

THE POINDEXTER PLACE

“Here, Arnie, the phone is for you,” said Mary.

“Hello, this is Arnie.”

“Hi, Pastor. This is Regina Wallace.”

“How are you, Regina?”

“I’m good, thank you. I’m calling to see if you know anybody with a pickup truck who could help move a few things for my elderly neighbor.”

“Well, Regina ... all the farmers around here have pickups, but I know they’re extremely busy right now trying to get their crops in the ground.”

“I understand.”

“Let me ask around and if I find someone, I’ll call you.”

“Okay, thanks, Pastor.”

“What’s going on with Regina?” asked Mary.

“She wanted to know if I knew anybody with a pickup truck that could help move a few things for her elderly neighbor.”

“Do you?”

“Not off-hand ... at least not anybody who isn't planting right now ... you know that's the third call I've gotten in the last couple of weeks about a pickup truck. It makes me think that maybe we should look into getting one.”

“Do you think we can afford another vehicle, Arnie?”

“It would be very tight, for sure, but let me do some asking around.”

Pastor Schmidt went into town the next day and stopped at the hardware store. He thought he'd talk to Sy Tobias, the owner and self-proclaimed expert on the local population.

“Hey, Sy,” said Pastor Schmidt. “How are you?”

“Fair to middlin, Reverend,” replied Sy.

“Sy, do you know anybody who might have a good used pickup for sale?”

“A good used pickup, huh? Off the top of my head, no. Most guys hold on to their trucks until they're worn out ... I tell you what, if you want to

post what you want on the community board over there, maybe something will come up.”

“Okay, thanks, Sy. I’ll do that.”

“Excuse me, Pastor Schmidt,” said Lois Elder. “Did I hear you say you are looking for a used pickup truck?”

“Yes, Lois. Do you know someone who has one?”

“My nephew—my sister’s boy over in Crawford—he’s going into the army, and he has a pickup truck that he won’t be needing anymore.”

“Do you know how much he wants for it, Lois?”

“Actually, Pastor, he would give it away to someone who promised to take care of it. It’s his ‘pride and joy’.”

“Well, that would be very generous of him. I’d love to have it. If you can give me his phone number, I’ll give him a ring.”

“He already left this morning for boot camp. Let me give my sister a call right now to make sure she’ll be home tomorrow.”

A few minutes later, Lois came back into the hardware store with a smile on her face.

“If you’d be available tomorrow morning, I could pick you up at the church and we could go over to my sister’s house and get the truck.”

“One second, let me check my planner here,” said Pastor Schmidt. “Okay, that would work for me. Say around nine o’clock?”

“I’ll see you then, Pastor.”

Despite having white knuckles for half the drive over to Crawford, Pastor Schmidt got out of Lois’s car safe and sound. Lois walked up to the front door where her sister, Sophie, greeted her. They walked around to the barn behind the house where the pickup was being kept.

“Here are the keys, Pastor,” said Sophie.

“Are you sure this is what your son would want, Sophie?” asked Pastor Schmidt.

“I won’t be able to talk to him for about a week, but I’m sure he’ll be glad it went to you.”

“Well, I appreciate it very much, Sophie.”

On his way home, Pastor Schmidt stopped at the Motor Vehicle Bureau and took care of the title

and registration. With that done, he headed home. He called his wife to let her know he would be there in about ten minutes. By the time he got to the end of the rock driveway leading to his house, Mary stood waiting at the front door.

“Well, what do you think, Mary?”

“I ... uh.”

“It runs great with plenty of power, and it’s been well taken care of.”

“I ... uh.”

Mary’s hesitation was understandable. A super jacked-up 4x4 with extra wide mud-grip tires had become a new member of the family. Her husband’s grin apparently showed the vehicle had reached into his soul and liberated some primeval instinct. The big longhorn steer hood ornament added a certain animal aura to the truck. The rear window displayed four deer antler decals with ‘Country Style’ lettering in the middle. It had a shin-buster ball hitch on the rear and a shiny toolbox just behind the cab. The front license plate said, ‘Pride and Joy’.

“Wait till you hear this, Mary,” said Arnie. When he pressed a button on the dash, the theme song from the Lone Ranger blared out from under the hood.

“How much ... how much did you pay for this, Arnie?” asked Mary.

“That’s the best part of all. It didn’t cost me anything. Lois Elder’s nephew over in Crawford gave it to us, if we promised to take good care of it.”

“Okay, then ... I guess we now have a pickup truck,” said Mary.

“Have you done the grocery shopping yet?”

“No ... uh.”

“Great. We can take the pickup truck in and load up.”

“Well, okay. Just let me put on some different shoes.”

