

# THE MONKEY HOUSE



BOYD TAYLOR

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**BOYD TAYLOR**

**Katherine Brown Press**

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*I think that I shall never see  
A billboard as lovely as a tree  
Perhaps, unless the billboards fall,  
I'll never see a tree at all.*

~Ogden Nash

from "Song of the Open Road", 1933

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## CHAPTER ONE

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### AUSTIN TWO YEARS EARLIER

Moonlight filtered through the large oak trees, casting wavy shadows on the small group of men, all dressed in black, who stood silently outside the Monkey House. At their leader's signal, they crept to the large wooden gate at the back of the three-story enclosure. The chimpanzees stirred, a questioning call from one, but otherwise there were only the usual sounds of the colony at rest.

The leader pointed at the chain that held the gate closed. A man appeared beside him, a large bolt cutter in his hand. Quickly, as the animals began to

chatter nervously, the man placed the bolt cutter on the chain and snapped the chain in two. The noise from inside the compound grew louder. The men pulled the gate open and ran into the building, opening the gate to a large common cage at one end of the building. As they opened the enclosure, a light came on in the custodian's building on the opposite side of the Monkey House.

The intruders hurried through the foliage, out of the compound and back the way they came. As they ran, they heard the first of the chimps swinging overhead, swinging out of captivity, swinging toward freedom.

Austin Globe Standard, Saturday, February 2:

## CHIMPS ESCAPE ANIMAL COMPOUND IN WEST AUSTIN

A number of chimps escaped from the Primate Preserve on the Hieronymus Parcel in West Austin last night and still remain at large in the Old Enfield and Tarrytown neighborhoods of West Austin. A spokesman for the Primate Preserve said that "only a couple dozen" of the chimps escaped, out of the

one hundred or so that are housed at the Preserve. He said that law enforcement officials had captured several of the escapees, and that he was sure the others would be found “before long.”

Austin Globe Standard, Sunday, February 3:

## TARRYTON RESIDENTS IN UPROAR AS CHIMPS RUN LOOSE

State and local officials sought to reassure Austin residents that the chimps running through their neighborhoods, perching in their trees and scavenging for food, were not dangerous and would all be returned to captivity soon. Meanwhile, beleaguered officials of the Primate Preserve defended the company’s program of biomedical research on the animals, claiming that it had been responsible for “enormous health benefits.” Officials at the National Institutes of Health, which provides fifty million dollars a year of funding for the preserve, said that the Primate Preserve had been inspected regularly and that the chimps were handled according to the protocols in place. “Of course,” the NIH spokesman said, “we deplore the

escapes, but there is no reason to believe that there is any public health concern.” They did advise residents to avoid contact with the animals. “That is only common sense. They are not domestic animals or pets. They are chimpanzees.” He said that the enclosure from which the animals escaped held chimpanzees not part of any ongoing research program. He said the chimps in question were not infected with any contagious disease and presented no health risk. Sheriffs’ deputies patrolling the West Austin neighborhoods denied they were under orders to shoot to kill.

Residents expressed surprise that the experimental lab had been allowed to operate in their neighborhood. A city official said that the land was leased to the Primate Preserve many years ago. “The monkeys were there first, before most of those houses were even built.” According to public reports the Primate Preserve is a consortium of drug companies created in the 1970s. The Preserve is on the Hieronymus Parcel, a large tract of land on the banks of Lady Bird Lake in West Austin, near the Tom Miller Dam. The preserve employs more than one hundred staff and faculty, including veterinarians, animal care staff, basic scientists,

research technicians and administrative staff. Its programs involve research that requires nonhuman primate models of human diseases such as cancer, hepatitis, HIV, diabetes and obesity.

Mayor Leaf Grandenberg, who lives in the area, and whose grandson took a picture of two of the chimps in his backyard, said while the research is important, there has to be a better location for it, and promised city action "to get that place shut down." Save The Chimps (STC) a group of retired university academics and local activists issued a statement deploring conditions at the Preserve, calling for its closure and resettlement of the animals to a safe environment that respected rights of non-human primates.

Austin Globe Standard, Saturday, February 9:

LAST CHIMP RECAPTURED

TARRYTOWN BREATHES EASIER

National Guard troops captured the last two escaped chimps yesterday from a greenhouse on an Old Enfield estate, where they had taken refuge

amid blooming fruit trees. “They looked really healthy and didn’t want to leave,” the guardsman said. STC and other community groups vowed to fight until all the animals are freed from captivity. Local residents, even those supporting the research, called on the city to close down the facility. “It’s a safety issue,” hair stylist Bon Chance said from his salon two blocks from the Hieronymus Parcel.

