

Welcome's Fantastical Journey

by H. W. Moss

Drinking 151 rum straight from the bottle on top of a couple lines of cocaine spread out on the table, someone passed Welcome a joint. He took a whiff of the smoke before he took a hit and declared with absolute certainty and hilarity in his voice, "This is great! Opium dipped Thai stick! I haven't seen this since the first Gulf war when my brother brought some straight from Afghanistan." He took a long deep pull and held his breath.

Exhaling a huge billowing cloud of blue, he gasped, "Sun's going down, it's getting late. I gotta go. Who needs a ride?"

Kenny and Sarah-Ruth said, "We do," at the same time.

"Jinks, jinks, you owe me a coke. Jinks, jinks, no jinks back," Kenny said rapidly and laughed.

They piled into Welcome's classic hardtop '65 Corvair Corsa, Kenny in front riding shotgun. He fished the two ends of his seat belt out and strapped it across his waist.

Welcome chose to ignore the safety equipment.

At the first intersection, the light was turning against him, so Welcome floored it. They blew through.

Sarah-Ruth said, "It's windy back here. Turn up the front window."

"I will if you'll rutabaga the back seat," Welcome said as he obligingly wound the hand crank.

This distraction caused him to miss the fact the car in front came to an unexpected and abrupt halt. Welcome swerved, but the Corvair clipped a rear tail light. Dutifully, the

driver pulled over, unbuckled and opened his car door to inspect the damage and discuss the accident. Welcome whipped around just as the guy stepped out of his car.

Kenny said jokingly, “Whoa, there big fella. Aren’t you going to stop? You’re gonna bring some heat down on us.”

“Are you kidding?” Welcome was openly hostile to the idea. “I can’t stop now. In my condition I’d flunk a field sobriety test. This would be my third offence. I’d go straight to jail. Do not pass go; do not collect two hundred dollars. Hell, no, I ain’t gonna stop. In fact, I think I should speed up.”

Sarah-Ruth chimed in with, “Great. Just great. Glad I ain’t driving.”

Welcome’s response to this nagging comment was, “Never so few fine statements set in so much crap.”

Kenny said nothing as the car picked up speed, but his eyes widened and his hands leaped out to press against the dash. He calmed himself when he realized Welcome appeared to have developed a heightened sense of driving seriousness: both hands on the wheel, arms in the racing position straight out from the chest, head slightly inclined, eyes moving rapidly from left to right and back to the highway again as if instantly taking every circumstance and all traffic into consideration.

They drove the winding road rapidly but not wildly and came out of the Malibu hills onto Highway 1 with the shoreline lying before them. Welcome scanned the rear view mirror to be sure they were not being followed. He took a left on Pacific Coast Highway heading south, but put even more care into his driving. He matched but never exceeded the speed of surrounding traffic.

If only the Ludes don't kick in, he thought, we might make it back just before sunset.

Their two lane side of the highway moved at a nice clip through the coastal communities. When he got to Santa Monica, Welcome was sure a Highway Patrol officer gave him a longer look than necessary, but broke away at the next exit.

They traveled at normal highway speed through Marina Del Rey, Manhattan and Redondo Beach, caught the traffic signal at Palos Verdes Boulevard where PCH stops following the coast and veers inland toward Wilmington.

The siren and red light sprang to life together, instantly, in a heart beat. Kenny said, "Oh, shit," and tried to make out who was after them by turning around in his seat. A white tube of brilliance blinded him as the spotlight beam was shined over the car. An amplified female voice said, "Blue Corvair. Pull over. Blue Corvair, pull over now."

Welcome sped up.

From the back seat, Sarah-Ruth screamed, "What the fuck are you doing, asshole? The cops said pull over."

Welcome hit the accelerator even harder. The second set of carbs became engorged with fuel, turned on with such power everyone was thrown hard against their seat backs. Sarah-Ruth was unable to pull herself forward or she would have punched Welcome in the back of his head.

Kenny contained his scream as they barely made it through the Crenshaw intersection in the yellow, dodged a double parked mail truck in Lomita, blasted through Harbor City above the Terminal Island Freeway as the wail of sirens increased behind them.

The light weight American sports car was in its element on the wide open highway and out-ran their pursuers who were hesitant lest they cause an accident.

When Kenny was finally able to look backward, the cops seemed to be losing ground, falling behind. He considered grabbing the wheel, but that was not really an option at such high speed. He had no idea their exact rate because the recessed dash hid the speedometer from view, but his body felt the rush of acceleration. Vehicles in front appeared to be standing still as Welcome wove a path in and out of traffic.

As for Welcome, he felt the increased thrill of adrenalin mixed with the rush of the Quaaludes taking hold. He saw with perfect clarity and his mind raced faster than the 4500 rpm engine as they crossed Long Beach Boulevard. He slowed in order to turn right on Atlantic and Kenny took that opportunity to unbuckle and jump into the back seat with Sarah-Ruth.

