a security clearance. Is there a problem?

Immigration law is very specialized, and it's not my thing. We just didn't have a lot of illegals in Stoneport for a couple of very good reasons. First, we just didn't have a lot of people in Stoneport. Second, few people could afford domestic servants, and there were no agricultural jobs available. Landscaping and lawn care were swamped with local boys (and some girls) who blew off high school and were now scrambling. There were no jobs for people with limited skills. Immigrants with skills (we had a few) were here legally. No skills, no Stoneport.

After asking after their "cousin," Elena from Guatemala who worked as a maid for them, I referred the couple to a lawyer in Gulfside City who might be able to help. I thought about referring them to Martha Blackwell, the other attorney in town, just to piss her off. Come to think of it, maybe I should call them back.

"Kamisha, it's Alessandro. OK, you're at a church function, just a quick question. I'm thinking about going to Mexico to try a new treatment for, you know, ah, an inability to keep it up to standards. They're going to inject powdered rhinoceros horn and pureed octopus penis into my manhood. Can I get you to give me the shots after I return?"

I hate that woman's laugh.

"Well?" I needed an answer.

"Alessandro, you know I love you. And because of that I am never injecting no pureed Mexican octopus penis into your dick. You got me?"

"Yes, ma'am." Now what do I do?

Look at the brochure again. Try to get back to the flight on the internet. Look at the brochure.

"Mr. Coelho, it's Brandy McCarthy on the line. Says you knew her as Brandy Snifter. Somebody died." I guess I could forgive Marcella for interrupting me. Memories flooded

back into my mind. We called her Brandy Snifter (last name was really Sinclair then) because her pussy was so sweet. Long time no see. The Snifter, and those glorious melons and ... right about now I should have an erection. I don't. Gotta get to Mexico.

"Hey, TDP, it's Brandy. You know, Brandy Snifter? Anyway, I'm calling everybody from school. Richie Gawne just died. Keeled over from a stroke or something. It was a basketball and a clot, and I don't have any more details. Anyway, there's a memorial service day after tomorrow in Las Vegas. If you're coming, I'll drive up from Phoenix. I'm available, by the way."

I didn't know Richie real well. He played basketball on a godawful team. So did I, and I wasn't all that good. In comparison to most of the rest of the guys, of course, I was NBA material.

Richie was two years older than us and ran with a different crowd. And he snagged Helen Bradley, the lust of my life. She was gorgeous, we all wanted her, and nobody could have her. She was saving herself for Richie.

So Brandy's available. Not that this is much of a change, she was always available back in high school. But, wait a minute, Helen Bradley Gawne is available now, too.

"Why is the service in Las Vegas? I thought they lived in Minneapolis?" I really should just hang up.

"They moved to Nevada a couple of years ago after Richie retired. So, are you coming? Or, maybe let's spell 'coming' a little differently? I remember your tongue and other appendages." Some people change after high school. Evidently that did not include Brandy.

I gave Brandy my regrets and hung up.

I'm not going to Richie's memorial service for sure. I didn't know him well. But, damn, Helen is available now. That just might fix my, you know, problem. Hitting on his widow at the service would be uncouth. But, a couple days later ...

"Hey, Elvis, wanna take a road trip?"

Woody

My sister, Yolanda, had seven kids. They had several litters of grandkids. There were about twenty or so (can't remember the exact number) still living in the Stoneport area. I'm not supposed to have a favorite, but I do.

Woodrow Wilson V – we call him Willy - is on the football team at Stoneport High. When I went there, it was a football school. Today it's a basketball school, but Mr. Thompson, the athletic director, doesn't play favorites with the teams. And that's a good thing. When I was in school, all the attention was given to the football team, and we were great.

The basketball team won an occasional game, but almost nobody went to the watch. I did, because some of my friends were on the team. Alessandro was on the team, and he was probably as good as any of them. Unfortunately, that's not very good. When I was a sophomore, the team went 10-8 and came in second in the division. That's when Richie Gawne was there. The next year it was 2-16. Meanwhile, the football team was awesome.

I wanted Willy to play quarterback, but he liked playing center. What's the fun in that? You never get to run with the ball or throw it. But, he's playing football, and that's all that matters to me.

"Hey, Gramps!" That's my Willy. I wasn't his Grandfather, but that didn't really matter.

"Willy-Willy! Shouldn't you be at football practice?" I was concerned he wasn't showing the kind of commitment athletics demand.

"Not for another few months, Gramps. And, please stop calling me Willy. An exchange student from London told everyone what that means in England. I'm Drow now." Oops.

About twenty years ago, a lady friend and I flew to England for a week. She worked for a firm with an office in London, and had become friendly with a lot of the staff. She would join them every day for a long lunch. And, her favorite topic of conversation was "My little Willy."

The other ladies would titter when she talked about me. She told them about the day a month ago when "My little Willy" fell down and couldn't get back up. An English colleague admitted that her husband had the same problem sometimes. When she told

them that “My little Willy” won a blue ribbon in a painting contest, they wanted to know some particulars. Like, how did he get the paint off?

Finally she offered to show them a picture of “My little Willy.” The women all crowded around to see as she pulled a photo from her purse.

“That’s not a Willy. It’s a middle-aged black man!” That’s when Clara learned that only men have Willies. Yes, they do sometimes have problems getting back up, and I suppose one could paint with one’s Willy but the question remains: How do you get the paint off?

