

THE
ANTELOPE
PLAY
BOYD TAYLOR



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Katherine Brown press

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*TO KITTY, ALWAYS LOVING,
ALWAYS KIND*

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Jan Bodgett's "Land of Bright Promise – Advertising the Texas Panhandle and South Plains,

1870-1917" (University of Texas Press, 1988) is a great resource for those interested in the marketing of the Panhandle. To my Pampa friends, I can only say that the people and places in my book are fictitious, and the history I recite is not a recounting of the actual settlement of Pampa or Gray County.

There are numerous accounts of the poisoning of Russian KGB agent Alexander Litvinenko on the Internet, and numerous newspaper and television reports are available for those interested in learning more about that event.

*Oh, give me a home where the Buffalo roam
Where the Deer and the Antelope play;
Where seldom is heard a discouraging word,
And the sky is not cloudy all day.*
Dr. Brewster Higley (1876)

*PLAY - The activities associated with petroleum
development in an area.*
OilGas Glossary 2007-2013

PROLOGUE

The full moon cast shadows from the bare trees that lined the gravel road on the other side of the cattle guard. The winter wind had died down into its midnight quiet, and the cold air was settling over the arroyos, covering the low indentions in the ranch land with a light frost. A black Cadillac SUV pulled up by the cattle guard. Two men jumped out of the back of the SUV. They wore heavy coats and their hats were pulled down low on their heads. Without speaking, they pulled the motionless man out of the back seat, bumping his head on the hard dirt. “Ten cuidado!” one said. “Lo queremos vivo.”

The man moaned. They took him, one by the shoulders, the other by the feet, and tossed him

onto the road in front of the cattle guard. They stripped off his boots and socks and threw them in the back of the Cadillac.

“Vamos!” one of them said. They jumped in the SUV and drove away quickly; its black outline disappeared down the country road.

The sun was barely visible over the eastern plateau when the man awoke, shivering from the cold. He struggled to his feet. He hopped across the cattle guard in his bare feet and cried out in pain. When he was finally across, he rested a minute. Then, breathing heavily, he began his walk up the gravel road. He wiped blood from his nose and mouth, held his broken left arm with his right hand, and slowly walked home.

CHAPTER ONE

The address read, “Don R. Cuinn, Attorney at Law,” so it had to be for him. Don looked at the legal-size envelope and sighed. He recognized the scrawled Las Vegas return address. *What now?* He tossed the unopened envelope on the pile of documents that Faye had stacked neatly before leaving the office the night before. When the envelope hit the stack, the papers scattered.

He ignored the mess and swiveled in his worn leather chair, passed on to him when Jake got new stuff, and stared through the dusty window at the brown Texas Panhandle landscape. From his aerie on the top floor, the fifth floor of Velda’s tallest building, he could see the end of town to the north

where it gave way to the flat land and canyons and dry creeks that stretched to Canada. He couldn't see his apartment, back to the east, toward the Country Club, and it bothered him. *Why do I care?*

He couldn't admit it bothered him because Jake, the Rosen of "Rosen & Associates" had the prime corner office, with windows to the east as well as the north, from which he could keep an eye on all of Velda that mattered: the business district, the city hall, the courthouse, the old residential district, the winding parks and dry creek, and the leafless trees. Not to mention the new developments, both of them, where wealthy Veldanians had built McMansions too big for the lots, like overweight teenagers with their exposed bellies overflowing their jeans at the Arcadia Theater or the mall in Amarillo.

But Don R. Cuinn, the associate in "Rosen & Associates," could only see to the north, and like everything else today, it grated on his nerves. *I'm in a crappy mood. What's new? Not a thing.*

Don could not see to the south, *thank God*, so he didn't have to look every day at the old warehouse district and railroad tracks, the recently repainted

depot reclaimed as a half-assed museum, where the early days of Velda were trumpeted to the five visitors a week. *In a good week*, he thought. The days when Velda was an important stop on the railroad; when early settlers came to try their luck raising cotton or wheat on the unforgiving Panhandle plains; when most of the farmers were ruined by flooding rains followed by unbelievable drought, forced to sell their land, in which they had invested their life savings, sell it for pennies on the dollar to cattle ranchers. The ranchers, over a decade or two, ended up with most of the land in Velda County, and with the land, the oil money when the boom came.

South of the tracks were the Flats, with its shanty towns and trailer parks, where Velda's Hispanics and its few blacks and its oil field trash lived uneasily next to each other, huddled against the north wind all winter. And, during the rest of the year, were unable to escape the ceaseless southwest wind or the acetic acid fumes blown over them from the Crackstone Industries' chemical plant.