“My customers are afraid.” He claimed a chimp snatched the Birkin handbag of a well-known West Austin matron. “She was livid. That chimp just laughed and ran off with it. Can you imagine?” City officials were studying the matter and there was talk of creating a commission to investigate.

Austin Globe Standard, Saturday, March 2:

## NIH REDUCES FUNDING FOR CHIMP RESEARCH

The National Institutes of Health announced that it was sharply reducing funding of testing on chimpanzees. “Americans have benefitted greatly from the chimpanzees’ service to biomedical research, but new scientific methods and

technologies have rendered their use in research today largely unnecessary. Their likeness to humans has made them uniquely valuable for certain types of research, but also demands greater justification for their use. Greatly reducing their use in biomedical research is scientifically sound and the right thing to do." The NIH denied there was any connection between its decision and the escape of chimps from the Primate Preserve in Austin. Officials of the preserve said they were considering their next move.

Austin Globe Standard, Saturday, March 21:

PRIMATE PRESERVE TO CLOSE

NEIGHBORS CALL FOR PARK LAND IN ITS PLACE

The Primate Preserve notified city officials that it was closing the Primate Preserve, which has conducted biomedical research on nonhuman primates on the Hieronymus Parcel on Lady Bird Lake for decades. The National Institutes of Health has decided to cease funding most primate research and the Austin consortium will close its Austin

facility immediately. Resident animals will be relocated to a non-testing preserve in Louisiana.

The H.H. Company, the Austin non-profit company that owns the Hieronymus Parcel said it was commissioning a study of possible uses for the parcel “consistent with the intent of Hiram Hieronymus.” The Parcel was left to the company for charitable purposes by Hiram Hieronymus, a wealthy Austin benefactor, who also donated land and an endowment for the Cartwright House, a retirement home located across from the Parcel.



It had been six months since the closing of the Primate Preserve. Professor Ralph Rothschild picked up the old set of binoculars from the table beside his chair and moved outside to the railing at the edge of his apartment balcony. It was mid-afternoon, and the professor had on his usual dress: A corduroy jacket with elbow patch sleeves, a neatly pressed white Oxford cloth shirt and a red tie. The stocky eighty-year-old's thick hair was completely white and his salt and pepper mustache was mostly salt now. His vision was not as good as

in his boyhood days in France and his hearing came and went but his mind was quick and his memory still accurate (unlike many of his colleagues who also resided at the Cartwright House).

From his sixth floor vantage point he could watch the activity on the Hieronymus Parcel across the road. Children parked their bikes beside the Monkey House, shuttered and fenced off ever since Primate Preserve closed. They played on the ropes and swings once used by the chimps, which had been salvaged by city park personnel and moved to the center of the parcel of land. The high chain link fences had been removed, but rusting poles were a reminder of the days when the chimps had played there.

This morning something was different. Through his binoculars Professor Rothschild saw two men with yellow fluorescent vests. One held a surveyor's rod and the other, a hundred yards away, took sightings with what the professor supposed was a theodolite. He knew the word, from the Greek for *sight*, or was it? He remembered an argument years ago at the Faculty Club between a slightly tipsy engineer and an indignant Latin professor about the

derivation of the word, but he could not bring the details to mind. *It's a transit, really; isn't that what we Americans call it?* he wondered.

"Dorrie Louise," he called. "Come see this. There are surveyors over on Hieronymus. What do you suppose that's all about?"

"Papa, look who's here."

He turned, but held on to the railing to keep his balance. In the doorway stood a tall, slightly stout but still athletic man with ruddy cheeks and a familiar shock of black hair. He stood beside Dorrie Louise with his arm around her shoulders. "Hello, Professor," he said. The warmth in the voice was still there.

"Wesley, my word, is it really you?"

The former All-American football player smiled. "I saw this in a bookstore and thought of you." He handed the retired poet a thin book. The professor's hands trembled slightly when he took it.

"Sorry. I'm afraid it may be Parkinson's but they say it is not, that it is just age. Doctors!" He looked carefully at the book. "It's *The Marble Faun!*" He

opened the book slowly. "My word," he said. "I do believe it is a first edition. A First of Faulkner's first." Ralph Rothschild was a poet, but he was also known in severely selective English Literature circles as an expert on the poems of William Faulkner. He was surprised that Wesley had remembered that. He had a way about him, this football player.

Wesley laughed. "It better be. That's what the man in the bookshop said. I saw it, thought of you and had to get it for you."

The professor shook his head. "No, Wesley, it's too much. I couldn't possibly accept it."