Willy-now-Drow asked me to throw the football with him. I hadn’t brought the football (in fact, I couldn’t remember where I left it). Not only that, how often does a center have to catch a pass?

“Grandpa, next year Mr. Thompson wants the coach to run some center-eligible plays. He’s seen some old game films of you catching passes thrown by a half-back, and wonders if I’ve got some of the same talent. And, anyway, Coach Martin wins games by fucking with the other team’s minds.” Good boy! Should I tell him to go wash out his mouth with soap? Fuck, no. He’d just laugh at me. And I shouldn’t say “fuck” so often.

“How do you know Coach Martin?” Les Martin was the basketball coach. When I went to school, the football jocks and the basketball jocks never even spoke. Willy – no, that’s Drow – told me Coach Martin wants him to play basketball next year.

“Why does Coach Martin want you to play basketball? Is it because you’re black?” I rarely thought consciously about being black, but it was always somewhere in the back of my mind.

Drow laughed. “Except for Antoine Jackson, all the basketball players are white. Half the black kids can’t dribble for anything. Coach saw me play one-on-one against Antoine, and asked me on the spot to join the team.”

Drow (that’s going to be hard to remember) brought out the football. Now I remember, I left it here last week. We tossed the ball around, it felt just like old times. Except, of course, that I couldn’t throw even half the distance I could in high school. But that’s OK.

Lunch was great, but it always was. I keep forgetting to bring something to contribute, but Yolanda tells me being there is so great for her and the brood, I shouldn’t worry about it.

Monique is pregnant again. The first time she got pregnant she was a senior in high school and the boy asked her to get an abortion. She refused, and they decided to get married. I had been afraid that the marriage would blow up. Not because Jeremy was white, but because a forced marriage just didn't often work out.

This is their third kid and they seem happy as pigs in shit. I shouldn't say "shit" so much.

Barbara-Ann, Yolanda's oldest daughter, drove me home. Barbara-Ann's kids are mostly nice to me. Like, one of them brought me lemonade, although I could have sworn I asked for beer. I think the one who brought me lemonade was Ricky. Or maybe Randy.

Barbara-Ann walked with me to the door and helped me unlock it. The damned locks have been seizing up on me now for months and I need to get someone to look at that. Sometimes it takes me an hour just to get in the damned door. Shouldn't say damned so much. My Mama taught me not to swear and shit.

I grabbed a beer and sat down in my recliner to think back on a nice day. There had been a lot of nice days, I just wish more of them would stay with me. I smiled when I thought about Willy – no, he's Drow now – following my instruction about hand and finger positioning when catching a pass. That boy's gonna go somewhere.

It would have been nice if I had been able to go somewhere. We won thirty-seven games (I think) the three years I started at quarterback. None of the big schools sent scouts to little old Stoneport High, but some of the small ones did. The arrest put an end to that.

We were at a graduation party and someone had snuck in a *lot* of beer. Being drunk wasn't the problem. Taking a leak in the bushes next to where Miss Darmeland and Mr. Flocker were screwing was the problem. Miss Darmeland called the police, and I was arrested for indecent exposure.

Stoneport is in rural Florida, and this was 1968. In small rural towns, there's a whole lot less racial tension than in cities, but I was still a black kid in a southern town. Mr. Flocker came forward and told the police what had happened. No charges were filed, but the fact of the arrest was enough to scare away the colleges.

I was almost ready to start feeling sorry for myself when the phone rang. It was Elvis.

“Woody, have you ever been to Las Vegas?”

Jake

I had retired a number of years ago as an editor with a small book publisher and struck out on my own. Freelance editing lets me keep my hand in, keeps me busy and out of trouble, and from time to time, gives me a whole new perspective on life.

I had just finished editing the well-written memoir of a white Rhodesian farmer. Rhodesia ceased to exist when its oppressive treatment of the black majority by the white minority became too much for the world to bear. The author had lobbied for more blacks in Parliament but was shouted down.

When the black majority took over in 1980, most whites had fled. The author had tried to redistribute his land to the black workers, but the Mugabe government began forcible redistribution of land owned by whites. There was more, but it was instructive and insightful. And it made me think. That's what good authors do, and why we editors love them.

He had tried to bring black Zimbabweans into the mainstream with the voter rolls, but was beaten back by the whites. He had tried again with parceling out the land, but was beaten back by the blacks. Everybody wanted all or nothing.

The first e-mail I opened was from an author I was about to drop. In Chapter One Jordan is sued for paternity of an illegitimate child. In Chapter Seven Jordan is suddenly a woman and, in one paragraph, is alternately referred to as Jordan and Veronica. It got worse from there.

In what the author believed to be an erotic interlude, the word "cock" was used for penis seventeen times in two paragraphs. I suggested a thesaurus, but he said he'd never heard his dick referred to as a thesaurus. I then offered dick, prick, rod, man-meat, cum-gun, and four other synonyms. He told me to make the changes.

The next to last chapter consisted entirely of "There's a party. Write about it." He was highly displeased with my response. When I was an editor at a publishing house very little bad writing got through to my desk. As a freelance editor I don't have a screening mechanism. I try to look through a manuscript before I accept it, but this one was a referral from an author I respected.

Time for my nap. Life has gotten boring lately. Home, eat, church, sleep, do a little editing. I need to get away.

The phone rang. Elvis must have been reading my mind.

“You up for a road trip?”

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