Lovely, Don thought.

He shivered. The cold wind leaked into his office,

even with the windows painted shut. There was no way to open them in the summer and fall, when the weather was mild and dry and the wind was light enough to be enjoyable. Almost. Even sealed, the windows leaked cold air in the winter and dust in the spring. He selected an old wool sweater from the various pieces of outdoor clothing he kept on the hook behind his door. He put it on, and his corduroy jacket over it, but he was still cold. He had never been this cold growing up in Austin.

He thought of the warm days in Beaumont, where he got his diploma mill law license. *Why did I leave? Oh yes, no job.* Not even an offer. Law firms knew the worth of a J.D. degree from the Jefferson Davis School of Law. . . warm weather. . . an image of Mexico City flashed through his mind. *Not that. Don't think about that. Not for an instant.*

He heard the elevator slowly climbing to the fifth floor. He looked at his watch. *Seven thirty. That would be Faye.* He heard her open the hall door.

She called out, "Morning. Mr. Cuinn?"

"I'm here, Faye. Freezing my butt off."

He thought about straightening the stack of papers

before Faye saw the mess he had made and then decided against it. For all the time he had been Jake Rosen's associate, Faye had lectured him about the virtue of a clean desk, but lately there was a resignation about her complaints. One of his few joys in coming to work every day was to listen to her complaints, and he was sorry they were becoming perfunctory. He liked Faye. She was one of the few people he did like in this town.

Even on the rare afternoons when his desk was clear, he made a point of throwing some files around so he could hear Faye say the next morning, "Oh, for goodness sakes, Mr. Cuinn. What am I going to do with you?"

The rail-thin widow set a cup of hot coffee on his desk. She looked at the files. Just as he had hoped, she said, "I'll swear, Mr. Cuinn. What am I going to do with you?"

"Run away with me, Faye. Let's leave all this behind."

She sniffed and touched her straight gray hair. She resisted the mile high hairdo, the specialty of Jean's Cuts. "Beauty parlor takes too much time," she told

him once. "Plus all the gossip. The women there want to know everything I know and they get peeved when I won't tell them. Fewer hurt feelings this way."

She re-stacked his files and ran her dust cloth over the old oak desk. "That's better." She handed him a thin file. "Trey Pervoy called about this yesterday after you left. I told him it would be filed today."

He opened the file to the divorce petition Faye had drafted, using his notes. She was the best drafter of legal documents in the office. Once he had suggested a wording change, and Faye made it, but with a look that told him all he needed to know. Now he read her drafts, but he didn't quibble. He doubted if Jake even read them before scribbling his name on them as attorney of record.

The divorce petition was for Belle Mada Pervoy, a petroleum princess, the spoiled sister of the most important of Jake's rancher clients. Predictably, Belle Mada had tired of her penniless rodeo boyfriend, Tipp Newton, who never won a rodeo event, but got the grand prize when he won Belle Mada. He quit competing once he had his bride to buy him beer and pay for his rodeo circuit trips.

According to the petition, the marriage had only lasted two years. He looked at the pre-nup that Jake had prepared in anticipation of this very day. By a combination of trusts, transfers of assets, and disclaimers signed by the eager-to-marry Tipp Newton, Jake had made sure the cowboy had no claim on Belle Mada's interest in the Pervoy Ranch; the royalties and minerals; the house the George Pervoy Family Trust built for the couple on Country Club Gulch; the bride's jewelry; the cars; the new cutting horse she had bought her fiancée as a wedding gift; none of that or anything else, except the groom's pick-up truck and ten thousand dollars get-out-of-town money.

At least the boy had the good sense not to contest the divorce. No lawyer in Velda would think of crossing the Pervoy's. Tipp threaten to hire an Amarillo lawyer to contest the pre-nup, but when he found out that the retainer coincidentally was also ten thousand dollars, he got quiet and surly and signed the papers that Don took to him at his mother's trailer house in the Flats.

Don signed the divorce petition and handed it to Faye.

She looked it over, checking it one last time. "I'll make the file copies and have Bobby take it over to the clerk's office."

"Where is he anyway?" Bobby was the law firm's errand boy, process server, auto reposessor, and driver.

Faye sighed. "Late. His excuse will be that he drove Mr. Rosen to Amarillo to catch the last flight to Dallas, but I know for a fact that the plane left at six o'clock."