Wesley winked at Dorrie Louise. "Tell him I can afford it, Mrs. Smith. Besides, they won't give me my money back."

The slight woman smiled. "Call me Dorrie Louise, Wesley. I'm divorced from Mr. Smith now." She fluttered around the small apartment and brought out glasses and a pitcher of tea. "Papa always adored William Faulkner. I never could seem to get past the first chapter. What was it called, Papa? *I Lie Dying*, or something like that?"

Professor Rothschild looked up from the book. “As I Lay Dying, Dorrie Louise. But his poems. Ah, his poems. Imagine. A first edition of *The Marble Faun*.”

They sat around the worn dining table they had brought with them from The Haven after Dorrie Louise sold the old hotel and moved herself and the professor to the apartment at the retirement home.

“This is nice,” Wesley said, looking around. There was a picture of Lena, the professor’s deceased wife, in a place of honor on the living room wall. “Lena,” Wesley said, “She was something.”

“Papa and I miss her so much.”

He turned to Dorrie Louise. “I drove by the old hotel the other day. I bet it was a hard decision to sell it. A lot of memories.”

“It was, but Donny Ray thought it was a good deal, and Papa and I agreed it was time for Papa to be where he could be looked after if something should happen to me. Do you know how many years I lived there?” She sighed. “Before I married Mr. Smith?”

“And how many more years Donnie Ray lived

there, when you moved out to the country.”

“That was so hard, Wesley. But Lena convinced me that it was best for Donnie Ray to go to school in town.” She looked at Papa fondly. “She and Papa were so good to Donnie Ray. They raised him like he was their son. I promised Lena that I would look after Papa, and that’s what I’m doing. Though truth be told, he doesn’t take much looking after.”

Papa looked up. “The women in my life tell me what to do and I learned long ago it is best to obey.”

Wesley sat down in the old recliner and thumbed through a Cartwright House brochure. “Very nice.” He looked around at the roomy apartment. “So you and the Professor are living in sin?”

Dorrie Louise giggled. “Oh, Wesley. It’s all very proper. We have separate bedrooms and bathrooms. It’s lifetime care, you know. There are two hundred apartments. And we have fruit, lots and lots of fruit.” She pointed at a large bowl on the table. “Would you like a banana? Or an orange?” She pointed a large bowl of fruit in the center of the table.

Wesley smiled. “No thanks.” He put down the

brochure. "It's a great location, right in the center of town and just a few miles from the University."

"Yes, and the wonderful thing is that so many of Papa's old friends are here. Everywhere you turn, there's a professor of something. Brilliant people."

Papa looked up again. "At one time they were brilliant. It would be wonderful if only scholars and teachers lived here. Unfortunately, all the administrators have also made their way here: deans, provosts, the whole lot. It's almost as if I never retired." He smiled. "Except I do not have to meet classes any longer." He frowned and said, "Wesley, come out on the balcony. What do you think those men are doing?" He pointed at the men in yellow vests, who had moved further away, down the street.

"It looks like they're surveying the Hieronymus Parcel, Professor."

"Yes, I think they are."

"Getting it ready, I imagine. I've heard the H.H. Company is going to sell it."

"You have heard that?" Papa sighed. "Dorrie

Louise, we need to have a STC meeting. Get me the list. I need to tell them there is activity on the Hieronymus Parcel.”

Wesley watched the men through the binoculars. “STC?” he asked, handing the binoculars back to the Professor.

“It is the name of our protest group.”

Wesley looked at him blankly.

“STC was formed to fight the operation of the Primate Preserve.”

“You were involved in that?”

“Yes. STC stands for Save The Chimpanzees.”

“I recall that a bunch of them escaped. Did they ever catch them all?”

Papa picked up a writing tablet and started making notes. “Oh, yes. I recall there was some disagreement about whether there were twenty-five or twenty-six chimps that escaped. STC did not orchestrate the escape, although we have been accused of that, but certainly the escape was a triggering event. After twenty five chimpanzees ran

loose in West Austin for forty-eight hours almost everyone agreed the primate laboratory did not belong here.”

“That must have been something to witness. I was in Houston then.”

“STC opposes using chimpanzees for research purposes, infecting the poor creatures with diseases and testing vaccines on them.” He shuddered. “Barbarous.”

“They were there a long time. I remember Donnie Ray and I used to take dates over there so the girls could hear the monkeys carrying on all night.” He lowered his voice and whispered to the Professor. “Some of them really loved it.”

