

**IN THE PECOS MAIN:  
Five Fables in Lieu of Wondrous Memories**

by

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circa 1972  
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## I

## PIQUE SECONDS

Jebediah Morgan, who lives in the El Rancho Trailer Park just south of Pflugerville with his little pet rat-terrier Lurleen, is known as the best rattlesnake hunter for miles around. People come from three counties to follow him and his dog on their weekly trek through the Hill Country in search of lethal game.

"Hoddamn," old Jeb would chortle when Lurleen would finally reel off a high-pitched bark at a non-descript pile of rock. "The little bitch must've once suckled on a mongoose," he would proudly announce to the anxiously amused crowd.

A large stick was poked into the hoped-for vipers' nest, forcing out a terrified five-footer that curled, hissed, and rattled before its equally terrified audience. Jeb would taunt the creature and regale the crowd with vicious snake-slurs. Then he would turn to his onlookers with the sobering observation: "A snake may be just a metaphor to you, but it can be a butt full of venom to me."

Quickly he would tear off a plug of tobacco, and while working up a good chew, tease the reptile by waving his arms in obscene semaphore formations. Once the snake was sufficiently incensed and giving off its sulfurous pique-aroma, old Jeb would draw his own head back in an amazing imitation of his prey and then suddenly throw a six-foot spit in its face. In those few critical seconds in which the insulted snake was stunned by the noxious expectorant, it was grabbed behind its unhinged jaw and quickly shoved into a pillowcase to the startled applause of the relieved spectators.

"Never confront a rattler," Jeb warned, "until you have come to terms with the momentary gods."

## II

## FETID SHRUB

While Xeriscaping my backyard near the Rio Grande, I happened upon a large stone which a local historian declared to be a symbolic plaque from the original Tejas native homeland. Within a week I was eminently-dominated by the Texas Historical Commission. The Smithsonian bulldozed my house and the Museo Nacional de Antropologia de Mexico arrived to begin an archeological dig.

The image on the smooth large rock looked like a plant chopped off at the middle of its main trunk with dark brown bark, marked by large blotches, covered by small wart-like excrescences, divided by long, shallow depressions, I tend to suspect that it is a rare poisonous pawpaw, aka "Indian Banana."

Although Linneaus himself named the pawpaw *Asimina triloba*, the people of South Texas still insist on calling it "fetid shrub" after their pioneering ancestors discovered that the seeds within the five-inch pawpaw fruits' ripe, custardy flesh contain an alkaloid that causes a person's brain to become stupefied.

It is generally believed that the first European notice of the pawpaw was made in 1542 in the diary pages of the notorious conquistador Hernando De Soto, who that very year mysteriously died.

To get my land back, I am going to argue in court that my home was not the site of an ancient Tejas tribe, but rather one of many pawpaw orchards that revengeful Aztecs, following Montezuma's defeat by Cortez in 1520, had carefully planted throughout the Southwest, accompanied by a stone sign that pictured a lobbed-off plant, the 16<sup>th</sup>-century international symbol that roughly translated as "Good Eats."

### III

#### IN THE PECOS MAIN

Yesterday at noon, Prescott Half-Feather, a respected member of the Pecos City Council, stood on the City Hall steps and recited an ancient Coahuiltecan prophecy that moved the townspeople at once to tears, and soon to madness. During this ordeal, I remain hidden in a large dried-up water main under the intersection of Cedar Street and West Third.

All afternoon I could hear the noise of cars above screeching to a halt, and crazed Christians rushing into the Methodist Church seeking relief. I suppose they found none, for they would soon run back into the street and pound their feet in an unnerving rhythmic manner. Soon hundreds of people were running through the streets shouting at each other in frenzied tones.

Fortunately, I work at the Judge Roy Bean Cafe, and so had with me an order of three large pizzas that I was delivering to a nearby house when all the commotion began. So the night was not without its entertainment. I played a makeshift game of solitaire-checkers with the pepperoni, providing some diversion during the unnerving moments, especially when the screams began after midnight.

It should be dawn by now. All that shouting and foot-stomping above has slowly ebbed, and I hear only a few people moving. I guess most are just standing still, perhaps catatonic. Whether they are looking at the sky, at each other, or at the pavement I can only surmise from this water main. I guess it's time to climb out and find out. Nothing left to do here. I finally ate the pepperoni.

## IV

## BLUE-RED RAY

Early last week, Ray Violetta suddenly had a hunch that the flickering plant-light over his potted marijuana was sending him coded messages. And for two days he recorded the longs and shorts of his bulb's outbursts.

The flashes were so erratic that he could not "operationally define" what length of time would constitute a "short" as opposed to a "long." So he just diligently noted the lengths of time with a stopwatch. He then went to his office computer, typed the data on computer cards, programmed for a Morse-Code-like dot-and-dash decipherment of the various timespans, and "threw it in the hopper to see what comes out," as computer people would say.

For a "dot" less than 5 seconds in duration, nonsense phrases were cryptographically found in the light flashes, such as:

*"ITJFLDPBIEL GI GOL DLTOBKEIBLD BOLEOFL"*

Defining a "dot" as under 10 seconds, this worrisome phrase was found:

*"YU HAF TWEEE MONTS TU LIV"*

For a "dot" under 15 seconds, this was found:

*"HAVING A GOOD TIME IN RIO, WISH YOU WERE HERE"*

Ray rushed back to his house to make another recording, but the lamp refused to flicker. It just continued to glow evenly. A suspicious electrician at the Balcones House of Lites later told him most emphatically that there was no reason to repair a good lamp.

## V

## SHADY LADY

Above Lake Travis, near the edge of a limestone ledge, a large cedar tree stands aslant, victim of a lightning strike seven years ago. On hot summer days Mary Dunbar Smith comes to the prickly shade of this chastened old tree to edit her memoirs.

Blue-penciled are her naïve early years in Fort Stockton as Express Checkout Girl at Sallie Mae's Five and Dime, Assistant Receptionist at Big Bruce's Mortuary and Gift Shop, and Coffee-Girl for the 6:20am Weather Report on KTEX-TV.

Erased are her whoopsie-doo years traveling with the Ranch Road Circus and Sideshow, where she triple-dutied as Gracie Gags the Topless Clown, Rubber Maid who could reportedly tie herself into a slipknot, and Razzmatazz the Androgynous Ectomorph.

Crossed-out are her sober college years in Waco where she got her B.A. in Criminology, served two years in Abilene as a burglary detective, and then served three years in Huntsville Women's Prison for being the first female cat-burglar convicted in Texas.

Smudged is her Houston society decade married to the Chairman of the Texas Board of Pardons, when she was President of the River Oaks Bayou League, Queen of the Montrose Cotillion Ball, and Grand-Marshal of the Galveston Dune Parade.

Those chapters are now all gone. The remains of her memoirs are still hidden within the loose bark of that old cedar tree, until she returns once more to recast her ever-changing past.