"He may be at the courthouse, waiting for somebody to bail out Eugene. Has the sheriff called?"

Faye sighed again, even louder. She went into her office and checked the office's messages. "Oh, Lord," she said. "The sheriff called Mr. Rosen early yesterday morning. He tried to get you. Didn't you pick up your calls?"

Don shook his head. "I don't do jailhouse runs." He had seen "Velda County Sheriff's Department" on the caller ID and had turned over and gone back to sleep. *I'll be damned if I'll hike over there in the middle of the night. Not on what Jake pays me. Then he had*

forgotten about the call when he woke up. Probably not good.

“If you want the Pervoy family business when Mr. Rosen retires, you’ll have to change your mind about that.”

Don snorted. He didn’t have to state the obvious. *There was no way Jake Rosen would ever retire.*

Before he could speak, Faye waved him off, listening to the other messages. “You were right,” she said with a grimace. “Bobby is at the jail waiting to drive Eugene home. Eugene has been in jail since early Sunday morning. You’d better get right over there. I’ll call Scoot to meet you to make bail.”

Scowling, Don put on his long leather coat and his black cowboy hat.

“File this divorce petition while you’re over there.” She handed him the file.

“Christ, Faye. When will Jake be back?”

“When he’s good and ready, I imagine.”

Jake was in Dallas for one of his monthly client conferences with a wealthy Dallas widow, who

looked to Jake for advice and comfort. Mostly comfort, Don suspected. He didn't know and didn't want to know.

He thrust the petition into his briefcase. "Damn Pervoy's. How can one family cause so much trouble?"

"Be glad they do," Faye said, turning back to her desk. *Probably going to crank out another invoice,* Don thought.

He decided to take the stairs rather than wait for the creaky elevator. It was the morning rush hour in Velda, and the Crackstone engineers and accountants would be straggling into work, sour faced and full of ill-tempered jokes. He opened the door and glanced to his left where Major Hansard's offices and penthouse apartment filled the other half of the fifth floor. The height-challenged Major no doubt enjoyed standing on a step-stool to look down at the town he had built—that is when he wasn't racing around it in his Mercedes 600. He and Jake jointly owned the building, and had christened it "The HanRo Building." They rented the rest of

the space to Crackstone Industries, which used it as its Western Office headquarters, and to the Pervoy for their in-town ranch office.

Don bounded down the bare concrete steps, two at a time, past the Crackstone floors. He opened the stairwell door into the lobby. The lights were on in the Pervoy Ranch office. A lone accountant manned the office, except on days when Trey Pervoy graced the HanRo Building with his presence.

Don nodded at several of the arriving Crackstone employees. One overweight middle manager, who looked like a personnel department type, was carrying a cup of coffee from *The Greeks*. *No Starbucks in Velda. Probably the only population center of twenty thousand people where that was true.* The thing was, Don Cuinn never liked Starbucks, never went there in Austin, where there was one at each intersection. Even so, he resented like hell that he lived in a place without a Starbucks. Some weekends he would drive to Amarillo just to have a four-dollar cup of dark Sumatra and nurse his grudge against Velda.

He gave a mock salute to Bill Byrnes, a Crackstone middle manager. He had handled a house closing

for Bill and his wife a few months back. Not a bad guy, but according to Jake, Bill had paid too much for the house.

Don pushed against the revolving glass doors and felt the full force of the north wind. He could hardly move the doors. Outside at last, he caught his hat before it blew away. He hunched over and fought against the wind for the two blocks to the courthouse. The streets were deserted. Most of downtown retail had moved to the strip mall on the west side of town, along the by-pass. *What did they think they were by-passing?*

Sheriff Boom Gordon and his wife Bessie lived in an apartment on the first floor of the courthouse annex. The annex housed the county jail, built in the 1930s to accommodate the crime wave that spilled over into the peaceful town of Velda from the oil boomtown of Borger. The apartment was situated so that any felon trying to escape from jail would have to pass through the Gordon's living room, where Boom usually sat in his overstuffed recliner watching Fox News, his shotgun at the ready beside him. If Boom had to leave the apartment, to seek out a criminal on the run, or to go to a sheriffs'

convention downstate, Bessie took his place in the recliner. No convict of moderately sound mind would attempt to escape when Miz Bessie was on duty. She was renowned as a sharpshooter as well as a cook, and many said she could outshoot her husband.