As they passed the barber shop on Main Street, Arnie pushed the button on the dash that released the Lone Ranger. The boys sitting on the bench in front of the barber shop waved and gazed in envy. At least that’s how Arnie saw it.

“Are you going to do that every time we come to town in the pickup truck?” asked Mary.

“No, I just did it today for fun ... I need to make a quick stop at the hardware store and let Sy know that I found a pickup.”

“Hey, Sy. I just wanted to let you know I got a pickup truck, so you don’t have to ask around anymore.”

“Great, Reverend. You know it must be some kind of divine coincidence that you came in here today.”

“How’s that, Sy?” asked Pastor Schmidt.

“You know old Jake Poindexter, don’t you?”

“Yeah. He’s got that place out there on Highway 19. Jake used to come to our church once in a while, but I haven’t seen him in a long time. I’ve been meaning to go see him.”

“Well, I’ve got forty bags of chicken feed that I need to get out to him. None of my drivers will deliver them out to him cause they say the Poindexter Place is haunted. I even threatened to fire them, but that didn’t seem to faze them at all. So, seeing as how you’ve got this pickup truck now and

seeing as how with your spiritual connections the possibility of there being ghosts out there wouldn't bother you ... well, I was wondering if I could get you to take these bags of chicken feed out there? Not only that, but it would give you an opportunity to visit old Jake ... you know ... like you said you'd been meaning to do."

"Divine coincidence, huh? ... Okay, I guess it would give me a good opportunity to see Jake, but I can't do it until tomorrow morning."

"No problem, Reverend. They'll be here waiting for you. And I'll even see if I can't rustle up a little something for the kitty at your church."

"What? And you a Methodist? Putting something in a Lutheran kitty?"

"Well, Reverend, nobody else has to know, right?"

As he headed west on Highway 19, he saw the first of several warning signs for Dead Man's Curve up ahead. Sadly, the name certainly fit, for over twenty-five people lost their lives at Dead Man's Curve over the years because they were going too fast, and they missed the turn to go flying down into the valley below. There is a stout

guardrail up there now, but it took a long time for the installation. What finally motivated the county to get the guardrail put up, he wasn't sure. There was a macabre rumor going around at one time that when the head of the County Commission realized most of those going over the curve were voting members of his party, he pushed the project through immediately. Although Pastor Schmidt hoped things had not come to that, in a moment of cynicism, he could see the possibility of some truth in the rumor.

About 500 yards before the curve on the right side of the road, there stood a huge billboard advertising Cedar Crossing Funeral Home. Seth Green, the owner of the funeral home, always had above average business sense.

Successfully making it around Dead Man's Curve, he figured he had about two miles to go to reach Jake's place. Just before an S-curve, he saw a car on the side of the road that looked like it was in trouble. It appeared to have its rear bumper caught on a rock and had gotten buried in the soft dirt trying to get out. Pastor Arnie stopped to see if he could help the elderly woman driver. As he walked back to the car, he noticed a sticker on the

front bumper that read, ‘Read the Bible. It will scare the hell out of you!’”. He didn’t know why, but he thought it somewhat amusing. Perhaps it was just the contrast with the ubiquitous John 3:16 ones seen around town.

“Do you need some help, ma’am?” asked Pastor Schmidt.

“Oh, my Lord,” said the lady. “I’ve been praying someone would stop, but I never expected it to be a priest driving something like that.”

Handing her one of his cards, he said, “Actually, I’m the pastor at St. John’s Lutheran in Cedar Crossing.”

“Well, you’re surely the answer to my prayers.”

Walking to the back of the car, he looked underneath the rear of the car and saw the rock that the bumper had gotten snagged on. Being an older car, it had an old chrome metal bumper.

“We’re going to have to get you off that rock to pull you out of the hole. Fortunately, the bumper is just bolted on, so I can loosen it or even take it

off if needed. Then I should be able to pull you out with my pickup.”

Pastor Schmidt went back to his truck, opened the toolbox, and took out a set of wrenches. After loosening the bumper enough to wiggle it free from the rock, he went back to his truck and took out a tow strap from the toolbox. He then backed his truck up to the front of the lady’s car and hooked up the strap. Locking it into 4-wheel drive, his pickup effortlessly pulled the lady’s car out of the hole.

“How can I ever thank you, Pastor?”

“It’s my pleasure, uh ...”

“Helen.”

“It’s my pleasure, Helen.”

Opening her purse, Helen pulled out a ten-dollar bill and said, “Here, Pastor. Put this in the offering plate on Sunday.”

“That’s not necessary, Helen.”

“Please, I insist. Thanks again so much for your help.”

“Okay, Helen. Pull your car up to that turn lane and I’ll get back under and retighten your bumper. Then you can be on your way.”