“Hmm,” Papa said. “You are a very interesting man, Wesley, with unusual experiences. You are correct. The preserve was there a long time. It was receiving fifty million dollars of federal funding, and of course drug company money. Everyone approved of it, except of course, the chimpanzees.”

“Did the H.H. Company get a piece of that?”

“Of the grant money? Oh, I imagine so. At least,

they always argued that that was what allowed them to support all manner of charities.”

“Doesn’t Dockery Ashley run the H.H. Company?”

“Yes, Judge Ashley is the president.”

“So your group of protestors shut down Judge Ashley’s favorite project?”

“Don’t underestimate the power of retired academicians, Wesley, in matters of protest. A Latin professor, an expert on Fifteenth Century Flemish history, a law dean, all sorts of talented people.”

“And a poet.”

“Well, yes. I did play a role. It was not easy, I assure you, but we were dedicated.” His eyes brightened as he remembered the events. “The claim was that the use of animals was essential to finding a cure for AIDS and cancer but neither was ever established. At one time, there were over a hundred chimps there.” He pointed at the land across the road. “They did develop a Hepatitis C vaccine. But at what cost? Those poor animals were deliberately infected with the most horrible diseases. Many were kept in cages all the time. The poor things were like

children, trusting their keepers and all the while..."

"Oh come on, Professor. They're monkeys. If they can help humans, shouldn't we use them?"

"In the first place, Wesley," the professor said, " we are not speaking of monkeys. We are speaking of chimpanzees."

Wesley smiled tolerantly. "There's a difference?"

"Indeed. They are both primates, but chimpanzees are a type of ape, closely related to humans, which is what led to their being used for medical research? Many kinds of monkeys exist, but their brains are smaller, and they are a different primate group."

Wesley winked at Dorrie Louise, who smiled at him. "Why is the building over there called the Monkey House? Why not the Chimp House?"

Papa said, "The Primate Preserve had monkeys there for many years, mostly rhesus macaque monkeys they were breeding for laboratory use. That program was stopped some time ago. The National Institutes of Health finally admitted that most chimpanzee research was unnecessary. When the government cut off the funding, the fight was

over.”

“What happened to the chimps?”

“They were sent to a real primate preserve in Louisiana.”

“So you won.”

Papa returned to his notes. “We won the battle for the chimps. Now we must win the battle for the Hieronymus Parcel. It is too precious to use for office towers and multi-million dollar high-rise apartment complexes. It would make a wonderful park. The Monkey House could become an arts center. The employee housing could be saved, updated, used as affordable housing for people who cannot afford to live downtown.”

“Good luck with that, Professor.” He looked at Dorrie Louise. “He’s something, isn’t he?”

“A man with a mission. Save the Hieronymus Parcel,” she said to Wesley with a smile.

They went into the kitchen and left Papa to his phone calls. Wesley shook his head. “Austin's never gonna stop growing, There's some amazing new projects ready to come online.”

She ignored his comment and asked, "How are you, Wesley? Happily married?"

"Oh, sure," he said. "Cindy's a great girl. Just a great girl."

"Children?"

Wesley sighed. "Not yet. But we're still trying."

"Are you, Wesley?" Dora asked. "I see the articles in those magazines at the checkout line at the grocery store. You and your wife are in there a lot."

Wesley shrugged. "They exaggerate."

"Do they? What I read was that you two are in the middle of a break-up. Is that true, Wesley?"

"I still have my hopes. But her friends poison her mind against me, telling her I'm sleeping around all the time. My friends tell me she's crazy jealous and generally bitchy."

"Those are not very nice friends, are they?"

"Another thing: the Patson family is well-lawyered, and I won't come out of a divorce in very good shape." He gazed out the kitchen window. A stray

cloud crossed in front of the sun, offering a moment of shade. "You know who Tommy Thomas is?"

"No," she answered.

"He's always been the go-to lawyer for the University's football players. Always. Well, I called him to ask what I should do, you know, in the event there is a divorce, and he said he couldn't advise me."

"Why in the world?"

"Nobody wants to cross her family."

"They're very wealthy, I guess."

"You could say that. Anne Morgan Patson, you know, Cindy's mother, is like the richest woman in Texas. Oil money. Tommy Thomas doesn't want Anne Morgan for an enemy. No lawyer in Houston does. At least, none of the good ones. Ann Morgan loves a good fight and she's hardly ever lost one."

They stood silently. Dorrie Louise broke the silence. "You should talk to Donnie Ray about this. He's a very good lawyer."

"Oh, I can't do that, Dorrie Louise. He won't talk to

me.”