They hugged each other in terror.

If Welcome thought he had lost the hunters, he was wrong. Their sirens were right behind them, but Atlantic was log jammed and the police had to abide by traffic laws. Not Welcome. He cut onto the sidewalk, ran over front yards and rose gardens with equal gusto, jumped back onto the street until forced to cross the broken double white line into oncoming traffic.

Cars heading toward them blared their horns in Doppler as they swerved to avoid impact.

The sirens wailed, but their throats were parched, they did not sound quite as insistent. By now the Long Beach police had joined the chase and dispatch ordered assists from nearby patrol cars which began converging on the Corvair's position.

Down Atlantic, Welcome took a right when he hit Fourth Street and within a block found himself approaching the four way stop at Linden. He paid no attention to the octagonal red sign and drove on through without hitting his brakes in the least. Perhaps he might have warned the other drivers that he was taking the right of way without permission by sounding his horn or, at the very least, turning on his headlights now that dusk had turned to dark.

Sarah-Ruth cried, “Omigod!” and Kenny shouted, “Look out,” but it was far too late. The SUV on their left had already started to cross when Welcome arrived. It plowed into the pristine Corsa high on the left front fender just inches from where Welcome gripped the wheel. The vehicles collided with enough force to tilt the Corvair up on its two right side wheels even as inertia caused the lighter vehicle to glide along beneath the large truck bumper. The door on that side of the Corsa was not so much mashed as annealed by the friction of metal on metal.

All the glass in all the windows on both the driver and back passenger sides shattered into millions of tiny fragments. The force knocked the Corvair completely across the intersection where it smashed up against a parked car, arced around its front end like a one-legged crazy person dancing the Limbo and came to rest at an angle tilted toward the incomprehensibly green sward of a manicured sidewalk meridian.

Kenny and Sarah-Ruth were surprised to find they were still alive. He leaned against the passenger seat in order to fold it forward, but it would not budge. Together, they scrambled out the broken rear window like worms from an apple and fell onto the sidewalk.

As she lay there, Sarah-Ruth wiped her face with her hand and it came away bloody. She had a slight cut on her upper lip and, miraculously, apparently nothing more. Kenny, on the other hand, could not talk. He fixed his eyes on her, their heads lying on the cement, and she stared at his tongue protruding from his mouth which reminded her of her cat licking himself. She laughed inappropriately.

Kenny's eyes were big as her cat's. He mimed for her to pull his mouth open. When she figured out what he was trying to say, she put one palm to the top of his forehead, gripped the lower jaw with her other hand and yanked. The mandible came apart and he said, "Franks."

After this small operation, it was apparent his mouth had been sealed shut by the accident. His front teeth clamped down on his tongue so hard, the force was enough to puncture it clean through which effectively stapled it in place.

Welcome had not fared so well. The impact tore his hands off the steering wheel, threw his body backwards and sideways. He hit his seat back so hard it broke off its hinges. Then, in a split second, he flew across the front driving compartment and slammed against the passenger side door which was thrown open by the force of his impact. He did not fall out, however, and remained upright in the passenger seat Kenny would try to push forward in a few seconds to attempt his own escape. It was because Welcome was solidly in the seat that Kenny could not bend it forward and was reduced to crawling out.

A curious calm engulfed Welcome as he assayed his situation. His mind remained clear and he heard the engine running. There was no fog or pain to impede his impulse to

get out of the wreck and stand up beside his passengers who lay at his feet in their own peculiar states of pain and confusion.

He ignored them and shrugged at his apparently remarkable good fortune. The Ludes must have given his body the ability to absorb the impact. He walked around the car which was destroyed beyond repair and sighed. He liked the old Corvair, but he had only been driving it two weeks. He purchased it on a whim when he sold a thousand hits of Ecstasy and had a pocket full of cash.

“Easy come, easy go,” he muttered to the small crowd that by now had gathered at the scene. Two teenage boys looked at him as if he were an alien visiting their planet. Several adults backed away at his approach. He stumbled around to the driver’s side and was again aware of the engine running at higher than idle. The throttle might be stuck. Was it accelerating?

A policeman approached as Welcome rounded the nose of the vehicle, but paid scant attention to him. The officer shined a flashlight into the now empty passenger compartment attempting to locate victims.

“You know, officer, that’s a rear engine vehicle.” Welcome enunciated his words carefully, spoke in a distinct and clear voice that was calm as an undisturbed pond. “It’s gas tank is in the front. It might be a good idea to reach in there and turn the engine off before it catches fire.”

The reasonableness of this suggestion was not lost on the cop who did exactly that. As he bent into the wreck in search of the ignition, it occurred to Welcome that the police did not know who had been driving. The officer turned away to accomplish his

task and Welcome slowly stepped backward to become one of the thirty or so people who now surrounded the wreck.