Back on the road, Pastor Schmidt soon came upon the driveway to Jake Poindexter’s house. He was glad he had a high-clearance vehicle, because the drive was bumpy and overgrown with vegetation. Clearly, Jake had very few visitors. Moving at a crawl, he finally reached the front of Jake’s house. He got out, walked up the path of broken steppingstones that led to the front door, and rang the big bell that hung by the door. Jake opened the door slowly and saw that it was Pastor Schmidt.

“Hi, Jake.”

“Hello, Pastor Schmidt ... It has been a long time. Come in. Come in.”

“Yes, it has, Jake. I have been remiss in getting out here to see you. I know you were coming to church for a while, and I sincerely apologize for not checking up on you.”

“It’s been tough trying to get around, what with not driving anymore.”

“Sy down at the hardware store asked if I could drop off some bags of chicken feed for you. Let’s get them unloaded and then we can talk some more. Where do you want them?”

“We can put them around back in the barn,” said Jake.

When they finished unloading the chicken feed, Pastor Schmidt said, “I’ve never been here before, Jake. How much property do you have?”

“I’ve got fifty acres of the valley all the way up to that ledge over there.”

Looking across the open space to where Jake pointed at the ledge, Pastor Schmidt asked, “I know it is easy to lose your sense of direction with all those S-curves on the highway, but is that ledge what I think it is?”

“Yes, Pastor. That’s Dead Man’s Curve ... I gotta tell ya, you’re a brave man for coming out here. It’s hard to get anything delivered any more, what with this place being haunted and all.”

“So, all those cars that came off the highway up there ended up on your property?”

“Yes, Pastor. There’s been blood spilled all over that end of the field.”

“Is that why you think this place is haunted, Jake?”

“It ain’t so much what I think, Pastor. It’s what everybody else thinks. I tried to sell this place once so I could move into town, but there wasn’t nary a bite. I admit it’s gotten run down of late. I’m just getting old and can’t do some things anymore.”

“I’m a bit of a skeptic on the matter of haunted houses, Jake. Have you seen any evidence that it is true?”

“Well, I ain’t never seen any ghosts, if that’s what you mean. Sometimes things just fall off the walls. All the lush pasture grass at that end of the field has disappeared. There won’t nothing grow there now but thistle. I’ve had county and state agricultural agents out, and nobody can explain it. And while I ain’t never seen anything, I’ve heard a lot. Sometimes when I’m lying in my bed at night, I can hear moaning and groaning coming from down in the valley. I mean, nothing’s ever happened to me. I guess they know I had nothing to do with it.”

“They? Do you mean all the people who died out there?”

“I’d reckon. I don’t know who else it would be.”

Just as Jake finished saying that, Pastor Schmidt thought he heard the faint sound of a scream.

“Did you just hear that scream, Jake?”

“Yeah, I hear them screams all the time. Sometimes, though, the wind blowing through those trees at the edge of the valley can make strange sounds, so it can be hard to tell them apart.”

“Very interesting,” said Pastor Schmidt.

“What do you think, Pastor? Do you think the spirits of all them dead people are haunting this place?”

“Like I said, Jake, I’m a bit of a skeptic in that regard. There were certainly demons that Jesus called out at times, but I don’t know of anything recorded as done by the spirits of dead people. I know that some of the people who lost their lives up there were believers, so it doesn’t seem likely that if they are with God that they would be

moaning and groaning anymore. Admittedly, though, there is a lot about the spiritual world that we just don't know. In a bit of wild speculation, I guess I could see God allowing some spiritual activity to occur in order to get people to think about what's really important and about how fragile life is."

"Well, I reckon that I'll be here till I pass on," said Jake. "I just trust in the Lord to protect me till that day."

"I know that if you don't drive anymore, it would be impossible for you to get to church, but if I found somebody to give you a ride on Sunday, would you come?"

"I surely would, Pastor. I surely would."

"I'll give you a call and let you know, Jake."

"Thanks, Pastor. I'd appreciate it ... Oh, and would you put these few dollars here in your pickup truck fund, if you have one?"

"I surely will, Jake. I surely will."

On the way home, all Pastor Schmidt could think about was Jake and his place. As he pulled into the church parking lot, he concluded that he

didn't believe the Poindexter Place was really haunted. But the whole situation, including the blood from Dead Man's Curve, was indeed curious.

When he got back into his office, he immediately called Mary and gave her the whole story on the Poindexter Place.

“Well, I should get to work on my sermon for this week, Mary, so I better go ... oh, one more thing, we've only had the pickup truck for two days now and it's already generated three donations ... I just thought you'd like to know that.”