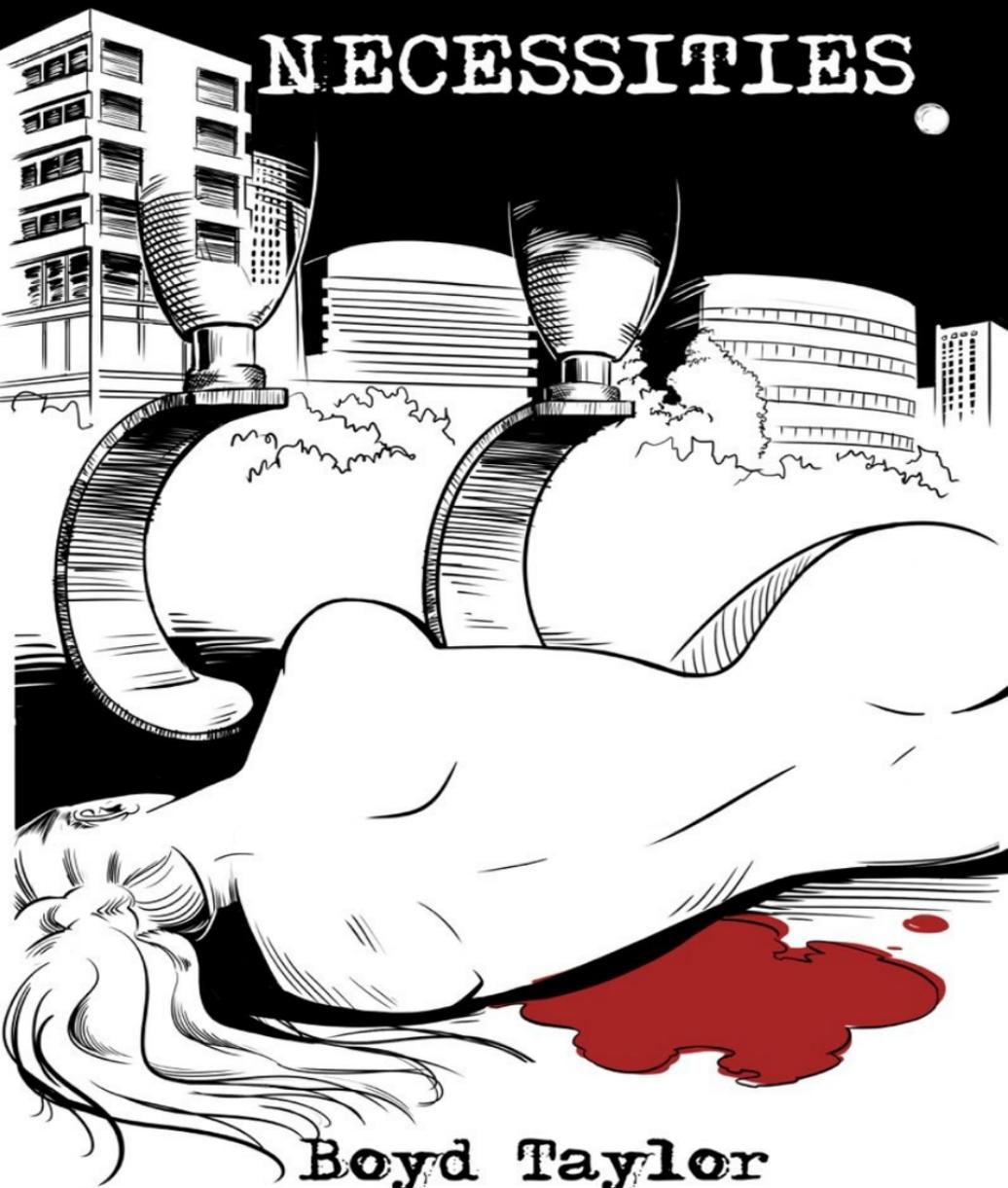


NECESSITIES



Boyd Taylor

NECESSITIES

BOYD TAYLOR

KATHERINE BROWN PRESS

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Katherine Brown Press

Austin, TX

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Authors' Assistant

First Printing 2017

PCN 2017957135

Printed in the United States of America

To Ray, a true Shakespearean

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INTRODUCTION

This book was a long time in gestation. Jack Rosshirt, himself a lawyer and a writer, listened patiently as the story

took form in my mind and gave me helpful notes when he read the text. James Wilson, neighbor and accomplished lawyer, gave me numerous suggestions, but perhaps most important, guided me through the trial procedure. His advice when my legal logic failed me was invaluable. Susan Madden, proofer par excellence, read the first completed draft with her eagle eye and corrected me when I

strayed from my narrative. Phyllis Schenkken, teacher and friend, made dozens of comments and as an Ohioan told me about sauerkraut balls. Max Sherman gave me the benefit of his professional insight. Margery Hauck saved me from some serious missteps. And of course, thanks to Mindy and Danielle at The Authors' Assistant for treating *Necessities* as if it were their own.