“What happened between you and Donnie Ray, Wesley? You were best friends. All that partying and double dates. I worried at the time that you two were partying too much, but that was the happiest I ever saw him. He won't tell me a thing about what happened between you.”

“I made a big mistake. I admitted it. I asked him to forgive me, more than once, but he never would.”

“That doesn't sound like him, to bear a grudge.”  
Dorrie Louise said.

“He bears one, I can swear to that. Did you know he wrecked my car?”

“Donnie Ray wrecked that beautiful blue car?”

“Yep. My Beemer. Drove it right off Coyote Hill out on 2222.”

Dorrie Louise sighed and brushed back her hair. “This humidity,” she said. “He never said a word about wrecking your car.”

“It doesn't matter.” He bounced on his toes, still light-footed enough to remind any fan that he had

been an All-American football player for the University. "We need to change the mood. I want you to see my new car. It's a Ferrari."

"Is it blue? I loved that blue car."

Wesley grinned. "It is. Come on. I'll take you for a ride." He led her back into the book-lined living room. "We'll drive out and look at my new development. And then we'll all go to dinner." He spoke to Papa. "There's a new Hungarian place on South Congress. How does that sound to you for dinner, Professor?"

Papa looked up from his notes. "Hungarian, you say? I've never had Hungarian food and I'm not of a mind to start now. No, if you're free for dinner, I insist you join us here."

Before Wesley could object, Dorrie Louise said, "He wants to show you off, Wesley. You're a real life celebrity at the Cartwright House. It will thrill Papa to bring you to dinner."

Wesley escorted Dorrie Louise to the parking lot where his expensive blue Ferrari glittered in the sun. He helped Dorrie Louise in and then lowered himself effortlessly into the sports car.

“Goodness,” Dorrie Louise said over the roar of the engine. Wesley sped out of the parking lot, leaving a sonic boom behind. “That’ll knock them right off their rockers,” she said with a laugh.

Wesley steered sharply onto MoPac and quickly got the low-slung car up to eighty. He wove in and out of the morning traffic, swerved sharply onto the Capitol of Texas extension and then onto Ben White. In a matter of minutes, they were on the Interstate, heading south.

“Where are we going?” she asked, shouting to be heard.

*“Universe Race World.* Have you heard about the Grand Prix racetrack being built past the airport? I want to show it to you.” He slowed the Ferrari onto a bumpy farm-to-market road. The sports car shook with every pothole. Dorrie Louise braced herself against the jolts. Wesley slowed down and pulled to a stop on a knoll that overlooked the site of the racetrack. He unfolded a large map. “Over there” he said, pointing to the north, “where the big dirt movers are, they’re building a 3.4 mile state-of-the-art, circuit track. The elevation will change about a hundred and thirty feet. It’s being designed for all

classes of racing, but the big deal will be with the Grand Prix. This is the first track in the U.S. built especially for Grand Prix racing.”

“It certainly will be large,” she said.

Wesley laughed. “Large? Yes. There’ll be a tower and an amphitheater. But think about this: its capacity will be one hundred and twenty thousand people.”

“No!”

“Yes! Can you imagine getting that many people out here from Austin to see a race?”

“I cannot. How are they possibly going to do it?”

“They have lots of plans, of course, but let me show you what the governor and I are planning.” He turned the car around and sped down the road a few miles, then slowed and turned onto a gravel road. “Here we are.”

Dorrie Louise stared at the scrubby land. A few goats were sheltered under an oak tree. There was a windmill in the distance. “What is this place, Wesley?”

He helped her out of the Ferrari. "Imagine it, Dorrie Louise, a four-lane expressway running from the Interstate right through here, and then, all the way to the Circuit of the Americas. Over there," he said, pointing to their left, "a world-class resort hotel. Over here, a Jack Nicklaus golf course. A helipad. Trees and beautiful plants everywhere you look. No expense spared."

"Really? It's hard for me to visualize."

"Not for me. Bob Braeswood and I have an option on this land."

"The governor?"

"His term is up. He and I are doing this. We're calling it *Austin Next*. You get it? The next big thing in Austin. The next generation of Austin. Right here. This land. All ours. It'll make history." He turned to her, eyes flashing. "This is a huge deal." His jaw tightened. "A huge, huge deal."

"It must be very important to you." She leaned against the sports car, squinting at the land. "You can visualize it all, can't you?"

"Every detail. This is mine, my deal. There won't be

a dime of Patson money in it.”

She touched his arm. “That’s important...that your wife’s family isn’t...involved?”

