

Excerpt from Lemon Bay Ticket to Paradise, Ray Hazel

I had a lot of friends looking out for me and one asked, "what's going on with you tonight."

I answered, "I'm wondering how much anyone owes to a good friend and I found one today. It's free, but it takes courage."

He offered, "it's a choice."

He walked away and got on his Harley, kicked a few times and headed out to the biker's bar to find what made him feel all right, for the rest of his night. It started to pour, and my friend got caught in a teenage movie at 65 years old and should have listened to the thunder before he made that stupid move. I bellied up to the bar with a beer next to a Mercedes and a Jaguar and my old walking stick didn't fit in the conversation. So, I looked around for an old ford pickup that showed signs of some work. Way too many beers later, I stumbled down the yellow brick road looking for the Wizard of Oz on my way to my condo.

I laid in bed and heard, "I have to go to Cottonwood Falls, will you come with me?." I knew right then, he had more than enough of the same old broken record at a square dance in Cottonwood Falls, Kansas. What do you say to your friend when he says, "we're leaving tomorrow and legally I'm locked and loaded." I offered that the trick is not to play their games too long. Drifter replied, "they think I'm too old and way over the hill. They're right about that, but my integrity and character are being challenged again and again."

I asked, "what's that, Drifter?"

"I never had to get my courage up to kick some ass. I was expected to do things right, on and off the ice. I will never let anyone steal that. My dignity is all I have left and it's worth saving."