Despite all this help, the book
and its flaws are mine.

*The art of our necessities
is strange,
That can make vile
things precious.*

— WILLIAM
SHAKESPEARE, KING
LEAR 3.2.70

ALSO BY BOYD TAYLOR

Other books in the Donnie Ray Cuinn Series:

Hero (Donnie Ray Quinn Series Book 1)

The Antelope Play (Donnie Ray Cuinn
Series Book 2)

The Monkey House (Donnie Ray Cuinn
Series Book 3)

PART ONE
JOURNAL

ONE

I had never been in the Ritz-Carlton before Cory took me there, the winter she came looking for me in Cleveland.

Hotels were out of the question during my senior year in St. Louis at Washington University, when we had our one-night fling. I had an apartment off campus. She had signaled at the Journalism department Christmas party, but I was seeing someone else. She was good-looking, sure, but I was put off by her attitude and the aura of entitlement that followed her around. When we met up

again, this time at a staff meeting for the college paper, she flirted shamelessly. I thought, *what the hell? Why not?* I ordered my long-suffering roommate out of the apartment, and we spent the night in my lumpy single bed. The next morning, she looked around but didn't say anything. She didn't need to. Her glance told me everything I needed to know. It was one night, over and done with. I

wasn't looking for a permanent arrangement. Even if I had been; even if I'd known then how rich she was, it wouldn't have mattered because she was done with me after that night. When I saw her in class, she averted her eyes and turned to talk to her wide circle of hangers on. I was a middle-class boy from Texas, and she was an Ohio newspaper heiress, sent to Washington University to

please her father by studying Journalism, but pleasing herself by studying Art History, or at least that's what I'd heard.

I'd forgotten about her, or thought I had, until one of the wars in Iraq—the one I was in. I found myself calling up the memory of that night many times when I couldn't sleep—wondering if I would ever get home. Why her and not any of the others who'd shared that

lumpy bed? I don't know. There was something special about Cordelia Lehrer.

So, after all those years, I never expected to look up from my desk in the newsroom of the *Cleveland Post* and see her, blonde, leggy and as beautiful as ever. In fact, her fresh and flowery scent, that light wistful perfume, preceded her.

That scent, which had lingered in my bed after she'd left it years before, alerted me

to her presence. I had just filed my column on the Republican primary. I looked up from my computer screen and greeted her with a grin. “Well hello, Ms. Lehrer. You can’t live without me, can you?”

“Caught me out, darling.” She looked around the drab over-lit newsroom. She sat on the side of my desk, leaned down and kissed me on the cheek. “Do you have time for a drink?”

Of course I did.

When I got back from Iraq, I had been lucky enough to get on the staff of the *Cleveland Post*. I traded on my war wounds and my Distinguished Service Cross to shame the editor into hiring me. I was a good newshound, and I knew that my petty blackmail would soon be forgotten.

I was back in Cleveland, and Cordelia was an Akron girl from a newspaper chain

family. I'd often thought about contacting her, but never did. I assumed she had married a rich boy and taken her place as a society belle in Akron, or wherever she had settled down.

I got my coat and led her out of the newsroom. I enjoyed the envious looks of the other reporters. "This is really good for my reputation, Cordelia."

She laughed. "Unless you've changed a lot, your

reputation can stand polishing.”

Her laugh was still a mixture of archness and randomness. Of course, she wasn't the same girl she was in college, but the years had been very kind to her. She had turned into a striking woman, her blonde hair straight and long. She had on a black sweater, a long black skirt and boots. Her brown cashmere coat was draped easily over

one arm. When she turned to talk to me, her deep hazel eyes were clear. The little scar on her chin was still there. She had told me it was an honor badge from a skiing accident at Aspen. She still didn't wear much makeup. She didn't need it.

I took her to Barney's, near the paper. It was early, and we were the only customers. We sat across from each other in a booth by the front window. I

looked out to see it was getting dark. People hurried past, their heads down against the cold winter wind blowing off the lake. When I looked back, she was staring at me. “Why didn’t you ever call me, David?”