He nodded his head. “Yes. It is. I don’t have anything of my own, Dorrie Louise. I’m on an allowance. A kept man. Cindy and her mother watch me like hawks. Any time I do something that doesn’t please either one of those women, there’s hell to pay.”

“Is there hell to pay often, Wesley?”

“You know me, Dorrie Louise. I can’t resist a pretty face.”

She smiled. “You’re a married man, Wesley. It’s about time for you to settle down.”

He helped her back into the car and squatted by the door. “So I’ve been told. It didn’t have to be this way. I should be in Congress now, making plans to succeed Bob Braeswood as governor. If Donnie Ray had only . . .”

“Why did Donnie Ray wreck your car, Wesley? What really happened between you?”

"I made a mistake, and he couldn't forgive me. In fact, he bad-mouthed me to important people, and I lost my chance to run for Congress." He stood up and shielded his eyes against the afternoon sun. "*Austin Next* will fix all that. It'll make me a rich man, and I can do what I want. What *ever* I want."

He got back in the car and turned on the ignition. Over the roar, Dorrie Louise said, "Tell me what happened, Wesley. I need to know."

"Ask Donnie Ray." He turned in the seat, and backed the Ferrari around on the gravel road. "I never meant to hurt him. Never."

"Let's call him, Wesley. Let's call Donnie Ray. I do so want you two to be friends again. You meant so much to each other."

"I don't know. I doubt he would even speak to me."

"He'll speak to you. Stop this car and give me your phone."



In his office in the Panhandle town of Velda, Don R.

Cuinn, attorney at law, recognized his mother's familiar voice. "Where are you, Mama? Is everything all right?"

"Yes, it certainly is, Donnie Ray. Guess who is sitting here beside me?"

"I give up."

"We're in a beautiful blue car, just as nice as the one you wrecked."

"It's a Ferrari," Wesley said loud enough to be heard.

"Don't tell me you're driving around with Wesley Bird in a blue Ferrari. You're not, are you? Please tell me you're not."

"Donnie Ray, Wesley forgives you for wrecking his car. He wants you two to be friends again."

"Jesus Christ, Mama. Let me talk to him."

She handed Wesley the phone. "I told you he'd talk to you."

Wesley winked at her and said, "Hello, *Crud*. What in the world are you doing way up there when you

could be in Austin with me and your Mama, drinking *mojitos*?"

"No, Wesley. The question is, what are you doing, riding around Austin with my mother?"

Dorrie Louise opened the car door and climbed out. She smoothed her dress and stuck her head in the window. "I'm going to walk down there," she said, pointing to a culvert across a stream, "and look around. When I get back, I want you two boys to be friends again. Okay?"

Don waited a minute and then asked, "Is she gone?"

"Yeah," Wesley replied.

"Good. Now listen to me Wesley. I want you to leave my mother alone. Do you understand me?"

"Donnie Ray, I can't believe you're still mad. Whatever I did, you wrecked my car, screwed me over with Sawbucks Banjo, kept me from being elected to Congress, and let me get married to Cindy. Aren't we about even?"

Memories rushed over Don, memories of the day when he discovered that Wesley had played him;

guiding him to a forgery in the State Archives that made the attorney general's ancestor out to be a drunkard liar; arranging for him to write an article about the incident ridiculing the attorney general's claim to be a descendant of a true Texas hero; getting that article published in Drayton Philby's magazine *Texas Today*; gleeful when the article played a big part in Bob Braeswood defeating the attorney general for governor; all that planned by Wesley, his best friend, the brother he never had, his mentor and confidant, who promised to always have his back.

"No. I did not screw you over with Banjo. I told Drayton that the article I wrote for his magazine was based on a forgery that you were responsible for, and Drayton was so angry, he told Banjo you were a bad actor. Which you are, by the way."

"Donnie Ray, everything I did, I did for us. We had something special. Remember how we promised to look out for each other?"

"I remember. You're the one who forgot."

"Not true, son. Not true. But think about all the good times: the partying, the fun, the girls.

Remember election night? How great was that?"

"We had some good times," Don admitted. "And yes, until the end you looked out for me. I appreciate that."

"I'm still looking out for you, D. Ray. This land deal I'm working on is going to be immense. You're a lawyer now, right?"

"I have a license."

"Are you any good? I'll bet you're a great lawyer."

"I'm not too bad," Don said.

"This deal is Bob Braeswood and me. We could use a general counsel. Come to work for our company and we'll give you profit participation in the deal."

"No."

"No? You don't even want to know how much you could make? You'd rather stay up there in a rinky-dink town than live in Austin and get rich? Not to mention getting to see me every day?"