The apartment was updated every ten years or so, which meant it had been painted and the appliances replaced three times since Boom was first elected sheriff. The recliner had been replaced more often, because Boom and Bessie each weighed close to three hundred pounds, and even the best chair that the county commissioners could buy only lasted a year or two.

As Don expected, he found Eugene Pervoy sitting at the kitchen table, eating breakfast. Miz Bessie cooked for all the inmates, but only a few regulars got to eat in the kitchen rather than in their cells. Eugene Pervoy was one of the privileged few.

Eugene looked up. "Want some biscuits and gravy, Cuinn?" he asked.

Don took off his hat and nodded to the sheriff and his wife. "No, thanks."

Boom turned away from the apocalyptic morning news. He lay back in the recliner; his scuffed cowboy boots were propped on the foot rest; his iron belly protruded over the massive silver belt buckle and two-inch wide leather belt; his cowboy hat was pulled down to shade his eyes. "Now wait a damn minute, Eugene. Just because you're here once a week don't mean you can offer breakfast to any jake-leg lawyer that drops in."

"Hush, Sheriff," his wife said, handing Don a steaming cup of black coffee. She wore a neat apron and an old style print dress that draped over her like a tent.

"Thanks Miz Bessie. I'm frozen."

"Sit under that vent. That'll warm you up." Bessie was inordinately proud of the central gas heat that was a part of the most recent renovation.

He pulled his chair under the vent and tried to shake off the cold. He looked at Eugene. The rangy West Texan needed a shave and a shower. His hair was mussed. He could have used one of Ginelle's home haircuts. His shirt was wrinkled. He had probably slept in his clothes all night. *Boom ought to*

provide pajamas for his regulars.

“Well?” Cuinn asked.

Eugene mopped his plate with the last of his biscuit.

“Well what?”

“Well what happened this time?”

Eugene shook his head. “I hate all these questions. Where’s Lawyer Jake? He never asks all these questions.”

“Jake’s in Dallas. Do you want to wait until he gets back or do you want to tell me what happened?”

Eugene held out his cup to Bessie, and she filled it with fresh coffee. “Thank you, Miz Bessie.” He shook his head again. “God knows how long he’ll be down there with that new widow of his. I guess you’re all I’ve got.” He looked at Don with bloodshot eyes. “No Jew. Just you.”

Don shook his head ruefully. “That’s cold, Eugene.”

“Get me out of here. I need to get out to the ranch. We’ve got a delivery of semen today.”

Don paused, trying to get that image out of his

mind. After a bit, he asked, "Who caught him this time, Boom?"

The sheriff, who was immersed in a missing dog story on Fox, didn't turn from the TV, but said, "Curtis, that city cop, noticed Eugene on Country Club Gulch weaving from side to side and driving suspiciously slow."

"Is that right, Eugene? Were you driving suspiciously slow?"

Eugene stood up and stretched. "Damn if I remember a thing. Must have been that medicine I was on."

"What medicine is that, Eugene?"

"You'll have to ask Lawyer Jake the name. Anyway, it has the exact same effect on a person as if he'd had six beers with whiskey chasers at the Country Club."

Don nodded. "I see." He checked his phone. "Scoot's made bail. You're a free man. Bobby is outside. He'll drive you home. Want us to pick up your truck?"

"All right with me. Thinking about getting a new

one, though. This one weaves from side to side too much. Be sure and mention that to Lawyer Jake.”

“Oh, I’ll be sure to do that.” Don was glad it would be Jake who had to negotiate with Richard Cator, the district attorney. He didn’t know the drill. It may have involved contributions to Cator’s re-election campaign. All Don knew was that Jake endowed many local office holders with money, money that Don suspected was reflected on the ranchers’ monthly billings as tax deductible legal expenses. However he did it, Jake managed to have Eugene’s weekend escapades reduced to non-moving traffic violations and a fine. The older policemen usually just drove Eugene home, but sometimes there was a new cop, like this weekend, or a state trooper, and Eugene had to spend the night watching TV with Boom and Miz Bessie.

Don was also glad he didn’t have Eugene’s hangover, because he had heard that Eugene’s plump wife, Ginelle, had a temper and that she didn’t approve of her husband sleeping somewhere else, even if he did say it was at the jail. The last time, Jake had to write a note assuring Ginelle that her husband had in fact been in police custody, and

not shackled up with some fortune hunter he met at the Country Club bar: The same bar where Eugene and Ginelle met.

DONNIE RAY CUINN SERIES OTHER BOOKS

Hero

The Monkey House

[Necessities](#)

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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