“I didn’t imagine you’d want to hear from me. Where’ve you been all this time?”

She sighed and reached across the table for my hand. She stroked it gently. “Europe

—Paris and London. Working at Sotheby's, like a good art historian."

"Tough duty."

She turned my hand loose and looked up at the waiter. "What wines do you have?" The waiter and I exchanged smiles. "Red or white. The usual for you, David?" I nodded and waited for her to choose.

"Anything. The white, I guess." She watched the waiter

walk back to the bar. “Nice place.”

I waited.

“Of course, I enjoyed Europe,” she continued. “But I thought about you often. I always thought we might have had a future.”

I sat silently, wondering if this were going where I hoped it was.

“Did you ever think about me?”

“Every day,” I said. The

waiter returned to the table with my vodka on the rocks and a large glass of white wine for her. She looked at it with distaste. "I thought about you every day," I repeated. That wasn't true exactly, but I certainly wasn't going to confess that fantasies of her got me through the war. And the hospital. And rehab at Brooke. That would have been too easy. If this was more than a catch up visit, she'd have to

work a little harder. If not, so what? I had accepted long ago that she was out of my life forever. Yet, here she sat, making a face while she sipped her wine.

“You’re a liar, but I’ll choose to believe you.” She tried another sip of the wine. “God, this is awful. Why do you come here?”

I raised the glass of vodka. “I don’t drink the wine.”

She straightened the sleeve

of her sweater. “So, tell me. Is there someone in your life?”

I took the plastic toothpick out of my drink, knifed one of the olives with it and popped the olive into my mouth. “No, not a soul.” That was the truth. Jan Beck, the perky redhead weekend weather girl I had lived with for two years had decamped for an evening news assignment at WMAQ in Chicago. I had been alone for three months, rattling around

in the apartment we'd rented together. Our few phone conversations made it clear that we had both decided to move on with no hard feelings. It was fun, but we had both known it wasn't forever.

I didn't do forever. Never had, never would. It had nothing to do with my missing parts. Jan had always acted as if my war wounds didn't matter. She didn't seem to notice when I unstrapped my

prosthetic legs at night and heaved myself onto the bed. Not easy to do, but I had exercised enough that my upper body could handle it. If she watched when I strapped my legs back on in the morning, or when I chose to use my wheelchair instead, she said nothing. *Would Cordelia Lehrer be as indifferent?* I doubted it.

I missed Jan, and her happy-go-lucky weather girl

personality, of course, but there wasn't the empty ache my drunken buddies described feeling when their girls left them. I occasionally had bouts of self-pity when I thought about my missing legs, blown away in an Iraqi street battle that sent part of me one way and my legs another. Whenever that began to eat at me, I reminded myself I had survived when my father left and again when my mother

was killed. Those were the *real* aching losses, and I'd survived them. Compared to that, the loss of my legs was nothing, nothing at all. Strap on the Army-supplied prostheses and get on with it. Find a job, find a girl to lay and live the life I'd always planned on living. There were the nightmares, of course, but the Army doctor assured me that they would pass in time. "See a shrink and he'll give you some keen

mind-altering meds.” I’d ignored that advice. I didn’t need meds, and I most certainly didn’t need a shrink. *Fuck that. Fuck them all. If it hurts, swallow a couple of Vicodin.*

She stroked my hand again. “Are you alone because of your...injury?”

“You heard about that?”

“I’ve kept up with you, David. You’re a genuine war hero—a brave man who risked

his life to save his comrades.”

I motioned to the waiter for another vodka. “Your family’s in the newspaper business. You know you can’t believe everything you read in the paper. Especially press releases from the Department of Defense.”

“But is that why you’re alone? The injury, I mean.”

I let out an angry sigh. “Just spit it out. If you’re asking if I can still function,

the answer is yes. I lost both legs below the knee. My dick is intact.”

“Now you’re just being crude.”

We sat silently for a few minutes. Finally, we both said, “Sorry” at the same time. We laughed. I speared the remaining olive and swished it in the icy vodka. “Enough about me. You never married? No English aristo or anyone like that?”

“God, no.” She pushed the wine glass away. “Let’s go someplace I can get a decent glass of wine.”

I threw some bills on the table and stood up, making sure it looked as effortless and natural as I possibly could. I gulped the last of my drink and helped her with her coat. “Some place such as...?”

“Such as my hotel. Daddy keeps a suite there. God knows why, as much as he hates

Cleveland.”