Don laughed, despite himself. "Wesley Bird, I would rather have my balls chewed off by a rabid

groundhog, than go into business with you. You are a low-down, thieving, cheating, skirt-chasing son-of-a-bitch.”

“Oh,” Wesley said. “I see. Well, that doesn’t mean we can’t be friends, does it?”

Don laughed again. He had missed Wesley. “I guess we can be.”



The Cartwright House was into the ninth decade since its establishment by Hiram Hieronymus as a retirement home for retired Methodist clergy and their widows. It had gone through several metamorphoses, each with new buildings and changes in its mission. Now it included two new residential towers alongside the original one. It was the retirement home of choice for University faculty and administrators. State politicians who preferred to retire in Austin rather than return to Muleshoe or Rusk flocked to it. Old Austin families had entrusted several generations of elderly mothers and aunts to the care of its staff. It had an incomparable location, across from Lady Bird Lake,

close to doctors' offices and shopping malls and convenient for family members who lived nearby in upscale West Austin. It had three hundred apartments for senior living and over five hundred residents.

The dining room was decorated in the style popular in country clubs in the 1970's: expanses of carpet with an almost oriental design, but dark enough to hide food stains; chandeliers with ornate brass fittings. The wait staff was recruited from Third World countries and trained by the manager of dining services to provide the attentive service the residents expected. The staff, wearing black and white uniforms, carried trays and stored walkers. Small hard-of-hearing women sat erectly at dining tables with white tablecloths, smiling with feigned interest at their dinner partners.

Dorrie Louise had been right. By the time she and Professor Rothschild escorted Wesley through the dining room doorway, the University's All-American tight end was recognized and a buzz spread across the room. Dorrie Louise checked them in and waited for the waiter to find them a table. "The food here is very good," she said to

Wesley.

But he couldn't hear her. Retirees, prominent men from the University, surrounded him. They were all laughing like schoolboys, clapping him on the back, shaking his hand. Wesley's team had won the school's last national championship at the Sugar Bowl. Listening, it seemed all of them had been in the stadium when Wesley caught the game-winning touchdown pass. Paul Stinson, the retired dean of the Engineering School, ninety-six years old and still alert, even though profoundly deaf, was recounting the game's last two minutes to Martin, the retired provost of the University and to St. Livermore Berkeley, the retired dean of the Law School.

Martin looked at Wesley and smiled. "We were at the game, Wesley. In fact, the three of us were sitting together. Paul just doesn't remember that."

Berkeley patted Papa on the shoulder. "Hello, Ralph. Can we convince Wesley to re-enroll? Coach Jones needs some help."

Papa shook his head. "Come on, Wesley. The dining room closes at eight. No food for late-

comers, even you.”

“Just a minute, Professor,” Wesley said. “Let me speak to Judge Ashley. And I think that’s Coach Wisconsin’s widow, isn’t it?” He turned and waved to the heavy-set, balding man who was watching from a long table at one end of the room. Ashley returned the wave and motioned for them to join them.

“My, my,” Dorrie Louise said, “we’ve never been asked to sit with Minerva Wisconsin.”

By the time they arrived at his table, former county judge Dockery Ashley had conferred with Minerva Wisconsin his hostess, and the self-appointed first lady of Cartwright House. She shooed away enough less important residents to make room for Wesley, Papa, and Dorrie Louise. She placed Wesley between herself and Judge Ashley. Dorrie Louise and Papa were relegated to the end of the table, next to Wilda Ashley, Judge Ashley’s peckish wife. She nodded at the two of them and continued her conversation with Charles Cowlson, the retired dean of the History Department. Papa nodded to Judge Ashley, who did not speak.

Minerva Wisconsin's booming voice carried to the end of the table, "Of course we will beat Baylor. We always beat Baylor." Wesley and Judge smiled at each other. Thrice widowed, Minerva Wisconsin's most recent husband had been the late Jack (One-Eye) Wisconsin, the famed defensive back and safety, who despite having sight in only one eye, was an All-American at the University; later he was an All-Pro, and eventually head coach at Pittsburgh. Being the widow of the famed Coach Wisconsin lent Minerva precedence on matters athletic or so she believed. In between comments about the year's football team and its woefully inadequate coach, Jonesy "J" Jones, Minerva tended to her other duties, not the least of which was observing the scene before her, noting wait staff errors or breaches of the dress code in a small notepad. She shared her sightings of lapses in service or resident attire at regular meetings with Billy Boykin, the portly manager of Cartwright House. Minerva pushed her chair back discretely, rose, blew a kiss in the general direction of Judge Ashley, and walked to the end of the table. "Do change places with me, Wilda," she said to Mrs. Ashley. "I want to talk to Ralph." She took the other

woman's chair and turned to Papa. "Tell me what books you've been reading, Ralph? Have you seen any plays? I love the theater."