Welcome did an about face and managed to walk a straight line to the other side of the street staring straight ahead at the beckoning glow of a streetlight waiting to engulf him. He still felt no pain, but when he decided to call his girlfriend to let her know he would be late for the movie, he found he could not lift his right arm to retrieve his cell phone. It remained a silent cenotaph in his pocket.

That's odd, he said to himself in quizzical dialogue that elicited a third person reply to himself. "Did you break your arm?"

"Well, I don't know. Why doesn't it work? And where am I anyway? Fourth and Linden. Say, doesn't Barry live near here?"

Barry was a pharmacist at Harbor General in L. A. He liked to smooth his commute with a little weed after breakfast and the original dealer/buyer relationship between them blossomed into one of mutual benefit. Welcome realized he could use some medical advice as well as a place to stay, at least temporarily until the carnage was cleaned up and the car towed away and he could go home.

He found the three story apartment building two blocks down Linden. It was old enough to have an electric doorbell, but the voice that emanated from the intercom sounded like it came from under water. "Who's there?"

"That's a clumsy translation from an obscure Weimar cabaret lyric," Welcome said by way of introduction. He felt witty. "Barry. Open up. It's me, Welcome. Open up, Barry. I think I'm in shock."

"You've been shot!?"

“Shock. I’m in shock. Oh, never mind. Just let me in, will you?”

Barry took one look at Welcome’s condition and slammed the door in his face.

“What the fuck are you doing? Let me in. Can’t you see I’m injured?”

Barry said through the firmly closed door, “Of course I can see you’re in shit shape. And I know this isn’t going to turn out well at all. The best I can do is call an ambulance, but you gotta put it on your tab, not mine. Here, I’m dialing 9-1-1 for you.”

The paramedics found Welcome leaning up against the apartment door, his head lolling, blood flowing from both ears, a delayed reaction to the accident.

They convinced him to lie down on the stretcher and covered him with a silver foil thermal shock blanket to minimize his body’s reaction to the trauma it had suffered.

Later, as he lay in the emergency room operating theatre, a physician entered and began explaining the multitude of damage.

“We’ve put you on a morphine drip and Ativan because you are going to feel pretty torn up. You have a fractured jaw, a broken collar bone, three cracked ribs and a mild concussion. I don’t know what you did, son, but you did a helluva job on yourself. I’m amazed you were able to tell the paramedics your name.”

Welcome decided he should explain to the doctor precisely what he had taken in the last 24 hours in case there might be a fatal conflict. He began with an explanation.

“Well, see, I was at this party in the Malibu hills where they had all kinds of illicit substances. I think I had some cocaine and I know I had some liquor and maybe a couple pills of some kind.”

The swinging doors to the operating room were thrown open by three burly police officers who demanded, “Is your name Welcome? Were you driving a blue Corvair earlier this evening? We want to talk to you.”

The doctor became outraged. “You can’t be in here. Get out of here immediately. This man is under my supervision and it is critical we get him to ICU immediately.”

One of the officers said by way of explanation, “We want to question him about an automobile accident he caused.”

“I don’t care what you want, he’s under my supervision.”

Perhaps it was the morphine alone, perhaps the combination of all the narcotics he had consumed that night, but Welcome decided to add his own voice to the discussion.

“Yes, that was me. I was driving the Corvair after I left this party in Malibu. I was just telling the doctor here how I took a bunch of pills and some snort and drank rum and then the Ludes kicked in and now I’ve got this wonderful morphine being pumped into my arm, but I don’t think you’re supposed to be in here because you’re making my doctor angry.”

The physician said, “In addition to suffering considerable physical damage, this man is under the influence of hospital analgesics and God knows what else he says he’s been taking. I forbid you to be here. You are interrupting our medical procedures.”

Hospital security arrived and explained to the police the patient was not allowed to be questioned while under care without the doctor’s express permission which had not been granted.

They backed away, eventually posting a sentinel at the patient’s door. When he recovered enough, Welcome’s rights were read to him and he was told he was under

arrest. He was handcuffed to his hospital bed where he remained for a week before being taken to jail in downtown Long Beach. He posted bail and was released.

“The trial never made it to court,” Welcome said gleefully through a haze of marijuana smoke. Completely recovered, he was explaining to Barry how the charges were dropped because his confession was inadmissible. “Unless it’s on a death bed they can’t use it. Plus, I was under the influence of so many drugs, nothing I said could be presented in court.”

Welcome was fully aware of the fact Barry had shut the door in his face, but business trumped personal anger. He took another hit.

“The car was totaled, but since the case was dropped, I never got a ticket. My insurance company paid for the car completely. Plus, the driver of the SUV’s insurance covered my hospital stay since he was cited for failure to yield at a four way intersection. It’s a driver’s responsibility to avoid an accident by looking to the right before proceeding.” He took another toke and asked through hissing breath, “You got any of that pharmaceutical grade methamphetamine hydrochloride lying around? I know someone who could use a dozen vials.”

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