It wasn't far by taxi to the Ritz-Carlton. She opened the door to the suite with a flourish, threw her coat on the antique chair by the entrance and turned to me, arms widespread. “Welcome to Chez Lehrer.”

I looked around. It was actually an apartment with a kitchen, a separate dining room, a living room and a bedroom, each with a view of

Lake Erie and large-screen televisions in every room. It was pitch dark outside, only the blinking lights of the city far below were visible. The windows vibrated a little with the howling wind. I couldn't see the lake, but I could imagine the whitecaps.

She opened the refrigerator and extracted a bottle of Montrachet. She handed it to me. "Open this."

I took it to the kitchen.

After rummaging through a drawer for a corkscrew, I took the opened bottle and two heavy Baccarat glasses into the living room where she had settled on the sofa. The entire room was done in some luxurious shade. Mocha maybe? I poured two glasses of wine and handed her one.

She reached up to clink my glass. "To St. Louis."

"To Cleveland."

"Now show me your legs."

I shrugged. “Morbid curiosity?”

“Not morbid, no. But curious, yes. I need to see.”

“Okay.” I pulled my pants legs up around my knees. The extra-light titanium prostheses glowed in the dim light.

“Oh my,” she said, leaning forward and touching the shiny metal. “How do they work?”

“Very well. I can do just about everything in them. For

sports, like jogging or boxing or basketball, I have a pair with blades. They don't fit into shoes like these."

"Wait a minute. Did you say *boxing*?"

"Sure. I flit around the ring on my blades like a butterfly."

"And sting like a bee?"

"Yes, I do." I pulled her up off the couch and kissed her. "I usually take them off for sex."

"Then we should take them off. Show me how."

I led her into the bedroom and sat on the side of the bed. I pulled the strap loose on my left leg. “Like this.”

SHE WAS A FAST LEARNER.

I woke to see her dressing. I wasn't surprised, but I was disappointed. “So soon...?”

“I'm afraid so, baby. I have this charity mess in Akron I need to get back for.”

I pulled her down against my naked body. “One for the road?”

She laughed and pushed me away. “No time.”

“What was this, a pity fuck? Or a good story you can tell your girlfriends—how you screwed an amputee in the company apartment?”

“I don’t have any girlfriends. And if it was a pity fuck, why would I want to see you again? Be in Akron on

Saturday. Try to get there by noon. There's a family lunch every Saturday with my father."

I sat on the edge of the bed, looking for my clothes. I pulled on my shorts. "I'm not sure I can get off work on Saturday."

She handed me my prostheses and kissed me lightly on the lips. "Sure you can. I put my address and number in your phone."

I need to put a password lock on my phone, I reminded myself.

“Remember, by noon,” she insisted.

I strapped on my T22s and stood up. “Am I wrong, or was this some sort of audition?”

“You might call it that. If it is, you’re getting a callback. Who knows? You may even get the part.”

After Cordelia left, I sat on the edge of the bed and

thought. At the *Post*, I had worked my way up from covering charity events and school board meetings to being a lead reporter for state and local politics. During the last campaign, I was assigned to the presidential press pool for the Ohio primary. It had been a hard slog, and I valued the job. *I probably shouldn't just run off to Akron whenever I please.* Of course, that was exactly what I was going to do. Why not?

Despite my injury, I had learned to run, and even to box, again, bouncing lightly around the ring in my sports titanium and carbon fiber T22s—the latest artificial limbs the government could buy. I did everything the therapists demanded, everything and anything to prove to the world, with its maddening condescension, that I was not someone to be pitied. I was not a loser. I was a winner. *After*

*all, I had just screwed Cordelia
Lehrer, and by God, I'd screw her
again.*

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



BOYD TAYLOR lives in Austin, Texas with his wife and their Havanese dog, Toby. *Necessities* is the fourth novel in the Donnie Ray Cuinn series. In a former life, Boyd was a lawyer and a corporate officer. A native of Temple, Texas, he graduated from the

University of Texas at Austin with a B.A. in government and an LL.B. from the law school.

Boyd's first novel, *Hero*, was prescient in its story about fake news. His second novel, *The Antelope Play*, dealt with drug trafficking in the Texas Panhandle, an unfortunately accurate forecast. The third, *The Monkey House*, involved commercial development of a large green space in the center of Austin, all too familiar to Austin residents. Whether his upcoming novel, *Necessities*, predicts future events with the accuracy of the earlier books remains to be seen.

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**DONNIE RAY CUINN OTHER
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Hero

The Antelope Play

The Monkey House