Rather than sit where Minerva had directed her, Mrs. Ashley drained her glass of Vodka, nodded primly and tottered across the dining room. "Poor Dockery," Minerva whispered to Papa. "She was very wealthy and considered quite a catch when they married."

Papa grunted. "I have not had much contact with the judge...or his wife."

"A good wife is the key to a man's success, so they say."

Papa raised his glass. "To success."

They clinked glasses. Minerva Wisconsin smiled "When will your next volume of poetry be published, Ralph? I love poetry."

"Do you? Most people do not."

"I'm not like most people. But when?"

"Oh, never, I suppose. There is very little market for my sort of work."

“Oh, but there should be.” She lowered her voice. “Send me the manuscript. Jack Fellows at the university’s press is a very good friend.”

“You’re very kind, Mrs. Wisconsin. But really...”

“Call me Minerva. Kindness has nothing to do with it. I am a supporter of the arts: the symphony, the opera, the ballet, I support them all. Why not poetry? I’ll call you tomorrow. Perhaps we can discuss it over tea.”

Papa blushed and turned to his mushroom soup.

At the center of the table, Judge Ashley and Wesley ate their soup. Ashley ate hungrily, without speaking. He boasted a muscular rotund body; big but not fat, set off by his shaved round head. He finished his soup with a final swipe of his spoon and said to Wesley, “Your mother-in-law, Wesley. What is she up to these days? Busy with the Houston arts scene?”

“Anne Morgan’s more interested in making money than giving it away.”

“Like her father. I worked with him on a few projects.” Judge retained the aura of power. For

decades, he was one of the most powerful men in the capitol city. During his terms as county judge, he spearheaded the change away from the city's distrust of growth, turning it into a Mecca for developers and land speculators. Welcoming, let alone seeking out new industries, was anathema to the city's Old Guard. However, they soon took their place among the wealth seekers, converting their land holdings and rundown properties into shining examples of the new Austin. At one time the judge had been the face of the new city, no matter who was mayor, or president of the university, or speaker of the house, or even governor. He knew every legislator, every regent, every lobbyist, and every important donor across the state. He vetted appointments for every governor, regardless of party, but Bob Braeswood's election had made public what insiders had known for some time: Ashley's days as a master powerbroker were over. The newcomers had their own ways of exercising power, and Ashley's brand was old-fashioned, crude, even. When he was finally deposed as county judge, his golden parachute was presidency of the non-profit H.H. Company, the owner of the Hieronymus Parcel, and the source of funds for

many local charities. "It is," he said, "my way of giving back to the community." In fact, it was his main source of income, now that his wife Wilda's inheritance was spent. Running the H.H. Company provided a large annual salary, an expansive downtown office, club memberships, and the other trappings of power that Ashley had become accustomed to.

Wesley broke off a piece of his Parker House dinner roll and spread butter on it. "Anne Morgan," he said of his mother-in-law, "may have inherited the largest oil fortune in Texas, but she'll leave the earth with a lot more than she inherited. I can't get her to even look at my projects."

"I hear that you and Braeswood have something in the works, out by the new motorway."

Wesley pushed his plate away and looked down at a plate brimming with meatloaf and mashed potatoes covered with dark gravy. "*Austin Next*, we're calling it."

Ashley leaned in close. "You ought to look into the Hieronymus Parcel," he whispered.

"So the rumors are true? You're opening it up to

bidders? That'll bring out a shitload of protesters, pardon my English."

"We have no choice but to sell, Wesley. The H.H. Company lost its major source of income when we lost the damned monkeys. We have to sell or close up shop. Yes, there will be protests. Many of them from people in this room." He frowned. "They want us to give the land away. Give it away! Use it for hiking trails and picnics. Ridiculous! But fortunately, I still have some influence. We'll keep them quiet. Even your friend, the professor, over there."

"Professor Rothschild is a poet," Wesley said. "I've known him for a long time. Maybe I could speak to him."

"Any help would be appreciated, Wesley. I don't like to be a schoolyard bully, beat up on the defenseless." He nodded with a thin smile and turned to his meatloaf. "This has been a good talk. Maybe your mother-in-law would be interested in bidding on the Hieronymus Parcel."

Wesley answered softly, "Yes. She might be interested. The question is, do I want to let her in?"

Ashley chuckled to himself. He knew how little influence Wesley had in the Patson Empire.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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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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